A STUDY OF THE POPULAR APPEAL OF
EAST LYNNE ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

A Thesis
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for the Degree Master of Arts

by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Selection of Area for Study

In 1862 Clifton Tayleure's dramatization of the popular British novel East Lynne appeared on the American stage. Although to the reader today, East Lynne appears to be a very unexciting, cliche-ridden melodrama, the play has become a legend in the American theatre, and was second only to Uncle Tom's Cabin in popular appeal and box-office success. The question arises concerning the story behind the phenomenal success of East Lynne, a play to which theatre historians readily point as being insignificant, less than mediocre dramatic literature. East Lynne appeared upon the American stage during a period of highly unusual and spectacular popular theatre. During the years of its greatest appeal, when the play was produced before sold-out houses across the country, East Lynne was sharing the scene with the spectacular melodrama of Dion Boucicault, the artistic talents of Edwin Booth, and such recognized and successful popular artists as Joseph Jefferson and Matilda Heron.
In view of the play's great box-office success, it is interesting to note that the majority of the contemporary theatre critics dismissed the play as "trite nonsense" at the time of its productions in New York and surrounding areas. How then, amid this highly competitive talent and spectacle, and with the added disadvantage of negative reviews, did East Lynne manage to take the lead in the popular theatre of the nineteenth century, and then remain, to the present day, as a representative of the successful popular melodrama of its era? Although East Lynne is mentioned by the foremost historians of American theatre as having reached the above mentioned level of success, and is cited as an historically significant theatrical production, thus far no evidence is available that indicates any attempts have been made to explain the phenomenon of East Lynne in any studied detail. Certainly, the fact that this rather ordinary, sentimental melodrama became one of the greatest success stories in the history of American theatre points to a need for a study that aims at presenting specific explanations for such a success.

Aims of the Study

The major objective of this thesis is to present specific explanations for the unusual theatrical success and appeal of the melodrama East Lynne on the American stage.
In considering the play's unique appeal, four aspects of the play's history and production will be presented. Chapter II is concerned with the early history of the play and presents basic background materials which are necessary to a complete understanding of the material that is contained in the main body of the thesis. The remainder of the thesis is divided into three areas: (1) Chapter III, which presents a typical example of how the play was staged in the nineteenth century, (2) Chapter IV, an examination of the play as a "moral" drama, which includes an explanation of how the term "moral" was applied to East Lynne, and how this aspect of the promotion of the play attributed to its success, and (3) Chapter V, which is concerned with the acting style and emotional appeal of Lucille Western (the actress who first introduced the play's heroine, Lady Isabel, to the American stage).

In addition to the major objective mentioned above, this study also aims at presenting a view of the popular theatre of the nineteenth century in the United States. Included in this view of the American stage are such aspects of the theatre as staging techniques, acting styles, audience appeal, and the critical views of the popular theatre as expressed by some of the professional writers and journalists of the period.
Methods and Procedures

In compiling the background materials for the early history of the play, the majority of the facts concerning dates, theatres, cast lists, critical reviews, etc., were found in the leading newspapers and periodicals of the era.

The research method employed in presenting a typical example of the staging of *East Lynne* consisted primarily of a comparison of pictorial materials found in Specimen Books of the period with stage directions, prompter's notes, and the prompter's sketches found within certain prompt books for productions of *East Lynne*. The Specimen Books are catalogues which contained designs for promotional materials for all types of theatrical entertainment. The majority of the designs found within these catalogues depict stage settings for the popular melodrama of the nineteenth century. The prompt books used in this study are printed acting editions of the play which contain standard, printed stage directions along with prompter's comments, directions, and sketches which are penned in on blank pages found opposite each printed page of the prompt book. Whenever a poster design exhibits a high degree of similarity with descriptions of the setting found in the prompt book, the poster design is offered as pictorial
evidence of the stage setting. By noting specific stage
directions and prompter's notes in the prompt book and
comparing these directions with poster designs, a conjectur-
al ground plan can be offered for each setting used in
the production. Specific interpretations of such notations
are presented in the discussion of stage settings found in
Chapter III.¹

In compiling evidence concerning the effects of both
the promotion of East Lynne as a moral drama and the highly
emotional acting technique of Lucille Western upon the
ultimate success and appeal of the play, the primary
sources of information were the newspapers and periodicals
of the period. Original playbills for productions of
East Lynne were also helpful in evaluating these particu-
lar aspects of the production of the play.

In providing an accurate account of contemporary
critical reactions and professional views on the appeal
of the "moral" drama, and Miss Western's appeal, materials
representing both favorable and unfavorable reactions will
be presented.

Primary Sources

The primary sources utilized in this study consisted
of prompt books, Specimen Books, playbills, and newspapers
and periodicals. One of the major primary sources was a
prompt book for a production of *East Lynne* at the Park Theatre, Brooklyn. This prompt book was employed during the period 1869 - 1870, and utilized a printed acting edition of the play published in Boston by Charles H. Spencer. No date of publication for the acting edition is given, but the prompter who used this book at the Park has been identified as John Moore. This prompt book is on microfilm in The Ohio State University Theatre Collection and is identified in this collection as P. 913. Two additional prompt books of *East Lynne* were consulted for this study, but their merit as primary sources of information was limited by the lack of prompter's notes in both cases.

Four Specimen Books were used in researching the material for this thesis. They are all on file at The Ohio State University Theatre Collection and are identified as OSU Films 147, 148, 149, and 896. Three of these catalogues (147-149) were issued by the Ledger Job Office of Philadelphia, and the fourth (896) by the Jackson Printing Company of Philadelphia. These books have been dated circa 1875.2

Four newspapers were of invaluable assistance to this study. They were: *The New York Times*, *The New York Tribune*, *The Brooklyn Eagle*, and *The Spirit of the Times*. In addition to these contemporary sources, the following
periodicals were of considerable value: Albion (New York), Leslies Illustrated Magazine (New York), and Figaro (New York). With the exception of The Brooklyn Eagle and Figaro, these sources are on microfilm in the library of The Ohio State University.

The playbills used in this study are all on file in the Theatre Collection of The Ohio State University. Although the playbills are of limited value because of the type and quantity of material found in them, they do provide an accurate source of cast lists, dates of productions, and, in some instances, a summary of staging techniques used in specific productions.

Several important secondary sources provided a general framework into which these specific items of information were fitted. Joseph Shipley's Guide to Great Plays was found to be a valuable guide for compiling a bibliography for general historical information concerning the play. Frank Mott's History of the American Magazine was of value since it provides a listing of newspapers and periodicals that would contain critical commentary on contemporary stage activity. Barnard Hewitt's work entitled Theatre U.S.A. 1668 to 1957 was most helpful as general background reading for the period covered in this study, because the book presents very complete and informative firsthand accounts of theatrical activities during this era.
FOOTNOTES

1. This particular method of reconstructing a series of stage settings is not unique to this study. This method, as described above, has been used in various studies at The Ohio State University Theatre Collection. A detailed description of this method of historical research along with a discussion of its validity and significance is found in The Ohio State University Theatre Collection Bulletin, Spring, 1957.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY HISTORY OF EAST LYNNE

Before examining *East Lynne* for contents that may explain its attraction to the audiences of the nineteenth century, it seems appropriate to provide a background for the study by presenting aspects of the early history of the play. This chapter will include such aspects of the play's history as its first appearances in New York City, the success of the play as a road show, prominent stage personalities associated with the play, some critical reactions, various stage adaptations, and mention of early film versions.

The novel *East Lynne*, written by Mrs. Henry Wood, was published in England in 1861. It first appeared in the United States in the same year in serial form in the *Baltimore Weekly Sun*. The novel was a solid popular success, selling over half a million copies. It was the first of forty novels written by Mrs. Wood, and was widely translated.¹

In 1862, Lucille Western, a young, unknown actress, commissioned Clifton W. Tayleure, a playwright of her day,
to create the first theatrical version of the novel for her. According to Joseph Shipley, Tayleure sold the rights for this first adaptation, entitled *East Lynne or the Elopement*, to Miss Western for the sum of one-hundred dollars.2

Synopsis of the First Adaptation

The Tayleure adaptation is a close copy of the novel and was billed as "A Great Moral Drama." The play presents all the dramatic high points of the overall action from the novel without becoming involved in the lengthy background material and the often dreary motivational analysis of each of the characters in the story.

The play opens as Archibald Carlyle, a well-to-do English barrister, returns to his estate at East Lynne with his new bride, Lady Isabel. East Lynne was once Lady Isabel's home, but when she was orphaned in her youth it was sold to Carlyle. Some time after she is established at East Lynne, Isabel overhears a conversation between two of her domestics in which mention is made of Barbara Hare, a young lady from a neighboring estate who is in love with Archibald. Barbara has been visiting Archibald seeking legal advice for her brother, Richard, who has been in hiding since he was falsely accused of the murder of his sweetheart. Isabel misinterprets the intentions of
Barbara's visits to her husband and is not comforted by Carlyle's protestations that he thinks of Barbara as a sister. Archibald is unable to relate to Isabel the real reason for Barbara's visits because of the danger of exposing Richard's presence to the town.

Isabel and her husband are visited by Francis Levison, the villain of the play, who is an unfeeling gallant. Levison persuades Isabel that Archibald's relationship with Barbara is not a platonic one. In her despair, Isabel runs off with Levison and in the years that follow she has a child by him. The child is killed in a train accident which disfigures Isabel.

During this time Archibald, believing Isabel to be dead, marries Barbara Hare. Isabel returns to East Lynne in the disguise of Madame Vine, governess to her own children. After a very emotional scene in which her son dies in her arms never knowing her to be his true mother, Isabel takes to her own deathbed. In the final scenes of the play Archibald, now recognizing Isabel, forgives her for her distrust in him, and for deserting him and their children. Francis Levison is arrested and convicted as the actual murderer of Richard Hare's sweetheart, and Richard is freed. Isabel dies lamenting her own responsibility for the tragedy of her life.
The First Productions of the Play

The play first opened in Boston on April 21, 1862, where it was later billed as the "great success of the season." From Boston the play moved to Baltimore where it played for twenty-seven nights. On December 11 and 12, East Lynne appeared at the Philadelphia Academy of Music, playing before 10,000 spectators on the two evenings it was presented. Prior to the first appearance of the play in the New York City area, it appeared for six consecutive weeks at the Grover Theatre in Washington, D.C.

The First Productions in the New York City Area

East Lynne first played in the New York City area on January 26, 1863, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in Brooklyn. Lucille Western appeared in the dual role of Lady Isabel and Madame Vine. The supporting cast for this performance is listed on the program shown as Figure 1. The play received a mixed reaction from the dramatic critic of the Brooklyn Eagle. He objected to the preaching of morality in the theatre, and complained that the plot of the play was an old, familiar story. However, the acting of Miss Western was favorably received. The play was successful at the box office, and was extended at the Academy for three additional days.

The official opening of the play in New York City did not take place until March 23, 1863, at the Winter
Figure 1. A newspaper advertisement with a cast list for the first appearance of East Lynne in the New York area. New York Times, January 26, 1863
Garden. This engagement lasted until April 14, 1863. An announcement for the play appearing in the amusement section of the New York Tribune on March 23 indicated that the play would be presented with "every attention to detail," including "new scenery and an excellent cast embracing all the stock company and some additional artists of celebrity." Lucille Western appeared in the lead role with the following actors in supporting roles: Mr. Barrett as Archibald, Miss Care as Miss Corney, Miss Ada Clifton as Barbara, Mr. A. H. Davenport as Lord Mount Severn, Miss Fanny Brown as Joyce, and Mr. Hagan as Richard Hare.

Miss Western, with her version of Mrs. Wood's tale of woe, had caused much controversial comment in the cities where she had appeared prior to the extended New York engagement, and the arrival of the play in New York was anticipated with a curious excitement. The following statement appeared in the New York Tribune on the day of the opening of the play at the Winter Garden:

The only novelty to which it is necessary to call attention this week is the appearance of Miss Lucille Western at the Winter Garden, in the drama of "East Lynne," which she has produced in various cities with remarkable success, and which has been the main attraction at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia during the month just past... Miss Western's version, as well as her personation of the leading character, Lady Isabel, will be witnessed with interest and curiosity.

Miss Western's fame in the role of Lady Isabel was soon to equal that of the novel itself.
The play met with general disfavor among the New York critics. The *New York Tribune* suggested that the play's success was founded in the "general depravity of mankind," or perhaps even in the "perversity of New York audiences." The latter comment was soon proved erroneous, as the play was to be a major attraction throughout the country. A review in the *Albion*, a literary periodical of the day, stated:

... a flimsy and stupid novel has been resuscitated into a flimsy, unnatural, incongruous, and feverishly sentimental play...  

This review generally dismissed the play as an "unmitigated nuisance." The *New York Illustrated* summed up its opinion of the play, and the novel, in two words: "quite stupid."

In general, the critics viewed the play as a weak, foolish attempt to entertain while preaching a moral lesson. They concluded that as entertainment the play bordered on being decadent, appealing only to the "unwashed" and uneducated. As for the teaching of morality, the critics seem to conclude that this should be left to the schools and churches. Despite the unfavorable reactions of the critics, the play had a very favorable run of twenty-two days.

Throughout the nineteenth century *East Lynne* appeared successfully in the theatres of New York City and other large metropolitan areas, but its greatest success came in the repertory of the road companies that appeared in every
town and hamlet of the country during this period in the American theatre. Kendall, in a study of the theatrical activities in New Orleans during this period, states that the play was seen most often with the road companies and floating theatres of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.12 Harlowe Hoyt, in Town Hall Tonight, a study of country theatres (the term he applies to rural theatres) of the eighties and nineties, relates that East Lynne remained a popular feature with the traveling companies "as long as rep shows played in the small towns."13

The most prominent touring company of East Lynne was the one headed by Lucille Western. In the years following her first presentation of the play, her company traveled around the country appearing in San Francisco, St. Louis, New Orleans, Providence (Rhode Island), and numerous other towns and cities. This company and the countless others that played East Lynne the length and breadth of the country helped to create a legendary success, second in popularity only to Uncle Tom's Cabin in American professional stage history.14

Prominent Actresses Who Appeared in East Lynne

Lucille Western, who first presented the stage version of East Lynne in America, was its most successful practitioner. Although she appeared in many of the successful
melodramas of that era, she was most noted for her highly emotional interpretation of the dual role of Isabel and Madame Vine. Miss Western's contribution to the success of the play is dealt with more fully in Chapter V. During and after the lifetime of Lucille Western, *East Lynne* served as a vehicle for the talents of a great many actresses of the American stage. Included among them were Ada Gray, Annie Clark, Mrs. Conway, Helena Modjeska, Lottie Harcourt, Charlotte Hunt, Agnes Purcelle, and Nance O'Neill. After the death of Miss Western it would seem that Ada Gray inherited the position of the country's leading impersonator of Lady Isabel. (Her numerous New York appearances in the play are listed in Appendix A.) Insight into her effectiveness in the role of Lady Isabel may be gained from a critique of her performance found in the *New York Mirror*.

She has elaborated the role with great care, and every little detail is given a weight it had not had in the hands of any other actress we have seen in "East Lynne" with the single exception, perhaps, of Lucille Western . . . Her chief blemish is a tendency to spout occasionally in the intense portions of the piece—a fault that is made doubly prominent on account of the naturalness with which all the lighter scenes are played. However, the performance is fair to view in its general outlines, and where there is so much to commend and so little to blame, we would be hyper-critical to dwell at length upon a flaw that is common to the majority of emotional actresses. We are able to give Miss Gray high credit as the illustrator of Mrs. Wood's famous heroine.15

It is recorded in many of the chronicles describing this theatrical era, that Helena Modjeska, the "Great
Modjeska," was forced by her managers to play *East Lynne* on Saturday nights to appease that portion of the public devoted to the sentimental melodrama. There was no doubt a second, more important reason for forcing the play on Modjeska—it was a certain box-office success. An interesting criticism of Modjeska's performance in the play appeared in the *New York Mirror* on June 17, 1882:

> Mme. Modjeska herself is quite unsuited to the role of Lady Isabel, who is so essentially an English lady of the most characteristically English type, the Madam's broken English and spasmodic utterances quite unfit her for the successful grasping and delineation of the elemental essentials of the character... English ladies in good society do not pass their lives in continually slobbering upon somebody's neck—it matters not whose so long as there is a shoulder annexed on which to pose the head gracefully—and, with hands pressed close to breast, uttering spasmodic "aches!"

It would appear that Modjeska was justified in objecting to the undertaking of *East Lynne*.

**Other Stage Adaptations of the Novel**

**American Adaptations.**

Clifton Tayloure, after furnishing Miss Western with her successful stage play, created another version of *East Lynne* which he produced in 1864 under the title of *Lady Isabel of East Lynne*. In December of 1862 Benjamin C. Woolf presented his version called *Edith, or the Earl's Daughter*. Matilda Heron achieved noteworthy success as Edith in this play. The Unwelcome Mrs. Hatch, a version of *East Lynne* written by Mrs. B. Harrison, appeared in
November of 1903. Two other American adaptations using the title *East Lynne* were presented. The first, written by G. L. Stout, was staged in 1864. In 1898 an adaptation by McKee Rankin was produced.\(^{17}\) At least six different stage adaptations of the popular British novel produced in the United States indicates that *East Lynne* was considered highly successful material for the popular stage, not only in the nineteenth century, but in the early decades of the twentieth century as well.

English adaptations.

The first English adaptation, *The Marriage Bells, or the Cottage on the Cliffs*, adapted by W. Archer, was presented in November of 1864. John Oxenford produced his version in February of 1866, followed by a work by Alfred Kempe in January of 1873.\(^{18}\)

Productions of *East Lynne* appeared well into the twentieth century. Shipley records a production as late as 1926 in which Mary Blair appeared as Isabel.\(^{19}\)

In the same year as the Blair production, the Greenwich Village Theatre presented a burlesque of the play with Eugene O'Neill as one of the producers. The following comments concerning this production appeared in the *Christian Science Monitor* at the time:

Poking fun is the cheapest form of criticism, and when laughter and scorn are directed at sincere sentiment, honesty, and virtue, then the laughter simply surrenders to the crude form of mob thinking....
The acting version of Mrs. Wood's novel is written in the sincere vein of its dramatic period, and treating it contemptuously does not depreciate the play, only the players. Might as well make fun of a pair of old wrinkled hands that helped build your theatre.²⁰ Perhaps the "old wrinkled hands" of East Lynne were still dear to the hearts of theatre-goers, even at this late date.

An English play version appeared as late as 1934 with Mrs. Cedric Hardwicke appearing as Isabel. Mrs. Hardwick played it straight and her performance caused the critic of the London Telegram to admit that at times the play was "quite moving."²¹

Six movie versions of the novel appeared between 1908 and 1931.²² An interesting insight into the changing demands of audiences and the techniques of the movie medium is brought about by a comparison of a movie scenario with the synopsis of the original stage adaptation. The following scenario is for the movie version of East Lynne that appeared in 1931:

Ann Harding is the heroine, Isabel. She married a young nobleman and thus comes under the baleful influence of her husband's gloomy estate in the country and his old maid sister, the impassive, rigid mistress of the estate. The pleasure-loving wife, smothered beneath the relentless, colorless routine of country life, finds existence pretty miserable. A slight indiscretion with a former admirer, and her husband brings divorce proceedings. She leaves him and her child and proceeds to cavort about Europe in search of happiness. In the end, poverty-stricken, her spirit broken, blindness about to fall upon her, she returns to East Lynne to take one last look at her child. And then, in her blindness, she walks over a cliff to her death.²³
The villain in this version was the husband, not the "pleasure-loving," misunderstood wife. Hollywood had replaced the sentimental heartbreak of the play with a sensational death-plunge from a cliff. Obviously the audiences of the twentieth century sought more immediate thrills than did the audiences of the nineteenth-century theatre.
FOOTNOTES


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., January 27, 1863.


8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., March 24, 1863.

10. Albion (New York), March 26, 1863.


16. Ibid., June 17, 1882.

17. Shipley, loc. cit.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Liston, loc. cit.


CHAPTER III

ASPECTS OF THE STAGING OF EAST LYNNE

This chapter will be concerned with a study of the staging of East Lynne to evaluate the relationship of the staging to the popular success of the play. Aside from this particular evaluation, this study provides a pictorial representation of the settings for the play as they appeared during the early years of its success. (A detailed description of the method used in reconstructing the staging, along with the poster cuts, ground plans, and prompt book material, is found in Appendix B.)

The prompt book used in this study is a printed acting edition of the play published in Boston by Charles H. Spencer. The original prompt book is located in the Harvard Theatre Collection, and is on microfilm in The Ohio State University Theatre Collection. The prompter has been identified as John Moore. Moore's own notes concerning production have been written on the printed text and on blank pages opposite the text. Contained in the prompt book are portions of playbills from two different productions, and a review of the play in which Mrs. Conway appeared as Isabel. The playbills contain the
dates of two productions--November 5, 1869 and May 23, 1870. The review that is attached to the prompt book mentions that Mrs. Conway's performance in East Lynne was to have been followed on the next evening by a performance of Ingomar, the Barbarian. Since announcements and a review of the November 5, 1869 performance of the play indicate that East Lynne was followed by Rob Roy, it is obvious that the review found in the prompt book is concerned with a performance of East Lynne other than the one given on November 5, 1869. This indicates that the prompt book may have been used for all performances of East Lynne at the Park Theatre while the theatre was under the management of Mrs. Conway. Performances of the play at the Park given previous to the two productions mentioned above are dated:

| May 16, 1864 | November 5, 1867 |
| December 27, 1864 | March, 1868 |
| February 25-26, 1867 | October 19, 1868 |
| March 4-8, 1867 | May 12, 1869 |
| November 4-9, 1867 | June 18, 1869 |

Performances of the play at the Park Theatre which followed the performance of May 23, 1870 are numerous and can be found in Appendix A. In the light of the above evidence, and the fact that Miss Western was the leading practitioner of East Lynne in this era, the Park Theatre productions of the play can justifiably be offered as typical productions during the nineteenth century.
Figures 2 and 3 are reproductions of the playbills as they appear in the prompt book. Figure 2 is probably not the complete cast list since it does not contain all the characters called for in the text. A comparison of the supporting cast for both productions indicates that the stock company at the Park appeared in identical roles for the two productions, with a few exceptions. Mrs. F. E. Conway, who managed the theatre at the time of both productions, starred in the 1869 production, and Miss Western starred in the production of 1870.

The prompt book indicates that the method of staging at the Park Theatre consisted of the use of grooved wings and shutters. The entire setting for the play at the Park could have been staged with the use of five sets of wing pieces and five shutters. These wings and shutters were arranged in banks as shown in Figure 4. In the American and British theatres of the nineteenth century each wing bank was traditionally accompanied by a bank of shutter grooves immediately upstage of the wing grooves. There is no reason to believe that this was not the case at the Park Theatre, and although for productions of East Lynne the use of shutters was restricted to the first and fourth bank of shutter grooves, Figure 4 indicates a bank of shutter grooves for each bank of wings. An examination of two prompt books for productions staged at the Park during the period of the East Lynne productions, while not
Figure 3. A portion of a playbill for a production of "Lady Isabel & Madame V.T.M." on May 23, 1876 at the Park Theatre.

Figure 2. A portion of a playbill for a production of "The Elopement" on November 5, 1876 at the Park Theatre.
Figure 4.
disclosing additional information concerning stage machinery, does indicate that three to four banks of wings and shutters may have been employed in the settings.¹ For productions of East Lynne, an additional temporary groove was placed upstage of the fourth groove of shutter frames. This groove was needed to accommodate a frame used as a backing for openings in the shutter frames forming the rear wall of a stage setting. These temporary grooves are identified in Figure 4 as "4A." The possibility exists that stage drops could have served this purpose, but at the Park Theatre all other scenic units employed wings and shutters; therefore this study concludes that the backing units were also shutter frames.

The fact that a groove system on the stage floor at the first bank of shutters could cause problems for the actors when the stage was set to the depth of the fourth bank may have been overcome by the use of upper grooves only, providing the lower portion of the shutters with casters to facilitate their employment during a scene change. This practice was known to have been in existence during the period of the East Lynne productions.

Figure 4 indicates that each bank of wing grooves could accommodate three wing pieces, while each bank of shutter grooves could accommodate two shutter frames. There is no evidence that this was the actual stage design for the Park Theatre, however staging traditions of the
nineteenth century do not preclude the possibility of this arrangement.

The prompt book uses the term "chamber" when referring to a shutter. For example, "chamber in 1," a description used in the prompt book, refers to the shutter in the first groove. For the purposes of this study, the term "shutter" will be used when referring to a sliding frame which forms the rear wall of a setting.

Entrances placed between the wings that are onstage are numbered numerically stage right and left from the downstage area to the upstage area. For instance, "L1E." would indicate the entrance between the proscenium and the first bank of wings on the stage left side; "L2E." would indicate the entrance between the first bank of wings and the second bank of wings on the stage left side, etc. When referring to entrances that occur in the rear shutters the following terms will be used: "CD" refers to the center door in the shutter; "CL" and "CDL" both refer to the door on the stage left side in the shutter; "CR" and "CDR" both refer to the door stage right in the shutter (see Plate I). The term "plug" refers to a solid insert or flat piece of scenery which is placed between two banks of wings. Tormentors are additional sets of side wings, those farthest downstage, which slide on and off stage directly in front of the first bank of wings.
The stage opening of the Park Theatre was sixty feet, with a stage depth of thirty-one feet. The deepest setting used in these productions of East Lynne was set in the fourth groove upstage, with the addition of the backing unit discussed above.

In order to mount the play at the Park Theatre, five sets were necessary. These settings required the following stage arrangement: two shutters in the second groove, three shutters in the fourth groove, and five different sets of wing flats. Figure 5 graphically depicts the arrangement of these five sets in the order in which they appear within the play. This figure illustrates the facility with which the sets were shifted from scene to scene by taking advantage of act breaks and "carpenter's scenes." A carpenter's scene is a shallow scene set downstage and arranged to mask the upstage area to enable stage hands to shift sets and props for scenes to follow.

The first setting found in the play is a parlor setting which utilized a shutter in the fourth groove. The shutter was painted to represent a wall in a chamber or living room. This setting was used in Act I, scene 1, and repeated in four other scenes (see Figure 5). The prompt book contains the following stage directions to set the scene in Act I, scene 1: "Chamber in 4 . . . a table and two chairs, R.H." Stage directions noting the entrances and exits of characters throughout the scene
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**Figure 5**

("c" = carpenter's scene)
call for entrances through the shutter at "CL," "CD," and "CR." This indicates three doorways in the shutter, which is placed in the fourth groove. Other stage entrances noted in the text occur at "R.1.," "R.2E.," and "L.1E." Plate I in Appendix B is offered as a conjectural ground plan for the setting.3

The second setting for the play, used in Act I, scene 2, is described in the stage directions as a "landscape in l."4 This indicates a shutter in the first groove painted to give the illusion of a landscape. In the text, two entrances are mentioned. They are located at "R.1.E.," and "L.1.E." This setting was repeated in four additional scenes.

The third setting for the play is a parlor scene with the shutter in the first groove. This setting appears in Act III, scene 1. In this scene, Archibald Carlyle is at home in East Lynne. Richard Hare knocks at a window and is admitted to the room through it. When Miss Corney, Archibald's sister, knocks at the door, Archibald hurries Richard out of the room to avoid a meeting between the fugitive Richard and Miss Corney. The stage directions set the scene as follows: "Chamber in l.—Enter R.1.E., Archibald, reading a book."5 The prompter's notes appear alongside these directions with a further description of the scene: "Tormentors on . . . window with curtains L.H.—closed."6 The window in the setting is a practical
one since action and dialogue call for the window to be opened and for Richard to enter through it:

ARCHIBALD. I'm uncommonly gloomy to-night; it's a bitter night out too. I wonder if it's snowy yet. (Goes to window in plat [sic] L.H. . . Richard Hare speaks outside L.)

RICHARD. O Mr. Carlyle! For the love of Heaven let me in. I'm nearly froze; it is I, Richard! (Archibald opens window L.H. . . Enter Richard Hare.)

A practical door is also indicated in the stage directions:

"Archibald opens the door R.H. and Cornelia enters." Since both the window and door are located by the text at the side areas of the stage, it is likely that they were constructed with plugs placed between the first bank of wings and the tormentors. The tormentors, set up on either side of the stage, not only acted as supports for the plugs, but provided additional entrances and exits for the set. In this scene, exception must be taken to the prior definition of the term "R.1E." That entrance in this scene could only be located between the right tormentor and the first bank of wings on the right hand side. Since the use of tormentors is shown only in the prompter's notes, and not in the text, it may be that this particular aspect of the staging of the play was peculiar only to the productions at the Park Theatre. The following stage directions support the conclusion concerning the use of this area in front of the tormentor as an exit from the
room:

ARCHIBALD. But you had better retire till I have spoken to my sister. (Puts him off, L.H. "Tormento"
(The word Tormento is written in as a prompter's
note.)

This setting was repeated in Act V, scene 2.

The fourth setting in the play was used only in
Act III, scene 2. The following description of this set-
ting is given in the prompter's notes:

Chamber in 4 . . . Lady Isabel discovered seated at
a table near fireplace, R.H. 2E. Wrapped in a large
shawl very pale and very ill . . . Enter Levison,
C.D. He goes towards table upstage--looks at her
apathetically, coolly takes off his great coat, gloves--
Kneel to mantelpiece behind her, takes cigar from box
on it . . . 10

From the description given above, the shutter used for
this scene can be located in the fourth groove. Later in
the scene, Lord Mount Severn enters the room from "C.L."
the left center door in the shutter. Figure 12 is a page
from the prompt book which contains a rough ground plan
for this scene. It indicates a fireplace stage right with
a desk and two chairs in front of it. The stage directions
have placed the fireplace at "R.H. 2 E.", which is between
the first and second banks of wings. This fireplace is
another indication of the use of plugs.

The fifth setting used in these productions was a
chamber shutter in the fourth groove. This setting was
repeated on two other occasions. When the setting appears
in Act IV, the text contains the following description:

Chamber in 4 . . . William discovered lying on
couch C. Madam Vine seated behind at head bending
over him.11

In this scene William dies in the arms of Isabel, without
knowing that she is his mother.

In Act V, the scene is opened with the following
description in the text: "Chamber in 4 . . . Isabel dis-
covered in bed, C."12 During this scene Archibald discovers
the true identity of Madame Vine, and with the truth at
last revealed, Isabel dies.

In another prompt book for East Lynne, which is
identified only as "Property of A. R. Wilbur," date unknown,
there is a prompter's note at the end of Act V which reads
as follows: "Vision--Near My God to Thee."13 This sug-
gests that in some productions of the play, the death of
Isabel is played with a vision, which may have been a
celestial scene revealed by the use of lights behind a
scrim in the rear of the set. In the Wilbur production,
the vision was accompanied by a hymn, a heavenly choir
singing "Nearer My God to Thee." This same prompt book
also calls for a "Vision" at the end of Act IV, when
William dies.14
Scene Changes

All scene changes were made with the lights down, except when changes were made during act breaks when the curtain was closed. The curtain was not closed for scene breaks within the act. Proof of this is found in the prompter's note at the end of each scene which took one of the following forms: "Lights down--change" or "Lights down--change--lights up." The notes to indicate the closing of the curtain read: "Ring Down Curtain," "Curtain down," and "Ring curtain."

The stage settings for *East Lynne* used at the Park Theatre were of a most ordinary, unexciting nature. Since such a simple arrangement of wings, shutters, and plugs fulfilled the function of providing an adequate background for the play at the Park Theatre, it is likely that with the exception of vision scenes, some musical background, and other similar effects to heighten the sentiment of melodramatic moments, this simple arrangement was typical of productions of *East Lynne* in the nineteenth century. Obviously, the stage settings were not essential contributing factors to the success of the play. This then brings the focus of the remainder of the study upon the two other possible sources of the success of *East Lynne*: the sensationalism of the "moral" tale itself, and the acting style of the first and most successful practitioner of the play, Lucille Western.
FOOTNOTES

1. Married Life (London: Benjamin Webster, n.d.),
   Ohio State University Theatre Collection, number P. 1644.

   Lady of Lyons (London: Covent Garden, 1838),
   Ohio State University Theatre Collection, number P. 298.

2. East Lynne (Boston: Charles H. Spencer, n.d.),
   Ohio State University Theatre Collection, number P. 913,
   p. 3.

3. Plates I through V, presented in Appendix B, are
   all conjectural ground plans to cover the settings used
   in this play. The method of arriving at the arrangements
   shown in these plates is described in the introduction to
   the study.


7. ______, pp. 24-25.

8. ______, p. 25.


11. ______, p. 36.


    University Theatre Collection, number P. 868, p. 43.


CHAPTER IV

EAST LYNNE, A MORAL DRAMA

The moral melodrama of the nineteenth century was one of the most successful forms of theatrical entertainment in the history of the American stage. In this chapter East Lynne will be examined as a "moral drama," a term used in promoting the play wherever it appeared. The three major sources for this chapter are newspaper advertisements, criticisms of the play presented by the drama critics of Brooklyn and New York, and East Lynne playbills.

The comments of drama critics in the leading New York newspapers at the time of the first appearance of East Lynne leave little doubt that moral drama held a fascination for the popular theatre-goer. However, it was not necessarily the moral that a play presented that was found to be the core of the appeal. For nineteenth-century audiences, moral drama meant sensational drama, and a sensational story usually meant box office success. Instances of such successful material are found in the spectacular staging called for by the melodramas of Dion Boucicault. Boucicault found success in the presentation of such stage devices as burning buildings, sinking ships, and realistic snow storms. His formula for successful audience appeal was simply sensational spectacle.
American stage adaptations of *Camille*, introduced in the early fifties, and more closely related in content to *East Lynne*, presented American audiences with a vignette of the pathetic fallen woman—sensationalism with the overtones of moral drama. In this era, *The Drunkard*, and *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*, offered as moral melodrama, attracted large crowds and, as Glenn Hughes points out, proved "heavy artillery for the forces of prohibition."¹

What did the moral tale of *East Lynne* offer? A quick glance at a typical program reveals a "Great Moral Drama," divided into five acts entitled: "Mated," "Tempted," "Exiled," "Remorse," and "Death."² According to the critic for the *New York Times*, the above mentioned ingredients were successful:

The success of a moral play may be reckoned in proportion to the amount of triumphant turpitude with which it is enriched and perfumed.³

The story centered around a vain, jealous, aristocratic young woman who is tricked into abandoning her husband and children by a stereotyped, handsome villain. Later, she commits adultery, and has a bastard child. Remorse and death come when Isabel returns in disguise to witness the death of her legitimate son and to die, pleading for forgiveness, in the presence of the husband she wronged. This material, according to the *Times* critic, provided
the "means for the progress and development of ingenious wickedness," which constituted the play's principal claim to popular fame.⁴

For three days before the opening of *East Lynne* at the Park Theatre in Brooklyn, full column advertisements appeared in the *Brooklyn Eagle*. These advance billings for the play stressed heavily the "moral tendencies," and "religious" aspects of the production, while lauding the artistic talents of the play's star, Miss Western. Heavy emphasis was placed upon the social acceptability of the "thrilling" situations in the story:

The moral drama of **EAST LYNNE** . . . Refined, Moral AND Religious . . . The success of this great emotional play at all points of its presentation is mainly attributable to the SOCIAL CONDEMATION of its visitants to their friends . . . has been endorsed by the PRESS, CLERGY AND HIGH TONED PEOPLE . . . Does not make vice lovely, nor paint the erring woman in hideous colors. Correct pictures of REAL LIFE . . . Suitable dramatic representation that could be offered to . . . Wives, Daughters, and Sisters . . . ⁵

After assuring the general public that attendance at *East Lynne* has been condoned by the church, high society, and the refined in general, the advertisements describe the story in the following enticing words:

- **Act 2** - Tempted . . . A moonlight walk. The Elopement . . .
- **Act 4** - Exiled . . . The arrest for murder. The deathbed secret. Retribution. (The best emotional scene) . . .
- **Act 5** - Death. A startling discovery . . . ⁶

The play premiered in Brooklyn to full houses.
The production of *East Lynne* in Brooklyn brought complaints from the local critic who did not feel that theatre must always be accompanied by a "certificate of the morality of their wares."

We confess an antipathy to the "moral" drama. The main object of the theatre is to amuse; to diversify life by adding to its pleasure, and to allow the spectator to be at once idle and innocent... If there be anybody so thin-skinned that he cannot visit a theatre unless he is assured that he will add to the stock of his moral principles, he had better keep away from it altogether. Morality is taught in the church, in the Sunday school and elsewhere, and the attempt to engraft either upon the theatre is sometimes nauseating and always dull... The audience at the Academy of Music last evening was quite large. Mr. Jarrett has secured a good name among us; and our people accepted his character as a guarantee that if their amusement was mixed up with morality the ingredients would be compounded in such a manner that the molasses would largely predominate over the physic... The moral of the thing is that if there be any silly woman who leaves a good husband for a man base enough to encourage her to do so, he will in all likelihood abandon her, degraded and ruined, upon the world. So that after all the "moral" of *East Lynne* is a tolerably old story... the success of *East Lynne* has induced the manager to repeat the performance tomorrow and the two succeeding evenings. 

The above selections from the Brooklyn review lend themselves to some interesting interpretations concerning the appeal of *East Lynne*, at least in that city. The "Great Moral Lesson" turned out to be a "tolerably old story."

The critic states that the Brooklyn audiences would stand morality in their theatre only so long as "the molasses would largely predominate over the physic." The "physic" in this case (the moral) gave way to the "molasses," the sensational story which succeeded in drawing the Brooklyn
audiences to the theatre. **East Lynne** became a favorite for the Brooklyn theatre-goer, appearing at least once in every season for many years. A notice in the **Brooklyn Eagle** announcing the appearance of the play six years after its initial production states that **East Lynne** was then an established "favorite" with the Brooklyn public.  

The obvious attempt by the promoters of **East Lynne** to present the play as a thoroughly decent, moral, even religious presentation leads to the supposition that they were aiming their appeal toward a segment of the population that had previously objected to the stage as an immoral form of entertainment. The fact that the moral, religious appeal was continued in advertising campaigns which followed appearances of the play in Brooklyn and New York City indicates that this particular aspect of the play's appeal was successful.

The advance notices for **East Lynne's** production in New York City stressed the moral and religious aspects of the play in the same manner as for the Brooklyn production. However, reaction from the critics after the official opening in New York City on March 23, 1863, differed considerably from the Brooklyn reviews. The Brooklyn critics had scorned the need of a moral lesson to accompany a realistic play, and issued the hope that "thin-skinned" moralists would stay away from the theatre.
They had not complained that the play championed the interests of vice, as did the New York reviewers:

... the moral drama is an unmitigated nuisance, tending to bring virtue into discredit, and to make vice acceptable; and I believe, still further, that save in very rare cases — every play, the plot of which hinges upon adultery, ought to be scooted off every respectable stage. 7

The New York Times voiced a similar objection:

It is a striking peculiarity of the "moral drama" of this period ... [that] its illustrations of the light and pleasant ways of vice constitute its principal claim to popular fame. ... East Lynne, which was last evening produced at the Winter Garden, is a piece of precisely this class. 10

Aside from objecting to the play as immoral, the New York critics dismissed the story as "dreary," sentimental nonsense. The critic from Albion noted that the novel was "flimsy" and "stupid," and the stage adaptation was no better.

There is 11 fatal defect in the plot, which dramatic art only renders more prominent. A wife and mother is made to desert her husband, her children, and a happy home, at the instigation of a villain against whom she has been expressly warned, and because of a suspicious circumstance which any woman of sense would have seen through immediately. Then ensue the customary jargon of the sated libertine, and the stereotyped lamentations of the remorseful wife, who ultimately breaks from her seducer, returns in disguise to her former home, and dies there—forgiven because she dies. 11

Here then, according to the New York critics, was an immoral play which offered nothing that would appeal to an intelligent audience. However, the play did succeed at the box office. A news item in the amusement section
of the New York Tribune during this initial New York run states:

The audiences last week were large and very warm in acknowledgment of the interest in the play. The matinee on Saturday afternoon was handsomely attended in spite of the discouraging weather, and full houses may safely be reckoned so long as the piece is kept before the public.\textsuperscript{12}

The New York Illustrated mentions that the moral drama East Lynne could only appeal to the audiences that frequent the "Bowery pits." Surely, the full houses at the Winter Garden represented more than just a gathering from the Bowery. The play no doubt attracted a number of sophisticated, experienced theatre-goers who came to the Winter Garden from sheer curiosity. The remaining, and most likely largest segment of the audience, was comprised of a less sophisticated, more naive populace who must have been lured to the theatre by one or both of the publicity factors working in favor of the play—the hard-sell moral appeal furnished by the promoters, and the inadvertent, but none-the-less powerful attraction found in the condemnation of the play by the critics, who in their columns mentioned an evening filled with "the light and pleasant ways of vice."

The fact that audiences during this period accepted plays which touched upon immorality is evidenced in three versions of Camille produced a decade before the appearance of East Lynne. The first two versions, featuring Fanny
Davenport and Laura Keene, attempted to avoid the presentation of an immoral woman upon the stage. In the case of Miss Keene, the action involving the presentation of a prostitute was written as taking place in a dream to avoid shocking the audience. Although these two versions of the play failed to attain box office success, in 1857 Matilda Heron was successful with her version, a faithful translation of the original work of M. Dumas fils. Her "realistic" production of the tragic story of a courtesan was warmly applauded by critics and audiences alike. As a result, Miss Heron was hailed as the exponent of a new realism in acting. Mention is made here of Miss Heron's success in Camille not to attempt to compare the play with East Lynne as dramatic literature, but rather to point to the presentation of immorality in the theatre as successful box office during this age of morality.

With the portion of the public drawn to East Lynne not for the vicarious thrill of a sensational story, but for the moral lesson it advertised, the theatre had found a new audience. Barnard Hewitt, in his work entitled Theatre, U.S.A., points out that the ability of the theatre to attract this new audience, who were "regularly opposed to the irreligious display of the stage," may have begun with the stage dramatization of Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1852.13 That play dealt directly with a contemporary problem, opposition to slavery, and had some value to those who
had hitherto opposed the stage play as immoral. The obvious effort to promote *East Lynne* as the great moral lesson of the century was no doubt an effort to appeal to this portion of the populace. The continued use of the moral appeal in newspapers and play bills in the years that followed, and the popular success of the play leads to the conclusion that this particular line of promotion was highly successful.

Robert Liston, in an article entitled "Dateline--East Lynne: 1962," aptly sums up the dual appeal of sensational story and moral lesson in Victorian America:

The real key to the popularity of "East Lynne" can be found in a line of John Chapman's. He said the play "mixed sex, high fashion, humble worthiness, and quarts of tears, so that it ran practically forever." In short, Victorian America was the very place for a play which had a woman commit infidelity and abandon her husband and children—a play which showed her with her bastard child and in bed in her nightie, and which exposed the lives of the rich and titled to be just what everyone thought they were all along. . . "East Lynne" thrived even in the Bible Belt because it left no doubt about the wages of sin—physical suffering, mental anguish and death. "East Lynne" was a moral drama, as any play had to be if suspicion of the theatre as a wicked form of entertainment was to be eliminated. Thus "East Lynne" triumphed over critical judgment to help establish the theatre in America. In the end it even triumphed over the critics.

Liston's comment crediting the play with helping to establish the theatre in America is certainly valid when considering the growth of the theatre in the newly settled western lands. John Kendall in his study of the New Orleans Theatre, mentions *East Lynne* with its highly emotional plot
Figure 6. A program for a production of East Lynne at the Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, March 11, 1863. From the New York Public Library Theatre Collection.
as one of the outstanding successes of the 1860's. He points out that the play was most successful in the repertoire of the road companies and floating theatres of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Edmund Gagey, in his work entitled *The San Francisco Stage*, explains that the sensational drama succeeded in the West because it was the only form of legitimate theatre that could compete with the music hall offerings of the era which featured the popular traveling minstrels reinforced with rows of pretty girls in glittering pink tights. East Lynne's success in the town halls and opera houses, despite such competition, seems to justify Mr. Liston's claim.

*East Lynne* offered a tale of immorality within a framework of a moral lesson. Because of this, the play attracted audiences composed of thrill seekers, the curious, and those drawn to the box office to witness the phenomenon of religious preachments on a theatre stage. Promoters of the play eagerly took advantage of the dual appeal of the play, as evidenced in the publicity approach used in newspapers and in playbills, and overcame the scorn of the New York critics. The initial success of *East Lynne* rested heavily upon the morality and immorality found with the story itself. However, in the years that followed the play's initial success, theatre audiences began to display as much enthusiasm for the young actress who first introduced
the play in the role of Isabel as they did for the great moral tale itself. In the sixties and seventies, Lucille Western's highly emotional impersonation of the erring and penitent Isabel also played an integral part in the success story of East Lynne.
FOOTNOTES


4. Ibid.


6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., January 27, 1863.

8. Ibid., November 6, 1869.


CHAPTER V

LUCILLE WESTERN - HER EMOTIONAL APPEAL

During the latter half of the nineteenth century the moral melodrama was accompanied in its sweep to popularity by the weeping histrionics of the newly acclaimed emotional actresses. Matilda Heron's portrayal of Camille in 1857 won for her the fame of America's first and foremost exponent of a new "realism" in acting. Among the names of actresses who followed Miss Heron in this tradition of the highly emotional style was Lucille Western. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the acting style and popular success of Miss Western, who introduced Lady Isabel of East Lynne to the American stage, and who continued to star in the most popular version of this tale of woe for the next fifteen years. Although Miss Western was never accepted by the theatre's leading critics as one of America's great actresses, her appearances in East Lynne attained for her a short lived but legendary popular fame throughout the United States.

Lucille Western was born January 8, 1843, in New Orleans, Louisiana, a child of parents who were themselves known
theatrical figures. Her father, George Western, was a well-known comedian famed for his eccentric characterizations performed at Barnum’s Museum in New York. George Western died while still a young man, leaving the family to the care of their mother, Mrs. Jane Western, who was somewhat of a celebrity in her own right, having appeared in numerous theatres in New York and Boston.

Lucille started her stage career while still a child, performing as Cora's Child in *Pizarro* and many other children's parts at the Boston Museum. She later performed with various dancing groups as a dancer-singer. Her mother joined in a second marriage with William B. English, who became manager of the National Theatre in Boston. While her stepfather managed this theatre, Miss Western appeared there for two seasons. Her youth and beauty enabled her to play a series of successful "sensational" roles.¹ At age fifteen, Lucille and her sister, Helen, toured as the Star Sisters in a popular feature of the day entitled *The Three Fast Men*. The Western sisters made their New York debut in this play at the Bowery Theatre on March 29, 1858. Their stepfather managed the sisters until his death in 1861.²

On October 11, 1859, Miss Western married James Harrison Mead of St. Louis, Missouri. Shortly after her marriage, and the death of her stepfather, Lucille broke
from the sister team and appeared for a short season in 1861 at the Holliday Street Theatre in Baltimore. Here she played Cynthia in the melodrama *Flowers of the Forest.*

In 1862, Lucille Western found the vehicle to her success in Clifton W. Taylure's adaptation of Mrs. Wood's famous novel *East Lynne.* With no formal training, the young, still-unseasoned actress met the New York critics armed with vitality, determination, and her play, *East Lynne.* Her newly-won audiences greeted her with an enthusiasm the critics lacked. The *New York Times* offered the following somewhat succinct comment on her impersonation:

> Her intensities are too hysterical to come within the range of art, and too ceaseless to belong to nature. They are simply painful. . .

The critic from the *New York Tribune* was equally unimpressed:

> Her efforts were all multiplied indefinitely beyond the modest possibilities of nature. Her tones of voice, her gestures, and her attitudes had no touch of truth to recommend them. They were all alike—wild, incoherent, extravagant, and impossible. . .

The *New York Illustrated* and the *Albion* described her efforts as evidencing a general ignorance of the art of acting.

In spite of the vehement condemnation of Miss Western's histrionic efforts in *East Lynne,* mention of her artistic potential frequently appeared along with the criticism of her crude impersonations. In a rather lengthy, thorough
Figure 7. Lucille Western in the character of Cynthia in *The Flower of the Forest*, circa 1861. From *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, April 21, 1866.
evaluation of her role in *East Lynne* and her potential as an actress, a critic for the *Spirit of the Times* chastised his fellow critics while defending Miss Western's merits as a performer:

> I think Miss Western's performances of Lady Isabel not only good, but truly great. She is unquestionably full of talent. That she lacks polish is very true; but swearing and sneering will not remedy the fault—diamonds are polished with diamond dust, and not with brickbats. It is easy to scold, but seemingly difficult to advise. . . Youth is especially entitled to counsel instead of censure. When an old stager sins, one of years and position, let him have justice and justice only; but with the young beginner, forebearance, advice, praise where it can justly be given, or if censure must come, let the chastisement be that of kind parents and not the flogging of a brutal executioner. . . It is, of course, impossible to determine, from a single character, the range and direction of this talent. I do not undertake to set her down as a great Artist, for to be an Artist years of experience are necessary; I do not undertake to set her down as a great Actress, for here a variety of characters is necessary; but I do say that in the portrayal of this one part, she has done all that a great Actress could do, and far more than any other in this country (with possibly one or two exceptions) could come anywhere near accomplishing. 6

Records of large audiences wherever she appeared and the legends of her beauty and emotional powers attest to her popularity and success as an artist known and admired by the popular theatre-goers of her age. In his work entitled *Curtain Time*, Lloyd Morris gives the following interesting description of Miss Western's own efforts to perpetuate the aura of mystery surrounding her:

> Miss Lucille Western protected the legend of her opulent beauty. She never set foot in the public rooms of the hotels where she stayed when on tour.
Her meals were always served in her suite, and when entering or leaving her hotel she wore a heavy, shoulder-length, black lace veil that concealed her features. Even in her suite she kept this veil at hand and, if anyone knocked at her door, she immediately covered her face with it before answering the summons. ... Glamour was a star's most valuable asset and extreme precautions were taken to avoid casual observations.\footnote{7}

Lucille Western was greatly admired by her female contemporaries because she exemplified for them the "self-made woman." In \textit{Leslies Illustrated Magazine}, the "ladies' home companion" of the nineteenth century, an article was devoted to Miss Western, whom they described as being "on the topmost wave of popular favor." The magazine lauded her achievements in a style befitting Miss Western's reputation as an emotional performer:

She has risen to her present position by dint of her own exertion. Without powerful friends; with little or no encouragement in her early career; blessed with no fostering and guiding hand to direct her steps, and unaided, even by what has ever been considered an essential prerequisite to the difficult and arduous profession she has followed—a thorough education—she has gone on, step by step—her motto, "Excelsior"—until to-day she finds herself a recognized artist, a popular favorite, and a woman of large intellectualty, capable of grasping the most difficult characters in dramatic art, and comprehending with subtle instinct, and portraying with wondrous power, every passion which can move the human soul.\footnote{8}

A study of reactions to Miss Western's art by the theatre critics of her time might lead one to hold suspicions as to the objectivity of the above artistic evaluations, but they do verify the existence of a widespread fame.
Miss Western's lack of formal training, her dependence upon her own ingenuity and raw emotions, met with the disapproval of the more sophisticated critics wherever she appeared. They frowned upon her crude grammar and her wild displays of frenzy. It is reported that she sometimes stuffed large portions of her clothing into her mouth to produce emotional effects in her audience. Among Miss Western's more gory tricks of trade, consciously designed for shock effect, was attaching a slice of liver to her cheek in order to feign a bruise and win the sympathy of the audience. In the memoirs of Minnie Fiske, collected by Archie Binns in a book entitled Mrs. Fiske of the American Stage, Mrs. Fiske recalled her experiences as a child when she appeared in East Lynne with Lucille Western who "lived her roles." In one instance Miss Western, in her frenzy of grief as Miss Isabel, nearly dislocated the arm of Little Minnie who was acting the part of William, the little boy who dies in the arms of his mother.

I can close my eyes now and in the conjured darkness see a woman with a brilliant, flashing face, a noble head, and sturdy shoulders pacing up and down in the deserted green room. I am sitting quietly in the corner watching her as she paces to and fro, her hands clasped nervously, her brows knitted, and great tears coursing down her cheeks... We are wise in our generation. The old-fashioned way was too wearing; it killed this woman who is pacing restlessly before me.

This vivid description of Lucille Western's preparation
for a performance, and the intensity with which she performed, furnishes us with a first-hand account of the "emotional" artist of a bygone era.

According to Odell, the height of Miss Western's career came with her engagement by the Grand Opera House in New York for the season of 1869. Odell observes that the Opera House maintained no company of its own, but instead engaged individual actors for special productions. The engagement of Miss Western set a precedent for that theatre. She opened this season with *Leah the Forsaken*, which played for two nights, July 2 and 4. *Oliver Twist* was presented on July 5 and ran until July 15, with Lucille playing Nancy Sykes. The remainder of the season included *The Child Stealer, Satan in Paris, Lucretia Borgia, Green Bushes, The Spy of St. Marc, Clytie, Queen of the Gipsies, The Robber's Wife, The Sea of Ice, Patrie*, and, of course, *East Lynne*. Miss Western closed this highly successful run on October 2, 1869.\(^\text{10}\)

Other plays in which she appeared successfully throughout the country included *Handy Andy, Rosina Meadows, Flowers of the Forest, Camille, Gamea, Masks and Faces, The French Spy, Don Caesar de Bazan, The Stranger*, and *The Honeymoon*.

Mrs. Fiske suggested that the demands of Miss Western's style of performing, the drain upon her emotional resources,
brought about by the "old-fashioned way" contributed to her death. She died at the age of thirty-four while performing at the Park Theatre in Brooklyn.\textsuperscript{11} 

In summing up her life, Allston Brown offers these comments, which may stand as an appropriate epitaph for Lucille Western's controversial, yet successful stage career:

Miss Western narrowly escaped being one of the great actresses of her generation, but escape it she did. Her emotional powers, her occasional characterizations, were the offspring of intuition. The public saw in her a woman of great natural power, lacking only great cultivation; and yet it is possible that cultivation would have spoiled her altogether.\textsuperscript{12}

H. P. Phelps concludes that Lucille Western's life was one of "incessant toil, without fruition."\textsuperscript{13} He expresses the thought that had her powers been properly directed, her impact on the history of theatre would have been far greater.

Whether Miss Western might have climbed to greater artistic heights had her talent been properly directed can never be determined. However, there can be no doubt that she held a fascination for the theatre-goer of that era, and often her frenzied interpretation of Lady Isabel had startling effects upon her audiences. The personality of Lady Isabel of East Lynne, as originally created by Mrs. Wood in her novel, was quite insipid and unexciting. Her adventures, it is true, were quite shocking for a Victorian society, but the actual character of the novel
was a one-dimensional, uninspired country mouse. Mr. Tayleure, in his stage adaptation, added nothing to this character. It is to the credit of the talents of Lucille Western that the dramatized Lady Isabel became the sentimental, emotional, stage favorite of nineteenth-century America. Newspaper accounts of Miss Western's appearances in New Orleans relate that her stage powers "sent ladies in the audience into fainting fits, and drove men from the theatre, so unable were they to endure the strain of her overwhelmingly realistic acting." Exaggerated anecdotes often follow public figures during their life times and remain as part of their biographies and, as is the case with Miss Western, are further evidence of popular fame. The New York Tribune noted that even in sophisticated New York City her appearance was looked forward to with interest and curiosity. She was the subject of popular legends and critical controversy.

An examination of the newspaper advertisements and playbills for *East Lynne* during the years of Miss Western's appearances in the play reveals that promoters relied as heavily, if not more so, upon the reputation of Lucille Western's strong emotional appeal as they did upon the moral-immoral story of the play. The critical reviewers in New York City devoted the majority of their space in discussing Miss Western's unusual, fascinating, if not
proper impersonations. In one instance, a playbill for East Lynne from the Academy of Music in Boston reveals that the name "Western" is set in the largest type on the program, overshadowing the name of the play itself.15

After her death, other emotional actresses succeeded in presenting East Lynne with varying degrees of success, but never again did the playbills and theatre marquees display a banner which spelled out box-office magic: "Next Week - Lucille Western."
FOOTNOTES

1. "Miss Lucille Western," Leslie's Illustrated Weekly, April 21, 1866.


12. Ibid.

13. Phelps, loc. cit.


CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

This study of the moral melodrama *East Lynne* presents certain explanations for the phenomenal, now legendary success of the play on the American stage of the nineteenth century.

1. A study of the staging of *East Lynne* establishes that the play was staged with very ordinary, conventional settings, in no way different from the settings which were used for countless other melodramas of the period. Although, in some instances, prompt book notes indicate the use of visions to accompany death scenes (which may have heightened the melodramatic effect of the story), these visions were not always used, and successful productions were presented without their inclusion. Since exciting, spectacular staging is not found with productions of *East Lynne*, this study establishes two other sources to account for the great popular appeal of the play. These are: (1) the presentation of a tale of immorality cloaked in a veil of morality and (2) the personal success and appeal of Lucille Western, who first introduced the play's tragic figure, Lady Isabel, to the American stage.
2. An examination of advance newspaper promotion for *East Lynne*, and actual playbills circulated by various theatre managers, reveals that the promoters of the play sought box-office appeal with a sensational story which offered an abundance of vicarious thrills for a popular audience, and which could, at the same time, be prominently and guiltlessly displayed as a moral lesson. Its formula attracted an audience composed of thrill seekers, the curious, and, no doubt, a percentage of viewers attracted by the promise of a refined, religious presentation on a theatre stage. The initial success of the play was the result of this successful campaign which offered the mysterious intrigue of a murder, the sensational thrill of illicit sex, and the heartache and suffering of an errant wife and mother, all given with the countenance and support of "the clergy."

3. The sensation and curiosity aroused by the advanced notices preceding the arrival of the play in Brooklyn and New York, and the critical reaction by reviewers to its sensational story material, centering around vice and sex, may explain the initial success of the play, but the prolonged attraction that *East Lynne* held for audiences during the sixties and seventies was undoubtedly the product of the talents of Lucille Western. Miss Western's raw, highly emotional interpretation of the role
of Isabel eventually became the main attraction of East Lynne for the general public, overshadowing all other aspects of the play. East Lynne reached the height of its fame and popularity during her tenure as its leading exponent. The pairing of this untrained, relatively obscure yet potentially dynamic actress with the sensational, widely-known, but artless script of East Lynne accounts to a great degree for the popular success of both.

4. The countless revivals of East Lynne in the twentieth century, along with the satires based on its flimsy, overly emotional, highly melodramatic plot, are explained by the fact that East Lynne gained an unparalleled success not only as a public attraction in the large cities which were the centers of theatrical activity during this period, but its appearance coincided with a major development in the American theatre—the traveling company which often featured a famous actor. This enabled the play, along with its most valuable asset, Lucille Western, to travel and spread its fame throughout the entire country. Because East Lynne was familiar not only in the East, but in every town and hamlet in the country during the height of its success, the play came to epitomize its genre, the sentimental moral melodrama, for decades to come.

5. East Lynne as a form of theatrical fare is neither unique nor in itself significant in the American theatre.
However, the play's great popular success and its appeal to the taste of a massive, untrained, newly discovered audience in town halls and playhouses of the smaller communities throughout the country contributed to a new awareness of the theatre as a popular form of entertainment in the late nineteenth century.

6. After the death of Lucille Western, East Lynne became a favorite starring vehicle for many aspiring actresses of the American stage. Although its popular appeal and box-office success gradually diminished throughout the remainder of the century, it was kept alive during this period by these actresses who were hoping to repeat Miss Western's success in the role of Lady Isabel.

7. East Lynne holds a significant place in the history of the American theatre because it is a prime representative of a theatrical genre, the sentimental moral melodrama, which held a prominent position on the popular stage for approximately four decades of the nineteenth century. East Lynne reflects an important aspect of the popular theatre in America during this period. Because the play was successful theatrical fare throughout the country for a considerable period of time, East Lynne provides us today with a source for viewing the acting styles and plot material that was an important segment of the popular theatre of its era. The play's appeal eventually
succumbed to the development of a more sophisticated American drama and a less-emotional approach to acting. However, the play's successful combination of immorality and sentimentality overcame the general damnation of the critics and enabled *East Lynne* to more than meet the challenge offered by the more spectacular theatre of the nineteenth century.
APPENDIX A
The following is a list of productions of *East Lynne* staged in the New York City area from 1863 to 1899. The list was compiled from two major sources: (1) George C. D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), Volumes VI - XIV, and (2) T. Allston Brown, *A History of the New York Stage* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1903), Volumes I - III.

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June 25       The Bowery Theatre       Fay Templeton
November 14    Grand Opera House     Lucille Western
1876 - February 2  Brooklyn Academy of Music  Lucille Western
February 24     Grand Opera House     Lucille Western
September 20-23  Brooklyn Theatre      Augusta Dargan
1877 - January 18-20  Park Theatre, Brooklyn  Mrs. D. P. Bowers
February 1      Niblo's Garden        (A benefit for Jane English, mother of Lucille Western, recently deceased. Mrs. English re-enacted scenes from East Lynne.)
March (?)       The Bowery Theatre      Ada Gray
September 24-26  Wood's Theatre       Jennie Carroll
1878 - January 28, 29  Park Theatre, Brooklyn  Mrs. D. P. Bowers
February 12, 14, 16  Lyceum Theatre     Ada Gray
July 8          Niblo's Garden         Gussie De Forrest
November 25-30   Novelty Theatre      Eliza O'Connor
1879 - January 20-22  Park Theatre, Brooklyn  Mrs. D. P. Bowers
May 5-10        Grand Opera House     Helena Modjeska
November 26     Town Hall              Mary Brimer
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The method of reconstruction used in this study of the settings for productions of *East Lynne* at the Park Theatre has previously been defined in the introduction to the study and in Chapter III. In this detailed discussion of the method employed in arriving at pictorial evidence and ground plans for the settings, the following primary material will be introduced in the order that the settings to which they are related appear in the play: six poster designs from the Specimen Books, one ground plan from the prompter's notes, and five conjectural ground plans.

Figures 8, 9, and 10 are offered as evidence of the arrangement for the first setting in the play. These three designs bear a close resemblance to the opening scene as described in the prompt book. Figure 8 is a design of a nineteenth-century parlor. The room has three openings in the rear shutter which lead to the grounds that form the background for the openings. Furniture in the room includes a small table and chair placed stage right, and a piano placed stage left. A man and a woman are at the piano, with a second woman framed in the central doorway. The arrangement of furniture in Figure 8 corresponds with the stage directions (Chapter III, pp. 31-33). There is no mention of a piano in the prompt book; however, on two occasions when this scene is on stage (Act I, Scene 3
and Act IV, scene 1), music is called for to accompany a song by one of the characters. It is possible that the piano was used to provide this accompaniment.

The positions of the characters seen in Figure 8 correspond with the action in Act IV, scene 1, when this particular setting is on stage. In this scene, Isabel is returning to East Lynne disguised as the governess, Madame Vine. When she enters the house she finds Archibald and his new wife, Barbara, in the situation described by the stage directions as follows:

ARCHIBALD. Spoken like my own wife. Now Barbara, you must sing to me. (She sings song, "You'll Remember Me." Archibald in same situation with Barbara as with Isabel at end of Act I. . . enter Lady Isabel as Madame Vine, during song, at C.D.L. At end of song sighs deeply—Archibald and Barbara turn and see her.)

The arrangement of furniture and the positions of the characters in Figure 8 correspond with the above description with the exception of Lady Isabel who appears at the center door in the poster and not at the left center door as mentioned in the text.

In Figure 9, the rear wall contains three openings and the type and placement of the furniture are the same as in Figure 8. Two characters, one a man and the other a woman, are making an exit through the central doorway.

Figure 10 displays three openings in the back of the room, but the type and placement of furniture differs from
Figures 8 and 9. In this poster there appears to be a solid wall between the last upstage flat and the shutter. This may merely represent artistic license on the part of the designer of the poster, but it could represent a plug between the last upstage flat and the shutter. A fireplace stage left may also represent a solid plug between the wings of the set.

Figures 8, 9, and 10 are offered as pictorial evidence representing possible staging arrangements for scenes from *East Lynne* for which this setting was used. Plate I is the conjectural ground plan for this setting.
Figure 8  A poster cut for *East Lynne* from a Specimen Book of the Ledger Job Office, Philadelphia. Harvard Theatre Collection.
Figure 9 A poster cut for *East Lynne*. Harvard Theatre Collection
Figure 10  A poster cut for *East Lynne*. Harvard Theatre Collection.
Plate I

Shutter in fourth groove

R2E

R1E

L1E
Figure 11 is a poster design offered as pictorial evidence for the second setting used in the play. In the left hand corner of the poster, an urn is shown mounted on a pedestal. The poster depicts this as a piece of scenery apart from the painted shutter, but it probably represents artistic license on the part of the designer of the poster. In all likelihood it appeared painted on the shutter. In this scene, the locale is used as a secret meeting place for Barbara Hare and her brother Richard. In Figure 11 a man and woman are shown, with the man gesturing offstage while the woman is reacting with dismay. This action is not associated with Act I, scene 2 but does compare with the action and dialogue described in Act II, scene 2, when this set is again used. In Act II, scene 2, Barbara and Richard are meeting in the groove by their home, as they do in Act I, scene 2. Archibald, Isabel's husband, joins them to discuss Richard's problem. Richard soon leaves and Archibald escorts Barbara home. It is at this moment that Levison enters with Isabel to point out to her that Archibald is conducting clandestine meetings with Barbara. Isabel becomes distraught and pleads with Levison to take her away. The gestures and poses of the two characters shown in Figure 11 coincide with the following lines of dialogue and action in the script during the above action:
(Enter Lady Isabel and Levison, L.E., in time to see them off. Archibald and Barbara have just exited stage right...)

LEVISON. There, Lady Isabel, I told you what you might see, - there is the proof.

ISABEL. Take me away from this accursed place. Francis Levison. I am faint-ill-wretched-mad!²

Figure 11 is a landscape as is called for in the text. The two characters in the poster may well represent Levison and Isabel as described in the above excerpt from the text. Figure 11 is offered as pictorial evidence for the setting used in this scene and other scenes where the setting is repeated. Plate II is the conjectural ground plan for this setting.

A poster design to offer pictorial evidence for the third setting used in the play was not available for this study. A description of stage directions and prompter's notes setting the scene is offered in Chapter III. Plate III is offered as a conjectural ground plan for this scene. It is constructed without benefit of a poster design and relies entirely upon scenic descriptions from the prompt book.
Figure 11 A poster cut for *East Lynne*. Harvard Theatre Collection.
Figure 13 is a poster cut which depicts a parlor scene showing a central doorway, a doorway left of center, and a fireplace stage right. The characters in the poster can be identified as Lady Isabel, Lord Mount Severn, Little Suzanne, and a maid. The overall design of the room and the characters in the scene definitely identify this poster as illustrating the fourth setting of the play. A comparison of figures 12 and 13 shows that the fireplace is in approximately the same position as is called for in the prompter's notes (Chapter III, p. 35). Plate IV is the conjectural ground plan for this setting.

Figure 14 is a poster design used to illustrate the fifth setting in the play. The design depicts a bed chamber with two entrances in the shutter. A couch is shown center stage with a woman reclining upon it. This is Isabel, as described in the directions which open the scene. Two women are depicted at the foot of the couch, and a kneeling man appears at the head of the couch. These characters could represent Miss Corney, Joyce, and Archibald, all of whom appear in the scene. Stage directions and prompt notes do not indicate specific entrances in the scene, therefore, the rear doorways in Figure 14 are not verified by the text. Plate V is the conjectural ground plan for this setting.
EAT LIES.  

[ACT III.

Ah, I shamed myself. — you, a married man with children in the house too! Oh! I tell you before anything wicked of myself than of you, Arscilla.

Arscilla. [Aside]. Why, what do you mean? Are you crazy, Cornelia? There has been no woman here, but a man who kept the police on his track; you ought to be able to guess the rest.

Miss C. Oh! What do you mean? Let me see him.

Arscilla. Why, you surely would not present yourself to him in that guise?

Miss C. What! not Richard Hare? Let me see him.

Arscilla. Why, surely you would not present yourself to him in that guise.

Miss C. What? not show myself to Richard Hare in this guise — he who I have stripped ten times a day when he was a boy, and he deserves it now for getting into such a scrape. He looks no better than I do, I dare say. Where is he? [Aside]. Why, Richard, was on earth has brought you here? You must have been crazy. Ric. The bow street officers were after me, and I had to cut away from London at a moment’s notice. I had no money to pay for a lodging or to buy me food; so I came to Mr. Carlyle in Northumberland Street. Miss C. [Aside]. It serves you right. You would go hunting after those Wrexham horses, my Lady-in-Waiting. 

Ric. [Aside]. Cornelia, there is no time for explanations. Do you go and prepare him some food, while I ask for the lodgings. 

Cornelia. [Aside]. Be at.

Miss C. Well, come along, Richard. We will show you how we mean for you; but you know always was the greatest natural-born fool that was ever set loose out of leading-strings.

Scene 11. — Character is 4.

EAT LIES.  

[Aside]. Miss C. Miss C. Miss C. Miss C. Miss C. Miss C.

Shall I keep up the show? very thin and very fine.

Arscilla. Ah! what is to be the end of my sufferings? How much longer can I bear this torture of mind, this never-dying anguish of soul? From what a dream have I awakened? (to lady, wife, mother) whatever trials may be the lot of my beloved life, I would endure them. I would go through the most cruel trials, the general’s daughter, to bring my patience to bear them. Fall down on your knees and pray for pardon; pray for strength to endure the sorrows which would torment you to accept them. Bear them patiently, rather than forget your good name and your good circumstances. I have suffered instead, home, children, friends, and all that makes life of value to woman — and for what? To be forever an outcast from society, to never again
Figure 14. A poster cut for East Lynne. Harvard Theatre Collection.
Plate V

Shutter in fourth groove
Results of applying the above method of reconstruction to the staging of nineteenth-century melodrama indicate that poster cuts from the Specimen Books are valid sources of information concerning scene designs from the theatre of this period. Of course, careful verification of the significance of these poster cuts through the use of prompt book notations is always necessary. In the case of this particular study, the reconstructed stage settings are rather ordinary and unexciting, but they fulfill the requirements of this study by placing staging techniques in proper perspective in relationship to the success of East Lynne. However, if Specimen Book designs are available for the more unusual and sensational stage spectacles (Dion Boucicault's melodramas as a case in point), the results of the application of this method of reconstruction could produce new concepts relating to the stagecraft of the nineteenth century.
FOOTNOTES

1. East Lynne (Boston: Charles H. Spencer, n.d.), Ohio State University Theatre Collection, number P 913, p. 32.

2. ________, p. 23.
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