“THE INEFFACEABLE CURSE OF CAIN”: RACE, MISCEGENATION, AND THE VICTORIAN STAGING OF IRISHNESS

By Scott Boltwood

Throughout the nineteenth century both the English popular and scientific communities increasingly argued for a distinct racial difference between the Irish Celt and the English Saxon, which conceptually undermined the Victorian attempt to form a single kingdom from the two peoples. The ethnological discourse concerning Irish identity was dominated by English theorists who reflect their empire’s ideological necessity; thus, the Celt and Saxon were often described as racial siblings early in the nineteenth century when union seemed possible, while later descriptions of the Irish as members of a distant or degenerate race reflect the erosion of public sympathy caused by the era of violence following the failed revolt of 1848. Amid this deluge of scientific discourse, the Irish were treated as mute objects of analysis, lacking any opportunity for formal rejoinder; nonetheless, these essentially English discussions of racial identity and Irishness also entered into the Irish popular culture.

This paper will examine the dynamic resonance of English ethnography within Irish culture by using Victorian theories of Celtic racial character to inform a reading of a seminal dramatic portrayal of the Irish. The focus of my analysis will be the romantic melodrama The Colleen Bawn, written by the Irish dramatist Dion Boucicault in 1860. This work is the first of Boucicault’s several “Irish” melodramas: plays that celebrated Irish identity, enjoyed the fanatical devotion of Irish audiences well into the next century, and inspired a school of Boucicauldian nationalists at Belfast’s Queen’s Theatre at the turn of the century. Ultimately, though, the artistic impetus for The Colleen Bawn underscores Boucicault’s deep ambivalence over his homeland. Early in 1860, he began working on The Colleen Bawn following his completion of The Octoroon, a play in which he performed each night throughout the period of the Irish play’s composition and rehearsal. Both plays focus on a young landowner who is torn between his love for a poor, local beauty and his financial necessity to marry his wealthy neighbor. Moreover, in both plays the heroes inherit estates teetering on the brink of financial ruin, both intended brides are faithful and wealthy cousins, and both heroines are celebrated for their innocence and purity. Tellingly though, the first heroine is the mulatto freed-slave Zoe, while the second is the Irish peasant Eily O’Connor.
Although avowedly not intended to be an "Irish Octoroon,"2 The Colleen Bawn anticipates the racial conflation of Irish and African that the English ethnological imagination scientifically argued for beginning in the 1880s.3 Indeed, the creative genesis of this Irish romance in a melodrama of slavery and miscegenation aptly reveals the status of the Irish within the United Kingdom in spite of the promised equality supposedly conferred on the Irish by the Act of Union in 1800. Whereas the modern reader may argue that the play’s tension arises from the social, religious, and economic disparities between Hardress Cregan and Eily O’Connor, the widespread popularity of Victorian theories of racial identity would have predisposed the play’s audience to recognize the racial difference between Hardress and Eily as the fundamental impediment to their happiness.

During the nineteenth century, popular prejudices permeated the academic discourse on race, which allied itself with the shifting ideological imperatives of English nationalism. Not only did English ethnologists participate in their empire’s continental rivalry with the French and Germans, but also with justifying the subjugation of the Irish within the United Kingdom. During the period relevant to Boucicault’s composition of The Colleen Bawn, the two academics who typify the ethnographic assessment regarding the Celtic race are the Edinburgh anatomist Robert Knox and the Oxford historian Goldwin Smith. Knox had most thoroughly explicated his theory of Europe’s races in the influential Races of Men, published in 1850 and expanded in 1862, a work primarily concerned with distinguishing the Saxons of England from the Celts of France and Ireland, on the one hand, and the “diverse races”4 of Germany, on the other. Smith’s work of 1861 Irish History and Irish Character is more concerned with the specific relationship of the English to the Irish, but he also establishes the centrality of ethnographic principles to his work, declaring that “the determining force in Irish history has been race” (90). Both works enjoyed academic respect and popular acceptance; Knox’s lectures and writings on Europe’s races exerted a strong influence upon his generation (Young 14–17), while Smith’s study earned him the reputation as one of England’s experts on the Irish (Wallace 137).

Unlike the later generation of ethnologists, who seek to endow their racial assumptions with scientific validity through a panoply of cranial measurements and anatomical comparisons, both Knox and Smith rely solely upon presumed attributes of racial temperament to embody the differences between the English Saxon and the Irish Celt. Similarly, both resist the pre-Darwinian tendency to model racial relationships upon linguistic ones. Freed from the constraints of these two conceptual frameworks, both Knox and Smith found their claims of Celtic inferiority upon the terms of popular prejudice. For example, though a famous anatomist, Knox’s frequent references to the physical differences between the Celt and Saxon are illustrated with allusions to cultural characteristics. In the following example, though Knox aspires to write a “physiological history,” he cites traits which lack any anatomical or biological component:

I may probably, then, commence with the Physiological history of the Saxon, tracing the moral and physical characteristics which distinguish him from all other races of men — his religious formulas, his literature, his contempt for art, his abhorrence for theory. (10)

Likewise, though Smith declares that race is “the most important” of the properties “which affect the character and destiny of nations,” his work dismisses any need to establish an analytical criterion for its definition:
We need not here inquire whether peculiarities of race spring from an actual diversity of origin, or whether they were superinduced . . . by the different circumstances under which different primeval families or tribes were placed. (5)

Smith freely bases his ethnographic analysis upon such subjective attributes as the character of a nation’s myths (7) or its “aptitude both for obedience and of command” in warfare (51). Moreover, both men assert the fundamental influence that climate exerts over race, a belief that allies their works with the ethno-climatologists of the previous generation. Whereas Knox’s study repeatedly expounds the belief that races can thrive only in their aboriginal climate, Smith more subtly reflects the same view, as when he attributes the decline of the Irish to a climate that “could not fail to relax the energies of the people, and to throw them back in the race of nations” (4).

Although Smith more thoroughly develops his analysis of the Celtic temperament, both he and Knox give a veneer of academic validity to the common, derogatory stereotypes regarding the Celt. Smith constructs a view of the race as arrested in a primitive stage of development which renders the Irish immature and unbalanced: “The Keltic intellect is subtle, inquisitive, and fond of the metaphysics of religion. . . . This is not a habit of mind which tends to the observance of orthodoxy” (28–29); or, “rhetoric is a peculiar gift both of the French and the Irish mind . . . the mark not of genius, but of want of sense and self-control” (11). Such examples demonstrate Smith’s tendency to convert even stereotypic Irish strengths into constitutional weaknesses which “produce a childlike carelessness” in them (10). Whereas Knox reflects a less paternalistic view of the Celtic mind, his comments also portray the Irish as inferior to the English; he flatly claims that “there never was any Celtic literature, nor science, nor arts” (325), and that the Irish “despise order, economy, [and] cleanliness” (320). Moreover, both writers adopt a common complaint of the colonizer by condemning the colonized for their constitutional indolence. While Knox celebrates the English for their insatiable industry (53), he castigates the Irish for their “horror and contempt” for “productive labour” (320). For his part, Smith more optimistically reassures his reader that the Irish can learn the English work ethic if they are “placed for at least two or three generations, in circumstances favourable to industry” (13).

The Victorian views of the Irish construct a discourse surprisingly similar to that concerning the Orient. Not only were both Celt and Arab viewed as indolent representatives of moribund races, but the Victorians believed both incapable of maintaining representative governments because of a common predisposition to despotism. While the Oriental is said to demonstrate a “tendency to despotism” (Said 205), everywhere Smith looks he sees the “effect of despotism” on the Kelt:

the Kelt loves a king. Even the highly civilized Kelt of France . . . seems almost incapable of sustaining free institutions. . . . The Irish have hitherto shewn a similar attachment to the rule of persons rather than to that of institutions. So far as willingness to submit to governors is concerned, they are only too easily governed. (18)

Likewise, whereas Knox celebrates the Saxon English for their love of justice (57), claiming that they are “the only democrats on earth” (46), he maintains that the Irish fail to even “comprehend the meaning of the word liberty” (24). Like Smith, Knox also asserts
that throughout history the Celtic nations of France and Ireland have naturally and repeatedly degenerated into despotism.

Boucicault’s interest in staging English encounters with racial alterity focuses on the threat of miscegenation posed by female characters who hide their racial difference beneath a theatrical “white-face,” which irretrievably seduces English or Anglo-American characters before they learn of the women’s racial compositions. As early as 1844, Boucicault’s romantic comedy *Old Heads and Young Hearts* portrays the efforts of Charles Roebuck to marry the fashionable Kate Rocket against the wishes of his father, the Earl of Pompion. Charles twice describes her complexion as “fair” (*Plays* 54–55), and throughout the play neither her speech nor her appearance betray that her mother was Hindu: “the Begum of Curriypore, princess of the first caste” of India (71). Whereas Charles arguably may be ignorant of her composition throughout the entire play, her racial contamination is of great importance to the Earl who is intent upon preserving his family’s racial purity (71).

Likewise, Zoe of *The Octoroon* fails to reveal any outward sign of the racial composition that brands her with “the ineffaceable curse of Cain” (*Plays* 147). Unlike the play’s other “Yellows” and “Blacks” who appear in black-face and speak a coarse English dialect, Zoe speaks an educated, standard English and appears as pale as any of the play’s planters. A reproduction of the play’s climactic slave auction from the *Illustrated London News* underscores Zoe’s perceived whiteness: even though Zoe stands on the auction table as a slave for sale, her white complexion and hoop-skirt gown distinguish her from the other slaves who are characterized by their ragged clothes, black-face, and markedly African features (Figure 25). Before her, the play’s romantic hero George Peyton, the young plantation owner who falls in love with Zoe, struggles with the villain Jacob M’Closkey while Zoe’s virtual double the plantation heiress Dora Sunnyside watches in dismay. Having recently returned from Paris, Peyton is initially ignorant of Zoe’s racial composition when he first falls in love with her and thus resembles the naive Charles Roebuck in *Old Heads and Young Hearts*. However, unlike Roebuck, Peyton learns of it when he proposes marriage to Zoe, for she rejects his offer with an argument that fetishizes racial purity and literally inscribes her invisible blackness back onto her body. Obsessed with the faint “blueish tinge” in her eyes and cuticles which betrays her African descent (147), Zoe expresses a self-loathing of her imagined, subcutaneous “blackness” that irrevocably colors her visual whiteness: “of the blood that feeds my heart, one drop in eight is black . . . but the one black drop gives me despair, for I’m an unclean thing — forbidden by the laws — I’m an Octoroon:” (147).

Despite the formal similarities, the two plays display a marked evolution in Boucicault’s conception of racial difference and miscegenation. The earlier play subsumes Kate’s racial difference within the generic imperatives of romantic comedy: neither she nor her suitor ever mention her Asian origins in their joint conspiracy to marry against the wishes of their oppressive fathers. Likewise, in appearance and social conditioning Kate is indistinguishable from Lady Alice Hawthorn, the play’s other eligible young heiress whose racial purity is acceptable to Lord Pompion. When he wrote *The Octoroon* fifteen years later, Boucicault abandoned the romantic formula of comedy to exploit the tragic irreconcilability of racial difference. Even though he dilutes Zoe’s racial hybridity of his source’s Quadroon status to his play’s Octoroon, the play’s Providential conclusion restores the delineations of society’s racial distinctions. After declaring herself an unclass-
Figure 25. “Scene from Mr. Boucicault’s New Drama at the Adelphi: The Slave Market – Sale of the Octoroon,” illustration, from *Illustrated London News* 39 (November 30, 1861): 562. Photograph courtesy of Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.
ifiable hybrid outside the pale of society, Zoe commits suicide, mandating the marriage between George Peyton and his cousin with her dying words.

As we approach *The Colleen Bawn*, we find Bouiccault a playwright who has refined his conception of hidden racial identity and displays less ability to reconcile even slight racial differences. He intended this next melodrama as another of his many adaptations, this time of Gerald Griffin’s *The Collegians* (1829), which itself closely follows the events of an actual Limerick murder of 1819 (Fawkes 115–16). While Bouiccault avoided the anti-English sentiment that defined both the scandal and novel, the substantial changes that he made to the plot and characters transform the narrative into an examination of the symbiotic relationship unifying the two strata of Irish society: the racially Celtic peasantry and the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy — the descendants of English colonists who sought to preserve the Englishness of their dynasties, marrying only within the aristocratic families of England or the Anglo-Irish of Ireland (Foster 169–74).

As in his earlier plays, *The Colleen Bawn* presents a young hero’s attempt to defy social norms and marry outside of his class and race. Hardress Cregan is torn between his love for the beautiful, yet socially unrefined Irishwoman Eily O’Connor and the financial necessity for him to wed his cousin, the Anglo-Irish heiress Anne Chute. However, in this version of the familiar plot, the young hero has already, though secretly, married his virtuous love and maintains her in the care of a nearby family. While Hardress hopes that Eily can learn the social graces of his station and thus win the acceptance of his peers, his mother interrupts his plan with the declaration that the Cregan estate will be foreclosed upon within two days if he does not wed his wealthy cousin. Mrs. Cregan has also discovered his attachment to Eily, but ignorant of his marriage, she derides him for this supposed liaison which guarantees to ostracize him socially and turn his love to “remorse, and then to hatred” (*Nineteenth Century* 201). While Hardress tepidly competes against Kyrle Daly for Anne’s affection, Mrs. Cregan unwittingly conspires with Danny Mann, her son’s foster-brother and loyal servant, to murder Eily. During the last act, Hardress mourns what he supposes was Eily’s suicide while he prepares to marry his cousin. Just before this ceremony is to occur, the local magistrate, with the deathbed confession of Danny in hand, interrupts the wedding to arrest Hardress for the murder of his wife. However, the local priest arrives to reveal to all assembled the restored Eily, and the ending celebrates the wedding of Anne to Kyrle and the reunion of Hardress to Eily.

Against this background of tortured love and melodramatic redemption, *The Colleen Bawn* constructs a view of Irish character compatible with Victorian ethnological stereotypes. Whereas Bouiccault’s portrayal of the play’s peasants resonates with the prejudicial stereotypes of Knox and Smith, the work focuses on the ambivalent relationship of the Irish to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy that ruled them. Although this aristocracy claimed a cultural and racial identification with England’s Saxon population that justified their separation from and superiority to the Irish Celt, they similarly asserted the existence of a special relationship to their subjects which necessitated their role as political surrogates for English authority.

The play opens by emphasizing the unusually polyvalent relationship between Hardress and his Irish foster-brother* Danny Mann. Hardress explains to his friend Kyrle Daly that he accepted the crippled servant as his “shadow” ten years earlier, after he threw Danny off a cliff in “a moment of passion” (177). Danny survived, but his injuries transformed him into a loathsome hunchback. Surprisingly, Danny expresses pride in
being singled out for his lord’s unintentional wrath, penitently declaring, “Why, wouldn’t ye brake my back if it plazed ye, and welkim!” (178). Danny’s devotion to his master recalls Smith’s assertion that the Irish character had “been arrested at a certain stage of development” where devotion to a despot “in unstinted measure is the highest social morality which they know” (Smith 25). Embodying the fawning servitude of the Celt abhorred by both Smith and Knox, Danny demonstrates an immoderate allegiance to Hardress that compels him to sacrifice his loyalties to family, class, and religion.

Danny Mann’s role as representative of Irish subservience is balanced by Boucicault’s exploitation of another common stereotype of the Celt as prodigally irresponsible. Sentimental and quick witted, Myles-na-Coppaleen served as the prototype for subsequent stage Irishmen well into the next century. His first appearance in the play’s second scene (186) resonates with the derogatory traits identified by Knox and Smith. Indeed, his entrance at dawn with a keg of illicitly brewed whiskey on his shoulder assures his association with the stereotype of Irish drunkenness as well as the ethnographic diagnosis of the race’s aversion to “regular labour” (Knox 320). Moreover, though Myles rejects the attempts of the local magistrate to enlist him as an informer, he resists not because of nationalist sympathies, but because of his devotion to the parish priest. Whereas Danny’s fawning loyalty to Hardress stages the Celtic reverence for despotic leadership, Myles embodies the religious facet of this same inclination.

Against this background of Irish stereotypes, Boucicault portrays the Ascendancy as a class striving to preserve its English identity while contending with the threats of nativism. Hardress’s mother, Mrs Cregan, is the first character faced with the prospect of embracing Irishness in the play’s first act, when a local “squireen” named Corrigan offers to dismiss the estate’s £8,000 debt to him, if she accepts his marriage offer (180). This proposal is met with a revulsion from both mother and son which is only partially explained by the obligatory aristocratic aversion to marrying into the moneyed middle class; indeed, this suitor’s Irish surname, derogatory title, and caustic reference to him as “a potato” clearly reveal the anti-Irish prejudice informing their response.

Unlike the literally physical threat confronting Mrs. Cregan, Anne Chute presents the more insidious danger that cultural permeation poses for the Ascendancy. Known as the Colleen Ruaidh among the peasants, Anne is the play’s only character with an Irish as well as an English name, and this duality alerts the audience to the instability of her Englishness. Whereas Hardress, Kyrle, and Mrs. Cregan rigorously adhere to their aristocratic dialect of English amid the play’s emotional tumult, Anne alone uses such Irishisms as “a-dhiol” and even briefly speaks in Gaelic (199). For example, when shocked with the revelation of Hardress’s impending bankruptcy, she vows to keep even “a hap’orth of harrum” from him. Embarrassed by her unexpected Irishism, she attempts to excuse herself by admitting, “When I am angry the brogue comes out, and my Irish heart will burst through manners and graces, and twenty stay-laces” (199). Ultimately, her explanation only accentuates her class’s struggle to suppress an Irishness that threatens the Anglo-Irish with a dilution of its perceived Saxon purity.

Boucicault’s intention to exploit racial stereotypes has its most elusive portrayal in Hardress’s sequestered wife, Eily O’Connor. As in the previous plays discussed in this essay, Eily presents the play’s young nobleman with a romantic alternative to his family’s dynastic intentions for his wealthy cousin. Whereas these cousins are all flippantly vivacious with the various male socialites in their respective plays, Eily shares with her
dramatic antecedents Kate and Zoe an innocence resulting from her general ignorance of male society. Moreover, Eily literally resembles Kate and Zoe: though beautiful, her depiction disallows any association with the erotically exotic. While these three heroines each embodies a racial Other, their race is buried beneath their visual whiteness: they are differentiated from their English counterparts only by the cultural markers more directly associated with class than race. Kate has acquired the habits and status of an English soldier, Zoe performs the duties of a household servant, and Eily struggles to rid herself of her coarse Irish dialect. Indeed, my grouping of Kate, Zoe, and Eily into one general colonial Other anticipates Augustus Keane’s later scientific assessment of the racial proximity of the Hindus, Masai, and Gaels. In his popular textbook *Ethnology* (1891), this influential London professor commonly defines the English, Swedes, and Danes as the Teutonic branch of the Xanthochroi, or “White,” Caucasian race — a group that seems to flower at the apex of the family tree of the Homo Caucasianus (Figure 26). Conversely, the Melanochoroi, or “Black,” Caucasians form distant limbs of subject peoples that include the Irish, Egyptians, Indians, and East Africans (Keane 380).

A comparison of the dramatic Kyrle Daly to Gerald Griffin’s original character demonstrates the extent to which Boucicault consciously manipulates his source to exploit his era’s racial associations. In Griffin’s *The Collegians*, Kyrle is the eldest son of “a very respectable family” (16), who practices law, lives with his nationalist parents, and often suffers the homespun advice of his peasant comrade Lowry Luby — a figure whose relationship to Kyrle parallels that of Danny Mann to Hardress. In his dramatic reworking of the character, Boucicault relieves Kyrle of his Irish companion to portray Hardress as one who has abandoned his class by developing immoderate ties to the Irish both through his unnaturally close association with Danny and his secret marriage to Eily. Moreover, Boucicault recognizes not Irish traits in Griffin’s portrait of Kyrle as one “so sincere, so rational, and regulated” (Griffin 50), but the essence of stalwart Englishness. In fact, Boucicault even reverses Griffin’s portrayal of the two men and their backgrounds to distance Kyrle from the Irish identity he proudly displays in the novel. In Griffin’s version of events, Hardress has just returned after several years of college in Dublin and France, while Kyrle has spent this time at home learning law and courting Anne Chute (105). However, in the play, Hardress has remained home deepening his ties to the native Irish, while his college chum has spent the past five years in that most English of all institutions, the navy. Although the dramatic Kyrle claims to be “Connought to the core of [his] heart” (179), his five years in the English navy have effected a rigorous cultural indoctrination that has transformed him into a typical, staid Englishman. In fact, he steadfastly adheres to perfect English usage throughout the play and even responds to Anne in English when she speaks to him in Gaelic, though his response demonstrates that he clearly understands the native language (199–200).

Although this play superficially seems to resolve Boucicault’s concerns over interracial marriage, the final matrimonial pairings suggest an eugenic hierarchy that rewards Kyrle and punishes Hardress. Just as Boucicault consciously reserves English traits for Kyrle, while celticizing Hardress, their marriages reveal analogous unions creating one Anglicized and one Celticized couple. With Kyrle, we witness a member of the Anglo-Irish gentry who has developed his Englishness; even his association with the navy underscores his innate Saxon nature,7 for Knox asserts that this race produces “the only really good sailors in the world” (55). Throughout the play Kyrle consistently comes closest to
embodying Smith’s staid Saxon qualities of “firmness, judgment, perseverance, and the more solid elements of character” (14). In fact, Kyrle demonstrates the stereotypically English ability to suppress even his sexual arousal beneath a placid exterior. When Anne first informs him of her intention to entertain his courtship seriously, his response highlights his ability to sublimate his desire: “the number of pipes I’ll smoke this afternoon will make them think we’ve got a haystack on fire” (200). Unlike Hardress, who precipitously rushed into marriage and visits Eily only during the night for carnal relations, Kyrle’s fires are restricted to his pipe, and through such acts of Saxon repression he wins the love of an heiress.

Conversely, Hardress’s personality is riven into the English baron, who mimics Saxon restraint among his peers, and Smith’s “Irish landlord” who has gone native, dangerously becoming more Celtic than Saxon (139–42). The unpalatable nature of Hardress’s incipient Irishness is grossly mirrored in his loathsome “shadow” Danny Mann; however, Hardress’s penchant for passion demonstrates the full extent of his celticization. Knox and Smith frequently condemn the Celtic race for its lack of self-control; whereas Knox spurns them for the “bloodshed and violence in which the race delights” (319), Smith asserts that “the wildness of the native character” is essential to understanding the race (34). Similarly, irrevocable acts of impulsive passion define Hardress’s character and establish his bonds to both of his Irish counterparts. His relationship to Danny was cemented ten years prior to the action of the play when “in a moment of passion . . . I flung him from the gap rock into the reeds below” (177). Likewise, he refers to his marriage to Eily as “that act of folly” (183), later adding that “I was mad to marry her” and a “giddy fool” (196). Similarly, after Eily has disappeared and is presumed dead, he claims that his “love for her, wild and maddened, [comes] back,” even while he prepares to marry Anne (225). Although Boucicault’s intention to associate Hardress with a specific form of madness is doubtful, both Hardress’s violent outbursts and general instability establish a temperamental resonance between him and the Irish.

In short, whereas Kyrle Daly’s successful self-mastery is reflected in his socially and culturally advantageous marriage, Hardress Cregan’s union represents his inability to accomplish the seminal task of self-creation. As for his marriage to Eily, despite all the innocence and charm with which Boucicault invests her, she brings to the alliance neither fortune, family, nor refinement; rather, Eily is most conspicuous for the coarse Irishness that threatens to stigmatize the Cregans as an unfortunate Anglo-Irish family in decline. Thus, the pairing of Hardress to Eily is not the celebratory union one might desire; rather, it presents to the audience a more cautionary tale which juxtaposes one man’s ascent of society’s ladder to another’s slide down the eugenic slope to racial dilution.

My argument, that Boucicault depicts an Ireland divided between two distinct races, acquires additional persuasive force from the marital resolutions in such subsequent plays as Arrah-na-Pogue (1864), The Rapparee (1870), and The Shaughraun (1874). These adventure romances, part history and part nationalist propaganda, conclude with two or three wedded couples, yet none marries members of the Irish peasantry to the Ascendancy; in other words, Boucicault maintains a strict connubial segregation of Celts and Saxons throughout the remainder of his career. Moreover, a later play, The O’Dowd (1880), actually portrays the attempt of a wealthy peasant’s son to pass himself off to London society as an Anglo-Irish lord with the extravagantly anglicized pseudonym of Percy Walsingham. Although Michael O’Dowd’s goal is to marry into Saxon English
society, the devoted love of his sentimentally Irish father eventually compels him to accept his Celtic identity, return to Ireland, and marry the Irish woman he had abandoned.

Paradoxically, despite the romantic alienation of these two races, Boucicault portrays the Anglo-Irish and Celtic Irish as united in emotional symbiosis. Whereas Kyrle Daly and Anne Chute benignly ignore the peasants, such later figures as Beamish MacCoul in *Arrah-na-Pogue* and Arte O’Neal in *The Shaughraun* are depicted as romanticized leaders of devoted Irish clans. Indeed, the Ascendancy embodies a fervent Irish nationalism whether the particular play’s setting is the uprising of 1798, the Fenian revolt of 1865, or the Mayo Land Wars of 1879. Similarly, the Irish peasants retain their stereotypical traits of loyalty to their Anglo-Irish lords and village priests, all of whom protect their childlike dependents from the misguided justice of British rulers who fail to understand the Celtic character. Ultimately, throughout his Irish plays, the native Irish resemble the African-Americans of *The Octoroon* in their need for and love of their Saxon masters, while reflecting the common ethnographic verdict that the Saxons and Irish should remain separate races.

**BOUCICAULT’S ULTIMATE OPPOSITION** to miscegenation mirrors the evolution of the ethnographic community; indeed, whereas Smith and Knox develop very similar Celtic stereotypes, they advocate radically different solutions to the problem of Irish difference. Surprisingly, despite his uniformly derogatory opinion of Celtic character, Smith calls upon the English to intermarry with the Irish, and thus absorb the race and its few attributes: “The two races blended together may well be expected to produce a great and gifted nation” (14). Claiming that “the endowments of the Kelt [are] the supplement to those of the Saxon,” Smith anticipates and to some extent informs the later, and more memorable, description of the Irish as the feminine counterpart of the masculine English in Matthew Arnold’s *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867).

Conversely, under the leadership of Knox, ethnologists throughout the century warn of the eugenic unsuitability of the union of the Celtic and Saxon races. Knox forcefully argues against the possibility that any two races can “amalgamate” through intermarriage to form a new, self-sustaining race or hybrid (64–75). Rather than anticipating Smith’s future of racial harmony, Knox endeavors to convince his readers of the inevitable “coming war of race against race” (16) that must ultimately accompany any attempt of races to coexistence (266, 374). As for the future of the English and Irish, Knox signals his apprehensions early in his study when he identifies the Saxons and Celts as “races of men, differing as widely from each other as races can possibly do” (24). Foreseeing a future when the colonial world will be divided between the powers of Saxon England and Celtic France, he calls for no compromise in Ireland:

> The [Irish] race must be forced from the soil; by fair means, if possible; still they must leave. England’s safety requires it. I speak not of the justice of the cause; nations must ever act as Machiavelli advised: look to yourself. (379)

Although subsequent ethnologists refrain from such virulence, a belief in the irreconcilability of the Saxon and Celt survives into the twentieth century. During the 1880s and 1890s, Augustus Keane, University College of London professor and president of London’s Anthropological Institute, argues that the English have become the “chief mem-
ber” of the Teutons (413) largely because “as a rule the Anglo-Saxon . . . do not amalgamate with the aborigines” (410). Conversely, he singles out the Celts as a race in general decline, because they “sacrifice their own racial purity” to such an extent “the word has long ceased to have any ethnical significance” (397). Likewise, in his *Races of Europe* of 1910, William Ripley, professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and famous collector of oddities, reaffirms the “utter irreconcilability of the Teutons and the so-called Celts” in his argument for the survival of English racial purity throughout history (332–33).

After such pervasive conformity in the ethnographic description of the Celtic character, how does one reconcile this disagreement over the future of Ireland? By way of answer, I would like to return to Boucicault’s play one last time to consider its final exchange. As the melodrama concludes amid the unstable combination of reassurance and intimidation uttered by Anne and Kyrle, Eily surveys the Ascendancy gathered around her only to feel alienated and awkward. She expresses her discomfort saying, “it’s frightened I am to be surrounded by so many —”; Anne interrupts the speaker to enforce the play’s obligatory harmony: “Friends, Eily, friends.” Nonetheless, before Eily turns to utter her closing appeal for applause to the audience, she betrays her inability to accept Anne’s assessment: “Oh, if I could think so —” (231). *The Colleen Bawn* awkwardly ends with Hardress silenced and Eily skeptical, their union undecidably suspended somewhere between reconciliation and estrangement. In other words, Boucicault reveals his own discomfort with the play’s endeavor to wed the Celtic and Saxon strata of society, even in the idealizing realm of melodrama. Likewise, Knox and Smith conclude with fantasies of their own; despite the methodological differences inherent in one’s systematic extermination and the other’s miscegenetic absorption, both propose extreme and untenable policies to eradicate the Irish completely. Thus, the Irish, like Eily, are uncomfortably surrounded by their attentive English “friends”: ethnologists, soldiers, and civil servants all of whom wish only to speak for the Irish, manage them, and document their existence before this English attention erases them from Ireland.

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1. For an account of Boucicault’s popularity in Ireland at the turn of the century, see Hogan and Kilroy 12, 14, 17. Herr documents the development of a Boucicauldian school of nationalist melodrama at the Queen’s Theatre of Belfast during the 1890s and provides a brief, but useful, discussion of his impact upon twentieth-century Irish drama; see especially 12–19.

2. Whereas *The Octoroon* is based upon Mayne Reid’s *The Quadroon* and *The Colleen Bawn* upon Gerald Griffin’s *The Collegians*, Boucicault simplified the latter in ways that create similarities between the plays. For example, Boucicault seeks to redeem Griffin’s more criminal hero, Hardress Cregan, by inventing a financial dilemma modeled directly upon
George Peyton’s troubles in *The Octoroon*. Likewise, though both wealthy heiresses are willfully independent, they freely redeem their neighbors’ estates after the false courtship has been revealed.

3. John Beddoe’s “Index of Nigrescence,” which initiated the scientific africanizing of the Irish, was first published in his influential work of 1885 *The Races of Britain*. His formulation enjoyed immediate and widespread acceptance among race theorists in both America and England.

4. The history of English race theory during the nineteenth century, which often conveniently embodied anti-English traits in the Irish, entails the central ideological quest for a racially pure Englishness. Although I have adopted Knox’s use of the more familiar term Saxon, instead of Smith’s preference for Norman — through which he argues for a Scandinavian lineage for the English more racially pure than that found in the Anglo-Saxons (47) — they both, like all Victorian theorists, seek an English racial purity that can compete with that perceived in the Germans. While ethnographers of the early nineteenth century borrow tribal terms from England’s past to describe English racial identity, such nomenclature as Aryan, Caucasian, Germanic, and Teutonic are the technical jargon of the next generation’s ethnological theories. Of course, each identification encompassed different and competing hypotheses concerning the specific origins and racial characteristics of the *echt* English, as well as this hypothetical group’s hierarchical relationship to other European races. For more on the evolution of ethnological constructions of Englishness, see Banton, Bolt, Stepan, and Stocking.

5. My physical description of Zoe relies upon a reproduction provided in Thomson’s edition of Boucicault’s plays (159). This illustration of a slave auction is particularly helpful: even though Zoe herself is for sale on the auction table, her white complexion and hoop-skirt gown distinguish her from the other slaves who are characterized by their ragged clothes, black-face, and markedly African features.

6. Fostering was an ancient Irish institution used to solidify the bonds between individuals and families. From pre-Renaissance times, English families resident in Ireland had adopted this convention and fostered their children with Irish wet-nurses, “a practice that the authorities until late in the seventeenth century tried but significantly failed to suppress, because the relationships formed by foster-peers were found to be stronger than consanguinity” (Cave 97–98).

7. Although the undisputed popularity of the nautical drama had passed, the Royal Navy retained its prestige throughout the century. Charles Sprawson provides a useful account of the imaginative power that water and its associations with the swimmer and sailor had for British popular culture into the twentieth century.

8. Foucault maintains that nineteenth-century psychological discourse recognizes the primary association between madness and passion: madness “finds its first possibility in the phenomenon of passion . . . which, starting from passion itself, radiates both toward the body and toward the soul” (Foucault 91). Whereas the Victorian ethnographic imagination attributes plodding common sense to the Saxon, descriptions of the impulsive and illogical Celt encourage the assumption that the entire race is comparatively mad. While Knox criticizes the Celt as temperamentally indolent, Smith is particularly disposed to portraying the race itself as deranged, notable for its “wildness,” “extravagance” “barbarism,” and “want of sense and self-control.” Thus, Hardress is attracted to the Irish through the natural sympathy existing between the temperament of an individual and a race.

9. The exact nature of Boucicault’s relationship to the Fenians has yet to be explored adequately; in part, because this terrorist organization, which thrived both in America and Ireland beginning in the mid 1840s, carefully protected the identity of its members. However, Boucicault gladly functioned as their *de facto* publicist during the 1870s, though remarks by
his wife Agnes reveal that their friendship with the Fenian leader of the large community in New York City, Thomas Francis Meagher, begins in the late 1850s (see Molin and Goode-fellowe, 2: 43). Fawkes’s biography provides several tantalizing examples of Boucicault’s attempts to aid the group publicly, from publishing an open letter to Benjamin Disraeli in the London press calling for the release of Irish political prisoners (196) to raising money for the families of jailed and transported Irish political prisoners (210).

WORKS CITED