From Carnival to Myth: Performing Nationhood in Pre-Civil War New York

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Approximately two weeks after Lee surrendered to Grant in Appomattox, Confederate President Jefferson Davis attempted to escape Union cavalry by wearing select items from his wife's wardrobe; his female impersonation was unsuccessful, and he was taken prisoner at Irwinsville, Georgia. On May 27, 1865, the *New York Clipper* printed the following notice: "Among the latest additions to Barnum's 'wax figgers' is one of Jefferson Davis and them female clothes. The petticoats will stick to Jeff as long as there is anything left of him to cling to."[1] While Barnum's display indeed responded to media reports of Davis in female disguise, it seems his wax exhibit was trying to signify something more than a familiarity with current events. With the war won, and the Confederate President now under Union supervision, Barnum communicated Davis's extreme loss by costuming him in drag. Audiences who paid a dime to see this wax effigy would have read this text as symbolic of utter devastation: the loss of the war and thus the Confederacy metaphorically stripped Davis of his masculinity/power. By showcasing this newly christened "Belle of Richmond," the American Museum—an eager barometer of national sentiment—communicated Southern defeat, yet the emergence of the *transvestite* at Barnum's in 1865 also signified what Marjorie Garber would call a "category crisis" as the nation once again faced redefinition.[2] Indeed, within the "theatre" of the Civil War, the transvestite made several compelling cameo appearances within American culture, as Union became Dis/Union became Re/Union. The transvestite body as a marker of category crisis signified national disruption, and it is the performance of that disruption that I will address here, and the use of the body not only as a beacon of crisis but as a material site upon which wartime politics were mapped and national identity was explored.

Definitions of American nationhood were especially fluid during the months between the election of Lincoln in November 1860 and the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April 1861. Not yet a propaganda machine, the New York City stage in the winter and spring of 1861 served as a space where definitions of Union and Confederacy—of what it meant to be "an American"—were tested, revised, and

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constructed by two unlikely candidates: Laura Keene and P. T. Barnum. While Edwin Booth and the members of Lester Wallack's company stuck to Shakespeare and the standard repertory, these purveyors of lowbrow entertainment offered topical pieces that made manifest the carnivalesque spirit of pre-war New York and served as a corporeal mirror reflecting texts that redefined the body politic and produced multiple meanings (possibly pro-South, possibly pro-North, possibly both simultaneously—this is who *we* are, this is who the *Union* is). Yet such carnivalesque expressions ceased as the outbreak of war in Charleston in April served to "fix" American identity, and the theatre became a manufactory of "myth," propagandistically working to construct "the cause," as opposed to a site for more playful investigations. Indeed, once this myth-making begins, performance is [dis]embodied and the artifact—the flag, statues of Washington, relics from Fort Sumter—figuratively replace the polymorphous mirror. Thus, I would like also to discuss how the use of the body in lowbrow performance (as it constructs and reconstructs) serves to elucidate "high brow" notions of national identity. Furthermore, I will explore the conditions under which the material body, as a reflection of culture, becomes threatening to a hegemony bent on going to war.

Lincoln's first inaugural address, delivered in March 1861, offered two possible ways to envision the American republic in the wake of secession: as (1) "an association of States in the nature of contract merely" or (2) a "government proper."[3] And while Lincoln was convinced of the right way, the inhabitants of New York City were not so sure. James McPherson describes pre-war New York as a "nursery of pro-Southern sentiment"[4] evidenced by newspaper editorials, Mayoral statements, and cultural expression. "The City of New York belongs almost as much to the South as to the North," wrote the *Evening Post* in February 1861—and with good reason.[5] The financial health of New York City depended upon the cotton industry: Five southern states alone created $200 million worth of business annually. Yet a precarious credit system threatened this "pot of gold" as roughly ninety percent of this potential gain was outstanding.[6] Talk of imminent war engendered uncertainty and near panic in the city as 1861 dawned. In March, the *New York Clipper* wrote, "The uncertain state of our political affairs renders it difficult to make calculations for the future. . . . [W]e are all abroad in our reckonings, floating about in wild disorder."[7] Indeed so poignant was local bewilderment over national affairs that mayor Fernando Wood called for the secession of New York City on January 7th and, while unsuccessful, enjoyed moderate support. "Were we at the North only united, of one mind, loyal to government, I should not fear civil war," George Templeton Strong confided to his diary; his reflections suggest the decided lack of any collective city consciousness; New Yorkers were unhinged and anything seemed possible in these "disjointed days."[8]

New York City's quandary of alliance was relatively unique, which is why it becomes such a good site for analysis. Other Northern cities—Philadelphia,

Cincinnati, Chicago, Boston—were much more unified in their denunciation of secession and of the "rebels," and fervently charged the new president to preserve the Union.[9] Because of its ambivalence, pre-Civil War New York presents a profoundly liminal, historical moment ripe for Bakhtinian analysis, as carnival—like the transvestite—is directly linked to crisis, emerging during times of "death and revival, of change and renewal."[10] Mikhail Bakhtin theorized carnival as "a temporary liberation from prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions." "[H]ostile to all that was immortalized and completed"—to a definitive sense of nationhood, to "the cause"—New York was, during these five months, a sort of "grotesque world of becoming," as Bakhtin would say, a stage for exploration and not yet a "theatre" of war.[11]

A musical extravaganza at Laura Keene's theatre, popular since it's opening in November of 1860 cultivated and reflected this spirit of exploration. *The Seven Sisters*—described by Keene as "A Grand Operatic Spectacular, Diabolical, Musical, Terpsichorean, Farcical Burletta, in Three Acts"[12]—introduced a new segment entitled "Uncle Sam's Magic Lantern" on February 11th, just two days after a provisional Confederate congress elected Jefferson Davis president. Described by the *Clipper* as "patriotic and tableauotic," this series of "Union pictures" outlined the national debate and, according to several New York papers, honored "both sides of the question."[13]

Because this piece was topical and one of few performances in New York that winter to comment on the approaching war, Keene continually altered the second act in order to comment on current events. Indeed, *The Seven Sisters* was regularly described as an ever-changing pastiche, forever undergoing revision and, according to the *Clipper*, "susceptible to every sort of change."[14] "[It] is nothing but patchwork," wrote another reporter, weekly introducing new scenes and new players while retiring others. Keene was busy keeping up with the times for simultaneous with her first one hundred performances, Lincoln was elected; South Carolina seceded from the Union followed by Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana; Jefferson Davis was elected president of this new confederacy of states and oversaw the drafting of their constitution; and president-elect Lincoln arrived in Washington. The second hundred nights of *The Seven Sisters* coincided with Lincoln's inauguration, the attack upon and surrender of Fort Sumter, the construction of two large armies, the shocking death of Northern Colonel Ellsworth, and the first Battle of Bull Run. So repeatedly transformed was Keene's second act that by May, the *Albion* critic declared that it had gone "through more transmogrifications than the Pleiades."[15] Yet "Uncle Sam's Magic Lantern" never functioned as a proto-newsreel, as a stump for Lincoln, Davis, or Fernando Wood; rather it communicated through its protean construction a carnival spirit, "ever-changing, playful, and undefined."[16]

This new second act followed upon the decorative (and also mutable) heels of the "Grand Triumphal March of the Corps Des Zouaves" performed by Laura's company of cross-dressed soldiers at the end of act one. Prior to the addition of "Uncle Sam's Magic Lantern," this faux military review was the highlight of *The Seven Sisters* and attracted a great deal of attention from New York Theatre critics (perhaps because its transvestite militia communicated a material category crisis in microcosm and foreshadowed a national category crisis in macrocosm). The Zouaves were a New York infantry regiment organized by Union Colonel Elmer Ellsworth, a personal friend of Lincoln's, who gained experience in this seemingly eccentric form of soldiering by training a volunteer group in Chicago prior to the war. Ellsworth's soldiers imitated certain French military units who themselves borrowed the idea for their flamboyant uniform from Algerian mountain tribes. After Fort Sumter, Ellsworth organized a group of New York firemen as the "Fire Zouaves," officially the Eleventh Regiment of New York State Volunteers. New York papers commented on the appeal of Keene's "regiment":

> The Zouave drill takes the shine out of the crack company of the Seventh Regiment; on a clear day Laura's Zouaves would fill Broadway and cram the Battery. We would respectfully suggest, in consideration of the prevailing political troubles, that the gallant Carolinians get Laura's Zouaves down to Charleston, and let them draw Maj. Anderson out of Fort Sumpter [sic], he would never fire on such a corps, and couldn't stand a charge from their eyes and muskets.[17]

Keene's cross-dressed representation of the Zouaves proved more than a spectacular and titillating leg show, however; it may also be read as a reversal of order, a comic inversion of Ellsworth's regiment of Bowery toughs. For Keene, women became the protectors in a seemingly Aristophanic "Happy Idea" that identified wartime anxieties; yet her female troupe also assuaged burgeoning concerns by introducing such ludicrous Yankee defenders. In their billowing trousers, loose tunics, and fez, Keene's corps sought to defend a nation struggling with secessional crisis, their transvestism identifying, as Garber would argue, an "irresolvable conflict or epistemological crux that destabilizes comfortable binarity, and displaces the resulting discomfort onto a figure that already inhabits, indeed incarnates, the margin."[18] Despite democratic, pre-war New York's almost desperate celebration of compromise between North and South (the "comfortable binarity"),[19] "Uncle Sam's Magic Lantern"—like the femme Zouave—surveyed the margin, for within this performance text, the destabilizing female body, a signifier of category crisis, becomes also a site for various expressions of nationhood. Through representations of the female body, crisis is both identified and subsequently investigated.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin argues that in addition to being polymorphous, carnival is also degrading. "Degradation," as Bakhtin explains, involves a " lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity."[20] While carnival expressions degrade—turn their subjects into flesh—they simultaneously renew, regenerate, and conceive. Sue Vice in her analysis of Rabelais reads gender into this notion of degradation, stating that the "Earth and the reproductive body are associated with the feminine; Heaven and the rational body with the masculine."[21] "Uncle Sam's Magic Lantern" explored national identity through carnival degradation as the lofty discourse of democracy was materialized through Keene's feminine spectacle.

Her allegory begins with Columbia at Washington's tomb. Columbia, played by a woman, ventures to the grave to seek wisdom from the great founding father; here she is confronted instead with the ghost of Disunion, played by a man—the only male allegorical figure in the play besides Uncle Sam. Tableau two follows with the "Thirty-Four States," described by the *Clipper* as "thirty-four virgin damsels" who, despite their demure appearance, speak their mind on political issues—South Carolina, of course, being the most vocal. New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, the "peacemaking beauties," are called upon to settle an ensuing row. This scene, popular for its "pretty women, pretty legs, pretty bosoms, and beautiful scenery,"[22] appears carnivalesque in its degradation, its "grotesque" fixation on body parts, and in its ambivalence—another important aspect of carnival. An "indispensable trait" of grotesque representation, Bahktin argues that ambivalence within a text or an image reflects "poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis."[23] Vice, in her writings about Bakhtin, confirms this idea stating, "ambivalence, particularly when it involves the new birth implicit in death, or the resurgence implicit in being toppled, is the characteristic principle of both grotesque realism and carnival itself."[24] Keene's tableau richly illustrates this crucial element of carnival, for the women in this tableau collectively represent both Columbia (a government proper) who seeks a deliverer in the dead (soon-to-be-resurrected-Washington) and also thirty-four individual states (a loose association). Almost an allegorical character in its own right, "ambivalence" looms over the players in this extravaganza. Unlike Disunion, however, this Bakhtinian presence is not exactly menacing, for it is pregnant with possibilities even on the eve of war, with hopes of revision and rebirth to counter both death and literal/figurative dismemberment.[25]

Tableaux that followed the "Thirty-Four States" included "The Ebony Wedge—representing the good old ship Constitution in danger of being destroyed by Fire-Eaters and Emancipators," "The Stump of the Liberty Tree" cut down by "the partisan" who "stands in the shoes of the statesman," "The Slave Auction, and the Happy Plantation Home," "Calhoun's Dream and Washington's Army at Valley

Forge," "Liberty and Diogenes," and finally the "Apotheosis of Washington and the Union." These tableaux—which together evoke a melodramatic construction—also communicate a gendered and racial subtext and a carnival ambivalence.

Women represent something to be owned, property, both intellectual and material, and all are in desperate need of a male savior—the resurrected Washington of the final tableau. As Columbia, Liberty, the States, and the Slave (two slaves, both female, are featured in the first part of tableau five: "a yellow girl" and a "mulatto woman"),[26] the female body moors ideals (the "high") such as freedom and democracy and, through their degradation (the "low"), makes material, and thus palpable, the concerns of American citizens regarding threats to their "property." Incipient war imperils the Union/Columbia/the States (read as white Woman), destabilizes liberties conceptual and personal (read as white Woman), and jeopardizes material wealth/property (read as *mulatto* woman). Indeed, introducing race complicates interpretations of Keene's text. The female slave in tableau five demands a savior, yet is she to be rescued from the auction block altogether—emancipated—or delivered to a "Happy Plantation Home"? Reading the "yellow girl" as "black" would produce a polarized response (unpopular in a pre-war New York bent on compromise) for only an *abolitionist* (i.e., extremist) could hope to see her liberated, just as returning her to the plantation would suggest an unequivocal pro-slavery attitude. Or might we read the *mulatto* woman as white—an interpretation perhaps enhanced by the recent success of Boucicault's *Octoroon* in Barnum's Lecture Room (February 1860) and the Winter Garden Theatre (December 1859), played in both productions by a white actress without "the theatrical markers of blackness (blackface makeup and dialect)."[27] For the New York theatre patron, to perceive the slave body as a "white" body would perhaps assuage anxieties about being labeled an abolitionist, as it follows in a racist America that a white body should be a free body. But how do we understand the "white" woman as sanguine and servile on the plantation, when her skin color in this context can only signify rape or miscegenation, a reading that vilifies the South? For audiences in pre-war New York, her body is an ambivalent body, a body that transcends binary thinking: She is neither black nor white and yet both black and white. From a Bahktinian perspective, the biracial body of the slave woman presents a perpetual state of possibility, an open text—carnival.

Indeed, Keene's commentary on nationhood is profoundly ambivalent in the Bakhtinian sense. Who, for example, shall be rescued in Keene's tableau by the heroic Washington, "Columbia" or "the thirty-four states"? Like tableau five, discussed above, tableau six also shows tandem images—the figure of John Calhoun followed by the picture of Washington's troupes at Valley Forge—and is also potentially ambivalent. Perhaps this message is pro-Union: dreams of secession lead to disaster, rebel armies will despair like the starving troops at Valley Forge if they persist in their traitorous campaign. And yet this scene might also invoke

associations between the South Carolina Senator's fervid desire for secession and George Washington as the original secessionist, between the lost utopia that Washington struggled for and the nascent Confederacy. With Washington's help, the Union does reach supposed perfection at the end of the second act, but this apotheosis is also equivocal. Does Washington unify the fragmented Union or sanction a new Union of compromise, a union of disunion? Thus, interpretations of "Uncle Sam's Magic Lantern" remain, I think, deliberately incomplete, contradictory, and, therefore, grotesque in these carnival days of pre-war New York.

Post-Sumter, these explorations are replaced by an increasingly conservative ideology as Keene's second act added "new Union tableaux" that served to construct a mythic "cause." Immediately following the declaration of war and prior to these new tableaux, the *New York Clipper*, evoking the memory of the "Astor Place Opera House excitement," warned, "It would be better [for] her to dispense with the entire second act as now given. The conflicting sentiments and tableaux in that act cannot but have a tendency to excite the worst passions of men already excited by the fearful news from Charleston; and if persisted in, the consequences may turn out destructive to Miss Keene and her theatre."[28] Keene heeded the press's admonition: tableau three, "the Ebony Wedge," and the first part of tableau five, "the Slave Auction," were removed to eliminate suggestions of abolitionist intent—this could not be a war about slavery, argued the new administration; all efforts were towards preserving the Union.[29] The "Thirty-Four States" become the "Thirty-Four States in Union" and Columbus, a second male hero, now joins Columbia at Washington's tomb. Calhoun and the tattered army at Valley Forge remain but are followed by a new "Picture of Desolation," thus fixing the fluidity of this piece by suggesting that secession can only lead to Valley Forge, to devastation. In the concluding tableau, Washington, aided now by Columbus, is clearly the hero of the old Union, and Keene's *burletta* is clearly republican—illustrating Carrol Smith-Rosenberg's idea that hegemonic prescriptions tend to intensify during times of social upheaval.[30]

The changes in "Uncle Sam's Magic Lantern" are emblematic of the way all cultural expression was transformed after the outbreak of war. "'The change in public sentiment here is wonderful—almost miraculous,' wrote a New York merchant on April 18. 'I look with awe on the national movement here in New York and all through the Free States,' added a lawyer. 'After our late discords, it seems supernatural.' The 'time before Sumter' was like another century wrote a New York woman. 'It seems as if we never were alive till now; never had a country till now.'"[31] Grotesque images, fleshly and incomplete, were replaced both inside and outside the New York theatre by icons such as the flag and statues of Washington or by baldly propagandistic dramas. A new "Union image" became increasingly evident in a transformed New York and served to, as Roland Barthes would say,

"organize a world without contradiction."[32] The events of April 12th and 13th, 1861 profoundly altered representations of Union identity in New York City. Almost immediately after Major Anderson's wearied federal garrison surrendered to General Beauregard after thirty-three hours of bombardment by four thousand shot and shells, carnival began to turn to myth as news of Fort Sumter galvanized the North. This almost bloodless engagement in Charleston harbor signaled an end to theatrical identity exploration and rather became the catalyst for a mythic construction of American nationhood. As Civil War historians Mark E. Neely, Jr., and Harold Holzer explain, "The Union presence in Charleston may have died when Fort Sumter surrendered, but with its death the Union image was born."[33]

Former (more protean) definitions of country would no longer serve; the North would conceive of itself anew. No longer adrift, "floating about in wild disorder," the Union became, according to a reporter for the *Tribune*, "like a ship getting ready for action, she wants to get all the lumber overboard; or it is like a merchant winding up his old affairs to commence a new business, he wants to get rid of all the old debts, and entanglements, and affairs, that he may give his undivided attention to his new relations."[34] While American Studies scholars Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean argue that American identity is "a constant shifting territory" that denies "fixity and stasis," this moment in American history required fixity, or at least supposed fixity, mythic fixity, a cause.

"Everyone's patriotism is rampant and demonstrative now," Strong remarked in his diary; "God be praised for the unity of feeling here. It is beyond, very far beyond, anything I hoped for. . . . The national flag flying everywhere; every cart horse decorated."[35] The American flag and likenesses of Washington saturated public discourse, these icons ushering in a "New Eden" or "New Creation" as the Union had now become. New York newspapers and trade periodicals established new regular columns with titles like "Our Flag, Our Country, and the Constitution" that featured weekly poems such as "Our Flag" and "The New Birth." "Our nation hath been born again, Regenerate by a second birth," sounded one contributor, while another described the Union as the "Sampson of nations" and called upon "Mount Vernon to awaken its dead."[36]

Both civic and theatrical demonstrations testified to the ubiquity of this Union myth through the performance of artifact. On April 20th, over a quarter of a million people crammed Union Square for a pro-Union rally, presided over by Sumter's hero Major Anderson (lauded despite his surrender), to celebrate the New York Seventh Regiment's departure for the capitol. Strong describes it as a "mass-meeting," Barnum as a "monster Union meeting"; penned Strong, "Few assemblages have equaled it in numbers and unanimity."[37] At this event, the statue of Washington that ornamented Union Square was made to "share its pedestal with a new adornment: the same great banner of the conquered Fort Sumter."[38] On the same day, Barnum ran an add in the *New York Tribune* stating that the museum had a

new wonder, "The Old Washington Flag," which, as the *Clipper* later explained, he secured at considerable expense, and which he advertised as the banner that was "raised on the battery by General Washington at the evacuation by the British troops" in 1783. Provided such a context, even performed, bodily representations of Washington—like that in "Uncle Sam's Magic Lantern"—also become artifact, fixed and complete, in their intended meaning and thus "disembodied" in a Bakhtinian sense.

While Barnum contributed, perhaps more than any other impresario, to the construction of a mythic Union identity in post-Sumter New York, he also housed certain entertainments before the war that more dimly reflected the spirit of carnival so alive in New York and upon the boards at Keene's. In February of 1861, just as "Uncle Sam's Magic Lantern" was being added to *The Seven Sisters,* Barnum introduced a new performance at the American Museum, "Miss Dawron, Double-Voiced Singer." Interestingly, this young woman was initially listed in the New York papers as one of Barnum's many "living" exhibits: "The Living Mammoth Bear, Samson," "The Living Black Sea Lion," "The Two Living Aztec Children," "The Living Monster Snakes," "The Living Albino Family," "The Living What Is It?" "The Living African Savages," and so on.[39] Barnum needed to remind the public that the displays at his museum were atypical: They were not stationary and inert as the term "exhibit" seemed to imply, but "living," their presence somehow suggesting a meaning that was not "fixed," but changeable or open to various interpretations. When used as a noun during the nineteenth-century, the term "exhibit" most often referred to an inanimate object, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*; thus, the juxtaposition of "living" with the contemporary understanding of "exhibit" is suggestively ambivalent in a Bahktinian sense. Dora Dawson was not only ambivalent as a phenomenon on Barnum's stage—both an exhibit and a sentient performance—but also as a signifier of category crisis. Dawson significantly appeared at Barnum's in the winter of 1861, along with the Swiss Bearded Lady, "A beautiful and accomplished lady yet having [a] heavy beard and whiskers; [t]he envy and admiration of every beardless youth." A transvestite of virtuosity rather than of person, a figure who with her performance destabilized binaries, Dawron appeared "at each performance, singing alternatively a deep and powerful tenor and delicate soprano."[40] In February and March of 1861, as the much contested President prepared to take office in the midst of secessional crisis, Dawron as transvestite—like Keene's Zouaves—identified, through her presence on Barnum's stage, America's profound identity crisis or, as Garber would say, "epistomelogical crux."

Prior to the outbreak of war in April, Barnum's museum, like Keene's theatre, introduced cultural texts that reflected the disjointed, carnivalesque spirit of pre-war New York City. Barnum, conscious of the nation's fluid sense of identity even before it became intensified by Lincoln's election, constructed performances that

also favored "both sides of the question." An example of this can be seen in the Museum's offerings during the winter of 1860. In an attempt most certainly to capitalize on the North's fascination with Dion Boucicault's (more ambiguous than ambivalent, yet decidedly) controversial play *The Octoroon,* Barnum mounted his own production in February in his Lecture Room. As Bluford Adams argues in his book *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U. S. Popular Culture*, "The Museum that raised the curtain on its *Octoroon* exactly two months after the Winter Garden production [December 1859] would seem perfectly suited to Boucicault's fence-sitting politics. As its divided critical reception would suggest, *The Octoroon* had something to offer both Barnum's antislavery country patrons and his antiabolitionist New Yorkers."[41] According to Adams, Barnum tried to shape the audience's reception of the play by coupling it with certain racist exhibits, thus attempting to counter some seemingly radical abolitionist readings that were emerging from the production, extend the hand of friendship to the South, and reach a New York audience desperate for compromise. Yet, by juxtaposing the play with reactionary exhibits, Barnum was perhaps also allowing for multiple readings, rather than simply shaping one in particular. While this was no doubt a box office strategy (just as Keene's chameleonic *Seven Sisters* was no doubt intended to entice an audience seeking variety entertainment), it was also reflective of increasingly porous conceptions of American nationhood, poised for redefinition during this carnival moment in pre-Civil War New York.

Barnum's production of the play, Adams argues, took on a very specific meaning for New York patrons as it was presented in the wake of John Brown's hanging and subsequent martyrdom. While Boucicault's Yankee character, Salem Scudder, was far from a revolutionary (his revenge, exorcised solely against the play's nefarious, white villain M'Closky, included no freeing of slaves or blanket condemnations of the institution), his final speeches to the villain's lynch mob and the evident paternalism he expressed regarding the Indian Wahnotee and the slaves Paul and Zoe aligned him with Brown in the mind of New York viewers. As Adams makes clear, New York papers understood Scudder to be an abolitionist of sorts regardless of Boucicault's perhaps explicit attempts to disrupt such a reading: "Through Scudder, Boucicault appropriates the moral righteousness of the era's most famous radical by detaching it from its specific abolitionist goal."[42] Because New Yorkers worried not only about Scudder's closet abolitionism and the "racial unruliness" of Wahnotee and the tragic *mulatto* Zoe, Barnum introduced representatives from his exhibit hall between acts of the play in order to contain the subversions latent in Boucicault's melodrama. By juxtaposing scenes from *The Octoroon* with the popular "What Is It?" (a male African dwarf, the supposed "connecting link between man and monkey," captured by colonial gorilla hunters in "the interior of Africa"), Barnum, Adams convincingly argues, assuaged mounting

anxiety regarding slave insurrection and racial equality and reinforced white supremacism.[43]

Like Keene's concurrent "patchwork" entertainment, Barnum's collective performance text is also suggestively carnivalesque both in its ambivalence and in its desire to "degrade"—to take the ideals emerging from *The Octoroon* regarding a higher moral law, freedom from oppression, and questions of racial equality and *materialize* them through the body of the "What Is It?" Such degradation is both recuperative, as Adams implies—the white audience feels comfortable with their own superiority and/or paternalism as they view the "man/monkey" despite their views on the slavery question—and perhaps challenging, as the response to such materialization might also produce sympathy for the othered subject, outrage over his captivity and display, and an awareness of the Barnumesque framing of his presentation.

Bahktinian degradation was also present in some of Barnum's other offerings prior to Sumter, again signifying New York City's instability and playful searching for identity. Lincoln, for example, became, for Barnum, a material subject, an object of public scrutiny at the Museum as he visited New York on his way to Washington for the inauguration. On February 23, 1861, the *New York Tribune* featured an advertisement for the Museum that began with the repeated phrase, "PRESIDENT LINCOLN VISITS THE MUSEUM." While this report was ultimately untrue, consumers of the advertisement could anticipate seeing Lincoln at Barnum's as the newspaper promised, "PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN has informed Mr. Barnum that he will positively VISIT THE MUSEUM THIS DAY, Those who would see him should therefore come early." Significantly, Lincoln was listed in the Tribune as another of Barnum's objects of wonder, a "living" exhibit. After a discussion of Lincoln's predicted arrival at Barnum's, the great "attraction of the day," a new paragraph in the advertisement began:

THE GREAT LINCOLN TURKEY,
Weighing Forty Pounds, raised and fattened by R.H. Avery,
esq., of Wampsville, Madison County, N.Y., to be presented to
ABRAHAM LINCOLN, PRESIDENT U. S.,
for his dinner on the Day of his Inauguration,
OLD ADAMS'S CALIFORNIA MENAGERIE
OF AMERICAN BEARS, GRIZZLY BEARN&c.
THE GREAT MAMMOTH BEAR, SAMSON . . .[44]

The ad continues to list other featured attractions at Barnum's such as the "living Albino family" and the "living What Is It?" By setting Lincoln's name in bold type and by placing it in front of other exhibits also in bold type, an association was made between his material presence and that of the other inhabitants of the Museum.

Lincoln became an object, something to be consumed by an eager albeit not necessarily supportive mob—and not just an object but a *carnival* object. He was the symbol of a new America, the Union's hopes and fears, of the Republican values of freedom and equality, "the high"; and yet for Barnum, Lincoln was also an othered body, a new and exotic acquisition, thus made "low" through its proposed degradation.

Indeed, such carnival juxtapositions were commonplace at the Museum prior to the outbreak of war in April: the bears engaged in mock "political meetings" dressed as government delegates and the "dirt-eating woman" offset dramatizations of Wilkie Collins's "Woman in White" in the Lecture Room. Thus, while not so much a site for identity exploration as Keene's theatre was, the offerings at Barnum's during the winter of 1861 illustrated the ubiquity of carnival spirit in New York prior to Sumter.

Immediately after Sumter, grotesque performance (in the Bakhtinian sense) ceased at Barnum's and was replaced by a mythic performance of artifact. In addition to displaying images of Washington and the flag, the Museum also featured "relics of Fort Sumter" throughout the spring and sported a painting of Fort Sumter "in a blaze of fire and powder" on the outside wall. Throughout the spring and summer, Barnum coupled such propagandistic artifacts with distinctly unequivocal plays in the lecture room with titles, such as *Anderson; or, The Patriots at Sumter in 61* and *The Patriot's Dream*.[45] Profiting off the newly constructed Union myth with such lecture room fare, Barnum further contributed to Yankee ideology with an addition to his exhibit hall—yet no longer were these couplings between exhibit hall and lecture room intended to invite a variety of interpretations as they did before the war. "Beside the standard attractions, Barnum has added an extraordinary family of dwarfs from Virginia," wrote a correspondent for the *Spirit of the Times*; "They are all old, and very small, and really worth seeing."[46] For Barnum, mythic creations of Union identity now depended upon displaying both the "patriot" and his "other" brother. And unlike his previous collective constructions, this was a contrasting image that did not allow for a binary co-existence. Rather than present a text in opposition to the message communicated by the Lecture room drama, the exhibit—no longer "living"—now fixed the dramatic meaning: the South was dwarfed by the Union, the "Sampson of nations." Hardly a villain like Keene's "Disunion," the Confederacy—in these days before the first battle of Bull Run—was represented as no match for the Union, fortified by Lincoln's 75,000 fresh recruits. Feeble and diminutive, Jeff Davis and the "other" members of his "extraordinary" family would be easily bested in this ninety days war.

Illustrations of nationhood after Sumter are clearly republican. Grotesque images—"entirely different from [the] ready-made, completed being"[47]—threatened propagandistic constructions necessary for a nation mobilizing for war and were thus largely absent from artistic expression. And yet, we can still glimpse the shadow

of the grotesque lurking behind both Barnum's Virginia dwarfs and Uncle Sam's imposing figure, for Barnum's Dixie visitors serve both as signifiers of hegemonic order (Union as strong/Confederacy as weak) and of potential disorder as the battle of Manassas would soon prove. Similarly, Keene's burletta never lost its final grand transformation scene, the "Birth of the Butterfly in the Bower of the Ferns," which followed "Uncle Sam's Magic Lantern" and concluded *The Seven Sisters*.[48] This spectacular final image perhaps suggests an overarching carnival performance text that controls all Civil War theatricals: as the Butterfly strains to emerge from her chrysalis and glories in her metamorphosis, "a new nation, conceived in liberty" looks somehow forward to receiving—in the midst of certain agony and death—a "new birth of freedom."

Notes

1. *New York Clipper* 13 (May 27, 1865): 54. For further information on Jeff Davis's female impersonation, see chapter 8 of Mark E. Neely, Jr., Harold Holzer, and Gabor S. Boritt, *The Confederate Image: Prints of the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1987).

2. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 16-17.

3. R. P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, vol. 4* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1953) 262-71, 8 vols.

4. James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Ballatine Books, 1988) 274.

5. See Ernest A. McKay, *The Civil War and New York City* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1990) 18.

6. 13.

7. *New York Clipper* Mar. 23, 1861: 390; *Albion* March 16, 1861: 127. See also McKay, *Civil War* 37.

8. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong: 1860-1865* (New York: Macmillan, 1952) 105. See also *Albion* March 16, 1861: 127.

9. McPherson, *Battle Cry* 247-49.

10. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984) 9.

11. 10, 308.

12. Ben Graf Henneke, *Laura Keene: Actress, Innovator, and Impresario* (Tulsa, OK: Council Oak Books, 1990) 147.

13. *New York Clipper* Feb. 16, 1861: 350; *New York Tribune* Feb. 11, 1861: 2; and *New York Tribune* Feb. 13, 1861: 3.

14. *New York Clipper* March 30, 1861: 398.

15. *Albion* May 18, 1861: 235.

16. Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 11.

17. *Spirit of the Times* Jan. 19, 1861: 608.

18. Garber, *Vested Interests* 17.

19. The doctrine of "Compromise" was espoused by politicians who argued that some agreement could be reached between North and South to stave off the disaster of wide spread secession. Kentucky Senator John Crittenden was the main architect of this plan, and many New Yorkers supported his idea of dividing territories along the Missouri Compromise line of 36/30, prohibiting slavery in the North and permitting it in the South. The fact that Keene's *burletta* honored both sides of the question, however, is not so much about compromise (some of the context especially regarding abolitionism was much too inflammatory to suggest compromise) as it is about the working out of a national identity. See the *New York Clipper* Feb. 23, 1861: 358 and *New York Clipper* Apr. 20, 1861: 6.

20. Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 19.

21. Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 156.

22. *New York Clipper* Feb. 16, 1861: 350.

23. Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 24.

24. Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* 155.

25. Information about these tableaux was taken from pre-Sumter playbills of the *Seven Sisters* housed at the Harvard Theatre Collection.

26. *New York Herald* Feb. 12, 1861: 7.

27. Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U. S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997) 147.

28. *New York Clipper* Apr. 20, 1861: 6.

29. Information on changes in the Keene's bill are from a playbill dated Monday, May 6, at the Harvard Theatre Collection. For more discussion on the North's desire to downplay abolitionist interests regarding the war effort, see McPherson, *Battle Cry* 312.

30. Playbills for Laura Keene's *Seven Sisters*, Harvard Theatre Collection; *New York Herald* Feb. 12, 1861: 7; and *New York Herald* Apr. 15, 1861: 7. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's book *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) is an extended treatise on the ways in which hegemonic control intensifies during times of crisis.

31. McPherson, *Battle Cry* 274.

32. See Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean, *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 143.

33. Mark E. Neely, Jr., and Harold Holzer, *The Union Image: Popular Prints of the Civil War North* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000) 4.

34. *New York Tribune* April 17, 1861: 4.

35. Nevins and Thomas, *Diary of George Templeton* 121, 124.

36. See the *New York Clipper* Apr. 27, 1861: 1; and the *New York Tribune* Apr. 20, 1861: 6.

37. Nevins and Thomas, *Diary of George Templeton* 127. See also *New York Tribune* for Barnum's notice, Apr. 10, 1861.

38. Neely and Holzer, *Union Image* 4.

39. *New York Tribune* Feb. 1, 1861: 1.

40. *New York Herald* Mar. 10, 1861: 7.

41. Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum* 157.

42. 152.

43. 147-63.

44. *New York Tribune* Feb. 23, 1861: 2.

45. See *New York Clipper* June 22, 1861: 79, and May 4, 1861: 22; *New York Tribune* Apr. 26, 1861: 2, and May 14, 1861: 2; and the *New York Times* May 19, 1861: 5.

46. *Spirit of the Times* June 15, 1861: 304.

47. Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 25.

48. Play00ura Keene's *The Seven Sisters*, Harvard Theatre Collection.