

THE RIDDLE OF THE *OEDIPUS*:
PRACTISING RECEPTION AND ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN THEATRE

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In the early 1830s, the Bowery Theatre was a rallying point for pro-American, anti-foreign working-class audiences. Eventually acquiring the nickname 'The Slaughter House' due to its preference for gory melodrama, the Bowery was the entertainment centre of its surrounding slums. On 20 October 1834, the Bowery featured a play that may have been the first American-authored adaptation of a Greek tragedy: *Oedipus, or the Riddle of the Sphinx*. *Oedipus* was repeated the next night, but there is no record of its reappearance at the Bowery or any other theatre. The text, by an unknown author, is lost and there are no extant newspaper reviews. Despite this lack of detail, the production raises tantalizing questions about American theatre in the early nineteenth century: why was an *Oedipus* at the Bowery Theatre? How might an American plebeian audience have responded to classical material? Was Greek drama part of the period's theatre? Although *Oedipus* played for only two nights, it has the potential to be a key text in nineteenth-century American cultural historiography.

Most studies of Greek drama on the American stage follow a conventional narrative: beginning with either an unsuccessful *Antigone* (1845) or *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1882) in New York, scholars routinely claim that nineteenth-century American audiences were unprepared, unwilling, or downright hostile to classical drama.¹ In this article, I will use the Bowery *Oedipus* as a tool to remove the layers of historical mythologizing that have accumulated around the place of Greek tragedy on the American stage, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century. I will also suggest avenues of inquiry for theatre historians and classical reception scholars in forming a methodology for researching nearly lost productions. Finally, any work on the commercial theatre must engage the notion of 'success'. I hope to unmoor this concept from its twentieth-century notions of financial accomplishment into something more applicable to how nineteenth-century audiences understood success. Although Greek drama did not enjoy long runs until the *Medea* plays of Ristori, Heron and others at mid-century, the regular presence of classical material throughout the century avows that Greek drama has always been a part of American theatre.

Sources and Evidence

Many productions of Greek-influenced drama originated from England and quickly grew roots in American soil. As early as 1801, the Hallam Company, run by a family of English actors, was performing a pantomime entitled *Medea and Jason*. Little is known of the piece, but its budget must have been expansive enough to promise a spectacle where: 'at the close of the Pantomime, MEDEA and her children will ascend in a cloud, amidst a BRILLIANT SHOWER OF FIRE' in a storm, surrounded by Furies.² Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd's pro-democratic verse tragedy *Ion* was popular among both upper- and working-class

audiences by the middle of the century. In 1837, it played at the elite Park Theatre and, in 1841, rubbed shoulders with T. D. Rice's minstrel act *Jump Jim Crow* at the Bowery Theatre.³ An 1845 *Antigone* at Palmo's Opera House, which I will treat in the conclusion, earned a less than honorific badge of distinction: a burlesque at the Olympic Theatre (Odell 1970: 128–29). The popularity of classical burlesque in New York's premiere theatres implies that audiences had seen enough tragedy to understand the jokes. In 1850, Francis Talfourd's *Alcestis, or the Original Strong-Minded Woman* was successful enough to induce a rivalry between Brougham's Theatre and Burton's Olympic Theatre, which each presented concurrent duelling productions (Odell 1970: 6:148).⁴ There were certainly more productions, but the exact number is difficult to fix.⁵ Details on almost any production in the first half of the nineteenth century, including the 1834 Bowery *Oedipus*, are elusive, making the historian's task one of tenuous estimates.

The most comprehensive sources for theatre in the early nineteenth century are chronicle histories such as George Odell's fifteen-volume *Annals of the New York Stage*. A monumental work that records major and minor New York productions up to 1894, its influence on nineteenth-century scholarship can hardly be overestimated. Besides giving information on plays, players, and theatres, Odell supplements a narrative with raw data such as cast lists, excerpts from reviews, and, occasionally, newspaper gossip. Odell's work, and those of the two other major chronicles of the theatre, Joseph Ireland's *Records of the New York Stage* (1966 2 vols.) and Thomas Allston Brown's *A History of the New York Stage* (1964 3 vols.), provide little more than a partial cast list and dates for the Bowery *Oedipus*.⁶ Although Odell usually bases his information on reviews, it is likely that his only source in this case was advertisements.⁷ To construct a reception history in this period, the historian must read often contradictory secondary sources alongside the broader theatrical and cultural context of the period.

The Bowery Theatre: Background and Context

The Bowery, a boulevard in what is now Manhattan's Lower East Side, started as a road passing by the city's outlying farms, or *bouweries*, during the Dutch settlement. By 1830, it was at the heart of the thriving city. In 1825, the city contained roughly 166,000 people, but in the 1830s, its population surpassed 250,000, largely packed into what is less than a third of present-day Manhattan (Henderson 2004: 56). In this highly urbanized zone, the elite Park Theatre and the plebeian Bowery competed for the majority of audiences in a battle of styles, tastes, and ideology that shaped antebellum theatre.

The Park Theatre, located in the expensive Park Row district, was the first theatre in New York to enjoy sustained popularity. Built in 1798, the Park, nicknamed 'Old Drury', was intended to be a locus of aristocratic entertainment, largely imported from England. The Kembles played Shakespeare there. For the Greeks, it hosted Ellen Tree's *Ion* among other 'high-class' entertainments. In 1825, a group of wealthy New Yorkers engaged a leading architect to design the New York Theatre to compete with the Park. With a handsome neoclassical façade, it was to be the new home for fashionable drama (Henderson 2004: 56–57).⁸ When the novelty wore off, audiences returned to the Park. In 1830, the management of the Bowery was bought by English tragedian Thomas Sowerby Hamblin, who, seduced by melodrama, transformed a temple of art into a rowdy hall of strictly lowbrow (or middlebrow) theatre—or so conventional history tells us.

The theatrical historiography of the period is marred by a polarization between 'high' culture, represented by the Park and 'low' culture, represented by the Bowery. In *Theatre Culture in America, 1825–1860*, Rosemarie Bank examines art, class, and ethnicity as operational forces within the culture rather than essentialized social categories. Her analysis uncovers deep instabilities in the notion that the Bowery was a house of strictly popular entertainment. According to Bank, the contrast between the Park and Bowery was largely a matter of discourse. Both theatres offered similar fare, charged roughly the same ticket prices, and attracted the same audiences (Bank 1997: 116–17). The difference was that Thomas Hamblin, the manager of the Bowery, propagandized his theatre as a home of nativist, popular theatre. After the Park suffered heavy damage during a nativist riot against English actor Joshua Anderson in 1831, Thomas Hamblin rechristened his theatre 'The American Theatre, Bowery'. By aligning the Bowery's American and democratic reputation against the Park as a home of foreign, aristocratic fare, Hamblin set the stage for a cultural conflict that would culminate in the Astor Place Riots in 1849, when a local militia fired on a mob of patriotic rioters attempting to evict William Macready from the city.⁹

Thomas Hamblin was a complex figure whose conflicting notions of art and commerce may well have been emblematic of the period. A glance at the list of productions at the Bowery makes it clear that, although he preferred a classical repertory, he 'succumbed to the advantages of melodramas and star-turns' (Bank 1997: 209).¹⁰ Before *Oedipus*, Hamblin had brought together classical themes and melodramatic appeal in Junius Brutus Booth's Shakespeare or Edwin Forrest's star role as Spartacus in *The Gladiator*, both favourites at the Bowery. Our most thorough source on Hamblin's manipulation of the repertoire is Odell's chronicle.

Although Odell deals in facts, he shapes his data to agree with his tastes and prejudices. Odell's narrative casts Hamblin as a noble, but tragic, victim to popular tastes and financial success. In his account of the 1833–1834 season, Odell departs from his typical chronological methodology to separate so-called legitimate entertainments from melodrama, admitting: 'I have purposely clustered all the melodrama into one rank bouquet' (3:677).¹¹ Despite success with legitimate drama, Odell informs us that: 'Hamblin became mad with blood and thunder' (ibid.). To Odell, this conflict between genres reaches a critical point in the season of the *Oedipus*.

After an initial run of success with 'the safe artistic ways of the legitimate' in August and September of 1834, Odell claims that Hamblin: 'now ramped through a maze of melodrama, a form in which I fear necessity made him, more and more, indulge with unholy glee' (4:26–7). The rest of Odell's account of the season vacillates between Hamblin the artist and Hamblin the entertainer, whose excessive lust for sensation undermined the integrity of the Bowery. In fact, Hamblin was a shrewd and resilient manager who steered the theatre through multiple fires, bankruptcies, and depressions. It is far more likely that where Odell reads Hamblin as a passive victim, we should see him as an active agent, exploiting his audience's love of sensational theatre. The *Oedipus* was born into this dynamic, possibly as the vanguard of an attempt to reconcile Hamblin's classical ideals with his audience's bloody tastes.

In addition to being a good manager, Hamblin was also an accomplished tragedian.¹² Recalling the entertainments of antebellum New York, poet Walt Whitman describes Hamblin as a 'first-rate foil' to Junius Brutus Booth, who he frequently performed

alongside.¹³ Whitman fondly remembers Hamblin as Faulconbridge in *King John*, when he reportedly: 'took the audience's applause away from young [Charles] Kean (the King)' (Whitman 1982: 841). There are no extant documents describing what Hamblin had in mind in planning his repertory; however, he usually acted alongside another star who would draw big crowds. Hamblin appears to have acted only when he had a reasonable idea that the play would succeed. For *Oedipus*, Hamblin cast himself as the lead with trusted Bowery regulars in the supporting roles, suggesting that he hoped to find a place for this Greek drama in the repertoire.¹⁴

THE PLAY

One of Hamblin's managerial strategies was to eschew the star system and rely on a good stock company that would perform new, exciting plays, or 'novelties'.¹⁵ *Oedipus* came at a key point in formulating the Bowery's identity as a company that performed new drama. The 1834–1835 season started off with a popular run of premieres that filled the houses through September. After Junius Brutus Booth finished a star turn in Shakespearean roles in mid-October, Hamblin immediately retaliated with a rash of new plays using company actors. After advertising *Oedipus* as being in preparation during the end of Booth's run, one of Hamblin's first choices after Booth's departure was to present *Oedipus, or the Riddle of the Sphinx* as the main piece of an evening.¹⁶

Clearly, Hamblin intended *Oedipus* to perform significant work on the Bowery stage. Presented three days after Booth's departure, it was likely intended to take a crucial step towards establishing the Bowery's autonomy from visiting stars while solidifying its identity as a house that could perform both the highest of tragedies and the most thrilling of melodramas. Despite Hamblin's high hopes, *Oedipus'* truncated run all but guaranteed that neither the script nor ancillary material would survive.

The extant cast list, derived from newspaper announcements, provides the best evidence for attributing the play to a genre or author. The cast of characters of *Oedipus, the Riddle of the Sphinx* deviates from Sophocles' version by adding two tell-tale figures: Adrastus and Alcander, a pair of characters included in the tale by the Dryden and Lee 1678 *Oedipus*. More likely, the Bowery's production would have been John Savill Faucit's version, published under the title *Oedipus: A Musical Drama in Three Acts* (1821). Partially bowdlerized from Dryden and Lee, Faucit's musical version would have appealed much more to the New York audience.¹⁷ After all, a featured event on the evening's bill was Mr Walton (who played Alcander) singing a 'celebrated description' of a storm (*New York American*, 21 October 1834). Faucit's emphasis on spectacle such as Oedipus' entrance on a triumphant chariot, an onstage fire, and a climactic knife duel would have thrilled Bowery audiences. Hamblin had been performing in London when Faucit's version was first produced and quite possibly saw it performed. Perhaps the tragedy made a strong enough impression that Hamblin remembered it thirteen years later when searching for Bowery fare? Although this configuration is a tempting solution to the question of authorship, it leaves unsettling questions.

The main objection to attributing the Bowery *Oedipus* to Faucit's version is the subtitle, 'The Riddle of the Sphinx'. Faucit's version is an adaptation, but it does not depict Oedipus' confrontation with the Sphinx.¹⁸ By including the Sphinx on the bill, Hamblin was augmenting the classical drama with an air of oriental mystery. In the week after *Oedipus*,

Odell tells us that Hamblin was 'still ... seeking feverishly for more and more gory stuff to fill the maw of his public' (Odell 4:28; emphasis mine), suggesting that the Greek play might have been an occasion for broad gore and violence, a subject that a plot centred around the murderous Sphinx is perfect for. Additionally, if this was Faucit's version unadulterated, Creon, the villain of the piece, and Eurydice, the ingénue, are conspicuously absent from the cast list. Most likely, the Bowery *Oedipus* was adapted from Faucit's musical version. The Bowery retained a number of writers to write new plays and revise old ones. Many would be familiar enough with Sophocles' tragedy to shape it into a hybrid of ancient tragedy, eighteenth-century tragedy, nineteenth-century musical, and American entertainment.

In the early twenty-first century, assessing a production's level of success is partially answerable. We can often consult numerous reviews ranging over a spectrum of media, archives and box office receipts. *Oedipus, or the Riddle of the Sphinx* was not reviewed by any paper nor do the daily receipts survive the periodic fires that struck the Bowery in its lifetime. Comments from the chroniclers label the entire bills for the evenings of 20–21 October as failures. On the first night, the tragedy of *Oedipus* shared the evening with a farce, *The Roman Nose*. Presumably, seeing that the bill was unpopular, Hamblin added a comedy *Beulah Spa, or Two of the B'hoys* on the twenty-first (Odell, 4:28 and *New York American*, 20 November, 1834).¹⁹ Ireland dismisses *Oedipus* with the understated 'it did not attain favor', and Odell informs us that 'none of the three lived long in the repertoire' (Ireland 1966: 1:119 and Odell 1970: 4:28). There is no record of this *Oedipus* being performed after 21 October 1834.

Odell's and Ireland's claims cannot be read as a received opinion on the piece. The *New York Mirror* published an article ten days after *Oedipus* closed that articulates a favourable opinion of the piece. The anonymous author of 'The Doings of the Season', an assessment of the current season, includes a paragraph on the Bowery.²⁰ Endorsing Hamblin's new play strategy, the author singles out *Oedipus* as an exemplary production:

And the Bowery; there have been [notable] doings there too ... New pieces in abundance have been produced with success, and melo-dramas and spectacles have delighted overflowing houses ... Classic literature has been drawn upon too, and the oracular sphynx of the ancients has been invested with a new (dramatic) existence ... The manager has been industrious, the attraction strong and varied, and the audience contented. (1 November 1834)

Odell and Ireland use the two-day run as evidence to the production's unpopularity. Certainly, *Oedipus* failed to live up to Hamblin's expectations, but it was not uncommon for a play to run for only one or two nights. In the absence of Hamblin's rationale for pulling it from the repertoire, we are left to guess whether or not *Oedipus* failed or whether it was discontinued for more mundane reasons. Although a precise history of the Bowery *Oedipus* is unattainable, the unique composition and behaviour of the Bowery audience provide us with better clues to the reception context of the *Oedipus*.

THE AUDIENCE

According to Whitman, 'The Bowery really furnish'd plays and players you could get nowhere else'. (Whitman 1982: 843). Elaborating on the nature of the entertainment,

Whitman recalls with glee the resounding cheers from the audience of 'the best average of American-born mechanics' (Whitman 1982: 842), indicating that the Bowery had been in the vanguard of popular culture. Although the Bowery was, according to Mary Henderson, the 'Mecca' of the working-class districts of the city (Henderson 2004: 58), class was a fluid concept in the period, problematizing easy categorization.

By far the most notorious members of the audience were the 'Bowery B'hoys' (and their female counterparts, the 'B'ghals'), apprentices, mechanics and artisans synonymous with the dangerous streets of the Bowery and Five Points.²¹ Historian Mark Caldwell garishly describes the area as 'a chortling proletarian hell that refused to apologize for itself' (Caldwell 2005: 113). Often identified with the sprawling gang subculture of antebellum New York, Bowery B'hoys formed the theatre's primary constituency, often raining such missiles as pork chop bones and peanut shells from their perches in the upper tiers upon the denizens of the pit below (Bank 1993: 56).²²

In *The Bowery Boys: Street Corner Radicals and the Politics of Rebellion*, Peter Adams states that most of this subculture was composed of young, single working-men in their teens and twenties as well as droves of homeless adolescents (Adams 2005: xv–xvi). Historians and critics have too often defined the Bowery as a lower-class theatre because of this audience; however, Adams rightly draws attention to the malleability of class in pre-Civil War New York. He notes that: 'not all the young men who called themselves Bowery Boys were at the bottom of the economic ladder. Many were shipbuilders, carpenters, butchers, and printers. Some owned property or were master butchers or tradesmen' (ibid.: xvi). By focusing on popular reactions to women in the Bowery Theatre, Rosemarie Bank demonstrates how the perceptions of class is related to perception of gender.

Women in the audience, if not confined to the private boxes, were expected to observe the entertainment from the infamous third tier, where the 'roughs' watched the plays. Although they were almost uniformly thought to be prostitutes, Bank convincingly demonstrates that that judgement is routinely misapplied, as the signs of prostitution were nearly impossible to read in a crowd. Class, she seems to suggest, was a matter of conduct more than income (Bank 1993: 56), calling into question the identification of the Bowery as singularly 'working class'.²³

The conduct of Bowery B'hoys and B'ghals was self-consciously theatrical. Putting themselves on display, they employed their dress to advertise the Bowery's subcultures. The most distinguishing feature of Bowery B'hoy was his 'soaplocks', close-cropped hair with ringlets of hair pasted to the sides of his head with copious layers of grease. The essentials of his gaudy dress, the jewellery, red shirts, blue coats, and green striped pants, performed, as Bank suggests: 'American virtues—of labor, patriotism, and resistance to affected "swells" ' (Bank 1997: 86). In particular, the red shirts signified allegiance and membership in various local fire brigades, a rough business in the period. Urban life forged deeper theatrical connections to the theatre. Fire companies often sported banners of burning theatres or famous actors, and the Bowery orchestra paraded with the local militia, named 'Hamblin's Guards' (ibid: 87–8). Many Bowery B'hoys were unemployed, spending most of their time conspicuously loitering on the street corners, enjoying their image as street-smart toughs.

Inside the theatre, the B'hoy's behaviour reveals a porous boundary between actor and spectator, stage and audience. During a production of *Richard III*, a gallery audience

rained pennies on stage during the wooing of Lady Anne to watch the 'apple munching urchins' scramble for the money while the scene played. During Richard's nightmare, 'amateurs' ventured on the stage to try on Richard's crown and play with his sword or mass themselves with the crowd of ghosts that tormented the king (*New York Mirror*: 29 December 1832). Contrary to expectation, these participants, who would be considered piratical marauders by today's standards, were attending a performance of audience favorite Junius Brutus Booth's most successful play. The *Mirror* relates their antics as a sign of appreciation and enjoyment rather than disdain.

Although the most infamous group of spectators, the Bowery B'hoys were not the entirety of the Bowery's patrons. Whitman points out that the audience usually included literati such as James Fennimore Cooper, Washington Irving, and William Culling Bryant. Presidents from John Quincy Adams to Zachary Tyler were at times also to be found in the audience (Whitman 1982: 842). Under Hamblin's management, the popular Bowery apparently sought to produce a mix of high and low entertainment at a cheap price. The audience that would have gathered to see the Hamblin's *Oedipus* would have been a mix of workers, women, and poor patrons crowding the upper galleries, with wealthier or prominent theatregoers in the boxes and pit.

In doing reception of early American classical drama, the unique performativity of audiences and their omnivorous tastes cannot be overstressed. Spectators should be read as participants rather than passive receptors, a frame of engagement that managers and actors put at the forefront of their decision-making. Although we do not know whether the 1834 Bowery *Oedipus* was written by an American or an English writer, it is reasonably safe to assume that it was fashioned or re-fashioned for the particularly diverse audience of the Bowery Theatre. This tragedy would probably have been broadly conceived: spectacle, song, pathos, and moments of high drama (or melodrama) would have been employed to appeal to all classes of participants. While some historians may see such a bold domestication of Sophocles' play as vulgar, it is evidence of classical drama engaged in a highly creative dialogue with the expectations of a particular audience, and as such, has the potential to inform scholars about the theatrical taste and social activity of a unique theatre culture.

CONCLUSION: WRITING HISTORY

The prevailing historiographic model of classical material in the nineteenth century, epitomized by Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, is that classical drama was imposed from above, meeting with resistance from popular audiences. For example, Levine posits that the 1882 production of *Oedipus* failed because it was alien to the audience, an argument that depends on the 1834 play failing for the same reasons (Levine 1988: 41–42). Stating that Sophocles' *Oedipus*: 'was introduced twice to New York audiences and failed both times, largely because of its subject matter' (ibid.: 41), Levine conflates the 1882 version, which sought to reproduce the archaeological detail of the classical stage with the presumably free adaptation of the 1834 Bowery version. According to Levine's model, if the Greek subject matter alone drove away both audiences, it follows that the story of *Oedipus* is firmly couched in an elite culture. What little we know of the 1834 version clearly troubles the foundation of Levine's critique, raising questions about where the dividing line is between high and low for American audiences.

Levine's source for the 1834 *Oedipus*—and one that is cited in almost every work discussing the 1882 production—is Doris Alexander's 1960 article 'Oedipus in Victorian New York'. A survey of period critical reviews, Alexander's piece singles out the Bowery version as a failure. As evidence, she quotes a review from the *New York Clipper*, which surmises that: 'the plays of Sophocles were literary masterpieces—in the days of Sophocles. They can be nothing but curiosities now' (Alexander 1960: 418). This damning criticism from a trade journal is from a review on February 4 1882 of the Booth's Theatre *Oedipus*. The quoted text is a reference to plays that the author has no familiarity with except by reputation. By conflating the two *Oedipuses*, Alexander, Levine and others after them, have obscured the 1834 *Oedipus* with a mistaken narrative that inscribes Greek productions as unpopular experiments by high-minded patrons.

Reading the early reception of Greek drama in America through the context of the 1834 Bowery *Oedipus* offers new perspectives through which to view subsequent productions. The 1845 *Antigone*, which played at the short-lived Palmo's Opera House, is routinely depicted as an embarrassing flop. In *Greek Tragedy on the American Stage*, Karelisa Hartigan describes *Antigone* as a failure as big as it was costly. A New York businessman, taken with the 1845 'Mendelssohn' production at Covent Garden, refashioned the stage of a New York opera house to represent a supposedly authentic Greek theatre. According to Hartigan, it 'failed on the quality of its production' and was 'coldly received' by the critics (Hartigan 1995: 11–12). She chides it for closing after two weeks, which by twentieth- and twenty-first-century standards is a devastatingly short run, but would have been considered long at the time. There is no doubt here that it was hardly a success—at least in the way the producers envisioned.

A contemporary newspaper review on *Antigone* dwells on a moment when an audience member brought the house down by climbing on stage to launch a plug of chewing tobacco onto a guard's shield (*Albion*: 12 April 1845). Recent scholars have taken this moment as proof of popular disapproval. Keeping the Bowery audience's performative interaction with *Richard III* in mind, we can read this act of vandalism not as an emblem of hostility, but as an opportunity for the deep enjoyment of this audience's performance of identity. Instead of expressing disapproval, the audience may have been interacting with the stage in the manner to which they were accustomed. If they enjoyed Sophocles in the manner they enjoyed Shakespeare, can it be said to have failed? Later productions, such as the 1882 *Oedipus* at Booth's theatre, supposedly failed, but we know that many people packed the house only to hear ancient Greek spoken on stage.²⁴ Rather than categorize this *Oedipus* as a failure, critics should eschew anachronistic banners of taste to approach it as a different kind of success. Nineteenth-century audiences craved theatrical expression and hardly needed the badge of financial gain to enjoy themselves at the theatre.

Oedipus, or the Riddle of the Sphinx played for only two nights at the Bowery Theatre, yet the production has the potential to redraw the topography of theatre history and classical reception in America. Not only was it possibly the first American-authored adaptation of a classical tragedy to receive a professional staging, but it provides evidence that all types of spectators were coming to see classical material in antebellum New York. The bare details that we have are enough to challenge the dominant historiography of the century, which claims a movement from populism to a hegemonic stratification of subcultures. As a supposed failure, this *Oedipus* has been left out of the historical record.

What traces we have of its reception are not enough to construct a 'good' history of the play, but this should be viewed as a challenge rather than a problem for history-writing. History is never complete, but scholars are not lost when grappling with reception in periods given to archival aporias and lacunae. Methodologies need to be developed and enhanced to acknowledge and explore productions and events for which there is only fragmentary and contradictory evidence. The 1834 Bowery *Oedipus* highlights the need for history-writing to be able to accommodate contingency in both the writing and sourcing of cultural events.

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ENDNOTES

¹ See Hartigan (1995), who begins by dismissing the *Antigone*, Alexander (1960), and Levine (1988), all of whom I discuss. Rogers (1986), an excellent dissertation, begins with *Antigone*. Only one other source, Brandes (1945), an unpublished Master's dissertation, covers productions before 1845.

² *The Weekly Museum*, 16 May 1801.

³ See Brown 1964 vol. 1 for Ellen Tree's 1837 production at the Park (49) and for the Bowery's version (117).

⁴ Odell (1970: 5:57) mentions that the *Alcestis* at the Olympic 'was performed for a large number of nights' and that it was 'seen frequently during this brief season'.

⁵ For example, Odell (1970: 4:26) mentions an actor giving Living Illustrations (*tableaux*) entitled 'Lo Studio, or, the Living Models of Antiques' at the Bowery two months before *Oedipus*, but we do not know what Mr Bennie, the actor, represented.

⁶ Ireland (1966: 2:119); Odell (1970: 4:28); Brown (1964: 1:112).

⁷ The information that all three chroniclers offer can be found in the *New York American*, (20 October 1834) and *New York Transcript*, (21 October 1834).

⁸ In *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), Frances Trollope wrote that: 'The Park Theatre is the only one licensed by fashion, but the Bowery is infinitely superior in beauty; it is indeed as pretty a theatre as I ever entered' (Trollope 1901: 194). Odell (1970: 3:414) has an illustration of the façade. For a description of the interior, see *The New York Mirror*, 23 August, 1828.

⁹ For more on the Astor Place Riots, see Ranney (1849), Buckley (1984), as well as Moody (1958).

¹⁰ For the production lists, see Shank (1956: 600–34).

¹¹ In Odell's terms, 'legitimate' is a category that includes recognizable genres from tragedy to minstrel show, while 'melodrama' is a robust category that includes anything oriented towards sensation or spectacle.

¹² Hamblin had a distinguished career in London before arriving in America. He first appeared on the professional stage at the age of nineteen at Sadler's Wells, and at age twenty-five made his American debut at the Park Theatre as Hamlet, having previously performed the role to acclaim at Drury Lane. He then made star tours across the United States until he took over the Bowery Theatre at age thirty in 1830. Hamblin died of brain fever in 1853 Brown (1969: 157–58).

¹³ Whitman's word choice is perhaps slyly suggestive. Booth and Hamblin had a tempestuous relationship and, at one time, Booth challenged his manager to a duel and stormed out of town when Hamblin declined to accept the challenge.

¹⁴ All the sources agree on the cast list, which is as follows: Oedipus (Hamblin), Alcander (Mr Walton), Adrastus (M Ingersoll), Tiresias (Mr. Gale), Jocasta (Mrs McClure). There were almost certainly other roles.

¹⁵ For Hamblin's strategy for identifying the Bowery with a stock company, see Shank (1956: 389–90).

¹⁶ For the advertisement for *Oedipus* see *New York American* (17 October 1834).

¹⁷ On Faucit's *Oedipus* as a 'modern' tragedy, see Hall and Macintosh (2005: 240–42).

¹⁸ The most the Sphinx is discussed is from a trio of lines by Creon: 'The Will of woman is a paradox/Harder to solve than e'en the Sphynx's riddle' (Faucit 1821: 6).

¹⁹ Although authors were not advertised for the pieces, both afterpieces were penned by English authors. *The Roman Nose* (1834?) was written by George Almar, who would go on to burlesque Dicken's novels. Charles Dance (1794–1863), later frequent collaborator with J. R. Planché, wrote *Beulah Spa* as a drawing room comedy in 1833. When it was published in New York and performed at Mitchell's Olympic Theatre, it acquired the title *The Two B'hoys, or the Beulah Spa: A Burletta in Two Acts*. There is no mention of Bowery B'hoys in the play. Possibly, this was just a matter of giving the play some local New York colour (although all place-names remain English), but possibly, the two impish clowns, Hector and Magnus, were costumed as Bowery B'hoys. The only recognizable difference between the two versions is that the American version is much shorter.

²⁰ The remainder of the column is devoted exclusively to the Park, the paper's favoured theatre at this time.

²¹ The Bowery B'hoy, or simply 'Bowery Boy' was immortalized in Benjamin Baker's play *A Glance at New York* (1848), which featured a kind-hearted, sentimental street thug named Mose, whose dress and type added to the longevity of the type, which ended roughly with the Civil War. The gang culture discussed here is epitomized in Herbert Asbury's *The Gangs of New York* (1928). Not all Bowery B'hoys were mere street criminals. One Bowery B'hoy, Steve Walsh, formed a political club, the 'Spartan Association', that wielded considerable power in the 1840s and 1850s.

²² Similar behaviour might be found at the Park Theatre earlier in the century. Writing in 1802 under a pseudonym, Washington Irving complained of the rain of food that the dwellers in the cheaper galleries might hurl at the denizens of the pit of the Park Theatre. Despite his irate tone, Irving's

character admits that there is nothing for the theatregoer to do but 'sit down quietly and bend your back to it'. (Irving 1869: 23).

²³ For a recent work covering class and audience behaviour in mid-century London, see Davis (2001). The authors survey audiences, bills, and demographics for London theatres between 1840 and 1880, arguing that audience class and behaviour were more diverse and flexible than has been previously acknowledged.

²⁴ For example, Alexander, admitting that the 1882 *Oedipus* sold a great number of tickets, claims that it failed because 'only a few literary sophisticates were ready to do it honor' (Alexander 1960: 421).