

Money
Transacting Value on the Romantic Stage

In 1833, the Boston socialite Anna Cabot Lowell Quincy recorded in her journal an account of the stunning performance she had witnessed earlier that evening by Fanny Kemble in Henry Milman's 1815 play *Fazio*. It concerns the scene where Bianca, played by Kemble, finally understands the consequences of her rash decision to punish her husband, Fazio, for his infidelity, only to see him charged with a far greater crime:

The moment which I think produced the most effect on the house was at the moment when Fazio is to be led off to execution in the prison. She has just been imploring the jailer to delay a few moments in the most passionate manner, when the bell tolls, the sound of which seemed to turn her into marble. She stood riveted to the spot – her eyes fixed, her cheek pale and ashen. Fazio embraces her, but she is entirely insensible of it, and he is led off the stage leaving her the solitary figure. She stood, I should think, five moments, a perfect statue, and the deathlike stillness that reigned over the crowded audience, every person seeming to hold their breath, was very striking. “She stood the bloodless image of despair” until the bell tolled again. (quoted in Wister, 116)

Responding to Kemble's fully realized portrait of her character's “insensibility” with profound admiration for the actress's skills, Quincy makes note of the expanded sense of time that she and the rest of the audience felt. Their vicarious experience of Bianca's “bloodless” inaction by way of their awe-struck appreciation speaks to the Romantic pleasures of the sublime.

Quincy's account is remarkable for several reasons, not least of which is the close attention she pays to a single scene of the performance, recording both Kemble's passions and movements in her interpretation of the role and the audience's rapt regard for the character's plight as well as the actress's skill. Capturing a suspended moment of Kemble's performance, Quincy's journal entry focuses on a wordless pose that brimmed with meanings that seemed to exceed the written text.

The technique Kemble used – known as a “point” – was marked by the actor’s physical display of intense emotion balanced by a regard for the play’s poetic language and overall narrative action. It emerged at a transitional moment between the declamatory style of neoclassicism and the physically impassioned style of Romanticism, in which the emphasis of the actor’s interpretation shifted from the play’s poetic language to the character’s unspoken thoughts and feelings. The innovations famously introduced in the 1740s by Charles Macklin and David Garrick, often practiced in tandem with Hannah Pritchard or Sarah Siddons, would become the hallmarks of the Romantic style.

Actors were not the only ones to make this transition. Audiences, too, had to shift their habits of aesthetic reception. Where, before, they attended closely to poetic images realized in the actor’s voice and gesture, by the second half of the eighteenth century, they were increasingly absorbed by the passions that revealed the character’s state of mind. What was once a predominantly verbal art became an increasingly pantomimic one; what was once an aurally attentive audience became a group of visually engaged spectators. But more than this: what was once a mostly presentational art form that stimulated the literary imagination became a predominantly representational one that fascinated for its approach toward the ever-receding horizon of reality. Quincy’s account captures this transition, revealing how audiences in the Romantic era were shifting their habits of attention from the actress to her proto-psychological character, becoming ever more submerged into the world of the dramatic fiction.

Simply put, the point readied the stage for the birth of the modern theatre, preparing audiences for its break with idealist aesthetics well before the plays of Victor Hugo and Henrik Ibsen were greeted with riot or scandal. The revolutionary impact of first Romanticism and then naturalism may have lain less in the content of their plays than in the realistic forms by which they were presented. In facilitating the historical shift from a neoclassical to a Romantic style of acting, the point introduced a representational logic of verisimilitude that would eventually extend from the site of the actor’s body to encompass the entire field of the stage. But that formal innovation did more than just align the fictional world of the stage with the social world of the audience. As we shall see, the point embedded a social relation in the very shape of its aesthetic form, revealing the political unconscious of its authorizing cultures. In allowing actors and audiences to barter the terms of the fiction for the real, the point enacted a social relation that was under intense cultural pressure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe and throughout much of the world.

Specifically, it modeled an economic exchange that, owing to the number of different currencies in circulation and the need to forge equivalences between abstract and material values, was proving increasingly complicated. In such a moment, the point emerged as an explicitly theatrical convention that helped audiences to understand their role in a changing economy and adapt to shifting standards of value.

In this chapter, I examine the Romantic point technique against the rise of the modern bank, which emerged from the state-chartered and free-market economies of the United Kingdom and the United States at the end of the eighteenth century.¹ In particular, I focus on the introduction of a national paper currency that was backed by a central governmental authority and based on tax revenues.² I argue that, like paper money, the point asked audiences to accept a representation for something real, and so helped them understand the shift from a specie economy based on intrinsic value and secured through the practice of interpersonal exchange to a representational economy based on paper money that circulated abstractly through a national system of managed credit and debt. Social meanings, in other words, are embedded not only in the narrative form of plays such as *Fazio* – which is indeed about the problem of reconciling different registers of value – but also in the aesthetic form of performance, where they are activated by the dynamic and historically changing actor–audience relationship. On the Romantic stage, actors such as Kemble transacted a type of representational exchange that helped audiences adapt to the economic changes that were newly defining them as citizen-consumers within a nationalizing economy.

That Kemble performed on both sides of the Atlantic makes her a particularly compelling case study during this period of uneven economic development within the larger epoch of modernity. The Romantic style of acting she exemplifies was practiced throughout what Elizabeth Maddock Dillon refers to as the “performative commons” of the Atlantic World. Key

¹ In reading an aesthetic development in light of economic change, I follow both theatre historians such as Tracy C. Davis, who illuminates the shifting relations of theatre production in this period, and literary historians such as Walter Benn Michaels, Mary Poovey, and Deidre Lynch, who persuasively argue that economic relations were not merely the subject of literature during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also shaping influences upon its aesthetic form, including style, genre, and character.

² Niall Ferguson, focusing on the history of the Bank of England (BoE), emphasizes these three features of modern banking (112). Economic historian Richard Sylla, comparing late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British and American economies, lists six key features, noting that the BoE’s original charter limited its full development. To its management of public debt, its issuance of currency, and its centralization of banking functions, Sylla adds three more: the development of an integrated banking system, a securities market, and a corporate structure.

to Dillon's conception of this region is the circulation of money and power that fueled the slave trade during the long eighteenth century, when "the" public sphere was taking shape less through the written word than on a variety of stages where consensus was just as often challenged as achieved (4, 14).³ As we shall see, Romantic acting developed differently in the USA and the UK, reflecting the anxieties and desires of audiences in a free market economy in one way and those of audiences bound by patent monopolies and state charters in another. That one economy was based on enslaved labor proved important, especially since the critical terminology of "points" registered a kind of value in that economy, too. In the transformations she enacted on stage, Kemble helped her audiences understand and adapt to new forms of value that were appearing in the modern world.

Allegories of Value: Henry Milman's *Fazio*

In 1797, with the Napoleonic Wars draining the coffers of the Bank of England (BoE), the English Crown introduced the paper pound note as legal tender, suspending the redemption of its value in gold or silver until 1821. Between those years, Britons had to learn to accept the representational value of the paper pound note, guaranteed as it was by the authority of the British government. But this was not a foregone conclusion. Many Britons had been dispossessed in the Great Recoinage of 1696, when representational tokens of exchange were outlawed in favor of gold and silver coins issued by the Royal Mint, as a longstanding policy of "intrinsic value" was made official (Valenze, 34). As historian Deborah Valenze has discussed, "a two-tiered system of coinage" had been in effect prior to the Great Recoinage, with the Royal Mint issuing coins whose weight in specie reflected intrinsic value, while commercial tokeners produced representational tokens of exchange whose value "rested simply on the assumption of continuing neighborhood custom and popular trust"

³ By emphasizing the fluidity of capitalist and colonial relations as well as public sentiment during this period, Dillon's study is an important corrective to conventional theatre histories that have tended to find a fully formed national identity expressed in a coherent dramatic tradition when, in fact, multiple publics of varied alliances were performing themselves into political existence. It is worth remembering, however, that those nationalist theatre histories were themselves a correction to the critical narrative of a uniform Anglo-American dramatic tradition that presumed an unbroken continuity between England and its commonwealth territories based upon a shared linguistic – and implicitly racial – heritage. While seeking to avoid the pitfalls of both of these earlier historical narratives, I aim to show how Kemble's Romantic style of acting was very much a part of the fluid culture of performance that Dillon describes, even as publics on both sides of the ocean were using it to forge increasingly distinct national identities in this very moment.

(37–38).⁴ After this first Great Recoinage, such tokens were officially outlawed, robbing the lifeblood of the tradespeople and commoners among whom they circulated.

One hundred economically volatile years later, Britons were effectively asked to reverse course and convert from a system of intrinsic to one of representational value. Given the uncertainties of war and the concomitant state of exception, they were understandably nervous – especially when, in an attempt to stabilize the currency, the government effected a second Great Recoinage in 1816. Because the silver content of British coins exceeded their face value at that time, they were often melted into bullion and sold on the open market, leading to a hemorrhage of specie that jeopardized the country's fiscal reserves. In response, the Royal Mint set the economy to a new metallic standard – gold – replacing the guinea with the lighter sovereign and introducing crown and half-crown pieces. Silver coins were restricted to a face value of no more than £2, and copper farthings were added in 1821. In the face of such a fluctuating set of standards, Britons were made to wonder: paper or specie? Silver or gold? Where did value lie?

Across the Atlantic, Americans experienced similar anxieties about the representation of value. Although paper money (e.g., in the form of tobacco certificates and even playing cards) had long been in circulation thanks to royal prohibitions against a colonial mint, rates of equivalence were unsettled, with no central banking authority to regulate exchange among the thousands of regional banknotes in circulation. Indeed, in the USA, banks were individually chartered by the states, with each bank issuing its own paper notes in a decentralized system that would become known as “free banking.” Although Alexander Hamilton first proposed a Bank of the United States (BUS) in 1779, it was not founded until 1791, owing to concerns voiced by Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and other Southern agrarians about centralizing the nation's banking authority in the hands of an urban mercantile elite. When the BUS's charter elapsed in 1811, those concerns re-emerged. Now President Madison, however, recognizing the necessity of a central bank to stabilize the national debt in times of war, changed his mind, urging Congress to re-establish the BUS in 1816. After the second BUS got caught up in a speculative land bubble that burst, its officers charged with mismanagement and larceny,

⁴ Valenze notes that, in 1660, no fewer than 3,543 tokeners were in operation in London and the surrounding areas, issuing tokens of all shapes and sizes and of various materials (such as tin or leather) (37–38).

the institution came under popular suspicion again. Its new president, Nicholas Biddle, restored its integrity, leading Kentucky Senator Henry Clay to urge Congress to renew its charter in 1832 – before its expiration – in a political attempt to keep the issue out of that year’s presidential election. Interpreting this pre-emptive move as a financial coup d’état, President Andrew Jackson vetoed the legislation and rode a wave of popular outrage against the “Monster” bank to defeat National Republican candidate Clay. Jackson dismantled the second BUS’s financial infrastructure by redistributing its deposit of federal reserves among designated state banks, putting the issue of a federal bank to rest until after the Civil War. The federal government did not issue the paper dollar until 1867; the Federal Reserve was not founded until 1913. Throughout the long eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century, then, economic vicissitudes in both countries provoked questions about the certainty of value, leading Britons and Americans to harbor attitudes of distrust toward any exchange of represented value – including those transacted on stage.

Such fears and uncertainties inform British playwright Henry Hart Milman’s verse drama *Fazio*, written in 1815, at the close of the Napoleonic War but six years before the BoE lifted its restrictions on converting the pound note to gold. The play, which was enormously popular on both sides of the Atlantic, articulates popular fears about paper money and the opacity of a centralized banking authority. Productions of it should thus be understood as part of a nineteenth-century performance culture that included British Parliamentary and US Congressional debates, as well as the stump speeches made by William Cobbett, the hard money populist who proselytized the value of a specie economy to rural audiences in both England and the USA. However different the two countries were in terms of their economic policies at the turn of the nineteenth century – differences that included trade restrictions and government charters (UK) versus a policy of “free trade” and limited liability corporations (USA) – they were alike in providing receptive audiences for Milman’s play.⁵

In production almost immediately upon its publication in 1815, *Fazio* continued to be performed regularly for several decades, finally losing currency in the UK around 1845 and in the USA around 1865. As we shall see, these dates invite interesting questions about the cultural work

⁵ Sylla demonstrates that the fledgling free market economy of the new American nation outpaced the growth of the British economy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Only with its move toward a free market in 1844 did Britain’s economy flourish, steaming the engines of the industrial revolution (Sylla, 227).

that the play – and its actors – performed for audiences in each of these different contexts. As a brief analysis of the drama reveals, concerns with money and value are encoded in its metaphorical language and thematic design.

Circulating in the popular press under titles such as “The Alchemist” or “Grimaldi,” the story of the play derives from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. In Milman’s treatment, the title character is Giraldi Fazio, a Florentine alchemist, who, though poor at turning dross to gold, is rich in the affection of his doting wife, Bianca. Together, they live a happy but humble life until their fortunes change instantly, when a neighbor, the miserly Bartolo, shows up at Fazio’s door, having been fatally stabbed by a band of robbers. A Jewish pawnbroker, Bartolo has been marked for his riches, but, as he explains to Fazio, the robbers did not get his keys, so he dies knowing that his riches are safe, even as he laments the lost profits from an as-yet unsigned mortgage. Alone with the corpse, Fazio ponders Bartolo’s situation, recognizing that the riches Bartolo has stored up in life will not accompany him to heaven. Yet, failing to heed the moral lesson of that homily, Fazio sees “a shorter path to fame and riches” (55), burying Bartolo’s body in his garden and assuming his wealth as his own.

Newly ascendant in the social firmament, now “Lord” Fazio experiences temptation once again, falling into the seductive arms of the Marchesa Aldabella. His devoted wife, Bianca, in a fit of jealousy, informs against her husband, naively thinking that his ill-gotten riches, once removed, will return him to her arms. When the Duke and his council sentence Fazio to die for the murder of Bartolo, Bianca pleads desperately for his life, appealing in vain to her rival for help. Meanwhile, the imprisoned Fazio, repentant of his sins, takes full responsibility for his moral turpitude and forgives Bianca, recognizing that in her love alone was his greatest wealth. Upon learning the truth after Fazio’s execution, the Duke posthumously exonerates him of Bartolo’s murder, sentences Aldabella to a convent, and offers sanctuary to Bianca’s children who are orphaned upon her death of a broken heart. Thus the tragedy ends, with Fazio’s fortunes reversed in both economic and moral registers, as the laws of tragic structure are reinterpreted through a code of Christian ethics.

In one of the few literary-critical treatments of the play, Daniel Watkins reads its obsession with money as a symptom of the ideological contradiction between the aristocratic worldview that undergirds the play’s structure (its tragic form) and the bourgeois consciousness expressed in its action (the narrative of class ascent). That contradiction, he suggests, is historical in two ways: by setting the play in Renaissance Italy, Milman addresses the

moment of capitalism's emergence; and, by treating money as the engine of class ascent, Milman documents the social disruptions caused by capitalism in his own moment. Watkins is right to note the historicity of the play's setting, its temporal displacement an invitation for its early nineteenth-century audience to take a longer historical view of the precipitating conditions of Fazio's dilemma and to understand themselves in relation to it. Milman's play should thus be understood within the loose context of the history plays that were coming into vogue in the early nineteenth century, offering opportunities for scene designers to enhance the stunningly realistic effects of their painted backdrops with sumptuous costumes that extended a three-dimensional touch-feel quality to their designs. As we'll see in Chapter 2, such staging effects situated the audience within a living history that was unfolding before them, facilitating an awareness of how they, too, were implicated within a world-historical process.

In his insightful analysis, Watkins aptly captures the play's anxiety about capital's disruptive force, but I would like to train his focus on the epoch of capitalism's emergence to the moment of the play's composition more specifically, and track the several moments and locations of the play's reception. The anxiety expressed in the play is not merely a symptom of the broad social disruptions caused by the displacement of an aristocratic social order with new networks of capitalist exchange; it also exists in the very acts and instruments of exchange through which new social relations were forged, especially when those acts of exchange featured a currency whose value was only represented, backed by an abstract authority far removed from the moment of trade. Such instruments take on a moral value in Milman's play, where "intrinsic value" refers not only to specie but also to the constancy of human love, and where redemption is either contingent, based on political necessity – like the BoE's war-time policy limiting the conversion of paper to gold – or fixed, whereby an act of grace offers the lasting reward of spiritual salvation.

Cultural anxieties about money and modern banking circulate throughout the play, erupting in its metaphorical language and informing its thematic structure. When mad with jealousy, for example, Bianca imagines that Fazio's infidelity enacts an exchange between her and Aldabella, making an equivalence between them that debases the value of her love:

Now henceforth all our joys, Our delicate endearments, all are poison'd.
Aye! If he speak my name with his fond voice, It will be with the same tone
that to her He murmur'd her's: – it will be, or 'twill seem so. If he embrace
me, 'twill be with those arms In which he folded her: and if he kiss me,
He'll pause, and think which of the two is sweeter. (Milman, *Fazio*, 54)

In Bianca's tortured imagining, Fazio substitutes her rival for herself and herself for her rival, becoming the center of an exchange where one is "the same" as the other. She hastens to qualify "or 'twill seem so," desperately insisting upon a difference between the base substance of her rival's affection and her own precious love, fearing that the failed alchemist will make a false equivalence.

But if, in the alchemical metaphor, Bianca is "gold," Aldabella is more than simply "dross," as her high social status would suggest. In the play's poetic language, she is likened to a bill of exchange, bearing the signature of one man – her wealthy uncle – as promise of payment to another. Explaining why she disdained Fazio in their youth, the fickle Aldabella tells him that her uncle, the Condé d'Orsoa, "deem'd me a fit mate For highest princes; and his honest flatteries So pamper'd me, the fatal duteousness So grew upon me" that she felt compelled to renounce her love to him (35). But as we see her dispense her affections liberally upon the now-married, newly wealthy Fazio, Aldabella draws down her own account, throwing into doubt the reliability of the value she claims to represent.

As for Fazio, situated at the center of this exchange, Milman presents a figure who rationalizes his actions on the basis of self-interest and short-term gain. He practices various excuses to justify his postmortem theft, for example, telling himself that Bartolo's riches are "but a quit-rent for the land I sold him, Almost two yards to house him and his worms." He then proceeds to reason that, having no kin, Bartolo would leave his riches to the state, but thinks, "Marvellous little owe I this same state, That I should be so dainty of its welfare." To the contrary, he thinks, he *aids* the state – and its economy – by spending these riches and putting them back into circulation – rather than allowing them to remain "close-lock'd treasures." Indeed, he is a liberator, proclaiming to the coins slipping through his fingers that, "With a deliverer's, not a tyrant's hand Invade I thus your dull and peaceful slumbers, And give ye light and liberty. Ye shall not Moulder and rust in pale and pitiful darkness, But front the sun with light bright as his own" (13–14). Such was the argument Adam Smith made against the mercantile system in favor of a credit economy, in which specie reserves are not hoarded in a vault but rather freed to circulate through loans that generate interest.⁶ It was also, as Jennifer Jordan Baker observes, a point

⁶ In a "rude state of society," nations "hoard" their wealth (393), Smith observes, but in more advanced societies (he explicitly cites the USA), paper money – i.e., credit – circulates, allowing "for building and extending [the citizens'] settlements and plantations; in purchasing not dead stock [i.e., specie], but active and productive stock" (423).

made by Benjamin Franklin in 1729: "Money which otherwise would have lain dead in [bankers'] Hands, is made to circulate again thereby among the People" (quoted in Baker, 13).

In claiming Bartolo's wealth as his own, Fazio effectively identifies with the pawnbroker, even as the role of landlord that he asserts over the murdered body allows him to quickly disavow any lasting equivalence. The anxiety he expresses in this speech is in excess of his expressed fear of being apprehended for the theft. Rather, by justifying himself for maintaining the flow of capital, Fazio identifies himself with a function that was once performed by Jews, who, as goldsmiths and pawnbrokers, made loans and other financial transactions that were otherwise restricted by usury laws. In the early modern Europe of the play's setting, Jews like Bartolo were what historian Yuri Slezkine refers to as "Mercurians," strangers within a host society who perform valuable but often taboo forms of labor.⁷ As restrictions on interest-generating loans were gradually eased, he explains, non-Jews began to assume those banking functions, increasingly regarding Jews as ethnic rather than religious "others" (Slezkine, 37). We might thus read Fazio's assumption of Bartolo's riches as a way of figuring that historical shift; although innocent of murder, he vests himself with Bartolo's money and buries a body that, marked as Jewish, becomes "corrupt."

As this suggests, the play's love triangle gives expression to more than just feelings of sexual jealousy, inviting us to regard its three characters and the relations of exchange among them as part of a cultural allegory, where the pure and ever-faithful Bianca is gold, the duplicitous Aldabella is paper money, and Fazio, the careless deceiver of Bianca's love, is the bank that would claim a functional equivalence. Such a reading suggests evidence for why the play was enormously popular among audiences adjusting to the new values and relations of exchange associated with the rise of modern banking. In identifying with Bianca, reviling Aldabella, and feeling pity and fear for the blind ambition that leads to Fazio's infidelity, audiences could project their anxieties about money onto an allegory that confirmed their suspicions of paper and a bank that would sell them short. This is not to say that they did so with awareness or even that Milman set up this allegory with conscious intent. Yet, as even a cursory synopsis of the play

⁷ In coining the term "Mercurian" (borrowed from "Mercury," the mythological Roman god known as "Hermes" in Greek), Slezkine denominates a variety of internal others who occupy a liminal status vis-à-vis the host culture. His primary focus is on the Jew in modern Europe, but he extends his analysis to the Romani and Travelers also in Europe, the Chinese in Malaysia and the Philippines, and the Jains and Parsis in India, to cite only a few (13).

makes clear, money is an explicit theme and functions as a metaphorical vehicle in much of its poetic language. Clearly, the play inscribes economic anxieties that were then in circulation, rhetorically inviting audiences to channel their conflicted feelings about the representational value of paper money through its action, where those conflicts are imaginatively resolved.

Yet, while the allegory would seem to condemn the BoE (and banks generally) in Act III, its terms curiously shift later in the play, when the condemned Fazio divests himself of his earthly possessions in preparation for his execution. Upon a visit from Philario, his loyal retainer, Fazio entreats his attendant to take Bianca's portrait from him, lest "the coarse and vulgar executioner Should handle it with his foul gripe" (Milman, *Fazio*, 90). As he takes the picture from his pocket, he inadvertently extracts a gold coin, prompting Philario to ask if he should take it to Bianca as well. Fazio remonstrates wildly:

Oh, touch it not, Philario!
 Oh, touch it not! –'tis venomous, 'tis viperous!
 If there be bottomless sea, unfathom'd pit
 In earth's black womb – oh, plunge it, plunge it deep,
 Deep, dark! Or if a devil be abroad,
 Give it to him, to bear it whence it came,
 To its own native Hell. – Oh no, no, no! –
 He must not have it: for with it he'll betray
 More men, more noble spirits than Lucifer
 Drew down from heaven. This yellow pestilence
 Laid waste my Eden; made a gaudy bird of me,
 For soft Temptation's silken nets to snare.
 It crept in to us – Sin came with it – Misery
 Dogg'd its foul footsteps – ever-deepening Sin,
 And ever-darkening Misery. – Philario,
 Away with it! – away! – (Takes the picture) Here's fairer gazing. (91)

As the language and implied staging make clear, Bianca and the coin are incompatible. Although, earlier in the play, Bianca's love was functionally equivalent to gold for boasting intrinsic value, in this scene, the allegorical relationship is refused as a different register of value is invoked. As Fazio recognizes, gold is what it is and nothing more, its exchange value a temptation to indulge the earthly sins of greed and lust. As such, it is a "pestilence" that "Laid waste" to the "Eden" of his happy life with Bianca. Recognizing that Bianca's true value is of another – more spiritual and perhaps prelapsarian – kind altogether, Fazio repents his sins and is redeemed. Here, the playwright, church historian, and future Dean of

St. Paul's Cathedral transmutes the play's concerns with value into a moral register, accruing greater meaning for his theme. To a certain extent, this shift from financial to spiritual redemption is made necessary by the play's action. After all, audiences would be discomfited if Fazio were executed without proper absolution, especially since he is not actually guilty of murder, and the shift from economic to moral values accomplishes this.

But Milman further complicates the play's climax when he sets the coin in relation not to Bianca but to her portrait. A common stage convention, the portrait metonymically stands for the character who cannot be present in the scene. But, in Milman's hands, it takes on greater significance. For Fazio's choice of Bianca over the coin is not only an affirmation of moral over economic value but also a claim staked in a representation over the real. Unlike the coin that has intrinsic value, Bianca's portrait has value only insofar as it *represents* her and the values that *she* represents. This may seem strange, given the drama's seeming distrust of paper money at a time when the BoE had suspended the redemption of paper banknotes for gold. But the play suggests that there is an important difference between worthless bills that claim to be what they are not – as represented by Aldabella – and paper that is backed by that which it represents. In the case of the Bank of England's paper banknotes, their value was backed by the authority of the Crown. That guarantee would prove essential to the stability of the pound note, as well as that of the BoE and, indeed, of the British state during this tumultuous period of economic uncertainty. Such backing, the play's resolution implies, justifies the representation, allowing it to substitute for what it appears to be. In this way, the play invites audiences to accommodate themselves to a paper currency backed by the authority of the government, for in *it* lies real value – both moral (i.e., patriotic) and economic.

If, as I suggest, Milman's play imaginatively reroutes its audiences' anxieties about money by transferring their suspicions of bank-issued pound notes onto only counterfeit bills, then its resolution would also need to reaffirm the authority of the state. This is why the Duke must exonerate Fazio – if only posthumously – of the murder charge; in recognizing that Fazio is not guilty, the Duke redeems not only Fazio's honor, but also his own authority in aligning himself with the truth. This is also why Aldabella's sentence – which otherwise seems gratuitous – is necessary; the Duke must restore moral as well as civic order. Eliding the moral and economic registers and collapsing the representation into the real, *Fazio* invites audiences to project their fears of economic uncertainty onto a villainess who is expelled from the world of the play and to believe in a figure of moral virtue who is presented to them as a representation.

Indeed, Bianca *is* a representation, even when she appears to them in the flesh of the actress who portrays her – whether Eliza O’Neill, whose incarnation of the role inspired Percy Bysshe Shelley (Milman’s classmate at Eton) to write the part of Beatrice for her in his *The Cenci* (Reiman, vi–vii), or any of a number of actresses who cherished this complex and career-making role. As we shall see in the following sections, the “point” technique that was foundational to the Romantic style of acting allowed actors to shift between their real offstage and represented onstage identities as well as between interpretive levels of the play. Imbuing her characterization of Bianca with the selfsame concerns of the play, Kemble invited audiences to assume a new relationship to representations of value that could help them adapt to the changing status of paper money.

“Points” of Exchange in Fanny Kemble’s Performance

The technique that Kemble employed – known as a “point” – was marked by the actor’s use of voice and body in order to realize images and meanings within the poetic text. It emerged at a transitional moment between the declamatory style of a neoclassicism that valued decorum – the actor’s ability to speak the dramatic poetry meaningfully, deploying voice and rhetorical gesture to illuminate salient tropes – and the impassioned style of Romanticism, which emphasized a realistic rendering of the sentiments and thought processes that motivated the character’s actions. The term itself appears to have been borrowed from the elocutionary reform movement that appeared in the mid- to late eighteenth century, when rules of decorum were being adapted to fit a new style of delivery beginning to emerge on stage. For the elocutionary reformers, the term refers to a stop, or a “point” of punctuation – a period, a comma, a semi-colon, etc. – where the orator or actor should pause to aid the auditor’s comprehension of meaning. While some reformers urged a return to traditional styles of declamation where an unbroken cadence should be used to indicate metric regularity, others praised the insertion of unexpected pauses to open up new interpretations of dramatic texts.

This debate was embodied in the rivalry between actors James Quin and David Garrick, respectively, with the 1741 London debut of both Garrick and Charles Macklin signaling the historical rupture that would shift the Anglo-American stage toward the Romantic style of acting (Woods, 30–34). Macklin, Leigh Woods reports, surprised audiences with his sympathetic portrayal of Shylock, recasting the stage type of the comic Jew into a much

more complex character in a turn that anticipated Henry Irving's by more than a century. Garrick likewise introduced proto-psychological portraits of characters who had functioned simply as stage villains, offering startling insights into the conscience-riven ambitions of Richard III, Macbeth, and King John (Woods, 35). His technique was to interrupt the poetic meter of the dialogue, inserting points or pauses to suggest the associative process behind the order or disorder of his character's verbalized thoughts. Filling those pauses with facial expressions, changes in posture, or gestures, Garrick revealed the changing state of his character's mind as if a tempest of conflicting feelings were washing over him in real time. This method of characterization, of acting on "points", was an important first step toward fully developed scenic realism, locating the logic of verisimilitude in the actor's body before expanding it into a fully three-dimensional stage set.

Part of what fascinated late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences was the close study that actors made of a character's thought process, especially as it was commingled with feeling and enacted as will. Representing these three faculties of a moral-philosophical model of self, Romantic actors looked to contemporary science in order to add a dash of realistic detail. In his analysis of Garrick's fright-wig Hamlet, for example, Joseph Roach shows how Romantic actors drew their understanding of sensation, sensibility, and sentiment from a post-Cartesian shift from a mechanical to a vitalistic model of nerve responsiveness (Roach, *Player's*, 100). With its emphasis on the visual signs of the body's passions, this new style was often discussed in terms of the "sublime," a term that the young Edmund Burke famously counterposed to the "beautiful" in his 1757 philosophical treatise. Responding to the new science of aesthetics, Burke maintained that art often provoked pleasure not from perfection, as Alexander Baumgarten argued, but – surprisingly – from a sense of fear, albeit one tempered by the realization that a second-order representation of the awesome object or event triggered such a response. Art, in other words, did not explicitly have to affirm the truth, beauty, and goodness of Baumgarten's aesthetics; it could represent the realm of human experience that exceeded that golden triangle, while rectifying us to its purpose. Macklin's Shylock, Garrick's Richard, and Kemble's Bianca were all characters whose passions exceeded the good. But each was also part of an artistic whole that, if not beautiful, was sublime in its ability to move audiences toward a recognition of the good by indirection, inspiring them to feel their way toward an understanding of the human motivations that make the good so difficult to achieve. The "point" thus opened the door to acting as a mode of character study.

Critics explicitly engaged such ideas in their reviews. Consider, for example, this assessment of an 1831 Covent Garden production of *Fazio*. The anonymous British reviewer calls attention to the complexity of the role, noting with masculinist admiration that Kemble's Bianca

is a woman drawn out of the very heart of the sex; with that mixed violence and tenderness, that self-devotion and unreasonable demand – that affection that runs by turns into all-confiding weakness or querulous suspicion; that is all agony over a doubt, or all joy in its own flatteries; that rushes to the extremes of the sentiment before patient thought can traverse the distant limits; is made up of boundless generosity and boundless avarice; is the dove and eagle commingled; and is as patient under misfortune as it is fierce under wrong – the strange but sublime contrarieties that belong to the nature of woman. For the filling up of this arduous portraiture, Miss Kemble deserves the highest praise. (*Irish Shield*, 3)

Kemble was met with similar enthusiasm when she and her father toured the USA in 1832 and 1834 – a trip necessitated by the financial exigencies the family faced as a result of Charles's investment in and management of the Covent Garden Theatre, its books forever in the red. Almost immediately after arriving in the USA, Kemble inspired the admiration of this anonymous *New York Mirror* reviewer for her ability to exhibit Bianca's seeming contradictions with conviction and fluid ease:

Among her best points here was her threat to Fazio, that if he pronounced his rival's name she would hate him, ferociously uttered, and instantly recalled by a gush of tenderness, as capricious jealousy relented and yielded to love. Her convulsive agony at the news that her husband was feasting with Aldabella, and her gaze of indignant and lofty displeasure at the menial who stood watching her tortures – her struggle and command – "Officious slave – away!" so haughty, yet choked with the anguish of a swelling heart, and the impatient bend of the arm to accelerate the mandate which her voice was yet unable to utter, although received in silence by the audience, at once stamped this young girl as the possessor of genius of the first order. (10, 13)

That these reviewers remark upon Kemble's "sublime contrarieties," where words and passions were counterpointed to poignant effect, suggests that her performance was felt to be something new. Clearly, they admire the actress's ability to realize the character she represents, even as they marvel at her ability to render Bianca both as an individual with her own emotional and psychological particularity and as an exemplar of "woman." The aesthetic experience that the word "sublime" describes – of reconciling conceptual opposites such as fear and pleasure in a visceral bodily

response – would seem to pertain not only to the critics' reception of Kemble's performance but also to the actress's realization of her character insofar as her body materializes meanings that augment or even contradict the semantic content expressed in the dramatic dialogue. The "point," then, functioned as a way of signifying meanings implied by, but in excess of, the poetic text.

Cultural historian Peter de Bolla has suggested that the late eighteenth-century rhetoric of excess that marked Romantic discourses of the sublime encoded contemporary anxieties about the effects of economic inflation. He notes growing public concern over the amount of paper money entering circulation and an expanding public debt, especially as specie was flowing across England's borders, was melted into bullion, and was sold on the open market for a value in excess of its face value (111). Although he focuses specifically on Britain during the Seven Years War (1756–1763), his analysis can easily be extended into the period of the Napoleonic Wars, when Milman's play was written, and when the British government finally staunched the flow of its specie reserves, if not the anxieties still coursing through the body politic. We might also profitably apply de Bolla's thesis to the USA in the 1830s, when President Andrew Jackson enacted what became known as the Great Reversal by breaking up the second BUS and redistributing its specie reserves.

Although historians have often painted Jackson as a crude backwoods populist, intent upon destroying the nation's central bank out of a misdirected sense of class-based resentment, his distrust of the second BUS and banking instruments that traded in abstract value was not without cause. After the Panic of 1819, for example, the BUS was revealed to have over-invested in inflated land deals, exposing a system of fraud and corruption that was rampant throughout the banking industry (not unlike that which tanked the real-estate market in 2008). Hailing from a farm in Tennessee, Jackson understood the necessity of a credit economy that traded in "futures." But he reviled those who exploited the difference between systems of value for their own gain, especially those who took advantage of the spatio-temporal lag of information concerning fluctuating market rates between coastal ports and interior regions of the country. Such men performed no labor for the money they earned, excepting the mental labor involved in calculating a "swindle," a favorite term of abuse at the time. In this class of scoundrel, Jackson included bankers like the president of the second BUS, Nicholas Biddle, whose position in the central bank provided him with a vantage point from which to enhance his own profits. A centralized authority to set exchange rates made the

conversion process something less than transparent, and allowed Biddle and his cronies to capitalize on margins of trade.

Although the free banking system of state-chartered banks that Jackson favored was likewise premised on differing systems of value, the process of reconciliation was theoretically more transparent and local bankers could be held accountable by investors who were free to take their deposits elsewhere. Jackson's redistribution of federal reserves decentralized regulation and localized deposits of "hard money," theoretically allowing for a more reliable conversion of soft currencies like land deeds, which were in plenteous supply after the federal land grab that Jackson authorized as "Indian Removal." The circulation of such deeds in the hands of "swindlers" playing the margins, however, led Jackson to issue his Specie Circular in 1836, requiring all federal lands to be bought with hard currencies. This inadvertently led to the devaluation of paper currencies, sparking inflation, and aggravating financial instabilities that crashed in the Panic of 1837.

The problem was that, despite their state charters, most of these free independent banks were unregulated, and, where regulated, often in flagrant violation of the law. Required, for example, to hold a certain amount of specie in reserve, many banks substituted other forms of value. Economic historian Leonard Helderman recounts the story of an inspection undertaken at a Michigan bank in 1838. Upon the request of the inspector, the teller opened a deposit box which was shown to contain \$1,000 worth of American silver half-dollars. When the second box was opened, the contents appeared to be the same, except that a top layer of silver coins hid a bottom layer of lead and ten-penny nails. Boxes three through eight repeated the ruse. A ninth and final box, also heavy to hand, was revealed to hold only broken shards of glass (Helderman, 27).

One of the reasons "wildcat" banks like this resorted to such creative tactics for evading regulations concerning mandatory specie reserves lay in the dearth of specie to be had in outlying regions of the country. From the perspective of these local institutions – and even many of their investors – this charade of compliance was necessary to facilitate the actual business of banking, which, in predominantly agricultural areas, often consisted of trading the security of land deeds for an advance on crop futures. When the Panic of 1837 hit, however, the tenuousness of this system was exposed, as the real estate that secured a loan proved difficult to liquidate into specie payment and banks were unable to cash out notes from their chimeric specie reserves.

Thus, in 1838, the US Congress enacted the National Bank Act, which applied New York State's free-banking system broadly to the country at large. As Helderman notes, it was essentially a compromise between the Hamiltonian Whigs, who favored a central bank, and Jacksonian "hard money" advocates, who wished to outlaw all notes of issue in favor of an exclusive trade in specie. Once the deal was set, the Whigs got centralized regulation, meant to ensure the stability of individual banks by linking their note issues to a federally mandated specie reserve; the Jacksonians got a decentralized system of banking, which, while allowing for credit creation, was theoretically based on real money (Helderman, 14).

This economic instability – fueled by Jackson's concerns about dwindling specie reserves, inflated paper, and speculation in abstract value – provides evidence for de Bolla's thesis, explaining why the language of the sublime, with its rhetoric of excess, marked audience responses to Kemble's performances of *Fazio* on her 1832–1834 tour of the USA. Like the London and New York reviewers cited above, the Boston diarist whose observations begin this chapter also identifies Kemble's performance in terms of a reconciliation of opposites that approaches the sublime. "Imploring" the jailer in a "passionate" manner in one moment, Kemble turns her Bianca to "marble," "a perfect statue," with the tolling of the bell in the next; "embraced" by Fazio, the man whose life she has tried to reclaim, her Bianca remains "insensible" to his touch, a "bloodless image of despair." From feeling deeply to feeling nothing at all, Kemble's Bianca moves Quincy and the rest of that Boston audience toward an identification with this pathetic character that is exquisite in its extremity. In their suspended breath is a palpable fear for the woman who, though redeemed by her husband's forgiving embrace, cannot allow herself to live. It is as if they stop breathing with her.

What allowed Kemble to achieve such a powerful effect was the "point" technique, which facilitated her movement between interpretive levels of engagement. Quincy describes Kemble's statue-like posture as an image that hovered between the iconographic, inviting audiences to "read" it much like a tableau vivant, and the realistic, seducing them into a fictional realm where Bianca's embodied passions felt palpably real. Using her voice and gesture to represent Bianca's grief with such conviction, Kemble moves Quincy to sympathize with the irascible woman, whose jealousy had cost her the love she desired to save, and to admire the actress's realistic rendering of her character's quixotic passions.

This ability to move between the representational and presentational aspects of the performance exemplifies Bert O. States's conception of

"perceptual synthesis," the audience's ability to attend simultaneously to the performed reality of a character and the actor's virtuosity in creating it. Although States argues that this mode of perception is transhistorical, he concedes that, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the star system dominated the stage, audiences may have been more consciously attuned to moments of virtuosity (375). If they were, it was because the point technique emerged into visibility as a formal convention at this time, helping them shift between the star's interpretive signature and the increasingly realistic world of the play in order to understand an especially complicated transaction.

That transaction involved an exchange that was not only between the actor's social and fictional identities, but also between the actor and audience in bartering the terms of the representation for the real. It also traded value between different interpretive levels in the play. The point facilitated all three types of exchange, helping audiences transact equivalences and calculate differences between literal and metaphorical meanings in the play as well as between the fictional world of the stage and their own social contexts.

As we have seen, *Fazio* exerts a rhetorical force on popular attitudes toward the value of paper money, seeking to quell anxieties in this protracted moment of economic uncertainty. Read allegorically, *Fazio* (the Bank) renounces *Aldabella* (a counterfeit bill of exchange) in favor of *Bianca* (gold), even as he renounces money (the gold coin) in favor of love (represented by the token of *Bianca*'s portrait). Inviting audiences to identify *Bianca* as a source of value, the play also asks them to accept the portrait of her – a representation – as having value insofar as it is backed by the real that is *Bianca* herself. That the "real" *Bianca* was actually a representation incarnated by Fanny Kemble enacted a double displacement of value that the audience was able to experience directly.

In fact, they helped to negotiate the exchange between Kemble's fictive and social identities, trading their applause for a moment of complete and utter absorption into the fictional world of the play. As an active trading partner, the audience was able to trace the representation back to its material source, demystifying the process of exchange that the play symbolically enacts. Kemble's performance in Milman's play is thus brilliant dramaturgy, using the convention of the "point" to realize an exchange that the play enacts in its symbolic register, rendering its meanings in a way that exceeds the text to present Kemble's audiences with a sublime and satisfying aesthetic experience that makes sense of their changing world.

Something of the sublime that audiences may have felt in this interpretive excess is captured in Thomas Sully's 1833 portrait of Kemble as

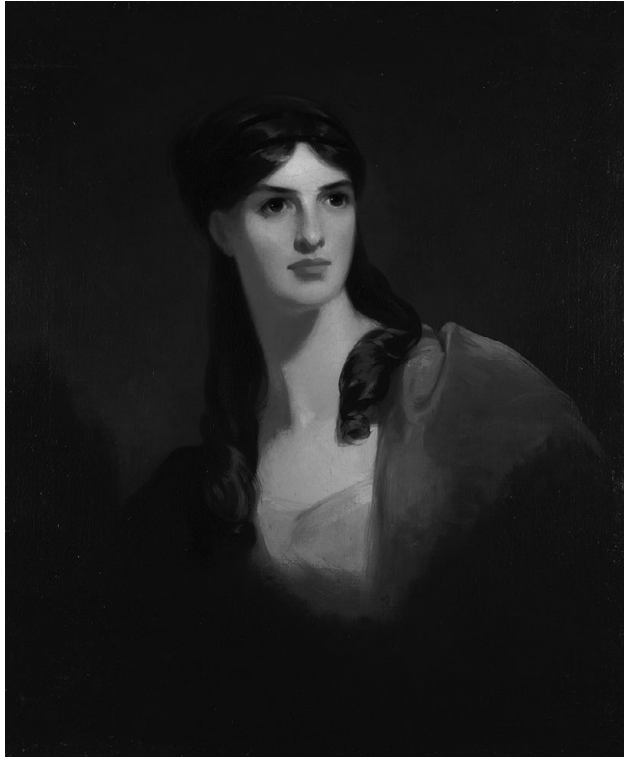


Figure 1.1 “Frances Anne Kemble as Bianca,” by Thomas Sully, 1833, oil on canvas. Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of Mrs. John Ford

Bianca (Figure 1.1). Wrapped in an earthy brown mantle, Kemble looks ahead with steady resolve, representing Bianca as an emblem of groundedness, constancy, and moral value. Her dress, however, is a shimmering gold, suggesting her character’s metaphorical function within the play’s economic allegory. The extent to which audiences consciously shifted their attention between these interpretive levels undoubtedly varied from one spectator to the next, but Quincy suggests that her performance was thrilling in large part for the way these multiple layers overlapped.

Black Market Value: On the Auction Block

If the “point” was the perfect technique for enacting the metaphor of exchange that animates Milman’s play, so, too, was *Fazio* the perfect vehicle for the “point”, making its transactional function visible to audiences

who were trying to comprehend the terms of a volatile economy moving toward stabilization. As the reviews excerpted above suggest, this was just as true for Kemble's audiences in the USA as for those in the UK, even if their respective economic realities were considerably different. While the UK modernized its economy by opening up its creaky royal patent and charter system to the free market, the USA tried to strike a balance between a free market unfettered by government regulation and the need to protect consumers from "swindles." Ever tenuous, that balance is always a delicate negotiation between local and national (and international) markets, as well as between the reliability of conventions that maintain economic order and the confidence and flexibility to stimulate entrepreneurial growth and innovation. Then, as now, the rhetoric of "states' rights" was invoked to declare political sovereignty and economic autonomy from federal regulation, especially by agrarian states in the US South, whose economic interests – underwritten by enslaved labor – differed from the mercantilist states in the North building their industrial base.

But even prosperous families in the North could be the beneficiaries of the slave economy, as Kemble discovered upon marrying the Southern-born slave-holding Pierce Mease Butler in 1834. The grandson of a prosperous rice and cotton planter, Butler – born Pierce Butler Mease – assumed his maternal grandfather's last name in order to inherit the 2,300 acres and nearly 1,000 enslaved persons who were the resident workforce on the family's Butler and St. Simon's Island plantations in Georgia.⁸ But Butler – like many wealthy Southern planters – was an absentee landlord, leaving his rice and cotton plantations under the management of his resident overseer and living off the profits of slave capital in distant Philadelphia. His grandfather had retired there after his wife died, serving as a director of the first BUS (where he exerted a temporizing force against the Hamiltonian federalists) and establishing the stately residence where Butler and his brother John grew up.⁹ When the abolitionist Kemble became aware of the circumstances of the Butler family's wealth, she was horrified, immediately committing herself to the domestic task of providing a moral compass, tirelessly exhorting her husband to free his captive

⁸ See Catherine Clinton for the background on Butler's grandfather, who sold his commission as a major in the British army to marry Mary Middleton, whose family owned the Georgia plantations. Through his British connections, Butler was able to barter a top price for the Sea Islands cotton that would bear his name on the British exchange (113–115).

⁹ Clinton relays the anecdote that the elder Butler likely offered help to Aaron Burr after he killed Alexander Hamilton, allowing him to escape to St. Simon's Island under the assumed name of Roswell King, Sr., the resident overseer of his estates (115).

servants and save his soul from the moral abomination of slavery. This was the beginning of the end of Kemble's marriage. After many months of his wife's pleading, Butler finally agreed to take his family South in the winter of 1838/1839, challenging Kemble to see for herself the realities of plantation life as compared with representations of it in the abolitionist literature she favored. Given the "task system" long employed on the family's estates, Butler believed himself exempt from criticism that focused on the most horrific abuses of slavery: the maiming and killing of human beings who were quite literally worked to death.¹⁰ Such accounts allowed paternalists like Butler to feel a sense of moral superiority over those who would manage their estates so irresponsibly as to destroy their own property. Rationalizing his investment in slave capital on purely economic grounds, Butler thus excused himself from his wife's moral objections. Besides, according to his overseer, Roswell King, Jr., his field workers were "much upon the same footing as the laboring men in the North" (Kemble, *Residence*, 65). By Butler's callous regard, then, the institution of slavery was merely one system of labor among others, if also the one best suited to maintaining the productivity of his rice and cotton fields.

There is, of course, no question that slavery was – and is – dehumanizing of those whose bodies are constrained by manacles, halters, whips, and ropes, whose labor is compelled by the threat of force, and whose subjectivities are conditioned by rape and capricious brutality. The scarred backs, amputated feet, and emaciated skeletons of those who stare back at us from photographs documenting the practice as it existed in the American South demand that we acknowledge this plain truth. As Harvey Young suggests, even the "stillness" of these images attests to the subjection of bodies so disciplined as to be rendered clearly by the

¹⁰ Kemble describes the task system at some length in her *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation*, recounting a story in which two of the estate's carpenters made a boat during "their leisure time," which they then sold for \$60 (65–66). Kemble distinguishes the task system, which she believes is "universal" throughout the coastal Southern states, from the more brutal practices in "Louisiana and the new Southwestern slave states," where "planters found it, upon the whole, their most profitable plan to work off (kill with labor) their whole number of slaves about once in seven years, and renew the whole stock" (65). Although, at face value, the distinction seems to blunt her criticism of the slave economy, it is in fact in the context of correcting "another of Miss Martineau's mistakes" (i.e., that the task system was anomalous, but so humane that it should be adopted by all slaveholders to improve the conditions of their enslaved workers). Kemble goes on to condemn the entire institution of slavery, including the task system, challenging one of its rhetorical niceties – that the tasks "profess to be graduated according to the sex, age, and strength of the laborer" – by stating for the record that "this is not the case" (66). Women who labored in the fields had the same task as men to perform, and – she continues with sincere outrage – were impressed back into service almost immediately after laboring in childbirth!

notoriously slow daguerreotype process. Referring to the ethnographic portraits of Alfred, Fassena, Jack, Jem, and Renty – the African-born subjects forced to sit for photographer Jack Zealy in 1850 – he sees in such arrested terror a living memory of the Middle Passage that continues to haunt the habitus of embodied Blackness (44). Scholars such as Young have written movingly about the experiences of living under, within, and against this system of oppression, recuperating the stories of a people almost lost to history except for such photographs, property records, and family lore recorded in bibles and passed down through oral traditions that persist in the face of white denial or embarrassment. While recognizing the importance of these accounts, my focus here is on the economic rhetoric of slave capitalism – a discursive system whose polite terms and whitewashed abstractions may have allowed for the kind of rationalizations Butler engaged in, but whose logical contradictions were also revealed by the sophistry of the arguments made in its terms. This is a story that also needs to be told, especially now, in a moment when apologists continue to claim that slavery was a mere epiphenomenon in the history of economic self-determination that goes by the name of states' rights.

Butler, for example, may have separated Kemble's private from his public sphere, but he implicitly acknowledged – even as he avoided – the moral responsibility he bore for the welfare of his workforce by delegating authority to his overseer, King. This allowed him to pretend that slavery was a feudal institution, with lords and vassals performing their roles accordingly, even as he capitalized on the knowledge of the enslaved Africans and the labor power of their descendants who irrigated his rice fields and picked his cotton. Their labor was not exactly “taboo,” but the menial and manual tasks that Butler's enslaved workers performed made them a kind of “Mercurian,” in Slezkine's terms, defined in opposition to the “host” society of wealthy planters in the South. Like the Jews in Europe, Africans and African Americans enslaved in the USA were marked as racial others, casting a sheen of privileged whiteness onto their owners who modernized the feudal imaginary of their aristocratic class prerogatives by way of racist justifications (W. Johnson, 81–82, 157).

As historian Walter Johnson shows in his rhetorical analysis of the language of slavery, to buy a slave was to purchase evidence of one's whiteness, especially for someone on the social margins of planter aristocracy like John M. Tibbeats, the “quick-tempered, spiteful man” of no fixed residence who was “not esteemed by white men, nor even respected by slaves” (quoted in W. Johnson, 80). This is Solomon Northup's description in his 1853 memoir *Twelve Years a Slave* of the man who bought him

after he had been kidnapped as a free Black man and smuggled South by traders playing the margins between the free North and the slave South. Johnson speculates that Northup – renamed “Platt” – was probably the first slave Tibeats bought in his bid for upward mobility. For those at the margins of planter aristocracy, whiteness provided provisional belonging in the American caste system founded by Britain’s second sons who, making claims on New World soil, added land to their Old World titles. Although men like Tibeats were excluded from the social rituals of the plantation aristocracy, they would later affirm their racial solidarity with the planter class by performatively enacting an Anglo-Saxon heritage with burning crosses and white robes. The feudal imaginary thus proved a rich repository of costumes and behaviors that new white landowners could draw from to dissemble humble origins, tutor rude manners, and pretend a life of ease that was in fact hard won. It also allowed white men – such as King, Butler’s overseer – to play the role of medieval lord, free to terrorize Black women claimed as property by exercising a mythic *droit du seigneur*.¹¹

Bought and sold as property, so-called “slaves” were a peculiar kind of Mercurian, existing both as serf-like laborers on crop-producing estates and as commodified objects of trade, anticipating, or implicitly serving as the primary exemplum for, Karl Marx’s analysis of capitalist relations. Under racial capitalism, “serf” and “commodity” were one and the same, an untenable equivalence that was forced to balance on a thumb-adjusted scale that went unnoticed for the tortuously confused rhetorics of the slave trade. As Johnson documents, plantation owners might practice a paternalism that acknowledged their enslaved workers to be human beings (albeit “children”), such as when they requested families be kept together when selling them, while traders treated them as objects, referring to them as livestock whose value could be enhanced by the proper discipline and training of their chief productive features (e.g., “docile temperament,” “reproductive potential,” “strong muscular build”). Caught between slavery’s justifying logics of feudalism and capitalism and its competing rhetorics of paternalism and animal husbandry, the subjectivities of enslaved peoples were forged in their leveraging vise. As Saidiya Hartman has powerfully argued, even the recognition of an enslaved person’s humanity was a scene of violence in the formation of their (“slave”) subjectivity (5). At once servant and commodity, human and

¹¹ Kemble remarks on the presence of children born to Black mothers who bear King’s resemblance (*Residence*, 201). Although her disgust is prompted by her feminine sympathies with the women so ill-used, it also belies her own implicit racial bias.

animal, person and object, the enslaved person had to respond to different discursive interpellations depending upon context and interlocutor, inducing the double consciousness that, even after emancipation, W. E. B. Du Bois described as the existential condition of Blackness in the USA. When I use terms such as “enslaved worker” or “captive servant,” I aim here for that sense of doubleness in which the human being exceeds – even as she is rendered knowable by – an economic system that assigns her a function and a value. Such terms are meant to tag the co-existence of competing logics, to expose their incommensurability without erasing the humanity of those who were hailed by them. Although these conflicting interpellations were never fully discrete, they overlapped in spectacular and troubling ways on the auction block, which, as Hartman has discussed, was among other things a “site of performance” (32), a liminal space where subjectivities that had been brutally conditioned were on full display. The contradictions of subject formation, she notes, were evident in the very performances that enslaved persons were forced to enact. Under offstage threat of violence, they embodied fictions of merriment and docility that were authored and directed by traders seeking to create an “economy of pleasure” for an audience of potential buyers (26). Speaking of the double consciousness induced through such performances, Johnson cites William Wells Brown’s account of “slaves forced to dance to a merry fiddle while ‘their cheeks were wet with tears,’” and Henry Bibb’s use of the third person to narrate his experiences in the slave pen (163). Like that of the actor shifting in and out of role, the body of the enslaved person was indeed the bearer of multiple meanings. For the potential buyer, it represented a fantasy, one carefully stage-managed by the trader, whose feeding, grooming, costuming, and rehearsing of the performer served a paternalistic narrative that flattered the buyer’s self-image. For the trader, it was a livestock commodity whose value was touted in the language of animal husbandry, with each salable “point” described to serve the fantasy on sale.

“Point” was indeed the term used to describe the physical features of the human being offered for sale to the highest bidder. Derived from the breeding of livestock, this usage functioned to appraise the value of horses, dogs, or other cultivated breeds in terms of the animal’s physical form. Consider, for example, the term as it appears in Northup’s account of his experience on the auction block:

Next day many customers called to examine Freeman’s “new lot.” The latter gentleman was very loquacious, dwelling at much length upon *our several good points and qualities*. He would make us hold up our heads, walk

briskly back and forth, while customers would feel of our hands and arms and bodies, turn us about, ask us what we could do, make us open our mouths and show our teeth, precisely as a jockey examines a horse which he is about to barter for or purchase. (79–80; italics added)

Likewise, in Josiah Henson's memoir:

Several planters came to the boat to look at me; I was sent on some hasty errand that they might see how I could run; *my points were canvassed* as those of a horse would have been; and doubtless, some account of my faculties entered into the discussion of the bargain, that my value as a domestic animal might be enhanced. (55; italics added)

This rhetoric was meant not only to enact an institutional power over the captive's body, reducing that person to the status of an animal, but also to shape its epistemological contours by transforming it into a commodity whose value could be assessed in terms of economic exchange.

Although the etymology of the "point" in this context is quite distinct from its rhetorical and theatrical usage, the two registers of meaning were beginning to overlap in the 1830s with the recognition of both the theatricality of the slave auction and the metaphorical exchange that was enacted at the site of the actor's body. As early as 1827, one theatre critic borrowed the term from falconry to esteem the technique of a promising young actor – Edwin Forrest, on the occasion of his stage debut – punning on the imagery of an eagle taking flight to predict the career trajectory of this talented new star (Anonymous, "Mr. E. Forrest," 335). Such instances suggest a growing cultural awareness of the way these two uses of the term – and, more important, the systems of valuation they named – were becoming citationally intertwined, depositing associative meanings into each other's register. Both kinds of performance were also beginning to converge, revealing the contradictions that abolitionists worked to name.

Of course, the performers on the auction block wielded little power to authorize their body's significations. Johnson suggests that they learned to read the codes that governed the slave trade, nonetheless, and were able to shape, within limits, the conditions of their sale. Standing at the center of the exchange, the enslaved person could return an existential gaze or make a verbal appeal that implicated the buyer-audience in the shared humanity that underwrote the paternalistic fantasy (W. Johnson, 164).

The audience of bidders may have focused attention on the physical attributes of the commodity for sale, but the spectators among them could also interpret the character duly presented on the raised platform, intuiting the stories – sentimental, melodramatic, or otherwise – behind their

glances, postures, and attitudes. Consider, for example, Mortimer “Doesticks” Thomson, who posed as a buyer to report on an auction for the American Anti-Slavery Society and the *New York Tribune* back home. He noted that

The expression on the faces of all who stepped on the block was always the same, and told of more anguish than it is in the power of words to express. Blighted homes, crushed hopes and broken hearts was the sad story to be read in all the anxious faces. Some of them regarded the sale with perfect indifference . . . without caring to cast even a look at the buyer, who now held all their happiness in his hands. Others, again, strained their eyes with eager glances from one buyer to another as the bidding went on . . . [s]ometimes . . . conceiving an instantaneous preference for one of the buyers over the other . . . the expression of his face changing with every bid. (18–19)

Looking for the hidden transcript in this account, we might find the supposedly indifferent performer subverting the script he had been given, eking out a small space on this public stage to assert a subjectivity resistant to the role he had been given. If bystanders acknowledged his humanity, however, they also would have had to recognize the violence outside the frame of the performance.

As for those spritely performers with “eager glances,” their roles had been scripted, too. But, in their expression of alternating hope and despair, they too might have performed their subjectivities with the kind of “afro-alienation” that Daphne Brooks attributes to the character of Cato in her reading of William Wells Brown’s *The Escape; or A Leap for Freedom* (1857). Taking Cato as a figure for the many “bodies in dissent” she traces throughout her book of that name, Brooks reads his oscillation between a comic minstrel caricature and a “ruminative and resistant runaway” as a strategy used by the playwright to signify on the characters found in abolitionist stage adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (2). Unlike Topsy and Tom, reverse images in the white fantasy of Blackness, Cato “encounters self-reckoning at the site of his alien condition,” according to Brooks, “and wriggles free of enslavement to perform a counternarrative to that of minstrelsy’s master script” (2). Significantly, he does so by donning his master’s clothes and remarking upon his changed condition as if reflecting upon his image in a mirror.

Brown’s scene is evocative of a similar one in John Murdock’s *The Triumphs of Love, or Happy Reconciliation* (1795). This is the sentimental abolitionist drama that Heather Nathans identifies as a precursor to the phenomenon of the Stowe adaptations (44–48). In it, Murdock asks his

audience to look with new eyes at the figure of the captive servant, Sambo, who, engaging in a moment of self-reflection before a mirror, assesses his physical attributes against his disadvantages, ruminating on the uncertainty of his fate should his good master die and he is sold – “like cow or horse” – to one who treats him poorly (Murdock, 51–52). Sambo’s speech before the mirror, musing on his value, explicitly stages the overlapping registers of “points” in a way that makes a sentimental appeal both to the audience and to George, his master, who has been watching unobserved and thus comes to understand the injustice of slavery from a new perspective. George, a figure for the young republic, leaves behind the callow indifference of his carefree youth and is initiated into manhood through his impassioned understanding of Sambo’s plight, telling the audience that “[t]he untutored, pathetic soliloquy of that honest creature, has more sensibly affected me, than all I have read, or thought, on that barbarous, iniquitous slave trade” (Murdock, 52). As Nathans points out, the play’s sentimental dramaturgy prompts the audience to be similarly moved and to arrive at the same conclusion.

An Afro-pessimist reading might argue, as Doug Jones does of Brown’s *Cato*, that, in identifying with Sambo, white audiences would have effectively erased his subjectivity as a Black man, substituting their own feelings for his in a narcissistic fantasy. But the meta-theatricality of the scene – made explicit in Murdock and key to Brooks’s reading of Brown – works against such an interpretation insofar as the scene explicitly acknowledges the convention that facilitates the empathic exchange. Placed before the mirror, with its doubled audience, Sambo’s body is framed explicitly as a site of transaction in which different values (and registers of value) are brought into functional equivalence within a larger symbolic economy. Sambo’s body is thus staged as a locus of competing values, where one identifies Sambo as a human subject and the other as a commodified object, poignantly dramatizing their incommensurability. Insofar as Brown likewise stages *Cato*’s rumination in a theatrical way (complete with costume, jokes, and song), he may reference this sentimental performance tradition that his nineteenth-century free Black audiences would have recognized with wry amusement.

Since both acting and the slave trade made use of both literal and representational economies, the conflation of these systems of value implied a commodification of the actor’s body that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, was beginning to prove troubling – not only to cultural gatekeepers, who wished to protect the theatre’s literary and artistic value from market contamination, as we shall see, but also to

actresses like Kemble, who were already vulnerable to moral condemnation for presenting the interpretive instrument of their bodies for public scrutiny. Kemble appears to have intuited a connection between these two economies of the “point,” but in a way that also enacts a disavowal. Writing in her 1838–1839 Georgia journal, the married and thus retired actress expresses frustration at her inability to halt the proposed sale of a servant, Psyche, which threatens to break up her family. After pleading with Butler to seemingly no avail, Kemble ruminates on possible ways that she, despite her limited agency, might help:

In the evening, I was . . . alone in . . . our sitting room, and revolving in my mind the means of rescuing Psyche from her miserable suspense, [when] a long chain of all my possessions, in the shape of bracelets, necklaces, brooches, earrings, etc., wound in glittering procession through my brain, with many hypothetical calculations of the value of each separate ornament, and the very doubtful probability of the amount of the whole being equal to the price of this poor creature and her children; and then the great power and privilege I had foregone of earning money by my own labor occurred to me, and I think, for the first time in my life, my past profession assumed an aspect that arrested my thoughts most seriously. For the last four years of my life that preceded my marriage I literally coined money, and never until this moment, I think, did I reflect on the great means of good, to myself and others, that I so gladly agreed to give up forever for a maintenance by the unpaid labor of slaves – people toiling not only unpaid, but under the bitter conditions the bare contemplation of which was then wringing my heart. (*Residence*, 139)

Here, Kemble glimmers an insight into the equivalences implied by the rhetoric of these systems of exchange. As the price of jewelry is to the value of a servant, so is the labor of acting to that of slavery insofar as both generate value, which circulates as money. Yet, in making this equivalence, Kemble also recoils from its implications, recognizing the “bitter conditions” of violence that undergird one of those systems of exchange. Significantly, her thought process shifts from having items to sell in order to buy Psyche and her children to having not only money but also the capacity to make money by acting. Of course, she means that, as an actress, she made the kind of money that would have allowed her to buy Psyche and her children and thus preserve their family. But note the aporia in her thought; her reasoning shifts – perhaps because the fantasy places her in the position of a slave buyer, which she has to disavow. Instead, she renews her appreciation of her former and much-beleaguered profession for allowing her to earn an *honest* living – one that did not implicate her within the slave economy. “I literally coined money,” she brightly remarks – a curious

statement, given the linguistic precision with which this erudite writer typically recorded her thoughts. She didn't "literally" coin money. But, within the apparatus of the theatrical exchange, she coined meanings that held both literal and metaphorical value. In other words, Kemble imagines the intersection of the theatrical and slave economies through the technique of the actor's "point." Into it, she inserts her laboring body, substituting the disparaged role of actor for the repugnant role of slave buyer in order to esteem the self-authorizing powers of the former as compared with the self-destroying power of the latter. The elision masks what cannot be said: both the enslaved person's and the actor's bodies are sites of capital, generating value by which more value is accrued.

Just as Kemble found the commodification of the actor's body inadmissible, so, too, did cities throughout the South refuse the explicit marketing of Black bodies, especially when the slave trade flourished openly in public streets. Such scenes invited Northern and foreign visitors to freely compare the practices they witnessed in person with accounts in the abolitionist press, revealing the real to be closer to its representation than men like Butler wished to acknowledge. The public spectacle around Charleston's Old Exchange¹² was increasingly an embarrassment to city leaders – so much so that they enacted an ordinance in 1856 mandating that "brokers, auctioneers, and commission agents" (as slave traders called themselves, in a bid for public respectability) move their ventures indoors. Thomas Ryan opened his Slave Mart on Chalmers Street, just a block and a half away from the city's Dock Street Theatre (Bancroft, 170, 173). The proximity is worth noting, since Ryan did not remove the offending spectacle from the public gaze so much as reframe it within a recognizable setting – complete with raised platform, costumed actors, and an engaged and attentive audience of prospective buyers. Dion Boucicault would redouble the frame around such spectacles in his 1859 play *The Octoroon*. Standing on the platform while well-meaning bystanders remark her fine qualities, his title character, Zoë, performs silent acquiescence to her fate, making her tragedy doubly "pointed."

Housed in a tidy building, the domestic slave trade took on the façade of a legitimate business, earning traders like Ryan something akin to the

¹² Historian Eola Willis notes that, after a 1782 fire destroyed much of Charleston, including a theatre building that had survived the Revolutionary War, the upper chambers of the city's Old Exchange housed a return engagement of the American Company in 1785 (88). Since the Old Exchange was the city's customs house, where imports – including tea, porcelain, silk, and African laborers – were registered through the offices on its first floor, the building was a physical site that provided contiguity to these overlapping practices.

respectability that actors had earned generations before upon moving their itinerant performances indoors. But on the auction block, grief was palpably real and tears spontaneously flowed. Even today, the stifled cries of those waiting in the wings seem to echo off the exposed brick of what is now the Old Slave Mart Museum. Such structures remain haunted by the phantoms of this Grand Guignol, where bodies in pain are signified by the silent artifacts of brutality on display, and where descendants testify as docents to a history that is not yet past.

In 1859, however, a storefront was not sufficient to handle the volume of trade, when an auction boasting an unprecedented 436 enslaved workers from a single estate was held on the grounds of the Savannah Tenbroeck race course. The estate to be settled was that of Pierce Butler, Fanny Kemble's then ex-husband, for whom the paternalistic cover story of economic necessity was in fact very real. Once the owner of two profitable plantations, Butler had lost money in the Panic of 1857, and, owing to "other exigencies of business" that probably included gambling, found himself in debt to his creditors (M. Thomson, 3). By this time, Fanny was long gone, having exhausted her appeals for divestment and conceded to a divorce. Their family would be divided, too, with eldest daughter, Sarah, siding with her mother, and daughter Fan, her father. Kemble's gift for writing would prove a family inheritance, but to her reflections on life on a Georgia plantation, Fan offered a revisionary account in her apologia for the Old South.

The auction of Butler's enslaved workers, the largest from a single estate ever recorded in North America, became colloquially known as "the weeping time," for the forced breakup of the extended families who had comprised the African American community of the Sea Islands and the labor force of the Butler plantations for generations. That the three-day event of preview and auction was accompanied by unrelenting rain made it seem as if the angels in heaven were crying, according to the oral history that Anne C. Bailey documents in interviews with the descendants of this tragic event. Among those sold were Chattels 9 – Joe, a carpenter – and 15 – his son, Robert. Joe's wife and Robert's mother, Psyche – on whose behalf Kemble had pleaded with Butler so entreatingly (with eventual success) – had died several years before (Bailey, 16). "As the last family stepped down from the block, the rain ceased," Thomson reports, and "for the first time in four days the clouds broke away, and the soft sunlight fell on the scene" (28). The sale had netted \$303,850 to cover Butler's debts; in paternalistic gratitude, he gave each of his departing workers "one whole dollar, in specie" (M. Thomson, 27).

Shifting Registers of Literary and Theatrical Value

The money that Butler doled out was no act of charity; it was the price he paid for the privilege of *noblesse oblige*, the chivalric duty he performed for his vassals one last time – or at least until after the war, when many returned to be tenant sharecroppers on the Butler estate. Such rituals allowed him to maintain the symbolic economy of his racial privilege and class status, even as his debts were due. It was a harbinger of what was to come. The institution of slavery may have ended, but racial capitalism would continue, supported by the symbolic economy of a thoroughly undemocratic feudal imaginary that recast class privilege in racialized terms.

Indeed, symbolic economies of various kinds helped stabilize a sense of volatility that citizen-consumers experienced in financial markets that were settling into order over the course of the nineteenth century. The theatre, for example, was part of a symbolic economy that assigned genres of entertainment to a cultural hierarchy ranging from high to low. At the top were the “legitimate” theatres of Covent Garden and Drury Lane in the UK (patented as such by royal decree) and similar venues in the USA where spoken dramas were performed. They were followed by popular entertainments such as melodramas, ballets, burlesques, music halls, pantomimes, rope dancing, and animal acts, which emphasized feats of physical skill. While used to make distinctions among varieties of entertainment, this scale of cultural value also came to mark the relative class status of audiences in attendance, implicitly distinguishing between performances that stimulated the literary imagination and those that merely appealed to the bodily senses. Never absolute in practice, such distinctions mapped a field of cultural value that could harden nonetheless, especially if a work effectively lost its symbolic capital, which is what happened to Milman’s play.

Although celebrated for its literary merits upon its first review in 1816, *Fazio* descended from the top of this summit over the course of the nineteenth century, reaching its base at the turn of the twentieth, when critics dismissed the play as having little to no value at all. *Fazio*’s debasement is notable not only for its extremity but also for the ways in which its literary and theatrical values were set at odds. For, with the actor’s body functioning as a site of representational exchange, the theatre’s explicit engagement of a commercial logic made it vulnerable to the laws of exclusion wielded by cultural gatekeepers who pretended that aesthetic value transcended material relations of exchange.

Written as a verse drama, *Fazio* was actually first produced – apparently without Milman’s knowledge or permission – as a melodrama entitled *The Italian Wife* at the unlicensed Surrey Theatre in London, where musical accompaniment was added so as not to violate the patents’ monopoly on spoken-word drama (A. Milman, 33). Such tactics, while technically within the letter of the law, were popular with audiences who recognized the increasingly arbitrary distinction between “legitimate” and unlicensed theatres. Indeed, the distinction was buckling under pressure not only from managers of unlicensed houses like the Surrey but also from those at patent houses like Drury Lane, where Garrick had transformed “legitimate” stage acting by introducing pantomimic techniques he had borrowed from John Rich, the popular harlequin actor at Covent Garden (Wood, 32).

Elocutionary reformers sought to restore decorum, regulating the line between propriety and excess in an attempt to maintain a literary standard within the legitimate theatre. For such arbiters of literary value, the declamatory theatre appealed to the ears of its aptly named “audience,” with actors presenting poetic verse through skillful oral delivery with restrained gestural emphases. For investors in Romanticism’s nascent realism, “pointed” effects converted audiences into “spectators,” as actors rendered their characters’ passions and motivations in newly legible ways. Existing at the fulcrum of this stylistic change, the “point” itself was variously practiced, with some actors leaning toward the declamatory end of the continuum and others shifting the weight of history toward Romanticism, where moments of heightened emotion would, by the end of the nineteenth century, elongate into a more sustained style of verisimilitude, aided by innovations in architectural, scenic, and lighting design. Functioning as a mechanism for negotiating the terms of the actor’s exchange of representation for the real, the “point” also shifted the standard by which the theatre’s literary and cultural value was measured.

Kemble herself critically discerned this shift, even as she helped effect it. In the fall of 1832, having just embarked upon her US tour, she ruminated in her personal journal on her father’s finely detailed “points,” comparing them with the bolder motions of Edmund Kean. With the fidelity of a loving daughter, Kemble laments the fading regard in which her father’s restrained and statuesque style of delivery is held by audiences increasingly accustomed to the spectacular performances of an actor like Kean who produces an “effect” upon their senses. Remarking of Kean, she observes that, “Indeed, he is the better artist of the two, though probably not the most intellectual man” (*Journal*, Vol. 1, 144). Her father’s approach, by

contrast, is so detailed as to require of him “laborious and minute study” that is “toilsome” in both conception and execution; yet, as she acknowledges, it is received by audiences in much the same temper: “Few persons are able to follow such a performance with the necessary attention, and it is almost as great an exertion to see it *understandingly*, as to act it” (*Journal*, Vol. 1, 145; emphasis in the original). What Kemble realized is that the point technique practiced by her father is quite different from that performed by Kean. Although personal style choices no doubt marked the two actors apart, Kemble also seems to perceive a generational – and, indeed, historical – shift; where her father nodded to the declamatory tradition’s emphasis on poetry, Kean unapologetically interpolated moments of intense passionate expression. In the midst of this transition, audiences adapted their habits of attention accordingly, shifting from a regard for the play-as-literature to an appreciation of the passions that motivated its characters to act. As reviews of her performances testify, Kemble herself would facilitate the theatre’s shift toward the impassioned effects that Kean made famous, further hastening the obsolescence of her father’s more declamatory style of “points.”

Increasingly, *Fazio*’s ideas also became subsumed by its passions, as the play became known for the opportunities it offered actors – especially actresses – to render such passions on stage. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the play had become primarily a vehicle by which to launch an actress’s career.¹³ No less an actress than Charlotte Cushman chose it for her London debut in 1845, making the part hers with a memorably intoned line which subsequent actresses copied (Anonymous, *The Times*, 6). Praising Cushman’s performance in a panegyric, Eliza Cook poeticized, “I had seen many ‘strut and fret their hour;’ But my brain never had become such slave To Fiction as it did beneath thy power” (Cook, 57). Matilda Heron performed the role in 1854 and a Miss Bateman likewise chose it for her 1877 debut. By that time, however, the play was “out of fashion,” and associated with literal-minded realism.¹⁴ The thematics and

¹³ Regarding an 1845 performance, the London *Times* reviewer described *Fazio* as “a disagreeable, transparent, monotonous drama, but one that has been frequently selected by debutantes, and not without reason. The passions of love, grief, and rage are clearly and intelligibly set forth, the weight of the interest rests alone on the female character.” Similarly, the *Examiner*’s reviewer of that production noted that *Fazio* was “in itself not a strong play, but not ill suited to display the powers of a *strong* actress.”

¹⁴ An 1877 review in *The Examiner* notes simply that Miss Bateman cites Cushman’s “point” but without equal effect (118). A writer for the 1854 *Ladies Cabinet of Fashion* confesses, “We are old playgoers, as our readers will own, when we tell them that we witnessed the first representation of Milman’s ‘Fazio’ at Covent Garden on the 29th March, 1818. Youth is a kindly critic; and what we

narrative structure of Milman's play – its economic metaphors and cultural allegory – were no longer registering prominently, if at all, with critics and presumably audiences in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Ironically, Milman's attempt to return literature to the stage became known for the claptraps it offered actresses seeking to exhibit their emotional range, serving as little more than a thin narrative frame upon which to hang moments of heightened passion. With this transition from literature to spectacle, the play no longer needed the "point" to facilitate exchanges among its various representational levels. As audiences entered into and became absorbed by the fictional realm of the play, they attended less and less to its poetic figures and tropes.

Perhaps this is why *Fazio's* stock as literature dropped in value between its first review in 1816, when an anonymous reviewer in the *Quarterly Review* (probably J. T. Coleridge) admired it for soliloquies "of the rarest merit," and 1909, when Arthur Symons dismissed the play for its "childishness of construction," citing "the naivete with which the speeches follow one another with too carefully irregular a logic of the passions" and the "quaint, unnatural neatness" of the play's "small scenes, with their brief statement, not action" (265). Twenty years later, Allardyce Nicoll had even less to say, briefly citing Milman in a long line of failed would-be saviors of an early nineteenth-century stage indebted to the styles of the past (166).

One of the reasons *Fazio's* value plummeted in both literary and theatrical value may have been related to the 1843 Theatre Regulation Act in the UK, which ended the patent theatres' monopoly on spoken-word drama and extended the Lord Chamberlain's powers of censorship to all theatrical venues. As Tracy C. Davis observes, these changes were part of a general shift in Britain from a classical to a free-trade economy, where value was configured not in terms of social utility but rather of the commodity market. This shift proved to be a mixed bag for the theatre. While it gave an economic rationale to the theatre that it had not had before (arguments about the moral utility of the theatre having had limited appeal), it also reduced the performer's body to the status of a commodity, with all the troubling implications that held for female actors (Davis, *Economics*, 115–135). As feminist scholars of the Victorian era have noted, any woman whose labor did not yield an alienable product risked becoming *herself* marked as a commodity; for such a woman to enter into a

then thought a faultless play, time and experience (sad magnifying glasses, which show the wrinkles on the fairest faces, imperceptible to the casual gaze) have taught us to consider a morbid and ill-constructed melodrama."

commercial transaction was thus to summon the metaphor of the prostitute, with all of its disabling discursive power.¹⁵ As Davis notes in her exhaustive research on working actresses, very few appear to have actually engaged in prostitution, even if they were increasingly subject to a spectacle that was marketed in terms of its erotic appeal (Davis, *Actresses*, 79–80, 127). Given the emotional set-pieces that Milman scripted into his play, actresses essaying the role of Bianca were especially at risk of being reduced to a commodity whose sexual attractiveness was exchanged for the ticket price that secured a seat from which to project an objectifying heteronormative male gaze. Thus the tendency for spectators to focus on realistic moments of intense passion at the expense of the play's aesthetic ideals and literary design – so much feared by literary traditionalists – was aided and abetted by the shifting economic attitudes toward cultural production and consumption that Davis has traced.

While such an explanation may account for why *Fazio* began to lose critical esteem and popularity in the UK at about this time, it does not explain why the play continued to be a success in the USA or why it was popular there to begin with. (Indeed, as economic historian Richard Sylla has demonstrated, the US economy provided the free trade model that Britain adopted at this time.) Other factors were also clearly at work. Free trade may have opened up British markets, allowing for unprecedented growth throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, but it was not free from the anxieties that constitute investor risk. What helped allay those anxieties in Britain – but not yet in the USA – was a stable national currency, backed by gold and secured by the authority of the government. Significantly, one year after the Theatre Regulation Act, Parliament passed the Bank Charter Act in 1844, which ended another monopoly: namely, the BoE's control over London commerce. Newly allowing banks within the previously restricted thirty-mile radius around London to compete with the BoE in most banking functions, it compensated the BoE by designating it the official sole issuer of the English pound note. Backed by the authority of the Crown, the BoE's pound note bound the commercial culture in which it circulated into a national culture as well. Although, in real terms, the paper pound note represented a value that could be converted into silver or gold, in symbolic terms, it represented a social and psychological bond between the citizen-consumers among whom it circulated. The modern bank could thus be added to the cultural transformations that Benedict Anderson outlines as necessary to the creation of

¹⁵ See, for example, Catherine Gallagher, who examines the power of this metaphor in characterizing female authors (127).

the modern nation-state as an “imagined community.” It not only rationalized the citizens’ investment and participation in the nation-state, but also offered them an imaginary means by which to make that transaction real: a single national currency.

The cohesion of that imagined community, however, was also premised upon the exclusion of others – Jews in the UK, Blacks in the USA – those Mercurians, or “service nomads,” whom the host society regards as strangers within and therefore “not true citizens” (Slezkine, 37). As Slezkine points out, the rise of the nation-state tracks with the rise of anti-Semitism as well as other forms of racism. In his three-volume *History of the Jews* (1829), Milman offers firsthand evidence for Slezkine’s thesis. He recounts then-recent legislative attempts to naturalize Jews as citizens of the UK, noting that such a bill was passed by both houses of Parliament in 1753 (399). But then, the church historian continues with mock-outrage, “The nation, as if horror-struck at finding those whom it had been accustomed to consider as outlaws thus suddenly introduced into its bosom, burst into an irresistible clamour of indignation. The Mayor and citizens of London (for mercantile jealousy mingled with religious prejudices) took the lead in denouncing this inroad on the Constitution and insult on Christianity” (399). Their efforts succeeded in the bill’s quick repeal (400). By 1883, the date of *The History’s* fifth printing, however, Milman reports that Jews were finally integrated into British life, with Sir David Salomons serving as Lord Mayor of London and Baron Nathan Rothschild taking a seat in Parliament, both allowed to assume their duties without having to swear an oath on the Christian Bible (423).

Even as ethnic tensions compromised its integrity, an English national identity began to consolidate itself symbolically in the paper pound note, which, as the national currency by the middle of the nineteenth century, circulated among citizens whose consumer acts of exchange bound them all into a united group of citizen-consumers. In the USA, however, this development was delayed – not only because some ethnic others were themselves considered property, but also because various bank-issued currencies continued to circulate at mid-century. As economic historian Niall Ferguson briskly narrates,

For most of the nineteenth century, America had “free banking” and paper money, with up to 1600 banks issuing as many as 10,000 different kinds of banknote . . . Only in 1863 were steps taken to reduce the number of note-issuing banks and to create a standardized national banknote; only in 1879 was the dollar restored to a metallic exchange rate, though *which* metal remained controversial; and only in 1913 was a central bank finally created in the form of the Federal Reserve. (116)

This brief account of the protracted history of US economic consolidation offers an interesting backdrop to the reception history of Milman's play in the USA. If *Fazio* continued to prove popular in the states, it may have been because the anxieties that it addressed – both thematically and formally in performance – were still very much felt. Not until the late 1870s does its popularity wane, precisely when a national paper currency – backed by specie (if not yet a central bank) – was beginning to unify American citizen-consumers into a single national entity. It was an uneasy consolidation to be sure, following the strife of the Civil War, when newly freed Black citizens in the South had their missing two-fifths value restored to the US Constitution in theory if not yet in practice as federated state governments were forged into a single national entity. Over the next fifty years, national unification would have to be enacted by a host of performative rituals to overcome the regional and ethnic identifications that persisted (and still do), but the circulation of a national currency backed by the Federal Reserve helped, as American citizen-consumers began to participate in an increasingly nationalizing economy.

Figures 1.2 and 1.3 indicate *Fazio*'s rise and fall in popularity in the two countries, based upon the number of productions mounted. In some cases, a production ran for a full week with multiple performances; in others, the play appears to have entered into repertory, with evidence of only a single (at times, a benefit) performance. Drawn from reviews in extant periodicals, the incomplete data is skewed toward evidence pertaining to London and New York City theatres. Provincial productions are included, where known, to suggest the nationalizing scope of the play's audiences (e.g., Bath, Edinburgh, Leeds, Bristol, Portsmouth, Belfast, and Dublin in the UK, and Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston, Albany, Louisville, Nashville, and New Orleans in the USA). The concentration of data pertaining to London and New York City productions is useful nonetheless, given the growing importance of both cities as national centers of financial trade during this period. Although incomplete, enough data exists to suggest a correlation between the play's rising and falling popularity and the exacerbation and amelioration of financial concerns in both countries. As modern banking practices became established, evolving differently in each country but converging in the six defining features Sylla identifies with its modern form, the play fell out of currency.

Likewise, the critical terminology of "points" began to lose favor around the time that each country adopted a national currency and consolidated its modern banking practices. In the UK, the term begins to fall out of critical usage in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, with even

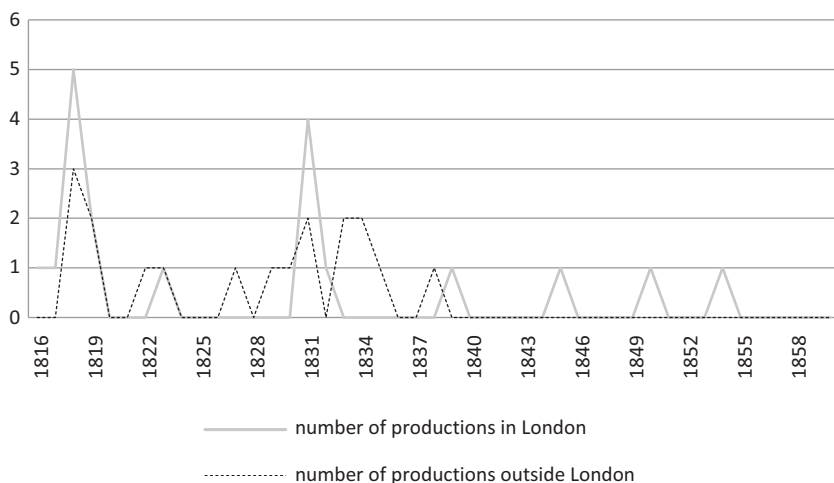


Figure 1.2 Productions of Henry Milman's *Fazio* in the UK. Note the peak of the play's popularity in 1818 – after the Napoleonic Wars had ended but before the suspension of gold conversion had been lifted in 1821. The second notable peak occurs just before 1833, when the Bank Notes Act made the BoE's English pound note legal tender; it also marks Fanny Kemble's debut in Bianca's role (even as many other actresses were also performing it). The play's popularity trails off around the time of the Bank Charter Act (1844), with productions in 1845, 1854, and 1877 (off the graph) that featured visiting American actresses.

Data from British Periodicals in Nineteenth Century Collections Online. My thanks to Barbara Barrow for charting the graph

actors substituting “effect” to describe the “point” technique. In the USA, however, the term persists well into the third quarter of the century, with critics recurring to the familiar standard of value even when they struggle to describe a new style of acting they are beginning to see on stage.¹⁶ With the end of the war and the adoption of a national currency, the critical terminology of “points” and the practice it named finally begin to disappear. By 1880, the term's critical power is diminished, as house lights darken on fully appointed box sets and, with no more need of a convention to facilitate the transaction between representation and real, even star actors begin to enter in character.

¹⁶ In an 1867 review in the *Atlantic Monthly*, for example, L. Clarke Davis praises Joseph Jefferson's performance as Rip Van Winkle even as he disparages the terms of his own praise: “[His] impersonation is full of what are technically known as *points*; but the genius of Mr. Jefferson divests them of all ‘staginess’” (quoted in Hewitt, 200).

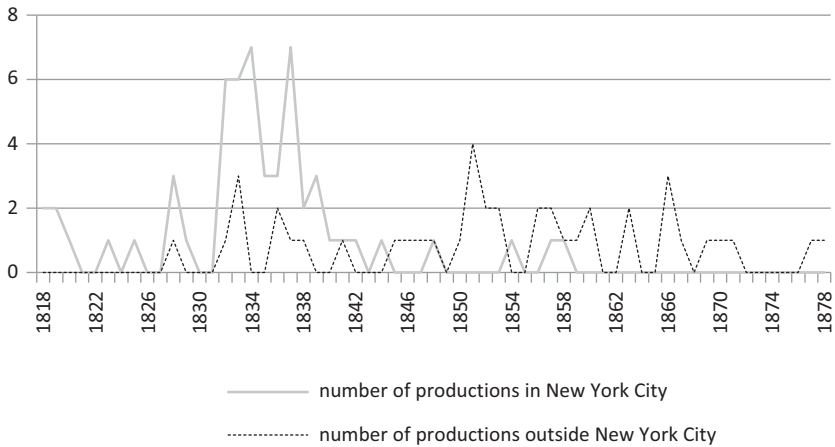


Figure 1.3 Productions of Henry Milman's *Fazio* in the USA. The play's popularity peaks around 1833, as Fanny Kemble tours the USA and the second BUS is dismantled. A second peak in 1838 correlates with the aftershocks of the previous year's panic, and the subsequent adoption of the National Banking System, based on New York State's "free banking" model with its regulated safeguards. Although the play is a mainstay on provincial stages between the Panic of 1847 and the end of the Civil War, its popularity trails off after the paper dollar is issued as national currency in 1867.

Data from Odell and Durham. My thanks to Barbara Barrow for charting the graph

Once paper currencies were backed by specie (whether gold or silver) and guaranteed by a national government, anxieties about money and the relationship between abstract and material value were significantly allayed. *Fazio*'s work was done. If the play's reputation diminished over the course of the nineteenth century, dwindling to a mere footnote in twentieth-century literary and theatre histories, the cause lies not only in the changing tastes of British and American audiences (as conventional literary and theatre histories would have it), but also in the changing cultural functions performed by the play's thematic – and performative – design.

Fazio made especially effective use of the "point," its economic metaphors activated by the technique with particular saliency, but it was not, of course, the only play to feature it in its Romantic style of performance. From the late eighteenth throughout the nineteenth century, the "point" was a standard technique, used to energize latent meanings in poetic verse dramas, melodramas, and Shakespearean plays, and practiced by stars and local repertory actors alike. Laying the groundwork for stage realism, it allowed the actor to negotiate the terms of the representation and the real by making such transactions transparent. It also gave audiences an active

role in the process insofar as *their* suspension of disbelief and *their* applause helped the actor move between realms. In this way, the Romantic stage served as a liminal site for transacting value (economic, literary, and theatrical), inviting audiences to participate in a modernizing economy and introducing them to new habits of social exchange.