

COWBOY UP: EVOLUTION OF THE FRONTIER HERO
IN AMERICAN THEATER, 1872 – 1903

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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On the border between Beadle & Adam's dime novel and Edwin Porter's groundbreaking film, *The Great Train Robbery*, this dissertation returns to a period in American theater history when the legendary cowboy came to life. On the stage of late nineteenth century frontier melodrama, three actors blazed a trail for the cowboy to pass from man to myth. Frank Mayo's *Davy Crockett*, William Cody's *Buffalo Bill*, and James Wallick's *Jesse James* represent a theatrical bloodline in the genealogy of frontier heroes. As such, the backwoodsman, the scout, and the outlaw are forbearers of the cowboy in American popular entertainment. Caught in a territory between print and film, this study explores a landscape of blood-and-thunder melodrama, where the unwritten Code of the West was embodied on stage. At a cultural crossroads, the need for an authentic, American hero spurred the cowboy to legend; theater taught him how to walk, talk, and act like a man.

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For a little boy in Nebraska.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In April 1831 at the Park Theatre in New York an American hero hit the stage. Wearing a coonskin cap, fringed buckskins, and carrying a flintlock rifle, James Hackett performed the role of Nimrod Wildfire in James Kirke Paulding's *The Lion off the West*. Like Edwin Forrest's commission of *Metamora* (1829), Paulding's play was written for cash. Hackett (1800 – 1871) offered three hundred dollars for an original play “whereof an American should be the leading character.”¹ Paulding won the money, but Hackett struck gold. Nimrod Wildfire became “the first theatrical representation of an American frontier hero.”² His entrance on stage changed the landscape of American popular entertainment, and inevitably, American culture.³

Paulding based Wildfire on Colonel David Crockett (1786 – 1836). In 1831, Crockett served the state of Tennessee in the United States House of Representatives. As a frontiersman, soldier, and ramrod politician, Crockett was both man and myth. His legend grew in story and song, but it was Hackett's performance in *Lion of the West* that presented the “first well authenticated anecdote of the Wild Colonel from Kentucky.”⁴ The theatrical representation of a frontiersman based upon an actual frontier hero struck the audience as authentic. Crockett himself was well aware of the power in performance; he quickly grasped the significance of Wildfire's contribution to the Crockett legend and invited *The Lion of the West* to Washington, D. C., for a command performance.⁵ At the curtain call, Crockett took the stage and stood next to Wildfire. Then the actor and acted, real and performed, bowed for a cheering audience.

Crockett was the inspiration for the character, but on stage Wildfire was the hero. As the dominant figure of the play, the man who was “half horse, half alligator, and a touch of the airthquake,” thrilled the audience with his tall-talk:

WILDFIRE: Mister, says I, I’m the best man – if I ain’t, I wish I may be tetotaciously exflunctified! I can whip my weight in wildcats...and ride on a flash of lightning! My father can whip the best man in old Kaintuck, and I can whip my father. When I’m good-natured I weigh about a hundred and seventy, but when I’m mad, I weigh a ton.⁶

Wildfire backed up his tall talk with action. His antagonist was a diabolical Englishman intent on swindling Wildfire’s relatives out of their family fortune by forcing a marriage with a young heiress through a blackmail plot. Alerted to the scheme, Wildfire traveled from the backwoods of “Kaintuck” to the streets of New York and confronted the villain.

In a climatic show-down, Wildfire is challenged to a duel at ten paces. Instead of using pistols as his weapon-of-choice, the backwoodsman calls for flintlock rifles. In the end, the hero defeats the villain, protects his family, and rescues the heiress. Paulding’s narrative adhered to a standard melodramatic formula, wherein the British villain, who represents greed and corruption, is outdone by the American hero who symbolizes honor and strength. The crucial twist in Paulding’s play is the hero now hails from the western frontier. As a thematic reinterpretation of conventional melodrama, *The Lion of the West* set the stage for a genre of uniquely American theatre: frontier melodrama. This brand of theatre eventually evolved into television and film productions known as the “Western.”⁷

The Lion of the West remains significant because it was among the first American dramas to feature “an uncouth wild-westerner” as protagonist.⁸ The embodiment of the American frontier in a character based upon an actual frontier hero proved to be a potent combination. Further, as stated by Jennifer Schlueter in “‘A Theatrical Race’: American Identity and Popular Performance in the Writings of Constance Rourke,” “the appearance of a Davy Crockett-esque woodsman in the theatre was significantly doubled: he was both a creature of the stage and of the frontier.”⁹ The doubling of fantasy and reality continued in American theatre throughout the nineteenth century, specifically in frontier melodrama, where actors like William “Buffalo Bill” Cody truly blurred the line between fact and fiction. A doubling of theatre and the frontier, along with claims of authenticity, became a driving force behind the evolution of the cowboy as an American heroic type.

As he stands now, Nimrod Wildfire is a patriarch of the American frontier hero. The bloodline of the cowboy runs through the backwoodsman, with both types sharing a pedigree of distinguishing characteristics:

The backwoodsman is a soldier from necessity. He belongs to this continent and no other. He is an original. He thinks big. He talks big, and when necessary he acts big. He is the genius of the new world...the first of our tall men, whose words were tall talk and deeds were tall tales.¹⁰

Although Paulding crafted his backwoodsman to win a cash prize, the staging of a homegrown hero from the American frontier, who could talk the talk and walk the walk, began to harvest a growing mythology of the wild west that was spreading to the east.

From here, the frontier hero as staged in nineteenth century American theatre began an evolution into what would become the cowboy. Like the backwoodsman, the cowboy was a cultural construction. His time in on stage, however, often gets short shrift. Most cowboy scholarship outlines a standard genealogy: the cowboy was born on the pages of the nineteenth century dime novel, matured in twentieth century literature, film, and television, and exists today as an icon in American cultural mythology. The absence of theatre in this lineage uncovers a void in pedigree. The cowboy came of age, I argue, in late nineteenth century frontier melodrama in what can be viewed as his adolescence. The early identity of the cowboy was a rough-and-tumble gang of many frontier types. And like many adolescents in search of themselves, the cowboy acted out in public.

Rather than divide the characters of frontier melodrama into definitive types, as was the methodology of scholars like Stuart Wallace Hyde and Merl William Tillson, depictions of frontier heroes like the backwoodsman, the scout, and the outlaw will be considered elemental in the creation of the cowboy. Further, in an effort to understand authenticity as a crucial component in staging the American frontier hero, cases of heroic doubling based on the Crockett/Wildfire/*The Lion of the West* model, will be illustrated. To that end, three prominent late nineteenth century stage actors and the heroes they portrayed will be explored: Frank Mayo (1839-1896) as Davy Crockett, William Cody (1847-1917) as Buffalo Bill, and James Wallick (1844-1908) as Jesse James. In doing so, actor and acted will tangle with fact and fiction in an effort to track the cowboy.¹¹

The cowboy did not achieve mythic stature in American popular culture until twentieth century film and television. Prior to this, actors like Mayo, Cody, and Wallick blazed a trail for the cowboy in the theatre. Thus, the cowboy is not a stand-alone cultural

creation of the American Old West, but the result of an evolution of frontier heroes; an evolution in which, I contend, theatre performed a crucial role. An exploration of the backwoodsman, the scout, and the outlaw as three incarnations of what was becoming a cowboy in the public mind will demonstrate that theatrical performance, complicated by the issue of authenticity, helped spur the cowboy from man to myth.

The concept is not without complication, beginning with the historical origins of the cowboy. Today, cowboy scholarship is reinforced by a tremendous volume of film, television, literature, music, and art devoted to the nameless hero of the American West, yet in actuality, the original cowboy was not much more than a hired hand, who occupied a brief moment of the nineteenth century. At that time, being a cowboy was more boring than heroic, more dangerous than glamorous, yet the myth of cowboy survived. How? How did the historic reality of the original cowboy develop into a cultural mythology? An answer lies in the theatre. If theatre reflects a culture's myth, then frontier melodrama cast the image of a new brand of hero who was born and bred in the America West.

History, Fact, and the Frontier Thesis

In roughly a thirty year period, the cowboy ventured from the open range to the landscape of American cultural mythology. The development of the cowboy in American popular entertainment took about half that time. In retrospect, it seems the transformation of the cowboy from hired hand to hero was not a gradual transition, but a rapid shift.

Although Wildfire appeared on stage in 1831, it was nearly forty years later when frontier melodrama gained a foothold in American theatre. 1872 through 1903 mark the time of the cowboy's ascent because of several key events that occur within that period.

In 1872, Frank Mayo and William Cody made their stage debuts as Davy Crockett and Buffalo Bill, respectively. On 15 September 1872, Frank Mayo donned the coonskin cap of Davy Crockett in Frank Murdoch's *Davy Crockett; or, Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead*. Three months later, William F. Cody stepped onstage as Buffalo Bill in Ned Buntline's blood-and-thunder melodrama *Scouts of the Prairie*. Throughout the 1870s, Mayo and Cody would emerge as "the masculine border hero in American frontier melodrama...and defined the poles of sentiment and fierce action that influenced virtually every succeeding border drama."¹² In doing so, both men became representative of the frontier hero in American theatre, as well as predecessors of the cowboy in film.

Old West historians consider 1903 the "first" year of the cowboy. On 1 December 1903, the Edison Film Company released Edwin S. Porter's silent motion picture, *The Great Train Robbery*. Porter's one-reel, ten-minute epic is regarded as the first Western. The film depicts outlaws robbing a train and the classic shot of a cowboy firing his Colt .45 directly into the camera eye, a scene that sent audiences running from the theatre. *The Great Train Robbery* was surely a hit; its impact marks a starting point in the cowboy's journey toward cinematic immortality. The second significant cowboy event of 1903 was Owen Wister's *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains*. Wister's novel was first published in May 1902 and became a best-seller throughout the next year. The novel was sold fifty-thousand copies in the first two months, went through fifteen reprints in eight months, and was the top seller in fiction for the next two years.¹³ *The Virginian* is generally considered the first great piece of cowboy literature, gaining high praise from Old West historians, like William Bloodworth, who wrote, "the history of the popular Western begins with the dramatic appearance of Owen Wister's *The Virginian*."¹⁴

Of course, claims of “firsts” are often suspect and easily debunked. Nevertheless, 1903 remains an important year for the cowboy, yet it is better understood as a year of innovation, rather than a year of “firsts.” Certainly, *The Great Train Robbery* and *The Virginian* are significant markers on the timeline of cowboy history, yet when viewed in relation to late nineteenth century frontier melodrama, statements from well respected cowboy scholars like Russell Nye, who wrote, “Owen Wister invented the cowboy” or William Wright’s declaration, “the history of the cowboy begins with film,” become ahistorical, especially in consideration of the stage actors in frontier melodrama, who wore buckskins, shot pistols, rode horses, and acted like cowboys before the 1900s.¹⁵

William W. Savage, Jr., a leading scholar in the history and mythology of the American West, wrote, “it is no simple matter to explain the cowboy’s status as hero.”¹⁶ His statement acknowledges the complicated relationship between fact and fiction in regard to the cultural evolution of the cowboy. Tracking the cowboy’s development from hired hand to hero is difficult, if not “backasswards,” to borrow a term from “Out on the Range: A Cowboy Glossary.”¹⁷ Meaning, the historical cowboy is often more difficult to pin down than the mythological cowboy hero. For example, if asked to name a famous figure from American frontier history, names like Crockett, Custer, Crazy Horse, Wyatt Earp, Jesse James, and Buffalo Bill are easily recalled, but what cowboy immediately comes to mind? The actors who played cowboys, like Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, and Sam Elliot. There is no representative cowboy hero in our cultural history, because most established heroic frontier types “were epitomized in great representative individuals, but the collective American memory has left the cowboy anonymous.”¹⁸ Thus, the mythological cowboy remains a hero with no name.

In a sense, history is the enemy of the original cowboy. We remember Davy Crockett, Buffalo Bill, and Jesse James as the famous backwoodsman, scout, and outlaw, because their stories are substantiated by historical fact, and advanced through popular culture. Original, occupational cowboys are not remembered, because they really did nothing, except work hard and raise hell. That is not to minimize the cowboy's role in frontier history. Cowboys were the backbone of the early cattle industry, and yet, not unlike the countless laborers who laid steel track to complete the transcontinental railroad, they are lost to history.¹⁹ How then did the cowboy transform from man into myth? Simply put, the cowboy became a hero, because he was made into one.

The legendary cowboy character is a creation of late nineteenth century popular culture. He was "introduced to audiences as a fixture among other fixtures on the western landscape, and eventually, as public acceptance increased, he was allowed to stand alone."²⁰ The cowboy is a brand. His image was made and marketed to an audience fascinated by the product. The more popular his brand became the less of the original cowboy remained. Elevating the cowboy to mythic status, in spite of his not-so romantic reality, suggests, "the cowboy is less important today for what he was, than for what he is thought to have been."²¹ Thus, much of what has emerged as cowboy scholarship is conjecture offered as fact, speculation passed off as history, including Richard White's *It's Your Misfortune, None of My Own: A New History of the American West*, which acknowledges the speculative nature of "New/Old West historicism."²² Considering this, tracking the cowboy hero as a predominant figure in American popular culture asks the historian to not only uncover the facts, but do so while wrestling with the fiction.

Here are some facts. The original cowboy was a hired hand who worked open range cattle drives in the western the United States and surrounding territories during the mid to late nineteenth century. Originating in Texas, some of the longest drives ran over 2500 miles, and as far north as Montana. History frames this period as lasting two decades, from 1866 to 1886.²³ While these dates are fluid, they are based on actual trends in the cattle industry. The majority of cattle drives originated in Texas were headed to railheads in Kansas and Missouri, en route to the Chicago stockyards. Railhead towns, such as Dodge City, Kansas, and Ogallala, Nebraska, were known as cow-towns.²⁴ These outposts catered to cowboys and provided them with the necessary diversions, namely barbers, brothels, and saloons. The beginning of the end for long range cattle drives was 1886. At this time, several forces effectively closed the open range. These included the expansion of railroads, the encroachment of homesteaders, the invention of barbed wire, and two abnormally harsh winters in '86 and '87, which devastated the cattle industry.²⁵

The original cowboy was primarily a young man, in his teens or twenties, who was hired to drive cattle across the open range to the cow towns. It was a very difficult line of work, and yet, it attracted a unique, if not unfortunate, breed of men:

The original cow-boy of this country was essentially a creature of circumstance. They were frontiersmen, accustomed from their earliest childhood to the alarms and the struggles...of a most ferocious and nature. Being scattered over vast areas, and beyond the efficient protection and restraints of civil law, they of necessity became a law unto themselves.²⁶

Cowboy life was dangerous. Richard Irving wrote, “The daily life of the cow-boy is so replete with privation, hardship and danger, that it is a marvel how any sane man can voluntarily assume it, yet thousands of men not only assume it, but actually like it to infatuation.”²⁷ Infatuation, or an unreasonable, foolish passion, is a distinct clue in the evolution of the cowboy. Is it possible that the original cowboy’s passion for his unique lifestyle, despite the difficult and dangerous conditions he endured, is tied to the audience fascination of the cowboy on stage and screen? While the reality of the original cowboy was hardly the stuff of which legends were made, the image of that lifestyle drew young men to the frontier. A similar, dramatized image drew the audience into the theatre.

In the context of American history and etymology, the word cowboy is old. In *Cow-Boys and Cattle Men*, the origin of the word is described as a historical mystery.²⁸ The earliest usage of the term dates to the 1770s. During the Revolutionary War, when colonists spoke of a cowboy, they referred to “someone who was hated and feared not only by his enemies, but also his friends.”²⁹ Under these negative connotations, the word cowboy was seen as “not polite” by Noah Webster’s Dictionary and excluded from the first edition in 1828, as well as the 1846 and 1852 editions of *The American Dictionary of English*. The first definition of the word “cow-boy” (as it was initially spelled) was in the 1901 edition of *The American Dictionary of English*, which defined it simply as “a boy who tended cattle.”³⁰ Under this definition, a cowboy can be seen as just that: poorly paid teenagers, who were hired to watch cattle on the trail. Taken together, the dual meaning of cowboy as an enemy and youth leads directly to nineteenth century public perception of the cowboy being viewed as a young outlaw.

Until the mid-1880s, ten years after Mayo and Cody were already on stage, the term was still considered derogatory. J. Frank Dobie, one of the first scholars to study the cowboy, wrote “through the 1880’s, the term cowboy in the West often meant drunkard, outlaw, and thief...they are a devil-may-care roistering gambling immoral revolver-heeled brazen light-fingered lot, who usually came to a no-good end.”³¹ Not only were cowboys feared, but they were also derided and looked down upon as bums. In a report to a commanding officer on 4 May 1874, Colonel Wesley Merritt wrote, “Although there are honorable exceptions, the majority of cowboys are idle, shiftless, and lazy.”³² In September 1879, the *New York Police Gazette* ran an article titled, “The Cowboy of the Plains: A Sketch of a Very Boisterous and often Murderous Character:”

While in town his home is in the saloon and dance houses. He soon gets gloriously drunk and then begins to yell like a wild Indian and shoots off his big revolvers promiscuously into the crowd. He is little else than a crazy demon at such times and woe betide the man who crosses his path.³³

In the eye of respectable frontier community members, the cowboy was considered a drunken delinquent at best and a violent criminal at worst. As a group, cowboys stood on a low rung of society throughout the 1880s.

The facts have not been lost on historians. Virtually anyone who has written a historic account of the cowboy admits there is little to justify his legendary status. With the closing of the cattle range in 1887, it seemed the cowboy would drift into obscurity. Instead, the cowboy reversed field and became the central heroic character in American frontier mythology. Don Russell, Old West historian and biographer of Buffalo Bill,

wrote, “just how the cowboy reputation became completely reversed within a couple of decades cannot be completely explained, for no one can forecast or analyze the popularity of an idea.”³⁴ Russell’s “couple of decades” might be on the long side. In closely analyzing this period, it is more accurate to claim that within one decade the cowboy had “replaced the scout as the true representation of the frontier...and became the final version of the frontier hero.”³⁵ Again, in roughly a ten year period, the image of the cowboy transformed from one of the more notorious characters of the wild frontier to its most heroic. In a true role reversal, the cowboy was first a figure to despise, then admire, and then idealized into a mythological hero. This fate, which now seems inevitable, overtook the cowboy. In doing so, the cowboy hero became an embodiment of the Old West mythology and American frontier history.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, cultural products like the dime novel and frontier melodrama recognized the myth-making potential of the frontier; however, it was not until a thirty-one year old history professor from the University of Wisconsin presented a lecture on the “myth of the frontier,” that the concept of frontier mythology gained a permanent foothold in American academia. At the Columbian Exposition and World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” to the American Historical Association.³⁶ The Turner thesis concluded that the “wellsprings of American exceptionalism and vitality, has always been the American frontier,” in what Turner described as “the meeting place between savagery and civilization.”³⁷

In his lecture, Turner proposed that the national and individual identities of Americans were linked to a single source: the frontier. He wrote “the existence of an area

of free land...and the advance of American settlement westward” defined of national development.³⁸ For Turner, the frontier was a key to understanding the unique quality of democratic development. He argued that the frontier had been a “generator of democracy, an incubator of individualism, and a nationalizing factor,” where pioneers of the New World encountered an environment and lifestyle far different from anything they had previously known.³⁹ To survive, colonists had to strip themselves of their European identity and forge an authentically American identity “in the furnace of the new world.”⁴⁰

According to Turner, as pioneers ventured across the frontier, the border between savagery and civilization remained in tension. As successive generations trekked further inland, the frontier was pushed as well and demanded more from its new inhabitants:

The Wilderness masters the colonist. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes or perish. The fact is that there is a new product that is American...the advance of the frontier has meant a steady growth of the independence of American lives. To study this advance, the men who grew up under these conditions, and the political, economic, and social results of it, is to study the really American part of our history.⁴¹

Thus, the further colonists moved into America, the more European characteristics fell to the wayside. Each generation that moved west became more intolerant of the monarchy they were rejecting. They also became more independent, self-reliant, and in some cases, more violent. In broad terms, the further west you went, the more American you became.

The impact of the Turner thesis was broad and caused a re-evaluation of American history, sociology, and cultural studies. Moreover, the frontier became instrumental in shaping our national character, customs, and philosophy, hence a cultural mythology that was uniquely “American.” The timing of Turner’s lecture is particularly relevant. His thesis was based in part on an evolutionary model which used the geographic development of the United States as evidence, including statistics from the 1890 census, which stated that the pattern of western settlement had reached a point where the frontier had essentially closed. As a historian, Turner was looking back into the past and speculating how the frontier experience would affect a nation moving into the future, beginning with a proposal that the closing of the frontier marked an end of the first great phase of American history.

Prior to Turner’s lecture in 1893, the subject of American frontier history had little academic legitimacy; this would not last long. Ray Allen Billington, Turner’s biographer, has shown that by 1903 the Frontier Thesis was known to most, if not all, professional historians in the United States, and by 1930, eighty percent of all American history textbooks had been rewritten to focus on the “inarguability” of the frontier thesis.⁴² Subsequently, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” is cited as a turning point in national scholarship, because it gave intellectual justification to the concept that American frontier history had a direct influence on shaping national character and ideology.

The longevity of the Turner Thesis exists in its claim of the frontier’s permanence in American mythology. In one of his final and most famous passages, Turner explains the lasting effects of the frontier upon American cultural identity:

To the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical and inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism; working for good and evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which come with freedom – these are the traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier.⁴³

This passage bound frontier history to national ideology. The American frontier experience could not be lost, could not be closed, because the spirit of the frontier was embedded in the American character and would live on forever.

While the Turner Thesis would become incredibly influential after the turn of the century, it was not entirely accepted in 1893. His theory needed a catalyst, someone or something to accelerate it toward full academic accreditation. Enter Theodore Roosevelt, who at the time was known as the “Cowboy from the Dakotas” in New York politics. Roosevelt endorsed Turner’s thesis with an indirect compliment by saying, “He put into shape a good deal of thought that has been floating around rather loosely.”⁴⁴ Roosevelt, who was a historian himself, had put forth his own frontier manifesto in a four volume series titled *The Winning of the West* (1889-1896). Like Turner, Roosevelt shared a certain ideology about the frontier, namely a belief the frontier was the most significant force in shaping the mythic entity called: national character. Both men also believed it necessary for Americans to appreciate the frontier past, in order to prepare for the future.

Roosevelt and Turner's assertions expressed a popular sentiment among the American people, to quote Roosevelt, "what a nation believes to be true affects its growth and character, regardless of what the actuality may be."⁴⁵ If the frontier was indeed a determining factor of American character, then the frontier was also influential in the development of American culture, specifically frontier melodrama and its central heroic characters. From here, it makes sense to acknowledge the influence Turner and Roosevelt had on the evolution of the American frontier hero, including the cowboy, but also to acknowledge the influence the cowboy had on each historian, particularly Roosevelt.

In 1885, after a series of tragedies, including a lost nomination at the Republican National Convention in 1884, suffering from poor health, and losing his wife and mother on the same day, 14 February 1884, Roosevelt packed up and headed west to a cattle ranch in the Dakota Territory. A year prior, Roosevelt had gone on a hunting trip in the region and bought into the ranching operation. When he returned in 1885, Roosevelt lived at the Elk Horn Ranch, which lay on the banks of the Little Missouri River in present day South Dakota, and began his career as cowboy. Although he would return east in two years, his time as a Dakota cowboy would stay with him for the rest of his life. In 1889, he wrote a description of the cowboy that appeared in *Harper's Magazine*:

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

existence is, it has yet a wild attraction that strongly draws to it his bold free spirit.⁴⁶

Roosevelt's idolization of the cowboy as a free and courageous spirit resonated in American popular culture. His romanticized cowboy was now prime material for playwrights and dime novelists, despite the negative perception the original cowboy held in the not so distant past.

It is significant the cowboy came out of the same period as Roosevelt and Turner. The ideology of the Turner thesis and Roosevelt's *The Winning of the West* embedded itself in a hero from the American frontier, who was independent, self-reliant, patriotic, pragmatic, and possessed the ability to administer violent justice. These traits became a recognizable code of characteristics, which were employed by writers, and then deployed by actors in late nineteenth century frontier melodrama. Moreover, the impact of the frontier on American popular culture helps explain the cowboy's abrupt transformation from a ne'er-do-well, young outlaw to heroic icon of the Old West, in what amounted to a decade. In *The American West: The Invention of Myth* (2001), David Murdoch wrote:

By 1903 it had all come together. Roosevelt was the cowboy in the White House, Remington was America's most popular artist, *The Virginian* was a runaway best seller, and Turner's thesis was widely accepted.⁴⁷

From 1893 to 1903, the cowboy made a daring leap that sealed his fate as a frontier hero. By the mid twentieth century, the cowboy was a central figure in American popular entertainment. And in spite of his shaky past, the cowboy continued a journey into American cultural mythology.

Mythology, Fiction, and the Code of the West

Each culture creates its own mythology. For the United States, the source of its most enduring myth, although youthful in comparison to other cultural mythologies, is the myth of the American frontier whose central heroic figure is the cowboy. In a rapid rise from obscurity to immortality, the cowboy hero was truly a myth made on the fly:

In retrospect the cowboy became not simply an employee who got a dollar a day, plus beans and bacon, for exhausting work. He was enshrined as the man who rode free – tough, alone, and unmarred by civilization. He enthralled a nation. In many ways, the cowboy was the most striking creation of America’s last frontier.⁴⁸

As a central character in American mythology, the cowboy remains tied to our national identity as an everlasting symbol of the frontier. And in spite of his obscure history, the cowboy has not only survived the test of time, he has thrived.

In *The Cowboy: Six-Shooters, Songs, and Sex*, Charles Harris describes the cowboy’s cultural impact:

Among the gimcracks and knickknacks of three centuries in American popular culture, the figure of the cowboy surely occupies a unique position. His mark – his brand, if you will – is everywhere on everything. His place in American mythology is somewhere above the President.⁴⁹

Statements like this illustrate the significance of the cowboy in American popular culture. It is important to note, however, the cowboy was not magically transformed into a mythological hero: he was made into one.

The cowboy hero is a cultural construction, a fictionalized rendition of a working-class drifter from the western plains. In late nineteenth century popular entertainment, like frontier melodrama, the cowboy underwent an extensive image make-over, due in no small part to stage actors who were character testing the frontier hero in front of a live theatre audience. Theatre helped change the reality of the original, occupational cowboy into a carefully costumed, central character in American popular culture. Another driving force behind the cowboy's transformation in was the dime novel.

Due to its popularity and mass publication, the dime novel is a primary source of cultural evidence in pre twentieth century Old West scholarship. Additionally, the dime novel is often credited with inventing the cowboy. In her dissertation, *The Depictions of the Cowboy in Selected Nineteenth Century American Popular Drama* (1983), Kay Marcella Robinson writes:

The fictionalized cowboy hero made a direct leap from the pages of dime novel onto the stages of nineteenth century American theatre; from here he grew toward his quintessential twentieth-century stature.⁵⁰

Subsequently, the dime novel cowboy has been extensively researched in books like Alf Walle's *The Cowboy Hero and Its Audience* (2000), Richard Aquila's *Wanted Dead or Alive* (1996), and Warren French's *The Cowboy in the Dime Novel* (1951).

In the mid to late nineteenth century, the most popular form of fiction in the United States was certainly the dime novel. Referred to as "the television of the time," the dime novel was a short work of fiction that focused on the adventures of a single heroic character.⁵¹ The dime novel provided its audience, primarily young men and boys,

with an inexpensive and portable form of popular entertainment. The most well known producer of the dime novel was a small publishing house in New York owned by Irwin and Erastus Beadle and Robert Adams.

On 9 June 1860, Beadle and Adams published the first dime novel, *Maleaska, the Indian Wife of the White Hunter* by Ann S. Stephens.⁵² Stephens (1810-1886) was an American novelist and essayist who wrote serial novels, short stories, and poems. At times, Stephens wrote under the pseudonym Jonathan Slick, so Stephens, like the characters she wrote, played a character herself. *Maleaska* is the story of an American Indian woman who is left widowed by the death of her white husband and in the end she dies of grief. The groundbreaking and unique frontier narrative centered on an indigenous woman sold over 300,000 in 1860 alone.⁵³

Throughout the 1860s, the Beadle and Adams dime novel was mass produced and distributed across the northeastern seaboard. Over the next ten years, Beadle and Adams dominated the market with their tales of the adventure and intrigue. In 1872/73, the same year Frank Mayo and William F. Cody were starring as *Davy Crockett* and *Buffalo Bill*, Beadle and Adams changed the format of their product. They added colored covers, numbered issues, and cleverly renamed it “The New Beadle Dime Novels.” Although it was a *new* series, Beadle and Adams republished revisions, if not exact replications, from their first series. It did not matter; the popularity of their product was undeniable, and soon, many rival publishing companies were following suit. By 1880, newsstands across the country were flooded with the dime novel.⁵⁴

The dime novel is credited with saluting the common man and supporting middle class morality. Storylines featured heroic, American males, including military men,

sailors, detectives, and civil servants, such as the New York City police and fireman. It was not until the 1880s, however, that the most popular dime novels were set in the Wild West. Novelists such as Hiram Robbins, Prentiss Ingraham, and Ned Buntline, who often doubled as playwrights, glamorized the western frontier with narratives centered on the adventures of frontier heroes, such as the backwoodsman, bandit, and scout.⁵⁵ In order to appeal to the widest possible audience, Beadle and Adams were quite specific in delineating between frontier types, yet the attributes of these central characters were often the same. This formula helped develop the American frontier hero in popular fiction and theatre. As the western hero was fictionalized, he was also being theatricalized. Eventually, the frontier hero would evolve into the cowboy hero, and take his show on the road into film and television throughout the next century.

In the mid nineteenth century, however, the role of the cowboy in dime novels was relatively minor in comparison to other frontier heroes like the backwoodsman, bandit, and scout. Due to Beadle and Adams's marketing strategy and strict delineation of heroic types, the dime novel cowboy, much like his on stage equivalent, was not fully realized until the late 1880s. As previously stated, the public impression of cowboys in the mid nineteenth century was that they were outlaws. Through the effort of popular entertainment, the cowboy's cultural identity was transformed from hell-raiser to hero, despite his questionable past. Although Beadle and Adams instructed their authors to "refrain from writing about subjects whom they had no intimate knowledge,"⁵⁶ the dime novelist apparently felt little responsibility to follow those guidelines. Eastern writers, who had never ventured west of the Hudson River, experienced few qualms in drafting outrageous adventures set in the Wild West. Figures like the backwoodsman, bandit, and

scout would momentarily reign as the central heroic character of these frontier tales. But by the late 1880s, the cowboy was becoming king of the American frontier.

The first dime novel to feature a cowboy as the lead character was *Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys; or, a Story of the Wild and Thrilling Life of William L. Taylor* (1887) by Prentiss Ingraham (1843 – 1904). The timing of Ingraham’s dime novel is important and illustrates further the rapid evolution of the cowboy in American cultural history. Like the plays *Davy Crockett*, *Jesse James*, *The Bandit King*, and Ned Buntline’s *Scouts of the Prairie*, starring Buffalo Bill Cody, Ingraham based his dime novel on a real person, specifically, on a real cowboy. William Taylor (1857-1924) was born and bred in Texas. He was orphaned at the age of eight, when his father was killed in the Civil War. His grandfather was also a casualty of war, when he died at the Alamo in 1836, allegedly fighting alongside Colonel Davy Crockett. In his teens, Taylor taught himself to how to rope cattle and break wild horses. He took a job driving cattle from Texas, north to Nebraska, where he found work as a ranch-hand on Buffalo Bill’s Scout’s Rest Ranch.⁵⁷

Taylor stood out among the other ranch hands. Six foot three inches tall, with broad shoulders, and shoulder-length brown hair, Taylor was “one helluva cowpuncher who could throw steers and break the wildest of horses.”⁵⁸ Buck was also a hell-raiser who lived up to the reputation of cowboys as the bottom of the barrel through the 1880s. In the dime novel, Buck was a mix of fact and fiction. Ingraham’s cowboy hero was a working-class cowboy, who longed to be a lawman. Buck stuck as an impressive figure in the dime novel, as he did in real life:

They beheld a man six feet in height, hardly over twenty-five or six, and with broad shoulders and a form as erect as a soldier’s. He

was dressed in fringed buckskin leggings, stuck into top boots...while a black sombrero sheltered his head. He carried a Colt's repeating-rifle and a pair of revolvers in his belt.⁵⁹

The description of Buck illustrates genetics at play in the evolution of the American frontier hero. Like previous frontier types, including the backwoodsman and the scout, the cowboy had an imposing physical stature, was dressed in frontier attire, and brandished firearms. During the next fifteen years, between the publications of *Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys* through the publication of Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, the archetypal characteristics of the American frontier hero would be set in stone.

The essential traits of the cowboy character in popular entertainment, including frontier melodrama and the dime novel, can be consolidated into a list of ten "must-have" characteristics: 1) The cowboy hero is naturally noble and aristocratic in bearing, if rustic in appearance. 2) He is brave, though not foolhardy. 3) He rejects violence until he has no other recourse; then he is ruthless. 4) He is a sure shot, no matter the weapon or the circumstance. 5) He is a clean fighter. 6) He is a loner, with no apparent relatives or dependants. 7) He is sensitive to nature and understands its power. 8) He is incredibly virile and good looking. 9) He is highly moral, and will always bear on the side of justice, even if it means going beyond the bounds of law to do so. 10) He is a man who respects "the Code of the West."⁶⁰ Two of the ten are particularly relevant to the frontier hero's evolution in American theatre: The Code of the West and natural nobility.

In *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture*, Richard Aquila considers the Code of the West the most important concepts of frontier mythology.⁶¹ In practice, the Code was an unwritten set of rules that governed life on the western frontier:

Back in the days when the cowman with his herds made a new frontier, there was no law on the range. Lack of written law made it necessary for him to frame some of his own, thus developing a rule of behavior which became known as the "Code of the West."⁶²

The failure to abide by the Code did not bring formal punishment, but "the man who broke it became, more or less, a social outcast. His friends 'hazed him into the cutbacks' and he was subject to the punishment of the very code he had broken."⁶³ These grassroots laws were statutes for survival and though a cowboy might break every law of state and federal government, he took pride in upholding his own unwritten rules.

For eastern playwrights and dime novelists, the Code of the West became an ad-hoc set of aesthetics that found their way into popular entertainment, as well as the public imagination. By 1880, writers were spreading word of the cowboy and his Code:

There has arisen a person in a big hat...this type loved horses, respected good women, and when working at his trade performed heroisms that must evoke powerful admiration in the Eastern breast. He was brave, he told the truth, he stuck to his pardner, and he scorned to shoot an unarmed enemy. He has a code.⁶⁴

Although the Code of the West was initially unwritten, it became common knowledge when Zane Grey, the famous western novelist, wrote an aptly titled *The Code of the West* in 1934. Gray categorized the statutes of conduct that pioneers, frontiersmen, and cowboys adhered to in order to survive in the wild west. Since that time, several cowboy actors have spelled out the unwritten code in their own style, including Gene Autry's Cowboy Ten Commandments and Roy Roger's Rules for Young Cowboys.

Depending on the source, the Code of the West states this set of rules:

- Live each day with courage.
- Do what has to be done.
- Never take unfair advantage.
- Never go back on your word.
- Know where to draw the line.
- Respect nature, women, and children.
- Protect the defenseless and helpless.
- Defend yourself when necessary.
- Stay loyal to your brand.
- Always respect your country.⁶⁵

The hero of late nineteenth century frontier melodrama became identifiable with the Code as a set of identifiable character traits. In addition to the Code, the hero had to look the part. He was young, strong, virile, and handsome, with a demonstrable skill-set suited to his theatrical environment that included horsemanship, marksmanship, hand-to-hand combat, and the ability to kill if called upon.

Novelists and playwrights, often one and the same, spelled out the Code of the West in a massive amount of material throughout the turn of the century. In the theatre, actors embodied the Code and brought it to life. Considering this, depictions of the frontier hero and the actors who portrayed them, shared a common characteristic in their embodiment of the Code. Thus, the Code of the West can be used as a gauge to measure the internal and external character traits of the frontier hero in American theatre.

Alongside the Code, the second must-have characteristic of the American frontier hero is natural nobility. Natural nobility is a foundational element of the frontier hero in popular entertainment. The classic, mythological hero such as the knight errant appeared naturally noble; that is, aristocratic in bearing, if rustic in appearance. The trait is seen in the American frontier hero. Davy Crockett, the King of the Wild Frontier, Jesse James, The Bandit King, and Buffalo Bill, the Knight of the Plains are bound by natural nobility. From the medieval knight to the Old West cowboy, a line of nobility stitched together a lineage of those “who in other times, other costumes, other dramas had struggled in Greece, Spain, and Camelot... wherever he exists, he is the Hero.”⁶⁶ In American theatre, the frontier hero continued to be portrayed “as a chivalric loner whose background is somewhat mysterious, fights his battles alone, and ultimately is rewarded.”⁶⁷ As he journeyed west, the frontier hero evolved. The backwoodsman shed his coonskin cap, leather stockings, and flintlock rifle for a cowboy hat, boots, chaps, and a Colt.45. As the most potent manifestation of the American frontier hero, the cowboy remains classic.

During his ascent, however, the cowboy was not the most popular frontier hero, but one of many types. While a number of frontier heroes, such as the backwoodsman, the scout, and the outlaw would momentarily reign as the most prominent frontier hero in American popular entertainment, the cowboy won out in the end. Although the cowboy surpassed his predecessors and achieved full mythological stature in twentieth century film and television, his essential traits were established in nineteenth century theatre. The stage actors of frontier melodrama stocked their characterizations with a shared set of internal and external characteristics we now recognize in the cowboy, including the embodiment of the Code of the West and natural nobility. Three actors stand out.

Frontier Melodrama: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Frank Mayo, William Cody, and James Wallick are three of a kind. Despite divergent backgrounds, the three men come together to form a strong hand in analyzing the frontier hero in American theatre. All three were American actors who worked in late nineteenth century frontier melodrama, all three played signature roles that reaped fame and fortune (only to lose it and start over), and all three portrayed actual heroic figures from the American frontier. Like Hackett's portrayal of Wildfire, the characterizations of these three actors blurred the line between fact and fiction. Individually, each actor portrayed a specific type of frontier hero, yet despite categorical differences between the backwoodsman, the scout, and the outlaw, the characters are cut from the same cloth. Simply put, the backwoodsman lives in the scout, who lives in the outlaw, who lives on in the cowboy; whether staged in the Alleghenies, the Great Plains, or on the Missouri borderlands, a bond exists in representations of the frontier hero in American melodrama.

The development of the frontier hero in American popular entertainment was a process as shifty as the frontier itself. The contribution of theatre in this movement, if not as well documented as other cultural products of the late nineteenth century, is equally important. In order to better understand an evolution of frontier hero in American theatre, it is necessary to explore the form in which he developed. The essential and indispensable source for any current examination of American frontier melodrama is Roger Hall's *Performing the American Frontier, 1870-1906* (2002). Hall's extensive research examines how the American frontier was performed in the theatre during a period from the postbellum years through the turn of the century.

With a wide scope, Hall targets the subject matter and theatrical styles used to dramatize the frontier; he examines “the plays, the playwrights, and the players who helped define the American westward migration in theatrical terms and covers the complete dramatic experience including performance and staging.”⁶⁸ Rosemarie Bank, noted theatre historian and theorist, credits Hall's book as:

The best survey of its subject. It recovers the texts, productions, and careers of the purveyors of frontier plays in the United States in the latter nineteenth century, identifies and analyzes frontier plots and characters, and assays their receptions by audiences, reviewers, and contemporaries. No scholar can now move on to what *Performing the American Frontier* has left unsaid without acknowledging a considerable debt to what it has articulated. *Performing the American Frontier* should be required reading for any current study on American frontier melodrama.⁶⁹

In conjunction with Banks' *Theatre Culture in America, 1825-1860* (1997), Hall's *Performing the American Frontier, 1870-1906*, extends fundamental coverage over American frontier melodrama.

Hall's chief analytical strategy is “to explore how the frontier plays enabled audiences to claim ownership of the territory” and “supplied a popular outlet for the public's fascination with border events.”⁷⁰ Hall's strategy is helpful when exploring the development of the cowboy hero in frontier melodrama. Analyzing nineteenth century theatre through primarily sources like newspaper reviews and clippings can be difficult. The newspaper critic can be subjective at best and unabashedly biased at worst. The

cowboy became the people's choice of preeminent hero of the American frontier, but why he was chosen is complicated. One driving force behind this decision was the power of popularity.

Popular theatre of this period and its audience have often been characterized by scholars in terms of clear cut delineations like good/bad and high/low, as in Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988). This bifurcated model encourages a divide between a sophisticated audience and "the mass of humankind forever destined to wallow in their beer, their gin, and their fun."⁷¹ This approach has its critics. Bank warns, "the binary model is an easy way in-and-out of the nineteenth century" and "like the Platte River in Nebraska, the highbrow/lowbrow divide runs a mile wide and an inch deep."⁷² John Storey, author and cultural theorist, would agree and does as much in *Inventing Popular Culture* (2003), which argues that "popular culture is a category invented by intellectuals" and has become "the dominant paradigm in cultural analysis" for over a century.⁷³ The problem with a high/low mode of analysis as applied to the frontier hero in late nineteenth century melodrama is that it discredits the people who perpetuated the product, specifically the actor and audience.

The relationship between actor and audience is a key to the development of the cowboy. Actors who portrayed actual frontier heroes reflected the interest of their audience, specifically the young men and boys who crammed theatres to watch. Walter J. Meserve, American theatre historian and scholar, wrote "the hero of frontier melodrama became incredibly popular during the 1870-80s, as the nation grappled with its ever-changing identity and the settling of the West."⁷⁴ Moreover, Hall writes, "the hero in frontier plays was especially important in late nineteenth century American society, for

they were in effect, defining postbellum masculine identity.”⁷⁵ In their portrayals of the frontier hero, Mayo, Cody, and Wallick embodied this identity.

The identity of the American frontier hero is seen in a single, symbolic image: a strong male, dressed in frontier attire, brandishing a firearm. The symbolic value of this image is acknowledged by Robert Warshow, in his article *The Westerner*:

The value we seek in the Western are in the images of a single man with a gun. The gun tells us that he lives in a world of violence, but the drama is that the moment of violence must come according to its special laws.⁷⁶

These laws are embedded in the Code of the West. Clad in buckskins with gun in hand, Mayo, Cody, and Wallick struck the pose and performed the Code on stage. In doing so, their stage presence gave form and meaning to the values of American frontier spirit.

In *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973), Richard Slotkin states “America attempts to create living legends; the nation’s myth and historical memory is created through the popular recognition of shared symbols.”⁷⁷ The shared symbols of frontier melodrama were performances based upon living legends. While the plays of Mayo, Cody, and Wallick were certainly theatricalized, the material was based on actual people, places, and events from the frontier. In this way, Mayo’s *Crockett*, Cody’s *Buffalo Bill*, Wallick’s *Jesse James*, could claim authenticity.

The issue of authenticity in the evolution of the cowboy is a rough terrain. The word itself lies somewhere in the territory between history and myth – fact and fantasy. Claims of authenticity in the theatre reinforced a “real” the frontier by offering a tangible experience, while perpetuating a belief in the mythic power of the American West:

The late nineteenth century produced an outpouring of drama about the American West. The plays placed onstage vivid pictures of the western landscape and adorned those pictures with garments and paraphernalia of the region; those pictures brought to life the cowboys, outlaws, natives, horses, and gunfire of the border.⁷⁸

Like Hackett's *Wildfire*, Mayo's *Davy Crockett* was viewed as "the first time an actor portrayed an authentic frontier hero who embodied the theme of the west."⁷⁹ In the forty years between Hackett and Mayo, the portrayal of Crockett transformed from authentic anecdote to authentic hero of the mythic American frontier. The transformation occurred through more specific claims of authenticity, most notably in the use of Crockett's name in the title of Mayo's production. The issue of names and titles in relation to authenticity will present itself again in the case of Wallick and Buffalo Bill Cody, who essentially portrayed himself in what amounted to a true blurring of fact and fiction on and off stage.

Ultimately, Mayo, Cody, and Wallick gave the audience what they wanted to see: an action packed adventure, set in the American West, featuring a genuine frontier hero. From 1872 to 1903, frontier melodrama emerged as a major force in American theatre. Throughout the turn of the century, audiences witnessed an "explosion of the form as performers hopped aboard the train to the dramatic frontier."⁸⁰ In portraying authentic frontier heroes, actors tangled with fact and fiction – history and myth. Emerging from the fray were three performers who captured the imagination of the audience, and in turn, represent a significant stage of development in the evolution of a hero with no name from the Wild West who will always be remembered as the cowboy.

Notes

¹ Gary A. Richardson, *American Drama from the Colonial Period Through World War I: A Critical History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993) 92.

² Melvin R. Mason, "The Lion of the West: Satire on Davy Crockett and Frances Trollope." *South Central Bulletin* (29.4, 1969) 143-45.

³ Rosemarie K. Bank, *Theatre Culture in America, 1825-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 70. See also: Rosemarie K. Bank, "Frontier Melodrama" *Theatre West: Image and Impact*, eds. Dunbar H. Ogden, Douglas McDermott, and Robert Károly Sarlós (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990) 151. The input of Rose Bank appears on the first page of this dissertation and remains throughout. I hope to have made full use of her contribution to the field, as well as, her personal guidance and provocation.

⁴ Mason 146.

⁵ William I. Paulding, *The Life of James K. Paulding* (New York: Scribner and Co, 1867) 218.

⁶ James Kirke Paulding, *The Lion of the West*, ed. James Tidwell, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954) 64.

⁷ Roger Hall, *Performing the American Frontier, 1870-1906* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 28-30. It is difficult to measure the full weight of Roger Hall's influence on this dissertation. Suffice to say, that *Performing the American Frontier* is indispensable for any study on frontier melodrama, not the least of which is my own. Hall's extensive research, thorough documentation, and striking analysis created a sturdy foundation, from which this study works with appreciation and gratitude.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jennifer Schlueter, "A Theatrical Race: American Identity and Popular performance in the Writings of Constance M. Rourke," *Theatre Journal* (60, 2008) 537.

¹⁰ Stuart Wallace Hyde, "The Representation of the West in American Drama from 1849 to 1917," (diss., Stanford University, 1953) 127. Hyde's dissertation, along with Merl W. Tillson, "The Frontiersman in American Drama: An Analytical Study of Characters and Plays Reflecting the Phenomenon of Westward Expansion," (diss., University of Denver, 1951), are considered the first academic studies to focus on the frontier in American theatre and drama. Both dissertations remain valuable for their foundational research and analysis. Equally valuable is Kay Marcella Robinson's *Depictions of the Cowboy in American Popular Drama*, (diss., Michigan State University, 1983). Robinson's study is one of the only dissertations that centers on the cowboy figure in American drama. In exploring the development of the cowboy in American theatre, I acknowledge and appreciate her valuable research and shared interest in this subject matter.

¹¹ Frank Mayo portrayed Davy Crockett in Frank Murdoch's *Davy Crockett; or, Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead* (1872). William "Buffalo Bill" Cody portrayed himself in a series of melodramas throughout the 1870s. James Wallick portrayed Jesse James in James McCloskey's *Jesse James, The Bandit King* (1883).

¹² Hall 50.

¹³ William Bloodworth, "Writers of the Purple Sage" *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture*, ed. Richard Aquila (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996) 46.

¹⁴ Bloodworth 45.

¹⁵ William Wright, *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) 88.

¹⁶ William W. Savage, *The Cowboy Hero: His Image in American History & Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979) 36. See also: *Cowboy Life: Reconstructing an American Myth*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975; and *The Frontier: Comparative Studies*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979.

¹⁷ Marc McCutcheon, *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in the 1800s* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books, 1993) 240. Section thirteen of McCutcheon's book is titled "Out on the Range." It offers a glossary of cowboy terminology, including, *backasswards*: done incorrectly, strangely, or opposite from correct.

¹⁸ David H. Murdoch, *The American West: The Invention of a Myth* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2001) 44. David Murdoch's *The American West* presents a concise analysis of how and why the myth of the American West originated. Drawing from a rich source of late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature, Murdoch argues the American frontier is not only romantic, but inspirational; our belief in the mythic West is a cultural creation of the imagination, in what amounts to modern mythology.

¹⁹ Savage 36.

²⁰ Murdoch 37.

²¹ Savage, *Cowboy Life*, 7.

²² Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991) 56.

²³ James H. Beckstead, *Cowboying: A Tough Job in a Hard Land* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991) 49-56.

²⁴ McCutcheon 243.

²⁵ Beckstead 50.

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- ²⁶ Joseph Nimmo, Jr., "The American Cow-boy" *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (Vol. LVII: November, 1886) 880-884.
- ²⁷ Richard Irving Dodge, *Our Wild Indians: Thirty-Three Years' Personal Experience Among the Red Men of the Great West* (Hartford: A.D. Worthington & Co., 1882) 609-10.
- ²⁸ Jacqueline M. Moore, *Cow-Boys and Cattle Men: Class and Masculinities on the Texas Frontier, 1865-1900* (New York: New York University Press, 2010) 168.
- ²⁹ Paul Howard Carlson, *The Cowboy Way: An Exploration of History and Culture* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 2000) 14.
- ³⁰ James R. Wagner, "Cowboy – Origin and Early Use of the Term," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* (63: 1987) 92-93.
- ³¹ John Clay, *My Life on the Range* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965) 122; and Moore 72.
- ³² Carlson 13.
- ³³ Murdoch 48.
- ³⁴ Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960) 56.
- ³⁵ Murdoch 80.
- ³⁶ Turner's original essay can be found in Frederick J. Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1894) microfilm, reel 543. no. 5458. See also: Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962); *Frontier and Section: selected essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961); *History, Frontier, and Section: Three Essays*, ed. Martin Ridge (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 1993); Ray A. Billington, *The Frontier Thesis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966); and *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: The Significance of the Frontier in American History, and Other Essays*, ed. John M. Faragher (New York, N.Y.: H. Holt, 1994).
- ³⁷ Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962) 13.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.* 8-10.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.* 15.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.* 16-18.
- ⁴² Ray A. Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 35.

⁴³ Turner 27.

⁴⁴ Richard Slotkin, "Nostalgia and Progress: Theodore Roosevelt's Myth of the Frontier," *American Quarterly*. 33.5 (1981): 613-614.

⁴⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*. (New York: Review of Reviews, 1910) xx.

⁴⁶ Jones, Thomas C. *Shaping the Spirit of America; Articles from Harper's and Century Magazines Recalling Events and Times That Helped Determine the Present National Image of the United States of America* (Chicago: J.G. Ferguson Pub. Co, 1964) 123-125.

⁴⁷ Murdoch 80.

⁴⁸ Bernard Weinberger, *The Age of Steel and Steam* (Time, Inc. 1964) 55.

⁴⁹ Charles W. Harris and Buck Rainey, *The Cowboy: Six-Shooters, Songs, and Sex* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976) 47.

⁵⁰ Kay Marcella Robinson, *The Depictions of the Cowboy in Selected Nineteenth Century American Popular Drama* (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1983) 39.

⁵¹ Newberry Library Dime Novel Collection, 2001 (<http://www.newberry.org/collections.html>).

⁵² Michael Denning, "The Figure of the Dime Novel in American Culture" *Popular Culture in American History*, ed. Jim Cullen (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) 133.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 134.

⁵⁴ Richard Aquila *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996) 23.

⁵⁵ Denning 137.

⁵⁶ Albert Johannsen, *The House of Beadle and Adams and Its Dime and Nickel Novels: The Story of a Vanished Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950) 53.

⁵⁷ Savage 110-112.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 111.

⁵⁹ Prentiss Ingraham, *Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys; Or, the Raiders and the Rangers: A Story of the Wild and Thrilling Life of William L. Taylor* (New York: Beadle and Adams Pocket Library, No. 204, 1887) 11-12.

⁶⁰ Aquila 164; Robinson 40-41; and Savage, *The Cowboy Hero* 145-147.

⁶¹ Aquila 10.

⁶² Ramon F. Adams, *The Cowman & and His Code of Ethics* (Austin: Encino Press, 1969) 91.

⁶³ Ibid. 96.

⁶⁴ Bernard DeVoto, "Birth of an Art," *Harper's Magazine* (CCXI December, 1955) 8.

⁶⁵ Zane Grey, *Code of the West* (Roslyn, N.Y: Walter J. Black, 1934). See also: Adams 90-95; Aquila 164-165; Carlson 193-195; and James P. Owen and David R. Stoecklein, *Cowboy Ethics: The Code of the West* (Ketchum, Idaho: Stoecklein Publishing & Photography, 2004) 15-16.

⁶⁶ Grey 271.

⁶⁷ Warren J. Barker, "The Stereotyped Western Story," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (XXIV, 1955) 235.

⁶⁸ Hall i.

⁶⁹ Rosemarie K. Bank, "Roger A. Hall. Performing the American Frontier, 1870-1906" *Modern Drama* 45.1 (2002)159.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003) 18.

⁷² Rosemarie K. Bank, Mid-American Theatre Conference, Cleveland, Ohio, March 5-7, 2010.

⁷³ Storey xi.

⁷⁴ Walter J. Meserve, *American Drama to 1900* (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1980) 50. See also: *An Emerging Entertainment: The Drama of the American People to 1828* (Bloomington: University Press, 1977); and *Heralds of Promise: The Drama of the American People During the Age of Jackson, 1829-1849* (NY: Greenwood Press, 1986).

⁷⁵ Hall 11.

⁷⁶ Robert Warshow, "The Westerner," David Denby, ed., *Awake in the Dark: An Anthology of American Film Criticism, 1915 to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) 113.

⁷⁷ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1973) 269. See also: *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1985); and *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

⁷⁸ Hall 3.

⁷⁹ Laurence Hutton, *Curiosities of the American Stage* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891) 92.

⁸⁰ Hall 49.

CHAPTER II

FRANK MAYO – DAVY CROCKETT

*Lacking a body of true myth and ritual, Americans conceive of their heroes.*¹

Go West, Young Man

Throughout nineteenth century frontier melodrama, the hero roamed a borderline between fact and fiction. The central heroic character of many “border plays,” as frontier melodrama was also known, were renditions of actual heroic figures who symbolized a larger, mythic persona for the audience. As stated in Chapter One, the first stage frontier hero in American drama was Nimrod Wildfire, the Ring-tailed Roarer in *The Lion of the West* (1831).² Wildfire was based on the famous backwoodsman, Davy Crockett, who was considered a living legend. By virtue of both chronology and geography the backwoodsman ranked first among stage frontier heroes. His character type appealed to the imagination of an audience fascinated by the frontier. Wildfire’s primary character traits were passed on to a lineage of western heroes, such as the scout and bandit. Beneath the categorical differences of the American frontier hero runs a common code of internal and external characteristics. Unknowingly, Wildfire blazed a trail for generations of frontier heroes to come, including the mythic cowboy hero.

Forty years after Nimrod’s Wildfire’s debut, another Davy Crockett took to the stage in Frank Murdoch’s *Davy Crockett, or Be Sure You’re Right, Then Go Ahead* (1872). To his credit, Murdoch’s *Davy Crockett* would become “the most popular frontier melodrama of its time.”³ The play featured an American-born actor named Frank Mayo as the central heroic character. *Davy Crockett* became a signature role for Mayo; he performed the role over two thousand times, in theatres across the continent. In his time,

Mayo was one of the most beloved actors in American theatre. Although not remembered as well as his contemporaries – Edwin Booth, Edwin Forrest, or Joseph Jefferson – Mayo was no less of a star, and *Davy Crockett* was his claim to fame.

Of the available sources on Frank Mayo, most were written by Mayo himself.⁴ It is notable then, that for someone so detailed in documenting his later life, Mayo kept his childhood a secret. We know that he was born on 18 April 1839 to Irish American parents in a poverty-stricken district of Boston, Massachusetts:

Because of a reluctance to identify himself with such humble beginnings, [Mayo] never gave any details about his early childhood. He never mentioned his parents by name, even his death certificate has only a blank where their names should be.⁵

Other than this information, little is known of Mayo's early years in Boston. In 1853, when Mayo was thirteen years old, he left Boston and headed west. Like many young men of his time, Mayo was drawn west by the prospect of gold that lay waiting in the mines of California and Nevada. By 1853, the Gold Rush was waning, and like other would-be prospectors who arrived late, Mayo did not strike it rich. He did, however, discover the theatre.

In 1895, the *New York Dramatic Mirror* published an interview with Mayo. The actor said, "When I was a mere lad, I was seized with an adventurous spirit to seek my fortune in the gold mines of California. My inclinations, however, soon took the direction of a stage career."⁶ Indeed, Mayo's time as a prospector was short-lived; he soon found himself kicking around the streets of San Francisco. At fourteen, Mayo was a long way from home. He was in need of a job or a friend; he found both in Thomas Maguire (1820-

1896). Like Mayo, Maguire was an Irish American migrant from the east coast who traveled to San Francisco in search of fortune. Maguire, who was unable to read or write, began his career as a bartender and gambling hall manager in 1849. The next year, Maguire convinced the owners of the establishment to turn the second floor into a theatre. He named it the Jenny Lind, after the famous nineteenth century opera soprano, who had toured the United States in 1850 under the promotion of P.T. Barnum.

Thomas Maguire made his fortune in the business of booze, gambling, and theatre. During the California Gold Rush, “gambling and the theatricals were inextricably interwoven in the city and in the mines; and both were accompanied by a richly flowing bowl. Every gambling house had a bar. Every theatre had a bar at its entrance.”⁷ Maguire, the illiterate gambling man with a taste for opera, would become one of the most famous theatrical entrepreneurs in the west. After his Jenny Lind venture, Maguire would go on to create a chain of opera houses throughout California and Nevada, suitably named Thomas Maguire’s Opera House.

Maguire gave Mayo his first job in the theatre, and both men would work together for years to come. Mayo started his life in the theatre as a backstage-boy peddling peanuts and serving as a stagehand. At sixteen, he began appearing onstage as a supernumerary or extra. In 1856, Mayo landed his first speaking role at the American Theatre in San Francisco. He served as the waiter in *Raising the Wind*.⁸ From here, Mayo’s career as an actor was on its way. After paying his dues, in a series of walk-ons and one-liners, Mayo became a permanent member of Maguire’s company. Mayo cut his teeth on Shakespeare in front of an unforgiving, yet discerning, audience of miners,

gamblers, and thieves. In ten years, he would become the company's leading man, and one of the most prominent stage actors on the west coast.

In setting out for San Francisco, Mayo inadvertently became part of a second boom that occurred during the California Gold Rush: an actor boom. In *Troupers of the Gold Coast; or, The Rise of Lotta Crabtree* (1928), Constance Rourke writes a vivid description on the confluence of actors in Northern California during the 1850s:

San Francisco was full of actors. They had come from the show-boats of Mississippi, from the small theaters of New Orleans, Nashville, and Cincinnati, from New York – actors, opera singers, vaudeville, and circus performers. They had converged from the ends of the earth...they were a wild, perverse race. Nearly all of them were young; they were posturing, perverse, humorous, desperate, a single extravagant whole; and [San Francisco] was their sporting-ground. These were theatre people.⁹

Throughout the 1850s, some of the greatest American and English actors traveled west to ply their trade. Star-power, from the likes of Edwin Forrest, Joseph Jefferson, Junius Booth and his sons Edwin and John Wilkes, Charles and Laura Kean, Adah Menken, Lotta Crabtree, James Wallack, James Murdoch, and even James Hackett (who twenty years earlier had originated the role of Nimrod Wildfire) reached the California coast by steamship and prairie-schooner. In their midst was a young actor named Frank Mayo.

During this time, Mayo's name appeared in several California newspapers including the *Daily Alta California*, *San Francisco Morning Call*, and *The Argonaut*. His west coast residency is also verified in books and memoirs, such as Walter M. Lehman's

Memories of an Old Actor (1886), M. B. Levitt's *Fifty Years in Theatrical Management* (1912), and, of course, Constance Rourke's *Troupers* (1928). In Chapter IV: The Merry Miners, Rourke recounts Lotta Crabtree's western tour in which Mayo played a part:

In 1858...from Stockton over the wide San Joaquin Valley the Crabtrees were weaving their way among other actors. [They] had recently been playing in Mariposa, with Frank Mayo, the genial Walter Lehman, and others, in a barn without a floor, where miners brought barstools and staked off places like claims.¹⁰

The migration of legitimate theatrical stars, like the Booths, Keans, and Crabtrees, from the east to west coast raises a question: why would actors leave the safety and security of New York, to make an expensive and often dangerous journey west?

We can speculate that east coast actors were inclined to travel west in search of adventure or sheer wanderlust; however, not unlike the touring actor today, they also did it for the money. If, as in Mayo's case, a fortune could not be found in actual mining, there was money to be made off the miners themselves. In the 1850s, top actors could earn \$3000 a week in San Francisco; the best theatres in the east were offering a tenth as much.¹¹ New York theatre managers, who witnessed the exodus, attempted to sign top talent to long term contracts to no avail; the call of the west was strong – tales of actors delivering Shakespearean soliloquies on giant redwood stump stages, to an appreciative cascade of gold, drew the actors in like flies.

Stage actors performing for an audience of uncouth miners on the wild frontier paints a striking backdrop for a chapter on Frank Mayo. Two aspects of Mayo's west coast apprenticeship stand out: first, the significance of Shakespeare in the American

West; and second, the unique performance conditions of theatre during the Gold Rush. Mayo's performance environment determined his development as an actor. He parlayed his experience performing Shakespeare in the rough-and-tumble mining camps of west into greater success portraying *Davy Crockett* in theatres back east. Moreover, Mayo's migration from east to west and back again, illustrates the manner in which frontier experience not only informed his characterization of Davy Crockett, but authenticated it as well. His Crockett displayed the signature markers of the frontier hero, specifically a characterization embedded with the Code of the West and natural nobility. In the process, Mayo marked his legacy as one of the great actors in American frontier melodrama, and provided passage for the cowboy hero.

Will Shakespeare and the Wild West

In 1831, the same year Wildfire appeared in *The Lion of the West*, a young Frenchman named Alexis de Tocqueville began a tour of the United States. The purpose of the Tocqueville expedition was to study the national prison system, as well as the broader institution of American democracy. At twenty-five, Tocqueville was also in search of adventure. He traveled as far west as the Ohio River valley and then south to New Orleans. Throughout his travels, Tocqueville recorded his observations on the essence of America, which ended up in his famous travelogue *Democracy in America* (1835). Of note, is a comment he made on the discovery of Shakespeare on the frontier:

In the recesses of the forests of the New World, there is hardly a pioneer's hut that does not contain a few odd volumes of

Shakespeare. I remember that I read the feudal drama of *Henry V* for the first time in a log cabin.¹²

The appearance of Shakespeare on the American frontier caught Tocqueville by surprise. It must have been shocking to find the work of England's greatest writer in these recesses of the forest. He certainly would have expected to find log cabins, but Shakespeare? And once there, how could the Bard's poetry be appreciated by pioneers? These questions and the broader issue of Shakespeare in pre twentieth century American culture, has been the focus of several books.¹³

Throughout the twentieth century, scholars have examined the role Shakespeare played in shaping nineteenth century American popular culture. One definitive take away from these studies is that in the hearts and minds of many nineteenth century citizens of the United States, Shakespeare was considered "American." Indeed, the appearance and importance of Shakespeare in the United States, and more specifically its western frontier, continues to be a source of curiosity for scholars old and new. Thus, the Tocqueville quote has found its way into most of the cited volumes, and in the process, become quite popular in itself as a connector between Shakespeare and the Wild West. Yet, there are other connections.

James Fennimore Cooper, the prolific nineteenth-century American author, declared Shakespeare "the great author of America," asserting that Americans had "just as good a right" as Englishmen to claim Shakespeare as their own.¹⁴ For his own part, Cooper created one of the first frontier heroes in American literature. In a series of novels known as *The Leatherstocking Tales* (1827-1841), Cooper introduced readers to Natty Bumppo. Bumppo was a prototype for frontier protagonists in American popular culture.

Born to white parents, but raised by American Indians, Bumppo grew up to be a skilled warrior and woodsman who respected nature. With his trusty flintlock rifle, Bumppo lived by the code: “One shot...one kill.” In each novel, Cooper gave Bumppo a second name including: Pathfinder, Deerslayer, Leatherstocking, and the most well known, Hawkeye, from *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). It is notable that Cooper claimed Shakespeare to be American, while inventing a heroic figure from the American frontier.

In *Highbrow/lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988), Lawrence Levine draws a direct connection between Shakespeare and the developing values of the nineteenth century American popular culture:

Shakespeare seemed to fit – because so many of his values were, or at least appeared, close to their own, and were presented through figures that seemed real and came to matter to the audience.¹⁵

Shakespeare did matter to nineteenth century America, particularly to inhabitants of the frontier, whose values and tastes were directly influenced by the environment they were facing. As they ventured west, pioneers felt the need to create “a national myth and historical memory through the popular recognition of shared symbols.”¹⁶ For them, Shakespeare was a perfect prefab fit.

On the frontier, Shakespeare was a cultural provision. At first glance it may seem surprising that a pioneer confronted with the harsh reality of frontier life and bent on survival might have any time or appreciation for Shakespeare. Life on the border was filled with danger; this violent reality was compounded by a fear of never being able to return home, what David Hackett Fischer referred to as a “voluntary banishment” from the eastern seaboard or further back to “the mother country.”¹⁷ For many nineteenth

century settlers, homesickness was much more than a sentimental yearning for an earlier, better time; it was an aching sense of physical separation, a disease originally diagnosed as nostalgia.¹⁸ Americans embarking on the journey west, which Frederick Jackson Turner describes as a crucible of the frontier, were afflicted with a simultaneous sense of anxiety and excitement, hope and loss.

To combat their nostalgia, settlers made precious cargo space for two books: the King James Bible and the works of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's plays were more than entertainment for strangers in a strange land; they were "sustenance for the spirit."¹⁹ This was not lost on Karl Knortz, a German American folklorist, who wrote a series of works in 1882, intended to instruct the people of his native Germany on the culture and customs of the United States:

There is, assuredly, no other country on earth which Shakespeare and the Bible are held in such general high esteem as in America. If you were to enter an isolated cabin in the Far West and...its inhabitants were to exhibit many of the traces of backwoods living, you will certainly find the Bible and...also some cheap edition of the works of the poet Shakespeare.²⁰

The plays of Shakespeare were indeed a cultural provision, the raw material of campfire tales, which fit the oral storytelling tradition crucial to America's cultural construction.

Yet, Shakespeare was more than just the stuff of frontier stories; his poetry and prose aligned pioneers with Shakespeare's characters on a personal level. Across the west, pioneers, miners, mountain men, and yes, cowboys, identified with Shakespearean language. Jennifer Lee Carrell recounts an anecdote describing "a bunch of cowboys"

sitting around a campfire in Montana listening to a reading of the “dogs of war” speech from *Julius Caesar*. In response, a cowboy said, “That Shakespeare could sure spill the real stuff. He’s the only poet I ever seen was fed on raw meat.”²¹ In Owen Wister’s novel, *The Virginian* (1903), the no-named cowboy hero says, “Shakespeare makes men talk the way they do in life.”²²

Shakespeare was at home on the frontier, and in some cases, he was there to stay. There is evidence that the name Shakespeare has remained an enduring part of the western landscape; a town in New Mexico, a mountaintop in Nevada, a reservoir in Texas, and a glacier in Alaska are all named Shakespeare.²³ It was miners and prospectors, however, who particularly staked Shakespeare’s name to the land. From Colorado to California, several mining claims were named after Shakespearean characters, notably women, including Ophelia, Desdemona, and Cordelia.²⁴

The popularity of Shakespeare in such an environment could be viewed as an anomaly. Instead, frontier theatre should mark a cultural communion. The performance of Shakespeare in mining communities of California and Nevada was tangible proof that the western United States had spliced into a long cable of English cultural past.²⁵ Something about Shakespeare’s plays, particularly the tragedies, resonated on the frontier. In *Troupers*, Rourke wrote, “miners swarmed from the gambling saloons and cheap fandango houses to see *Hamlet* and *Lear*.”²⁶ Indeed, the most popular plays in mining camps were Shakespearean tragedies. Rourke suggests a campfire mentality of frontier inhabitants was compatible with Shakespeare, whose words spoke to an audience that identified with the flawed heroes they witnessed on stage. In an environment where death and violence were commonplace, Shakespeare’s tragic hero was shockingly real. In the

words of Sturgess, “Shakespeare’s character’s fought and died; they were people who murdered and were in turn punished for their greed and other failings.”²⁷ Theatre on the frontier was a place that welcomed weary souls from the mine, mountain, or trail; a place where Shakespeare’s infamous stage direction, “Exit pursued by bear,” was a possibility.

Actor, Audience, and Theatre on the Frontier

During the Gold Rush era, actors referred to remote access mining camps of California and Nevada as the “ultima thule,” a term used in medieval geography to denote any distant place beyond the known border of the world. At twenty years old, Mayo must have felt like a paladin, acting out the adventures of Hamlet or Prince Hal on the edge of America. In these surroundings, Mayo developed an acting style determined by his performance environment, the site of theatre and its participating audience.

In the late nineteenth century, places like Virginia City, Nevada were wild. Those who succeeded in making the overland trek across the western United States did not find survival any easier when they reached remote mining towns like Rough-and-Ready or Hangtown. Tenderfoots and greenhorns alike had little idea how unrewarding or unhealthy prospecting was in actuality.²⁸ Miners suffered one misery after another: disease, accident, violence, and suicide were the norm. Government jurisdiction was scant at best. When necessary, inhabitants had to take the law into their own hands. Vigilante committees became ad hoc law enforcement; frontier courts were presided over by “Judge Lynch” and his legal statute, the Code of the West. The lack of legality created a lawless environment, which promoted an image of the Wild West back east. Like the cowboy hero, the image of the Wild West was a creation of fact and fiction.

In this environment, miners had few diversions: drinking and gambling. Theatre, especially the plays of Shakespeare, was in high demand. *In How Shakespeare Won the West* (1989), Helen Koon writes:

When they arrived in California, [actors] found an audience hungry for the theatre of Shakespeare. The vision of rowdy, illiterate miners sitting in rapt silence through the performances *Hamlet*, shouting lines to prompt forgetful actors...is less fanciful than it might seem.²⁹

Indeed, miners made an incredibly appreciative and lucrative audience for actors who ventured to isolated mining camps, in spite of the treacherous travel conditions.

There was money to be made in the hills; however, getting to the remote mining camps was another story. If life in San Francisco during the 1850s was rough, life on the road was downright dangerous. On tour, a company such as Maguire and Mayo's faced "almost as many hardships as the miners:"

When players toured outside of established towns, lawlessness was rampant. The slightest accident could bring serious consequences from the very real dangers of grizzly bears, wolves, sidewinders, and robbers. No roads led over the mountains...flash floods appeared without warning, high winds, called "Washoe zephyrs," blew men off of their feet.³⁰

Touring to mountain mining camps was risky. Yet, when a troupe of actors was fortunate to arrive at a destination like Angel's Camp, they often found no theatres.

Necessity was the mother of invention for frontier theatre. Although source material is difficult to corroborate, we can speculate that upstart mining communities were quite resourceful when it came to creating a space to play. Mining camps had few, if any, permanent structures. A well-off camp might boast a trading post, livery, three or four saloons, and a canvas-and-paper hotel; all could serve as a theatre. In 1908, *The New York Dramatic Mirror* ran a human-interest article describing the performance conditions of a makeshift, mining camp theatre during the Gold Rush years:

The rafters were so scanty that the glorious climate of California could circulate in and out almost interruptedly. The actors assisted by the landlord and the bartender had soon built a stage of rough boards, having on either side thereof horse blankets for wings.

When an immense American flag had been hung for a curtain their work of art was complete. The space which had been left for the auditorium was filled with long boards on beer kegs. This was for seating the audience. When the five candles stuck into beer bottles had been lighted for footlights, and the blind fiddler had screeched out his last notes...the show began.³¹

In Memories of an Old Actor (1886), Walter Lehman described a similar theatricalized saloon. As Lehman prepared for a performance of *Richard III* in Downieville, California, “a stage was improvised out of the two billiard tables...covering them with boards for that purpose.”³²

Lehman’s *Memories* is particularly relevant, because we know from Rourke’s *Troupers* that Mayo was on tour with Lehman at this time. While on tour, Mayo once had

to play “in the upper story of a cloth-and-paper house” and was “obliged to use two narrow windows for exits and entrances,” making a “heroic exit out of the question”³³ In order to successfully perform on a pool table in an open-air saloon, Mayo needed to acquire a skill-set that met the demands of his performance environment.

During his time in California, Mayo developed into an actor who was known for his incredible strength, internal passion, and a powerful vocal instrument. These traits, along with his handsome physique, became indicative of his acting style. A review in *The Morning Call* described a Mayo performance as:

Highly gratifying... manifest with the fervor and assiduity. Gifted with splendid physical advantages, his personal appearance on stage cannot fail to win admiration; his elocution is very clear and distinct and his enunciation was audible throughout the house.³⁴

Indeed, Mayo had developed the skills needed to conquer the frontier stage. The physical and vocal demands of performing in such an environment, however, were only half the battle. Once on stage, there was an audience to contend with.

Once Mayo made his entrance through a window and mounted the pool table stage, he looked out into the house and saw:

Coatless men with their sleeves rolled up, incessantly spitting, reeking of onions and whisky...expressed satisfaction by cries and thumping feet, instead of clapping. Every man seemed to think his reputation as a citizen depended on the noise he made. The more they like the play, the louder they whistle, and when an audience

bursts into shrill whistles and savage yells, you may be sure they are in the raptures of joy.³⁵

Conversely, if a performance did not meet the mob's approval, all hell could break loose. The *Sacramento Daily Union* reported that a production in 1856 did not wash, and "soon cabbages, carrots, pumpkins, a wreath of vegetables, one sack of flour and one of soot, and a dead goose, simultaneously fell upon the stage."³⁶ The challenge Mayo faced performing for an active audience was in his ability to portray a character that engaged not only the taste of the audience, but the worldview of the audience itself.

In ten years, Mayo had become one of the most highly regarded actors on the west coast. He was a favorite among the "Washoites, who admired the grit and resourcefulness of such a man."³⁷ Newspaper reviews in the *Daily Alta California* and *The Morning Call* offered praise:

The rapid rise of Mr. Mayo from obscurity to penury, by the simple efforts of his genius, to the highest walks of dramatic fame, the natural aptitude which he exhibits for catching the most striking features of the most difficult characters, as it were by intuition, and in fact his "tout ensemble" of everything constituting an actor of the highest order. Where but a few years since he was an unnoticed youth in the streets of San Francisco...he has far outstripped all preconceived expectations of his ability.³⁸

These writers were not the only critics in Mayo's corner. During a performance in Virginia City, Nevada, Mayo impressed a young journalist named Samuel Clemens.

Clemens traveled west in 1861. He was twenty-one, and like Mayo, he tried his hand at prospecting. In 1862, Clemens became newspaper correspondent for the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* in the Nevada Territory. Ten years later, Clemens, now working as Mark Twain, published *Roughing It* (1872). *Roughing It* was inspired by Twain's time in the gold country, and in part by his time spent in Virginia City during the early 1860s. At this time, Clemens and Mayo became friends, establishing a bond that would last throughout their lives.

In July 1863, Thomas Maguire was preparing to open a new opera house in Virginia City. On the fourth of July, he threw a party to celebrate its opening. Maguire invited his lead actor to deliver a poem written especially for the occasion. The house was packed that independence day, including Clemens, who wrote, "Maguire has erected a beautiful theatre on D Street. It is nightly crowded with admirers of Mr. Mayo and other 'theatricides' who are familiar to Californiana."³⁹ That evening, Clemens watched Mayo recite the poem "Washoe." Clemens wrote the performance was "masterful" and Mayo's audience responded with "tremendous applause."

Frank Mayo – This gentleman now performing some of the leading and most difficult characters at Maguire's...is fast rising to great eminence in his profession. He certainly occupies a prominent position in the theatrical world...the mere mention that Mayo is to sustain a certain character, no matter how difficult, is sufficient to fill the house.⁴⁰

Clemens' high praise illustrates the rapid rise of Mayo in west. By 1865, however, Mayo's talent was said to have rivaled the most highly-touted actors of the east, including

New York's own Edwin Forrest. Forrest is perhaps the most famous American actor of the nineteenth century, and a hero to the audience in his own right.

In 1865, Forrest announced a west coast tour. In anticipation of the star's arrival, *The Daily Alta California* informed the actor:

Our critics will soon let you know that your reputation cannot protect you on this coast. You have passed muster in New York, but they will set up Frank Mayo for your model as soon as you get here...and they will say you don't play up to him...that is the grand climax of all criticism.⁴¹

Mayo had come into his own. The poor Irish boy from Boston, who ventured west at fourteen had become a success in the west.

Mayo's journey west is a success story, as well as a story that embodied the Turner Thesis. By traveling west, Mayo had indeed forged his identity in the furnace of the American frontier. Importantly, Mayo's narrative is also a theatre story; a place where many vagabonds have found a place to call home. Like many actors, adventurers, and vagabonds before him, the road still called. On 10 June 1865 the *Daily Alta California* announced:

Off for the East – Mr. Frank Mayo, a young and exceedingly popular actor, leaves California today to try his fortunes on the Atlantic coast. We wish him success, knowing that if he desires to achieve it, he has the talent and ability to do so.⁴²

Mayo had been out west for over ten years; he had come of age. Emboldened by his success, he decided to shake off the dust of the boondocks, and try his luck back east in New York. Little did he know his frontier experience would be put to good use.

In *Melodramatic Formations, American Theatre & Society, 1820-1870* (1992), Bruce McConachie tackles the topic of performed heroism and honor in a section titled, “Theatre of Yeoman Independence, 1830-1855.” In it, McConachie writes that the east-coast theatre of the 1850s revealed aspects of “working-class belief and behavior, which hinted at an ideology of the heroic melodrama to come in the later part of the century.”⁴³ The task of an actor portraying a hero was to ensure that his performance of “traditional male honor [was] constant with the centrality of honor in the lives of its audience.”⁴⁴ Considering this, Mayo’s audience looked for him to do more than act; they wanted him to perform heroically and honorably. He was up to the challenge. When he returned east to portray the legendary frontiersman, *Davy Crockett*, critics were struck by Mayo’s physical and vocal prowess, but also by his ability to act truthfully. Mayo’s truthfulness – noted in the east, but developed out west – became indicative his unique acting style. On stage, Mayo performance embodied the values of courage, dignity, and self-reliance, which was tied to his audience’s sense of honor and self-identification.

Davy Crockett; or, Be Sure You’re Right, Then Go Ahead

On 23 September 1872, seven years after he returned from the west coast, Frank Mayo performed the title role of Davy Crockett in Frank Hitchcock Murdoch’s *Davy Crockett; or, Be Sure You’re Right, Then Go Ahead*. Murdoch’s play is arguably the most well known American frontier melodrama, and its lead character would become a

signature role for the actor. He played the role throughout his life, over two thousand times by his count. After that – “I lost track.”⁴⁵ The production premiered in Rochester, New York, at the New Opera House. One month earlier, in August 1872, Mayo was hired to manage the opera house. Since returning East, Mayo had worked in the city and found its audience receptive; so he put himself in a starring role.

In the 1870s, Rochester had a rising population of over 70,000 people, primarily German immigrants who worked the city’s burgeoning industries on the Erie Canal. At this time, Rochester had a number of entertainment venues which appealed to its working-class audience, including dance halls, museums, and sporting events. Rochester was also a theatre town. In *Rochester History*, a quarterly publication of the Rochester library, Blake McKelvey wrote:

Elder Rochesterians delight to recall the time when Rochester was a theatre-loving town. It was back in the years prior to the First World War, more especially in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, that the city welcomed serious plays, melodramas, and amusing light operas to the half-dozen stages east and west of the river...indeed, Rochesterians crowded the profusion of stages to see and hear their favorite stars.⁴⁶

Among the touring stars who added to the vitality of Rochester’s theatre scene were Frank Mayo, Edwin Forrest, Joseph Jefferson, Fanny Janauschek, the Queen of German tragedy, “and, most thrilling of all, Buffalo Bill. Indeed, William Cody’s residence in Rochester during this period gave the city a special interest in his remarkable success on the stage.”⁴⁷

On 27 August 1872, the New Opera House reopened under management of Mayo. In its first season, the company began rehearsing a “new American romantic play” by Frank Hitchcock Murdoch. Murdoch was a nephew of the famous actor James H. Murdoch, who had performed in San Francisco throughout the 1850/60s. While we do not know if Murdoch and Mayo worked together in San Francisco, we do know the theatre scene was a small world, suggesting that in all likelihood the two had crossed paths. Frank Murdoch was an actor and playwright who worked out of Philadelphia. He and Mayo had been in acquaintance for at least three years prior to the opening of *Davy Crockett*. There are suggestions which indicate Murdoch wrote the piece with Mayo in mind, including *America’s Lost Plays Vol. IV*, where Barrett H. Clark states that, *Davy Crockett* “was written by Murdoch specifically for the well-known actor Frank Mayo.”⁴⁸

Unlike a majority of frontier melodrama playscripts, *Davy Crockett; or, Be Sure You’re Right and Then Go Ahead* survived. Two versions of the script remain.⁴⁹ The Barrett H. Clark version was supplied to Clark by Professor Arthur Hobson Quinn, who secured it directly from a member of the Mayo family. The second version is held in the Billy Rose Theatre Archive of the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts. The NYPL manuscript is considered by both Clark and Quinn as “shorter and less satisfactory” than the published version.⁵⁰ Yet, both read essentially the same. In either case, the story of the script is interesting in itself. The play underwent countless revisions, as Mayo reworked it throughout his life. The fact that Clark’s version was provided to Quinn by the Mayo estate suggests it is as close as exists to the final version used by Mayo himself, giving the reader a sense of where the script lay in the final draft.

Despite the claims by Barrett and Hall of the play's enduring fame and popularity, the first production in Rochester was not a smash. In fact, *The Rochester Daily*, the hometown paper, surmised that the actor/manager must have intended "to abandon the opera house" at the opening of *Davy Crockett*.⁵¹ Undeterred, Mayo stuck with the piece and continued to tinker with it, until the play became more his than Murdoch's. Indeed, after its initial production, Mayo purchased the sole rights to the script, which was a common practice of the time, from Murdoch for \$1000.

Mayo's faith in the play is notable. Few actors have hung onto a play as tenaciously as Frank Mayo held onto *Davy Crockett*. It was not uncommon for actors in the boom-or-bust days of frontier melodrama to ditch an unsuccessful play and look for something new, but not Mayo. There was something in the backwoodsman that called to him. Perhaps it was the memory of his days out west, the lasting impression of bringing classic, heroic characters to life in front of a wild, frontier audience that pushed him onward. Indeed, Mayo hung onto *Davy Crockett* like a mining claim, and although the north-eastern urban seaboard must have seemed like a world away from San Francisco, he kept digging into the role. As *Davy Crockett*, Mayo could re-live the frontier experience for himself and for his audience. Mayo's resolve, if not stubbornness, to stick with *Davy Crockett* illustrates a spirit indoctrinated in the Code of the West.

After its rough opening, Mayo continued to bet on the play; that winter, the stakes were raised. On 24 February 1873, Mayo opened *Davy Crockett* at the Park Theatre in Brooklyn. Despite his effort, the play ran for one week, and again, was hit hard by the critics. Mayo wrote:

It is difficult to tell just what the reception was; it was so good and so bad – good with the “gods” – but for the critics! Well, perhaps you may form an idea of the way in which it was dealt with by them when I tell you the first review of it ended with the words: “of the play, little can be said; the chances are, Mr. Mayo will never play it again.” Others let it down easy. My friends were inclined to smile at it, but I saw dimly then what its chances were, and I have no reason to regret what was called obstinacy.⁵²

Once again, Mayo’s resolve was challenged, and once again, he did not waver. In as much as Mayo was gambling on the play, he was also betting on the audience.

If the popular theatre of 1850s whispered at an ideology of heroic melodrama to come, as suggested by McConachie, then frontier melodrama of the 1870s, was shouting in the halls. Border plays gave the audience what it wanted: action-packed displays of frontier life, featuring genuine heroes, horses, guns, and outlaws from the west. This brand of popular theatre, and its critical backlash, has been cut-and-drawn in terms of highbrow/lowbrow. Theatre scholars, like Rosemarie Bank, have warned that “binary readings deny the complexity of the ideological content” contained in representations of the frontier.⁵³ The ideology of frontier melodrama, the formation of its heroes, and the cultural identity of its audience is not clear-cut. In Chapter Six of *Inventing Popular Culture*, John Storey writes, “the roots and routes of identity are staged and performed in culture and with/in culture.”⁵⁴ Storey’s quote suggests that cultural identity may seem grounded in the past, but it is also rooted in who that culture wants to be, or in who it thinks it should be. Thus, the strength of frontier melodrama, and specifically the

popularity of Mayo's *Davy Crockett* was not only bolstered by the actor's tenacity, but also by a greater force of heroic ideology and identity formation rooted in the American Old West.

With the audience in his corner, Mayo began to win over the critics. In June 1873, he secured a two week run at Wood's Museum in Manhattan. Wood's was an upgrade from the Park Theatre in Brooklyn, an upgrade that applied pressure on Mayo. Under the gun, the actor revised the script and reworked the production. This time it opened to more favorable reviews. The *New York Clipper* stated, "the drama has undergone many changes since its first production; it may now be pronounced one of the most effective of its class."⁵⁵ Even in praise, *The Clipper* critic made certain to remind Mayo and his audience of its proper place. Nevertheless, after his successful run at Wood's in the summer of 1873, Mayo landed his most prominent venue to date for March of the upcoming year at Niblo's Theatre in Manhattan.

The space between productions is of interest. Mayo never sat still with the script; he revised and recalibrated, but never gave up. This was viewed as obstinacy by some of the New York Theatre critics, but the line between stubbornness and persistence is thin. Considering this, the subtitle of the play and Crockett catchphrase, *Be Sure You're Right and Then Go Ahead*, takes on a doubling of its own. The subtitle appears in Crockett's dialogue three times throughout the play in moments preceding heroic action:

DAVY. Mother, what's allus been mine and Father's motto? Ain't it been "Be sure you're right, then go ahead"?

DAME CROCKETT. But are you sure – dead sartin sure you're right?

DAVY. By the Eternal, Mother, I think I am -

DAME. Then go ahead! [Swell music curtain. End of Act I]⁵⁶

After a series of bad early reviews, Mayo must have questioned the viability of his project. Yet, like Crockett, he moved ahead. Mayo continued to perform *Davy Crockett* throughout the fall and winter of 1873/74, in preparation for his return to Manhattan in March 1874.

On 9 March 1874, at thirty-four years old, Mayo returned to New York and opened his most successful run of *Davy Crockett* to date. The run at Niblo's Theatre was extended to four weeks. During that time, Mayo garnered high acclaim:

Frank Mayo brought [Davy Crockett] to Niblo's and at once established his portrait of the brave pioneer as one of the gems of American theatre. How sweet is the memory of this play in the hearts of all who saw it!"⁵⁷

The *New York Times* saw the production as "a vast improvement on the Wild Western drama – with which New York has been surfeited...Mr. Mayo, who is of suitably heroic build, found in the title part a character well suited to him and played it in a rollicking and easy sort of way."⁵⁸ Bravery, rollicking, and a heroic build had been embedded in Mayo's acting style, since he had been out west. His current success ensured that he and *Davy Crockett* were in for a long ride.

The play opens at "A clearing in the forest, with Dame Crockett's cottage set Right." The Property Plot calls for "plenty of dry leaves to cover the stage – four guns to load – a gunpowder stuffed squirrel – water pail, sidesaddle."⁵⁹ Dame Crockett, Davy's mother, known as "the biggest hearted woman in these parts," is cooking in the cabin as a

group of Crockett's friends and fellow backwoodsman enter after an unsuccessful bear hunt:

DAME: Well, boys – what luck?

YONKERS: Bad enough – here's three of us been out on a tramp arter a bar since sun-up and nary a squint of the varmit.

BIG DAN: Say, Sal, what's for supper?

YOUNG BOB (Davy's nephew): Broiled bear steaks.

BIG DAN: Broiled bar steaks! Do you hear that, boys? Bob, where did that bar come from?

YOUNG BOB: Davy killed him last night.

OMNES: Last night! I'm an Injun if I don't think it's the same critter we been arter.⁶⁰

In the first two pages of the play, a chief characteristic of the frontier hero is established: the frontier hero has extreme prowess as a hunter and killer of game. Young Bob, Davy's nephew, reveals to the backwoodsman that Davy has already killed the "bar" that eluded the men, thus accomplishing a feat that three men could not. Moreover, the bear killing scenario sets the stage for Davy's entrance. This type of set-up was a common device in the presentation of frontier heroes onstage; it was seen with Nimrod Wildfire in *The Lion of the West*, and will be seen again in Buffalo Bill Cody's *Life on the Border*. In all three cases, it was important that the reputation of the hero hit the stage before the actual character arrives, in the same way Mayo's west coast reputation preceded him to the east.

Another connection between frontier heroes, including the representations of Wildfire, Crockett, and Buffalo Bill, is marked by big talk. The tradition of the "Ring-

tailed Roarer” lived on in Mayo’s *Davy Crockett*, notably enhanced by the actor’s impressive vocal instrument:

DAVY: (offstage): Hollo!

YOUNG BOB: That’s him. That’s our Davy.

YONKERS: Yes, that’s his voice – as clear as a bell and as sharp as the crack of a rifle - not another one like it on the settlement, and yonder he comes with a two-year old buck [deer] over his shoulder! Enter Davy].

DAVY: Why, hollo, boys, how are you?

YONKERS. In luck agin, eh?

DAVY. Yes, the red fools, will come my way. Well, it’s what they are made for, I spec – but for all that I never drew my knife across the throat of one ‘em without a shudder. Don’t seem like a squar fight, no-how.⁶¹

In his first few lines of dialogue, Mayo presents another element of the Code. Not only is Crockett an excellent hunter/fighter, he is also aware of the difference between right and wrong. In general, the morality of the frontier hero is rarely called into question; while he may have to resort to deadly violence, it is most often necessitated by a call for justice or self-preservation.

All of these elements, presented in the first scene of the play, were noted by the audience and critics alike. A reviewer for the *New York Times* wrote:

The play is full of adventures of frontier life, and the dialogue is plentifully besprinkled with accounts of bear-fights, deer-slaying

and the wiping out of red-skins, with whom the frontiersman a never-ending feud is supposed to rage. The hero of the piece was played last evening with a good deal of spirit and truthfulness.⁶²

The final word of this paragraph reveals a unifying thematic trait of the frontier hero as staged in late-nineteenth-century melodrama. The ability of Mayo to act truthfully was consistently noticed by the critics and audience alike. A review in New York's *The Spirit of the Times* explained, "Mr. Mayo's conception is correct, and his delineation of the backwoodsman never overdone. Every detail was carefully filled out, and the great charm of Mayo's acting was in his perfect naturalness; there was nothing stagey, nothing strained."⁶³ The perception of Mayo as natural and truthful is an elemental trait of the frontier hero on stage, and raises the issue of authenticity in frontier melodrama, an issue that will reoccur in the case of Cody and Wallick.

Claims of authenticity in frontier melodrama perpetuated a belief that border plays were offering a tangible experience of the frontier and frontier hero. An immediate signifying agent of authenticity in frontier melodrama was the actor's appearance or look. Mayo's *Crockett* costume built upon the backwoodsman that had come before him. Like Wildfire, Mayo wore fringed buckskins, a coonskin cap, and moccasins. He also carried a flintlock rifle and had a large Bowie-knife strapped to his waist. Adding to, and accentuating, Mayo's authentic appearance was a prop deer carcass, which the actor had flung over his shoulder as he entered. There was, however, one important addition to the 1870s manifestation of Crockett as opposed to Wildfire in 1831: Mayo wore a large, bushy moustache, whereas Wildfire was clean shaven. It can be said the moustache came into its own during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ While the mustache

remains a bold fashion statement, Mayo's moustache in *Davy Crockett* became another signifying element of the stage frontier hero to come, including Cody's Buffalo Bill.

Mayo's stage appearance was constructed to appear as realistic as possible. His natural look, as noted by critics, is an important element of the American frontier hero's stage evolution. Not only did his appearance help the audience immediately identify him as the hero, but the perceived truthfulness of the stage actor's appearance authenticated his performance. This authentication process would continue throughout nineteenth century frontier melodrama and into the twentieth century, inevitably becoming an important characteristic of the cowboy. As the most potent distillation of the American frontier hero, the cowboy carried on the tradition of wearing authentic frontier attire as a visual marker of his of being from the west.

For Mayo, his natural appearance, combined with his truthful style, stood out to critics, "Mr. Mayo's performance of this backwoods hero is a gem in its way. He looks and walks and talks the trapper to the life, never overacts, and never forgets the character he represents."⁶⁵ As stated, Mayo's style was developed, in part, by his experience out west. The demand of his ideological, if uncouth, audience, situated in the actual frontier, prepared Mayo for *Crockett*. The connection was not lost by the *Chicago Tribune*:

One can readily recognize beneath the uncouth exterior of dress and expression, and the intonation and rough language of the ignorant trapper, dignity and determination. Much of this is due to Mr. Mayo's fortunate possessions...but much is also accountable in his being as conscientious a student even in sensational pieces as he is of Shakespeare characters.⁶⁶

Consciously or not, Mayo applied his experience playing Shakespearean heroes out west on a new brand of frontier hero back east in *Crockett*. Yet, there are ties to an earlier heroic tradition that pre-date Shakespeare, a legacy that found its way to America and into frontier melodrama through tales of the medieval knight-errant.

King of the Wild Frontier

*The central figure in the frontier myth is not the stump-pulling, land-tilling, patriarchal settler who was probably the really significant person in the westward expansion of the United States. It is, rather, a man who caricatures the pioneer values of self-reliance and courage. In the western myth one easily recognizes him as the Hero.*⁶⁷

Davy Crockett is emblematic of the mythic American frontier hero, and Mayo's characterization furthered that myth. Together, both represent a transition toward a new type of central heroic character in American performance. Yet aspects of Crockett's heroic persona, and the larger persona of the frontier hero, belong in part to an earlier heroic tradition. Embedded in Murdoch and Mayo's *Davy Crockett* is the narrative of Sir Walter Scott's poem "Young Lockinvar." Lockinvar is the tale of a young knight who rescues a maiden from a villain. The villain has blackmailed her father with the threat of financial ruin in order to marry his daughter. In the play, Crockett replicates the feats of Lochinvar and transforms from rough backwoodsman into frontier action hero.⁶⁸ The poem is referred to and quoted throughout the play. The stanza listed below was a favorite of Mayo's, who recited it on and off stage:

O, young Lockinvar is come out of the West
Through all the wide Border his steed was the best,
And save his good broadsword he weapons had none
He rode all unarmed, he rode all alone,
So faithful in love and so dauntless in war
There never was a knight like the young Lockinvar.⁶⁹

Closely read, the stanza also provides a bridge between the medieval knight errant and American frontier hero, specifically with the image of a lonesome hero riding his horse across of the west.

In 1872, the mythic cowboy character had not been fully formed. His coded traits, however, were evident in other representations of frontier types. A specific trait that existed in the medieval hero and the American frontier hero was natural-nobility. Natural-nobility is a distinct, shared character trait of the frontier hero, including the cowboy. In *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture*, Richard Aquila considers natural nobility as a must-have element of cowboy character in late nineteenth century popular culture. He defines natural nobility in the cowboy hero as “aristocratic in bearing, if rustic in appearance.”⁷⁰ Indeed, the nobility of the medieval knight errant would cross the Atlantic and reappear as a signature trait of the frontier hero, who was “a chivalric loner whose background is somewhat mysterious, he fights his battles alone, and ultimately is rewarded.”⁷¹ Although the frontier hero was a product of the New World, he still embodied the classic, heroic traits of chivalry and bravery. What makes Mayo’s deployment of Lochinvar in *Davy Crockett* significant is the manner in which Mayo was able to become the “embodiment of epic poetry, chivalry, and romance, while at the same time belonging to our American world.”⁷² This concept is illustrated nicely in the play’s most famous scene.

In Act II, Eleanor, the heroine, and Neil, the gentleman she is forced to marry, have wandered into the wilderness, only to get lost. Crockett rescues the pair, and all three are forced to take shelter from a snowstorm in his hunting cabin. As a blizzard rages outside, Crockett disables the genteel groom with a “drop of spirit:”

DAVY. Open your head – thar, don't make up faces – it's good –

[Neil drinks] Takes the roof off your mouth. Now snooze away.⁷³

To revive the nearly frozen Eleanor, Crockett burns the wooden bar-lock of his cabin door. He then gives Eleanor a book of poetry, which she left at his mother's cabin. As Crockett tends the fire, Eleanor recites Scott's ballad:

Act II. Scene: Interior of Davy's hut.

ELEANOR. Is this your hunting lodge?

DAVY. Yes, this is my crib. This is where I come and bunk when I'm out on a long stretch arter game. Miss, here's something that belongs to you – [Hands her a book] You left it at my mother's house.

EL. Oh! It's dear Sir Walter's book...Ha ha! Now Listen: "Oh! Young Lochinvar is come out West," etc. [Reads first verse of Scott's poem].

DAVY. [Interrupting] Say miss, this ain't true – what you're reading, is it?

EL. Well it might be, although such things are rare nowadays.

DAVY. Yes, I reckon they be – go on, miss – go on! A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse.

EL. [Finishes verse] Why, how excited you are! Does it please you? You see, we have brought our young knight errant to the test...all the world's against him, but the lady's hand is his own.

DAVY. True blue, and the gal's his! Well, there's something in this rough breast of mine that leaps at the telling of a yarn like that. I'm myself hand in hand with nature...an unlicked cub, but my hearts in the right place.⁷⁴

As the two grow close over the poetry reading, howling wolves are heard offstage. The door, now without its bar, is unlockable, leaving the couple unprotected.

Mayo described the scene in the *Dramatic Mirror*, "Quick as thought, Davy Crockett thrusts his arm through the staples, in lieu of the bar, and stands post until daylight drives away the wolves. This scene – this is the 'sensation' of the play."⁷⁵

DAVY. Keep still and listen. [Howl] Thar it is agin. That's wolves.

EL. Wolves - ! [Screams]

DAVY. Don't be skeered. [Wolves howl all around the cabin]

Take it easy, girl. This door is built of oak, I built it – and – blazes the bar's gone!

EL. Gone! [Wolves throw themselves against the door. Warning curtain] Tis true, Nothing can save us!

DAVY. Yes, it can!

EL. What?

DAVY. The strong arm of a backwoodsman!

[Davy bars the door with his arm. The wolves attack the house.

Heads and paws seen in the hut and under the door. Tableau]⁷⁶

The next morning, Davy still stands at the door; the "torn and mangled flesh" of his right arm is of no matter, because "it takes more than a handful of wolves to wipe a man out in

these parts.”⁷⁷ Crockett rides off for help on his horse. Soon after, a search party approaches. Eleanor and Neil are saved from the wild and taken back to civilization to face their impending marriage.

The arm-bar scene became famous. Mayo was known as “The Living Barrier,” and the entire Act subtitled the same in playbills and publicity. A Boston critic wrote:

Mr. Mayo had a chivalrous sense of honor that would do credit to the knights of the round table...[he] is all that fancy paints the noble, poetical backwoodsman, and looked the very personification of nature’s nobleman. The act, in which he is the “living barrier” against the horrible death from the famished wolves...was done with a graphic realization.⁷⁸

The heroic fusion of old and new endured. In *Theatre U.S.A., 1665-1957* (1959), Barnard Hewitt wrote *Davy Crockett’s* “claim to success...is the poem of young Lochinvar dramatized and Americanized...it runs through the play like a thread of gold.”⁷⁹ Act III of Mayo’s *Crockett* combined the undaunted spirit of the American frontier hero with the chivalry of a medieval knight errant, all in the strong right arm of a backwoodsman.

Act Four of *Davy Crockett* is set in the mansion of Eleanor’s father, Major Royston. The blackmail plot is revealed, and the forced marriage is about to commence. Crockett, who has ridden miles for a farewell look at Eleanor, overhears the heroine’s lament. Against his better judgment, Crockett storms the mansion. The two confess their love for one another, only to be caught. In this encounter, Davy delivers a speech to the wedding party, and then whisks Eleanor off in a spectacular escape.

MAJOR ROYSTON: Crockett leave my house...you shall answer to me for this public insult...Leave my house, sir, or the servants shall force you.

DAVY: Force – say, Squire, I want to tell you a little story. There once was a game young knight, I think that is what they called him. He was a scout – a trapper, a man who forded rivers in his buckskins with nary a friend but his horse and rifle. Away he went, caring for nothing, stopping at nothing, until he reached the house that held the girl of his heart. “Whoop,” says the knight, “I’m Lochinvar!” [Runs off with Eleanor]⁸⁰

Act Five begins where the play began, back at Dame Crockett’s cabin. Davy and Eleanor enter and are immediately married by the Parson, who conveniently happens to be there. As soon as the couple are hitched, the others arrive, the extortion is revealed, the debt is cleared, and Crockett delivers a word of warning to the villain, should he return:

DAVY. Look here, do you know what we do with men like you in these parts? We of the hills and mountains band ourselves together, and form a court of law where thar’s mighty little learnin’, but where thar’s a heap of justice, and where a judge sits that renders a sentence – strikes terror to the boldest heart. Do you know his name? It’s Lynch – Judge Lynch!⁸¹

From the first page of the play to the last, character traits of the frontier hero were embodied by Mayo. In performance, the audience witnessed a piece of theatre based on an actual heroic character from America’s frontier past, dressed in immediately

recognizable frontier attire, enacting behavior and characteristics indoctrinated by the Code of the West. In doing so, the play “presented for the first time not only the frontiersman as hero, but also the theme of Western strength and essential goodness over Eastern weakness and corruption.”⁸² The frontier hero type and accompanying theme would appear in many plays well into the twentieth-century, and from there, into film and television, known as Westerns.

In *Performing the American Frontier*, Hall wrote that “Davy Crockett became one of the most revered plays of nineteenth century American theatre.”⁸³ Based on newspaper reviews, like the *New York Herald*, which claimed the play to be “immeasurably the best of American drama; we pity the man or woman who is not moved by his simple manliness and unconscious heroism,” along with publications like Laurence Hutton’s *Curiosities of the American Stage* (1891), which states, “it is almost the best American play ever written,” Roger Hall is correct.⁸⁴

As for Mayo, he became a bi-coastal star, “Mr. Mayo earned the laurels. We have rarely seen so perfectly acted character as *Davy Crockett*.”⁸⁵ The irony of the play’s meteoric rise was not lost on Mayo, who would later comment:

For a year and a half the play received no encouragement beyond the good-natured comment that is bestowed indiscriminately...It was not until the third year that it began to be regarded with high favor, and since that time it has been dubbed an “idyll,” a “pastoral,” an “epic” in five acts!⁸⁶

Indeed, something about *Davy Crockett* clicked. Through the actor’s perseverance and audience appreciation, the play went from bust to boom. Mayo had struck gold, and in the

process, helped usher in a uniquely American form of theatre: the frontier melodrama. Mayo made a theatrical transition himself, from Shakespearean protagonist to American frontier hero. His *Crockett* also marked a shift in the performance of American frontier heroics. In 1831, Crockett was staged as Wildfire; forty years later, Crockett could be Crockett. Was this because the actual Crockett died in 1836, and Mayo could play Crockett with impunity; or was it a desire for something else? The characterization, dramatization, and theatricalization of actual frontier heroes on stage in late nineteenth century frontier melodrama is a pivotal point in the development of the American frontier hero. It will continue to be explored in the next chapter.

As for Frank Mayo, he will be remembered as a good man and a great actor. At the conclusion of his section on Mayo, Hall writes, “Mayo was widely regarded as a decent and honorable man with many friends in the profession and few enemies. Buying Frank Mayo was like buying Jimmy Stewart.”⁸⁷ Like Stewart, Mayo was known for a distinctive voice, natural acting technique, and everyman persona. Mayo did have many friends and followers, none the least of which was Mark Twain. Throughout his career, Mayo also developed relationships with individuals that kept him tied to the Old West.

In 1873, the epicenter of American frontier melodrama was in upstate New York. In September 1872, Mayo opened *Davy Crockett* in Rochester. In December 1872, Cody made his stage debut in Ned Buntline’s *Scouts of the Prairie* in Chicago. In January 1873, both productions were on tour and crossed paths in Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Louisville.⁸⁸ It is not known if Mayo and Cody saw each other perform; however, on 31 January 1873, Buffalo Bill performed *Scouts* at the New Opera House in Rochester.⁸⁹ By 1876, Cody owned a home in Rochester. There is no known correspondence between

Mayo and Cody. One has to wonder, if the actors talked shop during their time in Rochester. Additionally, by performing characterizations of the backwoodsman and the scout, did Mayo and Cody have any sense they were uniting future representations of frontier hero and the cowboy hero to come?

In his analysis of Cody and Mayo, Hall writes, “during this time both men would emerge as major representatives of the masculine border hero in American frontier melodrama; Mayo and Cody defined poles of sentiment and fierce action that influenced virtually every succeeding border drama.”⁹⁰ Although, they took very different routes to the theatre, their characterizations of the backwoodsman and the scout, as well as, their shared residency in Rochester, would unite both men in the history and mythology of the American frontier hero in live performance.

There is one more connection. Both Cody and Mayo are linked to the Old West by their individual acquaintance with General George Armstrong Custer. It is not known if the three men were ever in the same room together, but Duane Fike discovered that Custer attended a performance of *Davy Crockett* in Rochester. After the performance, Custer presented Mayo with the gift of a rifle. Subsequently, Mayo began to carry the rifle on stage with him as Crockett. When Custer was killed at the Battle of Little Big Horn in June 1876, Mayo sent a sympathy letter to Custer’s wife, who responded, “she knew well that Mayo looked to the general as ‘a hero and an idol’ and was glad Mayo would have ‘a memory of his pure and chivalrous character’ in the rifle used as Davy Crockett.”⁹¹ For Cody’s part, he and Custer would have a far more complex relationship, an aspect of which would find its way on stage in 1877.

Sadly, Mayo died as he lived: on the road. On 8 June 1896, at fifty-seven years old, Mayo had a heart attack on a train in the middle of Nebraska. He was en route from Denver to Omaha for an engagement of *Davy Crockett*. Two days prior, Mayo performed the role that would indeed last a lifetime. On 6 June 1896, Frank Mayo was *Davy Crockett* for the last time. From Boston to San Francisco, New York to Nebraska, and points in between, the life and career of Frank Mayo would have a lasting impact on the development of the frontier hero and the cowboy hero to come. In the next chapter, we remain in the western plains, and pick up the trail of the American frontier hero with the Honorable Colonel William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody.

Notes

¹ Benjamin A. Botkin, ed., *A Treasury of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads, and Traditions of the People* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1944) 23.

² Bank 70.

³ Hall 71.

⁴ Frank Mayo, *Autograph Letters Signed from Frank Mayo to Augustin Daly, 1839-1896; Letters of Frank Mayo, 1880; and Pocket Diaries in the Alice Fischer Papers, 1878*, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts (microfilm). The only definitive study devoted solely to Frank Mayo is Duane J. Fike, *Frank Mayo: Actor, Playwright, and Manager*, (University of Nebraska--Lincoln, Diss., 1980). Fike's dissertation is a comprehensive study of Mayo's entire life and career; his research and analysis is valuable and greatly appreciated. In addition to the Fike study is Norman Leslie Earle, *Frank Mayo--American Actor* (California State University, Sacramento, thesis, 1972), 1972. Frank Mayo also appears in Richard Wattenberg, "Americaning Frontier Melodrama: from Davy Crockett (1872) to My Partner (1879)," *The Journal of American Culture* (12.1 1989): 7-16; and throughout George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927). The most recent and thorough recognition of Frank Mayo is in Roger A. Hall, *Performing the American Frontier, 1870-1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 49-87.

⁵ Duane J. Fike, *Frank Mayo: Actor, Playwright, and Manager*, (University of Nebraska--Lincoln, diss, 1980) 2.

⁶ *New York Dramatic Mirror* (Interview), May 11, 1895: 2, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts. Mayo's interview in the *Mirror* is a real find. It focuses on his time in *Davy Crockett*. Subsequently, excerpts and quotes from the interview are found in most of the available scholarship on Mayo/*Crockett*. The interview was given a year and a month prior to Mayo's death on 8 June 8 1896.

⁷ Constance Rourke, *Troupers of the Gold Coast; Or, the Rise of Lotta Crabtree* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1928) 15. Rourke's *Troupers* is still one of the few books that truly captures theatrical performance during the California Gold Rush; it is cited often as a source for frontier theatre, drama, and performance. Additionally, in her book, *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1931), Rourke wrote that the "stroller" or "trouper" – the travelling actor – was an American type on par with the backwoodsman. See also: Jennifer Schlueter "'A Theatrical Race': American Identity and Popular Performance in the Writings of Constance M. Rourke." *Theatre Journal*. 60.4 (2009): 529-543.

⁸ T. A. Brown, *History of the American Stage: From 1733 to 1870* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1870) 288.

⁹ Rourke, *Troupers* 15-16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 144.

¹¹ Carrell 102.

¹² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Phillips Bradley, Vol. II (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1945) 58.

¹³ Several books have focused on the role Shakespeare played in nineteenth century American popular culture, including but not limited to: Coppélia Kahn, Heather S. Nathans, and Mimi Godfrey, *Shakespearean Educations: Power, Citizenship, and Performance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), Esther Dunn, *Shakespeare in America* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1939); Frances Teague, *Shakespeare and the American Popular Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Helene Koon. *How Shakespeare Won the West: Players and Performances in America's Gold Rush, 1849-1865* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 1989); Jonathan Hart, *Columbus, Shakespeare, and the Interpretation of the New World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Kim C. Sturgess, *Shakespeare and the American Nation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988); Jennifer Lee Carrell, "How the Bard Won the West," *Smithsonian* 29 (1998); Nancy Webb, *Will Shakespeare and His America* (New York: Viking Press, 1964); Nigel Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots: Revenge, Drama, and Death in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Random House, 2007); and Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴ James Fennimore Cooper and Gary Williams, *Notions of the Americans: Picked Up by a Travelling Bachelor* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 113.

¹⁵ Levine 36.

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- ¹⁶ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1973) 32. See also: *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (New York: Atheneum, 1985).
- ¹⁷ David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 55.
- ¹⁸ Teague 11.
- ¹⁹ Sturgess 81.
- ²⁰ Eleonore Schamschula, *A Pioneer of American Folklore: Karl Knortz and His Collections* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1996) 47. See also: Karl Knortz, *Shakespeare in Amerika* (Berlin: Hofmann, 1882).
- ²¹ Carrell 102.
- ²² Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (New York: Macmillan, 1902) 155.
- ²³ Carrell 99.
- ²⁴ Koon 98-100.
- ²⁵ Ibid. 107.
- ²⁶ Rourke 101-102.
- ²⁷ Sturgess 91.
- ²⁸ McCutchen 245, 250.
- ²⁹ Koon 4.
- ³⁰ Ibid. 6.
- ³¹ *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, January 3, 1908: 3; and Koon 8.
- ³² Levine 19; and Walter M. Leman, *Memories of an Old Actor* (San Francisco: A. Roman Co., 1886) 212-213.
- ³³ Ibid; Fike 14; and Lehman 274.
- ³⁴ *The Morning Call*, May 28, 1893: 8; and Earle 18.
- ³⁵ Benjamin McArthur, *Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984) 171. See also: David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 57-60; and Levine 24-30.
- ³⁶ *Sacramento Daily Union*, December 8, 1856; Carrell 12; Dunn 206; Levine 28; and Teague 38-39.

³⁷ Margaret Watson, *The Silver Theatre: Amusements of the Mining Frontier in Early Nevada, 1850 to 1864* (Glendale, Calif: H. Clark Co, 1964) 92. "Washoites" refers to Washoe County, Nevada, one of the original counties of the Nevada Territory.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 163-164.

³⁹ Watson 143. See also: James E. Caron, *Mark Twain: Unsanctified Newspaper Reporter* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008).

⁴⁰ *Virginia City Evening Bulletin*, July 8, 1863, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁴¹ *Daily Alta California*, February 3, 1865: 2; Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts; and Earle 13.

⁴² *Daily Alta California*, June 17, 1865, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁴³ Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992) 125.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 130.

⁴⁵ *New York Dramatic Mirror* (Interview), May 11, 1895, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁴⁶ Blake McKelvey, Editor, *Rochester History Vol. XVI, No. 3* (Rochester Public Library, 1954) 1-2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 5.

⁴⁸ Barrett H. Clark, *America's Lost Plays* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963) xviii.

⁴⁹ Barrett H. Clark, *Favorite American Plays of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943); Frank Murdoch, *Davy Crockett, or Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead*, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts; and Isaac Goldberg, Hubert C. Heffner, Leonard Grover, Frank Murdoch, Lester Wallack, George H. Jessop, and James J. McCloskey, *Davy Crockett & Other Plays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940).

⁵⁰ Barrett *Lost Plays* xviii.

⁵¹ *Rochester Daily Union*, September 25, 1872, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁵² *New York Dramatic Mirror* (Interview), May 11, 1895, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁵³ Bank 69.

⁵⁴ Storey 86-88

⁵⁵ *New York Clipper*, June 21, 1873, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁵⁶ *Davy Crockett* 130.

⁵⁷ George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage, Vol. IX* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927) 407-8.

⁵⁸ *New York Times*, March 10, 1874, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁵⁹ *Davy Crockett* 116.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 120.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 121.

⁶² *New York Times*, October 21, 1873, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁶³ Barnard Hewitt, *Theatre U.S.A., 1665 to 1957* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959) 225-226.

⁶⁴ The first United States President to have his official Presidential portrait include a moustache was Ulysses S. Grant (in office 1869-1877), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents.com>, accessed August 20, 2011.

⁶⁵ Laurence Hutton, *Curiosities of the American Stage* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1891) 32.

⁶⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1873, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁶⁷ Richard H. Brown and William Wilbur, *The Western Hero: A Study in Myth and American Values* (Menlo Park, Calif: Addison-Wesley, 1993) 72.

⁶⁸ Hall 69.

⁶⁹ Walter Scott, *Favorite works of Sir Walter Scott, including Rob Roy, The lady of the lake, The lay of the last minstrel, and other poems* (New York: Book League of America 1942) 31.

⁷⁰ Aquila 164.

⁷¹ Warren J. Barker, "The Stereotyped Western Story," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (XXIV, 1955) 235.

⁷² *New York Times*, January 12, 1879. Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive.

⁷³ *Davy Crockett* 131.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 130-133.

⁷⁵ *New York Dramatic Mirror* (Interview), May 11, 1895, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁷⁶ *Davy Crockett* 134.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 135.

⁷⁸ *Boston Transcript*, January 20, 1874, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁷⁹ Hewitt 226.

⁸⁰ *Davy Crockett* 144.

⁸¹ Ibid. 147.

⁸² Hewitt 226.

⁸³ Hall 70.

⁸⁴ *New York Herald*, March 23, 1875, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts; Laurence Hutton, *Curiosities of the American Stage* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1891).

⁸⁵ *Spirit of the Times*, August 30, 1879, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁸⁶ *New York Dramatic Mirror* (Interview), May 11, 1895, Frank Mayo Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

⁸⁷ Hall 72.

⁸⁸ Fike 19-20; and Sandra Sagala *Buffalo Bill on Stage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008) 226.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Hall 50.

⁹¹ Fike 180.

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM CODY – BUFFALO BILL

Seeing Is Believing

In Cody, Wyoming, the past is present. The small, frontier town at the foot of Rattlesnake Mountain still retains the frontier spirit embodied by its namesake: The Honorable William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody. This spirit is encouraged at the Cody Chamber of Commerce, which promotes the town as “What America was, where the cowboy culture thrives, and where the new West begins.”¹ Located appropriately on the western edge of town is the Buffalo Bill Historical Center. The BBHC is more than a museum dedicated to the memory of Buffalo Bill; its mission seeks to interpret his story in the context of history and myth of the American West. Upholding this mission is the “Last Word on the West” – The McCracken Research Library. Above the entrance to the McCracken’s archive is a quote by American Indian author, N. Scott Momaday, which reads: “The West may need to be seen to be believed, but it must be believed to be seen.” Viewing the Old West today is inherently problematic. From the origin of the cowboy to the representation of American Indians in popular entertainment, the fact and fiction of frontier history is called into question. The same is true of Buffalo Bill on stage.

As a case study, Cody is unique. Like Mayo and Wallick, Cody’s time in frontier melodrama directly influenced the creation of the cowboy in American popular culture. Unlike Mayo and Wallick, who performed the roles of Davy Crockett and Jesse James, Cody portrayed himself. To his audience, Cody was the real deal, that is, an authentic frontier hero reenacting actual adventures on stage. This doubled Cody’s person and persona into one of the most iconic identities of the Old West history.²

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the stage career of William Cody in relation to the development of American frontier hero. Doing so will place Cody in a lineage of frontier heroes, thus binding the history and mythology of Buffalo Bill to the evolution of the cowboy through live performance. At the turn of the twentieth century, Cody was an international celebrity. Over a million people in the United States and Europe had experienced Buffalo Bill's Wild West, a traveling circus-like exhibition featuring horsemanship, sharp shooting, and historical reenactments which romanticized the American frontier. For many in the audience, Buffalo Bill was living history. Few men did more to popularize the legendary cowboy figure than Cody; he not only staged the western frontier hero, he embodied him. He remains one of the most prominent figures in cowboy scholarship and is credited as a precursor to representations of the cowboy in twentieth century film and television.³ Yet so much has been written about the "King of the Border Men," that it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. One of the most telling descriptions of Cody is "he blurred the line between fantasy and reality."⁴ Indeed, when considering the scope of Cody's career, from scout to showman, it is evident that he walked the line between man and myth for most of his life. Cody, however, was not alone on this journey. The West needed to be seen to be believed, and through performance, Cody made it all come true for his audience.

For Cody's part, he rarely forgot the public to which he played. In the introduction to his second autobiography, *The Life and Adventures of "Buffalo Bill," Colonel William F. Cody* (1917), Cody acknowledges "the generous American and English peoples" who witnessed "the small part [he] had taken in redeeming the West from savagery:"

I here pour out a full measure of profound thanks and hearty appreciation, and shall hold them gratefully in my memory as a remembrance of old friends, until the drum taps "lights out" at the close of the evening of my eventful life.⁵

Cody's life was a performance, and he used a performative language to describe it. On stage, he theatricalized his frontier heroism, and off stage, he dramatized the rest. That is, from a very early stage in his career, Cody was more than aware of his larger-than-life persona; he promoted and capitalized upon it.

Cody wrote his first autobiography when he was only thirty-two years old. *The Life of Hon. William F. Cody Known as Buffalo Bill, the Famous Hunter, Scout and Guide: An Autobiography* (1879) is a tale told between fact and fiction that leaves the reader wondering which is which. Across the book's three hundred and sixty five pages, Cody recounts his life on the western frontier with a sense of theatricality. He begins the first chapter, "My debut upon the world's stage occurred on 26 February 1845."⁶ Yet the publisher's introduction asserts, "There is no humbug or braggadocio about Buffalo Bill" and "while no literary excellence is claimed for the narrative, it has great merit of being truthful, and is verified in such a manner that no one can doubt its veracity."⁷ Even in the publication of his own autobiography, writers have felt the need to defend the legitimacy of Buffalo Bill.

The effort continues today. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scores of books, articles, and now, internet sites have been written about Cody.⁸ Most are inclined to address, in some manner, the fact and fiction of Buffalo Bill. However, the majority of historical and critical commentary focuses on Cody's time as a plainsman and/or

showman. This inadvertently excludes perhaps the most important chapter in his journey between fantasy and reality; before Cody became a national celebrity and iconic cowboy hero, the young scout from Nebraska moonlighted as a stage actor. On December 1872, at the Nixon's Amphitheatre in Chicago, William F. Cody literally made his stage debut performing the role of Buffalo Bill.

Throughout most of his life he Cody maintained a dual identity – Cody, the actual person, and Buffalo Bill, the character. This bifurcation needs unpacking. If the title of his autobiography is any indication, the “Honorable William F. Cody, known as Buffalo Bill,” was concerned (if not obsessed) with his name. As a young man, Cody fought for his nickname on the western plains and it preceded him through life. Cody's names were part of his performance. He wore each name like a costume. Each was part of the character he was creating, and true to form, each has a story.

For example, the “Honorable” title comes from Cody's election to the Nebraska State Legislature. In 1872, the same year as his theatrical debut, Cody was nominated to represent the Twenty-Sixth District of the largely Republican state. Cody, who was a Democrat, explained the event in his autobiography:

In the fall of the year 1872, a convention was held at Grand Island, when some of my friends made me their candidate...but I had always been a Democrat and had no idea of being elected. In fact I cared very little about it, and therefore made no effort whatsoever to secure election. However, I was elected; that is the way in which I acquired my title of Honorable.⁹

Cody never served in the Nebraska Legislature. He resigned from the seat before taking office, but obviously kept the title. Years later, Cody headlined his Wild West posters, programs, and own autobiography as The Honorable. This is classic Cody. From his initial indifference, to a sustained application of the “Honorable” title, Cody turned a blip of a political career into a lifelong legitimization of his heroic identity. Further, Cody’s election to office and subsequent title binds him to other frontier hero/politicians who came before, like Davy Crockett and Andrew Jackson. In a sense, Cody also set the stage for the cowboy politicians to come, namely Theodore Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, and of course, George W. Bush.

Cody also prided himself on being a military man. History verifies that Cody scouted for and fought with the United States Army during the North American Indian Wars of the 1870s. Called into question is Cody’s exact military rank. During his Wild West years, Cody went by Colonel William F. Cody, often shortened to “The Colonel” by his employees. Yet, Cody never officially achieved the rank of Colonel. We know his military career began in 1863, when he enlisted in the Army at the age of seventeen. Cody had previously been employed as a Pony Express rider and applied those skills as a teamster with the rank of Private in Company H, Seventh Kansas Cavalry. At the close of the Civil War, he was discharged from service and began to work as a buffalo hunter and guide for the Kansas Pacific Railroad.

In 1868, Cody performed an act that gained the praise of General Philip Henry Sheridan. In completing a three hundred and fifty mile reconnaissance through Sioux Territory in less than sixty hours, General Sheridan’s described Cody’s “act of heroism:”

Such an exhibition of endurance and courage was more than enough to convince me that his services would be extremely valuable during the campaign, so I retained him at Fort Hays and then made him chief of scouts for the Fifth Calvary.¹⁰

For the next four years, Cody was employed as a scout for the United States Army. Scouts, however, were not soldiers: they were private contractors. Louis S. Warren points out that “the militarization of Buffalo Bill’s reputation was so complete that it obscured a central fact of Cody’s career...his colonelcy came as an honorary appointment to the Nebraska state militia in 1887.”¹¹ In 1887, the Great Sioux Wars were over, Cody was through scouting, and thoroughly entrenched as commander of his Wild West.

Unlike the somewhat dubious origin of Cody’s titles, Colonel and Honorable, Cody received his famous nickname the old-fashioned way: he earned it. It is interesting to note that the nickname “Buffalo” was not solely his, but a relatively common title granted to many buffalo hunters on the western plains during the heyday of bison hunting. Cody was one of several such men. Much like the cowboy figure vying for cultural supremacy against other frontier heroes, Cody won out. In his autobiography, he devotes Chapter XIV to “Earning a Title:”

I began my career as buffalo hunter for the Kansas Pacific Railroad, and it was not long before I acquired considerable notoriety...in a period of less than eighteen months, I killed 4280 buffaloes. It was at this time that the very appropriate name of “Buffalo Bill,” was conferred upon me by the road-hands. It has stuck to me ever since.¹²

As cautioned, Cody often fictionalized the facts in his own writing, but biographer Don Russell substantiated Cody's claim more-or-less in his book, *The Lives and Legend of Buffalo Bill*. Russell concluded that during Cody's employment with the Kansas Pacific Railroad, he killed twelve buffalo a day for less than eighteen months, but more than a year.¹³ Twelve a day for twelve months adds up to 4380. Slaughter aside, what resonates clearly and is most pertinent to this study is that Buffalo Bill Cody was one hell of a shot. As a theatrical representation of the evolving cowboy hero, William F. Cody's superior hunting ability authenticated Buffalo Bill's identity as a Great White Hunter. This embodied the Code of the West's shoot-to-kill mentality and emblazoned his name on the frontier and beyond.

King of the Border Men

In 1870, Cody's reputation as a hunter, guide, and scout was well known on the western plains. It is difficult however to imagine that Cody thought himself a celebrity on the east coast. Yet by 1870, many New Yorkers were well aware of Buffalo Bill. In December 1869, the New York publishing firm of Francis S. Street and Francis S. Smith released a dime novel titled, *Buffalo Bill, King of the Border Men* (1869). The story was written by one of the most prolific and notorious producers of frontier fiction, Ned Buntline (1813-1886). Buntline (born Edward Zane Carroll Judson) was a writer, actor, temperance lecturer, convicted felon, bigamist, veteran of the Union Army, instigator of the Astor Place Riot in 1849, inventor of the Colt .45 Buntline special, and survivor of a lynching (the rope broke).

In a sprawling career, documented best in James Monaghan's *The Great Rascal: The Life and Adventures of Ned Buntline* (1952), Buntline is considered, among other things, a patriarch of blood-and-thunder dime novels. The Cody/Buntline story has as many sides as the men have names. Throughout their careers, each man attributed blame and praise to the other as needed to promote his own interest. Buntline's claims to having discovered Buffalo Bill were rejected by Cody. Cody's downplay of Buntline's influence infuriated the writer. In either case, during the boom-or-bust days of frontier melodrama Buntline and Cody were quite a pair to draw to. Their actual working relationship lasted just over two years, but in that time, they made a lasting imprint on the popular culture of the Old West and American frontier.

In the fall of 1869, Buntline had signed a contract to write exclusively for Street and Smith's *New York Weekly*. To introduce their new writer, the editors had created a publicity campaign which announced, "in order to prepare himself to write a new series of works, the prolific author, Ned Buntline, had traveled across the frontier in search of authentic western characters and tales of frontier heroism."¹⁴ This was no lie; the author did in fact travel West and in the summer of 1869, Buntline "discovered" Buffalo Bill. That, however, gives the writer a little too much credit. Buntline was a greenhorn. He had never been to the frontier, and when he did arrive out west, he did not know exactly for whom he was searching.

It is true that Buntline had set out in search of a "Wild Bill," whether this was Cody or his friend, Wild Bill Hickok, or any number of the other raucous Williams of the prairie is not known. It is known that Buntline found an audience with Major Frank North at Fort McPherson in Nebraska. North was a hard-nosed commander of three companies

of scouts who were enlisted in the Army to fight the Sioux. Buntline asked North permission to base a dime novel on the Major's military career. North declined, but suggested, "If you want a man to fill that bill, he's over there under the wagon."¹⁵ The man sleeping it off under the wagon was none other than Buffalo Bill Cody. Buntline spent less than a month riding with Cody. Despite the twist of fate that brought them together, Cody's gregarious nature and frontier lifestyle fit the character type needed to drive Buntline's narrative. During that time, the writer became enamored with the scout. This suggests that the heroic image of Buffalo Bill was already blending with and surpassing the reality of Cody.

That fall, Buntline returned to New York and churned out the first tale of his new series, *Buffalo Bill, King of the Border Men*. Street and Smith promoted the work as "The Greatest Romance of the Age." Buntline himself subtitled the piece "the wildest and truest story I ever wrote."¹⁶ Although Buntline and his publishers made much of the novel's reported authenticity, it had little basis in fact. Aside from a single research trip to the west, Buntline's knowledge of Buffalo Bill and life on the frontier was scant. So the novelist did what he did best: he pick-pocketed elements from other frontier narratives and made something up.

In the dime novel, Cody was portrayed as a great hunter, Indian fighter, and freelance enforcer of justice. This character type was not especially different from other fictionalized frontier heroes, including the backwoodsman or bandit. In fact, Buntline had freely lifted several character traits from previous frontier heroes. This was a common methodology in the creation of dime novels and frontier melodrama, supporting this

study's claim that the mythic cowboy of American popular culture was not a stand-alone figure, but an evolution of many frontier types. *In Wanted Dead or Alive*, Aquila writes:

This strategy of innovation contained within repetition is perceptible in the development of heroic types in dime and nickel Westerns. The imperative to produce a hero was paramount, but as the figure was inserted into different environments, his specific lineaments changed: the hunter gave way to the scout, the outlaw, and the cowboy.¹⁷

The imperative to create a new American action hero from the West was a hit-and-miss process. Dime novelists and playwrights like Ned Buntline, Hiram Robbins, and Prentiss Ingraham were creating the central heroic character of frontier fiction on the fly. Their chief strategy was the repetition and revision of previous frontier types. Thus, the first fictionalized character of Buffalo Bill was a main line descendent of an earlier frontier hero, like Davy Crockett, which Buntline created by “doubling the persona” of the backwoodsman, bandit, and scout.¹⁸

In *The King of the Border Men*, Buffalo Bill had the backwoodsman's skills in trailing, hunting, and shooting. He even retained a trace of the backwoodsman's humility, echoing Frank Mayo's characterization of Davy Crockett in *Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead*. The plot of Buntline's story consisted of a time honored melodramatic formula, wherein a genteel heroine is abducted by a villain (or villains) and then rescued by the hero. And so, after Buffalo Bill rescues the beautiful, wealthy heiress from a gang of drunken soldiers, he tells her grateful father they must never meet again: "If I see her any more, I shall love her, and love above my station would be madness and folly."¹⁹

This scenario is directly reminiscent of “the Lochinvar scene” in Mayo’s *Davy Crockett*. It is also became character trait of the cowboy hero who may have “saved the day” and “got the girl,” but in the end rode off into the sunset alone.

Recalling the backwoodsman from the past and foreshadowing the cowboy of the future, Buntline’s fictionalized version of Buffalo Bill became an “iconic frontier hero who fought in the name of justice.”²⁰ This image struck a chord with Street and Smith’s working class readership that were gripped by “manly characters identified with the fictional Western frontier.”²¹ The firm had so successfully publicized *King of the Border Men* that it was an immediate hit upon release and its lead character became a hot commodity. Thus, in 1870 while the actual William F. Cody was scouting the western plains, his fictionalized persona, *Buffalo Bill, King of the Border Men*, was rising in popularity throughout the east.

By 1871, the public could not get enough Buffalo Bill. Cody’s mass appeal and the success of the dime novel led Buntline to turn *Buffalo Bill, the King of the Border Men* into a stage play of the same name. Fredrick G. Maeder, actor and playwright, was charged with dramatizing the novel. Maeder’s production was set to open in February 1872 at the Bowery Theatre in New York with J. B. Studley cast to play the hero. Aside from having the perfect name to play the part, Studley was also an accomplished leading man on Broadway. Following Buntline’s character description, the actor transformed himself into the scout, buckskins and all, in preparation for the role.

Prior to opening, Buntline worked publicity. He determined the best angle for promoting a play about Buffalo Bill was to get the real person in attendance. Buntline enlisted the help of James Gordon Bennett, heir and editor of the *New York Herald*, to get

Cody to Manhattan for the opening of the play. Bennett made sense as leverage: he was a western aficionado who had met Cody on a hunting trip organized by General Philip Sheridan in 1871. Before he ever set foot in New York, Cody was entertaining an audience from the East. On the frontier, Cody schooled eastern “dudes” on the ways of the West, including the cowboy custom of taking a snort of bourbon before breakfast. Bennett found this particularly enjoyable and described it as “more refreshing than brushing teeth.”²² Enamored with Cody, Bennett jumped at the chance to host “the beau ideal of the plains” in New York and officially requested the scout’s presence as a gesture of gratitude for Cody’s hospitality on the plains.²³

Upon Bennett’s invitation, General Sheridan provided Cody with a thirty day leave of absence and in February 1872, Cody made his first trip from Nebraska to New York. He arrived in Manhattan to a celebrity reception. Bennett wined and dined Cody, who wrote, “I was introduced to quite a number of the best people of the city, and was invited to several ‘swell’ dinners.”²⁴ Bennett’s *New York Herald* sensationalized Cody’s journey to Broadway as “the man from the land of the buffalo and red man to see for himself the difference between Indian powwow and genuine masquerade.”²⁵ In his autobiography, Cody acknowledges his celebrity treatment and awkward moments among the New York socialites. Most telling, however, is a single statement from Cody which addresses the primary objective of his trip east: “I was curious to see how I would look when represented by some else.”²⁶ Cody fulfilled his mission. On the evening of 20 February 1872, he was escorted to a private box in the Bowery Theatre and watched the theatre fill with an audience there to see – him.

Over thirty years had passed since Colonel David Crockett and Nimrod Wildfire shared the stage, yet the connection between Cody's presence at the opening of *Buffalo Bill, King of the Border Men* and Crockett's at *The Lion of the West* is immediate. Like Crockett, Cody was a man watching himself being made into a myth. Except this time it was more direct; this time it was personal. The doubling of Cody's person and persona that evening in the Bowery is an incredible example of fantasy and reality blurring in front of a live audience. Seeing is believing, and once again the power of performance helped shape an actual man into a mythic hero.

Unsurprisingly, Bennett's *Herald* proclaimed *Border Men* a huge success:

J. B. Studley played his part [Buffalo Bill] to perfection. Rounds of applause greeted him when, finding himself surrounded by Indians, he slipped like a snake into a hollow log; which log the redskins presently added as fuel to the campfire; but the trapper soon found it grew uncomfortably hot, so he threw his powder horn into the fire. There was a grand explosion and the Indians went yelling skyward, while the hero escaped unscathed. This, as might be expected, was warmly applauded by the [gallery] "gods." The audience was spellbound, breathless, during this fierce encounter; but when it was brought to a conclusion by the death of the villain and the victory of Buffalo Bill, the burst of enthusiasm that followed would have rivaled the roar of Niagara.²⁷

The climatic encounter was a hand-to-hand battle between Buffalo Bill and Jake McKanless. Not one to be accused of being overly sympathetic, Buntline named the

villain “McKanless” after an actual victim named Dave McCanles who was killed by Cody’s friend, Wild Bill Hickok. Nevertheless, the audience went wild during the final scene, which included a knife fight with three feet long Bowie knives. That excitement, however, was matched earlier in the evening when the audience realized the real Buffalo Bill was in the house.

During Act I, word that Cody was in the audience traveled through the theatre. The crowd began cheering, whooping, and whistling until the performance was stopped. This happened several times throughout the show. At curtain call, the theatre manager took the stage and asked Buffalo Bill join Studley and company for a bow. Cody, who had dressed himself in his own buckskins which mirrored Studley’s costume, stood before the cheering crowd. He described the scene in his autobiography:

I attended the performance at the Bowery Theatre in the company of E. Z. C. Judson...the part of Buffalo Bill was impersonated by J. B. Studley, an excellent actor, and I must say the fellow looked like...a perfect picture of myself. I had not watched myself very long before the audience discovered the original Buffalo Bill was in a private box, and they commenced cheering, which stopped the performance...they would not cease until I had shown myself and spoken a few words. I felt very embarrassed – never more so in my life – and know not what to say. I made a desperate effort, and a few words escaped me, but what they were I could not for the life of me tell, nor could anyone else in the house.²⁸

At the end of the evening, the theatre manager offered Cody five hundred dollars a week to take Studley's part in *Buffalo Bill, King of the Border Men*. Cody declined the offer and responded, "You might as well try and make an actor out of a government mule."²⁹

In the next twenty years, Cody would become a world famous showman and celebrity, yet that evening in the Bowery Theatre, he chose not to act. Why? Some historians write this episode off as Cody's first bout with stage fright. Granted, Cody had not spent much time, if any, in the theatre prior to this, but stage fright could be an easy answer. What if Cody chose not to act, because he knew he didn't have to? He had just watched "himself" perform a theatricalized reenactment of frontier heroism for a cheering audience. Maybe during that speechless moment, the wheels started turning. Maybe that was the moment Cody first thought he could do on stage, what he did on the plains, but for more money and with less danger. The performance dynamic that made Buffalo Bill so unique was that he did not have to act, he could just be himself.³⁰

In the summer of 1872, Cody returned to Nebraska to scout. If he was not yet a bona-fide celebrity in New York, he certainly was on the frontier. On reconnaissance, Cody's attachment encountered a band of Sioux. Although there was no direct combat, Cody received a minor head wound. Nevertheless, Cody's captain filed an official report which stated, "Mr. William Cody's reputation for bravery and skill as a guide is so well established that I need not say anything else."³¹ Cody's mythos continued to grow on and off stage. Although he was over a thousand miles away from the New York theatre scene, Buffalo Bill continued to garner praise, publicity, and popularity. This phenomenon would call him back to the stage in the fall of 1872.

Scouts of the Prairie and Life on the Border

The success of the *Buffalo Bill, King of the Border Men* led Buntline to embark upon another project; a stage play dramatizing the frontier adventures of Buffalo Bill, featuring Cody in the leading role. In spite of the fact that Cody had already declined a similar offer, Buntline badgered the scout to reconsider:

During the summer of 1872, I received numerous letters from Ned Buntline, urging me to come east and go upon the stage to represent my own character. At times I almost determined to make the venture; but the officers at the fort as well as my family and friends to whom I had mentioned the matter, laughed at the idea of my ever becoming an actor. I was embarking on a sea of uncertainty. Having made up my mind, nothing could change it.³²

We do not know what finally changed Cody's mind. Although, his explanation sounds like many young actors who dare to leave their small mid-western town for the bright lights of the big city. In December 1872, that is exactly what happened: Cody left Nebraska for Chicago and accepted a lead role in Buntline's new venture.

Much has been made of the chaos leading up to the opening of *Scouts*. When Cody arrived in Chicago, there was no script and a venue had not been secured. In the days before opening, Buntline wrote the play and cast himself as a frontiersman named Cale Durg. Lacking actual American Indians, a chorus of Caucasian supernumeraries were hired to act like "red devils." For the heroine, an Italian cancan dancer named Giuseppiana Morlacchi was cast to play the Indian waif, Dove Eye. And all the while, the leading man who had never acted attempted to memorize his lines.

Anecdotes of Cody's difficulty (or disregard) in memorizing his lines appear in most historical accounts, including his own autobiographies. One of the most infamous is the "billiard cue" story. As with many of his recollections, the older Cody got, the bolder his stories became:

Buntline said, "Bill, how long will it take you to commit your part?" "About seven years, if I have good luck." I said. Then Buntline said, "Go to work!" I studied hard, and the next morning I recited the lines, cues and all, to Buntline. Buntline said, "Tut, tut, you must not recite the cues." I said, "Cues be damned! I've never heard of anything but a billiard cue!"³³

Throughout his stage career, Cody was notorious for not knowing his lines and improvising. This trait is often written off as an example of Cody's unprofessionalism; however, viewed differently it becomes an example of Cody's unique approach to acting and shoot-from-the-hip style, which was often noted as natural.

Cues be damned, on 16 December 1872 the curtain rose at Nixon's Amphitheatre in Chicago marking William F. Cody's stage debut as Buffalo Bill in Ned Buntline's newest "border drama" *Scouts of the Prairie* (1872).³⁴ Critical response to the performance ranged from thrilled to repulsed and even confused. "*The Scouts of the Prairie*...is about everything in general and nothing in particular...to describe the play and its reception is alike impossible. Everything was so wonderfully bad that it was almost good."³⁵ After the initial salvo, a common theme of many reviews was that in spite of his acting, Cody was captivating as Buffalo Bill, an actual frontier hero performing himself live in the flesh.

The *Chicago Tribune* called Cody “the real attraction, not only the hero of the play, but as a celebrity whose fame long ante-dates an appearance before footlights” and “with our own eyes we have seen the simon-pure Buffalo Bill, [who] is no longer a myth...Have we not seen the real heroes?”³⁶ It is important to note that a celebrity portraying himself on stage was an innovation in American performance at the time and one reason why Cody stood out. Further, Cody was keen enough to understand the multiple roles he played; equally important was that the audience understood it as well. That night at the Chicago Amphitheatre, much like the evening in the Bowery, a transformation was taking place. Cody was creating his own mythos through live performance, but the audience and critics interpreted his performance as genuine. Here, in this mix of history and mythology, fantasy and reality, lies the authentication of Buffalo Bill Cody.

Cody’s appearance onstage actualized his feats on the frontier, what historian Richard White referred to as a “complicated mimesis.”³⁷ The fact that William Cody was a “real- life” buffalo hunter, Indian fighter, and honored scout, meant Buffalo Bill could project those same attributes to the audience with absolute legitimacy. Cody’s acting career allowed him to do theatrically, what he did in reality on the frontier: be a hero. In doing so, he performed a symbolic representation of himself in front of a live audience that believed it to be true. In turn, these fictionalized reenactments of factual events solidified his status as an authentic frontier hero.

We cannot ignore how incredibly successful and loved Cody was to his audience. Rarely bashful, Cody boasted after only his first season of *Scouts*, “I’m no damned scout now; I’m a first class star!”³⁸ He also once confessed, “I’m no actor...I don’t pretend to

be anything of an actor, but you see the people seem to like it.”³⁹ Cody’s distinction between actor and star defines a shift in his own performance awareness. After a single season on stage, Cody knew there was a difference between what traditional actors were doing and what he was doing. From this point on, Cody took command over his acting career. First, he broke from Buntline and became actor/manager of his own traveling theatre troupe or “combination.” Second, he began to take a more creative role in defining his on stage image with off stage action.

After the theatrical season of 1872-73, Cody returned West, with tales of theatrical glory and big plans for the upcoming season. This began a pattern Cody would follow the next few years, adventuring on the frontier during the summer and restaging his heroics during the winter. In 1876, at the request of Mr. J. Clinton Hall, the manager of the Rochester Opera House in upstate New York, Cody prepared a new play based on his adventures at Fort Hays, Kansas. It was titled *Life on the Border*. Cody’s account of the play is often quoted to illustrate a perception that he held a low opinion of his time in frontier melodrama. Read closer, this quote offers another example of Cody’s acute awareness of the audience and critic:

My new drama was arranged for the stage by J. V. Arlington, the actor. It was a five act play, without head or tail, and made no difference at which act we commenced the performance. Before we had finished the season several critics, I have been told, went crazy trying to follow the plot. It afforded us, however, ample opportunity to give noisy, rattling gunpowder entertainment, all of which seemed to give general satisfaction.⁴⁰

Although later in his life, Cody would poke fun at the melodramas of his early stage career, there are qualities of this play in performance which make compelling examples of cowboy-like behavior. Specifically elements of the cowboy Code of the West, which Cody embodied on stage, before the Code had become a popular theme of twentieth century Westerns.

The connection between the Code of the West and frontier performance is inherently difficult, because inasmuch as the Code was unwritten, so too were a majority of frontier melodramas. Like James H. Wallick's *The Bandit King*, Cody's plays have disappeared. One explanation for this is the precarious publishing practices of the late nineteenth century. At the time Cody and Wallick performed in the "legitimate" theatre, a play could be copy-written by a title page alone, so none of Cody's complete plays were ever officially published. At present, the only extant copy of any Buffalo Bill melodrama is at the McCracken Research Library in Cody, WY. It is *Life on the Border: A Border Drama in Five Acts*.⁴¹

Although *Life on the Border* lacks the notoriety of *Scouts of the Prairie*, it is not so disorganized a play as Cody or the critics made it out to be. Rather, as a historical artifact, the play clearly illustrates Buffalo Bill's theatricalized frontier heroism. Again, Cody moves between fact and fantasy, suggesting that the action of the play actually took place during his time at Fort Hays, while clearly heightened through the melodramatic form. In his introductory notes, Nolan explains that by the time Cody started writing about his stage career, he tended "to both minimize and exaggerate the truthfulness of this plays."⁴² Nevertheless, in this specific and singular case, the proof is on the page. While there is no way of knowing just how much of the play was written or even

suggested by Cody, *Life on the Border* offers a detailed snapshot of what made Buffalo Bill Cody a mythic hero of the western frontier.

At the top of Act One, a couple of Buffalo Bill's old "pards" meet on a "Dark Landscape" and inquire about the hero:

SLOAT: Well, I hope to be kicked to death with grasshoppers if it arn't Longtrailer.

LONGTRAILER: But whar's Buffalo Bill? He's been killed five or six times, but somehow or other, he always turns up again.

Bill's a wonderful man, he is. I heard Bill had some difficulties with 'em this spring. How'd he come out?

SLOAT: He wiped 'em out! Thar was nine of 'em. In a fair, sqar fight of nine to one, by jingo!

LONGTRAILER: (WHISTLES) That knocks 'em out. Let's hear about it.

SLOAT: Well, you see, Bill hadn't been long in these diggings when these Jeehawkers picked him for a greenhorn...Some nine of them took it in thar heads to send Bill on a trip to the clouds. Thar was nothing left for Bill but fight, and fight he did. Tooth and nail, by Jingo. And in about nine minutes, there lay the whole nine men as they left Fort Hays to kill Buffalo Bill. One a minute, by jingo!⁴³

As in real life, Buffalo Bill's reputation preceded him on stage. Before his entrance, the stage was set for the hero by a proclamation of his prowess as hunter, fighter, and enforcer of justice.

In Act Four, Buffalo Bill jumps into action. Interestingly, it is not against the vigilante regulators Sloat so elegantly refers to as Jeehawkers or hostile savages, instead Cody takes on the frontier itself in the form of a “b’ar.”

ACT FOUR. SCENE 2: FULL STAGE. ROCKS UPSTAGE.

GRIZZLEY BEAR DISCOVERED ON LARGE ROCK, WALKS
DOWNSTAGE AND OFF. BILL, SLOAT, AND
LONGTRAILER ENTER.

BILL: Come on boys, this is good enough place to camp for a little rest. Now then, let’s take something to fill up with. (TAKES GRUB FROM BAG.) This used to be good Injun country around here once.

LONGTRAILER: Well, if it was good Injun country once, choke me if it ain’t good b’ar country now. Look! Look at those tracks. He was a big.

(ENTER QUAKER RUNNING AND OUT OF BREATH.)

BILL: Why it’s the Peace Commissioner from Washington. Where are you going? Spit it out. What’s the matter with you?

BROADBRIM: Buffalo William, there are forty copper-colored brethren, nine white brethren, and a bear. All have designs on thy life. I have seen them and hastened to thee with intelligence.

BILL: I’m obliged to you Quaker. (TAKES OUT REVOLVERS AND LAYS ON THE STAGE TO CLEAN.) Now I’ll fix myself for these cutthroats.

BROADBRIM: Verily, my Indian-slaying friend, but the bear was coming the same way also. Friend William, are bears very dangerous?

BILL: That's a fact Quaker. One old tough grizzly will clean out a whole company of United States soldiers. Now if you should ever see a bear, and there is no tree to climb or water to swim away, you lay flat down. (ENTER BEAR. QUAKER SEES HIM AND LIES FLAT DOWN. BEAR HITS BILL WHO ROLLS DOWNSTAGE. HE RISES AND SEES THE BEAR.) By Jingo, he's a whopper! I'll pass you up my grizzly friend. (STARTS TO CLIMB TREE. BEAR GOES FOR HIM.) Oh, he objects now. Mr. Grizzly, let me get one of my revolvers, and I'll make you sing. Hello. Here's my knife. Now, old Grizzly, get out of my way, for I swear I won't get out of yours. (BILL FIGHTS BEAR AND KILLS HIM.)⁴⁴

Buffalo Bill's killing of the bear without a firearm makes him almost super-human; it is both real and hyper-real. This is another example of Cody's on stage authentication. The audience had every reason to believe that Cody had actually killed a bear during his time at Fort Hays. Staging the kill authenticated the audience's perception of truth, while furthering the Buffalo Bill myth.

This scene is an embodiment of the Code of the West. By "schooling" the greenhorn Quaker on the ways of the wild, Buffalo Bill illustrates a tenet of the Code that requires a cowboy to be sensitive to nature and understands its power. When Buffalo Bill says, "By Jingo, he's a whopper! I'll pass you up my grizzly friend." He shows respect to

nature, in the form of a “b’ar.” When nature does not oblige, Buffalo Bill has no other recourse, but to kill the bear: sometimes you eat the b’ar. Sometimes the b’ar eats you. Resorting to violence is yet another important element of the Code; a cowboy rejects violence until he has no other recourse, then he is ruthless. Violent confrontations like this were a common theme in Cody’s plays, as well as other border dramas. It allowed the frontier hero to react violently, while preserving his morality. Walter Meserve wrote that frontier melodramas of the 1870s and 1880s emphasized a West where “violence was popular – against Indians, against uncouth villains, against nature.”⁴⁵ Cody’s early plays prove this to be true. In *Life on the Border*, Buffalo Bill conquers nature in the “b’ar” and villains in the “Jeehawkers.” In his next play, frontier hero would face the arch enemy of the cowboy: the American Indian.

The Red Right Hand; or, Buffalo Bill’s First Scalp for Custer

In *Scouts of the Prairie* and *Life on the Border*, Cody “played the part of a frontier hero, playing the part of an actor, playing the part of a frontier hero.”⁴⁶ In doing so, he staked claim to his own heroic identity through acts of on stage authentication. By 1876, Cody was becoming as a master of self-authentication in performance. The line he walked between fantasy and reality became indistinguishable, as Cody began “to even costume himself with attire he could wear both while committing and reenacting acts of heroism.”⁴⁷ The complexity of Cody’s movement between fact and fiction reached a new level of conflation in his third play: *The Red Right Hand; or, Buffalo Bill’s First Scalp for Custer* (1876).

Every hero has a nemesis. The archetypal enemy of the mythic cowboy hero was the American Indian. In *Regeneration Through Violence*, Richard Slotkin wrote:

Under the aspect of mythology and historical distance, the acts and motives of the Indian fighter have an air of simplicity and purity that makes them seem finely heroic. The heroism in this figure consists for us in...visual and concrete proofs of self-justifying acts of violence.⁴⁸

In *The Red Right Hand*, Cody staged a violent confrontation between cowboy and Indian. The play reenacted an actual battle of the Great Sioux War, where Cody had shot and scalped a Cheyenne warrior named Yellow Hair. The play presented visual and concrete proof of Cody's frontier heroics, as well as a symbolic representation of the white man's dominance over the American Indian. The performativity of the event, on and off stage, exemplified the stage career of Buffalo Bill Cody.

The Great Sioux War of 1876-77, also known as the Black Hills War, was a result of encroachment by white settlers into the Black Hills of present day South Dakota. Nations of the Plains Indian, namely the Sioux and Cheyenne, viewed the Black Hills as sacred territory. The region had been protected as part of the Great Sioux Reservation in the Laramie Treaty of 1868, but all bets were off in 1874, when gold was discovered in the Black Hills during an expedition led by General George A. Custer. Prior to this, the United States government had little use for the land and yet by year's end the rush was on as prospectors flooded into upstart mining towns like Custer and Deadwood, even though it was still Indian land.

The most significant action of the Great Sioux War was the Battle of Little Big Horn, also known as Custer's Last Stand. Little Big Horn occurred on 25-26 June 1876 as General Custer and five companies of the Seventh Cavalry were annihilated by the Sioux and Cheyenne near the Little Big Horn River in the Montana Territory. Next to Pearl Harbor and September 11, Little Big Horn is considered the worst defeat of the U.S. military on home soil. The Sioux victory was also a cultural defeat for the United States, which looked to celebrate its centennial anniversary with nationwide exhibitions of the country's progress. Custer's defeat by "savages" was a blow to national pride and a realization that America had not progressed as much as it was celebrating. Caught in the terrain between savagery and civilization was Buffalo Bill Cody.⁴⁹

In the spring of 1876, Cody was wrapping up his third theatrical season. His combination had a successful northeast tour playing *Scout of the Prairie* and *Life on the Border*. That May, Cody received a telegram from the Army requesting his services as scout for the upcoming summer campaign. Cody responded and following his final show in Wilmington, Delaware, on the night of 3 June 1876, he packed his bags and headed West. On 10 June 1876, Cody was designated chief of scouts for the Fifth Cavalry under the command of Colonel Wesley Merritt. The Fifth was charged with safeguarding the southern Black Hills road on what is now the Nebraska/Wyoming border. After mobilizing at Fort Laramie, Cody and the "Dandy Fifth" set out on patrol June 22, just three days before Little Big Horn.

The news of Custer's defeat traveled fast and the event was soon described as a massacre. This is an important moment in Cody's story. Custer's death struck Cody hard; the two had been friends and shared a mutual admiration for one another. Additionally, as

an employee of the Army, Cody must have felt the embarrassment of the military and blow to national pride. On top of this, Cody was a national celebrity viewed by many as a genuine frontier hero; he had an image to uphold. In a tangled mess of performed identities, the military man in Cody felt a responsibility to his country, the friend in Cody mourned a personal loss, and the showman in Cody saw an opportunity.

On 17 July 1876, an opportunity presented itself. Three days prior, Colonel Merritt had received intelligence that a band of 800 Cheyenne under Chief Morning Star were preparing to flee the Red Cloud Agency in Nebraska. The Fifth were charged with intercepting the Cheyenne. Merritt's mobilized his troops and marched to Warbonnet creek. From here, Cody began to scout the Cheyenne's position. In the early morning, Cody spotted Morning Star's band several miles from the Fifth's position. On his way back to camp, he noticed a smaller band who were scouting ahead of Morning Star. Cody reported his reconnaissance and the Fifth fell into action.

Merritt made quick plans to advance on the main band of Cheyenne. Cody requested permission to lead a handful of men against the smaller band. Merritt agreed and Cody prepared for battle. Astonishingly, at some point during the preparation, Buffalo Bill Cody retired to his quarters and made a costume change:

He reappeared resplendent, not in the rough, dusty garb commonly worn by scouts, but in a brightly colored and ornamented stage costume. His billowy-sleeved shirt was of red silk, with a single row of silver bullet buttons [on] the placket. His pants were of black velvet. They flared below the knees with a crisscross braid on the thighs. Bill's doublewide belt featured an unduly large,

rectangular, silver-washed buckle, one he often wore with his Wild West show. And crowning his head was a large floppy-brimmed, brushed beaver-felt hat.⁵⁰

The purpose of Cody's costume change has been the subject of speculation. It is not known, whether he made the change for battlefield show or was anticipating how the event might be dramatized in the future. It also is not known why Cody had packed one of his stage costumes before he headed off to war. It can be asserted that by making a change into an outlandish Mexican vaquero outfit, William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody was well aware of the performative nature in the upcoming confrontation. In *First Scalp for Custer*, Paul Hedren conjects that, "Cody was authenticating for future stage audiences the dramatic, but heretofore fictional attire of a plainsman."⁵¹ Pushing Hedren's thought a little further, it can be said that by changing into a stage costume moments before an actual battle, Cody was consciously imitating and authenticating his stage persona for an immediate audience on the plains. In doing so, he marked a potentially historic moment for future reenactment.

As a stage actor, Cody had presented his frontier life in theatrical terms. On the morning of 17 July 1876, Buffalo Bill was performing on the stage of history.⁵² That morning, the small band of Cheyenne were led by a man named Yellow Hair. Yellow Hair's name is consistently, but mistakenly, given as Yellow Hand, and his status often advanced to that of chief or sub-chief. Yet the most reliable accounts, such as Hedren and Russell, assure that Cody's opponent was a Cheyenne scout named Yellow Hair, and the discrepancy is due to translation or exaggeration. His appearance was described in an eyewitness statement by Sergeant John Hamilton, as "wearing a long feathered bonnet, a

charm, tin bracelets, a beaded belt wherein was tucked a scalp of yellow or blond hair, and a breechcloth fashioned from a cotton American flag.”⁵³ Considering Yellow Hair’s appearance in relation to Cody’s, both men made equally impressive characters the morning of the conflict.

The action between Cody and Yellow Hair, or what has come to be known as “The Battle at Warbonnet Creek,” can be reconstructed from sources other than Cody’s autobiography. Lieutenant General Charles King of the Fifth Cavalry’s Company K wrote that in the moments before battle Cody exclaimed, “By Jove! General, now’s our chance! Let our party mount here, and we can cut those fellows off!”⁵⁴ The histrionics of this quote might lead one to believe that it was penned by Buntline, but Russell has documented that it was first published in the *New York Herald* with a date-line “Fort Laramie, July 22, 1876” and again in Lieutenant Charles King’s *Campaigning with Crook* (1890). The quote is important, because it not only marks the actuality of Cody’s frontier heroics, but also illustrates the performative nature of Cody as he engaged his men to cross Warbonnet creek and charge the approaching Cheyenne.

As the charge began, Buffalo Bill and Yellow Hair saw each other, drew their rifles, and fired simultaneously. Yellow Hair’s shot missed Cody. Cody’s shot struck Yellow Hair in the leg and he fell to the ground. At this time, Cody either dismounted, or as some accounts suggest, his horse stepped into a gopher hole and Cody was thrown. The gopher hole theory seems unlikely. When a person is thrown from a horse, instinct necessitates dropping whatever is in their hands to brace for the fall. Of course, if there was anyone whose horse would find a gopher hole during a battle, throw the rider, only to have the rider land on his feet with rifle at the ready, it could only be Buffalo Bill Cody.

In either case, Cody was on the ground with rifle in hand and before Yellow Hair could recover, Cody shot a second round and killed the man. Cody made his way to the body, drew his bowie knife, and scalped Yellow Hair. As the Army troopers rode by in pursuit of the retreating Cheyenne, Cody raised Yellow Hair's scalp high into the air and cried out, "The first scalp for Custer!" The soldiers responded with cheers and gunshots. That, in summation, was the Battle at Warbonnet Creek. No one else was wounded, no one else died. There was, however, one last bit of action.

Before he left the battlefield, Cody gathered up Yellow Hair's belongings, including his war bonnet, shield, knife, and scalp. He boxed up the remains and had them shipped to his home in Rochester, NY. When Cody returned to Fort Laramie, he wrote his wife a short letter:

We have had a fight. I killed Yellow Hand [sic], a Cheyenne chief in a single-handed fight. You will no doubt hear of it through the papers. I am going to send the war bonnet, shield, bridle, whip, arms, and his scalp...so you can show it to the neighbors. My health is not very good. I have worked myself to death. Although I have shot at lots of Indians, I have only one scalp I can call my own; that fellow I fought in sight of our command and the cheer that went up when he fell was deafening.⁵⁵

Cody's letter is notable for its humility, especially in regard to his health. It also shows his propensity toward the theatrical, including the elevation of Yellow Hair to chief.

Cody's remaining tour of duty in the Great Sioux War was anti-climatic. He was discharged on 22 August, and returned home in early September to a hero's welcome. As

he rested in Rochester, Cody recounted his battle with Yellow Hair to friends and family, offering the artifacts as proof. In October, Cody went back to work. He traveled to New York and hired renowned novelist and playwright, Prentiss Ingraham, to craft his newest dramatic endeavor. The drama would be based on Cody's adventures from that summer's campaign. It was titled *The Red Right Hand; or, Buffalo Bill's First Scalp for Custer:*

The Buffalo Bill Combination. Season of 1876-77. In the New Western Drama written especially for Hon. W. F. Cody (Buffalo Bill), by Col. Prentiss Ingraham, founded on the Late Indian War, entitled The Red Right Hand or, Buffalo Bill's First Scalp for Custer. Introducing the renowned Historical Celebrity, Buffalo Bill (Hon. W. F. Cody).⁵⁶

The title page of the *Red Right Hand's* program, held at the BBHC, combines three critical elements of Cody in performance: the renowned celebrity of Buffalo Bill, the recent history of Custer's Last Stand, and "New" theatrical genre of Western Drama. Together, all three made the play a must-see for Cody's audience.

The production had an immediate impact. *The Morning Call* raved:

A bloodthirsty drama...there are numberless combats, in which the immense bowie knife, the short repeating rifle, and the big silver pistol of Buffalo Bill invariably do tremendous execution; the play itself is an extraordinary production with more wild Indians, scalping knives, and gun-powder than any drama ever heard of.⁵⁷

In the final scene, Cody and the actor playing Yellow Hair (a white man in red face paint) engaged in a violent hand-to-hand battle. The program's synopsis lists Act Five, Scene

Four as: “Bill kills Yellow Hand. The First Scalp for Custer – Allegorical Tableau.”⁵⁸

Presumably, the final tableau was the image of Buffalo Bill raising a scalp in the air.

During the tour, Cody displayed the remains of Yellow Hair in theatre showcases.

An advertisement in the *San Francisco Morning Call*, dated 10 May 1877, states:

The Scalp and War Paraphernalia of Yellow Hand, Chief of 800 Cheyenne Braves, KILLED BY BUFFALO BILL, at the Battle of Indian Creek, Black Hills, July 8th, 1876, are on Free Exhibition in the most prominent Show Window in the city as advertised.⁵⁹

Remarkably, Cody’s audience could see the actual scalp of Yellow Hair in a display case and then go into a theatre to watch a reenactment of the scalping. The lead actor who was the real-life perpetrator wore the same costume on stage as wore on the plains.

The Red Right Hand, or Buffalo Bill’s First Scalp for Custer was a head-on collision of fact and fiction; it is also the embodiment of Cody’s on stage authentication. In performance, Cody portrayed himself, reenacted a historical event, and theatricalized his frontier heroism. Moreover, the entire production was authenticated by the display and application of actual artifacts and properties. Cody not only legitimized his multiple identities as national hero, cultural celebrity, and prominent stage actor with this production, but also perpetuated his status as both man and the myth. This phenomenon would continue throughout Cody’s incredible career and lay the very foundation of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West.

Looking back, Buffalo Bill was also blazing a trail for the cowboy in American popular entertainment. The killing of Yellow Hair in *Buffalo Bill’s First Scalp for Custer*

was a precursor to a fundamental element of cowboy and his future genre: the Western.

In *The Westerner*, Warshaw states:

The point of violence by the cowboy against the Indians in Westerns is not the portrayal of violence, but how the violence is portrayed...the drama is in the moment of violence.⁶⁰

Cody's murder of Yellow Hair, on the plains and in the theatre, set the stage for countless battles between cowboys and Indians on the silver screen. His dramatization of history, while horrific to contemporary sensibility, reinforced the Code of the West and embodied the frontier values of honor, strength, and morality through theatricalized authenticity. For his audience, Cody did not merely represent the west, he was the west. Analyzing his stage career not only demonstrates the difficulty of navigating a borderline between fact and fiction in the life of Buffalo Bill, but also the history and mythology of the American West itself. Cody may never had imagining the enduring power of his performance, but for better or worse, his legend lives on in images of the cowboy.⁶¹

Notes

¹ *Cody Country Chamber of Commerce*. 2008. 1 Dec. 2010 (<http://www.codychamber.org/index>).

² Schlueter 537.

³ Robert Carter, Robert A. *Buffalo Bill Cody: The Man Behind the Legend* (New York: Wiley, 2000) 449.

⁴ Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000) 5.

⁵ Buffalo Bill Cody and William L. Visscher, *Life and Adventures of "Buffalo Bill," Colonel William F. Cody* (Chicago: Stanton and Van Vliet Co, 1917) Introduction. This autobiography was co-written by Cody's life-long friend, Colonel William Lightfoot Visscher, who was with Cody during his last days, death, and burial. The book was published the same year Cody died.

⁶ Buffalo Bill Cody, *The Life of Hon. William F. Cody, Known As Buffalo Bill, the Famous Hunter, Scout, and Guide: An Autobiography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978) 17.

⁷ *Ibid.* v.

⁸ An advanced search on WorldCat.org using “Keyword: Buffalo Bill Cody” results in two thousand and forty six hits. Refining the search to “Books,” results in eleven hundred titles. One hundred and thirty eight of these credit Buffalo Bill Cody as the author, thirty three of which are biographies. This article and its larger encompassing project relied heavily on several books, including but not limited to: Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960); James Monaghan, *The Stage Career of Buffalo Bill* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1938); Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 2005); Matthew Rehorn, *Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Paul L. Hedren, *First Scalp for Custer: The Skirmish at Warbonnet Creek, Nebraska, July 17, 1876: A Short History of the Warbonnet Battlefield* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987); Richard Slotkin, “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and the Mythologization of the American Empire,” *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993); Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Frontier in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1994); Robert A. Carter, *Buffalo Bill Cody: The Man Behind the Legend* (New York: Wiley, 2000); Roger Hall, *Performing the American Frontier 1870 – 1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Sandra Sagala, *Buffalo Bill on Stage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

⁹ Cody 319.

¹⁰ Don Russell, “The Duel on the War Bonnet” *The Journal of the American Military History Foundation* (Vol. 1, No. 2: Summer, 1937) 55-69.

¹¹ Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005) 87.

¹² Cody 162.

¹³ Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960) 88.

¹⁴ James Monaghan, *The Great Rascal: The Life and Adventures of Ned Buntline* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1952) 7.

¹⁵ Russell, *Buffalo Bill* 155.

¹⁶ Aquila 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 25.

¹⁸ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West As Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950) 105.

¹⁹ Ibid. 104.

²⁰ Michael Denning, "The Figure of the Dime Novel in American Culture" *Popular Culture in American History*, ed. Jim Cullen (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) 133.

²¹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 15.

²² Sarah J. Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business: A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1986) 112-114.

²³ Carter 157.

²⁴ Cody 307.

²⁵ *New York Herald*, February 16, 1872, William F. Cody Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

²⁶ Cody 310.

²⁷ Ibid 311.

²⁸ Ibid. 311-12.

²⁹ Cody and Visscher 56.

³⁰ Another option altogether could be that Cody was in a state of shock. Imagine traveling to New York from Nebraska, being fawned over by the social elite, trailed by the paparazzi, seeing your name in lights, and watching yourself being performed by an actor named Studley; it could be Cody was not suffering from stage fright, but dumb-struck.

³¹ Craig Francis Nieuwenhuys, "Six-Guns on the Stage: Buffalo Bill Cody's First Celebration of the Conquest of the American Frontier," (Diss., University of California, 1981, 35). See also: Jefferson D Slagle, "In the Flesh: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Performance on the American Frontier, 1860-1925" (Diss., Ohio State University, 2006); Matthew Rebhorn, "Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier, 1829 - 1893" (Diss., Columbia University, 2004); and Erika Elizabeth Hughes, "A History of the Buffalo Bill Combination" (Thesis. University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2003).

³² Cody 320-21.

³³ James Monaghan, *The Stage Career of Buffalo Bill* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1938) 418.

³⁴ *Plains* versus *Prairie*. There is some discrepancy as to the exact title of Cody's first stage play. In 1872, Cody performed the role of "Buffalo Bill" in *The Scouts of the Prairie* by Edward Zane Carroll Judson, aka Ned Buntline. In 1873, Cody acted in a melodrama titled *The Scouts of the Plains* by Hiram Robbins. In his *Autobiography*, Cody writes, "Buntline immediately obtained a supply of pens, ink and paper...at the end of four hours, he jumped up from the table, and shouted: 'Hurrah for The Scouts of the Plains! That's the name of the play. The work is done."

Hurrah!” (323-324). Louis Warren recounts the Buntline story on page 155 of his book, but then refers to the play as *Scouts of the Prairie* on 157. Joy Kasson refers to the play as “*The Scouts of the Prairie*, a drama written by Judson” on page 21. Roger Hall writes that Cody’s first appearance onstage “occurred in a Buntline drama entitled *The Scouts of the Prairie*,” and quotes a review of *The Scouts of the Prairie* in the *Chicago Tribune*, December 1872 (49-52). Hall also notes, “Their play for the second season, *The Scouts of the Plains*” (59). Robert Carter writes, “The first of the ‘Buffalo Bill combinations’ was *The Scouts of the Plains*, hardly to be distinguished from *The Scouts of the Prairie*” (188). The most complete documentation of Cody’s stage plays is Sandra Sagala’s *Buffalo Bill on Stage*. In Appendix One, Sagala lists *Scouts of the Prairie* by Ned Buntline (1872 Season) and *Scouts of the Plains* by Hiram Robbins (1873 Season). Cody continued to play renditions of *Scouts* throughout the 1870s, occasionally adding the subtitle “*or, Red Deviltry As It Is*,” as necessary.

³⁵ *New York Herald*, April 1, 1873, William F. Cody Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

³⁶ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Dec. 18, 1872, and *New York Herald*, April 1, 1873, William F. Cody Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

³⁷ Richard White, “Fredrick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill” *The Frontier in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Berkeley Press, 1994) 34.

³⁸ *Omaha Daily Herald*, July 17, 1873, William F. Cody Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Cody 360.

⁴¹ Paul T. Nolan, ed., *Life on the Border* (Cody: Pioneer Drama Service, 1965). The manuscript was recovered and edited by Paul T. Nolan from a hand-written copy owned by Mrs. Buford Richardson, a direct descendant of one of Cody’s acting partners, Captain Jack Crawford. It was published in 1965, by the Pioneer Drama Service of Cody, WY, and is the exclusive property of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, McCracken Research Library.

⁴² Paul T. Nolan, ed., *Life on the Border* (Cody: Pioneer Drama Service, 1965) xi.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 22-23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 50.

⁴⁵ Walter Meserve, “The American West of the 1870s and 1880s as Viewed from the Stage” *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* (3 Winter 1991: 62).

⁴⁶ Kasson 24.

⁴⁷ Hedren 54.

⁴⁸ Slotkin 564.

⁴⁹ The term “savagery and civilization” is often employed to describe William “Buffalo Bill” Cody and/or the American frontier, broadly construed. In 1893, at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his famous lecture “On the Significance of the Frontier in American History” and described the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization.” John M. Burke, Cody’s press agent, would use the words in promotional material for Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. A majority of the current scholarship on Buffalo Bill, including this study, continues to situate Cody in a polarity between “the savage and the civilized.” This binary relationship is destabilized by Rosemarie K. Bank in *Theatre Culture in America, 1825-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 68-70.

⁵⁰ Charles King, *Campaigning with Crook and Stories of Army Life* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1890) 42.

⁵¹ Paul L. Hedren, *First Scalp for Custer: The Skirmish at Warbonnet Creek, Nebraska, July 17, 1876: with a Short History of the Warbonnet Battlefield* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) 19.

⁵² Sagala 83.

⁵³ Hedren 20.

⁵⁴ *New York Herald*, July 23, 1876, William F. Cody Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

⁵⁵ Russell 64.

⁵⁶ *Red Right Hand* Programme, William F. Cody Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

⁵⁷ *San Francisco Morning Call*, May 10, 1877, William F. Cody Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

⁵⁸ *Red Right Hand* Programme.

⁵⁹ *San Francisco Morning Call*, May 10, 1877, William F. Cody Collection, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center.

⁶⁰ Robert Warshow, “The Westerner,” David Denby, ed., *Awake in the Dark: An Anthology of American Film Criticism, 1915 to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) 154.

⁶¹ Johns 11.

CHAPTER IV

JAMES WALLICK – JESSE JAMES

Ain't Gonna Hang No Picture

On 3 April 1882, Jesse James was shot and killed by Robert Ford in St. Joseph, Missouri. At that time, James was “the most wanted man in America” for a string of train robberies and bank heists throughout the 1870s. The “Robin Hood of the Old West” had a ten-thousand dollar reward on his head and was living under the alias Thomas Howard.¹ Legend has it that Ford gained access to James under the guise of a proposed bank robbery scheme. After the two men finished breakfast on the morning of the third, they walked into James’ living room to discuss the plan. At this point, James noticed a painting of a horse was hanging crooked above the mantle. As he stood on a chair to straighten it, Ford pulled a pistol and shot him in the back of the head. After the assassination, Ford turned himself into authorities anticipating the reward; instead, he was charged with murder and sentenced to hang. Governor Thomas Crittenden pardoned Ford the next day, but paid him only a fraction of the cash.² From that day, Robert Ford was known as “the man who shot Jesse James” and James lived on in infamy as the American bandit king.³

From the time of his death in 1882, through the turn of the twentieth century, there was a veritable explosion of material published on the life and death of Jesse James. In a reprinting of *The Life, Times, and Treacherous Death of Jesse James* (1882), historian Joseph Snell wrote, “Bob Ford’s shooting served as a starting gun in a race among publishers to become the earliest to write the authentic life of the notorious Missouri outlaw.”⁴ Indeed, in the year after the shooting, four books were published as

“authorized” or “authentic” accounts of the murder.⁵ Newspapers across the country scrambled to print anything on the James case, including daily updates, editorials, and letters sent to the press from anyone willing to throw in their two cents.⁶ Additionally, a wide body of music was composed that began to champion the outlaw as a hero. The most well-known was a folk song by Bascom Lamar Lunsford called “Poor Jesse James.” Lunsford, also known as the minstrel of the Appalachians, is credited with the infamous line, “That dirty little coward / that shot Mr. Howard / has laid poor Jesse in his grave.”⁷

The fascination with James continued into the twentieth century. In his folk song, “Outlaw Blues” from the album *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965), Bob Dylan wrote: “Ain’t gonna hang no picture / ain’t gonna hang no picture frame / I might look like Robert Ford / but I feel just like a Jesse James.”⁸ Finally, Hollywood’s run-in with the outlaw is most evident with over fifty films and television programs that feature James as a central character, most recently in *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007) starring Brad Pitt as the bandit king. Indeed, Jesse James still ranks today as one of the most prominent figures in Old West mythology.

The most popular form of literature devoted to James during the late nineteenth century was the dime novel. Frank Tousey’s *New York Detective Library* and *Wide Awake Library* was a chief competitor to the powerhouse publisher firm of Beadle and Adams. Tousey differed from Beadle and Adams in that his publishing house featured the outlaw as a central heroic character. As a matter of practice, Beadle and Adams avoided casting outlaws or bandits as heroes “in fear of threatening to offend public morality.”⁹ Buffalo Bill, it will be recalled, was hailed as King of the Scouts by Beadle and Adams, whereas Jesse James was viewed as a threat to both marketing and morality. In contrast,

Tousey depicted James as an “authentic, modern day Robin Hood...a fierce, yet heroic outlaw...misunderstood by society and misrepresented by law.”¹⁰ Tousey’s readership welcomed the bandit as hero. In the year after James death, Tousey published no less than one hundred dime novels featuring James.¹¹ Competing publishers, including a reluctant Beadle and Adams, followed suit and soon the bandit was seen as a viable representation of the dime novel frontier hero. A similar transformation occurred in the theatre.

Like *Davy Crockett* and *Life on the Border*, plays about Jesse James presented theatricalized renditions of an actual frontier persona. In the case of James, there was an added interest due to his recent death. From 1882 through 1900, a significant number of border plays were written and produced to capitalize on the intense public interest surrounding James. There were also non-dramatic presentations, like museum exhibitions and Wild West shows. In September 1882 (just five months after the James murder), Robert Ford and his brother Charles were on stage in New York at Bunnell’s Museum in: “The Ford Brothers, The Slayers of Jesse James.”¹² In 1903, Frank James, Jesse’s brother and partner in crime, joined “The Cole Younger and Frank James Wild West Show.”¹³ The exhibition of people and places associated with James perpetuated the outlaw’s mythic persona: theatre brought the bandit king back to life.

In *Jesse James Was His Name* (1966), William Settle writes, “dramatizations of events in the life and death of Jesse James date from immediately after the day Bob Ford shot Jesse.”¹⁴ Within a year of his death, at least three “Jesse James plays” premiered in New York: James McCloskey’s *Jesse James the Bandit King* (January 1883), Frank Lavernie and Sid C. France’s *The James Boys in Missouri* (January 1883), and Henry Belmar’s *Jesse James: American Outlaw* (February 1883).¹⁵ The convergence of frontier

plays based upon James set off a battle of its own; producers clashed in court for the right to claim the original copyright and actors jockeyed for the opportunity to portray the outlaw hero on stage. In the end, one James play emerged victorious: S. H. Barrett's production of James McCloskey's *Jesse James, The Bandit King*. The actor who starred in the show was James H. Wallick (1839-1908).

Wallick's portrayal of *Jesse James, The Bandit King* proved to be "the most successful dramatization of the outlaw's exploits."¹⁶ Like Mayo and Cody, Wallick portrayed a heroic figure from the American West on stage:

The Jesse James combination delighted a large audience at the Opera House Saturday evening in their melodrama recounting the life and deeds of the Missouri outlaw. Mr. Wallick made a manly looking bandit. He was in a word, an ideal melodramatic hero, which proves very acceptable.¹⁷

The Bandit King proved more than acceptable. After its premiere on 29 January 1883, Wallick performed the play for more than a decade, reviving it as late as 1902.¹⁸ Like Mayo's *Crockett*, Wallick's *Jesse James* would be the role of a lifetime.

Unfortunately, *The Bandit King* has not survived as an extant playscript, but the history of Wallick's *Jesse James* lives on, primarily in a handful of newspaper clippings and publicity material housed in the Billy Rose Theatre Archive at the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts, and secondarily, in the twelve pages Hall devotes to "the James plays" in *Performing the American Frontier*.¹⁹ Wallick himself remains a mystery. Unlike Mayo, there are no diaries, interviews, or collections of correspondence. Unlike Cody, there are no museums, monuments, or autobiographies. Hall writes, "Unlike movie

cowboys, the actors who labored in border dramas are forgotten, with the two exceptions of Frank Mayo and Buffalo Bill Cody.”²⁰ In this way, the theatrical career of Wallick is similar to the demise of the outlaw he portrayed. In the end, history remembers the good guy and the bad-guy dies. Yet, the story of Wallick and Jesse James is important to the history of American theatre, as well as the development of the cowboy in American popular entertainment. Wallick and James speak to each other; taken together their story makes a compelling, almost tragic third case study.

This chapter will consider James Wallick and *The Bandit King* in three parts. First, an attempt will be made to create a biography on Wallick from available sources. While he never achieved the stardom of Cody and Mayo, Wallick’s work in the theatre is notable for his innovation and notoriety. Second, in order to place the bandit hero in a lineage of the frontier hero, the origins of the character type will be explored. Jesse James is considered the “Robin Hood of the Old West,” a good outlaw who robbed from the rich and gave to the poor.²¹ The staging of Jesse James in frontier melodrama continues to illustrate a genealogy of frontier heroes who personified natural nobility and embodied elements of the Code of the West. Finally, *Jesse James, the Bandit King* will be analyzed in reference to the remaining reviews and source material. In his play, Wallick built upon the work of Mayo and Cody and continued to establish the stock characteristics of the frontier hero on stage. Additionally, Wallick’s production introduced a key element to the cowboy in popular entertainment. Wallick is considered an innovator of equestrian drama with his staging of performing horses. The actor also claimed to have actual Jesse James memorabilia, including weapons in his production. Wallick’s inclusion of genuine horses

and guns in *Jesse James, The Bandit King* will further exacerbate (and highlight) the problematic issue of authenticity in frontier melodrama.

The bond between Wallick and Jesse James ties both men to the development of the cowboy. Despite the lack of evidence, essential elements exist: Wallick portrayed a heroic figure from the American West in frontier melodrama. The actor employed genuine frontier artifacts, including live animals and weapons, in an effort to authenticate his production. Finally, the outlaw hero as staged in *The Bandit King* took his rightful place in a lineage of western frontier heroes who performed the Code of the West and personified natural nobility. Wallick's portrayal of *Jesse James* not only perpetuated the cultural mythology of the outlaw, but also contributed to the development of the cowboy.

Wanted: James Wallick a.k.a. Wallack

Patrick James Fubbins was inauspiciously born, and unfortunately named, in New Hurly, New York, on 26 June 1844. When Fubbins took to the stage, he changed his name to James Henry Wallack, in an attempt to imply a relationship to the famous James William Wallack (1794-1864). James W. Wallack and his son, John Lester Wallack (1880-1888), were patriarchs of an influential theatre family in New York throughout the nineteenth century consisting of actors, managers, and entrepreneurs who owned theatres in Manhattan that bore the family name. When John Lester Wallack became aware of Fubbins' name change, he got an injunction restraining Fubbins from using the Wallack name. In order to avoid any legal complications, but refusing to give up the linkage, Fubbins changed his name again, from Wallack to Wallick. And when John Lester Wallack died in 1888, Wallick subsequently changed his last name back to the more

recognizable Wallack. Throughout the remainder of his life, Wallick moved between both spellings, which makes tracking James Wallick/Wallack all the more elusive.²² Like the outlaw he portrayed, Wallick's true identity was masked by an alias.

As a young actor, Wallick created an early following. *The Sun* (1908) obituary states, "Wallick filled an annual engagement in New York City for years and enjoyed a wide popularity here and through the South and Middle West," adding "there are men and women today who remember him as Jacques in *The Two Orphans*, a role which for many was a favorite."²³ *The Two Orphans* (1874) was Jackson N. Hart's adaptation of a French melodrama. The play was one of the most popular productions of the late nineteenth century, and in the words of George Odell, "one of the greatest theatrical successes of all time in America."²⁴ In *Annals of the New York Stage*, Odell documents several productions of *The Two Orphans* in New York throughout the turn of the century and acknowledges actors who appeared in the role of Jacques, including John B. Studley who also portrayed Buffalo Bill in *Buffalo Bill, King of the Bordermen* (1869); however, Odell fails to mention Wallick's turn as Jacques in *The Two Orphans*.²⁵

Despite the snub from Odell, existing reviews of Wallick suggest he was strong actor. Moreover, the Wallick obituaries indicate that he was also considered a theatrical innovator. Wallick had not been working in theatre long when he realized there was money to be made in management, specifically by financing touring productions under his own name. Subsequently, Wallick is credited "as one of the earliest actor/managers in the country."²⁶ In the late 1870s, Wallick "had several companies on the road, John Dillion, the comedian, having been under his management at one time."²⁷ Unfortunately, the venture did not work out as planned and resulted in a series of financial "reverses."²⁸

Thus began a lifetime of tumultuous finances. Nearly all the available source material on the life of Wallick mentions his financial reverses. After going bankrupt, Wallick left theatre and joined the Sells Brothers circus. Throughout the 1880s, Sells Brothers was one of the largest traveling attractions in the nation, as indicated by its title: “Sells Brothers World Conquering and All Overshadowing Three Ring Circus, Real Roman Hippodrome, Indian Village and Pawnee Bill’s Famous Original Wild West Show.”²⁹ Sells Brothers originated in Columbus, Ohio, in 1872, and continued until it was bought out by Ringling Brothers, Barnum, and Bailey in 1903.³⁰ There are only a few accounts of Wallick’s position with Sells Brothers; the *Dramatic Mirror* notes, “The Sells Brothers circus offered him a position as manager in 1880, which he accepted and remained with this attraction up to the time of the death of Jesse James.”³¹ An untitled clipping in the Wallick file suggests “he performed in the circus on horseback.”³² This would make sense; trick-riding was a popular circus feature at the time, as it came into use through Philip Astley (1742-1814).

The timing of Wallick’s career in the circus is of interest. Both obituaries mention that Wallick was on the road with Sells Brothers at the time of James’ death in 1882. *The Sun* states, “During this time, he conceived the idea of weaving the tragic death of the bandit into a play.”³³ *The Dramatic Mirror* goes further and asserts that Wallick “had a drama written that he called *Jesse James, the Bandit King*.”³⁴ This quote is notable, in that it gives Wallick full credit for the original idea of a play based on Jesse James. The quote also indicates that McCloskey was hired to write the script, which was a common practice at the time, as noted in the case of Cody and Prentiss Ingraham.

On 19 February 1887, Wallick appeared in *The National Police Gazette*. *The Police Gazette* is known as “America’s Original Tabloid: Covering crime, sports, celebrities, and all things sensational since 1845.”³⁵ Throughout the late nineteenth century, the tabloid was a highly popular publication that often blurred the distinction between real and sensationalized news, combining sections like “Homicidal Horrors” and “Outlaws of the Wild West” with photos of burlesque dancers.”³⁶ Wallick appears in a section of *The Gazette* titled “Stage Skimming,” an editorial commentary and gossip column devoted to the New York theatre scene. The author of the column wrote under the pseudonym, Wooden Spoon. Next to the Wallick obituaries, Spoon’s brief mention of Wallick (three paragraphs), offers one of the most insightful sources on the life of the actor. Additionally, Spoon’s article is notable for its romanticized rendition of Wallick’s first run-in with the real Jesse James. The first paragraph reads:

One character of the American stage is burly, good-natured James H. Wallick, now starring in “The Bandit King.” I have known the brawny Wallick for many a year, and, as they say in Scotland, we had a bit o’ a crack together the other night. When I first encountered him, he was a bright, eager young fellow, who was spending his money, as well as, all of his large energy trying to become the Gus Daly of the West. One fine morning he woke up to find himself about 60,000 dollars out on his effort to upraise the dramatic taste of Hoosierdom. So he quickly shut down on society and joined the circus. But even in the sawdust ring his heart yearned after the dramatic.³⁷

The first paragraph reveals important information about Wallick. First, the “Gus Daly of the West” reference alludes to John Augustine Daly (1838-1899). Daly was a highly influential theatre director, manager, producer, playwright, and drama critic who dominated the United States theatre scene during the second half of the nineteenth century. Daly wrote the popular melodrama *Under the Gaslight* (1867), which first staged the classic, melodramatic scene of a victim tied to train-tracks, only to be rescued moments before the train approaches.³⁸ Judging from Spoon’s commentary, we can speculate that Wallick viewed Daly’s career as template of sorts and hoped to mirror Daly’s success as a theatrical entrepreneur in the east out west, which becomes yet another example of Wallick “doubling” a prominent figure in American theatre.

Also notable in the first paragraph is Spoon’s description of Wallick’s appearance and demeanor. Wallick was a big man: burly, brawny, and full of energy. He was likable, good-natured, and enjoyed conversation with libation. Theatre critics noted the same qualities. A review in Kingston, New York’s *The Daily Freeman* (1884) states:

James H. Wallick assayed the role of “The Bandit King,” and played it to perfection. His fine physique makes him a most admirable, almost lovable, outlaw. There is a manliness in his impersonation of Jesse James that carries the audience with him from the start between blood and terror.”³⁹

The review of Wallick echoes earlier descriptions of Mayo and Cody in frontier melodrama. As illustrated in the case of the backwoodsman and the scout, a commonality existed in theatrical representations of the frontier hero as not only possessing natural nobility, but also “manliness.” This description, now recognized as a gender stereotype,

was viewed at the time as a necessary characteristic of the American frontier hero, including the cowboy. Most frontier heroes were recognized manly; they had rugged good looks, physical prowess, and a likeable personality. Wallick's portrayal of the outlaw hero continued this characterization.

In the second paragraph, Spoon recounts a story (presumably told to him by Wallick), wherein the actor experiences a near-miss encounter with the actual Jesse James. Whether true or false, the experience is said to have inspired Wallick's conception of *The Bandit King*; again, giving the actor full credit for the original idea of a play based on Jesse James. Spoon writes:

One day, while he was with Sells Brothers, he was on a train, in Missouri, which immediately followed one robbed by Jesse James. The highwayman had just left the spot when Wallick arrived. Their horses' footprints were still fresh. The excitement and interest of the spectators gave the clever actor an instant inspiration. In less time than most men would have taken to think the matter over, [Wallick] was the owner of Jesse James' two horses and playing the outlaw to immense business.⁴⁰

The chronology of the event stands out in its potential accuracy and probable inaccuracy. The height of James' criminal activity occurred roughly over a ten year period between 1866 and 1876. The legendary Northfield Bank Robbery, where several members of the James Gang were captured or killed, occurred in Minnesota on 7 September 1876. After Northfield, James went into hiding. In 1879, he went back to work and recruited a new gang, who pulled off the infamous Glendale Train robbery near Independence, Missouri,

on 8 October 1879. James is credited with yet another Missouri train robbery near Winston on 15 July 1881.⁴¹ Wallick was touring with Sells Brothers from 1880-1882. Could his near-miss with Jesse James have occurred? Perhaps, but it is difficult to imagine that Wallick was able to purchase horses, from a “living” bandit king, who was known for his paranoia and reclusiveness. Nevertheless, whether the story is true, partially true, or entirely fabricated by Wallick, it stands as a key example of the authentication process that drove the actors and audience of frontier melodrama.

As we have seen in the case of Buffalo Bill, and in the broader narrative of the cowboy, the borderline between history and mythology in representations of the Old West is blurred in popular entertainment. The same is true of Wallick’s staging of *Jesse James*. It is important to note at this juncture, that despite the fact or fiction in Wallick’s conception of *The Bandit King*, the actor did indeed travel west and brought his frontier experience back east. Like Cody and Mayo, Wallick appeared bona-fide in portraying a hero from the American West, because he could claim to have actually been there. As a means of authentication, Wallick’s frontier experience legitimized his characterization of Jesse James and the production as a whole. In the case of his pre-production effort, Wallick could claim to have been on the scene of a Missouri train robbery – perpetrated by the infamous outlaw – when struck with the original idea for his James play.

In the final paragraph of *The Gazette* clipping, Spoon offers a snapshot of how popular and profitable *The Bandit King* was onstage, as well as another glimpse into Wallick’s financial life. Also notable, is the mention of Wallick’s future plans:

The piece, based on the experiences of the well known Western highwayman, has in six years, made so much money that in three

more years, he expects to retire and personally conduct the immense livery stable in which he is interested. Horse dramas of the Western type have netted him nearly \$100,000, besides enough to pay off all of his debts.⁴²

Wallick did not make his three year plan. *The Bandit King* opened in 1883, *The Gazette* article ran in 1887, and Wallick revived the play in 1902, six years before his death.

In his ten years as *The Bandit King*, Wallick made a lot of money. His obituary in *The Sun* states, "Jesse James, The Bandit King made a fortune for Wallick."⁴³ An article in *The New York Times* adds, "Mr. Wallick made a great deal of money from his production of 'The Bandit King.' Most of the money which he accumulated in the days of his great popularity had been given away or lost."⁴⁴ Finally, the *New Jersey Telegraph* described Wallick as:

The Last of the Old School: Mr. Wallack [sic], whose real name was Patrick J. Fubbins, was a showman of the old school. Without education, but gifted with a fine physique and talent for acting...the great fortune he was once possessed of had been lost in unfortunate theatrical ventures or given away. It is doubtful if he was worth \$1000 when he died.⁴⁵

The Times and *The Telegraph* add an important element to the story. Despite his financial troubles, when the actor did have money, he often gave it away. *The Mirror* states:

Mr. Wallick was generous to a fault, and no needy actor ever appealed to him in vain. After his first season with the Jesse James play he advertised for everyone to whom he ever owed anything to

call on him, and he paid off all his debts, many of which had long been outlawed.⁴⁶

This is an important element to Wallick, not only financially, but also thematically in relation to his portrayal of the outlaw hero. Jesse James lives on in American mythology as a Robin Hood of the Old West, a good outlaw who robbed from the rich and gave to the poor. The Code of the West states a cowboy should help the helpless and never go back on his word. Wallick embodied each concept, both on and off stage. In spite of his generosity, Wallick's downfall was the manner and passion in which emulated the American bandit king.

Origins of the Outlaw Hero

The outlaw as hero has been an object of interest in American popular entertainment for over two centuries. As a character type, however, the bandit has roots that run deep into other mythologies. Like the bond between Lochinvar the knight and *Davy Crockett*, the legend of Jesse James is inextricably bound to a chivalric, medieval hero. In his article, *Robin Hood and the American Outlaw: A Note on History and Folklore* (1966), Kent Steckmesser writes:

The most familiar characterizations of our American outlaw are that they are 'Robin Hoods.' The outlaw, though technically a criminal, may become a hero by serving the higher cause of justice...Jesse James is thought to have emerged this way.⁴⁷

Indeed, no American bandit has achieved more lasting notoriety than Jesse James. While there is no direct descendancy between Robin Hood and James, both figures are related

by a similar set of heroic characteristics, most clearly illustrated in their shared credo: to rob from the rich, and give to the poor.

The connection between Hood and James has not been lost on cultural historians of the American West, including President Theodore Roosevelt, who wrote, "there is something very curious in the reproduction here on this continent of Medieval England...essentially, sympathy for the outlaw, Jesse James taking the place of Robin Hood."⁴⁸ Roosevelt's curiosity echoes the larger question of heroic development as explored in the evolution of the American frontier hero. Much like the cowboy hero, the history of outlaw heroes, like James or Hood, is influenced by their mythology. In the case of Robin Hood, documentable facts are scant, which often leaves legend accepted as history. Even today, despite the effort of cultural historians who have debunked virtually every presumption held up as proof of Robin Hood's existence, the medieval bandit is still often perceived to have been a real person.⁴⁹ Like Jesse James (and, perhaps, like Wallick) legend becomes history.

Certainly both Robin Hood and Jesse James have been represented as heroic figures in contemporary film and television. More importantly, both bandits were enshrined by an earlier form of entertainment: the ballad. As previously stated, the most popular folk song written for America's Bandit King is "Poor Jesse James" by Bascom Lunsford. In the first verse, Lunsford evokes the spirit of Robin Hood:

Jesse James was a lad that killed many a man,
He robbed the Glendale train,
He stole from the rich and he gave to the poor,
He'd a hand and a heart and a brain.⁵⁰

The verse is notable for its immediate reference of the Robin Hood credo. Additionally, it marks James as a murderer and train robber, who had a kind heart: a good outlaw. The marking of Robin Hood as a good outlaw was passed on in a similar fashion, albeit five hundred years earlier, in “The Gest of Robyn Hode” (c. 1450):

Cryst have mercy on his soule,
That dyed on the rode!
For he was a good outlawe,
And dyde pore men moch good.⁵¹

The similarities between verses are striking; however, the connection between Hood and James does not begin and end with a song. The cultural mythology of both men as good outlaws has been furthered through oral storytelling, what Steckmesser refers to as “floating anecdotes.”⁵²

The most well known floating anecdote, shared in the mythology of both outlaw heroes, is a tale of the bandit rescuing a poor widow from financial ruin. In sum, the bandit learns of a poor widow who is unable to pay the mortgage on her land is about to be foreclosed upon by the bank. The bandit loans the widow a large sum of money in order to pay her debt. When the bank collector arrives, the widow pays her debt and the collector rides off. The bandit, who has been hiding nearby, ambushes the bank collector, steals double the amount loaned, and escapes into the countryside. The poor widow anecdote is told in the legend of Robin Hood, and retold in the legend of Jesse James, including an attempt to authenticate the story by Jesse James Jr. in his book, *Jesse James, My Father* (1899), which states the anecdote as true.⁵³

The similarities between Hood and James, as characterized in story and song, led an English professor at Western Oregon University to create a set of outlaw hero characteristics. In “The Outlaw: A Distinctive American Folktype” (1990), Richard E. Meyer constructed a list of twelve heroic traits shared by the outlaw hero.⁵⁴ Meyer’s list is similar to the “must-have” list of cowboy characteristics explored in Chapter One, in that he documents the essential traits of the outlaw hero as found in popular entertainment. Six of Meyer’s twelve traits directly invoke the cowboy hero: 1) The outlaw hero is a “man of the people.” He is admired by the public; 2) The outlaw hero only embraces outlawry to revenge injustice; 3) The outlaw hero is kind hearted, and never harms until forced; 4) The outlaw hero is daring and performs incredible heroic feats; 5) The outlaw hero’s death is brought on through betrayal; and 6) After his death, the outlaw hero is gone but not forgotten.⁵⁵

In analyzing Meyer’s list, it is clear the outlaw and the cowboy shared certain attributes. Two of Meyer’s traits are stated almost word-for-word in Gene Autry’s “Ten Commandments of the Cowboy.”⁵⁶ In this way, the cowboy and outlaw are bound in the history and mythology of the American frontier by the Code of the West. Moreover, elements of Meyer’s list could easily be applied to Mayo and Cody, although neither the backwoodsman nor scout was considered an outlaw, in any shape or form. Yet both Cody and Mayo had been performing a similar set of heroic characteristics ten years before Wallick’s production of *Jesse James*. Again, the Code of the West, as embodied in theatrical performance, was passed on from the backwoodsman to the scout to the outlaw to the cowboy.

Prior to the outlaw and cowboy joining the ranks of more established frontier heroes, both figures were still seen as controversial in the court of late nineteenth century public opinion. Throughout 1870s, characterizations of the backwoodsman and scout were perfectly acceptable representations of the frontier hero in American entertainment; the bandit and cowboy were not. Although the American outlaw was a reincarnation of Robin Hood, identifiable by a similar ideology, he differed from other frontier heroes in one distinct aspect: he stood outside the law. Like the outlaw, the cowboy “was a social outcast and a confirmed rebel whose attitude toward law was openly defiant.”⁵⁷ Until the mid-1880s, the cowboy was still considered an outlaw himself.

Frank Dobie, one of first scholars to study the cowboy as a cultural icon, wrote “through the 1880s, the term cowboy often meant drunkard, outlaw, and thief...a devil-may-care roistering gambling immoral revolver-heeled brazen light-fingered lot, who came to a no-good end.”⁵⁸ Dobie’s description of the cowboy is eerily similar to one of Robin Hood, “who has come down to modern times as a roaring, hot-tempered and kind hearted thief, for whom fighting is a joy and freedom a necessity, the eternal type of light-hearted rebel who cannot brook restriction.”⁵⁹ Thus, before the cowboy and outlaw became heroic figures in late nineteenth century theatre and then enemies in twentieth century Westerns, both types were considered socially unacceptable and dangerous.

Throughout the turn of the twentieth century, the development of the frontier hero picks up steam, specifically in the formation of the outlaw and cowboy. This rapid transformation revealed a tension in the construction of the frontier hero in American popular entertainment, which in turn created an artistic paradox for the actor and audience of *The Bandit King*: how do you make a bad man good?

In the case of *Jesse James*, Wallick followed the model of Cody and Mayo. He created an action-packed frontier melodrama based on an actual historic figure from the American West: he legitimized his characterization with his own frontier experience, authenticated the production with genuine frontier memorabilia (horses and guns), and performed elements of the Code of the West by staging aspects of the Robin Hood myth. Wallick masked the bandit's objectionable behavior "with an impenetrable veneer of chivalry and natural nobility;" moreover, he vindicated the violence and rebellion in the guise of morally justifiable revenge.⁶⁰ In the years after Jesse James death, the outlaw became a heroic, if not controversial character in American theatre, whereas the cowboy was only beginning to achieve cultural notoriety.⁶¹ True, the cowboy was hot on the heels of the outlaw, but for the time being, the stage belonged to *The Bandit King*.

Don't Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth

A determining factor in the success of Wallick's *Bandit King* was his claim of originality. On 27 January 1883, *The New York Times* ran an article entitled "Jesse James in Court." The piece described a legal proceeding, "wherein Lavernie and France, the proprietors of a romantic drama entitled *The James Boys, Frank and Jesse; or, Falsely Accused*, applied for an injunction restraining S. H. Barrett and James H. Wallick from producing their play entitled, *Jesse James, The Bandit King*."⁶² As defendants in the case, Barrett and Wallick, provided the court with a New York state copyright and claimed their play to be "a good domestic drama, which was originated and composed in New York long before the plaintiffs' play."⁶³ Additionally, the defendants described their work as "an original drama embodying incidents in the life of the Missouri outlaw...and also

that they had the original horses of Jesse James.”⁶⁴ After deliberation, the court refused to restrain the production “on grounds the facts being so greatly in dispute.”⁶⁵ Thus ended the legal battle for a right to play Jesse James in New York. On 29 January 1883, *Jesse James, The Bandit King* starring James H. Wallick opened in the Windsor Theatre at the Lee Avenue Academy in Manhattan. Wallick’s claim to James, however, began out west.

Wallick’s assertion of being “the original and only Jesse James” played a significant part in the legality, publicity, and staging of *The Bandit King*. As seen in the case of Cody and Mayo, words like authentic, genuine, and original were used to describe frontier melodrama. In *Pioneer Performances* (2011), Matthew Reborn argues that representations of the west in frontier melodrama were “a contest over legitimacy...and the primary battleground of the contest was the debate about authenticity.”⁶⁶ Reborn’s argument is applicable to Cody and Mayo, who applied their real-life frontier experience on stage in an effort to authenticate their performances. Wallick pushed the claim of authenticity further in his overt inclusion of property allegedly owned by Jesse James, which “contributed to the emotional attraction of the play” and “related to real events by using artifacts such as horses and guns connected to James.”⁶⁷

Nearly all of the available source material on *Jesse James, The Bandit King* mentions the performing horses: Bay Raider and Roan Charger. In *The Police Gazette*, Wallick implies that he acquired the horses from Jesse James before he was murdered in 1882. While it is difficult to disprove this claim, it is more probable that Wallick purchased the horses from the owner of the James residence in St. Joseph, Missouri, after the outlaw had been killed. In *Jesse James Was His Name*, William Settle writes:

Soon after Jesse's death, the public was avid...on April 10, only seven days after his slaying, the *St. Louis Republican* told of thousands of people visiting the house he had occupied in St. Joseph. The owner, seeing an opportunity for gain, charged an admission fee of ten cents.⁶⁸

Settle goes on to report that the owner sold "fences, stables, and splinters of wood from the structures as souvenirs to relic hunters," and that no one "had exploited its possibilities as fully as theatrical productions," one of which "featured a pair of horses that the company advertised as having belonged to Jesse. One, Roan Charger, was identified by a local man as a horse found in the outlaw's stable at the time of the assassination."⁶⁹ Settle's research combined with Wallick's claim in the copyright case suggests there is sufficient evidence to prove Bay Raider and Roan Charger were either owned by or associated closely enough with James to sway legal opinion. Once Wallick received the legal right to proceed with *Jesse James, The Bandit King*, he continued to use the horses as an authenticating element in publicity and performance.

On 1 July 1883, Wallick bought a full-page advertisement in *The New York Clipper*, which "traced the provenance of the James boys' guns and horses."⁷⁰ Newspaper journalists followed suit. In November 1883, an article in *St. Joseph Gazette* reported:

In the weeks after Jesse's death a producer in New York announced he was preparing to stage a drama by J. J. McCloskey, *Jesse James, The Bandit King*. The play would be founded on the life of the noted James, picturing daring exploits, and introducing the equine paradox, the most educated horses in the country!"⁷¹

An unidentified clipping in the Wallick file with a handwritten date of 1883 states:

It was an easy matter to crowd the Academy to the doors last evening with people who desired to see James H. Wallick in "The Bandit King." The scenes of the play are laid out in the West and there is plenty of shooting. The horses, Bay Raider and Roan Charger, are alone worth seeing, to witness the perfect training the notorious Jesse James must have given them to perform their really marvelous feats. At the end of the act, Mr. Wallick and his beautiful horse responded to several curtain calls.⁷²

The unidentifiable reviewer makes an assumption that Jesse James had trained the animals, yet all indications point to Wallick as trainer and stage director of the performing horses. A review in the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, written for a revival of *The Bandit King* in 1902, puts Wallick's horsemanship into historical perspective:

In most plays now where horses are introduced, they are dragged in by mane-and-tail, but after all of the time that Mr. Wallick has had during this period in preparing and training the horses that are used in his play, [he] has brought them to that state of perfection where their work is really remarkable. The horses are of as much importance as the human actors, for without them the play could not be given. Mr. Wallick is undoubtedly the greatest trainer of horses for stage purposes in the world.⁷³

As an innovator of equestrian-drama, Wallick becomes uniquely responsible for presenting a more authentic (and undoubtedly more aromatic) frontier experience for the

theatre audience. His staging of horses in frontier melodrama can now be seen as having influenced future representations of the American frontier, namely the Western.

In the aptly titled *Burs Under the Saddle* (1964), Ramon Adams writes that if a man “didn’t have a ‘hoss’ he couldn’t be a cowboy.”⁷⁴ Yet, as crucial as the horse was to the original cowboy’s livelihood, the image of a cowboy riding his horse across a deserted western landscape has become more potent as an iconic symbol of the American West. William Savage describes the importance of the cowboy and horse in Old West popular culture when he wrote, “Owen Wister’s *Virginian* could be a cowboy without cows, but he had to have a horse.”⁷⁵ In this way, the cowboy hero and his horse have become an inseparable element of Old West mythology, in no small part to the stage presence of James Wallick, Bay Raider, and Roan Charger.

Jesse James, The Bandit King

At the time of his death in 1882, Jesse James was a polarizing figure. The intense public interest in James was part admiration, part consternation. Subsequently, the staging of an outlaw in the theatre was viewed with equal passion from both sides of the audience. A small notice in the *Michigan Farmer’s Almanac*, dated 11 April 1882, states:

James Wallack [sic] is making preparations to dramatize the life and death of Jesse James, so as to show young Americans how they can distinguish themselves if they only start out with a determination to rob and murder whenever an opportunity offers.⁷⁶

The almanac notice provides two important pieces of information. First, it corroborates Wallick’s claim to the original idea for a play about Jesse James and justifies the rapid

chronology of his theatrical production. Second, it alludes to a public fear that a play featuring Jesse James would embolden young boys who saw the production to emulate the outlaw's lifestyle. This anxiety was heightened when Wallick brought *The Bandit King* back west from the theatres of New York, most notably to play in James' home state of Missouri a year and a half after the his death.

In November 1883, Wallick and company performed at the People's Theatre in St. Louis. Needless to say, a production of *The Bandit King* in James' own back yard was a huge attraction. To such an extent, the Midwest production made news back east. An article in the *New York Clipper* (1883) described the production as:

THE GREAT BOOM. Over twenty-six hundred people pay to gain admission, and hundreds turned away on the opening night to see James H. Wallick in the Magnificent Melodrama: Jesse James, The Bandit King, which was played to the greatest number of people ever in a theatre in St. Louis. Accept no stolen thunder, but wait for the Original and Only Jesse James, introducing the Original and Only horses Roan Charger and Bay Raider.⁷⁷

Although potentially exaggerated, the impact of the Missouri performances are documented in James' biography: "A Jesse James troupe favored Tootle's Opera house in St. Joseph with a two night engagement in November 1883. The attraction featured a pair of horses that the company advertised as having belonged to Jesse."⁷⁸ Settle goes on to say, "the standing-room only house" reacted strongly, which "was to be expected so near the James boy's home."⁷⁹ The *Kansas City Star* confirmed the negative response by quoting an unnamed audience member who said:

That dad-binged play glorifies these outlaws and makes heroes of them. The theater was packed to the doors last night...most of those were young boys and men. What will be the effect upon these young men?"⁸⁰

To be sure, the production caused a stir. The residents of Missouri, however, were not alone in their strong reaction to *The Bandit King*. In March 1884, Wallick and company were scheduled to perform in Mansfield, Ohio. Wallick's reputation, however, beat him to the scene.

Upon arriving in Mansfield, "a dozen or more prominent citizens" had petitioned the Mayor to prohibit Wallick's performance. An article in the *Mansfield Herald* states:

The equestrian drama of *The Bandit King*, in which J. H. Wallick personated the character of the murderer and cut-throat Jesse James, was advertised to be produced at Miller's Opera House on Thursday evening last night. That the tendency of such performances, by familiarizing the youth of the city with scenes of bloodshed, robbery, and other crimes, and by making heroes out of outlaws and desperadoes, was corrupting to their morals, and that the city might be saved from the disgrace of an exhibition so injurious to the minds of the rising generation.⁸¹

Undeterred, Wallick reportedly "demanded the papers or warrants" ordering him to stop the performance. When no such warrant arrived "Jesse James and troupe hustled headlong down the stairway and proceeded the play to the end undisturbed."⁸² The Mayor, "after passing the greater part of the day in some saloons," wandered into the

Opera House that evening and was “a deeply interested spectator of the blood and thunder scenes depicted.”⁸³ The Missouri and Ohio incidents illustrate the challenge Wallick faced not only in performing his play, but also in transforming public perception about the outlaw as an American frontier hero.

Wallick certainly faced a number of challenges in staging Jesse James, *The Bandit King*. A similar struggle exists today in trying to analyze the play itself. Unlike Mayo’s *Davy Crockett* or Cody’s *Life on the Border*, there is no extant script of *The Bandit King*. Unfortunately, the fate of Wallick’s play was far more common than Cody or Mayo’s. Except for a few remaining scripts, “the drama that brought the frontier to life for late-nineteenth-century audiences has vanished.”⁸⁴ That being the case, a rough outline and summary of *The Bandit King* can be cobbled together by analyzing the available source material and newspaper reviews. Read closely, the remaining sources reveal the signature traits of the frontier hero as staged in late nineteenth century frontier melodrama, as well as thematic elements of the frontier hero in theatrical performance.

The Wallick file at the New York Public Library holds a single page from a *Bandit King* playbill for performances “commencing the week of January 27, 1883.”⁸⁵ The playbill page does not include the name of the theatre, but it does list a cast of characters and synopsis of acts. The cast list identifies thirteen actors and the characters portrayed, as well as “the famous horses Raider and Charger, and an ensemble of Herders, Vigilantes, and Officers.”⁸⁶ Wallick is credited in the playbill as the “great master of all melodramatic stars, who will appear Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday as: Jesse James, alias Joe Howard, the accused.”⁸⁷ The playbill synopsis includes a six act breakdown with subtitles:

Act I. – The Howard Home in Missouri. The Oath of Vengeance.

Act II. – Grand Union Hotel, Kansas. Detective foiled. The leap for life.

Act III. – Kansas City Fair Ground robbery. The ride for liberty.

Act IV. – Home of the Vigilante. Break neck rapids. Administering the Oath. Rescuing the girl from the angry torrents – The finest water effect on the stage.

Act V. – The great duel on horseback.

Act VI. – The promised pardon. The scoundrel's revenge. Tableau.⁸⁸

The most complete synopsis of the play from an existing review can be found in an 1883 edition of the *Frankfort Roundabout*. *The Roundabout* was a newspaper located in Frankfort, Kentucky, a small town located between Lexington and Louisville. The review is dated 26 December 1883, which would have been almost a year after the New York premiere and about three months prior to the Mansfield, Ohio, production. The review is tucked in at the bottom of page three under “Amusements.” The first paragraph states:

Last evening, a large audience assembled at the Opera House to witness the performance of a six-act melodrama by sir, J. H. Wallick, entitled “The Bandit King,” the principal features of which were the introduction of the horses, Bay Raider and Roan Charger. The chief character of the play is Joe Howard, alias Jesse James, the devoted son, who afterward became the Bandit King, in which capacity he poses as the protector of virtue and the punisher of crime. The Bandit King being the central figure of the plot is, of course, represented by Mr. Wallick”⁸⁹

Knowing what happened in Mansfield, the description of Jesse James as “a devoted son, protector of virtue and the punisher of crime” in the first paragraph of the review is significant.⁹⁰ First, any son who is devoted to his mother is naturally considered good in the eye of the public. Additionally, the description of Wallick serves as a marker of chivalric behavior and the Code of the West. Specifically noting the bandit as “the punisher of crime,” echoes two tenets of the Code: protect the defenseless and helpless and always bear on the side of justice. It is not know if *The Roundabout* had any financial interest in Wallick’s production. If so, the review may have served to temper any resistance from potential audience members.

The second (and final) section of *The Roundabout* review manages to encapsulate all six acts of *The Bandit King* in one paragraph:

The first act appropriately concludes in a murder and a general firing of pistols. As the plot thickens, gore flows abundantly. Terrific situations abound, one of the most extraordinary of which is the attempted murder of Kolomath, the half-breed waif, by drowning, and her prompt rescue by the Bandit King, who lassoes her, and fishes her out of in the nick of time, and who has a knack of turning up when someone is about to be murdered. The air was charged with the smell of gunpowder while the play was in progress. There are a fight on horseback and a ride to the death among the scenes presented and altogether the audience had no reason to complain of monotony, for as soon as one terrific scene

is off another comes on. The play ends with guilt exposed,
innocence vindicated, virtue rewarded, and a treacherous act.⁹¹

In addition to *The Roundabout* review, two newspaper clippings from the Wallick file comment on the plot. Again, neither of these clippings from the Wallick file includes the name of the paper, dates, or location of the production; however, one offers the name of the venue in its title: “The Bandit King Greeted by a Crowded House at the Academy.”⁹² Together, all three clippings provide a glimpse of what the play was like in performance.

From these reviews, we can determine the narrative of the play was loosely based on events from the life and death of the actual Jesse James as presented in a melodramatic format. Like Cody’s *First Scalp for Custer*, Wallick’s *Bandit King* embedded elements of the James legend into the storyline, which served to legitimize the performance as a potential history of James, while reinforcing the mythology of the bandit as a frontier hero. For the purposes of storytelling, both aspects sparked audience interest. In the play, Jesse James is characterized as Joe Howard, the accused. From 1880 to 1882, the actual Jesse James lived under the alias Thomas Howard.

The action of the play is set “in a time when the country around the Missouri and Kansas border was overrun with outlaws.”⁹³ The Missouri/Kansas Border War, also known as Bleeding Kansas (c. 1854-1860), was a violent conflict centered on the issue of whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free-state or a slave-state. The Border War and subsequent Civil War are considered influential in shaping the life and career of Jesse James. Thus, the primary villains in the play are a corrupt detective and former Union military captain named Sharpleigh and his accomplice Jake McKinstrey, known as Kansas Jake.

In Act One, the villains seize control of property owned by James' mother (listed as "Mrs. Howard, a loving mother"). When Mrs. Howard accuses the men of theft, Sharpleigh has her killed by enlisting Kansas Jake to firebomb her home. In January 1875, the home of James' mother, Zerelda Samuels, was firebombed by the Pinkerton Detective Agency in a botched raid upon the James Gang. Zerelda was not killed, but received an injury to her right hand that required amputation. At the news of his mother's death in the play, Howard swears vengeance upon her killers; however, Sharpleigh abuses his legal authority, accuses Howard of the bombing, and arrests him for the murder of his own mother. Shortly after, Howard escapes.

Seven years pass, during which time Howard takes on the title of Bandit King, "a violent desperado known for robbing trains, holding up banks and pillaging right and left."⁹⁴ Throughout the seven years (Acts II–IV), Howard is trailed by a "half-breed Indian maiden named Kolomath, who was raised by the Indians, but in all actuality was rightfully the child of a rich man who was murdered years ago by the villain Kansas Jake."⁹⁵ The Kolomath relationship has some basis in the James legend. On 23 April 1874, James married his cousin, Zee (named after Zerelda, James' mother). Zee and Jesse were married until the day he died; however, there is some speculation that while hiding out in the region of northeast Nebraska known as Devils Nest, James married an American Indian woman and had a son.⁹⁶ In the play, the Bandit King and Kolomath "become sweethearts and on two or three occasions he saves her life," most notably, when Kansas Jake recognizes Kolomath, ties her up, and throws her in the river to drown.⁹⁷ At which point, the Bandit King lassoes the girl and rescues her "from the angry torrents," described in the playbill as "the finest water effect on the stage."⁹⁸

In Act V, the Bandit King is finally cornered by Sharpleigh and Kansas Jake in a deserted tavern on the outskirts of town. At the moment of his impending capture, Howard's horse jumps through a window and rescues his rider. Upon their escape, the horse tears a wanted poster from the tavern wall, which advertises a \$10,000 reward for the capture of Howard: Dead or Alive. The amount and conditions of the reward in the play are the same as the actual reward placed on Jesse James in 1881. The fifth act features "the great duel on horseback, the weapons are bowie knives, and the duel is thrilling."⁹⁹ Justice is served in the final act. Sharpleigh is killed, Howard is pardoned, and "Kansas Jake, who was bad when there was no danger in sight, made a hit."¹⁰⁰

In addition to the reviews cited above, the Wallick file in the Billy Rose Archive holds a review from the *Lowell Daily Courier* (1883) in Massachusetts, which states:

The Jesse James Combination delighted a large audience at the Opera house Saturday evening...exciting incidents, shooting affrays, trained horses, bandits, Indians, border agents, injured maidens, etc. etc. etc., crowd fast upon each other, and amuse and interest the auditor. Mr. James H. Wallick and his horse were objects of awe-inspiring greatness.¹⁰¹

A review in the *Amsterdam Daily Democrat* (1879-1886) strikes a similar tone:

The crowd and enthusiastic audience that assembled in Turner Hall last evening betokened that the fame of Mr. James H. Wallick that preceded him. Mr. Wallick, as the fearless avenger, is well-fitted for the role, he possessing a fine physique and the stage presence, and the debonair manner he assumes is excellent. The

best portion of the play is the duel on horseback, a cleverly worked up realistic stage combat, which has not been excelled. The play has a dime novel twang, but it is in reality, a perfectly pure and enjoyable melodrama.¹⁰²

The Daily Democrat review is notable in that it mentions Wallick's reputation. At the time of this review in 1886, Wallick and company would have been performing *The Bandit King* for three years, in which time it became a success (Wallick's reputation and the success of the play were noted in *The Gazette* interview, 1887). *The Daily Democrat* also mentions heroic elements of Wallick's performance, namely his imposing stage presence and chivalric manner, as well as the description of the bandit as a fearless avenger, which again invokes the Code of the West. Finally, the review makes an interesting distinction between the "twang" of dime novels and the reality of pure melodrama, indicating a shift in the perception of frontier melodrama from crude theatrics to a viable form of popular entertainment in American culture.

By the late-1880s, Wallick had performed *The Bandit King* for five years in theatres across the country. On a return trip to New York, a reviewer at *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* wrote:

James Wallick's wild and woolly Western melodrama entertained last night. His horses, his pistols and his company filled this theater with yells, snorts, smoke, laughter and rejoicing last night. The play was "The Bandit King," and there was a good deal of it."¹⁰³

It is significant *The Brooklyn Eagle* refers to the play as a Western melodrama, as opposed to frontier or border play. By 1888, plays like *The Bandit King* and were blazing the trail for new forms of popular entertainment based on (or in) the American Old West.

In the period of time between the opening of *The Bandit King* in 1883 and its revival in 1902, frontier melodrama underwent a transformation from “prominence to phenomenon.”¹⁰⁴ Hall writes, “extraordinary exhibitions dominated the dramatic presentation of the frontier in the early 1890s. Characters such as Jesse James... were defining a new kind of American theatre.”¹⁰⁵ Wallick’s characterization of Jesse James as good outlaw who abided by the Code of the West, along with the introduction of horses on stage who served not only as a scenic element, but as characters unto themselves, helped transform the identity of frontier melodrama and the frontier hero into something more than dime novel twang. Wallick was staging a tangible theatrical experience rooted in an American West that was shifting from fact to fiction to mythology.

It Comes at a Cost

An evening with *Jesse James, The Bandit King* was an action-packed event, filled with “horses, pistols...snorts, and smoke.”¹⁰⁶ Yet, we do not exactly know how the play ends. There are, however, a few clues. The playbill synopsis subtitles Act VI: “The promised pardon. The scoundrel’s revenge. Tableau.”¹⁰⁷ *The Frankfort Roundabout* describes the play ending “with guilt exposed, innocence vindicated, virtue rewarded, and a treacherous act.”¹⁰⁸ Although the legend of Jesse James, like that of Buffalo Bill Cody, blurs between fact and fiction, there are two cold, hard facts. To quote John O. West, “most people agree that Jesse James was born and that he died; on virtually everything

else relating to Jesse, there is no agreement.”¹⁰⁹ Considering the effort Wallick exerted to prove that he was “the original and only Jesse James,” it stands to reason that he would end his production as genuinely as possible with the murder of James.

Although Wallick’s script is lost, two extant versions of James plays that can be used to construct a potential and probable ending of *Jesse James, The Bandit King*. There are indications that a common thread ran through all the James plays. A review in the *San Antonio Light* (1884) notes, “though not possessing much originality, [The Bandit King] is undoubtedly a powerful drama, having cleverly taken the best points of many other dramas of the same subject and woven them together with ingenuity.”¹¹⁰ Hall adds that “several factors of the James plays relate the productions and various elements contribute to their associated appeal.”¹¹¹ That being the case, the two available Jesse James plays can be used as accomplices, in order to finish off *Jesse James, The Bandit King*.

The Library of Congress holds a series of archived plays in microfilm form listed as “copyright deposits 1901-1944.” There are two Jesse James plays in this collection. The first is a copy of Henry Belmar’s *Jesse James, An American Outlaw Or, the Life and Death of Jesse James: A Sensational Western Melodrama in Four Acts* (1901).¹¹² The second is Thomas F. Nye, *The Bandit Hero, or Jesse James, the Mission Outlaw* (1906).¹¹³ Belmar’s play was one of the three original productions, along with Wallick’s *Jesse James, The Bandit King* and Lavernie and France’s *The James Boys, Frank and Jesse, or Falsely Accused*, all of which opened in 1883.

The microfilm copy of Belmar’s script has a copyright of 1901. Thomas Nye’s *The Bandit Hero, or Jesse James, the Mission Outlaw* has a copyright of 10 May 1906. Both scripts follow the conventional plotline of frontier melodrama, “featuring moral

dilemmas, spectacular action, and overt conflicts between good and evil with large doses of punishment, repentance, and revenge.”¹¹⁴ The Nye script is four acts. The last act is subtitled: Jesse’s home in St. Joseph. The serpent enters Eden. Death of Jesse James.¹¹⁵ James enters dressed in “a Western costume, with a mustache and goatee.”¹¹⁶ He is followed by Bob Ford:

Enter JESSE and BOB, sneaking business.

JESSE. Well, Bob, did you have some breakfast?

BOB. A meal fit for a king, Jesse.

JESSE. All right, we’ll have a talk for awhile. (*Looks up at picture*) Hello, Siroc’s picture’s hanging crooked. Ah, there’s a horse for you, Bob, money couldn’t buy him. I must straighten that picture, (*takes chair*) there, that’s better –

BOB *shoots JESSE and exits. JESSE staggers off chair and falls C., dies.*

Enter ZELDA.

ZELDA. My God, speak to me, Jesse – for God sake, speak to me, it is I, Zelda, your wife. (*rises*) He is dead, murdered! Oh, my heart will break, my heart will break. (*falls on body, sobbing*).

*Quick Curtain. THE END.*¹¹⁷

Nye’s rendition of James’ murder follows the legend of James death point-for-point. Like the Nye script, Belmar’s play is four acts and the final scene takes place at Jesse James home in St. Joseph. The details of James’ death however are dramatically heightened, most notably in James’ monologue and the gift of his pistol to the murderer, Bob Ford:

JESSE. Bob – you’re a good boy and I like you the more I see you – now I’m going to make you a present. (takes gun from belt) This old gun, I have carried it with me a great many years. It has sent many the man to his long home! I wonder who will be your next victim! Can you tell me old friend? (looks down the barrel) You would of course if you could – I know you would – this little barrel will unite eternity with time. Take it with you Bob – a present from me – but promise never use it unless in self defense. (JESSE kisses gun) I have given you away old friend. Mind you prove as faithful to your new owner as you have to me. Good-bye I’ll never use you again. (JESSE gives gun to BOB)

BOB. (aside) You never will!

JESSE. (looks up at the motto on wall) “God bless our home.”

May God bless every good man’s home is the prayer of the outlaw Jesse James. The motto is not hanging straight. (JESSE goes up stage places chair under motto and stands upon it. BOB shoots JESSE and he staggers back and falls down stage C. Mrs. James runs in bends over Jesse and lifts his head on her knee. BOB exits)

ZEE. Jesse! Jesse! My husband! Dead! Assassinated!

(Dark change. TABLEAU. CURTAIN)¹¹⁸

Although the Belmar version essentially follows the same narrative of James’ murder, there is a fatalism to his American outlaw. Looking down the barrel of the gun, kissing it, and then giving it as gift to his murder evokes a sacrificial quality to scene, as if James

knows he is about to die. Additionally, Belmar's painting becomes symbolic in its change from a horse to the "God bless our home" motto, which allows James the opportunity to offer his final prayer for mankind.

As a thematic device, the murder of James finds its way into the evolution of the frontier hero in American entertainment. As noted, the bandit hero shared a similar code of behavior and characteristics embodied by other heroes in frontier melodrama. In this way "the outlaw was little different than the backwoodsman of the scout who preceded him."¹¹⁹ The outlaw hero, however, differed from earlier frontier heroes in two distinct factors. First, the outlaw stood outside of the law, a trait masked with chivalry and morally justified by the need for revenge. The second determining factor was not so easily hidden. In, "The Outlaw: A Distinctive American Folktype," Meyer explains that the outlaw hero is different from other incarnations of Old West heroes, because he must die in the end.¹²⁰ Indeed, the death of the outlaw is what separates his character type from the backwoodsman and scout of the past, and the cowboy hero of the future.

The necessary death of the outlaw and its impact upon his audience is explained by Kent Steckmesser in "Robin Hood and the American Outlaw," where he writes:

Theoretically the disposal of the bandit should be welcomed by society. But because society's law is frequently seen as corrupt, the death of the popular outlaw symbolizes the defeat of all hope for true justice.¹²¹

In the context of American popular entertainment, the hope and need for a purveyor of true justice who was personified in the form of an authentic hero from the American West, quite frankly, could not die at the end of the picture or play as a matter of practice.

In spite of the bandit's natural nobility and adherence to the Code of the West, he could not stand the test of time as the iconic hero of the Old West if he had to die. Like Jesse James, the fate of the outlaw hero in popular entertainment was to be killed, but not be forgotten. As a heroic type from the wrong side of the tracks, the outlaw helped blaze a trail for the cowboy who was on the verge of his own heroic transformation.

As for Wallick, like the outlaw he portrayed, his story does not have a happy ending. After his revival of *The Bandit King* in 1903, Wallick finally fulfilled the retirement plan he had laid out to Wooden Spoon in 1887. Wallick purchased a large farm in Middletown, New York, about seventy-five miles outside the city. He named his estate the Holly Rood Stock Farm and began to train horses. In the years between 1902 and 1906, Wallick suffered yet another financial catastrophe, where "he lost everything and the farm he loved was sold on a mortgage foreclosure."¹²² Despondent and alone, Wallick moved into the Commercial Hotel in Middletown. During this time, he suffered from "a malady which caused his right hand to decay."¹²³ It is believed he sustained the injury during his time on stage "by gun or horse."¹²⁴ Wallick refused to undergo an operation on his hand, "because he dreaded going through an operation in which he would have to take ether."¹²⁵

On Friday morning, 1 May 1908, Wallick "arose early, made his toilet carefully, lay in his bed, and shot himself in the right temple. On the window of his bedroom he had pinned this note: 'This is my own act. James H. Wallack [sic].'"¹²⁶ On Saturday, the New York papers reported Wallick's death. A headline in the *New York Dramatic Mirror* read, "James H. Wallack [sic] Dead. The Picturesque Career is Remembered by Old Theatergoers." *The New York Sun* stated, "James H. Wallick Dead. Long known as an

Actor and Producer of Melodramas.” The *New Jersey Telegraph* wrote, ” J. H. Wallack [sic] Dies a Suicide. Chief Actor in Old School Border Melodrama Shoots Himself in Bed.” *The New York Times* declared, “James H. Wallick Suicide. Actor of ‘The Bandit King,’ Broken in Fortune, Shoots Himself in the Head.”¹²⁷ Finally, an untitled clipping from the Wallick file printed a poem the actor reportedly kept in his desk:

In men who men pronounce as ill, I find so much of goodness still;

In men who men pronounce as divine, I find so much sin and blot.

I hesitate to draw the line - between the two when God has not.¹²⁸

Patrick J. Fubbins, also known as “Jesse” James Henry Wallick/Wallack, The Bandit King was sixty-nine years old.

Notes

¹ Marley Brant, *Jesse James: The Man and the Myth* (New York: Berkley Books, 1998). See also: J. D. Robinson, *Jesse James: Legendary Rebel and Outlaw* (Minneapolis: Compass Point Books, 2007); T. J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2002); and William Settle, *Jesse James Was His Name, Or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966). Settle’s biography is considered the landmark scholarly study on Jesse James; it was first conceived as a dissertation, during his graduate studies at the University of Missouri, Columbia in 1945.

² According to Settle, “Crittenden never revealed how much Ford received...and that his part was meager.” Pg. 119.

³ J. D. Robinson, *Jesse James: Legendary Rebel and Outlaw* (Minneapolis: Compass Point Books, 2007) 4-6; T. J. Stiles, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2002) 20-25; and William Settle, *Jesse James Was His Name, Or, Fact and Fiction Concerning the Careers of the Notorious James Brothers of Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1966) 20-25.

⁴ Frank Triplett, *The Life, Times, and Treacherous Death of Jesse James* (Chicago: Promontory Press Inc., 1970) xi.

⁵ Frank Triplett, Zerelda James, and C. J. Samuel, *The Life, Times, and Treacherous Death of Jesse James: The Only Correct and Authorized Edition* (St. Louis, Mo: J. H. Chambers, 1882); James W. Buel, *The Border Outlaws: An Authentic and Thrilling History of the Most Noted Bandits of Ancient or Modern Times, Jesse and Frank James, and Their Comrades in Crime, Compiled from Reliable Sources Only* (St. Louis, Mo: Historical Pub. Co, 1882); Joseph A. Dacus, *Life and Adventures of Frank and Jesse James: The Noted Western Outlaws* (St. Louis: W.S. Bryan, 1880, reprinted 1882); and Unknown, *Jesse James: the Life and Daring Adventures of This Bold Highwayman and Bank Robber and His No Less Celebrated Brother, Frank James (written by one who dares not disclose his identity)*, (Philadelphia: Barclay, 1882).

⁶ Cathy M. Jackson, *The Making of an American Outlaw Hero: Jesse James, Folklore and Late Nineteenth-Century Print Media* (diss., University of Missouri, Columbia, 2004) 150-151. See also: Stephanie A. Coon, *Jesse James in Public Memory* (thesis, University of Central Oklahoma 2008); and John O. West, *To Die Like a Man: The "good" Outlaw Tradition in the American Southwest* (diss., University of Texas, 1964).

⁷ Bascom L. Lunsford, "Poor Jesse James," *Minstrel of the Appalachians* (N.Y.: Riverside, 1959) Sound recording.

⁸ *bobdylan.com*, 2011 (<http://www.bobdylan.com/songs/outlaw-blues>).

⁹ Daryl Jones, *The Dime Novel Western* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1978) 75.

¹⁰ James I. Deutsch, "Jesse James in Dime Novels: Ambivalence Toward an Outlaw Hero," *Dime Novel Round-Up* 45.1 (February 1976): 11-12.

¹¹ *Ibid.* See also: Jackson 157.

¹² Ted P. Yeatman, *Frank and Jesse James: The Story Behind the Legend* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2000) 144-146.

¹³ The Ford Brothers also appeared on stage, as themselves, in Henry Belmar's *Jesse James: An American Outlaw* (1883). Frank James was more reluctant, in the years after Jesse's death, Frank was perused by theatrical companies and circus managers who wanted to pay him for live appearances. Frank declined these offers until 1902, when he suffered a financial setback that forced him to turn toward the stage. As a head-liner of the Cole Younger Wild West show, Frank James rode "shotgun" in a stagecoach robbery, led the grand finale, and attended post-show receptions to speak with audience members and sign autographs.

¹⁴ Settle 175.

¹⁵ Hall 128.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Lowell Daily Courier*, March 22, 1883: 8, James H. Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.

¹⁸ Hall 128-129.

¹⁹ The Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the New York Library of the Performing Arts holds three file folders on James Wallick: 1) James H. Wallick; 2) James Wallack; and 3) Bandit King. There are a total of twenty-three items in the three folders, including a poster, a playbill, and identifiable newspaper articles. The majority of items are mere clippings with no source information. The primary “finds” of the collection are two obituaries: 1) *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, May 9, 1908: 5; and 2) *The Sun*, May 2, 1908: 8. While both obituaries include essentially the same information, they compose the most comprehensive source material on the life and career of James H. Wallick.

²⁰ Hall 15.

²¹ Albert H. Hughes, "Outlaw with a Halo" *Montana: the Magazine of Western History*, 17.4 (1967): 61.

²² *New York Dramatic Mirror*, May 9, 1908: 5; and *The Sun*, May 2, 1908: 8. An untitled clipping at the Billy Rose Archive states that Wallick’s actual last name was spelled “Wallaich.” To further complicate matters, there is an article in *The Kingston Daily Freeman*, February 23, 1923:8 (fifteen years after Wallick’s death), which states that Wallick’s actual name was either Ellsworth or Henry Wheeler (known by his friends as Hank). Although Wallick took Henry as his middle name, there is no evidence available to corroborate the claim of *The Freeman*.

²³ *The Sun*, May 2, 1908: 8.

²⁴ George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage: X 1875-1879* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1927) 195.

²⁵ Wallick does not appear in Odell until Volume XII 1882-1885, with *Jesse James, The Bandit King*. It would appear that Odell was not terribly impressed with Wallick or his production. Wallick’s name is found a total of twenty-eight times throughout Volumes XII-XV (3402 pages). The twenty-eight references are listed only as “parts played,” and more often than not, include statements such as “once again” and “as usual.” There are no photos of Wallick in any of the fifteen volumes.

²⁶ *New York Dramatic Mirror*, May 9, 1908: 5

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Alden Hatch, and Henry North, *The Circus Kings* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960) 108-111.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *New York Dramatic Mirror*, May 9, 1908: 5.

³² Untitled clipping, James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive. It is not known if Wallick performed on horseback with the circus or Pawnee Bill's Wild West show; however, at their height, Sells Brothers had an enormous collection of animals, including, lions, tigers, bears, zebra, rhinos, hippos, eighteen elephants, and no less than two-hundred and fifty horses. If the untitled clipping is accurate, we can speculate that during his time with the Sells Brothers circus, Wallick began to develop his renowned horsemanship.

³³ *The Sun*, May 2, 1908: 8.

³⁴ *New York Dramatic Mirror*, May 9, 1908: 5.

³⁵ *National Police Gazette Enterprises, LCC*, 2011 (<http://policegazette.us/>).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Wooden Spoon, "Stage Skimmings," *The National Police Gazette* 1845-1906: 49.492 (February 19, 1887) 2. American Periodicals Series (<http://proqwest.com>).

³⁸ Wilmeth 137-138. Daly also wrote the well-known frontier melodrama *Horizon* (1871).

³⁹ *Kingston Daily Freeman*, February 14, 1884:8, Old Fulton New York Post Card, September 2008 (<http://www.fultonhistory.com>). This is a searchable repository of historic newspapers published in New York State.

⁴⁰ Wooden Spoon, "Stage Skimmings."

⁴¹ Paul Wellman, *A Dynasty of Western Outlaws* (New York: Doubleday, 1961) 120-121. See also: Settle 106-114.

⁴² Wooden Spoon, "Stage Skimmings."

⁴³ *The Sun*, May 2, 1908: 8.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, May 2, 1908: 9. *The New York Times* Article Archive, 2011 (<http://query.nytimes.com//.html>).

⁴⁵ *New Jersey Telegraph*, May 2, 1908. James Wallick Collection, New York Library of the Performing Arts.

⁴⁶ *New York Dramatic Mirror*, May 9, 1908: 5.

⁴⁷ Kent L. Steckmesser, "Robin Hood and the American Outlaw: A Note on History and Folklore." *Journal of American Folklore*. 79.312 (1966): 348-349. See also: "The Frontier Hero in History and Legend." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*. 46.3 (1963): 168-179; and *The Western Hero in History and Legend* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965).

⁴⁸ Richard Slotkin, "Nostalgia and Progress: Theodore Roosevelt's Myth of the Frontier" *American Quarterly* 33.5 (1981): 627. See also: Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, Vol. 3 (New York: Review of Reviews, 1910).

⁴⁹ William E. Simeone, "The Mythical Robin Hood" *Western Folklore*. 17.1 (1958): 21-28. See also: West viii.

⁵⁰ Lunsford, sound recording.

⁵¹ Francis J. Child, *English and Scottish Ballads* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood, 1880) 117, stanza 46.

⁵² Steckmesser 351

⁵³ Jesse James, Jr., *Jesse James, My Father: The First and Only True Story of His Adventures Ever Written* (Cleveland: Buckeye Publishing Co., 1906) 135-137.

⁵⁴ Richard E. Meyer, "The Outlaw: a Distinctive American Folktype." *Journal of the Folklore Institute*. 17.3 (1980): 94-124. See also: Harry S. Drago, *Outlaws on Horseback: The History of the Organized Bands of Bank and Train Robbers Who Terrorized the Prairie Towns of Missouri, Kansas, Indian Territory, and Oklahoma for Half a Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Aquila 164.

⁵⁷ Jones 76.

⁵⁸ John Clay, *My Life on the Range* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965) 122; and Moore 72-73.

⁵⁹ Christine Hole, *English Folk-Heroes* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1948) 89.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 78-79

⁶¹ Jones 80.

⁶² *New York Times*, January 27, 1883. *The New York Times Article Archive* 2011 (<http://query.nytimes.com//.html>).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *New York Times*, February 2, 1883. *The New York Times Article Archive*, 2011 (<http://query.nytimes.com//.html>).

⁶⁶ Matthew Reborn, *Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 207.

⁶⁷ Hall 129.

⁶⁸ Settle 127.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 174-177.

⁷⁰ Hall 129.

⁷¹ *St. Joseph Gazette*, November 11, 1883; and Settle 175.

⁷² Untitled clipping dated 1883 (handwritten in pencil), James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Library of the Performing Arts. It is unknown if the clipping's "Academy" is the Lee Avenue Academy, which housed the opening production of *Jesse James, The Bandit King* in 1883.

⁷³ *New York Dramatic Mirror*, clipping dated 1902, James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Library of the Performing Arts.

⁷⁴ Ramon F. Adams, *Burs Under the Saddle* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964) 3.

⁷⁵ Savage 40-41.

⁷⁶ *Michigan Farmer's Almanac*, April 11, 1881: 15.

⁷⁷ *New York Clipper*, November 11, 1883.

⁷⁸ Settle 175. See also: *St. Joseph Gazette*, November 13, 1883.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 176.

⁸¹ *The Mansfield Herald*, March 27, 1884: 34.19.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Hall 15.

⁸⁵ *The Bandit King*, playbill, James Wallick Collection, New York Library of the Performing Arts. The date of the playbill coincides with the opening of the play at the Lee Avenue Academy in Manhattan on 27 January 1883.

⁸⁶ *The Bandit King*, playbill.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Frankfort Roundabout*, December 26, 1883: 3, James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Library of the Performing Arts.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

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- ⁹¹ *Frankfort Roundabout*, December 26, 1883: 3, James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Library of the Performing Arts.
- ⁹² Untitled clipping, James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Library of Performing Arts.
- ⁹³ Ibid.
- ⁹⁴ *Frankfort Roundabout*, December 26, 1883: 3.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁹⁶ Settle 67-68.
- ⁹⁷ *Frankfort Roundabout*, December 26, 1883: 3.
- ⁹⁸ *The Bandit King*, playbill.
- ⁹⁹ Untitled clipping, James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Library of Performing Arts.
- ¹⁰⁰ The Kansas Jake quote is ambiguous. It is not known if “made a hit” means he killed Jesse or had a strong show.
- ¹⁰¹ *Lowell Daily Courier*, Thursday, March 22, 1883: 8, James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Library of the Performing Arts.
- ¹⁰² *Amsterdam Daily Democrat*, Tuesday, May 12, 1886: 7, James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Library of the Performing Arts. See also: Old Fulton New York Post Card, September 2008 (<http://www.fultonhistory.com>).
- ¹⁰³ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Tuesday, November 27, 1888: 4, James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Library of the Performing Arts.
- ¹⁰⁴ Hall 163.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 136-138.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Tuesday, November 27, 1888: 4.
- ¹⁰⁷ *The Bandit King*, playbill.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Frankfort Roundabout*, December 26, 1883: 3, James Wallick Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Archive, New York Library of the Performing Arts.
- ¹⁰⁹ West 24.
- ¹¹⁰ *San Antonio Light*, October 27, 1894: 3, “Portal to Texas History,” University of North Texas Libraries, 2005 (<http://texashistory.unt.edu>).

¹¹¹ Hall 129.

¹¹² Henry Belmar, *Jesse James, An American Outlaw Or, the Life and Death of Jesse James: A Sensational Western Melodrama in Four Acts* (1906: Library of Congress, Archived Material, Microfilm, copyright deposits, 1901-1944, reel no. 18).

¹¹³ Thomas F. Nye, *The Bandit Hero, or Jesse James, the Mission Outlaw* (1906: Library of Congress, Archived Material, Microfilm, copyright deposits, 1901-1944, reel no. 190).

¹¹⁴ Hall 131.

¹¹⁵ Nye 2.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid* 5. Note the mustache and goatee.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid* 77.

¹¹⁸ Belmar 117-118.

¹¹⁹ Jones 81.

¹²⁰ Meyer 99-100.

¹²¹ Steckmesser 353.

¹²² *New York Dramatic Mirror*, May 9, 1908: 5.

¹²³ *Ibid*.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*.

¹²⁵ *The Sun*, May 2, 1908: 8.

¹²⁶ *New Jersey Telegraph*, May 2, 1908: clipping, James H. Wallick Collection, New York Public Library.

¹²⁷ *New York Times*, May 2, 1908: 9. *The New York Times Article Archive*, 2011 (<http://query.nytimes.com//.html>).

¹²⁸ Untitled clipping, James H. Wallick Collection, New York Public Library.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

*The Cowboy is popularly accepted by Americans as a symbol, indicative by his stature as myth. He represents rugged individualism and ultimate heroism in fiction and film. He needs no proper identification, because he is immediately recognizable.*¹

When You Call Me That Smile

We began an exploration of the frontier hero in American theatre with a question: how did the cowboy transcend an obscure history and achieve mythological stature?

William Savage contends the cowboy did not become the ultimate hero of fiction and film until after the turn of the nineteenth century. Prior to this, the cowboy was viewed as one of the more reprehensible characters in frontier history. At that time, being a cowboy was more dangerous than glamorous, more toiling than heroic. Yet within a decade, the cowboy transformed from hell-raiser to hero, primarily through the effort of storytellers. As a creation of popular entertainment, the cowboy not only survived the test of time, but thrived as a mythic hero of the American West.

Although the cowboy is often portrayed as a man with no name, he is not without a past. The cowboy is the result of an evolution of heroic frontier types – an evolution in which, I have argued, theatre performed a crucial role. Between the dime novel and film, the cowboy roamed the stages of frontier melodrama in prototype, specifically the backwoodsman, the scout, and the outlaw. Each of these frontier heroes and the actors who portrayed them added essential elements to the cowboy character: the chivalry and nobility of Mayo in *Davy Crockett*, the prowess of Cody as a hunter and Indian fighter in *Buffalo Bill*, the “good” banditry and horsemanship of Wallick in *Jesse James*. Through them, the cowboy took shape on stage and then made a move toward myth.

The transformation of the cowboy from man to myth was not a gradual transition, but a rough and rapid ride. Until the late-1880s, the cowboy was still “the bottom of the barrel as a Western type.”² By 1903, the “devil-may-care, roistering, immoral, brazen, no-good, lazy bum” had been converted into a hero, largely through the publication of Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* and the release of Edwin S. Porter’s film, *The Great Train Robbery*.³ In this short span of time, the cowboy made a leap from the dime novel to the silver screen by way of the theatre, which enabled the cowboy to become an embodied, authentic frontier hero in his own right.

Due to the ephemeral nature of theatre, literary products like the dime novel often receive credit for creating the cowboy. Savage does as much in *The Cowboy Hero*, when he argues there was not a cowboy hero until Beadle and Adams published Prentice Ingraham’s *Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys; or, The Story of the Wild and Thrilling Life of William L. Taylor* (1887).⁴ Taylor was a real cowboy discovered by Buffalo Bill. Cody touted Taylor as the “King of the Cowboys,” a title which continued to identify the American frontier hero as noble, such as Davy Crockett, The King of the Wild Frontier; Jesse James, The Bandit King; and Buffalo Bill, The King of the Scouts. It was Cody, along with Ingraham, who first initiated the cowboy into the brotherhood of American frontier heroes in the early-1890s. Their effort began to transform the image of the cowboy in the public mind, “from one of the more alarming manifestations of savage land, indistinguishable from road agents and assorted desperadoes, to an admired hero who replaced the scout as the true representative of the frontier.”⁵ Yet, the dime novel cowboy never achieved full potency. As a literary character, the cowboy hero lacked an ingredient that only theatre could provide.

Like other fictionalized frontier heroes, the dime novel cowboy fought villains, rescued maidens, and exposed treachery. Stuck in these ranks, the cowboy was unable to “escape the straightjacket of limited plotlines that had been done to death.”⁶ Audiences wanted something the dime novel no longer offered – literally; in 1896, the House of Beadle and Adams ran its final printing and closed up shop. The influence of the dime novel on the cowboy had run its course. In retrospect, it appears the creation of the cowboy coincided with the death of the dime novel, rather than being propagated by it. Meaning, if the cowboy was going to make it to the twentieth century, he would do so without the jargon of the dime novelist, leaving someone “to talk seriously about men and horses.”⁷ Three individuals rose to the challenge. Through the rhetoric of Roosevelt, the thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner, and narration of Wister, the cowboy made a “decisive leap from hell-raiser to half-wild, half-cultured frontier hero in the 1900s.”⁸

In 1896, Roosevelt published *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, which documents his time as a rancher in the Dakota Territory from 1884 to 1886. In *Ranch Life*, Roosevelt recounted his adventures in the west, from big game hunts to capturing cattle rustlers. Roosevelt reserved his highest praise for the cowboy, who was not described as a dime novel caricature, but rather as a genuine hero of the plains. Roosevelt’s cowboy hero “carried the stamp of authenticity,” like Cody, Mayo, and Wallick, Roosevelt had gone west and could claim his experience to be real:

I have been part of all that I describe; I have seen things and done them; I have herded my own cattle, I have killed my own food; I have shot bears, captured horse thieves and stood-off Indians. The descriptions are exact.⁹

The publication of *Ranch Life*, notably illustrated by the famous painter Frederic Remington (1861-1909), continued the transformation of the cowboy begun by Cody and re-characterized the one-time ne’re-do-well into the rightful heir of Cody and Crockett as the conquering hero of the western frontier.¹⁰ Roosevelt had bolstered the credibility of the cowboy in American history, but a complete representation of the cowboy hero had yet to be staged in American theatre. That void would soon be filled by a friend and future biographer of Roosevelt, who also went west.

On 3 July 1885, Owen Wister (1860-1938) stepped off a Northern Pacific Railway train in Omaha, Nebraska. Wister was twenty-four years old and like Roosevelt, he had been advised by his doctors to leave the east and travel west in order to recuperate from health problems, namely acute anxiety and nervous hypertension. For Wister, the west was just what the doctor ordered. In *Wister Out West: His Journals and Letters* (1958), Wister wrote:

One must come West. This life has a psychological effect on you, to ride twenty miles and see no chance of human traces...never a column of smoke or sound except the immediate grasshopper. It is no wonder a man never comes back East after he has once been here for a few years.¹¹

After 1885, Wister continued to spend the next fifteen summers out west, covering a wide range from Oklahoma to Oregon, but residing primarily in southeastern Wyoming. During this time, he recorded the experience in a series of journals, essays, and short stories with the purpose of “writing a great big fat book on the whole thing...The West.”¹² Wister became “intimately acquainted with cowboys, Indians, cattle thieves,

saloonkeepers; noting true incidents and reporting real conversations; making a list of words in common use that he had never heard.”¹³ In the summer 1893, Wister met Frederick Remington in Yellowstone, Wyoming. Remington, who is considered the most renowned visual artist of the Old West, asked Wister to write the narration for picture book to be titled *The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher* (1895).

In its first illustration, titled *The Last Cavalier*, Remington depicts a cowboy on his horse against the background of a western landscape. Wister’s text reads, “From the roundup! So upon the land...from the tournament of Camelot to the round-up of Abilene. Those who had been deprived of the knight-errant on this continent got him back as a native son.”¹⁴ *Evolution of the Cowpuncher* revealed Wister’s passion for writing about the west. Roosevelt “called him out for that purpose,” and declared that Wister “was now *the* writer of the cattle kingdom.”¹⁵

For the next two years, Wister “worked diligently on his cowboy story...a task that plagued him throughout the early months of 1902.”¹⁶ He finished the book in April. In May, *The Virginian: A Horsemen of the Plains* was published. Wister’s story centers on a nameless drifter, known only as the Virginian, who travels west to Medicine Bow, Wyoming. Once in Wyoming, the Virginian takes work as a cowboy and rises through the ranks of ranch hands to foreman. At one point, he is forced to preside over the lynching of his best friend Steve, who was caught rustling cattle and “convicted by laws that lay unwritten in the code of the West.”¹⁷

Meanwhile, the Virginian falls in love with a pretty schoolteacher named Molly Wood. Their relationship is threatened by the villain Trampas. After being humiliated by the Virginian, Trampas vows to shoot him on sight and warns the hero to leave town

before sundown. The Virginian struggles between love and honor: if he kills Trampas, he loses Molly. The story ends in a climatic gunfight, considered the first representation of an Old West show-down. Trampas fires first, but his shot misses the mark. The Virginian fires and kills Trampas in what amounts to self-defense. In the end, the Virginian administers frontier justice, retains his honor, gets the girl, and rides off into the sunset.

The Virginian had an immediate impact. The novel sold fifty-thousand copies in the first two months, went through fifteen reprints in eight months, and was a best-seller for two years. Wister, who dedicated the novel to his friend Roosevelt, is credited with writing the first novel about the cowboy hero, as well as casting an unbreakable mold for the Western genre. In *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture*, Aquila writes:

The dawning of the twenty century ushered in a 'Golden Age' for pop culture of the Old West. The new era began with the publication of *The Virginian*, which pulled together all the elements of the Old West and the cowboy. This book, which firmly established the Western as a literary genre, featured the nameless, self-reliant western hero/cowboy.¹⁸

In *The American West: The Invention of a Myth*, Murdoch adds, "Wister's influence was extraordinary, he did not just rescue the cowboy from his dead end dime novel; he created the modern Western."¹⁹ In *The Mythic West*, Athearn writes, "Wister filled a vacuum in 1902; he hit the bull's eye by offering something that transcended the common literary fare of the dime novel. His cowboy had been around, but in a supporting role that lacked heroic proportions."²⁰ Finally, in *The Western*, David Mogen definitively states,

“*The Virginian* created our mythical West, the heroic cowboy, and his code of honor.”²¹

The *Virginian* is indeed the archetypal cowboy hero of literature, but in order for the cowboy to truly come alive, he needed a more tangible medium.

In *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (1992), Jane Tompkins argues that Westerns, as a fictional genre, are fantasy at play with reality in hope of an authentic experience:

Westerns satisfy a hunger to be in touch with something absolutely real. A powerful need for self-transformation. The light, the space, the creak of saddle leather, the horses’ energy – these things promise a translation of self into something more authentic, more intense, and more real.²²

Westerns allow the audience to imagine being out west, to imagine being in touch with the west. The tangibility of the Western in literature is limited to the imagination; the tangibility of the Western in the theatre is something more real, more transformative, and embodied. The presence of actors like Cody, Mayo, and Wallick enhanced and capitalized upon the transformative power of the American West in frontier melodrama. Through them, the theatre became a driving force behind the evolution of the frontier hero from literary character to embodied hero. In portraying actual heroic figures from the American frontier, including the staging of historic events and artifacts, Cody, Mayo, and Wallick are uniquely responsible for creating a theatrical experience that made good on Tompkins’ promise of something more authentic. The result of their effort can be seen in future renderings of *The Virginian*.

The success of *The Virginian* made the cowboy a prominent subject for early filmmakers. In 1903, Edwin S. Porter premiered *The Great Train Robbery* at Edison Film Studios in New York. Porter's ten-minute epic is regarded as the first cinematic Western; the film "capitalized upon Wister's novel...and emphasized the same elements: cowboy heroes, villains, gunfights, and the wide open West."²³ *The Virginian* received four screen treatments itself and a television series that ran from 1962 to 1971. The first film was a silent movie directed by Cecil B. DeMille. Shot on location in California, *The Virginian* (1914) was one of the first releases of Paramount Pictures. In the title role, DeMille cast an up-and-coming stage actor named Dustin Farnum (1874-1929). Farnum, along with his horse Dusty, would go on to become a leading man of silent Westerns, including DeMille's *The Squaw Man* (1914), *Davy Crockett* (1916), and as General George Custer in Farnum's final film, *The Flaming Frontier* (1926).²⁴

Critical accounts of *The Virginian* as a film are abundant. Less widely considered is the fact that *The Virginian* was also a play. The playwright was Owen Wister himself. Wister had roots in the theatre, most notably from his grandmother, Fannie Kemble (1809-1903), who was a renowned Shakespearean actor and the eldest daughter of the actor Charles Kemble (1775-1854). Coming from a theatre family, it stands to reason that Wister was interested in seeing his novel come alive on stage. And he did not waste time: in the same year *The Virginian* was published, Wister wrote an adaptation of the novel for the theatre. The play was produced and directed by Kirke La Shelle (1862-1905). In the title role, Wister and La Shelle cast Dustin Farnum as the strong, silent cowboy hero without a name.

The four act stage treatment follows the narrative of the novel, including the Virginian's rise to foreman, the courtship of Molly Wood, the lynching of Steve, Trampas' ultimatum, and the climatic shoot-out, which occurs on the final page of the play. A typed copy of the script is held at Western Washington University. In the editor's preface, N. Orwin Rush writes "this type script copy was given to me by Owen Wister's first cousin, Alice Butler. I have never seen a printed copy of the play, and the Library of Congress has informed me that the dramatic version was never copyrighted."²⁵ Rush dates his preface: July, 1958 – Medicine Bow, Wyoming.

After a trial run in Boston and Buffalo, *The Virginian* opened at the Manhattan Theatre on 5 January 1904. The play ran in New York for five months, "then Farnum toured all over the country with *The Virginian*, and it became a standard in stock companies for twenty years, being played as late as 1938 in summer stock by Henry Fonda."²⁶ Critical response to the New York opening was generally positive. The reviews echo similar responses to the performances of Cody, Mayo, and Wallick. *The New York Times* (1904) wrote:

Last night Dustin Farnum appeared as the heroic cattle puncher. Viewing his performance of Mr. Wister's nameless hero only serves to increase one's admiration for the character and the actor who plays it. His *Virginian* is one of the most attractive features on our stage today.²⁷

Roger Hall quotes an unidentified source from *The Virginian* file at the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, dated 4 May 1904, which raved "Farnum was as splendid a specimen

of physical manhood that ever came east of the Mississippi and as fine an actor as ever went west of it.”²⁸ Finally, Nash includes a review from “a New York paper” that states:

“The *Virginian*” is especially worthwhile because heretofore the West of the dramatic stage has been a bloody No-Man’s-Land. In a large degree, Mr. Wister has brought the true West of twenty years ago to the stage.”²⁹

While it was considered difficult to condense the expanse of a five-hundred page novel into a four act play, Wister succeeded. Hall notes, “the play successfully transferred much of the thematic content from the novel, especially as exemplified by the cowboys” and the *Virginian*’s justification of “fighting violence with violence, even outside the law.”³⁰

Three examples from the script support Hall’s claim, as well as marking the reoccurring themes of the frontier hero in American theatre: specifically, a description and the reputation of the hero precedes his entrance, the hero is costumed in genuine frontier attire, he personifies natural nobility and embodies elements in the Code of the West.

The Virginian takes place in Medicine Bow on the high desert of south-eastern Wyoming. The setting of Act One is the ranch house of Judge Henry, which has been prepared for a dance. Prior to the entrance of the *Virginian*, Molly Wood, the schoolteacher, tells Mrs. Henry about an encounter she had with the *Virginian*:

MOLLY. He was tall and big and strong and gentle with great brown eyes.

MRS. HENRY. What was he wearing?

MOLLY. A blue shirt and a blue and white spotted handkerchief, and great leather trousers. What do you call them?

MRS. HENRY. 'Chaps' my dear. What all the cowboys wear on the range. And strong and gentle with big brown eyes?

MOLLY. Yes. Oh I wish to see him again.

MRS. HENRY. Of course dear. I guess you'll have a chance tonight, for I'm sure your hero is the Virginian on Judge Henry's ranch.³¹

Molly's description of the Virginian continues the practice of romanticizing the frontier hero before his first entrance; as seen in the case of Davy Crockett, Buffalo Bill, and Jesse James, the hero is tall, strong, and handsome. Molly's set-up also makes note of the hero's distinctive Western costume, including chaps, "what all the cowboys wear."

After Molly's dialogue, "Four cowboys enter despondently with whiskey" and debate whether or not to ask the pretty schoolteacher to dance.³² Moments later, the Virginian rides up and is heard offstage bellowing, "Whoa there, horse," to which Judge Henry replies, "There's my Virginian. A man in a thousand."³³ Again, the reputation of the frontier hero is made known before his first entrance. And, like Mayo's *Crockett*, the entrance of the cowboy is marked by a strong, powerful voice heard offstage. In *Davy Crockett*, it was:

DAVY. (offstage) Hollo!

YONKERS. That's him. That's our Davy. Yes, that's his voice – as clear as a bell and as sharp as the crack of a rifle.³⁴

As the Virginian enters, the cowboys crowd around and greet him, excluding the villain Trampas who (stands at the door of the Drink room):

STEVE. Hello you old son of a bitch. Where you been since you and me painted Cheyenne red?

VIR. Well I guess I kept on painting.

TRAMPAS. He's only a son of a bitch.

VIR. (Goes to draw his gun) When you call me that smile.³⁵

Far and away, the most oft-quoted line from *The Virginian* is the hero's warning to Trampas: "When you call me that smile." In addition to showing the cowboy's wry sense of humor, the line also exemplifies the cowboy as a frontier hero who continues to be caught on the border between savagery and civilization. The Virginian recognizes Trampas' comment as an insult, as opposed to Steve, whose "you old son of a bitch" was a good-natured greeting. In his response, the Virginian defuses a potentially violent situation without losing face or having to defend his honor in the presence of Molly and the Judge. From the moment preceding his entrance to the single page of dialogue that follows, the Virginian is immediately recognizable as a character that possesses the determining characteristics of the frontier hero. Like the backwoodsman, the scout, and the outlaw, the cowboy hero has good looks, physical prowess, authentic frontier attire, weapons, natural nobility, the ability to act violently, and the judgment to know not to.

In Act Two, the cowboy hero enters a larger thematic structure – the Code of the West. As ranch foreman, The Virginian must preside over the lynching of his friend Steve for cattle rustling. Molly objects to vigilantism as a means of justice, in response the Virginian whispers, "I belong to the West. I must do its work."³⁶ In this, Wister implies the Code of West is not merely a character trait of the cowboy, but "an expression of a well-understood code of behavior which bound all men in the frontier."³⁷

In the final scene, the Code is put to the test. After being threatened by Trampas, The Virginian is torn between honor and love, savagery and civilization. Alone on stage, the cowboy hero delivers one of his only monologues and makes a decision:

I am going my own course. Don't I owe my honesty something? If a man says I'm a thief, and I hear of it, am I to go on letting him spread such a thing of me? Would I sit down in a corner rubbing my honesty and whispering to it: "There, there, I know you ain't a thief." No, sir. Not a lick. What men say about my nature is not just an outside thing. For the fact that I let them keep on saying it is proof I don't value my nature enough to shield it from their slander and give them their punishment. And that's being a poor sort of cuss. (After a pause, draws gun. Exits.)

The stage is empty after the Virginian's exit. Trampas enters from the saloon. He stands alone. The Virginian re-enters:

VIR. Trampas!

(Trampas wheels, draws, and fires. The VIRGINIAN replies.

TRAMPAS falls – half rises. VIRGINIAN fires again, TRAMPAS is killed.)

VIR. I expect that's all. I told her it would not be me.

(Cowboys enter).

VIR. If anybody wants me about this, I'll be in the saloon.

McLEAN. Who will want you? Three of us saw his gun out. You were that cool – that quick.

(MOLLY bursts through the Hotel verandah to the Virginian.)

VIR. You have to know it. I killed Trampas.

MOLLY. (As she falls into his arms) Thank God! (CURTAIN.)³⁸

As an embodiment of the Code of the West, Wister's cowboy hero pushed the values of the Code – chivalry, nobility, honor, justice – beyond the realm of dime novel twang.

Herein lies a distinct shift of the frontier hero from the backwoodsman, the scout, and the outlaw to the cowboy. And, as indicated by the rapid velocity with which the cowboy was transformed into a hero throughout the 1890s, the shift is all in the timing.

This has been noted by Murdoch:

By 1903, it had all come together. Roosevelt was the cowboy in the White House, Remington was America's most popular artist, *The Virginian* was a runaway best seller and Turner's thesis was widely accepted.³⁹

The bond between these men can be seen in *The Virginian*, which Wister dedicated to his friend Roosevelt. Moreover, Wister acknowledged the Turner thesis in his introduction, specifically Turner's argument that by 1893, the American frontier had disappeared; a statement supported by the 1890 census which claimed western settlement had reached a point where no frontier remains. As a result, Wister's frontier hero – the cowboy – came of age in a vanishing environment. If the cowboy was going to surpass his predecessors, he had to embody the American West in a different manner than previous frontier heroes. Meaning, in the time of his ascent, the cowboy had to endure the crucible of the frontier as stated by Roosevelt and Turner, rather than the blood-and-thunder bellowing of Ned Buntline.

In *Early-twentieth-century Frontier Dramas on Broadway* (2011), Richard Wattenberg analyzes *The Virginian* in relation to the crucible of the frontier:

Wister's cowboy hero is not simply an eastern gentleman in cowboy clothes...the Virginian can be viewed as a product of the wilderness process that has stripped him of all civilization's artificial conventions. For Wister, the western frontier experience meant "taking off the bridle" and fostered an absolute independence of spirit in the western hero.⁴⁰

Like Roosevelt and Turner, Wister believed that frontier experience influenced individual character, as well as the larger entity of national character. On stage, Wister's cowboy became the physical representation of a hero who was forged in the furnace of the wild west and survived to become the enduring symbol of American frontier spirit. In this way, the Virginian "conflates the savage vitality" described by Turner and Roosevelt "with a knightly code of conduct drawn from stage melodramas."⁴¹ Thus, the cowboy not only continued the bloodline of his European ancestors, but also embodied the ideology and values of the American frontier, namely rugged individualism, justice over law, and personal triumph over the unknown.⁴²

The cowboy journeyed to the western frontier, but more importantly, he learned the lesson of the frontier and in the process represented a new breed of frontier hero, who emerged from Old World roots to surpass those as a result of a frontier apprenticeship.⁴³ Considering this, the cowboy hero ventured past earlier melodramatic characterizations of the frontier hero into a deeper symbolic representation of American frontier history, as stated in the Turner thesis and by Roosevelt, who wrote "what a nation believes to be true

affects its growth and character, regardless of what the actuality may be.”⁴⁴ The significance of the cowboy’s transformation was not lost on Wister’s grandmother, the actress, who declared “*The Virginian* was written as fiction, but has become history.”⁴⁵ What became history pushed onward into mythology.

The staging of *The Virginian* represents a key moment in the development of the cowboy in American popular entertainment. First, the cowboy hero became the ultimate characterization of the frontier hero in a lineage of types – the backwoodsman, the scout, and the outlaw – as portrayed in late nineteenth century frontier melodrama. Second, the cowboy hero transcended the thematic limitations of melodrama and came to embody the national ideology of Roosevelt and Turner. Finally, as a piece of theatre, *The Virginian* marks a definitive moment in the evolution of the cowboy and reinforces the significance of live performance in the journey of the cowboy from the open range, to the dime novel, the silver screen, and then onto the mythological plains, where he now “thrives like the hardest weed that ever grew on the American cultural landscape.”⁴⁶

Following the theatrical success of *The Virginian*, the cowboy began to make regular appearances on stage in American theatre, most notably in *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905) by David Belasco and *The Cowboy and the Lady* (1908) by Clyde Fitch in 1908, but also in titles like *The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot* (1904) by Franklyn Whitman, *The Cowboy from Dakota* (1905) by Albert F. Carr, *The Cow Puncher* (1906) by Hal Reid, and *Scotty, The Cowboy* (1908) by Frank Dumont.⁴⁷ These early cowboy plays are significant in that they place the cowboy in the theatre at an important stage in American popular entertainment – post-dime novel – on the downswing of frontier melodrama and the upswing of film.

Although the presence of the cowboy in the theatre has been overshadowed by film and television, the stage cowboy proved influential and gave form and meaning to the most striking creation of the American frontier.⁴⁸ And, despite the omnipresence of film and TV, the cowboy survived on stage. He lived on in American vaudeville of the 1920-30s, with Will Rogers (1879-1935), the cowboy philosopher in the Ziegfeld Follies. In 1943, the cowboy began to sing and dance as Curly in Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway musical, *Oklahoma* (1943). In the 1950s, the cowboy made a move toward realism as Bo in William Inge's *Bus Stop* (1955). Then, Sam Shepard distorted his image in *Cowboys* (1964), *Cowboys #2* (1967), and *Fool for Love* (1983). The cowboy made an entrance in twenty first century America theatre and was promptly queered by Sarah Ruhl in *Late: A Cowboy Song* (2003). And the cowboy continues to be transformed in the Off-Broadway production of *Cowboy Vampires* (2010). Knowing this, the cowboy is unlikely to "mosey off into the sunset" and leave theatre in the dust, because theatre is in his blood, and as charged by Roy Rogers in Roy's Rules for Real Cowboys, "a real cowboy always stays loyal to his family."⁴⁹

As a site of development, theatre has invariably been left out of the equation in regard to the evolution of the cowboy in American popular entertainment. Even the most established Old West scholars have marginalized and neglected theatre as an influential entertainment form in the development of the cowboy. Savage skips right over theatre when he writes "the cowboy image is pervasive within American culture, literature, art, music, cinema, sports, advertising, politics, and a host of other elements."⁵⁰ Aquila does the same thing when he states, "the cowboy has been marketed through numerous books,

songs, movies, television shows, and other products.”⁵¹ In *The Cowboy Way: An Exploration of History and Culture* (2000), Paul Carlson adds his two cents and states:

Cowboys have burned deep into America’s collective consciousness; seen first in the dime novels and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, and subsequently in the western novel, in western films, in television, and in other formats.⁵²

In these classifications, theatre finds a home under that catch-all term “other.” Yet, some scholars leave theatre out in the street altogether, such as David Dary in *Cowboy Culture: A Saga of Five Centuries* (1989). In his epilogue, Dary mentions dime novels, Wild West shows, rodeos, radio, film, television, popular music, politicians, historians, advertising, pick-ups, and bumper-stickers, but no theatre.⁵³ Finally, in *The Six Gun Mystique* (1971), widely considered “the most detailed study of the Western and Western Hero,” John Cawelti produces a fifty-page bibliography at the conclusion of his study that includes chronologies, filmographies, subject guides, and a series of lists that concerns itself with “the most important types of works from both artistic and cultural points of view...in the nineteenth century shaping and twentieth century practice centered around the Western and Western Hero,” and yet not one play.⁵⁴

Thankfully, the significance of theatre in relation to the American West has been acknowledged in scholarship, most notably Hall’s *Performing the American Frontier* and Bank’s *Theatre Culture in America*, both of which endeavor to recognize the plays, players, and audience who helped define the American frontier in theatrical terms. More recent work, such as Wattenberg’s *Early-Twentieth-Century Frontier Dramas* (2011), Rebhorn’s *Pioneer Performance: Staging the Frontier* (2011), and Jeremy Agnew’s

Entertainment in the Old West (2011), continue the effort. These publications indicate that interest surrounding theatre and the frontier has not diminished. Yet, the purpose of this study goes beyond an effort to suggest the cowboy tip his ten-gallon hat toward the theatre. The question remains: how did the cowboy move from history to mythology? The answer lies somewhere in the territory of authenticity.

Scholars such as Savage, Slotkin, Tompkins, Cawelti, and others, have argued that authenticity serves a critical function in representations of the Old West. As noted by Tompkins, the nature of Westerns as presented in film and television promised the audience an authentic experience “as they sit in front of the glowing alter and pledge their cultural allegiance to the cowboy.”⁵⁵ Prior to film, the promise of an authentic, tangible wild west experience was fulfilled in the theatre. To exclude or marginalize the authenticating power of frontier melodrama as unimportant in the evolution of the cowboy misses an important thematic target of American West cultural studies.

Authenticity, as applied to this brand of theatre, is a term as shifty as the frontier itself. Historians and theorists of frontier melodrama have inevitably wrestled with the word. In his approach, Hall describes authenticity contractually, as an exchange between actor/vendor and audience/buyer for the purchase of an authentic, frontier experience with an immediacy that only theatre can offer.⁵⁶ Rebhorn adds, the American audience had an avid desire to read about the frontier, “but more importantly, they wanted to *see* the frontier.”⁵⁷ From literature to theatre, the frontier became embodied with the purchase of a ticket; theatre brought the frontier to life and authenticated itself with genuine heroes, horses, and guns.⁵⁸ Jeffery Slagle describes this transaction as “a nearly-neurotic insistence on authenticity” that generally occurred in two ways: either through the

reenactment of historical moments, or by the use of characters or objects associated with historic events,” both of which encoded the performers as authentic.⁵⁹ Considering this, authenticity is the bridge that connects frontier history and frontier melodrama. As seen in Cody, Mayo, and Wallick, authenticity has two tiers: material and experiential.

First, authenticity is seen in the material elements of performance, including the people, places, and properties of the American frontier. Authenticity was at play in the productions of Cody, Mayo, and Wallick, from Buffalo Bill’s costume, to Crockett’s rifle, to Jesse James horse. Through these elements, the actors employed authenticity through tangible frontier evidence. Once on stage, the evidence served as an artifact or relic, which in turned boosted its symbolic, theatric value. Second, authenticity is experiential. Like the frontier heroes they portrayed, Cody, Mayo and Wallick had experienced the frontier. At some point in their lives, notably before they set foot on stage as in their respective roles, all three men traveled west and defined themselves: Mayo as a prospector-turn-actor in California and Nevada, Cody as a buffalo hunter and scout on the Great Plains, and Wallick as a circus trick-rider in Missouri. In doing so, each man gained frontier experience that enabled him to claim authenticity.

As the most prominent incarnation of the frontier hero, the cowboy claimed authenticity in roughly the same way as the backwoodsman, the scout, and the outlaw. But the path of the cowboy stretched beyond that of his predecessors, in that he passed from history, through theatre, into mythology. Rosemarie Bank contends the frontier is the largest totalizing myth in American history and theatre helped shift the frontier from history to myth through claims of authenticity.⁶⁰ Here, authenticity not only provides a bridge between history and theatre, but extends a further passage into the mythic.

This connection can be found in *The Western Hero* (1982) by Rita Parks, who writes “the Western hero was formed in historic crisis, arose in drama, and received affirmation from myth.”⁶¹ This is the trail of the cowboy. At a time when the American frontier was vanishing into history and real cowboys were dying off as well, the cowboy hero appeared on stage. At his core were a set of noble traits passed down through a lineage of European heroes. In his appearance and attitude were characteristics of the American frontier hero. In ideology and principle, he embodied American frontier spirit and the Code of the West. Through this, the cowboy surpassed his predecessors and reached the territory of American mythology. Once there, the cowboy needed to take one final step to secure his place as *the* mythic hero of the Old West. To uncover those tracks, I return to the archive of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming.

Above the archive is a quote that reads: “The West must be seen to be believed – but it must also be believed to be seen.”⁶² The same holds true for the cowboy. The cowboy received affirmation as mythic hero through a belief in his ineffable authenticity. As we believe in the authenticity of the American West, so too we believe in the cowboy; one step beyond belief is faith. Through faith, the cowboy was no longer tied to history; he no longer needed to carry the title of King or name of Crockett. Faith enabled the cowboy to surpass the showmanship of Buffalo Bill Cody and the death of Jesse James. Faith allowed the cowboy to transcend the rhetoric of Roosevelt and the thesis of Turner, to roam the timeless landscape of American mythology. Through faith, we believe in a hero who is both fact and fiction, savage and civilized, known and unknown. We believe in the weather-beaten face of a hero with no name who in the face of danger whispers, “When you call me that smile.”

Notes

¹ Savage 110-111.

² Ibid. 111.

³ Clay 122.

⁴ Ibid. 109.

⁵ Murdoch 61-62.

⁶ Ibid. 61.

⁷ Robert G. Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America* (Lawrence: University Press, 1986) 163.

⁸ G. Edward White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) 27.

⁹ Theodore Roosevelt and Frederic Remington, *Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail* (New York: Century 1901). 42.

¹⁰ Murdoch 69.

¹¹ Owen Wister, *Wister Out West: His Journals and Letters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) 29-30.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. 3.

¹⁴ Owen Wister and Frederic Remington, *The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher* (New York: Harper, 1895) 4.

¹⁵ Richard Etulain, *Owen Wister* (Boise, Idaho: Boise State College, 1973) 25.

¹⁶ Wister, *Wister Out West*, 19.

¹⁷ Alf H. Walle, *The Cowboy Hero and Its Audience* (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press, 2000) 104.

¹⁸ Aquila 9.

¹⁹ Murdoch 75.

²⁰ Athearn 163.

²¹ James K. Folsom, *The Western: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979) 54.

²² Jane P. Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 3.

²³ John G. Nachbar, *Focus on the Western* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974) 28.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 49-50; and Hall 198.

²⁵ Owen Wister and Kirke La Shelle, *The Virginian: A Play in Four Acts* (Medicine Bow, Wyoming, 1958) ii. In the preface to the script, Nash quotes Wister saying, "The whole tale of this venture about the dramatization of the classic American cowboy would make an interesting chapter of biography. I encourage some future historian to write this chapter."

²⁶ Wister, *Wister Out West*, 20.

²⁷ *New York Times*, August 10, 1904. *The New York Times Article Archive 2011* (<http://query.nytimes.com//.html>).

²⁸ Hall 198.

²⁹ Owen Wister and Kirke La Shelle, *The Virginian: A Play in Four Acts* (Medicine Bow, Wyoming, 1958) iv.

³⁰ Hall 196.

³¹ Wister, *The Virginian*, 7.

³² *Ibid.* 6.

³³ *Ibid.* 11.

³⁴ *Davy Crockett* 121.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 12.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 53.

³⁷ Murdoch 76.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 99.

³⁹ Murdoch 80.

⁴⁰ Richard Wattenberg, *Early-twentieth-century Frontier Dramas on Broadway: Situating the Western Experience in Performing Arts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 126-127.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 128.

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- ⁴² Athearn 177.
- ⁴³ Walle 110.
- ⁴⁴ Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West*, xx.
- ⁴⁵ Etulain 89.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid. 188.
- ⁴⁷ Hall 198-199; and Marcella 152-153.
- ⁴⁸ Athearn 177.
- ⁴⁹ Carlson 194.
- ⁵⁰ Savage 18.
- ⁵¹ Aquila 1.
- ⁵² Paul H. Carlson, *The Cowboy Way: An Exploration of History and Culture* (Lubbock, Tex: Texas Tech University Press, 2000) x.
- ⁵³ David Dary, *Cowboy Culture: A Saga of Five Centuries* (New York: Knopf, 1989) 332-334.
- ⁵⁴ John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1971) 89-130.
- ⁵⁵ Tompkins 188.
- ⁵⁶ Hall 2-4.
- ⁵⁷ Rebhorn 165.
- ⁵⁸ Hall 2-4.
- ⁵⁹ Jefferson D. Slagle, "In the Flesh: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Performance on the American Frontier, 1860-1925" (Diss., Ohio State University, 2006) 6-7.
- ⁶⁰ Bank 59-60.
- ⁶¹ Rita Parks, *The Western Hero: Mass Media Mythology* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982) 76.
- ⁶² N. Scott Momaday, McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.

APPENDIX A
INNER COWBOY

Dr. Buss



By: Olivia Buss

It's time to write.
No excuses!
It's time.
It doesn't matter if your
Bored.
I don't care if your
Grumpy.
It's time.

There is no reason to
Be nervous.
Don't doubt yourself!
You **can** do it.
I promise,
You can.

Just set high goals,
And fly past them.
Think deep thoughts,
And dig deeper.
Find your inner
Cowboy.

Everything will be
Perfect.
So, don't give up.
Never give up.
You can do it.
And I love you.
I love you so much.

Well....
Don't just sit there, cowboy!
It's time to write!

APPENDIX B

ARCHIVES

Archival Sources

Billy Rose Theatre Collection and Archive
Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center
New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
New York, New York

Fales Library & Special Collections
New York University Libraries
New York, New York

Folger Shakespeare Library
Reference Resources and Special Collections
Washington, District of Columbia

Great Plains History, Literature, and Folklore
Archives & Special Collections
University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries
Lincoln, Nebraska

History and Research Exhibit
Buffalo Bill Museum & Grave
Golden, Colorado

Joseph J. Marchi Theater Collection
Performing Arts Library
Museum of Performance and Design
San Francisco, California

McCracken Research Library
Buffalo Bill Historical Center
Cody, Wyoming

Pony Express Historical Society
Jesse James Museum/ Patee House Museum
St. Joseph, Missouri

Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Archives
Knight Library
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon

Rochester Opera House Archive Collection
Rochester Public Library Local History Resources
Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County
Rochester, New York

South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center
Museum and Library
Pierre, South Dakota

Tabor Opera House Collection
Western History and Genealogy
The Denver Public Library
Denver, Colorado

Archival Newsprint

Amsterdam Daily Democrat, Tuesday, May 12, 1886: 7 (Wallick).

Boston Transcript, January 20, 1874 (Mayo).

Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Tuesday, November 27, 1888: 4 (Wallick).

Chicago Daily Tribune, Dec. 18, 1872 (Cody).

Chicago Tribune, March 25, 1873 (Mayo).

Colman's Rural World. "Intelligence of Horses." January 14, 1903 (Wallick).

Daily Alta California, February 3, 1865: 2 (Mayo).

Daily Alta California, June 17, 1865 (Mayo).

Frankfort Roundabout, December 26, 1883: 3 (Wallick).

Kingston Daily Freeman, February 14, 1884:8 (Wallick).

Lippincott's Monthly Magazine. "The American Play." March 1886 (Mayo).

Lowell Daily Courier, March 22, 1883: 8 (Wallick).

Mansfield Herald, March 27, 1884: 19 (Wallick).

Michigan Farmer's Almanac, April 11, 1881: 15 (Wallick).

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New Jersey Telegraph, May 2, 1908 (Wallick obituary).

New York Clipper, June 21, 1873 (Mayo).

New York Clipper, November 11, 1883 (Wallick).

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New York Dramatic Mirror, 1902 (Wallick).

New York Dramatic Mirror, January 3, 1908: 3 (Mayo)

New York Dramatic Mirror, May 9, 1908: 5 (Wallick obituary).

New York Herald, February 16, 1872 (Cody).

New York Herald, April 1, 1873 (Cody).

New York Herald, March 23, 1875 (Mayo).

New York Herald, July 23, 1876 (Cody).

New York Times, October 21, 1873 (Mayo).

New York Times, March 10, 1874: 5.6 (Mayo).

New York Times, March 23, 1875: 7.4 (Mayo).

New York Times, January 12, 1879 (Mayo).

New York Times, January 27, 1883 (Wallick).

New York Times, February 2, 1883 (Wallick).

New York Times, June 9, 1896: 5.5 (Mayo obituary)

New York Times, June 13, 1896: 9.6 (Mayo obituary).

New York Times, June 16, 1896: 6.1 (Mayo).

New York Times, July 5, 1896: 6.7 (Mayo).

New York Times, August 10, 1904 (Wallick).

New York Times, May 2, 1908: 9 (Wallick obituary).

New York Times, December 2, 1908 (Wallick).
New York Times, December 3, 1908 (Wallick).
Omaha Daily Herald, July 17, 1873 (Cody).
The Ray [Boston] 1875: 4 (Mayo).
The Ray [Boston], 1889 (Mayo obituary).
Rochester Daily Union, September 25, 1872 (Mayo).
St. Joseph Gazette, November 11, 1883 (Wallick).
Sacramento Daily Union, December 8, 1856 (Mayo).
San Antonio Light, October 27, 1894: 3 (Wallick).
San Francisco Morning Call, May 10, 1877 (Cody).
San Francisco Morning Call, May 28, 1893: 8 (Mayo).
Scribner's Monthly. "The American Stage." July 1879 (Mayo).
Spirit of the Times, August 30, 1879 (Mayo).
The Sun, May 2, 1908: 8 (Wallick obituary).
Union and Advertiser Press [Rochester], 1875 (Cody).
Virginia City Evening Bulletin, July 8, 1863 (Mayo).

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