ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:	STAGING AN EMPIRE: HOW LATE VICTORIAN THEATRE REPRESENTS PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE
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This thesis denotes the changing perception of the British empire among the general populace during the late Victorian period. By placing the plays of Dion Boucicault and Gilbert and Sullivan into the larger historical context, this thesis also comments on the larger historiographical debate about the influence of imperialism on popular culture between John MacKenzie and Bernard Porter.

STAGING AN EMPIRE: HOW LATE VICTORIAN THEATRE REPRESENTS PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

by

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Dedication

Dedicated to my supportive parents and my loving wife.

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Introduction

"We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind."[1] This is undoubtedly the most famous statement from the nineteenth-century British historian J. R. Seeley's book *The Expansion of England.* Seeley's history of the British Empire was meant to counter his contemporaries who wrote parliamentary or national histories, as opposed to ones centered on a global British subject.[2] Seeley sought to open the eyes of the British public and create an imperial identity which would supersede an English, Scottish, Irish or Welsh national identity in response to a rapidly changing world which included the ownership of a vast empire which spanned every habitable continent on earth. Seeley's theory on how that occurred was best summarized in that short and simple quote, that the British conquered the world accidentally and without intent. Seeley argued that through its desire to trade and through the machinations of the East India Company, Britain had unintentionally transformed an economic mission into imperial conquest.[3]

It was with this idea in mind that Bernard Porter wrote *The Absent Minded Imperialists* published in 2004. Porter challenges the notion of most historians writing in the 1980s and 1990s that the empire had an overwhelming influence on economic, social, and political life in Britain. For example, John MacKenzie wrote numerous works on the wide reach of imperialist propaganda, and Anne McClintock wrote on

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[1] J. R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1931), 12.

[2] Ibid, 96-98.

[3] Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2006), 316-317.

the gendered aspect of imperialism and the effects of the media on the Victorians. By contrast, Porter asserts that the vast majority of Britons in the metropole did not know much of, nor care about, the empire. Porter takes Seeley's words as his title and, working backward from the end of Britain's empire in the mid to late twentieth century, argues that because there was no lamentation for the empire upon its loss, therefore it could not have mattered. He goes further to ask if the empire ever mattered to all but a few interested parties.[4] Porter concludes that the average Briton did not have a close connection with the empire, and that only professional families of bureaucrats, some nobility and businessmen actually had any interest in the empire at all.[5]

This thesis aims to take this ongoing historiographical debate as a point of departure in order to show how the Victorian theatre reflected popular sentiments about the empire over time. Yet before doing so, one issue raised by Porter must be addressed. Regardless of which side of the debate one falls on, Porter brings attention to the sources historians of the late twentieth century use to make their claims that the empire was very important to the British, or at the very least that the public had some vested interest in the imperial project. When scouring the archives for sources demonstrating imperial influence, the amount of content could appear overwhelming. But Porter accuses historians of cherry-picking, ignoring the context of the massive quantity of contemporary sources which had nothing to do with the empire. "'Imperialism,' he writes, "was not the only characteristic feature of nineteenth and

[4] Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists : Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2-3.

[5] Ibid, 25-26.

twentieth century Britain. It may not have been a dominant one. Only an awareness of the broader context can tell us how important it was, and how deeply, therefore, the fact of her possession of an empire sank its teeth into Britain's domestic society and culture."[6]

Following Porter's argument, one might question the importance of any particular source. Just because a book, a newspaper article, or a pro-empire periodical exists within an archive, does not mean the content was consumed during its time. With that in mind, how does one enter the debate without being paralyzed over the issue of ensuring one's sources are representative, and avoiding the assumption that a published work on the empire was consumed by enough of the people to be significant to broader cultural developments? One solution to this dilemma is the theatre. While it can be difficult for historians to ascertain the extent to which popular printed media was consumed, theatrical performances are another matter. If a play is not being attended, it will not be shown. That is as true today as it was in the nineteenth century. By examining four plays spanning the latter half of the century, it will be possible to note changes in public perception of imperialist themes, from British identity, to the representation of colonial subjects (to name but a few). Through an examination of late Victorian theatre, I will show that the British public did indeed engage with the empire and imperialism in a substantive way, in response to ongoing historical events and processes.

The plays to be discussed are from three authors, the Irish melodramatic playwright Dion Boucicault, prominent from the 1850s until his death in 1890, and

[6] Ibid, 13.

the comedic operas of the writer W. S. Gilbert and composer Arthur Sullivan, popular at the end of the century. These playwrights were chosen due to their popularity during their careers. Each were exemplars of their chosen genres, whose productions mirrored Victorian social sentiments. Boucicault's two plays are *The Relief of Lucknow* of 1858 and *The Shaughraun* of 1875. Gilbert and Sullivan's operas are *The Mikado* of 1885 and *Utopia, Limited* of 1893. The time period focused on begins with the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, as it is largely considered to be a turning point for British imperialism, and ends in 1899, the start of the Boer War. The Boer War heralded a new age of public interest in imperial affairs which was superseded by the First World War only fifteen years later.[7]

This introduction examines the views and theories of Bernard Porter alongside those of John MacKenzie and Anne McClintock on the opposite end of the debate in order to contextualize the contributions of this thesis. Then it establishes importance of theatre to the Victorian working and middle classes, as an underexplored source base contributing to the debate. The two chapters undertake a close analysis of the four plays, the first focusing on Boucicault and the second on Gilbert and Sullivan. The plays are placed into conversation with each other, showing how, despite representing different genres and being produced across several decades, they reveal key shifts in popular attitudes towards the empire.

Much of the historiography on Victorian theatre consists of literary studies not focused on historical context. George Rowell's *The Victorian Theatre: A Survey* is

[7] John M. MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*. Studies in Imperialism (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1986), 5.

one such study. The short book, originally published in 1956, chronicles how influential playwrights such as Dion Boucicault contributed to their genres. Rowell's book was invaluable in the research process for this thesis because he included a long list of important plays from the Victorian period.[8] There has not been a comprehensive history of the Victorian theatre written since. Many of the more recent publications are not focused solely on the theatre but include it as an aspect of Victorian culture, following MacKenzie's *Propaganda and Empire*. John Russell Stephen's *The Censorship of the English Drama* is a history of the Victorian theatre from a bureaucratic angle. J. S. Bratton's *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and Stage, 1790-1930* is a strong companion to MacKenzie's books. Bratton's book is similar to this thesis in that it delves into imperialist themes found in plays. However, this thesis differentiates itself from Bratton by including of the Porter-MacKenzie debate and denoting changes in the empire's representation from the Indian Mutiny to the Boer War.

At its strongest Bernard Porter's *Absent Minded Imperialists* questions the very existence of the British Empire as a coherent entity.[9] Porter does not deny the fact that Britain colonized or occupied vast swathes of the earth, but rather focuses on issues of definition and perception. Porter posits that historians of the twentieth century, in an attempt to retroactively create an imperial culture for Britain, pieced together various elements found within all societies and called them elements of imperialism. He identifies, for example, patriotism, masculinism, militarism, racism,

[8] George Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre: A Survey*, 1St ed. corrected, reprinted lithographically ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1967), 151-157.

[9] Porter, *Absent Minded Imperialists*, 16.

geographical studies, and the popularity of adventures of people like David Livingstone as cultural elements which can exist independently of one another. According to Porter, to combine disparate cultural phenomena of the nineteenth century under the umbrella of imperialism was to simply change one's working definition of imperialism to make it retroactively fit the evidence.[10]

Porter also discusses the Victorian perception of what constituted a part of their empire as opposed to what was merely a colony or possession. For example, he argues that India would not have been considered representative of the process of imperialism due to it having been acquired through conquest and despotically ruled by the East India Company before indirect rule at the close of the century.[11] Porter's assertions are supported by Seeley's *Expansion of England,* which made very clear distinctions between what he considered to be the real British Empire and what was merely a colonial possession. For Seeley, the empire only consisted of the white settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the West Indies and South Africa. Seeley was opposed to India's inclusion into the empire proper, characterizing it as a foreign land bound by conquest and alien to European traditions and values, which only served to destabilize Britain.[12] According to Seeley, the empire should be viewed as an extension of the home country (what he called Greater Britain), rather than as a collection of disparate colonies.[13]

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[10] Ibid, 12-13.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Seeley, *Expansion of England,* 14-15.
[13] Ibid, 38.

Seeley's explanation of the paradox of India provides support for Porter's theory that the Victorians had a limited perception of their own empire. If Greater Britain was a community of equals, with the white colonies as extensions of the British race moving forward in progress, then Britain's despotic rule over India was of no benefit to civilization. For Seeley, the white dominions were places with no past and only a strong future, whereas India was all past with no future. However, Britain could not abandon India as it had taken on the responsibility of governing its people, a responsibility which Seeley claimed the British took lightly. Seeley argued that a lack of education for students on the history of the empire, and on India in particular, ran the risk of the rapidly changing world leaving the British behind, particularly when faced with new international rivals such as Germany and Russia.[14]

Porter notes that the Victorians did not place any real importance on contemporary history in their middle-class schools. The consensus was that imperial conquest was a thing of the past, belonging to the eighteenth century and the East India Company; Britain was meant to only spread liberty and progress in the nineteenth century.[15] Victorian history courses typically dealt with classical history and ended with the reign of Queen Elizabeth, leaving out any history of the American colonies or India. In addition to the lack of any contemporary history courses, Victorian middle-class schools had a habit of inflating their offerings to attract students, only to drop non-essential courses such as history. Any imperialist textbooks in schools had to be privately purchased for the students, and only occurred

[14] Ibid, 140-142.
[15] Porter, *Absent Minded Imperialists*, 64-65.

in a relatively small number of cases at the end of the century.[16] Porter's analysis of Victorian schooling certainly appears to confirm Seeley's assertion that the British lacked any substantial education on subjects which would benefit the future inheritors of the empire. Porter extrapolated from a lack of imperialist literature in schools that there was a lack of interest in the empire among the common people.

Porter's views on entertainment solidify his stance on the limits of imperial influences on popular culture. He concedes that almost every novel or work of art held some reference to a colony or two, as they would have to in order to remain topical, yet he dismisses these references as marginal and passing. Porter claims that there were no 'good' books, poems, music or any other form of art with imperialist themes produced in the early to mid-nineteenth century.[17] The working and middle classes distrusted 'high' culture, which was deemed effeminate and without practical use.[18] He also did not accept the notion that when Victorian fiction included overseas settings, missionary stories, and adventure tales, these themes were inherently imperialist. Instead, they should be placed into a wider context and historians must prove that nothing else could have been celebrated instead. Whereas adventure stories could be harnessed and used for the purposes of imperial propaganda, and were indeed by authors such as Rudyard Kipling, they could and were also used for other reasons such as the need to place the adventurer in a 'barbaric' setting without the protection of a colonial government.[19] The advantage of Porter's approach is that it

[16] Ibid, 66-67.
[17] Ibid, 134.
[18] Ibid, 135-136.
[19] Ibid, 155.

forces historians to think more critically about the importance of their sources. Often the simplest answer is the correct one, and this limited view of imperialism offers an interesting alternative explanation for how invested the British public was in the empire.

The most prominent historian on the opposite side of the debate, whom Porter directly critiques, is John MacKenzie. He was the first to seriously study the vast amount of imperial propaganda of the late Victorian period.[20] MacKenzie's definition of imperialism is much broader than Porter's, as it did not just constitute overt propaganda but was rather a permeating force throughout popular culture. MacKenzie argues that imperialism served as a style of nationalism which could cross class lines in deeply divided, heavily industrialized Victorian Britain.[21] One of the unique features of imperialism as a form of nationalism is that it was supported by both liberal and conservative governments, and could mold itself into everyday life through any form of media. MacKenzie's theory was that the empire suffused society through the mass media and classrooms, and thus by more subtle means than overt militant patriotism. He explained that even though a figure such as David Livingstone did not explore or advance Britain's formal empire, it was how his memory was invoked and used in the late century that truly matters. MacKenzie and Porter also differ in how they conceptualize Britain's informal empire. MacKenzie, in his response to Porter's book, explains that he would "certainly include informal empire

[20] Ibid, 6.
[21] MacKenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture,* 4.

in the imperial 'habit of mind' whereas I am not sure that Porter does."[22] For MacKenzie, unofficial possessions, spheres of influence, exploration, and adventure all contributed to a wider culture of empire, while for Porter they do not.

MacKenzie strongly argues that the theatre played an important role in the creation of an imperial culture in Britain, spreading in popularity from the working class to the middle and upper-classes.[23] The upper classes adopted the theatre and music halls due to their immense popularity amongst the workers. MacKenzie rejects the notion that imperial culture was imposed upon the workers from on high, that the theatre and music halls were an attempt to trick the common folk into patriotism. It would be unreasonable to assume that a good majority of the population were deceived into adopting opinions counter to their class interests.[24] MacKenzie's argument that imperialist themes simply resonated with their audiences is more plausible, as this thesis will show.

While the greatest patriotic fervor could be found in the music halls, MacKenzie explains that the classical melodrama also adapted to changing popular tastes with the military epic. He traces the popularity of military melodramas back to the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars which saw audiences clamoring for foreign news. Another catalyst was the Crimean War of 1853-1856. After the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the empire became a constant source of content for the military melodramas,

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[22] John M. MacKenzie, "'Comfort' and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 4 (2008): 659-668, https://doi.org/10.1080/03086530802561040.

[23] John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire : The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 40.

[24] Ibid, 41.

with real-life colonial figures serving as fictional heroes on stage.[25] The appetite for military spectacle on the stage ended with the Boer War in 1899 but was replaced by real warfare put to film in the twentieth century.[26]

Anne McClintock writes of imperialism as an inextricably gendered phenomenon. She states that imperialism only occurred in the West, and that the racial constructions that resulted from it were fundamental aspects of Western modernity.[27] The latter nineteenth century was an era of militant masculinity and the solidification of new gender roles and identity. Similar to Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, the masculine gender was defined through the creation of an effeminate 'other.' McClintock also argues that imperialism was being sold to the public through domesticity. Advertising in Victorian Britain adopted imperial themes in order to sell commodities. McClintock references an advertisement for Pears Soap which invokes a sense of manliness, militarism, adventure, and domesticity. It shows "an admiral decked in pure imperial white, washing his hands in his cabin as his steamship crosses the oceanic threshold into the realm of empire." It also includes racist phrases such as, "the first step towards lightening THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN (sic) is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness."[28] Commodities were being sold to the public through an appeal not only to a sense of being British, but of being white men. There was a shift at the end of the nineteenth century away from the scientific racism found in academic journals to commodity racism. The imperial Expositions at the end

[25] Ibid, 46.
[26] Ibid, 48.
[27] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather : Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.
[28] Ibid, 32.

of the century turned the empire into a consumer spectacle.[29] MacKenzie also argues that the Expositions were a turning point. As more European rivals industrialized, Britain used its empire to flaunt its technology, wealth, and racial superiority.[30]

The definition of imperialism this thesis utilizes is broad in scope. The effects of imperialism on popular culture were not limited to subject matter that was blatantly about a colony or the formal empire. The culture of empire subtly infiltrated all aspects of Victorian society, especially at the end of the century under the policy of New Imperialism. The decision of Pears Soap to include an Admiral and calling on the White Man's Burden in their advertisement is, therefore, an aspect of imperialism. My definition of imperialism aligns with MacKenzie and McClintock as being a force that permeated throughout society.

There were two methods through which I could analyze plays to contribute to the Porter-McKenzie debate: a quantitative or qualitative study. For a quantitative approach, I would have needed access to the Lord Chamberlain's collection in the British Library (the largest collection of Victorian plays). The benefit of such a method would be that I could compare the amount of theatrical material related to the empire to that which did not. Unfortunately, the Lord Chamberlain's collection is not digitized, and due to the titles of plays not being representative of their content, it would have not necessarily been a useful exercise. A qualitative approach was more viable due to the ready availability of the full texts of selected plays. Only the more

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[29] Ibid, 33.

[30] John MacKenzie "Empire and Metropolitan Cultures," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Edited by William Roger Louis, Nicholas P Canny, P. J Marshall, A. N Porter, Judith M Brown, and Robin W Winks, The Oxford History of the British Empire (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1998), 282-283.

prominent playwrights have their plays available digitally. Online repositories such as Proquest, The Literature Network, and the Victorian Plays Project feature a selection of famous and lesser known plays. The Victorian Plays Project has just over 300 plays available. While The Literature Network and Proquest are more difficult to quantify, they both usually contain the complete collection of works for playwrights of renown. The more often a playwright appears, the more prominent they were. While it was restricting not to have access to the Lord Chamberlain's collection, the archives filtered the most famous plays to the top. That is how I selected Dion Boucicault and Gilbert and Sullivan as the subjects of this thesis. Plays by these authors would have been widely attended in their time, making them accurate representations of public sentiments.

One important question to consider is why theatre can serve as a representation of public opinion at all. In order for the analysis of the following plays to make a meaningful contribution to the Porter debate, it is necessary to understand where theatre stood in London culture and society. First, one must consider socioeconomic factors. Who went to see these productions and how popular were they? The early Victorian period was a low point in theatre, as the wealthy only patronized the opera and the lower classes had little to no interest in the productions at the time. The upper classes had abandoned the theatre due to working-class riots against inflated prices.[31] The Old Price Riots of 1809 were due to large theatres like Drury Lane raising the ticket prices for all seats. Whereas the upper classes were given better accommodations in the form of private boxes in exchange for a price

[31] Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre*, 4.

hike from six to seven shillings, the working class lost what little luxury they had. Construction of the private boxes resulted in the transformation of "the pit" (the working-class viewing area) to include pigeon holes. The pigeon holes prevented those in the pit from seeing anything but the actor's feet. Ticket prices for the pit were raised from three shillings sixpence to four shillings for the pleasure.[32] Theatre in England struggled in the first half of the century, which is important to note in framing the issue of who frequented the performances in the latter half.

In order to survive, theatre owners had restructured their locations to meet popular demands by the mid-1840s. The number of locations across London increased and the prices were lowered. The plays themselves had become more topical, as they had to be reflections of popular sentiments in order to draw in the largest crowds. This fact is articulated most aptly by George Rowell when he states that, "in nineteenth century England the audience shaped both the theatre and the drama played within it."[33] Playwrights played on popular sentiment to fill seats, which lends credence to the use of plays as evidence of popular opinions regarding imperialism. The lower classes became more involved in theatre due in part to the abolition of patents with the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843. This act helped to loosen the monopoly that large, storied theatres such as Drury Lane had on where competing locations could be established and what could be performed.[34] The result

[32] Terry F. Robinson, "National Theatre in Transition: The London Patent Theatre Fires of 1808-1809 and the Old Price Riots," *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History* (2016), www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=terry-f-robinson-national-theatre-in-transition-the-london-patent-theatre-fires-of-1808-1809-and-the-old-price-riots.

[33] Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre*, 1-2.

[34] Ibid, 12-13.

was an influx of smaller stages which catered to audiences of lesser means but greater in number. These smaller venues were met with enthusiasm from the working class as they were no longer forced to view the plays through pigeon holes and increased competition stabilized the price of admission.

The slump in theatrical interest in Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century does not preclude the entertainment medium from having a cultural influence on the people. Melodramas frequently utilized foreign and exotic locales as their settings, and tales of exploration and European heroism as their stories.[35] These early imperially themed plays largely consisted of Orientalist imagery and erotic fantasies for European men consorting with Asian women.[36] This is a trend that continued throughout the nineteenth century, albeit with a decline after the Sepoy Mutiny. Exotic locales meant to evoke wonderment returned at the close of the century, as we shall see in chapter two.

The most topical form of theatre in the Victorian period was the melodrama. Such plays were published in large quantities, due in part to the Theatre Regulation Act, and were frequently written in a short time.[37] The Act restricted the ability of the Lord Chamberlain to refuse licenses to smaller venues therefore reducing corruption and breaking the monopoly of large theatres. Low-effort melodramas drew upon established tropes reaching back to Shakespearean precedents and used familiar story structures.[38] That is not to say that all Victorian melodramas were of low quality, nor

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[35] MacKenzie "Empire and Metropolitan Cultures," 276-77.

[36] Ibid, 277.

[37] Bratton, J. S, *Acts of Supremacy : The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930,* Studies in Imperialism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 23.

[38] Ibid, 24.

is that judgement the purpose of this project. The quantity and topicality of the medium further elevates a melodrama's value as a representation of popular opinion. The melodramas were as close a form of entertainment to live television that the Victorians would have had access to in order to obtain a visual experience of distant events.

One factor regarding Victorian theatre which must be taken into account is censorship. British plays were subject to censorship under the office of the Lord Chamberlain and, specifically, his Examiner of Plays.[39] The aforementioned Theatre Regulation Act of 1843 required all plays to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office for patent licensing, which resulted in the British Library's collection today.[40] The Examiner of Plays had a rather free hand in their duties of censorship and as such the personalities of the particular office holder largely determined what was published.[41] An important personality relevant to the early plays discussed here is William Bodham Donne, who served as the Examiner of Plays from 1857 until 1874. Donne was a theatre enthusiast who also helped expand the duties of the Examiner of Plays to include inspections of the physical buildings for public safety. Donne had a fondness for Boucicault's earlier plays in the late 1850s and 1860s, which would have allowed the Irish playwright to publish plays on subjects more critical of England than would have been potentially possible under a different Examiner. According to

[39] John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama, 1824-1901* (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 17.

[40] Ibid, 2.

[41] Ibid, 17.

L.W. Conolly, when Donne retired from his position in 1874, the theatre managers of London expressed remorse for their loss of a tolerant and enthusiastic censor.[42]

The Victorian perspectives on artistic censorship were not the same as they are today. In the late century, while music halls were technically not within the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain's censors, few playwrights deviated from the established rules. Even fewer seemed too stifled by the Examiner's restrictions.[43] Censorship to the Victorians was a positive safeguard of morality not the opposite of creative expression. Donne's successor, Edward Pigott, who served as Examiner from 1874 until 1895, was a polarizing figure in his time.[44] Due to the rather arbitrary manner in which the Examiner censored, it is worth taking stock of Pigott's personality in order to explain why the plays to be discussed here were put on stage. Pigott's reputation was, in the words of historian John Russell Stevens, "something of a paradox." He was considered tolerant enough early in his career, until the mid 1880s when he began strictly censoring dramas based on the morality or depravity of the characters. Some playwrights supported Pigott's rigid protection of moral standards while others denounced him as a bigot preventing the advancement of the craft.[45] The importance of Pigott's choices meant that plays published during his tenure could not depict foreign peoples too far from British sensibilities. Anything deemed immoral in nature could be subject to censorship. Famous Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw was an outspoken critic of Pigott, referring to him as "a

[42] Ibid, 30-32.
[43] MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire,* 41-42.
[44] Stephens, *Censorship,* 32.
[45] Ibid, 33-34.

walking compendium of vulgar insular prejudice," and railed against censorship itself.[46]

This aside regarding censorship is meant to illustrate that the plays of the mid to late Victorian period were products of three forces. The first was the playwright's desire to tell the story and hone their craft. The second were the whims of the public, whose ability to vote with their wallets largely determined how characters were portrayed and what messages were in the performances. The third were the censors who, under Pigott, represented an institutional conservatism and investment in plays which did not challenge authority too much.

[46] Ibid, 33.

Chapter 1: Dion Boucicault and Empire in the Melodrama

Why choose a play about the Mutiny and why make 1858 the starting date of this project? The simple answer is the immense impact that the Sepoy Mutiny had on Britain, and on other European empires which looked to Britain as an example. Prior to the Mutiny, the territory that would be known as India was conquered piecemeal by the private East India Company. The Company began this conquest after Britain took possession of the wealthy region of Bengal after the Seven Years War with the French in 1757. The method of expansion was the subjugation or coercion of the numerous princes who ruled over the fractured territory of the subcontinent. The Company's conquest of these territories was facilitated by the use of Indian soldiers, known as *sepoys*. It was not until 1784 that Parliament passed the India Act which firmly brought the East India Company under the supervision of the crown.[47] Its leash had been tightened but the Company had not been fully reigned in, and it continued to rule as a quasi-independent government until the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 changed everything about how the British viewed their colonial possessions.

The Sepoy Mutiny began as a religious grievance. The new Lee Enfield rifle cartridges required grease in order to be easily loaded, and the soldier had to bite down in order to open it. The rumor amongst the sepoys was that the grease used was from cows, which were sacred to Hindus, and pigs which were reviled by Muslims.[48] There was also a belief among many Indians that the British were plotting to remove

[47] Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny : India, 1857* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 17-18.

[48] Hyam, *Imperial Century,* 134-35.

the caste system and force conversions to Christianity.[49] The Mutiny was a short but bloody affair, beginning with the massacre of British officers by the sepoys they commanded.[50] The British soldiers were outnumbered by their Indian counterparts by six to one, although the disjointed and disconnected nature of the revolt across the countryside meant that the British could defeat their enemy in detail.[51] The result of the Mutiny was the end of the dual rulership of crown and company, as Parliament dissolved the East India Company on November 1, 1858. A Viceroy was appointed for India, which for the first time was under the direct rule of the British government.[52] The Mutiny was a turning point for British imperialism, and was in a way, the nail in the coffin for the earlier eighteenth century model of colonial rule. Private charter companies would be treated with suspicion and trepidation, as will be discussed later in regard to the plays of Gilbert and Sullivan.

The most overtly imperialist play discussed in this thesis is *Jessie Brown, or the Relief of Lucknow* by Dion Boucicault, which was first performed in 1858, a mere year after the Mutiny.[53] Boucicault's plays will serve as prime examples of imperialism's influence on dramas of the Victorian period. Dion Boucicault was born Dionysius Lardner Boursiquot in Dublin, Ireland in 1820. His father changed his surname to Bourcicault in 1827, which Boucicault correct in 1845. Boucicault was inspired by the French operas and began his career as an actor in the late 1830s.

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[49] Rudrangshu Mukherjee, ""Satan Let Loose upon Earth": The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857." in *Past & Present*, no. 128 (1990), 95.

[50] Ibid, 136-37.

[51] Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, 19.

[52] Ibid, 389-90.

[53] Dion Boucicault, *Jessie Brown; or The Relief of Lucknow* (1858): 2, http://victorian.nuigalway.ie/modx/index.php?id=54&play=97 (accessed November 1, 2018).

Through constant harassment of theatre managers he was able to stage his first play, *London Assurance,* in 1841. The play earned him enough renown to be welcomed into the Dramatic Author's Society in 1842. Boucicault was plagued with debt his entire live due to overspending. Although until 1860 most playwrights were given a pittance for their work while the theatre managers kept the lion's share. Boucicault managed various theatres across the United Kingdom, the United States and France before settling in London in 1860. His career is credited for raising the compensation for playwrights to come, as he earned £27,000 that year alone.[54] Adjusted for inflation that was a value of over 2.7 million pounds.[55] He continued to tour internationally in Europe and North America, starring as Conn, the Shaughraun in his titular play to much acclaim until his death. Boucicault died poor in 1890 not due to a lack of funds, but due to his constant spending.[56] Boucicault's earlier melodramas were comical, such as *Used Up* (1844), *Don Caesar de Bazan* (1844), and *The Corsican Brothers* (1852). After *The Relief of Lucknow's* success in 1858 Boucicault was able to stage three serious Irish melodramas, *The Colleen Brown* (1860), *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1865), and *The Shaughraun* (1875), discussed later in this chapter.[57]

The Relief of Lucknow is not simply a dramatic retelling of contemporary events. It is emblematic of Britain's attitudes toward its empire, Muslims, Indians,

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[54] Peter Thomson, "Boucicault, Dion [real name Dionysius Lardner Boursiquot] (1820–1890), playwright and actor," In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008), http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2976.

[55] "Inflation Calculator," Bank of England, last modified January, 22, 2019, https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator.

[56] Thomson, "Boucicault."

[57] Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre,* 53-55.

and the military. Rushed to publication and stage swiftly after the events of the Mutiny, the play gave audiences in Britain as close to a live experience of the event as they could have hoped. *The Relief of Lucknow*, as one would expect of a wartime drama, overtly and unabashedly patriotic. The British are valiant while the Indians are treacherous, foolish, and menacing.

As the title suggests, the setting of the play is the residence and fortress of the city of Lucknow in India during the Mutiny of 1857.[58] Despite being the conquerors of India, the British are always the weaker force in the story. They are always outnumbered by the besieging sepoys, who number some fifty thousand by the climax.[59] Despite overwhelming numbers, the sepoys are still hesitant to attack the British soldiers who, are portrayed as courageous and worth many times their Indian counterparts.[60] As stated by Heidi J. Holder in *Acts of Supremacy*, a British victory is a foregone conclusion for the viewer.[61] While it may seem obvious that a wartime drama would include overly patriotic themes, it is necessary to detail the portrayal of the British, the empire, and Indians in Boucicault's early play to compare it with his later works on a different subject, Ireland.

The first subject of note will be Boucicault's portrayal of the British in Lucknow. The British can be broken down into three subcategories: the civilians which consisted of women and children, the officers, and the lower soldiery. The women of Lucknow are depicted as having come to India for their love of the men in

[58] Boucicault, *Relief of Lucknow*, 4-5.
[59] Ibid, 33.
[60] Ibid, 11.
[61] Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy*, 138.

the army, not to promote any imperial project directly.[62] The named women present in the play are there to be protected by the men and provide further drama during the battle. They are not, however, mere passive observers. Some engage in otherwise unfeminine acts such as the titular Jessie's stabbing of the villainous Nana Sahib.[63] Boucicault utilized numerous references to the slaughter of women and children elsewhere in India during the Mutiny to paint the sepoys as inhumane monsters and provide further reasons why the British could not surrender to their aggressors.[64]

Jessie Brown is more a symbol of Britain itself rather than a distinct character. She is a Scot of the lower classes, based on her fraternization with the lower soldiers and the thick dialect Boucicault gives her: "Yon lassie loo's him, I spier it in the blink o' her e'e. She'll be fashed wi' him for kissin' me."[65] Jessie is idolized by the men for being simple yet kind, a not-so-subtle hint at how women were expected to behave.[66] Through Jessie the soldiers' nerves are calmed with recitations of memories and odes to Scotland.[67] At the finale of the play, when all hope is lost, it is a delirious and ill Jessie who hears the bagpipes of the relief force approaching over the sounds of the battle.[68] Jessie, as a representation of imperial patriotism, is a simple woman of common stock whose blind faith in her betters drives the British to never surrender.

Boucicault portrays the British officers as well spoken, courageous, and in possession of staggering foresight and knowledge of events during the Mutiny. The

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[62] Boucicault, *Relief of Lucknow*, 7.
[63] Ibid, 17.
[64] Ibid, 10.
[65] Ibid, 9.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid, 19-20.
[68] Ibid, 38.

officer Randal MacGregor is entirely unphased by an assassination attempt by his treasonous servant Achmet which he inexplicably anticipates. MacGregor, dismisses his assailant as a pest when he states to his fellow officers, “Do not be alarmed. 'Twasonly (sic)—a jackal; I fired and scared him away.”[69] This event is the first of many instances of the British officers’ stalwart resolve, as Randal never displays any hesitation or despair while wounded.[70] Even when the audience is led to believe that the other officer Geordie has written a letter ordering Randal to surrender, under threat of execution by the sepoys, we learn that he has instead written it in Gaelic to warn the British of a trap.[71] Geordie is so devout to his cause that he orders his fellow Britons to shoot him before he could be executed by the sepoys rather than surrender.[72]

Boucicault’s portrayal of the officers extends beyond military rank to class representations. The officers are well spoken, and their dialogue is written in clear and plain English. One could surmise that the grammar, spelling and accent inflections given to the characters of differing social status are meant to reflect their intellect and refinement. Both officers, the brothers Randal and Geordie MacGregor, are Scottish, as evidenced by Jessie’s history with Geordie.[73] Yet Jessie’s dialogue was written in stark contrast to the well-spoken officers. A prime example can be found in Geordie and Jessie’s descriptions of one another. Geordie describes Jessie as follows: “What is it? Why it is a sprig of heather from the Highland moors. It is a

[69] Ibid, 12.
[70] Ibid, 21.
[71] Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy,* 139.
[72] Boucicault, *Relief of Lucknow,* 28.
[73] Ibid, 9.

slogan on the Scotch pipes that nature has put into the prettiest throat that ever had an arm round it. It is the pet of the regiment.—It is Jessie Brown."[74] By contrast, the lower class Jessie speaks as follows: "Eh, sirs, it's maister Geordie—gude day, leddies—eh. My certie, how braw a chiel he is in his red coat and his gou'd lace. There's MacGregor in every inch of him. Eh why wasn't I the Queen of Scotland to make a king of him!"[75]

The lower soldiery is more similar to the civilians than to the officers who lead them. The soldiers' mannerisms and language are similar to those of the simple Jessie. Corporal Cassidy and Private Sweenie, the two named soldiers of the performance, speak in slang and dialects neither of the officers utter through the entire play.[76] How the actors were supposed to present the lines of their characters indicates class differences. The slang employed by the soldiers implies a lack of intelligence and refinement found in their betters. Yet a lack of eloquence does not equate to a lack of courage. The Sepoy Mutiny and its coverage in the Victorian media marked a change in how the public viewed the military. By the end of the century soldiers and sailors were co-opted by imperial propagandists to represent a universal ideal of British masculinity.[77]

The soldiers on stage are meant to represent the ideal Briton, in opposition to the rebellious sepoys. Private Sweenie volunteers for a dangerous mission meant for

[74] Ibid, 8.
[75] Ibid, 8-9.
[76] Ibid, 9.
[77] Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack : Representing Naval Manhood in the British Empire, 1870-1918*, Studies in Imperialism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 2-3.

Geordie, demonstrating precognition of how the sepoys would react to his actions.[78] Later, while Geordie and Randal are captured by Nana Sahib, it is Sweenie and Cassidy who rescue them.[79] Boucicault elevated common soldiers to a heroic position on par with that of the upper class officers. The common British soldiers are compassionate to the civilians even in the face of starvation and potential insubordination, as the following exchange shows:

> SWEENIE. (advancing and saluting) Please your honor, the men wants to know very respectfully sir, please if this here ration is the last of our food—what's the children and ladies a' goin' to have starved out?
>
> RANDAL. That is a mutinous question, sir, fall in your ranks.
>
> SWEENIE. As your pardon, please sir—the men won't eat their rations till they know. They say they wouldn't fight-no how, sir, anyways comfortable, if they ain't allowed to share all fair with the women and the little 'uns.
>
> ALL THE MEN. Share alike! Share alike!
>
> RANDAL. Silence in the ranks ! fall in, my good lads. Listen: for eighty days we have held this fort against fifty thousand rebels; from week to week our numbers have been Thinned off, until few indeed remain; a few hours more, and General Havelock may arrive, (a gun) but those few hours will be terrible. The rebel Sepoys grown desperate by repulse, will try to overwhelm us with their whole force, (a gun) To preserve the lives of these weak ones, you must have strength to repel this attack—you are starving; the food you eat is their protection.
>
> {the MEN whisper again}
>
> SWEENIE. Please, Captain, the men say they'd feel worse after such a meal.
>
> RANDAL. Do as you will, there is a Captain above who commands your hearts. Break

[78] Boucicault, *Relief of Lucknow*, 11.
[79] Ibid, 26.

ranks.[80]

Here the soldiers risk the wrath of their officer through their desire to assist the civilians at all costs, even above their own welfare. The decision to do so is unanimous amongst the men, and Randal allows such an act without much prodding.

In 1858, the time of Boucicault's production, the ideal British soldier put the needs of others above his own wellbeing. This portrayal stands in contrast with contemporary 'Jack Tar' naval theatrical productions, which spread the common belief that servicemen were as alien as the places they visited.[81] The British sailor was being transformed in the latter nineteenth century into a reflection of white imperial masculinity. The sailor no longer embodied excess and vulgarity but rather represented self-restraint, courage, and respectability.[82] Boucicault's soldiers in the passage above depict these traits. Sweenie rises above his station as a private to voice the unanimous concerns of the other soldiers. Boucicault's characters were to the army what Jack Tar was to the navy, presenting an ideal man on stage that the lower classes who witnessed the performance were meant to emulate.

The other outstanding feature of Boucicault's officers is their overall knowledge of the mutiny and their full situational awareness. Randal knows of the rebels' treachery even as knowledge of the mutiny amongst the civilians is limited. Any misfortune that befalls the British had to be caused by the betrayal of the sepoys and could not have been the fault of any Briton. This play was one of the first to incorporate information, which was crucial to imperial surveillance and control, as a

[80] Ibid, 32-33.
[81] Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack,* 2-3.
[82] Ibid, 3.

central plot device.[83] In the middle of the play, Jessie uses the information found in a British newspaper to expose the lies of the villain Nana Sahib.

> JESSIE.{reading the paper} "And under these conditions, Cawnpore was surrendered; the garrison marched out, and entered the boats provided for their safe transport."
> NANA. YOU say your countrymen still look for aid, but they know not that the sahib Havelock was defeated by troops. From Lahore to Alahabad, Hindoostan is ours, you shall write these things that they may know; they will believe. Yourword, and they will yield. Inshallah! they shall go forth safely ; we will show mercy—on my head be it.
> JESSIE. (reads) "No sooner were the boats containing the troops, the women and children, in the midst of the streamthan the enemy opened a murderous fire, and a work of slaughter began."[84]

The newspaper Jessie inexplicably finds in her jail cell delivers an objective British truth against Indian lies. Boucicault was one of the first dramatists of the Victorian era to incorporate a newspaper into the plot, which would become a common theme of imperialist melodramas in the later decades.[85] When Nana offers mercy to his captives, Jessie reads about the massacre of Cawnpore and convinces the British not to trust him.[86]

One of the most important consequences of the Sepoy Mutiny for British culture was the death of an attitude of indifference toward the Indian empire, which was replaced by hatred. The notion of a 'mild Hindu' was supplanted by that of a

[83] Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy*, 138-39.
[84] Boucicault, *Relief of Lucknow*, 24.
[85] Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy*, 139.
[86] Boucicault, *Relief of Lucknow*, 24-25.

treacherous and cruel people.[87] Nana Sahib was the real perpetrator of the Cawnpore massacre in which two-hundred women and children were massacred by the sepoys during the outbreak of the Mutiny.[88] The real Nana Sahib was the adopted son of the last *peshwa* (prime minister) of the Maratha confederacy which had surrendered to the East India Company in 1818.[89] This connection to a former adversary and competitor of the British on the subcontinent added to his infamy. By the time *The Relief of Lucknow* was being performed in London, the Cawnpore massacre would have been common knowledge.[90] Nana Sahib was a recognizable villain to the British, an embodiment of the unstable nature of imperial power in India at the time.

The final group of characters in the play are the sepoys, who are, as one would expect, portrayed in an entirely and irredeemably negative light. Boucicault wrote the *Relief of Lucknow* while the event was ongoing based entirely on a single news report.[91] Therefore the information Boucicault had regarding how he conceptualized his Indian characters would have come from Orientalist literature and knowledge. However, as Edward Said stated in *Orientalism*, "every writer on the Orient assumes some prior knowledge of it."[92] While Boucicault was by no means a historian of the Orient, Orientalist preconceptions were accessible to playwrights such as Boucicault whose performances reached the masses.

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[87] Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914 : A Study of Empire and Expansion*, 3rd ed. Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2002), 141.

[88] Hyam, *Imperial Century*, 126.

[89] Mukherjee, "Kanpur Massacres," 97.

[90] Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy*, 137.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25Th anniversary edition. with a new preface by the author ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 20.

Said's theory of Orientalism explains how stereotypes came to be as a result of power structures. The British did not acquire 'objective' knowledge about the Indians, but rather accumulated it due to their empire.[93] Orientalist knowledge thus grew out of inequality of the colonizers over the colonized.[94] The British had the opportunity to send scholars and writers to India in order to study it while the Indians could not do the same to the British. The Orient was alien and threatening; it needed to be known and understood in order to be governed and such knowledge came through the form of scholars, soldiers and explorers.[95] The British in Lucknow claimed to know everything about the Indians and it was their knowledge that gave them their victory. The stereotypes Boucicault drew upon when portraying the Indians in his play came from an unequal and one-way exchange of knowledge that did not accurately represent the Indian people.

One important aspect of the portrayal of the sepoys in *The Relief of Lucknow* is that they are all Muslim as opposed to Hindu. Nana Sahib, in reality a Hindu, and his servant Achmet, in a parody of Islamic phrases, typically interspersed "Inshallah!" and "Mohammed is his prophet" within their dialogue with no provocation or context.[96] In contrast to the well-spoken British officers and the simple civilians and soldiers, the sepoy leaders exhibit these quirks in order to widen the cultural gap between Boucicault's Western audience and the Eastern subject matter. Said stated that the Orient was alien and threatening, with Islam serving as the epitome of the

[93] Ibid, 122.
[94] Ibid, 150.
[95] Ibid, 91-92.
[96] Boucicault, *Relief of Lucknow*, 27.

'other' to European civilization.[97] The Mutiny was committed by both Muslims and Hindus, who shared in indignities at the hands of their British masters. Society in northern India had been brought together by a common enemy.[98] But European audiences may have had more of a passing familiarity with Islam which, according to Said, would have been threatening by its very nature before one takes into account the details of the Sepoy Mutiny itself.

The Mughal Empire, the largest polity in India prior to British conquest, had a tradition at court of tolerant Islam that incorporated Hindu customs. However, due to growing Christian missionary activity among the British during the 1850s, there arose in parallel a fundamentalist Islamic movement in Delhi, inspired by Shah Waliullah.[99] Waliullah denounced the worship of saints and Muslim attendance of Hindu festivals. In opposition to the tolerant Sufism of the elites, Waliullah and his disciples found support among the merchant classes that felt excluded from politics. In opposition to an exclusionary Mughal elite in Delhi and a growing militant British Christian community, the Indian Islamic fundamentalists spoke out against British rule. There was growing suspicion amongst the British of a "Wahhabi conspiracy" by Indian Muslims to seize power in Delhi. The British authorities launched a raid to capture the leaders of the alleged conspiracy in 1852, and to find any actual evidence that the plot was real.[100] Regardless of any truth behind the conspiracy, the British were apprehensive toward Indian Muslims. The initial belief was that the Mutiny in

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[97] Said, *Orientalism,* 70.

[98] Mukherjee, "Kanpur Massacres," 107.

[99] William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal The Fall of a Dynasty: Delhi, 1857* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 73.

[100] Ibid, 78-80.

1857 was the culmination of the Wahhabi conspiracy, although this was proven to be false.

The second Boucicault melodrama to be discussed may not appear outwardly imperialist at first glance, yet it does contain scenes and characters which are very telling regarding public sentiment towards the colonies and Ireland as a colony of England. *The Shaughraun* was first performed in London in 1875 and shares some themes with *The Relief of Lucknow* seventeen years earlier.[101] *The Shaughraun* is an Irish melodrama which similarly paints the empire as dangerous and precarious. The plot revolves around an English captain in Ireland searching for an escaped fugitive bound for Australia. The fugitive, Robert Ffolliott (sic), escapes to reunite with his sister Claire and helps save her farm from an abusive landlord. The landlord, Corry Kinchela, is the informant who had Robert arrested. With assistance from a local troublemaker known as the Shaughraun and Captain Molineaux who has fallen in love with Claire, Robert has Kinchela arrested and saves his family home.

The play opens with a scene in which the English Captain Molineux looks down upon an Irish girl as a simple peasant. He remarks that her language is unpronounceable and generally treats her as a child.[102] In a linguistic disparity reminiscent of that found between the officers and soldiery in *The Relief of Lucknow*, Molineux's first action in the play is to place himself above Claire, not only for being

[101] Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy*, 105.

[102] Dion Boucicault, *The Shaughraun* (1875): 6, https://literature-proquest-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/searchFulltext.do?id=Z000748873&childSectionId=Z000748873&divLevel=0&queryId=3097123980693&trailId=167F2FDD809&area=drama&forward=textsFT&queryType=findWork (accessed December 23, 2018).

below him in station but also due to her being Irish. Claire's economic troubles are seen by Molineux as due to the racial characteristics of the Irish:

> Molineux. You have to suffer bitterly indeed for ages of family imprudence, and the Irish extravagance of your ancestors.
>
> Arte. Yes, sir, the extravagance of their love for their country, and the imprudence of their fidelity to their faith![103]

Here Boucicault addresses both an English and Irish audience. There was a general stereotype on the English stage of the Irish as buffoons, or the 'joke race' of the empire.[104] In this opening scene Boucicault reiterates dominant stereotypes and then subverts them with the two women's resolve to defend themselves from Molineux's quips.[105] Through Molineux, Boucicault reminds the audience of the darker side of imperialism for its practitioners. In *The Shaughraun* the protagonists are not the conquerors as in Lucknow, but the Irish, who are the subjugated people.

Boucicault's decision to use a conflict between tenants and their landlord as a driving plot point was not without precedent. Abusive landlords had been a longstanding issue in Ireland, with land reforms coming to public attention just as the legitimacy of empire weakened in the aftermath of the Sepoy Mutiny.[106] In the 1870s, the decade that *The Shaughraun* was produced, Britain was gradually granting increased protection to Irish tenants against their landlords, in an attempt to appease growing nationalist resistance. At the same time, in response to the Mutiny and a need

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[103] Ibid, 9.
[104] Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy,* 64.
[105] Ibid, 107.
[106] Hyam, *Imperial Century,* 142-43.

for stability, Britain was empowering the landlords in India.[107] Irish nationalist pride is made evident in *The Shaughraun* when Arte calls upon her ancestry in the passage above to defend herself against Molineux's snide remarks.[108] What is most evident from these two plays is that post-Mutiny theatrical productions of the empire portray it as standing on a razor's edge. While there was never any doubt that the British would be victorious in Lucknow, the message of the dangers of the East is made abundantly clear. Ireland is a different case, equally dangerous but much more familiar.[109]

In the early scene quoted above, Boucicault establishes an unequal power dynamic between an Englishman and an Irish girl. In spite of Molineux and Claire's flirtations, the captain is in Ireland to assist in the recapture of an escaped Irish convict, Robert Ffolliott (sic).[110] Despite Molineux's pleasantries toward Claire after his initial snub, he represents an occupying force. He is, in a sense, a member of a 'foreign' military with intentions to arrest an Irishman. Molineux continues to distinguish himself from his Irish counterparts through his comparative refinement. The first Irishman to enter the scene, the landlord Corry Kinchela, is a braggadocious, crude, and rather cold individual who mistreats his female tenants.[111] Despite looking down upon the Irish women initially, Molineux is shown to be the better man than the landlord by his very nature as an English gentleman.[112]

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[107] Ibid, 143.
[108] Boucicault, *The Shaughraun,* 9.
[109] Hyam, *Imperial Century,* 170-71.
[110] Boucicault, *The Shaughraun,* 7.
[111] Ibid, 9.
[112] Ibid, 8-9.

We recall that the British officers in Lucknow were just shy of omnipotent when it came to predicting their enemy's actions and the best course to take. This stands in direct contrast with the cluelessness and fumbling nature of Captain Molineux as he attempts to navigate Ireland. While hiding out on the cliffs awaiting assistance from Conn, the Shaughraun, the convict Robert Ffolliott saves Molineux from walking off of the cliffs and into a bog.[113] While the circumstances of the plots were drastically different, the subject matter of the two plays remained the same: two British officers in a foreign, occupied land. However, Molineux seemed incapable of traversing Ireland without local aid, as if the land itself resisted the English.

The Shaughraun drew inspiration from the Fenian uprising of 1867, a decade after the Mutiny. The Fenians were a transatlantic offshoot of the Irish Republican Brotherhood which planned to free Ireland from English rule by using the support of Irish-American revolutionaries and invading Dublin. The uprising did not amount to much, as the Fenian militia fell apart due to local rivalries producing enough informants for the English to suppress it before it really began. While the physical threat had been neutralized by the police, the Fenians caused a panic among the English public and politicians who feared Ireland would break out in full rebellion.[114] The character of Robert is a Fenian leader who escapes deportation to Australia following his defeat by the English. Many Fenians, including the fictional Robert, were arrested due to tips by informants. However, Queen Victoria issued a pardon to many of these rebels due to the realization that most of the tips had been to settle

[113] Boucicault, *The Shaughraun*, 14.

[114] Edward Macdonald, "Who's Afraid of the Fenians? The Fenian Scare on Prince Edward Island, 1865-1867." in *Acadiensis* 38, no. 1 (2009): 33-34.

local disputes and familial grudges. Boucicault's use of two informants, Kinchela and Harvey Duff, as the villains was meant to elicit immediate scorn in the aftermath of such an embarrassing event for the police and government.[115]

The perception of Ireland as a colony of the British Empire was a subject of much debate throughout the nineteenth century. The Act of Union was passed in 1800 in order to secure more Irish support for military recruitment during the Napoleonic Wars with France. At best, the majority of Ireland was ambivalent towards its annexation. At worst, and arguably more commonly, the Irish were openly hostile toward the prospect. English rule over Ireland, dating back to the sixteenth century, promoted a landowning Protestant class which ruled over the majority Catholic peasantry.[116] This adds a further undertone of religious and social animosity to Kinchela's character in *The Shaughraun.* Kinchela is reviled by his own community as an abusive landlord, but also as an individual friendly to the English, and a part of a social class dominated by Protestants.[117]

Irish resentment against English occupation can best be understood by placing the methods of English rule into the context of wider imperialism. The tactics for governance and suppression in Ireland were strikingly similar to those used abroad in the non-white colonies. The aforementioned Protestant landowners mirror the local elites (landowners and princes) in India. It was common practice in systems of indirect rule to delegate local authority to a native elite. The Protestant minority of Ireland served such a purpose. The prospect of colonizing the entirety of Ireland

[115] Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy,* 109.
[116] Hyam, *Imperial Century,* 166.
[117] Boucicault, *The Shaughraun,* 13.

proper with Scots and Englishmen was open after the great famine of the 1840s which was accompanied by mass migrations to the Americas. Land was readily available for foreign occupation, although the opportunity was passed up for continued Anglicization through education.[118]

Racial stereotypes of the Irish varied. They were seen as white imperial subjects, savage barbarians, and everything in between. Such drastically opposing perceptions of the Irish as a race depended on the MP or administrator's own sensibilities and how hostile the local climate was. There was a caution not to entirely dismiss the Irish as outright savages, lest the racial boundaries between whites and non-white subjects elsewhere in the empire were blurred. The British did not want the Irish to find obvious common ground with the Indians, who had mutinied in 1857. The Irish existed in a state of both union and colonization, a paradox which resulted in confused policies of governance. When the Irish problem was treated as one of mere ignorance, then education policies were put in place. However, during times of animosity, acts of extreme repression against the Irish were deemed acceptable to the British administrators. Despite Britain's treatment of Ireland as a colony in most respects, and the existence of intense racial discord, efforts to educate the Irish brought them closer to the British themselves.[119] In India, meanwhile, racial boundaries hardened after the Mutiny.[120] The confused state of Ireland within the

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[118] David Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Empire," *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, edited by William Roger Louis, Nicholas P Canny, P. J Marshall, A. N Porter, Judith M Brown, and Robin W Winks, The Oxford History of the British Empire (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1998), 498-499.

[119] Ibid, 503.

[120] Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*. New Cambridge History of India, Iii, 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 44.

British imperial system helps contextualize the ambivalent attitudes in *The Shaughraun.*

Despite Molineux's poor first impression and his standing in opposition to the hero Robert, he does end up as a protagonist. Molineux serves as Boucicault's representation of England itself, a physical embodiment of all of the vices and virtues of the country. The play itself ends with the marriage of Molineux and Claire, the Irish girl.[121] With Claire as an embodiment of Irish pride and innocence, a union between her and Molineux is rather symbolic of the United Kingdom itself. *The Shaughraun* is a pro-Irish tale in which the villains are not the English, but Irishmen who acted as traitors to their own kind. The play promotes the unity between Ireland and England, which could have been the result of Boucicault catering to the censors, or a call for understanding and cooperation between the feuding nations.

One of the more important underlying elements of the story concerns Australia. Robert Ffolliott was being exiled as a Fenian to Australia to serve out his sentence.[122] This was the only other British colony to be mentioned in the performance. This is important as deportation to Australia is a punishment to be avoided at all costs. To an Irishman, the empire represents nothing but subjugation, discipline, and exile. There is no description of the conditions in Australia in Boucicault's work; the mere mention of the name of the colony lets the audience know it was a place to be avoided. Indeed, Robert risks greater punishment by escaping back to Ireland rather than serving out his sentence. Through the lack of an

[121] Boucicault, *The Shaughraun,* 62-63.
[122] Ibid, 8.

explanation of Australia one can surmise that Boucicault assumed that the average Briton who patronized his play would be knowledgeable enough about what purpose the colony served and could fill in the blanks with their own imagination.

Boucicault's representation of Australia came at a time when the British were reevaluating the status and position of their overseas colonies. The Mutiny, coupled with German and Italian unification in the 1860s and 1870 produced new European rivals to global British supremacy.[123] In 1883, just thirteen years after German unification, J.R. Seeley published his famous *Expansion of England,* in which he promoted the idea that the white colonies, such as Australia should be viewed as an extension of the mother country rather than as separate colonies.[124] While Seeley was a historian and lecturer and not a representative of public opinion, it was his influential book which helped to shape imperialist discourse in Britain in the last decade of the nineteenth century.[125] Seeley raised the alarm among intellectuals and politicians about the emergence of Germany and Russia as major rivals to Britain, in particular a threat from Russia to India.[126] The significance of Boucicault's portrayal of Australia in 1875 as a punishment and penal colony is that not even a decade after *The Shaughraun's* publication there were calls for a transformation in how Australia should be perceived in the empire. As a performance meant to be viewed by the

[123] John Rowan Griffiths, *Imperial Culture in Antipodean Cities, 1880-1939*, Britain and the World (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1-2.

[124] Seeley, *Expansion of England,* 147.

[125] E. H. H. Green "The Political Economy of Empire, 1880-1914," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Edited by William Roger Louis, Nicholas P Canny, P. J Marshall, A. N Porter, Judith M Brown, and Robin W Winks, The Oxford History of the British Empire (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 1998), 346.

[126] Seeley, *Expansion of England,* 229.

masses and, to make money, Boucicault's play would have had to make sense to the public at large. One could make the assumption that in 1875, public opinion on Australia's standing had not yet been swayed by elite intellectuals more concerned with the rise of Germany and Russia as threats to imperial security.

This analysis of Boucicault's plays demonstrates a link between the Indian Mutiny and the Irish problem. The racial hierarchy taking form across the West during these decades could not reconcile the Irish as part of the white race. The Irish could not be dismissed as non-white lest it murky the waters for the British in India. The combination of the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and the Fenian uprising of 1867 led to a of anxiety toward the empire. The threat from within was the most dangerous for the British Empire, and the plays of Boucicault reflected this. Despite the heroism of the British soldier, the empire was in a precarious situation from the 1850s to early 1870s.

Chapter 2: Gilbert and Sullivan, From Anxiety to Comedy

The final decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a resurgence of chartered companies in the European Scramble for Africa. Chartered companies had been a staple of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonialism, particularly in the foundation of Britain's North American colonies and, as we have seen, in India. The East India Company represented one of the first attempts at indirect rule by European powers over their foreign possessions. Its charter, which was continually renewed by the Crown, gave the company the power to make treaties with foreign governments, raise and maintain standing armies, mint its own money, and administer civil and criminal justice over British subjects.[127]

In the first half of the nineteenth century the East India Company was under repeated parliamentary investigations into corruption and faced complaints that its policies in India were harming trade and the native peoples. The private business interests of Members of Parliament, coupled with the British global war on the slave trade sparked concerns over the conditions of Indian subjects under the Company, which furthered the investigations leading up to the Mutiny.[128] Private colonies in Southeast Asia such as Brunei, owned by the individual James Brooke, further damaged the image of charter companies as the legal standing of private governments were called into question. Brooke's legal battles over the status of his colony under the crown and in international law consumed most of the 1850s.[129] The poor perception of charter companies and the East India Company itself prior to the

[127] Steven Press, *Rogue Empires : Contracts and Conmen in Europe's Scramble for Africa* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), 24-25.

[128] Ibid, 28.

[129] Ibid, 24.

Mutiny meant that it was not surprising that the Company was dissolved in 1858. The East India Company shouldered nearly all of the blame for the Mutiny and the Crown technically purchased India from the Company, which was the legal rationale for Britain assuming direct control over the colony.[130]

The context of the revival of chartered companies is vital to understand the two plays by W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan discussed here, *The Mikado* (first performed in 1885) and *Utopia, Limited* (first performed in 1893). Unlike the two plays of Boucicault, which explicitly deal with British colonies, Gilbert and Sullivan's plays are set in a fictitious town in Japan and on a fictitious Pacific island community. *Utopia, Limited* is a more overtly imperialist production, yet the themes and character portrayals in both plays will be shown to have imperialist themes. *Utopia, Limited* will be analyzed first, out of chronological order, to build the case that *The Mikado* was an imperialist production.

William Schwenck Gilbert was an English author and playwright born in 1836. During the 1860s he wrote various stories, plays, and journalism while also writing operas on the side he hoped to one day produce. He made a name for himself as a comedic and satirical writer, and was served as a war correspondent during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Gilbert and Sullivan were brought together in collaboration by Richard D'Oyly Carte in 1871.[131] Arthur Sullivan was an English composer born in 1842. Before he was twenty he was known as a musical genius;

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[130] Ibid, 31.

[131] Jane W. Stedman, "Gilbert, Sir William Schwenck (1836–1911), playwright," In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2014), http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-33400.

being named so by Charles Dicken's support boosted Sullivan's popularity. His music was flexible enough to fit with Gilbert's clever writing and was also adapted to serve as dance music and for parade marches.[132]

Gilbert and Sullivan collaborated on fourteen productions known as the Savoy Operas. Of the fourteen, five of the plays, *HMS Pinafore, The Mikado, The Yeomen of the Guard, The Gondoliers,* and *Utopia, Limited,* all contain overtly imperialist themes. An additional four operas included army or naval officers as central characters. This suggests that the empire was an important enough subject for Gilbert and Sullivan to put to the stage. The Savoy Operas were characterized by a large chorus and extravagant costumes and set designs. Carte's publishing company bankrolled the lavish operas and paid for the expensive sets and costumes. Over the 1870s the plays were profitable enough for Carte to not only pay Gilbert and Sullivan a great deal for their work, but also to build a new theatre in 1882. The Savoy Theatre responded to growing public demand for the operas, which sold out regularly. The theatre could seat nearly 1300 patrons and was funded through the establishment of a limited-liability company by Carte in 1876. Gilbert and Sullivan's collaboration ended with Sullivan's death in 1900. Both men died wealthy and world renowned.[133]

Together Gilbert and Sullivan are credited with inventing a new theatrical genre, the English comedic opera. The genre was developed to parody older styles of

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[132] Arthur Jacobs, "Sullivan, Sir Arthur Seymour (1842–1900), composer and conductor," In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* (2006). http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-26772.

[133] Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan : Gender, Genre, Parody*, Gender and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 75-78.

theatre, including the melodramas Boucicault was known for. Rather than the grounded reality of a melodrama which would have been under close scrutiny of the censors, the extravagance of the comedic operas allowed for further liberties with social commentary.[134] While some may have taken the nationalist themes in the plays of Gilbert and Sullivan at face value, they were tailored for a British audience whose immersion in Victorian culture would have allowed the sarcasm and parody to become evident.[135] Despite the immense cost of the costumes and sets, the plays were popular enough to be profitable, therefore proving that the public did consume their messages.[136]

Utopia, Limited or *The Flowers of Progress* was first performed at the Savoy theatre in 1893 and is set on the Pacific island nation of Utopia, implied through costume design and mannerisms of the characters to be Polynesian.[137] The play was so popular that a review of the opening night from *The Times* stated: "No doubt Mr. Carte would have found it convenient to enlarge his theatre to three times its size, for it is said on good authority that the demand for seats at the production was greater than on any former occasion."[138] The Utopian peoples were portrayed through Orientalist stereotypes to an absurd degree for comedic effect. The opening chorus of

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[134] Ibid, 4.

[135] Ibid, 6.

[136] Ibid, 327.

[137] W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *Utopia, Limited* (1893): 408, https://literature-proquest-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/searchFulltext.do?id=Z000082845&childSectionId=Z200082849&divLevel=&queryId=3103986662153&area=poetry&forward=textsFT&pageSize=&print=No&size=177Kb&queryType=findWork&fromToc=true&warn=Yes (Accessed January 3, 2019).

[138] "Utopia, Limited *The Times* Review," Gilbert and Sullivan Archive, last modified August 29, 2011, https://gsarchive.net/utopia/reviews/times93.html.

the performance included lines about the laziness and passivity of the people: "In lazy languor---motionless, we lie and dream of nothingness; for visions come from poppydom (sic) direct at our command."[139] This conforms to Edward Said's claim in *Orientalism* that non-Europeans were perceived as being locked in time, slothful and incapable of improving their civilization.[140] Furthermore, the Utopians spoke in English, not simply for the benefit of the audience, but as a detail of the plot; the natives had abolished the use of their own language in favor of English as superior. Those who broke out into the 'native' tongue espoused nonsensical noises in parody of Asiatic languages such as when the Public Exploder first arrives: "Callamalala galalate! Caritalla lalabalee kallalale poo!"[141] Non-European languages were seen as not alive and growing unlike European languages, and would and therefore need to be replaced in order for natives to comprehend complex modern scientific concepts.[142]

The plot of *Utopia, Limited* revolves around the court of King Paramount of Utopia. The King's eldest daughter returns from Britain with six representatives of various pillars of British society: a Lord Chamberlain, the captain of the Life Guards, a captain of the Royal Navy, an envoy from a joint-stock company, a member of parliament, and a member of a county council. These self-titled "flowers of progress" set about Anglicizing the Utopians with the goal of turning the island into Britain. As the play progresses, the Utopians gladly embrace the British way of life, with disastrous consequences.

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[139] Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia*, 408.
[140] Said, *Orientalism*, 96.
[141] Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia*, 408-409.
[142] Said, *Orientalism*, 146.

The Utopians live under a tyrannical despotic king who makes all of the decisions for his people without their contributions and without discourse. Lacking any form of representation of the nobility or the people in a parliamentary system, the Utopians degenerate further into lethargy and immorality.[143] The King himself is described as despotic and immoral by his own courtiers and by his press: "It (the newspaper) actually teems with circumstantially convincing details of the King's abominable immoralities! If this high-class journal may be believed, His Majesty is one of the most Heliogabalian (sic) profligates that ever disgraced an autocratic throne!"[144] The King's first entrance demonstrates the themes of sensuality, eroticism, and fantasy, as described by Said.[145] King Paramount of Utopia makes his first appearance with a harem of female dancers escorting him onto the stage in a display of extravagance and excess:

"Enter ***King Paramount****, attended by Guards and Nobles , and preceded by Girls dancing before him.*

Chorus: Quaff the nectar---cull the roses---
Gather fruit and flowers in plenty!
For our King no longer poses---
Sing the songs of *far niente* !
Wake the lute that sets us lilting,
Dance a welcome to each comer."[146]

[143] Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia*, 408.
[144] Ibid, 409.
[145] Said, *Orientalism*, 188.
[146] Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia*, 413.

This scene is full of movement, sound and color, which is immediately contrasted by the entrance of the first British and Anglicized native characters. The twin daughters of King Paramount, Nekaya and Kalyba, are demure, modestly dressed, quiet and stand with hands clasped and eyes facing down.[147] This is because the two daughters were trained by their English governess, Lady Sophy, to behave as proper British ladies.

One gets the impression from the portrayal of the British ladies in *Utopia, Limited* that Gilbert and Sullivan are mocking their own culture and behavior. During their duet, the twin princesses sing, "And as we stand, like clockwork toys...Extremely modest (so we're told), Demurely coy---divinely cold."[148] In stark contrast to the opulence and energy of the King's arrival with the native dancers, the British-trained princesses stand still, almost catatonic in state. By calling them clockwork toys, Gilbert states rather openly the machinelike behavior British society wished their women to engage in. Said claimed that the Orient was conceptualized to serve as an 'other' in order for Europeans to better define themselves against a nebulous alien entity. As this play shows, Orientalist stereotypes could also be deployed to criticize those elements of their own society they found wanting.[149]

While Said's theory assumes the Orient mainly consisted of the Islamic world, the process of producing information on the Orient applies to other regions as well.[150] By geographical standards Japan is located in what would typically be considered the

[147] Ibid, 414.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Said, *Orientalism,* 43.
[150] Ibid, 51.

Orient, whereas the Polynesian island of *Utopia, Limited* would not be. Nevertheless, Gilbert and Sullivan's portrayal of Polynesian culture conforms to Said's theory, which describes where knowledge comes from. The British in *Utopia, Limited* believed they were superior to the Utopians by virtue of their knowledge of them. This was due to an unequal power dynamic - the Utopians lived in an implicitly Stone Age society while the British arrived on the island in steamships. The Orientalism present in *Utopia, Limited* is best summarized by Said himself when he argues that "the Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in-or fear of-novelty."[151]

Gilbert fabricated this primitive society in order to make observations about Britain. He utilized the most blatant and cliched Orientalist tropes in order to portray an alien land in appearance alone. The behaviors of the Utopians and the keen observations they make throughout the performance as they remark on strangeness of British culture makes them more British than Oriental. The cultural discrepancies between the British and Utopians are established immediately but are confused by the end as Utopia becomes fully Anglicized.[152] The Utopians regularly comment on imported British practices which have negative qualities or seek to remove any joy and happiness found in the native culture. Upon the completion of the first act, the Utopian characters all dress in British attire. In response, the King remarks, "To a Monarch who has been accustomed to the uncontrolled use of his limbs, the costume of a British Field Marshal is, perhaps, at first, a little cramping. Are you sure that this

[151] Ibid, 59.
[152] Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan,* 328.

is all right? It's not a practical joke is it?"[153] The character of the King serves as a straight man in the play. Although he is fumbling and complicit in the Anglicization of his people, it is not without some self-awareness of the damage it is causing.

The implication one may draw from Gilbert's criticism of British culture in the 1890s is that the attitudes of the British to non-European 'others' had shifted since the Indian Mutiny. Despite being British in all but name and dress, the Utopians remain, with suspension of disbelief, an Oriental people. The Utopians are not the threatening, conniving, dastardly villains of *Relief of Lucknow,* but an observant and self-aware society which, most importantly, has non-European virtues which stand in stark contrast to the reserved and mechanical attitude of the British. Two decades without major colonial uprising since the Indian Mutiny, along with the rapid colonization of Africa and the Pacific, instilled a confidence in Britain's mastery over the world which alleviated some of the threatening elements which existed earlier in the century.

Joint-stock companies are a central theme of *Utopia, Limited,* as Carolyn Williams points out. If one recalls the damaged reputation of the East India Company even before it shouldered the blame for the 1857 Mutiny, then the resurgence of similar company forms in the last decades of the nineteenth century must have been baffling to many observers. Williams specifically names the Panama Canal scandal in early 1893 and the Glasgow Bank fraud of 1878 as likely inspirations for the company that colonizes Gilbert's Utopia.[154] The former scandal involved massive

[153] Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia,* 439.
[154] Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan,* 330.

corruption by politicians to hide the illicit activities of joint-stock companies operating in the Panama Canal Zone. The scandal was caused by wealthy and influential backers of the Panama Company misleading investors and banks and defaulting on loans. Even the government of Panama was believed to be involved. The result was a public trial in France, of which the British audience would have been aware.[155]

The pseudo-antagonist of Gilbert's play is Mr. Goldbury, a joint-stock company promoter who offers to incorporate the island nation of Utopia. In an informative and absurdist song, Goldbury describes the process and benefits of incorporation which, for the importance of the story, includes limited liability for shareholders and local elites:

> Some seven men form an Association
> (If possible, all Peers and Baronets),
> They start off with a public declaration
> To what extent they mean to pay their debts…
> The good sense of doing so
> Will be evident at once to any debtor,
> When it's left to you to say
> What amount you mean to pay[156]

Immediately following Goldbury's song about the joint-stock companies, King Paramount expresses his concerns: "Well at first sight it strikes us as dishonest, But if it's good enough for virtuous England---The first commercial country in the world---

[155] California Digital Newspaper Collection, "Panama Canal Scandal," *Los Angeles Herald,* January 10, 1893, https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=LAH18930110.2.2&e=-------en--20--1--txt-txIN--------1, 1.

[156] Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia,* 434.

It's good enough for us."[157] The performance is filled with these quick asides by King Paramount, before he acquiesces in his farcical and impassioned desire to become British and to relinquish cultural and political control of his island to Britain. Conflict arises at the beginning of act two, when every Utopian is billed for their change in attire by the British company. To oppose this charge, every Utopian incorporates themselves in order to avoid liability.[158] Williams argues that Gilbert invented such a ridiculous scenario to criticize the ease with which one can create companies that benefit so heavily from the liability loophole.[159] Being culturally Anglicized in *Utopia, Limited,* according to Williams, meant being personally incorporated to protect free trade, in order to allow Britain, a nation, to shirk its responsibilities to its people in favor of the wealthy.[160]

Gilbert's anti-capitalist message in *Utopia, Limited* was laid on fairly thick, with people and nations becoming more like corporations and the country of Utopia renaming itself to Utopia Limited in order to mock both the naming conventions of joint-stock companies and state that the Utopian society was degraded by contact with Britain. *Utopia, Limited* was, like the Boucicault plays, representative of public sentiments and beliefs. The 1890s were a period of industry and rapid colonial expansion, and also a time when Marxist and socialist ideas were circulating around Europe and the West. Even those not politically committed to the socialist cause would have had some passing knowledge of criticisms of capitalism made popular by

[157] Ibid, 435.
[158] Ibid, 443.
[159] Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan,* 332.
[160] Ibid, 333.

Marx and Engels. For working and middle-class Londoners attending Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy Theatre, parody of the excesses of the joint-stock companies would have resonated.

The final play to be discussed is *The Mikado* or *The Town of Titipu*, first performed in 1885 at the Savoy Theatre. Unlike *Utopia, Limited,* which criticized colonialism and capitalism while holding a mirror to British culture through parody, *The Mikado* only does the latter. This is partly due to its earlier production date, when the critiques mentioned above had not yet been fully developed. The play was set in a fictional town in Japan, although the setting could have been anywhere outside of the West. Gilbert and Sullivan's representation of Japan was so far-fetched and unrealistic that no one was under any illusion that it was supposed to be an accurate portrayal.[161] The element that makes *The Mikado* unique amongst the plays included in this project is that Japan was never a British colony, nor a part of any European empire. As such the parodical nature of the performance and story requires one to look closer at the lyrics and mannerisms of the characters in order to understand that it is an overt parody of British culture.

Williams makes an important distinction between the portrayal of 'Japan' in *The Mikado* and Saidian Orientalism. The performance had just a flair of authenticity as Gilbert and Sullivan spent an exorbitant amount of money procuring costumes from Liberty & Company, a business which dealt in the trade of Japanese artifacts. They also had their actors coached on body languard and gestures by some Japanese residents from the exhibition village of Knightsbridge in England. According to

[161] Ibid, 256.

Williams, Gilbert and Sullivan practiced "cultural tourism" with *The Mikado.* She described the play as mocking "an insular, absorptive projection of Japan as a cultural 'other.'"[162]

Utopia and 'Japan' are both invented others for the purposes of parody and social commentary. Utopia was not Britain but tried to become it and was made worse in the attempt. Japan in *The Mikado* does not come in contact with Britain, nor does it entirely resemble it; the mixture of something foreign and something familiar and domestic created an entirely new society which does not seek to understand the Orient or pretend it does. The setting of Japan is almost irrelevant, as it exists only the poke fun at the late-Victorian obsession with Japanese culture. The characters of *The Mikado* presented themselves as 'Japanese gentlemen,' which immediately draws comparisons to the British gentleman and the role such a distinction held in Victorian society, which we also saw in the Boucicault plays.[163] The Macgregor brothers in *The Relief of Lucknow* were gentlemen officers of unparalleled refinement and bravery, and Captain Molineaux, for all of his prejudices against the Irish at the start, became the hero of *The Shaughraun.* The facade of a Japanese setting allowed Gilbert and Sullivan to make bold statements about the strange behavior of British elites. One of the goals of the Savoy Theatre was to explore what it meant to be British.[164] Japan stood as a shield in front of the mirror Gilbert and Sullivan held to British society.

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[162] Ibid, 258.

[163] Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Mikado* (1885): 176, https://literature-proquest-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/searchFulltext.do?id=Z000082618&childSectionId=Z000082618&divLevel=0&queryId=3101632216369&trailId=16879591627&area=drama&forward=textsFT&queryType=findWork (Accessed January 10, 2019).

[164] Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan,* 255.

The plot of the play revolves around the town of Titipu where the leader, the Mikado, declares flirtation a capital punishment. The Mikado's son, Nanki-Poo, returns from his travels abroad in disguise to rekindle his old relationship with Yum-Yum, his childhood sweetheart. All of the positions in the government of Titipu are held by one man, Pooh-Bah, who accumulated power when every other official resigned due to the Mikado's proclamation. The Mikado declares that someone must be executed soon, and due to the jealousy of another woman, Nanki-Poo is scheduled for the block. With the assistance of Ko-Ko, the high executioner, Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum escape with their lives and get married, while the Mikado finds out the truth of his son's identity.

The High Executioner Ko-Ko, one of the main characters, is elevated to his position on the premise that before he could execute anyone else, he must first behead himself thus serving as a warning and deterrent for anyone else who may engage in flirtation.[165] The character of the High Executioner in *The Mikado* evolved into the Public Exploder of *Utopia, Limited.* The Public Exploder in Utopia is meant to blow up the King should he fail in his duties to the people: "we are governed by a Despot who, although in theory, absolute---is, in practice, nothing of the kind---being watched day and night by two Wise Men whose duty it is, on his very first lapse from political or social propriety, to denounce him to me, the Public Exploder, and it then becomes my duty to blow up His Majesty with dynamite."[166] Both characters find themselves in uncomfortable positions that demand the exercise of violence under

[165] Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Mikado,* 179.
[166] Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia, Limited,* 409.

certain circumstances. However, the Executioner's duty is to kill those of a lower station who commit a crime based on an unjust law. Violence in *The Mikado* is exercised from the top downward, whereas in *Utopia, Limited* violence is exercised on behalf of the subjects against the rulers. *The Mikado,* as an allegory for Britain, displays how those at the bottom of society cannot win against unjust laws, with this law in particular being a pointed commentary on Victorian restrictions on public behavior such as the repression of emotion and adherence to a strict sense of morality. *Utopia, Limited,* being a later play, represents Gilbert's disillusionment with and desire for accountability for those in power by inventing a man whose duty it is to inflict violence on a corrupt monarch.

The Mikado also mocked the extreme patriotism found in imperialist propaganda and heroic melodramas such as Boucicault's *Relief of Lucknow* and the Jack Tar productions. The secret son of the Mikado, Nanki-Poo, upon returning in disguise to his home, sings a song of love for his homeland:

> But if patriotic sentiment is wanted,
> I've patriotic ballads cut and dried;
> For where'er our country's banner may be planted,
> All other local banners are defied!
> Our warriors, in serried ranks assembled,
> Never quail---or they conceal it if they do---
> And I shouldn't be surprised if nations trembled
> Before the mighty troops of Titipu!
> And if you call for a song of the sea,
> We'll heave the capstan(sic) round,
> [50] With a yeo heave ho, for the wind is free,

Her anchor's a-trip and her helm's a-lee,

Hurrah for the homeward bound!

Yeo-ho---heave ho---

Hurrah for the homeward bound![167]

This short section of one of the opening songs includes numerous allusions to themes of imperialism and conquest with a specifically British flair. "Serried ranks" refers to Napoleonic line infantry, a European style of warfare which would not have been prevalent in premodern Japan. The lyrics about Titipu's banners defying others is a direct reference to imperialism and the British belief in their own racial superiority and destiny to rule the earth. Such notions could be found in Seeley's *The Expansion of England*, which argues that that the trait of liberty, inherent to all of the British race, was what allowed it to flourish around the world.[168] Seeley's famous book, with which this thesis began, was published two years prior to *The Mikado's* first performance in 1885, and is credited as being a catalyst for the outbreak of imperial enthusiasm which was rampant throughout the 1890s.[169]

The mention of a captain and of sailing would have immediately formed a connection to Britishness. The navy continued to be a source of pride for Britain well into the late nineteenth century. It was also a symbol for manliness and patriotism, as the earlier discussion of Jack Tar shows.[170] But in the 1880s Britain was no longer the unrivaled master of the seas as it had been three decades prior. External threats from European rivals such as Russia and the newly unified Germany increased anxieties

[167] Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Mikado*, 178.
[168] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 118-119.
[169] Ibid, xii.
[170] Conley, *Jack Tar to Union Jack*, ix.

amongst the intelligentsia and the ruling class. Seeley claimed in 1883 that the greatest threat to British domination was an internal mutiny in India coupled with an attack by Russia across Central Asia.[171] According to Mary Conley, the Royal Navy quadrupled in size from 1850 until 1913 and instituted a series of reforms such as better living conditions on the lower decks, meant to attract more recruits and reduce the stigma of the wild and boisterous Jack Tar sailor.[172] Gilbert and Sullivan's earlier play the *H.M.S. Pinafore* directly parodied the trope of the polite and masculine sailor in 1878. The references to sailing in *The Mikado* were intended to remind the audience of Britain's glorious naval tradition in a moment of crisis.

The Mikado also addressed the issue of corruption and the consolidation of wealth and power in the hands of the few. The character of Pooh-Bah served as the "Lord High Everything Else" as he had gradually accumulated the duties of every office in the country.[173] His uniquely privileged position allows the protagonists, Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum, to shirk the unfair legal system and pursue their affections for one another. When the Mikado believes he has executed his son, he resigns himself to the laws which allegedly resulted in his heir's death.[174] This was yet another example of Gilbert's mockery of a legal system which, at the end of the century, appeared to favor the protection of corporations and property rather than life. Gilbert and Sullivan's commentary on legal absurdities was a result of the resurgence of joint-stock companies and the rapid expansion of the empire had during the 1880s.

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[171] Seeley, *Expansion of England,* 229.
[172] Conley, *Jack Tar to Union Jack,* 19.
[173] Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Mikado,* 176-178.
[174] Ibid, 214-216.

As John MacKenzie has argued, the play directly responded to, "an awareness of growing continental protectionism, European imperial rivalries, and endemic bouts of industrial depression."[175]

Gilbert and Sullivan's operas could be considered a form of counter-propaganda. The Jack Tar plays, which spanned the nineteenth century reinforced the public perception of the rowdy and unsophisticated sailor until, as MacKenzie argues, the titular character had been co-opted into the paragon of masculinity and Britishness abroad.[176] Jack Tar plays punched downward at the lowest of society (the common sailor), while Gilbert and Sullivan punched up at the British gentleman. In neither *The Mikado* nor *Utopia, Limited* will one find a lower class Briton as a character. Gilbert's parodies focus on high society, with criticisms of the wealthy and on colonization as a negative influence on native people.

The Indian Mutiny had been a turning point for British justifications for imperialism; the common belief was that the Indians had rejected the European gift of progress. The immediate reaction from the public, as evidenced in Boucicault's melodramas, was hostility toward colonial subjects, displays of patriotism in the face of danger, and an anxiety and uncertainty toward the future of colonies in the empire. Military heroes from the Mutiny and other colonial rebellions in the 1860s were treated as martyrs for the empire and their imagery and tales of bravery fostered an environment of patriotism in the face of adversity. Gilbert and Sullivan wrote *The Mikado* and *Utopia, Limited* in the entirely different historical context of the New

[175] MacKenzie "Empire and Metropolitan Cultures," 283.
[176] Ibid, 277.

Imperialism, as the wave of imperial enthusiasm propagated by Seeley and others came to be known.[177] New Imperialism was a time of self-reflection and an attempt at societal reconceptualization which stemmed from a relatively small group of elite imperial enthusiasts who sought to place the empire above all other communities and identities in Britain. The empire itself, according to these proponents, should be considered an extension of the British race, as if the borders of Britain had naturally expanded through the settlement of the white colonies.[178]

It is worth reviewing the timeline of the four plays discussed in this thesis. Boucicault's melodramas, *The Relief of Lucknow* and *The Shaughraun* were first performed in 1858 and 1875 respectively. Gilbert and Sullivan's comedic operas *The Mikado* and *Utopia, Limited* debuted in 1885 and 1893. Over those three and a half decades Britain took direct control of its Indian colony, faced rebellion in Ireland, put down a revolt in Jamaica in 1865, witnessed the rise of a European rival when Germany unified in 1870, and vastly expanded its territory during the Scramble for Africa in the 1880s. The Indian Mutiny was arguably the most influential of those events on the psyche of the British. It was perceived as a battle for the very survival of the empire and the massacres of white civilians caused further racial tensions in the non-white colonies.[179] In the aftermath of the Mutiny, the empire had been shaken, its fragility laid bare for the world to see. From 1857 until 1867 the empire seemed under siege from internal strife in the colonies and Ireland. Perception of the empire for the people of Britain, when told through the lens of theatre, was that of danger and

[177] Ibid, 279-283.
[178] Seeley, *Expansion of England,* 233.
[179] MacKenzie "Empire and Metropolitan Cultures," 280.

heroism. Boucicault's melodramas told tales of Britain's solidifying its hold over its overseas possessions, yet they also participated in a culture of insecurity and militant patriotism as a result. The unbridled heroism of Randal and Geordie Macgregor and their near-superhuman precognition of events fueled the culture of colonial hero worship MacKenzie describes.[180]

As previously discussed, the tactful way in which Boucicault addressed England's colonization of Ireland in *The Shaughraun* was part of an ongoing debate about the position of Ireland within the United Kingdom and the empire at large. While neither of the Gilbert and Sullivan plays weigh in on the Irish Home Rule issue, which became more controversial in the 1890s, they did write in a small line in *Utopia, Limited* which expressed the confusion and internal conflict its audience must have felt at the time.[181] The King twice sings, "That all Utopia shall henceforth be modelled Upon that glorious country called Great Britain---To which some add---but others do not---Ireland."[182] While Boucicault, as an Irish playwright, made Ireland's colonization an important element of his work, Gilbert and Sullivan included lyrics about its ambiguous situation in jest eighteen years later. For such a joke to resonate with the audience, the public must have felt a sense of fatigue about the issue, as even a foreign king in the Pacific knew that the Irish situation was complicated.

The major change in the perception of imperialism among the British public that emerges from these plays is that, from the mid-1880s onward, anxiety and fear toward the 'other' was superseded by cultural introspection. Boucicault's melodramas

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[180] Ibid, 281.
[181] Fitzpatrick, "Ireland and the Empire," 506-507.
[182] Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia, Limited,* 413.

dealt with external threats, or how Britain or Ireland interacted with the outside world. By the time of *The Mikado,* Britain had not fought in a major European conflict since the Crimean War in 1856 and would not have a colonial rebellion on the scale of the Mutiny until the Boer War in 1900. Britain had successfully quelled resistance in its colonies and Ireland in the 1860s and 1870s, and thus had tasted victory for over a decade prior to the performance of *The Mikado.* Gilbert and Sullivan, who began their collaboration in 1871, took part in Britain's reevaluation of its place in the world and in the global enterprise it had created during a period of relative calm across the empire.[183]

New Imperialism was a defensive ideology, which had to confront the fact that Britain no longer had free reign to do what it wished outside of Europe. Following the assessment of Robinson and Gallagher that the British Empire before 1857 sought informal control to protect free trade, E.H.H. Green argues that the New Imperialism was a response to the perceived failure of that model. Green notes that the rapid expansion of Britain's formal empire was countered by an equivalent decrease in its informal empire. As other European empires expanded in the 1880s, British businessmen believed that preemptive expansion of formal territory was necessary for free trade and protection against foreign tariffs. Private investment by wealthy businessmen into the empire waxed and waned with the economy.[184]

If one were to accept Porter's limited model of imperial influence, then these wealthy businessmen would have been among the few with actual interest in the

[183] Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan,* 1.

[184] E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism : The Politics, Economics, and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880-1914* (London: Routledge, 1995), 36.

empire and its security. Therefore it would have been necessary for imperialists in the government and those involved in the many of imperialist organizations which arose in the 1890s to favor investors with laws that suited them.[185] If one seeks to explain New Imperialism through Porter's lens, resurgent yet unpopular joint-stock companies made some sense. If, as he argued, only a very small number of individuals were actually invested in the management and expansion of the empire, then it must have needed a tremendous amount of capital from that limited group. British businessmen, facing the prospect of rivals in Europe and from the United States which set up their own colonies and cut into free trade, believed that Britain should be involved in gathering up as much territory as possible to ensure a fertile free trade zone. Joint-stock companies were able to claim territory for Britain across much of Africa and Southeast Asia, which resulted in colonies owned privately by businesses and some individuals.[186]

After the Mutiny, despite the public criticism of the East India Company and the loss of its charter, Britain outsourced its colonial expansion yet again to private enterprise in order to keep up with a changing world. The empire could not remain intact if England had to foot the bill for its colonies; the preferred method remained the Indian model where the colonies paid for themselves. The companies were a method of alleviating risk to the nation, while the laws of limited liability alleviated the risk for the private investors.[187] The mid-1880s and 1890s were a period of

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[185] Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists : Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford England: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25.

[186] Press, *Rogue Empires,* 68-69.

[187] Ibid.

consolidation after rapid expansion.With the trials and tribulations of the midcentury in the past, the empire had reached new heights and it was time to hold onto what had been gained.

This defensive culture was reflected in the comedic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. The operas do not lash out at other nations or peoples for propagandist purposes. Despite his Irish heritage, and possibly due to pressure to avoid censorship, Boucicault's melodramas were pro-imperialist productions. *The Relief of Lucknow* was, without a doubt, a form of propaganda for the military and for the empire whether or not that was the intent. *The Shaughraun* had an English protagonist, however uptight and judgmental he was, and ended with the union between an English gentleman officer and a genteel Irish woman. Boucicault's plays never questioned the legality or morality of Britain's ownership of India, nor did he take a hard stance against England's occupation of Ireland. Boucicault represented a public culture that was concerned with glory and heroism representing a British military power that stood strong against a hostile world.

Gilbert and Sullivan, by contrast, reflected a time of unending victory and, for the common people, almost complacency when it came to imperial affairs. Fearful of complacency and apathy towards the empire, the leagues promoting imperial federation, founded on Seeley's notion of one imperial race across the globe, lobbied in both the government and in the cultural sector for their interests.[188] W.A.S Hewins, a member of the conservative empire movement at the turn of the century, claimed that consolidation of the British Empire required a change in commercial policy. The

[188] Griffiths, *Imperial Culture in Antipodean Cities,* 2.

main principle of public policy should not be the consumer but the solidarity of the empire which necessitated preferential trade agreements with the dominions.[189]

As the empire waxed at the end of the century, there was an attempt from the top by elites such as Seeley and Hewins to change how the public thought of themselves in a new imperial age. The goal was to replace loyalty to an English, Scottish, Australian or South African nationality with one imperial nationality and consciousness.[190] Gilbert and Sullivan's plays were the other side to this cultural phenomenon, as they examined what it was to be British through a parody of Britishness itself. Gilbert and Sullivan, in *The Mikado,* spread the message through the fictitious Anglicized 'Japanese' characters that national identity could be taken off and put on, that the communities with which one identified were flexible.[191] At the end of the century a new self-awareness appeared amongst the British public as new technologies allowed news to travel from around the world to be put on stage or told of in novels and newspapers. The agenda at the turn of the century was not just to build patriotism or a sense of unity as it was during Boucicault's time, but to spread imperialism through the mass media. Throughout, public awareness and consumption of theatre remained a constant.

It is a fair criticism of this thesis to say that the presence of imperialist themes in these plays does not necessarily mean the public had knowledge of the subject matter. For melodramas that could be true, although the two Boucicault plays dealt

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[189] W.A.S. Hewins, *Apologia of an Imperialist: Forty Years of Empire Policy,* vol. 1 (1St Am. ed.
London: Constable & Co, 1930), 5.

[190] Green, *Crisis of Conservatism,* 199.

[191] Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan,* 260.

with highly visible events. The melodramas are grounded in reality and do not require further imagination to understand the plot. The Savoy Operas are a different case altogether. Parody and satire require a level of understanding beyond the melodrama. Gilbert and Sullivan did not have to explain joint-stock companies to their audience as they trusted that those attending would have some prior knowledge. For jokes to land, one must have some knowledge of its subject. Nothing kills a joke like having to explain it. The fact that Carte had to build a larger venue that was still deemed too small to meet demands proves that the public ravenously consumed these plays, and that Gilbert and Sullivan were attuned to what the public knew.

Conclusion

Through a close reading of these four plays, this thesis has sought to advance the Porter-MacKenzie debate in new directions. Building on Edward Said, MacKenzie shows how that imperialism was so pervasive and ubiquitous in the nineteenth century that it permeated all aspects of society. However, one's interest in the empire could be divided both horizontally and vertically, based on socioeconomic class and nationality within the United Kingdom. While traditionally the aristocracy and bourgeoisie were the primary participants in the imperial project, MacKenzie concludes that the nineteenth century had created a new middle class that co-opted an interest in the empire into consumer culture.[192] The members of this class had the capital to invest in expanding forms of entertainment. The popularity of plays with empire-related themes is proof of the public's interest in such matters.

Boucicault's plays refute Porter's claim that there were no 'good' novels, music or art with imperialist themes in the mid-Victorian era.[193] Boucicault was a well-established playwright by the time of the Sepoy Mutiny, and his melodrama *The Relief of Lucknow* was being performed only one year after its conclusion in 1858. Due to the passing of the aforementioned Theatre Regulation Act of 1843, a number of smaller theatrical venues catered to the working and middle classes across London. When pub owners combined their existing businesses with entertainment, the theatre and music hall became widely popular.[194] While Porter specifically referred to 'high'

[192] MacKenzie, *"Empire and Metropolitan Cultures,"* 270-271.
[193] Porter, *Absent Minded Imperialists,* 134.
[194] Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama,* 2.

culture being unrepresentative of popular sentiments, what constitutes high culture is up for debate. Does Porter presume that all art, music and theatre was considered high culture by the lower classes? If so, then the popularity of music halls amongst the working classes weakens this argument.

When Porter directly addresses theatre, he claims that there were very few plays which had to do with the empire. Indeed, he argues that other historians such as Catherine Hall are unable to find any overtly imperialist plays in the middle of the century apart from *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* which he dismisses as having nothing to do with the empire.[195] MacKenzie shows how this methodology is misleading. While searching for plays on imperialism in the Lord Chamberlain's collection, he finds that the titles of the works are of no use for determining their content.[196] If taken at face value, of the plays analyzed in this thesis, only *The Relief of Lucknow* could possibly hint at being imperial. Only with prior knowledge of the Indian Mutiny and the importance of the siege during the event could readers or spectators discern the topic. The other three plays offer no hints as to their content through title alone.

Porter claims that historians who grasp at straws to discover imperialist themes in popular culture are "code-breakers" which implies some dismissiveness.[197] However, based on this analysis, it is not much of a stretch to notice themes which had been influenced by the empire and, in the case of the Gilbert and Sullivan productions, a concerted imperialist culture. Porter asserted that elements such as racism, patriotism and militarism were not inherently imperialist, and that much is

[195] Porter, *Absent Minded Imperialists,* 140.
[196] MacKenzie, "'Comfort' and Conviction."
[197] Porter, *Absent Minded Imperialists,* 140-141.

absolutely true.[198] However, to dismiss these elements as not open to influence from Britain's empire is to limit one's definition of imperialism to an extremely narrow scope.

The Mikado did not set itself at all in a colony, real or fictitious, yet it clearly was influenced by the culture of the empire, parodying the mannerisms of British gentlemen, and the culture of the army and the navy through its faux-Japanese characters.[199] The success of *The Mikado,* a play which is still occasionally performed today, is proof of its ability to reach a large audience. If these works did not reflect the feelings of their audiences, they would not have been attended. The subtle innuendos and parodies found in the comedic operas suggest that Gilbert and Sullivan expected their audiences to understand the meaning between the lines. Does *The Mikado* lack imperialist influences simply because it does not say the word 'empire?' Does *The Shaughraun* not lay bare Boucicault's conflicted views toward England's occupation of Ireland? To restrict one's definition of imperialism, as Porter has, to only those works of literature and entertainment which directly involved the colonies or expressly made statements about empire is to view the culture of Victorian imperialism through horse blinders.

Porter concedes in *Absent Minded Imperialists* that every Briton was, to some extent, imperialist by the simple fact that they lived and worked within the borders of metropolitan Britain. The working classes tolerated the empire, and even took some small measure of pride in it, but its influence did not have a real impact on their

[198] Ibid, 13.
[199] Gilbert and Sullivan, *The Mikado,* 178.

everyday lives or opinions.[200] Yet such a claim disregards the effect that the consumption and immersion of oneself in media has on one's thoughts, even unconsciously. The working classes had options on how to spend their precious leisure time, yet in the late nineteenth century, they chose to remain informed about worldly affairs and educated themselves on classical and modern topics. According to Jonathan Rose, the late Victorian workers were ardent readers, with public readings of books and headlines on most street corners and pubs.[201] Mid-nineteenth century Britain saw the advent of mass literacy, and even those who were illiterate took part in the public readings in the industrial and working-class areas of London.[202] Reading was viewed as a public and communal activity with books being held as public property regardless of ownership.[203] When the theatre became accessible to the working classes, it served as a new medium for distilling information. A transition period occurred when the audience had to learn not to take seriously everything put to stage.[204]

Boucicault's early melodrama, *The Relief of Lucknow,* is not subtle in any sense of the word. It is an overt and blatant pro-military and pro-British tale with no real undertones of self-reflective commentary on why Britain ruled India in the first place. The play was originally intended to be a patriotic tale of British heroism for the masses to cheer for. Just over fifteen years later, Boucicault produced another story

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[200] Porter, *Absent Minded Imperialists,* 227.

[201] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 83-84.

[202] Ibid.

[203] Ibid, 85-86.

[204] Ibid, 98-99.

for a mass audience that was critical of the Irish situation in the United Kingdom. *The Shaughraun* was not yet not bold enough to speak publicly against it, perhaps due to the censors. Yet the characterization of the snobbish English officer becoming a hero to the Irish protagonists, while the real villains were Irish traitors, suggests a level of trust Boucicault had in his audience.

Such intricacies became much more prevalent in Gilbert and Sullivan's operas, which mocked British culture and the empire while not ever expressly opposing it. *Utopia, Limited* is comparatively anti-imperialist. Every British custom adopted by the Utopians makes them less happy and their lives more difficult, yet they do so with aplomb.[205] The very nature of Gilbert and Sullivan's comedic operas, in their absurd exaggerations of Britishness, could only have resonated with an audience that knew enough about the subject matter to find it entertaining. *Utopia, Limited* could feature a fictional colony willingly overtaken by a joint-stock company as the central plot device only with an audience that understood why the companies were unpopular. The invasion of Egypt in 1882 was viewed by vocal critics of imperialism such as John Hobson as the first time the interests of capitalists were put before the interests of the British people. Critics of imperialism used the invasion of Egypt to try and expose the symbiosis between capitalism and imperialism.[206] While it would be conceited for historians to read the minds of past audiences, it is reasonable to assume that either the plays were popular because they reflected the

[205] Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia, Limited*, 435.

[206] Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics : British Critics of Empire, 1850-1920*, Ideas in Context, 97 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4-5.

sentiments of their audiences, or that the audiences were convinced or at least understood the messages of the performances.

McClintock's theory of gendered imperialism is also on display in *The Relief of Lucknow, The Mikado,* and *Utopia, Limited.* The first, as a war story, portrays the women as objects to be protected with little agency of their own. The exception of course is Jessie Brown, who serves more as a representation of Scottish nationalism and as an allegory for home than as a living, breathing person. The soldiers, on facing starvation during the siege at the climax of the play, sacrifice their last meals to the women in an act of chivalry.[207] The play attempts to instill virtues of masculinity into its audience, a masculinity that took the form of heroism with compassion. The character of Jack Tar was the embodiment of imperial masculinity, as he traveled the globe holding firm in his British ideals and morals in the face of Oriental temptations. As MacKenzie notes, until the 1850s Jack Tar fought for interracial harmony and frequently assisted friendly 'natives' against despotic oppressors. Towards the end of the century, Jack Tar tales began stressing the importance of British technological and moral superiority over those they fought.[208] This thesis argues that the Indian Mutiny in 1857, when Indian subjects had 'broken faith' with their British masters, was one important cause of such a shift in the narrative.

Gendered representation in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas differed from the patriotic militarism of Boucicault's melodramas. They instead juxtaposed an oversexualized Orient with a repressed Victorian culture. Williams argues that *The*

[207] Boucicault, *Relief of Lucknow,* 32-33.
[208] MacKenzie, *"Empire and Metropolitan Cultures,"* 277.

Mikado avoided the stereotypical geisha character, which was an embodiment of an exotic and alluring woman too improper to be found in Britain but proper in her own culture. The costumes erased any distinction between the male and female characters, as both appeared in heavy makeup meant to indicate effeminacy.[209] Due to the fact that the Japanese gentlemen were stand-ins for British gentlemen, the feminization of the characters was a commentary on the British upper-classes and their lack of masculinity. Porter supports the fact that the lower classes viewed the elites as effeminate when he argues that they rejected any high culture associated with them.[210] Gilbert and Sullivan clearly capitalized on the public's perception of the upper classes by parodying them in *The Mikado.*

These plays also support McClintock's commodification of imperialism through advertising.[211] As the empire was sold through the spectacle of imperial expositions and through products, such as Pear's Soap, the theatre adopted a similar tactic. Gilbert and Sullivan's operas were boisterous, raucous, and colorful affairs full of movement and hyperbole. While the melodrama existed alongside the operas, audiences wanted more from their plays than solemn and comparatively static affairs found in a production like *The Shaughraun.* The empire was indeed brought to the domestic sphere at the end of the nineteenth century through advertising, but it had been present in the theatre from the 1850s at the latest.

In the end, the debate on the popularity of the empire in nineteenth-century Britain comes down to a matter of definition. Both Porter and MacKenzie admit that defining

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[209] Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan,* 267-268.
[210] Porter, *Absent Minded Imperialists,* 135-136.
[211] McClintock, *Imperial Leather,* 32-33.

imperialism is difficult. Porter claims that it was impossible to do so as the term holds no solid meaning.[212] MacKenzie's model of imperialist culture is much like a gas - it fills and takes the shape of whatever container it is within. Every historian faces similar problems of definition, yet when analyzing Victorian theatre, it is clear that imperialist themes permeated the stories. The empire's presence could be felt, especially in the melodramas and comic operas, even if the roots of these genres were not inherently imperialist. While it is true that it requires extrapolation to reveal imperialist themes in plays like *The Shaughraun* and to some extent *The Mikado,* the tales were certainly products of their time, reflective of changing public perceptions about the world they lived in.

[212] Porter, *Absent Minded Imperialists,* 13.

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