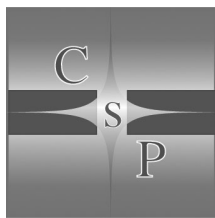


Passionate Politics

Passionate Politics:
The Cultural Work of American Melodrama
from the Early Republic to the Present

Edited by

Ralph J. Poole and Ilka Saal



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PASSIONATE POLITICS: AN INTRODUCTION

RALPH J. POOLE AND ILKA SAAL

The Cultural Work of American Melodrama

Melodrama and the United States came into existence at virtually the same time, the late 18th century, and as Daniel Gerould suggests, for virtually the same reasons: the “democratic revolution in thought and feeling.”¹ The new nation was particularly susceptible to the sentimental aesthetics and rigorous moralistic worldview advocated by the new genre that was emerging in Europe in the aftermath of the French revolution, and it quickly adapted it to its own mimetic needs. “Crude, violent, dynamic in action, psychologically and morally simplistic, reliant on machinery and technological know-how for its powerful effects, melodrama became the direct expression of American society and its national character,” Gerould writes.² He continues to point out that the melodramatic worldview, which stresses action over contemplation and quick reversals of fortune over perseverance, was highly appealing to “a nation founded on a belief in opportunity for all and dedicated to getting ahead and making money.”³ As one of the pioneers in the study of American melodrama, Gerould recognized not only the popular appeal of the genre’s aesthetics, but also the enormous productivity of its vision in establishing and sustaining the ideology of the new nation.

Other scholars, too, especially of American film melodrama, such as Thomas Elsaesser, Christine Gledhill, and Linda Williams, have confirmed the lasting appeal of the melodramatic vision for contemporary audiences, at the heart of which is the quest for “moral and emotional truths.”⁴ While this quest might have manifested itself most vividly and bluntly in the overt Manichean dualism of the Victorian stage, it continues to be apparent in contemporary film melodrama; only that it now draws on more sophisticated discourses “for the apportioning of responsibility, guilt, and innocence—psychoanalysis, marriage guidance, medical ethics, politics, even feminism.”⁵ As Elsaesser, Gledhill, and Williams agree, as “a peculiarly democratic and American form that seeks dramatic revelation of moral and emotional truths through a dialectic of pathos and

action,”⁶ melodrama has come to constitute the very foundation of the Hollywood culture industry.

With this new collection of essays on American melodrama we aim to illuminate further the connection between the genre’s enduring popular appeal and ongoing contributions to the formation and refiguration of American identity(ies). We, too, believe that melodrama has been one of the most prevalent and versatile genres in American culture. But where former critics sought to clarify what exactly melodrama *is*—a “genre? Style? Mode? Ideology?” as Gledhill asks⁷—we are primarily interested in the cultural work that melodrama has accomplished over the past two hundred years. In other words, we consider melodrama above all a *mode of cultural production*, whose most distinctive trait is its creative merging of an aesthetics of affect and excess with an idealist desire for uncovering what Peter Brooks has termed the hidden “moral occult.” In the confluence of hyperbolic aesthetics and moralistic vision, melodrama persistently pressures the surface of the ordinary in order to make it yield meaning. This quality is particularly pertinent to the ways in which a community imagines itself in times where, as Brooks writes, “traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern.”⁸ It is under such conditions of social duress, that melodrama reveals its unique capacity to record social problems and to resolve them in the spirit of an ideal morality. The essays in this collection will show how melodrama was crucial to the formation of national identity in the Early Republic, how it partook in the debates over abolition, contributed to the discussion of gender roles at the turn of the 19th century, participated in the fervent class struggles of the 1930s, critiqued the policy of domestic containment in the 1950s, and continues to debate issues of gender, race, and sexuality today.

Melodrama’s primary impulse in these debates is to return the inhabitants of its universe (and with them us, as their spectators) to a locus of innocence. It does so by swiftly identifying the dominant opposing social forces, bringing them into violent conflict, and striving to eliminate those forces that impose suffering on the “true” representatives of virtue. According to Brooks, the typical melodramatic plot has a tripartite structure: the presentation of virtue as innocence (e.g. the young virgin) taking pleasure in itself, the intrusion of villainy into the enclosed space of virtue (e.g. the villain coming down the open road), persecuting virtue and threatening its survival, and finally the resistance of virtue and its ultimate triumphant recognition against all odds. But as Brooks also points out, “with the triumph of virtue in the end, there is not as in comedy the

emergence of a new society formed around the united young couple, ridded of the impediment represented by the blocking figure from the older generation, but rather a reforming of the old society of innocence, which has now driven out the threat to its existence and reaffirmed its values.”⁹

Arguably, this desire to recuperate an originary, mythological innocence is particularly prevalent in American melodrama, where melodramatic desire functions as a kind of “public testimony to an elusive virtue.” “The perceived excesses of the mode may in fact be a function of a particularly American insistence on innocence and good,” Linda Williams writes, “as if American national identity required a constant assertion of innocence in a way that, say French national identity does not.”¹⁰ According to her, melodrama signifies a “quest for a democratic, plain-speaking recognition of innocence and guilt, a guilt or innocence that can be spoken out loud and seen by all.”¹¹ And she suggests, that ultimately, this quest for recognition and acknowledgement of an essential innocence, manifesting itself in popular melodramas on stage and screen, might be the “best example of American culture’s (often hypocritical) notion of itself as the locus of innocence and virtue.”¹²

Due to this distinctive nostalgic yearning, melodrama has been variously described as an inherently conservative genre. Its primary dramaturgical goal seems to be the reassurance of the audience that while virtue might be persecuted, its intrinsic value shall be recognized and triumphant after all—even if only in death. Critics have therefore surmised that melodrama is primarily concerned with the affirmation rather than the questioning of a given set of moral imperatives. This reading, however, fails to take into account the genre’s revolutionary origins as well as its periodic come-back and mass appeal in times of social unrest and fundamental political transformations.¹³

Here, it is important to remember that melodrama is always both vision and document.¹⁴ While it might nostalgically yearn for a lost innocence, it also simultaneously documents the social injustices that fuel this vision. And it does so in a manner that is swift, simple, straightforward, and above all, legible to anyone. As Jane Gaines asserts, melodrama “can be depended upon to narrate intolerable historical conditions in such a way that audiences wish to see wrong ‘righted,’ are even moved to act upon their reaffirmed convictions, to act against tyranny and for ‘the people.’”¹⁵ In this regard, the most maudlin melodrama still contains a core of social critique, even while it reduces complex social problems to “the individual, to the family, or some ahistorical human condition”¹⁶ and refuses “to

understand social change in other than private contexts and emotional terms.”¹⁷

Moreover, while melodrama might have a propensity for working in concert with the dominant ideology, we should also keep in mind that ideology itself is never fully able to naturalize its productions completely and can therefore form the basis of its own critique. To put it differently with regard to melodrama, what might be obvious from the point of view of plot is often far from being obvious from the point of view of the *mise-en-scène* and vice versa. One of the central issues at stake in our study of melodrama is precisely the question of how the *mise-en-scène* interpellates the reader/spectator differently than the plot and dialogue. As James Kavanagh points out, there is always more than one discourse at work in a given cultural text, and this discursive layering marks “an ideological struggle over whether a pleasurable/beautiful/fascinating/cultural text will be used to reaffirm or to challenge the prevailing sense of self and social order”—it is “always a struggle over what is ‘obvious.’”¹⁸ Nothing is immediately obvious in melodrama, even as it might be derided for its “naïve,” “simplistic,” and “reductivist” portrayal of social problems.

Thomas Elsaesser, in fact, concludes that more than anything the genre of melodrama distinguishes itself on the grounds of a *radical ambiguity*: “Depending on whether the emphasis fell on the odyssey of suffering or the happy ending, on the place and context of rupture [...], that is to say, depending on what dramatic mileage was got out of the heroine’s perils before the ending [...], melodrama would appear to function either as subversive or as escapism—categories which are always relative to the given historical and social context.”¹⁹ We might add that the categories of “escapism” and “subversiveness” are also relative to the context of reception, to the aesthetic and political disposition of the spectator. Perhaps it is precisely this hermeneutic quality that has kept the genre alive. Despite its inherent formulaic character, melodrama has proven to be an extremely complex, versatile, and productive cultural genre, easily adapting to ever-changing contexts and situations, embracing new subjects, generating surprising variations, and in this manner also pushing for change.²⁰

What emerges then is an aesthetic mode of cultural production full of contradictions: conformism to formulaic conventions and conservative imperatives on the one hand, and a vivacious impulse towards affect and excess on the other, which perpetually subverts and transcends the generic rules and conventions that it is embedded in. As Gerould reminds us, particularly in American melodrama, everything is possible, everyone can “undergo a change of heart, start life anew, reform, move on, escape, be

someone else. Even the villain may be offered these options.”²¹ In sharp contrast to European naturalism, “social background, genes, wealth, talent are no major determinants in melodrama. All empathy goes to long-shots who come from behind, to triumphant underdogs and lucky lottery ticket holders, if not every one can win, everyone has the chance to win.”²²

Our goal is the critical assessment of the multifarious and contradictory uses to which melodrama has been put in American culture from the late 18th century to the present. The nine essays in our collection approach this issue from a variety of angles, including historical, aesthetic, cultural, phenomenological, and psychological approaches. Together they present a complex picture of the cultural work accomplished by the genre over the course of the past two centuries, particularly in times of profound social, political, and aesthetic transformations, such as in the early Republic, during the Civil War, at the turn of 19th century, in the 1930s and 1950s, as well as at this very moment.

We think that it is high time for such reassessment of melodrama. Widely considered the illegitimate and semiliterate child of American literature, melodrama has been the subject of few studies by scholars of American culture—with a few notable exceptions that have been crucial for staking out and advancing the field of American melodrama studies, such as David Grimsted, Thomas Elsaesser, John Cawelti, Daniel Gerould, Thomas Schatz, Linda Williams, Christine Gledhill, and Marcia Landy.²³ All of these works, however, date to the 1970s and 80s, and, except for Grimsted and Gerould, most of them are concerned with film and TV melodrama, emphasizing particularly feminist and psychological approaches to melodrama. A new collection of essays by Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Literary Genre* (1996), dedicated to stage melodrama, appeared in the mid-nineties. Aside from Thomas Postlewait’s influential essay “From Melodrama to Realism: The Suspect History of American Drama,” this collection focuses exclusively on 19th century European (mostly British) melodrama. Above all, it contends that melodrama ought not to be considered beyond its genre definition—that is, rather than studying it as a highly versatile and ever-changing aesthetic mode, the editors insist that it needs to be historicized in the specific context of its cultural emergence in the early 19th century. Since then there has been a marked silence with regard to melodrama, punctured only recently by a study on the sensational film melodrama of the turn of the 19th century by Ben Singer and a new essay collection by Frank Kelleter, Barbarah Krah, and Ruth Mayer. In his book *Melodrama and Modernity* (2001), Singer highlights to what extent popular theater and film between 1880 and 1920 (both heavily

inflected by the more spectacular and sensational aspects of melodrama) reflected the sensory complexity and intensity of urban modernity.²⁴ As the title of Kelleter's, Krah's, and Mayer's book, *Melodrama! The Mode of Excess from Early America to Hollywood*, suggests, the collection focuses geographically on North America, while its generic scope encompasses an impressive array of prose, drama, film, and television over the course of more than two centuries in order "to demonstrate that there are many reciprocities and correspondences in the differently mediated enactments of the melodramatic mode, stretching from the eighteenth century to our days, even while there are just as many breaks and discontinuities that require explanations."²⁵

With our collection, we want to expand and deepen this reopened discussion by thinking of melodrama not primarily as a historical genre but as an aesthetic means of reflecting and engaging in the various social and cultural processes that have shaped the United States. Focusing on key historical periods and mainly on stage and film melodrama (and therefore leaving aside the intricacies of the American novel tradition vis-à-vis melodrama as discussed at length in Kelleter et al.'s book), our selection of essays aims at investigating to what extent the conformity to and subversion of genre conventions allows melodrama to intervene in a given cultural context both progressively and conservatively and in what ways it has enabled American culture to participate in the formation, consolidation, and critique of a new nation.

Since both Gledhill and Williams have given us detailed accounts of the evolution of the scholarship in the field,²⁶ and since each of our contributor's draws on seminal theories of melodrama, we will here refrain from a survey of the crucial literature. Instead, by way of introducing the work of our contributors, we would like to highlight two major issues that have emerged out of our discussion of melodrama: melodrama's highly contested relationship with realism, and melodrama's engagement in matters of race, class, and gender/sexuality.

Melodrama and Realism

The story of the emergence of American drama is commonly narrated as the ultimate triumph of a mature, sophisticated, and sincere high-cultural realism over a youthful, sensational, and sentimental—and therefore somewhat juvenile and naïve—melodramatic entertainment culture.²⁷ As Thomas Postlewait comments in his essay "The Suspect History of American Drama" (1996), "[t]his progressive shift from melodrama to realism, occurring between the 1880s and the 1920s, is

usually seen as a step-by-step transformation of American playwriting or a difficult struggle between two adversarial forms.”²⁸ In either case, it is a progressive, teleological narrative, at the end of which realism emerges as the dominant new aesthetics, finally enabling American drama to come into its own. Canonical theater histories therefore pay little attention to the role of melodrama in American culture, relegating it to the pre-history of American theater or dismissing it as either failed tragedy or *realism manqué*. As suspicious critics of this master narrative have, however, pointed out, it was precisely this logic that enabled the arbiters of high culture to constitute melodrama “as the anti-value for a critical field in which tragedy and realism became the cornerstones of ‘high’ cultural value, needing protection from mass, ‘melodramatic’ entertainment.”²⁹ Not surprisingly the history of American drama thus often begins with Eugene O’Neill (the first American playwright to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936). In hailing O’Neill’s early modernist experiments and later naturalist plays as the inception of American drama, theater scholars have, however, effectively erased over two hundred years of a rich and complex national theater culture as several essays in this collection will argue.

What is more, in choosing *Long Day’s Journey into Night*³⁰ as the quintessential example of the triumph of realism over melodrama, of high culture over low-cultural commercial entertainment, the historiographers of American drama, ironically, have also canonized a play that is probably the greatest American melodrama of all. Underneath its bleak depiction of disintegration and delusion, life lies and addictions, *Long Day’s Journey* strives to recuperate the lost innocence of the American family. As the Tyrones are drifting ever further into night, Mary searches frantically for “[s]omething I miss terribly.” “It can’t be altogether lost,” she avers feverishly, “[b]ecause then there would be no hope.”³¹ The classic of American stage realism is thus deeply implicated in a melodramatic vision; it is, as Postlewait puts it, “the great melodrama wearing the mask of realism.”³² With this seemingly oxymoronic formulation, he also points up the intrinsic complexity of the relationship of realism to melodrama. Rather than viewing their relationship as one of competition or succession, we need to arrive at a more dialectical understanding of these two aesthetic modes.

While we recognize that melodrama and realism (understood here not simply as certain sets of formal principles, but as dominant modes of cultural production in certain epochs, as *Epochenstil*) evolved at different times (the late 18th/ early 19th century, respectively the mid to late 19th century),³³ we also hold that melodrama did not disappear with the

emergence of bourgeois realism but, on the contrary, continued to assert its influence *alongside* and *within* the new dominant aesthetic. As Peter Brooks and others have convincingly demonstrated, even in its most classic form (critical bourgeois realism) realism was far from being averse to melodrama. Thus the narrators in the fiction of Henry James and Honoré de Balzac hardly ever content themselves with merely recording and describing the gestures of everyday life; but rather they apply pressure to these gestures and through them to the very surface of reality in order “to make it yield meaning.”³⁴ Like the spectators in the roulette scene in *Le peau de chagrin* (1830), Balzac and James expect their readers to look for drama in the fate of a single piece of gold, which could after all stand for “the final scene of a noble life.”³⁵

It is such dual conception of melodrama as “both document and vision”³⁶ that informs the analyses of all of the contributors in this collection. Verena Laschinger thus cautions us not to dismiss Henry James’s first stage drama *Pyramus and Thisbe* (1869), a play heavily inflected by the melodramatic tradition, as a botched theater debut, nor to take it as an indication that James was simply a better writer of fiction than drama. Rather, so she argues, the author’s first play presents his deliberate attempt to fuse melodrama with realism and in this regard ought to be considered as an *ouverture* to James’s novelistic oeuvre. As Laschinger compellingly demonstrates in her reading of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the play contains many of those characteristics that were to become tenets of realism: a middle-class setting, mature but conventional characters, and an early attempt in perspectivism (James’s signature formalistic innovation). Moreover, in addition to infusing a melodramatic structure with realist content (for instance, in the depiction of the emergence of a mature love relationship), James also uses melodrama to probe the psychological fabric of his protagonists. The melodramatic imagination is thus shrewdly redirected from the level of external conflict and action to that of the drama of consciousness itself. For James, “real melodrama happens merely within,” Laschinger writes.³⁷ It becomes “dramatized consciousness in action.”

In a similar vein, Sāmi Ludwig ascertains that melodrama not only responds to changing historical demands (such as the shift to psychological realism that Laschinger addresses) but that it also continues to adapt as well as generate new aesthetic exigencies. With his discussion of what he terms the “realist melodrama” of the pre-modernist American stage (“the period of the big commercial productions [...] before the arrival of literary modernism and the film industry”),³⁸ Ludwig opens up a complex field of study, which has often been neglected by literary studies

precisely because it blurs the neat boundaries between melodrama and realism, respectively an emergent modernism. He argues that the various formal and technical innovations in the theater of the turn of the century (the introduction of three-dimensional sets, the use of electric light, the development of more intimate acting styles) are all indicative of a shift towards greater realism in *mise-en-scène*, acting, and playwriting—long before Eugene O’Neill appeared on the scene. At the same time, however, American theater continued to emphasize the spectacular aspects of its productions by way of competing with an emergent film industry. Yet, while early cinematography borrowed many of these spectacular attractions, it was for the time being unable to compete with the more “realistic” aspects of the stage, such as color, sound, and the live presence of actors. American melodrama is therefore more than simply a forerunner of Hollywood film, so Ludwig insists. In order to appreciate its rich history and manifold cultural contributions, “we must avoid the notion of a linear development of the stage tradition and instead consider breaks, turns, loose ends, and new beginnings.”³⁹

Other contributors in this volume also argue against the long-standing canonical assumption of a rivalry between melodrama and realism, in which realism finally gained the upper hand. Rather, so Ilka Saal, Agnieszka Soltysik, Christof Decker, and Ralph Poole argue, American theater and film throughout the twentieth century have been marked by a fruitful symbiosis of realism and melodrama. Saal shows how melodrama was particularly useful to leftist workers’ theaters during the early 1930s, allowing them to infuse their critique of social and economic problems with revolutionary fervor and vision. When in 1935, leading critics pushed for “greater realism” in American proletarian literature (in the interest of an emerging *rapprochement* between the radical left and bourgeois liberal forces), this vivid melodramatic strain did not disappear. While the new “revolutionary realism” tended to be more accurate in its detailed accounts of working-class life, it nonetheless retained the hyperbolic rhetoric, sentimental affect, and Manichean vision of the earlier plays. Above all, it anchored its fervent advocacy of social change in the democratic demand that everyone had a right to “love, home, and happiness”—the very tropes of melodrama.

Soltysik and Decker, furthermore, reveal melodrama to be at the heart of such decidedly male genres as the western and the combat film, which have often been touted for their “realism.” In a careful close reading of several popular war films, such as *Bataan* (1942), *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *Platoon* (1984), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006), Soltysik demonstrates that each film draws on a

distinctive set of “affect-generating and meaning-producing devices specific to melodrama.” She argues that realism is in fact *one* of the defining features of war melodrama. “Realism in melodrama serves the melodramatic agenda of heightened emotion by striving to bring the viewer ‘inside’ the action,” Soltysik writes.⁴⁰ “Sound, and hand-held cameras, the depiction of sand, water, and blood spraying the camera lens, as well as the portrayal of general confusion along with graphic display of combat wounds” are, according to her, very effective in drawing the spectator into the diegesis of the film and in establishing the film’s “credibility,” but they also effectively mask the fact that the story itself is highly contrived and often implausible; if anything constructed not with an eye to history but to maximizing emotional affect and creating a moralizing spectacle of heroism.⁴¹

Christof Decker engages in a similar analysis when he demonstrates in what ways the classic Hollywood genre of the western (which had initially defined itself in opposition to the sentimental, domestic, and therefore decidedly “feminine” space of melodrama) frequently resorts to overtly melodramatic tactics by way of creating “internal hybrids.” Infusing the formulaic structures of the western with melodrama has enabled filmmakers like John Huston (*Misfits*, 1961), Andy Warhol (*Lonesome Cowboys*, 1968), John Schlesinger (*Midnight Cowboy*, 1969), and Ang Lee (*Brokeback Mountain*, 2005) to assert a complex critique of traditional concepts of gender and sexuality and to investigate cultural taboos. Ralph Poole, on the other hand, argues that in his film *Far From Heaven* (2002) director Todd Haynes deliberately uses the retro-aesthetics of the 1950s film melodrama as paradigmatically developed by Douglas Sirk to engage in a double play of nostalgia: while on the surface the film seems to reenact the lush decorum of its predecessors, an in-depth analysis of its color-coding reveals the dialogical politics as an interplay of past and present. As such, Haynes’s meta-melodrama pays as much homage to filmic melodrama’s pivotal decade, the 1950s, as it is proof of the ever-renewed effort of American melodrama to engage in cultural commentary of its own times.

In short, what becomes evident from our discussion here is that what was once a new genre emerging from a concrete historical context (post-revolutionary France, a pre-revolutionary Germany, and a rapidly industrializing England),⁴² soon became an enduring and ever-changing mode of cultural production that transcends genre, media, and historical periods. At no point did it posit an antithesis to realism. Rather, just as realism frequently draws on melodrama to affect “the recognition of a hidden and misunderstood virtue [...] in a world where virtue has become

hard to read,⁴³ so melodrama has always been grounded in realism. As Gledhill reminds us, “[t]aking its stand in the material world of everyday reality and lived experience, and acknowledging the limitations of the conventions of language and representation, it proceeds to force into aesthetic presence identity, value and plenitude of meaning.”⁴⁴

However, we also need to acknowledge that while melodrama is related to realism, it is also intrinsically different from it—and it is this difference that ultimately stakes out a third aesthetic and epistemological mode beyond realism and modernism. “While the drive of realism is to possess the world by understanding it, and the modern and the post-modern explore in different ways the consequences of this ambition’s disillusion, the central drive of melodrama is to force meaning and identity from the inadequacies of language,” Gledhill comments.⁴⁵ While these semantic claims might be “unsubstantiable,” they nonetheless “force the status quo to yield signs of moral legibility within the limits of the ‘ideologically permissible.’”⁴⁶ And in this regard, so Gledhill avers, melodrama vehemently opposes the limitations exposed by modernism and postmodernism—not with a cautious “Yes, but...” but with a defiant “So what!”⁴⁷

Melodrama and Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality

Reading melodrama as a fundamentally *American* way of representing social problems invariably entails class, race, and gender issues. As Kelleter and Mayer highlight, “the melodramatic mode has always lent itself to stories of power struggles and to enactments of socio-cultural processes of marginalization or stratification.”⁴⁸ But whereas European melodrama is more concerned with articulating these struggles within the realms of class and gender, it is especially American melodrama that has consistently turned to conceptions and anxieties of race. The politics of melodrama—so often revolving around “black and white” Manichean moral opposites—have thus leaned towards resorting to race whenever the nation is in turmoil, prompting questions as to who makes up the “we” of the nation. As Linda Williams forcefully argues, “melodrama has been, for better or worse, the primary way in which mainstream American culture has dealt with the moral dilemma of having first enslaved and then withheld equal rights to generations of African Americans.”⁴⁹ Williams stresses the enduring melodramatic mechanics of “playing the race card” (thus the provocative title of her study) “whenever racial abuse is invoked to cast one racially constituted group as the victim of another.”⁵⁰ Referring to the power of the seminal melodramatic novel about the ‘race problem,’

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851/52), Williams speaks of a recurring, if transmuted "throwback to a distant era beyond which modern, and postmodern, American citizens have long since 'progressed.'"⁵¹ She therefore confirms "the deeply embedded racial stereotypes that seem hopelessly outmoded yet live on in the culture" to accentuate the ever renewed "incarnation[s] of this negrophilic/negrophobic cycle" of citing previous versions of the Tom/anti-Tom story of racial victimization and villainy.⁵² Racial melodrama, Williams contends accordingly, perpetually resorts to one of the "two central and opposed 'moving pictures'—the vision of a black man beaten by a white and responding 'counter' vision of the white woman endangered or raped by the emancipated and uppity black villain."⁵³

Susan Gillman in her study on the American race melodrama furthermore argues that the history of American race melodrama attests to "the irreducible historical identity of race itself as melodrama in the United States."⁵⁴ She emphasizes the protean narrative mode as well as the cultural mobility of melodrama to stress the fact that racial melodrama has constantly called for "some shifting and rearranging" of the melodramatic script leading to wide-ranging consequences in turn. Most striking seems the lack of melodrama's requisite moral reconciliation: "Race melodramas are narratively organized through the structural polarities dear to the melodramatic imagination, but the doubling of plots, characters, and events in these texts—formal expressions of polarity—fails notably to provide the sense of order associated with the moral Manichaeism of melodrama."⁵⁵ As Toni Morrison has stressed that race remains "a virtually unspeakable thing" that nevertheless harbors a virtual—ghostly—presence as simultaneously being there and not-there,⁵⁶ Gillman also claims such a doubling effect to argue for melodrama's excessive politics. In race melodrama, this excess, however, is acted out somewhat differently compared to such melodramas where the moral occult means bringing things unseen and unspoken of into the domain of the legible and visible. Brooks's famous phrase that melodrama strives to have meaning visually represented in a *tableau vivant*, that is "emotions and moral states rendered in clear, visible signs,"⁵⁷ cannot be applied to race melodrama without some—paradoxical—alterations. Since in America the fear of race has historically been "operating in unseen ways beneath the surface of society,"⁵⁸ the bringing forth of this fear encompasses a contradictory, excessive, and even terrorist logic of racial visibility: "*Seeing the invisible* [...] sums up the threat and the promise of racial legibility in the melodrama."⁵⁹ The alternative model of moral legibility that race melodramas offer works in two possible ways: "the invisible 'one drop'

revealed by the narratives of passing,” focusing on the “blood narratives” of individual identity and “the invisible empires that dominate the narratives of race conspiracy and race riots,” where conspiracy narratives draw on the exposure of a collectivity such as—most notoriously—the “Invisible Empire of the Klan” in race melodramas of the turn of the century.⁶⁰ The various race melodramas discussed in this volume certainly attest to an “open-secret” logic typical of such examples.

Additionally, race melodramas especially undermine melodrama’s usual urge for closure, however imperfect the solution in the end might be. Thus Laura Mulvey argues with regard to the deliberately contrived and forceful endings so typical of Douglas Sirk that the strength of melodrama lies in the sudden maneuver of “over-determined irreconcilables,” which were putting up a resistance throughout the plot “to being settled in the last five minutes.”⁶¹ By contrast, race melodramas typically act out a sexual conflict that *remains* irresolvable because of its racial implications till the very end. The open-endedness therefore is largely due to the impossible resolution of a race/sex-nexus building up, not to a closure, but to an impasse instead. In this regard, race melodrama is a hybrid form, both attesting to the genre’s versatility in adapting the form to needs not necessarily inherent in its usual outlay and to the cultural work melodrama is achieving through its thematic and visionary actuality.

Of the three chapters that predominantly deal with race melodramas, those by Juras and Poole strongly emphasize the uncertainties and paradoxes of the race/sex impasse especially with regard to melodrama’s endings, whereas Post in her overview highlights the varying possibilities of such constellations. Constance J. Post discusses three historical melodramas of the Early Republic that account for “the interplay between nationalism and hybridities of race, gender, and class in a society that valorized white men of property.” Post’s claim of important shifts in the cultural formations of this crucial formative period of the United States follows the development of the melodrama of that time with readings of Susanna Haswell Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers* (1794), James Nelson Barker’s *The Indian Princess* (1808), and Mordecai M. Noah’s *She Would Be a Soldier* (1819). All of these post-Revolutionary plays celebrate racial, religious, or gender hybridities in varying, ever increasing degrees of inclusiveness. Rowson ultimately reserves her praise for a more inclusive understanding of gender “by holding up the American Revolution as an exemplum for the emancipation of women on a global scale,” so Post.⁶² While Rowson discards all other hybridities (ethnic, religious), Barker’s plot of mixed marriages explores gender *and* racial boundaries in a more encompassing way leaving, however, a presupposed European superiority

over American native inhabitants unquestioned. Of the three dramas discussed, Noah's is most suggestive in its treatment of race, gender, and class and thus of "the notion of who comprises 'We, the People,'" as Post claims.⁶³ Taken together, these historical melodramas embark, according to Post, on a celebration of America as a nation not yet fixed in its beliefs of who constitutes the people. Even though never leaving a doubt that Americans are superior to their enemies, there is a constant negotiation of who these "Americans" might be. By dealing with crucial moments during the founding and consolidating era of the new republic, these post-Revolutionary dramas point towards an ongoing process of cultural transformation.

Dion Boucicault's racial melodrama *The Octoroon* (1859) highlights the racial dilemma of its own times. Like the plays of Rowson, Barker, and Noah, Boucicault chooses to interlink the racial with the gender issue. The title heroine accounts for the rise of one of the major stock characters in race melodrama: the tragic mulatta. The octoroon Zoe reflects the increasing anxiety—and indeed panic—in antebellum culture of racial contamination. She also prefigures later versions of the tragic mulatta character such as in Fannie Hurst's novel *Imitation of Life* (1933) and its film adaptation by Douglas Sirk (1959), which in turn served as one of the sources of Todd Haynes's nostalgic film melodrama *Far From Heaven* (2002), discussed in this collection by Poole. In his reading of *The Octoroon*, Uwe Juras compares the implications of the two diverging endings of Boucicault's play and thus adds a subtle twist to Gillman's claim of the typical "open-endedness of the race question" in American race melodrama mentioned above.⁶⁴ The original version of the play ends with the heroine taking her life onstage, thus rendering "everybody's darling," as Juras says, into the tragic mulatta.⁶⁵ This ending has remained the standard American version of the play, negative responses notwithstanding. The British version, however, due to the level of irritation voiced by the London audience, has the unhappy resolution changed into a happy conclusion: the mulatta survives—thus losing much of her tragic appeal—and even succeeds in uniting with her white lover. Even though in terms of *melodrama* the American version shows a stronger spectacular dynamic, Juras claims that the suicide actually was counterproductive to abolitionist concerns. Seeing the heroine's "self-victimization" as an act of racial "self-classification," Juras interprets her ambiguous cultural position as a racial hybrid in terms of a legal impasse that needs (re-)assurance as to her racial status. In contrast to the happy ending for a British audience, the Southern statutes against miscegenation would make any such ending at least legally impossible for an American context it seems. By shutting

down the openness of its ending in the American version, however, Boucicault remains true to one of melodrama's goals, namely the ultimate dramatic closure and thus ensuring the restoration of social order. The play here attests to the cultural work this genre performs in specific historical and cultural contexts: while showing the social injustice and juridical flaws, the old Southern order and the rule of the white plantocracy is restored in the end.

While on the surface Ralph J. Poole's contribution to this collection is not about racial passing or hybridity (and is thus also not following the model of the 'one drop'-narrative as described by Gillman), it nonetheless addresses those very questions by exposing the long-lasting politics of racial demarcations in filmic race melodrama. His reading therefore leans towards the other interpretative model of race melodrama, "the invisible empires that dominate the narratives of race conspiracy and race riots,"⁶⁶ which in this case explores the restrictive politics of the McCarthy era. In his reading of Todd Haynes's 2002 film *Far From Heaven*, Poole shows how the director transforms melodrama into an ironic meta-aesthetic. Set in the suburban 1950s, Haynes's film plays with our nostalgic longing for an older period and space of American innocence by vividly evoking its aesthetics in color, sound, and *mise-en-scène*, but at the same time the director also criticizes the period for its repressive Manichean gender, class, sexual, and racial politics. Moreover, in the nostalgic link between present and past the film highlights the continuation of these repressive politics into our very present. Choosing a white suburban middle-class heroine with a background of liberal arts education and progressive (pink) sympathies, who is married to a closeted homosexual and falls in love with her sophisticated, well-educated black gardener, the film in its lush filmic presentation nostalgically recalls the seminal aesthetics of 1950s Sirkian melodrama *and* hyperbolically reworks them at the same time. The interlacing of sexual and racial impasses in this film leaves the heroine alone in her treasured suburban home in the end—"alone," in the sense that she remains without either ill-fated male love object. And yet the film portrays a mixed race/class companionship as its anti-climactic and thus non-melodramatic conclusion: the white heroine and her black maid, an unlikely pairing but a challengingly ambiguous, if not implicitly queer, variation on Gillman's dictum on the "open-endedness of the race question" in American race melodrama. As the concluding chapter in this collection, the essay suggests that in terms of the race question this specific "incarnation" of the "negrophilic/negrophobic cycle"⁶⁷ is nowhere near coming to an end.

Thanks to its genealogical roots in the bourgeois tradition of European sentimentalism (Samuel Richardson's sentimental novel and Denis Diderot's bourgeois domestic tragedy) as well as in the tradition of popular entertainment, melodrama has always appealed to broad and heterogeneous audiences, extending from the lower classes to all sectors of the middle class, at times even to members of the aristocracy. Striving to make its representations legible to everyone (via a Manichean plot, hyperbolic speeches, affective scenes, and strong visual imagery), melodrama does not require much cultural literacy for its appreciation. On the contrary, as Sergej Baluchatyj puts it, it invariably works with "any group of spectators whose hearts are open to such affecting emotional experiences."⁶⁸ Such "primitive" spectators, so he adds, constitute an extremely broad group, even if their range of emotions is limited. Due to its wholesale aesthetic appeal as well as its origins in the "illegitimate" theater of post-revolutionary France,⁶⁹ melodrama is widely considered an inherently democratic genre.

Not surprisingly, melodrama has become the genre of choice of the "historically voiceless"⁷⁰ and as such has been periodically deployed to discuss problems anchored in class conflict. While in the late 18th century, this conflict tended to be portrayed in terms of sexual exploitation, involving an aristocratic villain lusting after a chaste bourgeois maiden (such as in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* [1772] or Friedrich Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* [1784]), early 19th century drama shifted the paradigm to the labor and social exploitation of workers by factory owners (such as in John Walker's *The Factory Lad* [1832]). Spurred by the Radical movement of the early 19th century, the melodrama in England, for instance, played a crucial role in transforming the political and social exigencies of the country into public discourses.⁷¹ Even Karl Marx was not immune to the power of the melodramatic imagination, when he portrayed the basic antagonism between labor and capital in *Das Kapital* (1867) as the human drama between a puffed-up capitalist and a cowering worker, as Jane Gaines reminds us.⁷²

While from the start the melodramatic aesthetic has been perceived "as a cross-class and cross-cultural form,"⁷³ it is all the more surprising that social conflict has rarely been argued along class lines in American melodrama. Even a popular play like Dion Boucicault's *The Poor of New York* (1857), which so perceptively portrayed urban poverty, carefully avoided pitching labor against capital. Rather, as Daniel Gerould shows, it insisted that poverty was ultimately not a social but temporal category; the result of sudden reversals of fortunes, the temporary off-shoot of money-making. One may lose one's fortune, so the play insisted, but an

enterprising New Yorker never loses heart.⁷⁴ Like many other American plays of its time, the *Poor of New York* ultimately upheld the national ideology of self-reliance and eternal optimism. Thus, while on the one hand an increasing popularity of melodrama in America during the 19th century led to a shift in audience participation with an ever-growing interest on behalf of low-income and less-educated as well as immigrant and ethnic spectators,⁷⁵ American melodrama of the time on the other hand also functioned, as David Grimsted stresses, as the “great equalizer.”⁷⁶

Without doubt, class matters in American melodrama. However, as several of our contributors show, matters of class are frequently amalgamated and overlaid with those of race and gender (see Poole, Juras, Ludwig, and Decker).⁷⁷ Above all, it is by evoking the rhetoric of family and home that melodrama repeatedly sublimates the politics of class into those of sentiment. As Saal argues in her analysis of the workers’ theaters of the 1930s, “while proletarian melodrama talks a good deal about the revolution it does not necessarily advocate the overthrow of capitalism.”⁷⁸ Rather, by portraying the economic problems of the Depression and their accompanying social conflicts in terms of an immediate threat to the universal human longing “for a home, for a woman, for children, for security, for love, happiness,” leftist stages encouraged their audiences to take a political stance not so much as workers or capitalists but as homeowners, mothers, husbands, and lovers. Imbuing the political with moral relevance and sentimental value, they were able to mobilize broad sections of the working and middle class for social change regardless of their actual political allegiance. Moreover, by presenting political struggle in terms of the defense of general human values, even of basic natural rights (the unalienable right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”) leftist theaters also adroitly evoked the national vernacular of a revolution that had already taken place—the American Revolution of 1776. In its appeal to safeguard the family home, to protect it from the violence of intruding forces, the proletarian melodrama of the 1930s also suggested “that oppression and exploitation are not inherent to American capitalism but merely excesses that can be expelled.”⁷⁹ In the end, so Saal argues, the sentimental rhetoric of the leftist theaters cuts two ways: “it effectively anchors the political in the personal” and thereby facilitates trans-class identification with social problems that helped to consolidate a broad Popular Front in support of Roosevelt’s reforms, but, on the other hand, “it also precludes a systemic critic of the existing social order appealing instead to the better nature of American capitalism to save itself.”⁸⁰

It seems superfluous to stress melodrama's involvement in gender. Already Jean Jacques Rousseau's inaugural *Pygmalion* (1762) coined the term "mélo-drame" in the late 18th century, thus not only embarking on a new usage of verbal and musical relations in contrast to Italian opera but also choosing a gender conflict (the longing of a male artist for his female statue) as the dramatic vehicle of his play. Like class, race, and ethnicity, gender represents an essential and enduring moral dilemma of American culture and, accordingly, representations and negotiations of gender within the melodrama's moral universe have remained a key issue transcending all historical changes of the genre. While it is widely acknowledged that melodrama must not be reduced to merely a woman's genre, the centrality of emotion and feeling as manifestation for moral value continues to tie melodrama to the realm of femininity. This is especially true for 19th-century stage melodrama but also for later manifestations like the film melodrama until the 1950s. As Ann Kaplan asserts, the idealization of the heroine as "Angel in the House," i.e. as a demonstration of the "Cult of True Womanhood," highlighted her significance for evoking emotions, be it pity for undue victimization or horror at witnessing her demise.⁸¹ Feeling with and for the heroine is a distinct trademark of melodrama, and crying is an outward sign of the spectator's involvement with its moral workings.

Julian Hanich's contribution to this collection takes a close look at this mechanism. His is a phenomenological inquiry into the ambiguous occurrence of weeping in cinema as an individualizing—and thus isolating—as well as emotional—and thus bodily—experience that can be highly pleasurable at times. Especially men sense a feeling of public exposure and isolation from others due to their conceiving weeping as a shameful experience. This "male disadvantage in the crying game," as Hanich claims, "is certainly one major reason why melodramas are preferred by women."⁸² Melodrama, perceived as 'women's weepie,' does not grant men the full participation in the enjoyable part of melodramatic empathy, whereas it seems that women can more fully partake in melodrama's compensatory offer, namely that cinematic tears counterbalance the pervasive effect of the disembodied way of life, which in advanced modern societies has led to an ever-growing effacing of lived-body experiences. Hanich thus asserts that melodrama through its inbuilt weeping strategy may even in our contemporary times succeed to rouse our bodies to an "awareness of aliveness," and he concedes that this can also be possible for men in more male-audience oriented melodramatic subgenres like sports film, war films and disaster movies.

Following this last line of reasoning towards a diversified outlook on melodrama's gendered politics,⁸³ the essays by Soltysik and Decker both make a strong claim for melodrama being more than just the stereotypical women's film loathed by male audiences.⁸⁴ Questioning a thesis like Christine Gledhill's that the "re-masculinisation of cultural value" after the turn of the century led to a reinforcement of male heroism in 'classic' genres like the gangster film and the western, these essays reconsider the male hero tying him back to melodrama's pervasive stronghold within Hollywood cinema.⁸⁵ Both, Soltysik and Decker, claim melodrama not to be a "pure" genre at all, but a genre "hybrid" instead that quite comfortably encompasses so-called 'male' genres as the combat film and the western.⁸⁶ Agnieszka Soltysik argues that from the earliest stages of film history films like *Birth of a Nation* (1915) have engaged in mixing the melodramatic into depictions of war, in this manner not only casting the soldier as innocent victim but also allowing the audience (including the male majority typical for war films) to be emotionally moved to tears. Combat films as a subgenre of the war film emerging during World War II from *Bataan* (1942) and *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) to *Flags of our Fathers* (2006) and *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006) are more than a nationalist vehicle continuously safeguarding the virtuous integrity of the American soldier (and thus the nation as a whole), they are also offering "a spectacle of one of this culture's very few widely [...] respected rites of passage to masculinity," as Soltysik asserts.⁸⁷ The ritualized transit from boys to men as well as the integration of socially and ethnically diverse individuals into a "loyal and effective group of soldier-brothers" relies on the visible signs of the victims' physical suffering and thus on one of melodrama's major stock trademarks. But instead of the sentimental heroine having to suffer through the pitfalls of endangered virtue, here a male hero has to endure the trial, which in the course of this transition strategically feminizes him—at least for some dramatic moments.

Gender role reversals due to the melodramatic logic may only be temporary in the combat film, but enduring—and even leading to sexual engagement—in the western films Christof Decker discusses in his essay. Playing off the gendered and aesthetic differences between *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), Decker unearths two visions on the supposedly sexually liberated era of the 1960s. Especially with regard to the discourse of homosexuality, *Midnight Cowboy* stresses the cultural clash between this period of liberation and the exhausted mythology of the westerner, whereas *Brokeback Mountain* in its nostalgic retrospection invokes a decade of intolerance and rigidity and re-mythologizes the western hero by drawing a sentimental picture of the

loving male couple within the idyllic space of nature (and only there). With this comparison Decker draws attention to the similarity of melodrama and western (their mutual tendency of backward-looking nostalgia that emphasizes loss through the destructive forces of modernization and urbanization) as well as to their generic differences (melodramas domestic home as contested space of female innocence versus the temporary home of nature in the western as masculinized space between civilization and wilderness). Concepts of masculinity and male identity are being questioned and redefined in the course of recodifying what once was thought to be a 'pure' genre.⁸⁸

Melodrama, we may conclude, can be seen as a genre prone to breaking codes strategically—not only of gender and sexual orientation, but also of ethnicity and social class. But more often than not this contestation of boundaries leads not necessarily to an assessment of melodrama as a democratizing force for American culture⁸⁹ but to a more ambiguous oscillation between advancement and nostalgia, innovation and containment, liberation and repression. The strength of melodrama then paradoxically seems to lie precisely in its versatility constantly to stage cross-overs that despite the genre's acclaimed politics of simplifying its material into crude Manichean representations perform a much more complicated logic of cultural translation. The essays in this collection, we believe, attest to these at times contradictory, yet always passionate politics that American melodrama has been engaging in from the Early Republic to the present.

Notes

¹ Daniel Gerould. "The Americanization of Melodrama." In *American Melodrama*, ed. Daniel Gerould. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983, 7.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Christine Gledhill. "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation." In *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill. London: British Film Institute, 1987, 32. See also Thomas Elsaesser. "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama" (1972). In *Imitations of Life*, ed. Marcia Landy. Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1991, 68-91; and Linda Williams. "Melodrama Revised." In *Refiguring American Film Genre: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, 42-88.

⁵ Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field," 32.

⁶ Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 42.

⁷ Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field," 7.

⁸ Peter Brooks. "The Melodramatic Imagination." In *Imitations of Life*, ed. Marcia Landy. Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1991, 60.

⁹ Peter Brooks. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976, 32.

¹⁰ Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 81.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 50.

¹³ Melodrama was, for instance, also the genre of choice of the leaders of the Russian Revolution. See Daniel Gerould. "Gorky, Melodrama and the Development of Early Soviet Theatre." *Yale/theatre* 7 (Winter 1976): 33-44.

¹⁴ See Brooks, "The Melodramatic Imagination," 56.

¹⁵ Jane Gaines. "The Melos in Marxist Theory." In *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class*, ed. D. James and R. Berg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 59-60.

¹⁶ Lothar Fietz. "On the Origins of the English Melodrama in the Tradition of the Bourgeois Tragedy and Sentimental Drama." In *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Literary Genre*, ed. Michael Hayes and Anastasia Nikolopoulou. New York: St. Martin, 1996, 97.

¹⁷ Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury," 72.

¹⁸ James H. Kavanagh. "Ideology." In *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, 318.

¹⁹ Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury," 72.

²⁰ For a succinct summary of melodrama's essential formulaic conventions see Sergej Dmitrievič Baluchatyj. "Poetika melodramy." In Sergej Dmitrievič Baluchatyj. *Voprosy Poetiki*. Leningrad: Isdatel'stvo Leningradskovo Universiteta, 1990 (1927). Parts of this essay have been translated and published by Daniel Gerould in "Russian Formalist Theories of Melodrama." Note that Gerould transcribes the author's name as "Sergey Balukhatyj," while we use ISO documentation style. In *Imitations of Life*, ed. Marcia Landy. Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1991, 50-67. Notably, Baluchatyj concludes by emphasizing the genre's extreme versatility and adaptability with regard to changing social and ethical demands, allowing it to morph into modern derivatives such as "psychological melodrama," "moral melodrama," "quotidian melodrama", and "social melodrama." ("Voprosy Poetiki," my translation).

²¹ Gerould, "The Americanization of Melodrama," 9.

²² Ibid.

²³ See David Grimsted. *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976; Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury" (1972), John Cawelti. "The Best-Selling Social Melodramas." In *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976; Gerould, "The Americanization of Melodrama" (1983), Thomas Schatz. "The Family Melodrama." In *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System*. New York: Random House, 1981; Christine Gledhill (ed.). *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in*

Melodrama and the Woman's Film. London: British Film Institute, 1987; Marcia Landy (ed.). *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*. Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1991.

²⁴ Ben Singer. *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

²⁵ Frank Kelleter and Ruth Mayer. "The Melodramatic Mode Revisited: An Introduction." In *Melodrama! The Mode of Excess from Early America to Hollywood*, ed. Frank Kelleter, Barbara Krah, and Ruth Mayer. Heidelberg: Winter, 2007, 15.

²⁶ See Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field" and Williams, "Melodrama Revised."

²⁷ See for instance John Gassner, who introduces his collection of early American drama as "Before O'Neill." See *Best Plays of the Early American Theatre: From the Beginning to 1916*, ed. John Gassner. New York: Crown Publisher, 1967. Christopher Bigsby similarly pinpoints solely O'Neill as the pre-war origin of modern American drama. See C. W. E. Bigsby. *Modern American Drama, 1945-1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

²⁸ Thomas Postlewait. "From Melodrama to Realism: The Suspect History of American Drama." In *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Literary Genre*, ed. Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996, 39.

²⁹ Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field," 5.

³⁰ *Long Day's Journey into Night* was completed in 1942, but upon O'Neill's insistence, the manuscript remained sealed until twenty-five years after his death. It was, however, released prematurely and published by O'Neill's third wife Carlotta Monterrey in 1956, only three years after the author's death.

³¹ Eugene O'Neill. *Long Day's Journey into Night*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, 176 and 177.

³² Postlewait, "Suspect History," 56.

³³ Here we part with Postlewait's account of melodrama and realism as developing during the same period (ibid. 54).

³⁴ Peter Brooks, "The Melodramatic Imagination," 51.

³⁵ Balzac qtd. and trans. by Peter Brooks, ibid.

³⁶ Brooks, "The Melodramatic Imagination," 56.

³⁷ Verena Laschinger. "Feasting on the Fruits of the Mulberry Tree: The Metamorphoses of Henry James's *Pyramus and Thisbe*," 105.

³⁸ Sämi Ludwig. "Realist Melodrama: Innovations on the Premodernist American Stage and Eugene Walter's *The Easiest Way*," 109.

³⁹ Ibid., 111.

⁴⁰ Agnieszka Soltysik. "Melodrama and the American Combat Film," 175.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² For the historical background of the cross-influence of the French *drame bourgeois*, the German *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, and the English melodrama, see Lothar Fietz. "On the Origins of the English Melodrama in the Tradition of Bourgeois Tragedy and Sentimental Drama: Lillo, Schröder, Kotzebue, Sheridan, Thompson, Jerrold." In *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Literary Genre*,

ed. Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

⁴³ Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 54.

⁴⁴ Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field," 38.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 33. Williams similarly asserts, "If realism ignores contradictions in bourgeois epistemology in its strife for causal explanations, modernism obsessively seeks to expose them; melodrama by contrast is structured upon the 'dual recognition' of how things are and how they should be." Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 48.

⁴⁸ Kelleter and Mayer, "The Melodramatic Mode Revisited," 9.

⁴⁹ Linda Williams. *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001, 44.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9 and 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁴ Susan Kay Gillman. *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁵⁶ Toni Morrison. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (1989): 11.

⁵⁷ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 62.

⁵⁸ Gillman, *Blood Talk*, 18.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, original emphasis.

⁶⁰ Gillman, *Blood Talk*, 19.

⁶¹ Laura Mulvey. "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama." In *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill. London: British Film Institute, 1987, 76.

⁶² Constance J. Post. "Performing Hybridity in Historical Melodrama of the Early Republic," 52-53.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶⁴ Gillman, *Blood Talk*, 22.

⁶⁵ Uwe Juras. "Melodramatic Tactics and the Issue of Slavery in Dion Bouicault's *The Octoroon*," 75.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁷ Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 5.

⁶⁸ Baluchatyj qtd. in Gerould, "Russian Formalist Theories of Melodrama," 128.

⁶⁹ As Brooks has shown in his seminal study *The Melodramatic Imagination*, melodrama emerged in post-revolutionary France as *melo drame* (a pantomime set to music) out of the impetus of popular stages to challenge and subvert the aristocratic monopoly on spoken dialogue (granted only to the legitimate theaters). See Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 82-93. In 18th-century England and France, the new aesthetics of the "illegitimate" theater not only led to a crisis in

elitist representational modes, it also produced ever broadening “audiences drawn from newly emerging middle, lower-middle and proletarian classes.” See Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field,” 15.

⁷⁰ David Grimsted. “Melodrama as Echo of the Historically Voiceless.” In *Anonymous Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth-Century Social History*, ed. Tamara K. Hareven. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971, 80. See also Martha Vicinus’s claim that “[m]elodrama always sides with the powerless,” especially with a villain invariably being associated with “social power.” Martha Vicinus. “Helpless and Unfriended: Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama.” *New Literary History* 13 (1981): 130 and 132.

⁷¹ See Michael Hayes and Anastasia Nikolopolou. “Introduction.” In *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, ed. Michael Hayes and Anastasia Nikolopolou, New York: St. Martin, 1996, viii and Hartmut Ilsemann. “Radicalism in the Melodrama of the Early Nineteenth Century.” In *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, ed. Michael Hayes and Anastasia Nikolopolou, New York: St. Martin, 1996, 191-207.

⁷² Jane Gaines, “The Melos in Marxist Theory,” 60.

⁷³ Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field,” 18.

⁷⁴ Gerould, “The Americanization of Melodrama,” 13.

⁷⁵ See Gary A. Richardson. *American Drama: From the Colonial Period Through World War I: A Critical History*. New York: Twayne, 1997, 113.

⁷⁶ Grimsted. “Melodrama as Echo,” 88.

⁷⁷ With regard to the amalgamation of class and race, David Roediger, for example, has shown how the crude racism of the popular minstrel shows of the 19th and early 20th centuries served as an effective mechanism for Irish and Eastern European immigrants of masking class tensions and ethnic discrimination experienced in everyday life by projecting “a common, respectable and increasingly smug whiteness under the blackface,” and thereby deflecting class and ethnic conflict in a common adversariness to racial otherness. David Roediger. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991, 118.

⁷⁸ Ilka Saal. “Love, Home, and Happiness: Proletarian Melodrama and the New Deal,” 149.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Ann Kaplan. “Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The Maternal in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film 1910-1940.” In *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill. London: British Film Institute, 1987, 113.

⁸² Julian Hanich. “A Weep in the Dark: Tears and the Cinematic Experience,” 31.

⁸³ This approach is also taken up by Linda Williams in “Melodrama Revised,” 42-88. See also Richard Henke, who in his discussion on the “embarrassment” of Henry James’s first melodramatic novel *Watch and Ward* contends that “[w]hile the most interesting analyses of the representation of gender in melodrama have been articulated by feminist critics, their emphasis, logically enough, has been an