

**Melodrama: The Nineteenth Century**

**Soap Opera**

by

**Mary Zehringer**

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For my family and friends, especially my parents, Robert and  
Barbara Zehringer, and a special friend, Greg Hoffman, without  
whom this finishing touch to my undergraduate education would  
not have been possible.

"Melodrama's so much fun

In black and white for everyone

To see..."

Billy Joel, "Zanzibar,"

52nd Street, 1978.

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## Preface

The purpose of this work is to establish the relationship between the melodrama of the nineteenth century minor theaters and the twentieth century daytime drama or "soap opera." Because both mediums went through periods of transition, a representative example is used from each type in the evolution of melodrama and several examples from each stage in the evolution of the soap opera.

Almost every person familiar with both melodrama and the soap operas of the last sixty years has noted the similarities that exist between the two forms or has declared that the latter was influenced to some extent by the former. But up to the present moment no work has appeared whose definite purpose is to treat exclusively the question of this recognizable relationship. This work will show melodrama as a nineteenth century soap opera through giving a detailed history of both the melodrama and the soap opera, including representative works from each form in chronological order. After the chronological histories, a breakdown of elements will be given for both forms and the relationship between the melodrama and the soap opera will be shown through commonalities in elements and evolution. The conclusion will attempt to prove that the nineteenth century melodrama is, in fact, a nineteenth century soap opera. Also presented in the conclusion will be the premise that the "new drama" which evolved

from melodrama had a great influence on the development of the radio and television soap opera.

The terms "melodrama" and "soap opera" will be explicated at the beginning of the history of each.

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## I.

### A Short History of Melodrama

Author and actor of melodrama William Gillette was once quoted as saying, "No one that I ever met or heard of has appeared to know what melodrama really is."<sup>1</sup> The term "melodrama" literally means "a play with music."<sup>2</sup> Melodrama can be further defined as "a play based on a romantic plot and developed sensationally with little regard for convincing motivation and with an excessive appeal to the emotion."<sup>3</sup> The action throughout is designed to thrill the audience by arousing strong feelings of pity, horror, or joy. The characters are either very good or very bad and are either rewarded or punished according to their conduct. Poetic justice is secured, often resulting in a happy ending.<sup>4</sup> For a more insightful understanding of the melodrama it is necessary to trace its history back to the early influence of Shakespeare.

Few works by prominent playwrights survived the Puritan ban on the theaters in 1642; however, Shakespeare's plays continued to be emulated up to and beyond the melodramas, especially his comedies. All drama was banned from 1642 until the restoration of Charles II in 1660. Through King Charles II:

a monopoly on 'tragedies, comedies, plays, opera, and all other entertainments of that nature' was given in patent form to Sir William D'Avenant and Thomas

Killigrew, becoming the precedent for the Licensing Act of 1737.<sup>5</sup>

D'Avenant's "Duke of York's Company" at Lincoln's Inn Fields and later at Dorset Garden and Killigrew's "King's Company" at Drury Lane were established shortly after the Restoration and continued to give renditions of Shakespeare's works and of modern playwrights' unhindered save for an occasional disruption by companies not of the "patent" theater, such as the riot at King's Inn Field led by Thomas Betterton in 1695.<sup>6</sup> The next attack on these theaters came not from other actors, but, once again, from the Puritans.

"A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage" was written in 1698. The author, Jeremy Collier, took the lead in this Puritan stance against drama.<sup>7</sup> Well received and widely read, Collier's treatise was, in part, responsible for a change in attitudes toward morality in eighteenth century drama, bringing to the stage sentimental comedies such as Sir Richard Steele's The Conscious Lovers(1722), sentimental tragedies like George Lillo's London Merchant(1731), and later, comedy of manners dramas in the style of Oliver Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer(1777). This was an age that, until sometime after 1760, "preferred to see life as it was instead of life as it ought to be."<sup>8</sup> As the century advanced, drama was turning toward morality and the virtue of things natural. At the end of the century the natural and the supernatural had combined to produce the Gothic genre, the sort of tales to be found among the works of Horace Walpole and Lord Byron. The popular

enthusiasm for the Gothic was spanning the continents at the same time that the rush toward piety and virtue occupied a larger and more democratic population.

Faced with meeting the entertainment needs of the new democratic society and staying within the limits of the Licensing Act of 1737, the drama necessarily expanded to musical entertainment-burlettas, etc.-at the "illegitimate" theaters. In this same period the decline in the number of playwrights producing serious works, was due in part to lack of demand.<sup>9</sup> Thus the drama at the turn of the nineteenth century was adapting and evolving. This adaptation was a step-by-step process that, combined with influences from abroad, brought about an "illegitimate" mutation of the drama, the melodrama. The melodrama came into existence in response to popular taste, and as this taste changed, it also changed. J.O. Bailey wrote:

Without binding traditions or inhibitions, it provided audacious spectacles, songs, and dances; it treated the domestic interests of middle- and lower-class audiences.<sup>10</sup>

Entertainments at the minor theaters, frequented by the middle- and lower-classes, were required to feature music, so that dramas might circumvent the Licensing Act of 1737. At the "illegitimate" theaters at least six songs were usually sent as part of the manuscript to be inspected by the licenser. According to J.O. Bailey:

Generally, by 1832 violation of the law tended to be ignored; in any case the minor theaters were thriving on

kinds of drama that featured music, dancing, and  
 pantomime -  
 the melodrama!<sup>11</sup>

With the minor theaters thriving, with the patent theaters beginning to use illegitimate forms of drama before and after the traditional piece of the evening, and with frequent violations of the Licensing Act of 1737, Leonard Ashley tells us: "in 1832, the future Lord Lyton [Edward Bulwer] introduced a bill (to Parliament) to remove the restrictions on the minor theaters."<sup>12</sup> Included in the bill were provisions to restrain the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain and to provide for the copyright of plays. It was defeated and afterward the laws of license were even more laxly enforced. "A bill ending the monopoly and permitting any properly licensed theater to produce spoken drama was [finally] passed in 1843."<sup>13</sup> The traditional drama was expected to flourish under the new relaxed restraint, but the largely middle- and lower-class citizens who frequented the melodramas and made them popular far outnumbered the upper-class, who might have supported a revived traditional drama. Even though a new drama eventually began to rise, melodrama survived and continues to survive in some forms at the present.

The final evolution of melodrama in the late nineteenth century brought about "sensational and domestic dramas." Drury Lane was showing such later adaptive melodramas as Youth (1882), A Life of Pleasure (1900), and The Sins of Society (1907). The Princess and

the Lyceum, two minor theaters, also were producing melodramas well into the twentieth century. Most of the large theaters eventually closed down or passed into the hands of film makers in the 1930's after most forms of melodrama had succumbed to the so called "new drama" written by playwrights like George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, and their successors. Two modern types of melodrama, however, did survive: "the murder mystery and the psychological study of criminality" at theaters housed in the West end of London.<sup>14</sup> Melodrama also survived on film.

Just as the beginnings of melodrama were varied and complex, so were its endings. It did not suddenly appear, nor did it die an immediate death. Motion picture melodrama began producing both in old melodrama theaters and from old melodrama scripts. Frank Rahill comments, "The blood-and-thunder drama has a hard core that is ageless and indestructible."<sup>15</sup> Occasionally an old favorite was revived from the stage, but when these began losing appeal, new motion picture melodramas were introduced. D.W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation was based on the 1906 melodrama The Clansman. The Great Train Robbery, also by Griffith, was a spur for Western motion picture melodrama, the genre where melodrama effectively continued to exist, even down to such 1950's films as The Outlaw and High Noon.<sup>16</sup>

Melodrama may not have survived per se in radio and television, but most assuredly many of its elements did, even in current popular broadcasts. Perhaps the history of melodrama may well continue as long as television, film and the stage last.

## II.

### Melodrama's "Type-ical" Evolution

No history of melodrama can be complete without an examination of several melodramatic works. A greater understanding can be achieved by beginning with an early play and moving chronologically in its adaptations, type by type, to a late play. Although types went through many changes, the common factor in the melange of melodrama was the taste of the people. Through melodrama they could meet their desire to "escape monotony through the vicarious excitement of thrilling entertainment, and yet to see their lives portrayed on the stage."<sup>17</sup> Along with idealizing tendencies came a sentimental faith in poetic justice - an outcome which rewards virtue and punishes vice.<sup>18</sup>

This poetic justice surfaced in virtually every melodrama regardless of its subject matter. According to J.O. Bailey's authoritative work, British Plays of the Nineteenth Century (1966) the melodramatic themes included:

- 1) The long-lost son (a sailor perhaps), supposed to be drowned and almost disinherited by the trickery of a villain;
- 2) Helpless heroine trapped into choosing between disaster for her father and unwelcom marriage to the villain;
- 3) A hero unjustly accused by the real perpetrator of a crime;

- 4) The grasping cheat who manipulated legacies or other legal papers;
- 5) True love in danger through libels and misunderstandings;
- 6) True love across class lines (solved when the secret of high birth is revealed);
- 7) The villainous employer's oppression of his workmen;
- 8) A virtuous youth tricked into apparent crime and hounded till saved by a detective; and
- 9) The evils of strong drink and gambling.<sup>19</sup>

Just as a motif might appear according to a pattern, so did the evolution of melodrama follow a pattern. An episodic structure and two or more plot incidents tied loosely together, end-to-end, typified the early melodrama. Through the influence of French playwright Eugene Scribe's formula for the well-made play, the structure of melodramas were gradually tightened and unified. Scribe's formula is described by Winton Tolles in J.O. Bailey's affore mentioned work:

Two human forces, A and B, are opposed to each other in a struggle to be decided by brains and chances... The action then leads the opposing forces through a series of artfully contrived crises, each more exciting than the last. Suspense is constantly present, and surprise occurs repeatedly as first A, then B, gains the supremacy through the amazing influence of some apparently trivial factor. The most common device to throw the weight first on one side and

then the other is the shifting possession of some material object, preferably a letter. As the play develops the pace with which the commanding position changes accelerates until in a whirlwind climax one force obtains final victory.<sup>20</sup>

As suggested above and in the "Short History of Melodrama," the melodrama is of varied origins. Foreign influences abounded; in fact, many melodramas were simply translations or adaptations of French works. The Frenchman Guilbert de Pixerecourt is generally accepted as the father of melodrama. Pixerecourt in turn drew upon Shakespeare for subjects, plots, situations, characters and devices.<sup>21</sup> Pixerecourt also gathered subject matter from personal experiences in the French Revolution. Frank Rahill comments:

The experience constitutes an indispensable clue to the peculiarities of the genre which he was to help create... In the early decade of the nineteenth century there was no complaint from playgoers on the score of the improbability of the characters and situations presented before them nightly... Nothing was improbable to people who had lived through (the Napoleonic wars)."<sup>22</sup>

It was through these consequences that Pixerecourt began to write combination blood-and-thunder and Gothic melodramas such as Coelina; ou, L'Enfant du Mystere (1800) which marked the ripening of his talents and the emergence of British melodrama.<sup>23</sup>

The first British play to be called a melodrama, Thomas Holcroft's A Tale of Mystery (1802) was based on Pixerecourt's

Coelina: ou, L'Enfant du Mystere. This two act play combined the use of Gothic setting (castles, storms, darkness and the supernatural<sup>24</sup>) with the use of virtually continuous mood music to complement the stripped-to-the-essentials dialogue in the story of an orphan girl and her tragedy.<sup>25</sup>

In keeping with the melodramatic tradition, A Tale of Mystery uses only necessary dialogue. The action moves forward almost by pantomime alone. In keeping with the Gothic tradition, the storms and the music help set the predominant mood of urgency, discontent, and alarm.<sup>26</sup> Along with the melodramatic music, dialogue, action, and setting, come the traditional melodramatic characters: Selina, the motherless orphan who discovers her father during the play; Stephan, the "straight" hero; Francisco, the active hero and Selina's long-lost and much wronged father; Bonamo, the nearly villainous repenter; and Romaldi and Malvoglio, the true villains.

The plot begins with Stephano's fear that his father, Bonamo, will let Romaldi's son marry Selina for her money. Stephano and Selina first resist Bonamo's attempt to put Francisco out to accommodate Romaldi. At this point Romaldi and Francisco meet and Francisco leaves suddenly, seemingly out of fear. Francisco can not reveal his identity or defend himself because he is mute. Then Stephano and Selina resist Bonamo and Romaldi's plans for her marriage. In an attempt to blackmail Bonamo into giving consent for Selina's marriage against her will, the identity of Francisco is revealed. Selina is turned out of the house. She finds Francisco

and travels with him until at last Stephano joins them. The obligatory Gothic storm takes a large part as they are pitted against the elements. Back at the half of Bonamo, the true story of Romaldi and Francisco is related to Bonamo by Signor Montano. Romaldi fathered Selina when her mother was married to his brother Francisco. Selina's mother died. Selina was sent away, and Romaldi (whose real name was Bianchi) then tricked Francisco out of his property and title. In a later incident Romaldi and Malvoglio had attempted to kill him, but, unknown to them, they had only succeeded in making him mute.

A search party is then sent after Romaldi, who had escaped. At the last minute Romaldi repents in the midst of an intense storm. Francisco has an offer to get even by killing Romaldi, but mercy prevails. Thus, Selina and Stephano are left with no obstacles in their immediate future and a happy end for all of them is nearly assured.

Another Gothic melodrama resembling A Tale of Mystery was The Woodman's Hut (1814) written by Samuel Arnold, manager of the Lyceum until 1814. It too, was full of castles, forests, storms, fires, the supernatural, and similar Gothic elements.<sup>27</sup> Toward the beginning of the nineteenth century, the popularity of the Gothic melodrama began to decline, but not before it had shown great popularity itself.

The 1820's saw the appearance of another sort of melodrama along the lines of William Moncrieff's Father and Daughter (1820),

J.R. Planche's Chari; or, the Maid of Milan (1823), and John Buckstone's Luke the Labourer (1826).<sup>28</sup> These melodramas turned from the improbable to the definitiveness of the daily life of the common man.

The domestic melodrama, Luke the Labourer was the first play that 24-year-old John Baldwin Buckstone ever had produced. Like other newly fashionable domestic melodramas of the 1820's, Luke the Labourer deals with a domestic ordeal - in this case, the ill effects of alcohol abuse. In this drama alcohol abuse ends in the death of the alcoholic's wife by starvation and a blow received at her husband Luke's hand. Luke seeks revenge against his employer, who in Luke's mind caused his poverty and alcoholism and, thus, Maria's death. Luke the Labourer is an unusual drama in that Luke, a misguided villain, is not only a member of the lower-class, but has a degree of motivation for his villainy.<sup>29</sup> Other characters include Squire Chase, the true villain, who wishes to lure Clara, the heroine, into his lecherous clutches and take her father's land, if possible and Clara's father, Farmer Wakefield, the one-time employer of Luke and friend to Maria (and to her father before his death). Clara, unlike the usual heroine, has both a mother and a father. Her father, however, is in jail during the greater part of the play, leaving her semi-orphaned. Maria was more of a typical heroine, being an orphan, before she died. Phillip is Farmer Wakefield's son, "stolen by the gypsies at age 10." He returns 20 years later and becomes the hero by saving his sister from the

villain's trap. Charles Maydew is a hero, of sorts, when he gives Clara the money to have her father removed from debtor's prison. He wishes to marry her. Michael is one of the gypsies, wronged by Farmer Wakefield and poised for vengeance. He is a good-hearted semi-villain. The remaining characters are minor.

The melodrama opens with Maria gaining re-employment for Luke with Farmer Wakefield. Luke, instead of going right back to work, takes part in a wrestling match, wins, and uses the money to buy drinks for himself, his friends, and some gypsies, among them Michael. Luke wants more money for more drinks. He plots revenge against Farmer Wakefield who told him he had to report to work that day or never to report to work again. To get more money he enlists with the King's Army. About this time Maria comes in search of Luke. She manages to get enough money together, with the help of a Jewish peddler, to buy Luke back out of the King's service. Happy that she has bought his freedom, Maria rushes to him. In his drunken confusion he accidentally flings out his arm and knocks her unconscious.

Later that night Luke and Michael carry out their plan for revenge. Luke and Maria had had a baby boy and the boy was killed when a beam from their decrepit house (Farmer Wakefield had been negligent in his role as landlord) fell and struck him. In return for the loss of his son during the storm that felled the beam, and in return for turning Michael and his fellow gypsies out from his barn during the same storm - Luke and Michael kidnap Wakefield's

son Phillip. Luke wishes him to be sold as a servant, but, unknown to Luke, Michael raises him to manhood and then releases him to become a sailor. On the same night, Maria, weakened from the blow delivered accidentally by Luke, and from starvation, dies in Luke's arms. Luke blames Wakefield and schemes against him for the years that follow.

Twenty years later Luke has prospered and Farmer Wakefield has fallen into bad times. Luke has had Wakefield thrown into debtor's prison for owing him 20 pounds. Luke's co-hort, Squire Chase, intends to take advantage of Clara's desire to have her father released from prison. Already mourning the loss of their son Phillip, the Wakefield's are about to lose their daughter to the evil Squire. Charles, a friend of the family and in love with Clara, gives Clara the money to pay her father's debt, but she goes to the Squire anyway to see if he can help her family. Charles, sent on a trip to see his "dying" brother by the trickery of Luke, cannot prevent Clara from nearly being attacked by the Squire and Luke. It is at this moment that Phillip, the long-lost-and-thought-to-be-dead son of the Wakefields', comes off his docked ship to save her. Clara, not knowing who Phillip is, takes him home to reward him with hospitality. Phillip discovers that he is at his own home (he was coming into port for precisely that reason) and tries to find Michael to back his story and let himself be known to his family.

Meanwhile, Phillip saves Michael from being drowned by some neighboring farmers who caught him looking in their chicken house. Phillip and Michael return to the Wakefield farm hoping to finish Phillip's story that he began by telling the Wakefields' that he is a friend of their son's. Before Michael can help Phillip with his story, it is time to retire for the evening. While the Wakefield household is settling in for the night, Luke, anxious to silence Phillip, steals into his room and is about to shoot him. Michael runs into the room and causes Luke's pistol to fire into the air instead of at Phillip. The Wakefields' run in and demand to know why Luke is trying to kill Phillip, and the truth is finally told. At last, there is a happy ending for the Wakefield family, but not so for Luke and the Squire.

The most interesting part of this melodrama was the usage of substandard and dialectal English by Buckstone in the character of Luke. Touching on alcohol abuse and its short and long term effects, Buckstone's Luke the Labourer was an excellent early domestic melodrama of the type that gained domestic melodramas their status as the most popular and the longest lasting type of melodrama in what could be called the "type-ical" evolution. At least partly accountable for their popularity were the Victorian morals being held by an increasingly larger portion of the populace. "Besides affirming the virtue of the home, domestic dramas expressed the concept that inherent worth is not dependent on birth or rank, and that the lowborn may rise."<sup>30</sup>

The popularity of the common man was eventually expanded to include the sailor in what came to be known as the nautical melodrama. Jolly Jack Tars, with their ballad singing and jig dancing, appeared more and more often as the naval powers of the British isles gained notariety. Among the melodramas dealing with the new nautical themes were Edward Fitzball's Nelson (1827), C.Z. Barnett's The Loss of the Royal George; or, the Fatal Land Breeze (18 ) and Douglas Jerrold's Black-Ey'd Susan; or, All in the Downs(1829).<sup>31</sup>

Inspired by Admiral Nelson's naval victories over the French and Spanish fleets in 1805 and by John Gay's nautical ballad "Sweet William," Jerrold created Black-Ey'd Susan, renowned for its accuracy. Maurice Disher, in her work Blood and Thunder, comments:

No drama was ever more nautical; no other seamen so virtuous compared with landmen, so full of sea-faring oaths, exclamations, similes, and metaphor - salt water is rarely out of their mouths and often in their eyes. William never utters a word that is not seaworthy.<sup>32</sup>

The nautical melodrama became so firmly established that William S. Gilbert parodied it fifty years later in H.M.S. Pinafore. Opening at the Royal Surrey Theater, "one of the most important and most fashionably attended of the illegitimate or minor theaters in the first half of the century," Jerrold's work was quickly a success.<sup>33</sup> Taking his title from John Gay's ballad "Blue Peter," about a sailor and his black-eyed Susan, Jerrold set a lasting trend.

Black-Ey'd Susan's cast of characters comes complete with the orphan heroine, Susan, whose mother died early in her youth and whose father died directly before the action of the play begins, leaving Susan in the care of her villainous uncle, Doggrass, also her landlord. The hero, William, has been sent to serve under Captain Crosstree for a period of at least three years, because he could not pay the debts he and his new wife had incurred to Doggrass.

When the action opens Susan has not seen William, except once, in three years. Her rent to her uncle Doggrass is past due and he is pressuring her for the money. Hatchet, Captain of the Redbreast, a smuggler's ship, is in on the presurring of Susan because if she is turned out of her cottage she will turn to him since she will have no where else to go. Hatchet pays the rent for Susan under the pretense of having sailed with her husband. Before Hatchet can cash in on his "kindness" to Susan, William sails into the harbor.

Susan is late in meeting William at the port and on her way there, she is seen by William's captain, Crosstree. He also shows an interest in her, but does not act on it immediately. He does not know she is William's wife; he proclaims that he "must and will possess her," thinking she is only the wife of a "common seaman." William, having saved Crosstree's life on one occasion, is not a commone seaman. William and Susan are reunited amid much singing and dancing, but the sailors' singing and dancing is brought to a premature end by Crosstree's announcement of sail setting in the morning. William and several other of the sailors go to the

Admiral to seek extra time off and Crosstree begins to accost Susan. William returns to hear Susan's cries of protestation. Coming from around a corner, William does not see that it is his Captain who is alarming his wife; he strikes out blindly. The end result is a trial for court martial of William for striking a superior. While Crosstree has no ill feelings toward William, his testimonies are fruitless as William is to set an example for the other sailors. William accepts his fate with good will. Susan, of course, is plagued by remorse. Just as William is about to be hanged, Captain Crosstree runs to the platform with William's backdated discharge papers that were being withheld by Doggrass. William is saved!

Jolly Jack Tars and domestic melodramas remained popular well into the middle of the century, but by the 1860's melodrama was becoming more sophisticated, better written. According to J.O. Bailey:

Characters remained types, but touches of subltly and complexity appeared in characterization. Slapstick was replaced by witty repartee. Restrained sentiment now and then replaced tear-jerking sentimentality...A sense of mystery and foreboding is established more subtly than in melodramas where the obvious villain is announced.<sup>34</sup>

As early as 1830 in Moncrieff's The Heart of London; or, the Sharper's Progress a hint of realism appeared making the

melodrama more appealing to the increasingly democratic, middle-class audiences. "High-voltage emotionalism, examination of soul-states, and the observation of manners" combined with lessened use of music and mechanical devices and the new, more complex characters brought about such melodramas as Mark Lemon's Slave Life (1852) and Tom Taylor's The-Ticket-of-Leave Man (1863).<sup>35</sup>

Taylor's realistic melodrama was first produced in 1863 at the Olympic Theater after the Licensing Act was repealed. With dialogue fashioned after that of Charles Dickens' works, Taylor's melodrama was part of the development toward Scribe's structure of a well-made play with deepened characterization, lessened sensationalism, and a more realistic plot.<sup>36</sup> The plot involves a well-to-do young man who has "run through" his money and falls into bad times through his connections with a bad crowd. This man, Robert Brierly, then, would be considered the hero. As a hero, however, he is not as straight and good as were heroes of the earlier melodramas. The villains, Moss and Dalton, criminals who try to con Brierly into working for them and then seek revenge against him later when he displeases them, are clearly evil. Another hero is Hawkshaw, the police detective who could set Brierly up for more trouble, but helps him become a better man instead. Mr. Gibson could almost be considered a hero, but when the chips are down he lets his doubts about Brierly win out. When proven wrong, however, he is quick to forgive and forget. The heroine, May, stands by her man through thick and thin. Like the typical

heroine, May is an orphan.

The melodrama begins in a tea garden - a cafe with entertainment. Detective Hawkshaw is seated at one table watching Moss and Dalton, at another table, who are trying to set up a deal with Brierly to pass forged money. Brierly does not know the money is forged; he thinks he is getting a loan. It is at this moment that Brierly meets May. May is a singer. She walks through the tea garden singing for money. Most of the people there, with the exception of the Jones' (Green Jones and his fiance Emily) are cruel to her. Robert Brierly, a semi-alcoholic, after changing the forged 20 pound note, buys May some wine and gives her some money. Detective Hackshaw, knowing that Robert passed the counterfeit money, but not knowing of his innocence, arrests Robert and has him sent to prison.

While at prison, Robert has kept in touch with May. May has given up singing and has been given a respectable job by Mr. Gibson. When Robert is released (early for good behavior), he finds May and asks her to marry him. He had not spent all of his inheritance money and May had saved some, too, but Robert discovers that May's poor landlord was the lady that he had unknowingly passed the counterfeit money to and she had been down and out ever since. Without telling her it was him, he gets the money back to her and her grandson Sam. Now Robert must find a job if they are to get married. May's friend and employer, Mr. Gibson, provides Robert with one, thinking that Robert has been in His Majesty's Service, rather than in jail.

In the earlier melodramas events were just presented and to end; Taylor's Ticket-of-Leave Man has interwoven events. Robert begins working for a stocks and bonds firm and one day he encounters Hackshaw and the interweaving begins. Hackshaw has come to the agency looking for counterfeiters who have been "doing business" with that firm. Hackshaw recognises Robert, but after questioning Mr. Gibson about his employee's qualifications and on the job behaviors, he is satisfied that Robert has repented for his past "crime" and does not tell Mr. Gibson that he has a criminal record. After this close call, May begs Robert to tell Mr. Gibson about his prison life, but Robert wants them to be married first, and for him to have a more secure position with the firm.

May agrees to this, but on the day of their wedding Robert has a run-in with Moss and Dalton, who try to trick him into working with them again to pass counterfeit bonds on his own firm. When he refuses they tell Mr. Gibson about his past and he is fired. The wedding is called off and every time Robert gets a new job, Moss and Dalton reveal his past to the right people, until he loses it again. Moss and Dalton make Robert believe he will never get honest employment again and trick him into helping them rob Mr. Gibson's offices. Robert goes along with their scheme, but tips off Hackshaw.

Just as Moss and Dalton are dipping their hands in the till, Hackshaw appears with Mr. Gibson and May. A scuffle ensues, and Robert is hit in the head with a gun and almost knocked unconscious. Hackshaw arrests Moss and Dalton and informs Mr. Gibson that Robert

helped in their capture. As Robert lies bleeding in May's arms, Mr. Gibson apologizes for doubting Robert and says he will repay him. The play ends happily with these words from Robert, "You wouldn't trust me, sir, but I was not ungrateful. You see, there may be some good left in a 'Ticket-of-Leave Man' after all."

The padded realism of melodramas like Taylor's were soon followed by a harsher realism in melodramas like Dion Boucicault's The Streets of London (1864) which graphically portrayed cross sections of life among the poor and included realistic scenery suggestive of the great, dingy city and its social evils. The lower- and middle-class members of the audience were often "simple-minded and sentimental. They loved the melodrama and apparently accepted its blacks and whites for life itself."<sup>37</sup> This simple-mindedness grew into a higher level of literacy as prosperity became more general and pushed up the social level of the playgoers later in the century, paving the way for society melodramas with adult themes.

Lady Audley's Secret (1863) is a later melodrama, adapted from Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novel of the same name, by Colin Henry Hazlewood. In the evolution of melodrama into the "new drama," Lady Audley's Secret takes its place as a society drama at the very end of the melodramatic range. As a society melodrama, it is better written than previous melodramas. The characters are more complex, the humor more developed, there is a more restrained sentiment, and, rather than lower- or middle-class characters and setting, since

the audiences of the melodramatic theaters were becoming more and more refined, the characters and setting are aristocratic.

Lady Audley's Secret portends mystery in its very title. Lady Audley, the villainess, is not immediately visible as an evil person. She has newly found wealth by marrying an old rich man. She is greedy and her true background is eventually discovered. Sir Michael Audley is the unsuspecting husband. Whether he be hero or almost villain is determined by his actions at the moment and how they are interpreted by the audience. He can be either, at any given point. Robert Audley, Sir Michael's nephew is revealed as the true hero midway through the melodrama. Another complex character among these characters is Alicia Audley. Alicia, Sir Michael's daughter, is suspicious of Lady Audley, but is not sure why. Before Lady Audley is discovered to be the true villain, Alice's behavior is questionable. George Talboys and Luke Marks, both heroes, add their share of mystery to the tale. All of the Audleys are aristocrats; all but Lady Audley are blue bloods. Phoebe and Luke Marks are lower-class, but they are servants to the Audleys and hold only minor roles during most of the play. George Talboys is not a prominent character, except that his "prior relationship" with Lady Audley and his "death" give him a major role. Instead of the contrived attempts at drastic deaths and misfortunes, this society melodrama uses genuine pathos to prompt sentiment.

The melodrama begins with Phoebe's comments to Luke about Lady Audley's recent and conspicuous marriage to the wealthy Sir Michael Audley, nearly on his death bed. Lady Audley had started as a

governess. She is much younger than her husband. It seems to Phoebe (and others) that it is a strange match. Sir Michael, however, is deeply satisfied with their relationship, even though his daughter Alicia and his nephew Robert have their doubts about Lady Audley's intentions.

At this point Robert arrives from a journey with his friend George Talboys accompanying him. George tells his tale about his wife who died when he was in the service overseas. He is visibly shaken when he meets Lady Audley, Helen to him. She is his dead wife. Helen, having been discovered in her faked death and remarriage to Sir Audley, does her best to silence George. Since George is Robert Audley's friend and Helen wishes to stay on the good side of her husband's nephew, she first attempts to bribe him into keeping quiet. Then she threatens. Finally, when all these efforts fail, Helen fakes illness, has George go to the well for water and surprises him with a blow to the head from behind. Thinking they are alone, she pushes him down the well and leaves him for dead. She thinks she's won.

Alicia, meanwhile, has become more and more suspicious of her step-mother's reputation. Alicia wishes to marry Robert, who refuses to do so until the disappearance of George is cleared up. In her fear of being discovered, Helen persuades Sir Michael to banish Robert from the mansion on contrived charges. It is at this same time that Luke announces to Helen that he was witness to her evil deeds. Needing to support his new wife, Phoebe, and his alcoholic habit, Luke blackmails her. Helen agrees to pay him money to be quiet, simply

bidding her time until Sir Michael dies, so Luke thinks. In reality, she plans to string him along and eventually kill him to keep George's death quiet once and for all. Robert puts a kink in her plans, however, when he catches wind of Luke's involvement. When he is banished from the Audley mansion, he goes to stay in Luke and Phoebe's inn, and endeavors to learn from Luke the true story of George's disappearance.

Helen discovers that Robert is a visitor at Luke's establishment, and, since she was on her way to kill Luke, she sets fire to the inn to silence Robert, too, thinking that he was asleep and Luke drunken stupor. Meanwhile, Phoebe has been sent toward the Audley mansion on an errand and comes upon Alicia who is in search of Helen. She must tell her that Sir Michael is dying. Alicia returns to the Audley mansion to watch over Sir Michael and sends Phoebe back to get Helen. Phoebe meets Helen on the road and seeing the flames in the distance wants to go back to her home and get Luke. Helen tells Phoebe that it is not her house that is on fire and forces her to return to the Audley grounds. Phoebe resists and Helen begins to drag her toward the infamous well, when out of the darkness appears Robert. He had not been asleep when Helen set fire to the inn and was able to escape.

Robert sends Phoebe back after her husband and confronts Helen. She is astounded that he intends to expose her. She rushes at him with a poignard, hoping to finish him off in the same manner that she did George, but Robert takes it from her before she can do any damage.

Luke appears at this time and is about to reveal his knowledge in the matter, but faints. Helen, thinking Luke has died, believes herself to be triumphant. Alicia rushes in and announces Sir Michael's death and then Helen truly believes she is safe. Robert postulates that she murdered George, and Luke revives long enough to say that Helen pushed him down the well. Until this time no one was exactly sure what had happened to George. Luke whispers his last words, that George's body will not be found in the well, and dies at the very moment that George makes his appearance.

George tells his story about being pushed into the well and being saved by Luke, whom he promised not to reveal, so Luke could use the incident to his own ends. Lady Audley is so astounded to see him that she becomes mad. George forgives her, but it makes no difference. In her madness, she believes George to be Sir Michael. She imagines that she was lied to about his (Sir Michael's) death. She claims to have no husband but him, talks about her madness, as observed by Robert, clutches her temples, cries for pity and dies asking the grave to close over 'Lady Audley' and her 'secret.'

As a society melodrama, Lady Audley's Secret fulfills all the stated characteristics. The characters are not always simply good or simply evil. Lady Helen Audley is presented as a poor girl using all possible means to become wealthy. Alicia may be seen at some points as manipulative, as when she strives for a reason to dislike Helen and when she insists on accelerating her relationship with Robert into marriage before he is ready. Alicia, in the final part

of the melodrama, is seen as a heroine when she shows concern for both her father and Phoebe, speeding a good ending for George and Robert. None of the characters, except perhaps George, are explicitly evil or good.

Since motivation plays a large role for both good and evil actions in Lady Audley's Secret, we see it moving from the traditional elements of melodrama to a more realistic drama. The move from tear-jerking sentiment to restrained sentiment by use of pathos, also marks a period in this evolution. All of the incidents provoking sentiment in this society melodrama, Lady Audley's Secret, were believable, as opposed to many contrived events in the earlier melodramas.

Tom Robertson's Society (1865) marked the beginning of the end for traditional melodrama. He led the way toward the 1870's and 1880's "careful craftsmanship in structure and naturalness in characterization and dialogue."<sup>38</sup> Although the melodrama sporadically continued into the twentieth century, the beginning of the problem play with its more significant theme, and the emergence of writers like Shaw, Wilde, and their successors truly signaled the end of melodrama in its truest sense.

## III.

## A Short History of Soap Opera

The following history of soap opera serves as a precursor in identifying the similarities that exist between melodrama and soap opera. So called because they had originally been sponsored by the soap companies, soap opera has been defined by Madeleine Edmondson and David Rounds in their book From Mary Noble to Mary Hartman as:

A radio or television serial drama performed usually on a daytime commercial program and chiefly characterized by stock domestic situations and often melodramatic or sentimental.<sup>39</sup>

At once alert to a surface resemblance, the observer will find that a deeper analysis reveals extensive likenesses. A sharing of certain basic elements can be seen when looking at James Thurber's humorous definition of soap opera:

A soap opera is a kind of sandwich, whose recipe is simple enough, although it took years to compound. Between thick slices of advertising, spread twelve minutes of dialogue, add predicaments, villainy, and female suffering in equal measure, throw in a dash of nobility, sprinkle with tears, season with organ music, cover with a rich announcer sauce, and serve five times a week.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, the commonalities build.

While the modern soap opera, having evolved into a more complex

type, does not closely fit these definitions, early soap opera did. Like melodrama, soap opera appeared from a background of diverse influences. The first soap opera would not have been possible if radio had not become popular and if the serial had not been a familiar form in other media such as films, newspapers, and magazines.<sup>41</sup> Whereas the first melodrama in Britain was clearly labeled as such, the claim for title of first soap is still disputed.

The history of soap opera begins with the history of radio. Radio had only been in existence since 1920, when station KDKA opened in East Pittsburg to carry the returns of the Harding-Cox election. According to Edmondson and Rounds:

Rapidly it developed into a medium that brought music, sermons, prize-fights, and political speeches into the American home; but all that was in the evening. Daytime programming was haphazard (and) morally uplifting.<sup>42</sup>

Including such programs as Beautiful Thoughts.

Radio was ready for something new, and with some experimentation, began to do as melodrama had done - fulfill the audience needs. As radio became more popular and the Depression of the 1930's necessitated cheap entertainment, listeners grew to accept serials in the daytime as well as on nights and weekends. But it was an emergency improvisation by an announcer in the 1920's, Norman Brokenshire, who read part of a short story on the air while awaiting the arrival of the scheduled act, that ushered in the daytime serial. Brokenshire's reading was interrupted when the promised actors appeared. Over the next few

days, he reported that he received hundreds of letters from disappointed listeners begging him to finish the story.<sup>43</sup>

If Brokenshire's claim of discovering an audience for soap opera is true, the soap opera itself was still to be created. Among fore-runners of the soap opera were night time domestic dramas such as The Smith Family, first aired in 1925. A young vaudeville couple, Jim and Marion Jordan developed this one-night-a-week comic serial that contained elements of soap opera, such as regularly appearing characters. It was a domestic drama about a mother whose two daughters were being courted, one by a prizefighter, and the other by a Jew. The comic night time drama then became a six-night-a-week production including famous shows like Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden's Amos 'n' Andy (1929) reworked from Sam 'n' Henry (1926) which was owned by the local radio station that gave them their start. Amos 'n' Andy, a national fad listened to by more than 50 percent of radio-owning families, was about two negro boys from Atlanta, one industrious, one lazy, who had come to Chicago to seek their fortune. Although each episode was self-contained, the central characters aroused a general suspense from ups and downs. This interest in characters is an element of the soap opera today. The huge success of Amos 'n' Andy drew imitations, each drawing closer and closer to true soap opera.<sup>44</sup>

Moonshine and Honeysuckle (1931), though aired only once a week, approached very closely what soap opera was eventually to become. The main characters were meant to be taken seriously. Their emotions were

given full weight, the setting, Lenoxome Hollow, was described as beautiful, and they were attractive people. Of wider renown was the night time serial, The Goldbergs which started on NBC in 1929.

Edmondson and Rounds comment:

Unquestionably, The Goldbergs was a soap. Comedy there was, but the series reflected a quintessential domesticity, presided over by a powerful and benevolent woman; its subject matter was human relations and its surface was resolutely realistic.<sup>45</sup>

The only move left was the change to daytime programming.

The transition to daytime programming began with a show first aired in Chicago as a night time serial in 1930, but it "leaped to national status and daytime air, establishing the fifteen-minute, five-day-a-week pattern later adopted by all the radio soaps."<sup>45</sup> Three sorority sisters at Northwestern wrote and played the parts of Clara, Lu, 'n' Em - Louise Starkey (Clara), Isobel Carothers (Lu), and Helen King (Em). Although containing gentle comedy, the show was, according to Edmondson and Rounds:

Domestic, woman-oriented and dealt mainly with personal relationships. The leading character was Em, harried mother of five and a neglected wife. Clara was her housekeeper, and Lu the widow who lived in the upstairs duplex.<sup>47</sup>

It was successful until 1936 when Isobel Carothers (Lu) died unexpectedly and the two remaining friends took the program off the air.

With the stage set for daytime soap opera all that was needed was the writers to put together a program that was soap through and through. The three most famous names in soap history are Irna Phillips, Elaine Carrington, and the Hummerts (Frank and Anne, husband and wife team). They took what had gone before, retained selected elements, and invented a stock of plot devices, characterizations, and story telling methods. Combine these with the simultaneous influencing of each other and the 1930's became the decade of the first soap operas.<sup>48</sup>

Following the example of Correll and Gosden's necessary renaming of Sam 'n' Henry to Amos 'n' Andy when becoming nationally broadcast, Irna Phillips had to rename her Painted Dreams (1932) to Today's Children when becoming nationally programmed. In its national version, Today's Children (193 ) told the story of kindly old Mother Moran, her grown children, and their friends. According to Edmondson and Rounds, it, too, was essentially "domestic and woman-oriented and dealt with personal relationships," but also "the connecting lives of the various characters provided a variety of intertwined plot lines, some slowly developing as others receded or were resolved."<sup>49</sup> The message was that marriage was a woman's finest career.

Also dealing with human relationships, but from the angle of a middle-class teenager was Elaine Carrington's Red Adams. Red lived in a supposedly typical small town of Oak Park with his mother, father, and younger sister. The plot developments often centered on the mysterious allure of the opposite sex. The central characters remained essentially the same, even though the soap itself changed

titles three times, eventually ending as Pepper Young's Family that in 1938 was being broadcast by both NBC and CBS at three different hours every day.<sup>50</sup>

Overshadowing both Phillips and Carrington were the Hummerts, who at one time in the late 1930's were purported to have two dozen soaps running at one time. Soap titles credited to them include Backstage Wife (1935), Our Gal Sunday (1937), The Romance of Helen Trent (1933), and Stella Dallas (1938). Many of their soaps were founded upon a social gap and seemed to have discovered a lasting theme. Stella Dallas, a superwoman show, billed as "The world famous drama of mother love and sacrifice,"<sup>51</sup> told the saga of a mother whose daughter had married into wealth and society. Stella had to deal with these differences in the best interest of her daughter. This theme of heroic self-sacrifice survived to be found in TV's modern soap Search for Tomorrow (1951), whose heroine, Joanne Tate (Mary Stuart) has, through the years, given help and moral support to her many friends, neighbors, and relatives, but Patti, Jo's only child has always been the center of Jo's life.<sup>52</sup>

Many radio soaps like Stella Dallas inspired television soaps of the same theme in the first ten years of TV soap history, which began in 1950. From 1950 to 1960 radio and television soap operas competed with one another. Many radio soaps tried to make the transition to television, but only one did so successfully - Irna Phillips' The Guiding Light - which survives to this day. All other radio soaps either set the stage for television counterparts or made a short-term

transition to television and failed. The former was more often the case. Eventually, by 1960, radio soaps disappeared, but not without setting the trends for the television soaps to follow. As already mentioned Stella Dallas set the stage for heroic self-sacrifice soaps like Search for Tomorrow. Woman in White (1938) was one of the first of the doctor/hospital soap genre which evolved into current doctor soaps like General Hospital (1963). Even the mystery of radio's Perry Mason was translated not only to the TV series of the same name, but also to the TV soap opera The Edge of Night (1956).<sup>53</sup> The soap opera continued to follow time-proven themes while still meeting the needs of each serial's demographic audience.

The increased popularity of soap operas and the increased number of women in the work force made the television programming open for night time drama and miniseries<sup>54</sup> like Rich Man, Poor Man; Family; Dallas; and Dynasty. Although these prime time soap operas air (or as in the case of the miniseries Rich Man, Poor Man and the cancelled Family, aired) only once a week, they feature such soap elements as regularly appearing characters, continuing plot lines, domestic subject matter, and human relationships.

Since all true soap operas are serials and relating the plot line of even one serial would far exceed the purpose of this history, no attempt will be made to expound on any particular soap opera. In the following chapter, "The Common Elements of Melodrama and Soap Opera," examples of limited plots will be given when necessary for each element to establish a clear commonality.

#### IV.

#### The Common Elements of Melodrama and Soap Opera

To see the melodrama as a nineteenth century soap opera, it is necessary to discover elements shared by both genres. To the reader of this thesis certain commonalities may already be apparent, while others are still unknown. In an attempt to make the most important shared elements clearly discernable, both melodrama and soap opera will be examined element by element, emphasizing those elements and aspects of elements that most closely compare to each other.

Because melodrama in its very title denotes music, the presence of this element in both melodrama and soap opera will be examined first. Music's importance was summed up by J.O. Bailey as follows:

The orchestra accompanied the action and heightened the emotions...Certain chords marked slow or rapid action, expressed joy or sorrow, heralded the hero or thundered the entrance of the villain.<sup>54</sup>

Maurice Disher also describes music as:

A power to subdue or rouse the multitude. Strings and woodwind...employed to presage human distress or imitate storms in between utterances. The orchestra industriously worked upon the audience's feelings.<sup>55</sup>

Which genre do these quotes describe? Although these specific passages were used to show music's place in melodrama, they are equally descriptive of music in soap opera. Each melodrama had music written

to accompany it, often taking its title from one of the ballads, as in the case with Black-Ey'd Susan. Soap opera also has its own music, known as the theme song. A familiar ballad like Red River Valley was used to signal the beginning, the exit to and return from commercial breaks, and the episode's end for Our Gal Sunday. Virtually all other soap operas, each using their own theme music, follow the same pattern. And, as in melodrama, soap operas use music to "heighten mood." Today's Guiding Light recently used a popular song from the pop charts in a romantic scene between Phillip Spalding and Beth Rains. Now whenever it is deemed necessary to revive that mood or memory the same music is played again. The same technique was often used in melodrama to identify the entrance or exit of the villain or heroine. Both genres use certain types of music to arouse the proper emotion. Listening to any soap opera or reading script instructions such as "music to express discontinued and alarm"<sup>57</sup> which appear in melodramas like Holcroft's A Tale of Mystery, may prove the role of music as a commonality in both.

Just as music is commonly shared by both melodrama and soap opera, so are basic character types. While the evolution from well-defined, black and white or bad and good characters to deeper, more complex characters with both good and bad sides, moved at a different pace for each genre, similar character types can still be found. Stock characters in melodrama were closely paralleled in soap opera and included the heroine, the villain, the hero, the father, and, sometimes, the mother. Assorted minor characters completed the casts.<sup>58</sup>

The characters of early melodrama, as well as those of early soap opera, were "chiefly symbols of virtue and vice, personified moral qualities."<sup>59</sup> Heroines, in particular, were held up as examples of unquestionable virtue. The heroine always was a fair woman bestowed with "soul, sense, sentiment, sensibility, and a noble mind."<sup>60</sup> This vision of blessedness is seen as "salvation" and "redemption" and though storms sometimes gathered round her radiant head, the countenance of the heavenly maid, resigned, serene, and meek, beams forth, after a season of patient suffering, in triumph.<sup>61</sup> This virtue was joined by passivity and vulnerability. The total goodness and extreme weakness of the heroine made possible the constant threat of catastrophe, which made the genres what they were.

The typical heroine in melodrama is personified in Susan in Jerrold's Black-Ey'd Susan. The entire plot revolves around her vulnerability against Doggrass and Crosstree. The typical heroine survived in this form in almost all of the melodramas, even the later ones. Soap opera heroines, however, began in this form, with women like Sunday in Our Gal Sunday (the orphan girl who must re-adjust to her new wealth), Mary Noble in Backstage Wife (the wife of a famous Broadway star who must accept the millions of other women who adore her husband, Larry Noble), and the superheroine, Stella, from Stella Dallas (a self-sacrificing mother intent on staying out of her daughter's new life of wealth and society),<sup>62</sup> but more quickly evolved into the modern heroine, strong in feelings, but indecisive in actions. She trusts too easily and falls too hard. TV's newest

soap opera, ABC's Loving, features a heroine of this type in Stacy Donovan. She had put her trust in Tony Perrelli, whom she was to marry and fell hard when she discovered that he was father of the child carried by her "friend" Lorna Forbes. These trusting heroines, whether it be in the soaps or melodramas, were the favorite prey of the villain.

Both melodrama and soap opera have the typical villain at the center of the problematic plot. Both have had males and females cast in the role of "tireless iniquity, implacable vengeance, inexhaustible evil resource, treasonable ambitions, base grudges, lack of compassion.." <sup>63</sup> and the list could go on. Whatever the form, the villain is persistent, energetic, and more often than not, has no motivation for his or her fiendish deeds.

Two prime examples of villains in melodrama are James Dalton in Taylor's Ticket-of-Leave Man, who involves Robert Brierly in crime and nearly ruins his life, and Lady Helen Audley, the villainess in Hazlewood's Lady Audley's Secret, who succeeds in causing the death of one person and nearly causing the death of two others. Defeat was always the villain's end, though, and both Dalton and Lady Audley suffered it. Dalton was sent to prison and Lady Audley was inflicted with madness, closely followed by death. The soap opera, likewise, has male and female villains and villainesses. The early soaps had villains like the infamous Sheik on Stella Dallas, who kidnapped Stella's daughter. The modern soaps have even more horrendous villains like Bradley Rains on Guiding Light.

wanted for the rape and abuse of his step-daughter Beth, and Delia Reid-Ryan-Ryan-Coleridge (she had been married to two brothers consecutively), on Ryan's Hope, a coniving marriage wrecker, who will go to any lengths to get a man to marry her, then have affairs with other men once they are married. One of Delia's most famous schemes was to fake pregnancy to get one man to marry her, then fake a miscarriage to cover her trail. While these characters are sometimes taken off their program (as in Delia's case), their continued existence off the screen, keeps the viewer wondering when they may resurface to cause more trouble.

Between the villain and his victim stood the hero. The hero was often as perfect as the heroine: "as undaunted in action, as faithful in love, as appalled by evil, as elevated in sentiment."<sup>64</sup> Sometimes the hero is married to the heroine whom he protects from the villain, as is William in Black-Eyed Susan, or is soon to marry the heroine, if the villain can be defeated, like Stephano in A Tale of Mystery. In soap operas the hero is known as Mr. Right. Manuela Soars, author of The Soap Opera Book, comments:

To soap heroines, Mr. Right resembles the man invariably recommended by one's parents and grandparents: good family, good manners, good job...tall, slender, attractive, ...his appeal is his stability.<sup>65</sup>

One of TV's newest soaps, Capitol, features the Mr. Right all soap-land heroines have been looking for, Tyler McChandles: a veteran, a politician, polite, handsome, and from a good Irish family. Tyler

displays every characteristic of not only the soap opera hero, but the melodrama hero as well.

No soap opera or melodrama would be complete without a parent to help or hinder things for the hero and the heroine. The father, in melodrama and early soap opera, played one of two roles:

Either to emphasize the moral of the piece through his good advice, or to set up the conflict between the heroine's love and duty, around which the plot revolved. He was usually presented as a person of great natural dignity and elevated sentiment, especially if his principal dramatic job was that of moral lecturer.<sup>66</sup>

Filial piety was carried to such an extent that children often honored the father by gladly offering their own happiness to promote his welfare. Promises that he had made were usually fulfilled, sometimes after his death, causing enough troubles to keep an entire plot line developed. Selina's uncle, a father-figure in A Tale of Mystery, is blackmailed into promising her to a criminal. Filial piety almost fulfills this promise, but Selina, and later her uncle, discover the mistake that had been made and she is consequently reunited with her long-lost father, believed to be dead. Often the father has died just prior to the opening of the melodrama, but the heroine feels inclined to follow his wishes and advice even in death, as does Susan in Black-Eyed Susan.

Whereas in the melodrama even a father's good intentions often seemed to backfire, the soap opera has a seemingly equal number of

strong fathers as weak fathers. Early soap operas like Life Can Be Beautiful (1938) feature strong, advice-giving fathers, in the likeness of Papa David Solomon. The modern soap operas at times seem to have more weak fathers, or perhaps their weaknesses are greater than the strong fathers' strengths. As The World Turns features two typically weak fathers. One, Whitney McCall is wealthy and has raised several spoiled, ungrateful children, over whom he has no control. The other, John Dixon, is the irresponsible parent. The secret of his part in daughter Margo's life was withheld from her for so long and his irresponsible characteristics so firmly established, that he never was able to gain her respect or be a true father to her.

On the other end of the spectrum are Carl Williams and Kevin Bancroft of The Young and the Restless. Carl Williams is the father of Paul and Patti Williams, both with their share of young-adult problems. Carl is always willing to listen, give advice, and act, when necessary, to protect his children. Kevin Bancroft is also a protective father and, though his daughter is yet a baby, he will go to any length to do what is necessary in her best interests.

The other parent, though almost never making an appearance in melodrama, is particularly prominent and often the hub of the plot in soap opera. Mothers often took a backseat to the fathers' control of the heroine in melodrama. Though she was sometimes a social climber, more often than not (if she had not died immediately or long before the beginning of the action), she was not a character of central importance.<sup>67</sup> Of the five melodramas explored in the previous chapter,

"A Short History of Melodrama," only one included a mother in its cast of characters, Luke the Labourer, and she was not a central character, appearing only to perform motherly duties, and to celebrate the return of the long-lost son. Mothers in soap operas, however, are usually prominent, whether this prominence be good or bad. The early soaps billed motherhood as the greatest satisfaction available for women, and so mothers like Stella Dallas were ineffably and unquestionably good, paving the way for future good mothers like Bert Bauer of Guiding Light, matriarch of the Bauer family. She is the woman to whom all the Bauers' turn to for comfort and consultation. In direct contrast to Bert Bauer is Phoebe Tyler. Phoebe, when not directly meddling in her family's personal affairs, is just as often scheming for further episodes of All My Children.

Assemble the helpless orphan heroine, whose father is discovered during the action, a passive, but perfect hero, a dynamic villain, with remorseful speeches when trapped, a somewhat Gothic setting and atmosphere (storms, castles, forests, fires and other such devices), dialogue stripped to essential exposition, rapid action accompanied by music to heighten the excitement, inculcate morals and let virtue be triumphant<sup>68</sup> and what do you have? With slight modifications the above plot ingredients could conceivably become just as easily a nineteenth century melodrama as a twentieth century radio or TV soap opera. Whatever the variations, the central plot of either ultimately involves small towns, characters from all social classes, human relationships, and various devices to propel the action forward.

The location of the action and the social status of the characters involved in either genre shows some similarities. The melodrama may be set anywhere from a castle or mansion in the middle of the country, as in A Tale of Mystery, to a big city, like London in The Ticket of Leave Man, but more often than not the action takes place in small towns like those in Black-Ey'd Susan and Luke the Labourer. Soap opera is almost always set in a small town, for instance, One Life to Live's Llanview and Guiding Light's Springfield. In the traditional soap opera, as well as in melodrama, the big city was seen as ranging from cruel to evil.<sup>69</sup>

Both genres are famous for use of devices to propel the action forward, though melodrama was often far more elaborate than soap opera has ever been. Melodrama revelled in mechanical devices such as storms, in A Tale of Mystery; fire, in Lady Audley's Secret; and other such devices as avalanches, crumbling bridges, tottering walls, striking thunderbolts, charging horses, and even volcanoes, to either push the heroine and hero away from each other or into trouble.<sup>70</sup> Soap opera uses such devices to a lesser extent (Margo Hughes and Craig Montgomery barely surviving a resort fire, in As the World Turns), but more often relies on impossible love - across class lines as with Dr. Chuck Tyler and Donna, a former prostitute, on All My Children, - or love triangles - Rick Bauer, Beth Rains, and Phillip Spalding of Guiding Light. Soap opera also relies on mental illness and pregnancy as devices to propel action forward. In fact, many types of illnesses are used. Compare the blindness of Eve Stapleton on Guiding Light

with the muteness of Francisco in A Tale of Mystery. One remaining favorite for both genres is the appearance of a long-lost relative, as in the return of Phillip in Luke the Labourer or the discovery of a new relationship with an already familiar person, such as in the case of Jill Calderidge on Ryan's Hope, who discovers that her maid, Bess, is her real mother, whom she has never known.

Whoever the characters, whatever the location and devices, the main plot line follows a human relationship. Such relationships center around the quest for love, but sometimes capitalized on other passions - hate, greed, envy, and others. These relationships provided the basis for melodrama and soap opera's universal theme: in the conflict between virtue and vice, the victory of morality is always assured.<sup>71</sup> In melodrama, virtue is materially rewarded, vice immediately punished, and the hero and heroine live happily ever after. In soap opera the same ends are gained, but the process is more drawn out and poetic justice is not directly bestowed. Personal happiness, if not permanent, at least temporary, is possible by struggling through misfortunes. The morals which were commonly inculcated in the struggle between virtue and vice were time proven: honesty, patriotism, obedience to parents, purity, the sacredness of the family and other similar virtues. Neither the melodrama, nor the soap opera questioned the value of these virtues, and both brought vices to the surface to show the evils of them. Vices commonly disparaged in melodrama were gambling, drinking (Luke the Labourer), greed (Doggrass in Black-Ey'd Susan), cruelty, seduction, philandering,

polygamy (Helen in Lady Audley's Secret), and crime (The Ticket-of-Leave Man).<sup>72</sup> Similar virtues and vices are presented in soap opera, particularly the virtue of motherhood in early soap operas like Stella Dallas, and the vice of crime in The Right to Life (19 ).

Though the central theme of both melodrama and soap opera has remained the same throughout their respective evolutions, several of the other elements have gone through a process of change. Typically these transitions paralleled each other. In each case the changes were due largely to the influences of the audience. The heavy-handedness of music in early melodrama gave way to a more subtle use toward the end of its evolution,<sup>73</sup> as did the use of music in soap opera. Both declinations can be traced to the use of more complex characters. Music was often associated with the character: light, joyful music for the heroine, patriotic music for the hero, dark foreboding music for the villain, and was played on the characters entrance into the scene. Music was also used to compliment moods: heavy music when the villain threatens the heroine, light music when all ends happily. With the transition to character complexity and more subtle threats, music lost part of its usefulness, drifting farther and farther into the background.

The transition in characters may have been caused by a change in audience. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, audiences of the melodrama had evolved from lower- and middle-class to upperclass. The characters in turn evolved from easily understood, clearly identifiable, black and white personalities (the virtuous Selina and the

viceful Bonamo of A Tale of Mystery) to the more complex, often interesting personalities desired by a more educated audience (Helen in Lady Audley's Secret). Audience demographics played a large role in determining character personalities in radio and television soap operas. The early radio soap operas played to an audience of homemakers, wives, and mothers. The heroines were, naturally then, homemakers, wives, and mothers; the villains were persons who disrupted or attempted to destroy family life or the search for love. Ma Perkins, Backstage Wife, and Stella Dallas had these character types. The latest TV soap operas have younger and often career-oriented audiences, such as the new audience found in University students. While love and family life still constitute the happy human relationship, the new heroine is usually everything the old heroine was, plus career woman - nurse, lawyer, business woman, or something similar. While the hero stays almost unchanged, the new villain is often the boss or some type of male chauvinist who tries to avert the heroine from her goals.<sup>74</sup>

The transition in characters was accompanied by a transition in plot line. The early audiences of both melodrama and soap opera were largely of the struggling economic class.<sup>75</sup> The early plots promoted escapism, with the lower-class hero or heroine discovering noble birth or marrying into wealthy, social circles. As the audience grew and changed, the melodrama and soap opera changed to realism: tenants struggling against landlords, (Luke the Labourer), ex-cons making a new life (The Ticket-of-Leave Man), parents losing children

in war (Ma Perkins), the lone woman in society (The Romance of Helen Trent and Young Widder Brown, both early soap operas). The later stages of evolution and the demise of melodrama involved the treatment of social problems. Melodrama, as previously defined, ceased to exist, and the "new drama" of Shaw, Wilde, and their successors met the needs of the late nineteenth century. The soap opera, however, is currently the leading vehicle of the message on how to cope with life,<sup>76</sup> and has even branched out to night time dramas like Dallas and Family, and miniseries' like Rich Man, Poor Man to increase the audience it can reach with its messages.

The later melodramas catered to the needs of their middle-class audiences by presenting the issues relevant to the common man: over-demanding employers, exploitative landlords, the amoral justice system, and others. The audience of the of the latest soap operas, however, is upper-middle-class, and, in keeping with their primary focus on love stories and personal crises, the issues presented today include anything that endangers a healthy human relationship: drug abuse (Mark Dalton's use of cocaine on All My Children), obesity (Tracy Abbot's battle against herself on The Young and the Restless), rape (Ruth Martin's rape by Ray Gardner on All My Children), homosexuality (delt with on All My Children), teenage pregnancy (April on The Young and the Restless, also unmarried), political corruption (Herb Callison's loss of his governorship for misuse of funds on One Life to Live), blackmailing and framing (Steve Andropolis' set up by Craig Montgomery on As the World Turns), child abuse (Beth Rains abuse at

the hands of her step-father on Guiding Light) mental illness (Heather Webber's illness which caused her to kill Diana Taylor; she was sent to an institution, only to return later to cause more problems on General Hospital), alcoholism (Kay Chancellor on The Young and the Restless), euthanasia (Dr. Seneca Beaulac's court battle on Ryan's Hope after he took his clinically dead wife off her life support machine), and the list could go on and on.<sup>77</sup>

Whatever the fashion, characters to relate to, issues to resolve, values to inculcate, the melodrama and the soap opera both provided entertainment that fulfilled audience needs.

V.

Melodrama: The Nineteenth Century Soap Opera;  
or, A Conclusion

In examining the melodramas of Holcroft, Buckstone, Jerrold, Taylor, and Hazlewood in conjunction with the history of melodrama, and in examining various early and late soap operas and their history, several similarities can be identified.<sup>78</sup> These similarities are especially clear when identified side by side, melodrama to soap opera, element by element. Both genres employ music to heighten emotion and intensify action, provide heroines and heroes and villains of the type considered most popular at the time, set their action in small towns with generally middle-class values and concerns, use similar devices to further plot, deal with human relationships, promote fantasy to escape by and suggestions to live realistically by. Both genres followed similar patterns of development, paying particular attention to audience needs.

It will be noted by the careful reader that the histories of the two genres overlap. Just as melodrama was evolving into the "new drama," soap opera was beginning to grow. The basic tenants of melodrama are such that it is not surprising to see them resurface in the soap opera. One might even postulate that the melodrama had an influence on the creation of soap opera. It may even be contended that the soap opera is a twentieth century melodrama, which can be

transformed to state that melodrama was the nineteenth century's soap opera.

Though soap opera (and thus, melodrama) may be scoffed at, it is an unquestionable part of the American culture. Edmondson and Rounds comment:

...there must be something in a form, art or not, that lasts so long and attracts so many. It is as much an expression of American culture as skyscrapers and super-highways or even hot dogs. But they will not disappear simply because someone finds them distasteful. One may ignore soaps (melodramas), but to do so is to pass up a chance to glimpse the mind and mood of a large segment (and time period) of America. Middle America, perhaps, and perhaps not worthy of serious consideration when Art is up for discussion. But it is well to remember that every culture has its mythology, created by nameless men and women, many of them illiterate, passed down and altered from one generation to another, used to create imperishable masterpieces, whip up patriotic enthusiasm for dubious enterprises, or frighten children into good behavior. Disavow them as we will, the soaps are our own American mythology.<sup>79</sup>

The melodrama was the nineteenth century's soap opera and quite possibly evolved into the twentieth century soap opera. It, too, is a part of American culture not to be disavowed.

End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Frank Rahill. The World of Melodrama (Univ. Park and London: The Pennsylvania Univ. Press, 1967), p. xiii.
- <sup>2</sup> Hugh C. Holman. A Handbook to Literature, (3rd ed. (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1972), p. 312.
- <sup>3</sup> Holman, p. 312.
- <sup>4</sup> Holman, p. 312.
- <sup>5</sup> Leonard R. N. Ashley. Nineteenth Century British Drama (Atlanta: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1967), p. 1.
- <sup>6</sup> Holman, p. 383
- <sup>7</sup> Maurice Willson Disher. Blood and Thunder: Mid-Victorian Melodrama and Its Origin. (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1949), p. 21.
- <sup>8</sup> Disher, p. 24
- <sup>9</sup> Rahill, p. 116.
- <sup>10</sup> J. O. Bailey. British Plays of the Nineteenth Century (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1966), p. 1.
- <sup>11</sup> Bailey, p. 4.
- <sup>12</sup> Ashley, p. 4.
- <sup>13</sup> Bailey, p. 5.
- <sup>14</sup> Rahill, pp. 217-222.
- <sup>15</sup> Rahill, p. 297.
- <sup>16</sup> Rahill, pp. 300-305.
- <sup>17</sup> Bailey, p. 31.

- 18 Holman, p. 401.
- 19 Bailey, pp. 31-32.
- 20 Bailey, pp 33-34.
- 21 Rahill, p. 43.
- 22 Rahill, p. 15.
- 23 Rahill, p. 40.
- 24 Michael Kilgariff, ed. The Golden Age of Melodrama: Twelve Nineteenth Century Melodramas. (London: Wolfe Publishing, 1974), pp. 28-29.
- 25 Bailey, pp. 223-225.
- 26 Kilgariff, p. 29.
- 27 Disher, p. 76.
- 28 Disher, p. 84.
- 29 Bailey, pp. 238-239.
- 30 Bailey, p. 25.
- 31 Disher, p. 112.
- 32 Disher, pp. 143-144.
- 33 Ashley, pp. 102-103.
- 34 Bailey, p. 34.
- 35 Rahill, p. xv.
- 36 George Rowell, ed. Nineteenth Century Plays. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953), p. 268.
- 37 Bailey, p. 16.
- 38 Bailey, p. 35.
- 39 Madeleine Edmondson and David Rounds. From Mary Noble to Mary Hartman (New York: Stein and Day, Publishers, 1976), pp. 13-14.

- 40 Edmondson and Rounds, p. 14.
- 41 Manuela Soares. The Soap Opera Book (New York: Harmony Books, 1978), pp. 171-172.
- 42 Edmondson and Rounds, p. 24. For much of the history of soap opera, the author is indebted to Edmondson and Rounds.
- 43 Soares, p. 171.
- 44 Edmondson and Rounds, pp. 25-31.
- 45 Edmondson and Rounds, p. 33.
- 46 Edmondson, and Rounds, p. 34
- 47 Edmondson and Rounds, p. 34.
- 48 Edmondson and Rounds, p. 38.
- 49 Edmondson and Rounds, p. 38.
- 50 Edmondson and Rounds, pp. 41-42.
- 51 Soars, p. 175.
- 52 Robert LaGuardia. The Wonderful World of TV Soaps (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974), p. 304.
- 53 This information was gleaned from Edmondson and Rounds, pp. 1104-133, LaGuardia, pp. 234-304, and Soares, pp. 174-180.
- 54 Bailey, p. 33.
- 55 Disher, p. 65.
- 56 Edmondson, and Rounds, p. 20.
- 57 Rahill, p. 121.
- 58 Holman, p. 509.
- 59 Bailey, p. 31.

<sup>60</sup> David Grimsted. Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 173.

<sup>61</sup> Grimsted, pp. 172-173.

<sup>62</sup> Edmondson and Rounds, pp. 44-45.

<sup>63</sup> Rahill, p. 207.

<sup>64</sup> Grimsted, p. 180.

<sup>65</sup> Soares, p. 64.

<sup>66</sup> Grimsted, p. 181.

<sup>67</sup> Grimsted, p. 183.

<sup>68</sup> Bailey, p. 31.

<sup>69</sup> Edmondson and Rounds, pp. 53-54.

<sup>70</sup> Rahill, pp. 111-113.

<sup>71</sup> Grimsted, p. 220.

<sup>72</sup> Bailey, p. 31.

<sup>73</sup> Rahill, p. xv.

<sup>74</sup> Soares, pp. 74-9.

<sup>75</sup> Rahill, p. 162.

<sup>76</sup> Edmondson and Rounds, p. 240.

<sup>77</sup> Soares, pp. 113-121.

<sup>78</sup> The style of this conclusion and much of this thesis was borrowed from Alexander Lacey. Pixerecourt and the French Romantic Drama (Toronto: The Univ. of Toronto Press, 1928),

<sup>79</sup> Edmondson and Rounds, p. 249.

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