PART ONE Introductory

CHAPTER 1 Pictures

> I claim that every object, taken from a given viewpoint and shown on the screen to spectators, is a dead object, even though it has moved before the camera. The proper movement of an object before the camera is yet no movement on the screen, it is no more than raw material for the future building-up, by editing, of the movement that is conveyed by the assemblage of the various strips of film. Only if the object be placed together among a number of separate objects, only if it be presented as part of a synthesis of different separate visual images, is it endowed with filmic life.[. . .] Editing is the basic creative force, by power of which the soulless photographs (the separate shots) are engineered into living, cinematographic form.[1]

First published in 1928 in the introduction to the German edition of his book on film technique, this proclamation of the Soviet film director Vsevolod Pudovkin expresses an outlook on the nature of the cinema that still underlies most critical, historical, and theoretical considerations of cinema and films, despite the relative loss of prestige of the particular school of filmmaking, Soviet montage cinema, that Pudovkin wished to promote. Most discussion of films that goes beyond mere plot summary to describe and analyze the ways a film produces its effects starts from shots in their relations to other shots. Stylistic history of cinema discusses the origins of the close-up, of alternating editing, of shot-reverse-shot, of the point-of-view shot; stylistic analysis discusses average shot length, variation in shot scale, rhythms in the alternation of shots, or more broadly, schools of filmmaking based on differences in editing — American "invisible editing" versus Soviet montage cinema, for example; theory discusses the Kuleshov effect, the possible syntagmatic organization of shots in films, and "suture," the relation between the film spectator and the kind of coherence he or she can find in a series of shots.

One reason for the success of this program is convenience. Shots are (or appear to be) relatively unequivocal objects of investigation, found in almost all kinds of films (even animated ones), usually in a sufficiently large number in any one film to allow for all sorts of variation and hence subtle and detailed analysis. When they become more equivocal, as in montage sequences in American films, where multiple superimposition often makes it hard to say where one shot begins and another ends, those sequences can usually be isolated from the rest of a film so as to leave shot-by-shot analysis unimpeded, and those films that lack shots (such as some abstract films) or where the number of shots are so few as to tend to make such analysis banal, are rare enough or sufficiently off the beaten track of the film scholar to be ignored. On the other hand, the content of individual shots — staging, lighting, composition, blocking, acting — is much harder to analyze (except unsystematically, by an immediate correlation with plot, as when chiaroscuro lighting is described as "sinister"). Hence a concentration on editing and the shot in Pudovkin's sense.

So self-evident has this centrality of the shot become, it is worth emphasizing that, before the Russian montage theorists, it had no such importance — indeed, it is arguable that the "shot" in Pudovkin's sense did not exist. In America, film scriptwriters divided their scripts into "scenes," and commentators discussed films in terms of scenes. "Shot" was used only when what was at issue was how the length of footage was made — thus some scenes are "glass shots" (part of what seems to be a landscape or large building is in fact a picture on a glass sheet in front of the camera lens). "Editing" was originally taken over from publishing terminology to mean the tightening up and smoothing process that intervened between the rough assembly of the film and the finally released version; the assembly of the negative was called "cutting" and was performed by the cameraman with the assistance of lowly "cutters." "Photoplays" — the term was preferred by the film trade to the vulgar "movies" — were thought of as a sequence of "scenes" on the model of the stage play. Such "scenes" might materially correspond to "shots," i.e., they might be lengths of film footage demarcated by cuts or dissolves (which is why it is possible for film history to conceive the early history of cinema in terms of shots and editing in the later sense), but this correspondence is deceptive. In a script, a scene was numbered and described, and then, usually inset, would follow one or more separately listed and numbered "inserts." Some of these inserts would be titles (usually by the mid-1910s dialogue titles), some close-ups, memory flashes, vision shots, cutaways. Conventionally (though this would not always be notated), the inserts were each followed by a "return to scene." Thus, what for Pudovkin might be a relatively large number of "shots" could constitute a single "scene."

At the beginning of the 1910s, scenes were in general long and inserts few, so scenes and shots

largely coincide, but as the number of cuts in a scene began to grow, the response was not a shift of emphasis to the lengths of footage between cuts, but to the scene considered as a multiple entity. Thus, in their manual *How to Write Photoplays*, John Emerson and Anita Loos advise screenwriters they need not specify the cuts: "Of course, a director will change his camera many times during a scene to get long shots, close-ups, etc.; but these changes of camera need not bother the scenario writer to any extent, as any good director understands this technique and may be trusted to take the scenes in a manner that will get over the meaning of the author. If there is some special point which the author wishes emphasized by a close-up, there is no harm in noting it in the script."[2] By the end of the 1920s, this sense of a scene was embodied in the "master-shot" method of filmmaking (consolidated by the fact that in the early sound cinema there were usually far fewer cuts in the sound than in the image track — i.e., a whole scene often consisted of a single continuous recording of dialogue, with the different pieces of the image track made up of material shot simultaneously with another camera or "wild" shots containing no synchronized dialogue).[3]

Despite modern commentators' emphasis on the shot, the scene in this sense remained crucial to classical narrative filmmaking. Pudovkin was well aware of this way of conceiving film construction; his account is not a universal theory of cinema so much as a polemic against this method of constructing the scene: "Terms such as 'interpolation' and 'cut-in' are absurd expressions, the remnants of an old misunderstanding of the technical methods of the film. The details organically belonging to scenes [. . .] must not be interpolated into the scene, but the latter must be built out of them."[4]

The success of the shot- and editing-based understanding of film is not simply a matter of descriptive convenience. Pudovkin and his colleagues were eager to locate a peculiar aesthetics of the film medium, a field of devices that were specific to that medium, not borrowed from any of the other arts. Editing seemed to provide such a field. Moreover, an emphasis on the importance and centrality of film editing, that is, on the combination of lengths of moving photographs of objects, people, events, and actions, rather than on those moving photographs themselves, seemed to conjure the suspicion that the moving-picture camera was no more than a sophisticated copying device, that any art there was in the cinema resided in the objects, people, events and actions that had once been in front of the passive camera. As Hans Richter put it:

> On the roof of a tenement block one day, sets were put up and — so Henny Porten says, discussing the early days of the cinema — Messter began to film her in a (much abridged) *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*. Smoke from the chimney pots cast a magical veil over the sets. The sun shone, Henny Porten entered stage left on cue (as was customary in the theatre), acted her scene, Messter cranked, and she exited. The whole business lasted some three to five minutes, then they were finished — as was the film. The film was the actress.[5]

The contaminating art in Richter's example is the theatre, and early film aestheticians' predominant demarcation dispute was with the aesthetics of theatre, or with "theatricality" in films and filmmaking traditions. This brings us to the relations between theatre and cinema that are the central concern of this book.

According to Pudovkin and Richter, although the earliest films were actualities, as soon as the cinema turned to fiction, it took the theatre as its model, and the true history of the medium since then has been one of its emancipation from the tutelage of the theatre, the discovery of an autonomous cinematic aesthetic:

> The first films consisted of primitive attempts to fix upon celluloid, as a novelty, the movements of a train, a landscape seen from a railway-carriage window, and so forth. Thus, in the beginning, the film was, from its nature, only "living photography." The first attempts to relate cinematography to the world of art were naturally bound up with the Theatre. Similarly only as a novelty, like the shots of the railway-engine and the moving sea, primitive scenes of comic or dramatic character, played by actors, began to be recorded.[. . .] The first experiments in recording serious and significant material appeared. The relationship with the Theatre could not, however, yet be dissolved, and it is easy to understand how, once again, the first steps of the film producer consisted in attempts to carry plays over on to celluloid. [. . .] The film remained, as before, but living photography. Art did not enter into the work of him who made it. He only photographed the "art of the actor." Of a peculiar method for the film actor, of peculiar and special properties of the film or of technique in shooting the picture for the director, there could as yet be no suspicion.[6]

This view dominated film history for many years. Georges Sadoul says of Georges Méliès, "theatrical imperatives continue to weigh on the productions of Star Film,"[7] and Jean Mitry of D.W. Griffith, "with his short films, America discovered a new art, quite different from the theatre, the decalcomania of which was all that could initially be achieved."[8] The same view is expressed today by a writer who is not a film historian: "Many early movies were stagy. Vaudeville turns and other theatrical material were presented as if seen inside a stage frame, not a picture frame.[. . .] But the more the medium advanced, the closer it came to its dramatic pictorial ancestors and the further from the stage."[9]

Professional film historians today, however, have largely ceased to speak of a theatrically dominated early cinema. This is probably one of the many transformations in our understanding of early film history that were brought about by the Conference of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) held in Brighton in 1978. At that conference, as many as possible of the films held by member archives thought to have been made before 1905 were viewed together, by archivists and invited film historians. It immediately became clear that early filmmakers borrowed from whole series of sources

unlinked to the theatre (short stories, novels, strip cartoons, political caricatures, lantern slides, wax museums, pyrotechnic displays), and that the kinds of theatre they drew on when those sources were theatrical were so diverse (from vaudeville dog act to Shakespeare via conjuring trick, *féerie* and Grand Guignol) as to make "theatrical" a vitiatingly vague term.[10] Attention among scholars has shifted to a reconsideration of the notion of the "primitivity" of the cinema before about 1907, no longer considered negatively as an absence, a vacuum filled by inappropriate theatrical devices, but as a differentia specifica of early films that demands positive characterization.[11] As for the cinema after 1907, the predominance of accounts of classical cinema centering on devices of narration has directed attention to the importance of literary narratives, particularly short stories, as influences on its formation.[12] Theatre is probably less considered, whether as a positive or as a negative influence on the cinema, by film historians today than at any other time.[13]

The strongest arguments for a continuity between theatre and early cinema have in fact been made not by film historians but by theatre historians. Historians of nineteenth-century popular theatre, who are particularly interested in the *mise-en-scène* rather than the texts of the plays of the period, have the problem that staging and acting have to be reconstructed from a variety of not very trustworthy sources: reviews, memoirs, descriptions of performances, playbills, specially posed publicity photographs or woodcut illustrations, even ceramics. Early cinema seems to offer a direct view of acting and staging at the beginning of the twentieth century. And indeed, by the turn of the century some significant theatrical stars had appeared before the camera to perform fragments of their stage successes, and many early fiction films drew their plots from well-known plays. However, writers such as David Mayer and Stephen Johnson, while stressing the significance of these moving photographic records of theatrical practice, are also well aware of the differences between moving photographs and theatrical performance, the most obvious of which are the lack of spoken dialogue[14] and the brevity of films before about 1910 (we will discuss other important differences below).[15]

A much broader claim about the relationship was made nearly fifty years ago by A. Nicholas Vardac in *Stage to Screen — Theatrical Origins of Early Film: From Garrick to Griffith*.[16] Basing his argument on promptbooks, set designs, theatrical cuts, photographs, and clippings files, mostly in the Harvard Theatre Collection, Vardac argued that a large part of nineteenth-century theatre was cinema *manqué*. Indeed, as his subtitle indicates, he traces this proto-cinematic tendency in the theatre back to the eighteenth century. He does this via the notion of a very general cultural project, a kind of *Kunstwollen*, which the theatre participated in, and whose origins he finds in the Enlightenment. This project demanded "realism" in the arts, but this realism can be understood in two ways, which Vardac does not always clearly distinguish. On the one hand, there is the demand that works of art should deal with the important social and psychological issues of the day; on the other, a demand that, whatever is being represented, the representation be "life-like." This second demand is a demand for illusion, and by no means necessarily implies the first. Having posited the first demand, Vardac generally ignores it, on the grounds that, as he says, for the practical stage designer, it makes no difference whether you need to represent a drawing room or fairyland; realism and escapism both required the same illusory techniques.[17]

Vardac examines the staging practices (mostly in England and America) in a number of kinds of theatre — the popular sensational drama usually known as "melodrama," his principal example being Dion Boucicault,[18] the "archaeological" costume drama of Charles Kean, the pantomime or *féerie*, and the more respectable spectacle drama of Henry Irving and David Belasco. All of these tendencies were, he argues, essentially cinematic and were eventually more appropriately realized in the cinema. Melodrama was particularly constrained by the stage, because its audience's craving for sensation demanded rapid changes of place, time and situation, but the illusory representation of such sensational incidents as volcanic eruptions, burning buildings, railway accidents, shipwrecks, and so on, demanded very elaborate mechanical sets, which were hard to change rapidly even in big, well-staffed metropolitan theatres; this problem was exacerbated by the fact that, as a popular form, melodrama had to be able to tour, and the smaller, less well-equipped and staffed provincial theatres in the U.S. could not accommodate elaborate three-dimensional sets, but tended to retain the older system of backdrops, borders and wings. As a result, the contrast between the desire for complete illusion and what was actually seen on the stage became acute. Film solved these problems. Real eruptions, fires, train wrecks, and so on could be photographed with the moving-picture camera, and editing meant that such sensational scenes could be changed as often as desired. The same film could also be projected in a moving-picture theatre anywhere in the country and not have to compromise to accommodate local deficiencies. Hence popular melodrama rapidly disappeared from the live stage once moving pictures took over its subject-matter and adapted its techniques. The other genres lasted longer, but Vardac cites reviews complaining about the difficulty of sustaining the illusion even in the most lavish stage spectacles, notes the disappearance of the pantomime from the American stage in the twentieth century, and claims that Belasco was fighting a rearguard action in attempting to maintain his staging methods until the 1920s. However, and here Vardac returns to the first definition of realism, the cinema notably failed in its attempts to assimilate the naturalistic drama of Ibsen. The kinds of stage play that seem to Vardac the most direct forebears of contemporary drama were those that lay outside the proto-cinematic project.

Some of the difficulties with this account have already been referred to — these theatrical genres were certainly not the only sources that the cinema drew on, especially in its first twenty years. But even when dealing with the period after this, when theatrical models became more obviously pertinent to the much longer films being made, Vardac's account is unhelpful to the film historian. Partly this is because, beyond the realism supposedly guaranteed by moving photography, and the flexibility granted by editing, cinematic techniques and their development are not specified, and nineteenth-century staging is described metaphorically using cinematic terms like "alternation" or "cutting." Thus it is impossible to analyze how early filmmakers actually responded to the theatre, either in assimilating it or in rejecting it — it is as if an entirely naive filmmaker would automatically reproduce and perfect the work of an Irving as a result of the nature of his medium.

However, there are more serious objections to Vardac's thesis. In particular, he finds it unproblematic to claim that the illusionism desired by the nineteenth-century theatre audience was better satisfied by moving photographs of sensational or spectacular scenes than it was by stagings of such scenes. In the era of *Cats* and *Les Misérables*, it seems hard to believe the claim that competition with the cinema has driven spectacle from the theatre. Despite the care with which he describes nineteenth-century popular theatre (his thoroughness in this respect is surely the reason the book has gone unchallenged for so long), he shares a common mid-twentieth-century prejudice against it, and against all popular theatre, and so remains blind to the fact that spectacle did not disappear from the stage when the plays of Eugene O'Neill began to be performed on it. On the other hand, he feels no need to argue his claim that cinema is naturally spectacular, but this is by no means self-evident. David Mayer notes how unimpressive is the scene of the chariot race in the 1907 Kalem version of *Ben Hur*, despite the fact that real chariots, horses, and riders have been photographed engaging in a real race, and argues that such films were fairly unsuccessful attempts to emulate stage spectacle rather than the other way about.[19] Some of Vardac's own quotations suggest the same. When Ashton Stevens reviewed the San Francisco presentation of Nance O'Neill's production of Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *Judith of Bethulia* in 1906, he condemned it as no better than moving pictures: "The whole thing might be read at a ladies' club to the accompaniment of moving pictures. It is vivid only in a moving picture way; even the tent scene."[20] When Belasco signed a moving-picture contract with Jesse J. Lasky in 1914, interviews he gave suggest he felt he could give the younger art a helping hand rather than that he was deserting a sinking ship.[21]

We are also dubious about Vardac's citations of contemporary reviews to demonstrate audiences' dissatisfaction with stage illusion. He is particularly fond of taking quotations from reviews of the first production of a play that praise its realism, and then ones from reviews of revivals that denounce the failure, often of the same sets and stage machines.[22] But this is simply the nature of illusionistic effects in any medium — they wear out quite rapidly. The cinema has not solved this problem; special effects a decade old no longer convince us today.

More fundamentally, the aspiration to an integral reproduction of reality, an aim of art that certainly existed in the nineteenth century, and one that the development of moving photographic pictures was expected to advance, if not realize, was itself contradictory. First, the technology could not actually reproduce the effect of being in the presence of the reality represented. In the period with which we (and Vardac) are concerned, film lacked three dimensions, and usually natural color and dialogue, all of which the theatre could provide. However, the sense of being present at the simplest of events is highly synesthetic — all the senses participate in the global impact of the event, constituting what Michel Chion calls a perceptual "lump" (*boule*). No cinema can actually replicate this "lump"; instead it renders it with a whole battery of devices that are not simulations, devices of editing, scale, contrast. The most visceral moments of presence in the cinema are what Chion calls "renderings," not replications, of reality.[23] Noël Burch argues, however, that the rendering process is not so much a matter of supplying the deficiencies of the recording apparatuses, as it were, adding to them, as of controlling, often literally reducing, their powers. He notes the example of Grimoin-Sanson's Cinéorama, devised for the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, in which film recorded by ten cameras facing out in all directions from the gondola of an ascending balloon was projected onto a circular screen by ten projectors mounted under a mock-up of the gondola. The audience in the gondola then saw a 360-degree moving panorama of what it looked like to rise up in a balloon.[24] However "realistic" the effect achieved, the banality of this is clear; it would have been just as easy, and presumably more "realistic," to have flown the audiences who witnessed the show in a real balloon. To fulfill the aim of producing a fully "life-like" rendering of reality, it was necessary to make that reality intelligible, by framing it, composing it, orchestrating it in time. For Burch, the history of the "primitive" cinema is a history of the discovery and installation of means of cinematic representation to control the dispersal, the haemorrhage of significance characteristic of simple replication.[25]

Although realistic detail was an important constituent of what a nineteenth-century audience experienced as an overwhelming spectacle, photographic realism alone does not constitute spectacle. Photographs can be intimate as easily as they can be spectacular, and the same is true of film. Sheer scale is an important factor, but for much of the first twenty years of cinema, screens were relatively small as compared with the proscenium openings

of metropolitan theatres. It was possible, as it was not (except by use of miniatures) in the theatre, to present mass scenes in very long shot, but, as we shall see in Part 4 below, early film audiences, and especially those familiar with the live stage, were not willing to adopt the scalar relativism required to be impressed by small pictures of large things. Felix Salten, a German theatre critic who was already writing scripts for films, complained about the diminutive size of the figures in the spectacle scenes in the 1912 film version of *Quo Vadis?* and the grotesque contrast between them and the giants in closer shots, demanding a screen big enough to give the same sense of spectacle as in a theatre: "It should be possible to project any scenery that requires size and breadth in that size and breadth. For this one would need a screen that has more or less the area of our theatrical proscenium openings. In the cinema as in the theatre, the natural size of the human body should be the unchanging unit of measurement. And, as required, the whole projection surface or only a section of it should be used."[26]

Finally, a spectacular effect depends on the audience's perception of the disproportion between the reality represented and the means used to represent it — it is the very impossibility of having a train crash on stage that makes even a very tacky simulation of it in the theatre impressive. Photography suffers from a modified form of what might be called the "Parmeno's pig effect."[27] Its products are not "real things" like the pig to which Parmeno's mimicked pig was preferred, but they rapidly came to be seen as mere mechanical copies of such things. The earliest viewers experienced the movement in moving pictures as the result of a technical marvel, but once they were familiar with the moving-picture camera as a recording device, the effect was lost. Special trick effects remained wonderful for longer, though audiences eventually became disenchanted with them, too, as noted above. Simply photographing something hard to stage with a moving-picture camera was not sufficient to produce the spectacle demanded. Such moving photographs had to be spectacular independently of the reality of what they represented.

It seems important to insist on the demand for spectacle as such, not on a demand for "realism," and particularly not on a demand for the kind of realism offered by photographs (or, more precisely, "photographic" has to be seen to be a particular connotation endowing certain images with a "real effect," not as a kind of equivalent of the "real thing"). "Spectacle" described a kind of staging that appealed primarily to the eye, and what appealed to the eye was conceived in terms of painting rather than photography, and if photography was appealed to, it was as a genre of picture, not as a token of reality. Thus, when the Lasky company made a film adaptation of Charles A. Kenyon's play *The Kindling* in 1915, Wilfred Buckland built sets imitating Jacob Riis photographs of tenements to create an appropriate mood for the film. Vardac notes the demand for pictorialism in nineteenth-century theatre, but for him such pictorialism was a constant feature — it could be traced back to the Renaissance stage, and in the nineteenth century it characterized the "old" staging method of flats, drops and wings as much as the "new" staging with three-dimensional furnishings and box sets. The dynamic factor was the attempt to make these pictures more and more "realistic," eventually outrunning the possibilities, first of the old staging, then of the new, and only achievable by the cinema. As always for Vardac, "realistic" can only mean "photographic," and "photographic" only "indistinguishable from reality." However, the effects achieved by the acknowledged masters of pictorial theatre, Henry Irving and David Belasco, while extremely picturesque, are only like photographs insofar as certain schools of late-nineteenth-century photography attempted to reproduce the effect of paintings, or photographs came to define a recognizable style or styles for pictures, as Jacob Riis's photographs did. The illustrations of Irving's *Faust* published in the contemporary press draw on romantic, Gothic graphic traditions, and descriptions of the production show that Irving was seeking just such a pictorial effect.[28] Belasco did occasionally resort to an accumulation of realistic detail that was hailed as photographic by contemporary commentators, most famously in the scene in a Child's Restaurant in his 1912 production of *The Governor's Lady*, but the emphasis is always on how that detail creates atmosphere, which a photograph as such may well lack.[29] It is noteworthy that most of his settings were more picturesquely exotic than a New York restaurant — the Western fort in *The Girl I left behind Me* (1893), the port of Nagasaki in *Madame Butterfly* (1900), the Japanese bamboo forest in *The Darling of the Gods* (1902), the Californian Sierra in *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905), to name only a few. All of these settings provided the occasions for the extended gradual changes in lighting that were a Belasco trademark, and that the cinema has never attempted to emulate.[30]

It is by an examination of the notion of the pictorial and pictorial effect in theatre that we shall attempt in this book to recast Vardac's account, specifying what filmmakers might have looked for from the theatre to help them make the new, longer films that began to be required of them after 1910. This is not to say that these filmmakers simply took over the pictorial techniques of the stage. On the contrary, they started from an already sophisticated battery of filmmaking techniques that were relatively independent of the theatre, and they were perfectly aware of the technical differences between the two media. Rather they shared the widespread conception of the theatre as a matter of pictures, and sought ways to find equivalents of these pictures for a new kind of cinema. To grasp this process it is necessary both to understand what was meant by pictorialism in general and in the theatre in particular, and also how such a pictorialism was modified in its transfer to a new medium.

The importance of the spectacular and the pictorial in nineteenth-century theatre has received

much attention in recent years, most notably in Michael Booth's studies, especially *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, and in chapter 3 of Martin Meisel's *Realizations*. Despite the numerous instances they can cite where scenes from plays are praised for being "just like a picture," and the variety of ways they describe that theatrical technicians appealed to and exploited features of painting (ways that we will examine again and again in this book) it is important to realize that "spectacle" was a term as likely to be used pejoratively, especially by the cultural elite. Aristotle had argued that spectacle (*opsis*), the part of drama that appealed merely to the eye, was subordinate to the words of drama, indeed "has nothing to do with poetry," by which he seems to mean the composition of a play.[31] Aristotle's prestige and the obvious appeal of this opinion to writers, have meant that throughout the period when spectacular theatre flourished, most published comment subordinated the visual aspects of production to the texts and deplored the theatrical impresario's emphasis on the former. Many of the new theatrical movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, from naturalism to symbolism and expressionism, and the new methods of staging the classics that accompanied them, can be seen as attempts to re-establish the centrality of the text to the theatre.

The prejudice against a theatre of pictures that pervades twentieth-century commentary is not limited to a defense of the text, however. It is also found in much art history and art criticism, in the form of a prejudice against the kind of pictures that this theatre appealed to, pictures that can be called "theatrical." If cinematic modernists like Pudovkin or Richter saw theatre as stifling the development of an authentically cinematic art, some modernist art critics have attempted to free the notion of the picture from theatricalism. Although the cinema plays almost no part in the writings of the principal critics we wish to discuss, Michael Fried and Svetlana Alpers,[32] their position has recently been extended to the cinema by Ann Hollander. Before discussing how theatrical pictorialism helps to explain the ways in which theatre was appropriated as a model by filmmakers, it seems important to clarify what a theatrical pictorialism is in relation to these arguments. Although these authors are by no means unanimous in their formulations of the question, a key place in the arguments is taken by the issue of address — the degree to which a painting acknowledges the spectator. This distinction, expounded by Fried in relation to painting, is central to an understanding of the conception of pictorialism we wish to propose in relation to cinema.

Hollander's book is a little like Vardac's, insofar as she wants to claim that a series of characteristics of post-Renaissance painting are like the cinema, anticipate moving pictures. However, it is only some schools of painting that exhibit these characteristics, precisely those that are anti-theatrical. She posits a connection between such paintings and cinema in the claim that "films are essentially dramatic and not theatrical."[33] On the face of it, such an opposition seems paradoxical, but it has a considerable history, documented by Jonas Barish in his survey of the seemingly universal suspicion of the theatre, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*.[34] Often invoked by proponents of the text, in particular those who would rather read plays than see them staged, it is also appealed to by promoters of theatrical reform. Hollander's use of it can be traced to such a reformism, that of Denis Diderot, though her more immediate source is Michael Fried's study of Diderot's place in eighteenth-century French art criticism, *Absorption and Theatricality*.

Fried's book is concerned with two related phenomena: first, the beginnings of a new sense of the picture or "*tableau*" in France in the early eighteenth century (anticipated to a degree, as he notes, by Shaftesbury in England); and an emphasis in art criticism and in painting itself on "absorption." "*Tableau*" ceased to designate the portability of paintings on wood or canvas as opposed to murals and came to indicate a relationship between the viewer and the painting, the way the viewer was captivated by the self-contained unity of what he saw on the canvas (hence the term quickly came to be used metaphorically to denote particular kinds of viewing experience independently of whether what was seen was in fact a painted flat surface). "Absorption" denoted both a purely contemplative relation between the viewer and the painting, and the nature of the kinds of painting that allowed such disinterested contemplation — in particular, paintings such as those of Chardin showing children absorbed in play, oblivious to any spectators in the painted world, and *a fortiori* to the viewer of the painting. Absorptive paintings of this type are opposed to those that solicit attention, where the subjects are on display, either apparently engaging the viewers (addressing them by look or gesture), or revealing the self-consciousness that suggests an awareness of the regard of an unacknowledged viewer. This second kind of painting is, in this discourse (and clearly in Fried's own assessment), inferior, and another way to describe it is, of course, to say that it is "theatrical."

Diderot was a strong proponent of this anti-theatrical program in his writings on the visual arts, but he also extended it to the theatre itself. In discussing his own plays, and especially *Le Fils naturel*, seen as models for a reformed theatre, he appealed to the analogy with the picture to free the stage from those quintessentially theatrical moments known as *coups de théâtre* where a sudden change in the dramatic situation achieves a maximal effect on the audience: "An unforeseen incident that turns into action and suddenly changes the positions of the characters is a *coup de théâtre*. An arrangement of those characters on the stage, so natural and so true that, if faithfully rendered by a painter, it would please me on the canvas, is a picture."[35] These prescriptions are made in relation to the play Diderot pretended he had witnessed secretly, unbeknownst to most of the actors, who were themselves the characters of the play, repeating the actions as a

family ritual — as the father is made to say to his son in proposing this ritual: "It is not a matter of setting up a stage here, but of preserving the memory of an event that concerns us, and performing it as it occurred."[36] But Diderot managed to be there, not addressed, but witnessing the action. This idea of a work witnessed by but not addressed to its spectator is one definition of the absorptive picture. In contrast, the *coup de théâtre* is defined by both an acknowledgment of the spectator's presence — in the organization of plot to produce striking effects for an audience — and a strong emphasis on narrative action.

Thus, Diderot's drama both does and does not partake of the theatre. The dialogue form of his commentaries on his play, the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*, precisely allows him to advance (via his character Dorval) a kind of drama that at the same time he (as himself) can admit to be theatrically impossible. It sometimes almost seems that his notion of the tableau derives not just from the painting but also from the table, as in Quesnay's *Tableau économique*, which sets up the elements of a social situation side by side upon the page, and formulates their interaction as a continuing process, not a sequence of cause and effect with a beginning, a middle and an end, i.e., not as an action in the Aristotelian sense.[37]

Fried does not go so far as Diderot here in advocating the elimination of action. He notes that the mid-eighteenth-century shift in taste usually thought of as a "neo-classical" reaction against the rococo insisted on the supremacy of history painting, and hence precisely the representation of significant action, among the genres. He links this to the absorptive program by arguing that this renewed interest involved a greater emphasis on a momentary representation, with the characters' involvement in the sequence of events implied in that single moment guaranteeing their absorption, and hence the absence of theatricality. Svetlana Alpers, however, in a paper cited approvingly by Fried, and at greater length in her book *The Art of Describing*, links theatricality to a broader tradition that, from the Renaissance on, privileged the history painting, and insisted on the representation of significant action as the true task of painting: "In referring to the notion of art in the Italian Renaissance, I have in mind the Albertian definition of the picture: a framed surface or pane situated at a certain distance from a viewer who looks through it at a second or substitute world. In the Renaissance this world was a stage on which human figures performed significant actions based on the texts of the poets."[38] The reference to the stage here derives not from Alberti so much as from the claim, most recently reiterated by Ernst Gombrich on a number of occasions, that the renewed interest in the representation of space in the Renaissance was connected with the rise of religious drama.[39] Alpers counterposes to this narrative conception of the picture one she calls descriptive characteristic of Dutch genre painting, but also found in Northern landscapes and in non-Dutch painters such as Caravaggio and Velasquez, where the visual appearance of the world as such is at stake. Insofar as seeing is central to such paintings, they exert an immediate fascination on the viewer. This fascination is one of the properties Fried attributes to absorptive paintings, and Alpers aligns her opposition with his. Thus, in citing Roger de Piles's preference for Rembrandt over Raphael because a friend who had walked past Raphael's Vatican frescoes without noticing them was captivated by a Rembrandt self-portrait, she suggests that his attribution of this superiority to Rembrandt's use of color really stands in for the absorption Fried counterposes to theatricality.[40]

Despite Alpers, and despite Diderot, the term *tableau* in the eighteenth century usually carries strong implications that pictures should represent actions. Thus de Caylus, in a discussion of literature appealing to painterly models, wrote of Camoëns, "however, his poem presents images rather than pictures [*tableaux*], that is, descriptions rather than interesting actions," with a note that "a picture, to speak precisely, is the representation of the moment of an action."[41] Caylus is concerned with the problem that received its most famous formulation later in the century in Lessing's *Laocoön*, how different arts could represent different subjects, and, in particular, how static visual arts like painting and sculpture, as opposed to verbal arts such as epic, could represent events unfolding in time. The answer was found in the selection of what Lessing called "the most fruitful moment"[42] to depict, a moment of harmonious repose that nevertheless revealed the traces of the causal process that brought it about and carried the implications of the consequences that were to follow. In eminently Aristotelian fashion, painting was rescued from the charge of being mere *opsis* insofar as it was able, like drama, to imitate action, understood as a causal process with a beginning, middle and end.

This problem might seem irrelevant to drama (conceived of as drama staged rather than in a book), since drama can represent action in time directly, but a shift was under way in the conception of drama at this time from a rhetorical one focused on the speeches of the actors to a spectacular one emphasizing what could be seen on the stage.[43] The new conception of the picture was rapidly adapted to this new conception of drama. By the middle of the eighteenth century, and markedly in the writings of Voltaire, the notion that a play and the actors' performances in it could be metaphorically described as a series of "pictures" was well established. For Voltaire, the presentation of such "pictures" on stage was closely tied to the notions of action and theatrical effect — precisely the *coups de théâtre* deplored by Diderot: "Plays used to have to be made up of long speeches: they were beautiful conversations rather than an action.[. . .] This form, which excluded any theatrical action, also excluded those grand expressions of the passions, those striking pictures [*tableaux*] of human misfortunes, those

terrible and piercing characteristics that tear out the heart; the latter was touched, where it should have been lacerated."[44]

However, the application of an Aristotelian conception of painting as imitative of action to drama paradoxically produced an anti-Aristotelian tendency in drama. Action as movement was arrested into action as simultaneously rendered causal sequence. The temporal foreshortening this demanded is well illustrated by an example of Edward Mayhew's cited by Meisel, the cuts that became customary at Othello's second entrance in Act II, scene 3 of Shakespeare's play in the late eighteenth century and persisted as stage tradition throughout the nineteenth (the Boito-Verdi opera has the same compression). The initial exchange between Othello and Montano and part of Iago's admonishing speech were cut, so that

> Othello appears, and standing with his sword drawn immediately under the archway, brings all to a climax by shouting at the top of his voice, "Hold for your lives!" at which instant Montano receives his hurt and staggers into one corner. Cassio, conscience stricken by the sound of his General's voice, occupies the other. The rest of the performers put themselves into attitudes — the stage is grouped — and a picture formed, of which the Moor is the centre figure. After this there is a pause; when Othello, having looked around him, walks forward, and the half exclamation of *Why, how now, ho! whence ariseth this?* becomes an inquiry.[45]

While such pictorialism guaranteed the intelligibility and significance of the action, it threatened the overall causal unity of the drama as the causal connections were, so to speak, retracted into the series of pictures. Commentators often condemned the kind of drama that resulted in Aristotelian fashion as episodic. More commonly, it was thought of as "situational." This situational dramaturgy is the subject of the next chapter of this book. What needs to be emphasized here is that the pictures to which this dramaturgy appealed were not of Fried's absorptive type, and that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theatre did not in general attempt to follow Diderot in trying to place on the stage a world that "is no more concerned with the spectator than if he did not exist."[46] Indeed, insofar as commentators could grasp this notion, they found it untheatrical, indeed, unaesthetic.

Thus, in an essay published in 1800 that praises the pictorial (*malerisch*) character of French tragic acting (with reservations, which will be discussed in Part 3 below), Wilhelm von Humboldt condemns Diderot's notion of a "peep-show" theatre:

> Diderot claims to have witnessed his *Natural Son* acted by its own protagonists as the repetition of a real occurrence. He clearly implied that this was to see genuine nature and truth, so that both poet and actor had much to learn from it. It may be an instructive lesson to repeat an interesting scene from life as it were theatrically, but how something that was not intended for a spectator could be any kind of a work of art I cannot conceive, nor what Diderot, sitting concealed in a corner, could have learnt from it as an artist; what he saw was certainly neither nature nor art, and I know not what else it might have been besides.[47]

If Humboldt found Diderot hard to understand, only a few years later his central arguments seem to have been forgotten. In 1824, a commentator, far from contrasting *tableau* and *coup de théâtre*, entirely identifies them, defining the former as "the marked wordless scene, general pantomime, *coup de théâtre*, obligatory at the end of each act of a melodrama." The commentary was intended to be malicious, but could be cited quite seriously in Arthur Pougin's *Dictionnaire historique et pittoresque du théâtre* in 1885.[48] The term "picture" was used in a variety of specialized ways in the nineteenth-century theatre, many of which we will be discussing in this book, but all of them appeal to the "anti-absorptive" sense that emerged in the eighteenth century.

However, something very close to the absorptive picture has often been taken to be characteristic of the cinema. Christian Metz has argued that the theatre is exhibitionist — the actors on the stage know they are being watched by the audience, and the audience know that the actors know. In the cinema, on the contrary, the actor is absent; only his image is present, and the spectator is correspondingly in the position of a voyeur:

> It is enough, it is even essential [...] that the actor should behave as though he were not seen (and therefore as though he did not see his voyeur), that he should go about his ordinary business and pursue his existence as foreseen by the fiction of the film, that he should carry on with his antics in a closed room, taking the utmost care not to notice that a glass rectangle has been set into one of the walls, and that he lives in a kind of aquarium, one which is simply a little less generous with its "apertures" than real aquariums (this withholding of things being itself part of the scopic mechanism).[49]

This is, of course, Diderot's notion of the spectator in his ideal theatre. Metz notes that theatre and cinema share "the distance instituted by the look — which transforms the object into a *picture* (a '*tableau vivant*')," but insists that the presence of the actors implies their consent and hence an acknowledgment of the spectator that the cinema lacks.[50]

Metz's argument is concerned with the technology of the cinema, but he notes that these effects are those of that technology in the institutions of the fiction cinema with which we are currently familiar. Tom Gunning gives this a more historical basis, and explicitly links it to Fried's terms, when he contrasts the early cinema with that exemplified by the films D.W. Griffith directed for the Biograph Company in the 1910s by asserting that in the former "theatrical display dominates over narrative absorption,"[51] whereas the latter creates a diegetic world and "like ink into a blotter, we become absorbed into this diegetic world through our act of voyeurism."[52]

We might note here that narrative, which was played down by Fried as a characteristic of the absorptive picture, and counterposed to it by Alpers,

appears for Gunning as aligned with it. The notion of the picture that dominated nineteenth-century pictorial theatre was in no way anti-narrative, and in emphasizing the importance of this notion to the cinema of the 1910s, we implicitly reject historical distinctions based on the presence and absence, or dominance and subordination, of narrative. However, we would note a more profound opposition between pictorial in our sense and that basically shared by Fried, Metz, and Gunning, in the link between their various senses of the absorptive picture and the shot-based approach to cinema described at the beginning of this introduction.

Accounts such as those of Metz and Gunning are not traditional editing-based histories of cinema, of course. Rather than considering the relations between shots along the length of the film, they concentrate on the relation between the spectator and the world depicted in the film, analyzed into that between spectator and film and that between camera and filmed event. This does, however, tie them to the shot and relations between shots, insofar as the shot is, precisely, the unit of film defined by a relation between the camera and a recorded event.

However, the dynamics of address and spectatorial response appear differently if the scene, rather than the shot, is taken to be the basic unit. The organization of components of *mise-en-scène* in ways designed to underscore particular dramatic effects, along the lines of Diderot's *coup de théâtre*, becomes evident once one attempts to deal with changes within the shot, and with units larger than the shot conceived to have a dramatic unity equivalent to that of the theatrical scene. At its broadest, a picture designated everything that became visible when the curtain rose or the lights went up after a change of décor. More locally, a scene could be punctuated by what are often called "tableaux" even in English, moments when the actors formed (and held for a longer or shorter time) a grouping, each adopting a posture or making a gesture suited to the dramatic situation. Such pictures underlined the significance of the situation, and also, by interrupting the flow of the action, modulated the rhythm of the performance as a whole. Finally, on the most local level, each actor was enjoined to consider his or her part as a sequence of pictures, each posture or gesture being studied as an attitude of its own. These three levels are considered in this book in Parts 4, 2 and 3, on staging, the tableau, and acting, respectively.

Crucial here is the ability of the picture to articulate and thus make intelligible the relatively large space beyond the proscenium "window," and the relatively long temporal unit constituted by a theatrical scene. Pictorial effects convey to the audience which of the many objects and people visible to them are significant for the development of the action, while changes in the stage picture overall, and in the attitudes of the actors, indicate new centers of attention and changes in the situation. Shot-based accounts of the cinema assign these functions largely to framings that isolate the significant element — hence the importance in such accounts of the emergence of the close-up — and to the shot changes that shift the attention from component to component of a scene. The problem with this approach is that editing developed by no means evenly. In particular, cutting rates remained much slower in European films until the 1920s. Barry Salt presents histograms comparing the average shot lengths (ASLs) of European and American films: "There are no American films in the sample with ASLs longer than 10 seconds in the 1918–1923 period, and hence the mean value of the Average Shot Length for this period is 6.5 seconds, whereas for the previous six years 1912–1917, the mean value of the ASL for American features was 9.6 seconds. On the other hand, for European features, the 1912–1917 mean value of the ASL was 15 seconds, which only decreased to 8.6 seconds for the next 6 year period."[53] Nevertheless, the emergence of the longer film, which presented new problems of plot complexity and the articulation of much longer spans of time, was initiated in Europe, despite the fact that many early European features have what is sometimes described as "primitive" or "backward" editing.

To take a perhaps extreme example, the Italian film *Ma l'amor mio non muore!* (But my love does not die!)[54] of 1913 has a long scene — really, an act — representing a dinner party at the home of Colonel Holbein in the Grand Duchy of Wallenstein, where the adventurer Moïse Sthar, invited because he is supposedly courting the Colonel's daughter Elsa, steals the secret plans to the Duchy's defenses. The scene is restricted entirely to a single setting, the Holbeins' salon, photographed along its diagonal so that a dining room and a study are visible through large wall-openings rear left and right, respectively. The scene lasts 13 minutes 5 seconds (at 16 frames per second) in current prints, which probably lack many of the intertitles there would have been in the original, and there are only four changes in camera setup in the scene: closer shots with the camera more or less at the same angle showing the study, first when Holbein and a fellow officer examine the plans, then when Sthar steals them, and the area around the piano in the salon when Sthar, supposedly listening to Elsa's playing, watches the officers off right in the study. The only other changes are entrances and exits and regroupings of characters in different parts of the set. Editing is used here to help establish the crucial event for the plot — the detection and theft of the plans — but this effect seems like a stronger version of articulations achieved elsewhere in the scene by pictorial changes.

The overall slowness of editing and the tendency to use depth in many European films of this period once led one of us to propose that complex staging was the European alternative to the American development of editing,[55] but here we would like to suggest rather that pictorialism was part of both European and American filmmaking traditions, and that its relation to

changes in editing is complex. Sometimes film editing came to interfere with the methods of stage pictorialism; this is particularly true of the way the timing of changing attitudes by actors was disrupted by rapid shot change. At others, editing could be adopted as a new kind of pictorialism, as in the example from *Ma l'amor mio non muore!* or in the use of flurries of shots from extreme angles to underline spectacular moments in the 1914 World version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, discussed in Part 2, below.

As this last remark indicates, our conception of "pictorialism" goes well beyond the use of frame compositions that a painter or an art historian would recognize as typical of painting in any period. Although the model for the idea of a picture in theatre and cinema derives from history painting, and paintings have been reproduced as tableaux vivants on the stage, both as an autonomous genre, and as part of plays (e.g., Greuze's "L'Accordée de village" in *Les Noces d'Arlequin* in Paris in 1761, and David Wilkie's "Distraining for Rent" in *The Rent Day* in London in 1832), and in films (e.g., *Hell Bent*, Universal 1918, which begins with actors holding poses reproducing Frederick Remington's "The Misdeal"), most stage pictures were directly invented for the production in which they occurred, and even when a freezing of the action was involved, this was not long enough to allow the kind of teasing out of the narrative role of all the details typical of painting, especially nineteenth-century narrative painting. Pictures in theatre and cinema were not autonomous narratives; they were part of the narrative structure of the play as a whole, and a way of articulating the relation of the play's story in time. We have referred to this interplay between temporal unfolding and punctual picture as a "situational" approach to narrative. It is to the notion of the dramatic "situation" that we turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2 Situations

Within the nineteenth-century traditions of staging and painting with which we are concerned, pictorial effects were understood to underscore narratively significant elements. Conversely, the interest in creating pictorial effects had ramifications for narrative form. Indeed one can find examples, such as the 1839 Newgate novel *Jack Sheppard*, discussed by Martin Meisel, in which the pictures became so important that George Cruikshank the illustrator could claim creative priority over the writer William Ainsworth.[56] More generally, we would like to consider how the models of narrative employed by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics and practitioners opened the way to an integration of pictorial effects.

It should be noted that this way of formulating questions about pictorial effect runs counter to present-day conceptions, which tend to oppose narrative and spectacle or at least to see them as distinct registers of the text. For example, Tom Gunning's distinction between the cinema of attractions and a later cinema of narrative integration opposes two modes of address, as already noted. The first is a mode that directly solicits the spectator's engagement with a visual display, which he calls "theatrical," although it is exemplified by the realistic illusion of motion offered in the first *actualités* as well as the magical illusion offered by the trick film.[57] In the later narrative fiction film another mode of address predominates, one that subordinates theatrical display in the interests of narrative absorption, and makes overt visual display take second place to the linear chain of cause and effect motivated by psychologically coherent and compelling characters. Gunning conceives of cinema after the early period as a dialectic between these two modes of address. Moments of display — a slapstick gag or a bit of spectacular staging such as the chariot race in *Ben-Hur* (1926) — are embedded within a narrative like plums in a pudding, remaining discrete entities due to their distinctive way of engaging the spectator's attention.

The term "cinema of attractions" seems to us compelling in relation to film before 1907, particularly insofar as it captures the commonality of the actualities of the Lumières and the trick films of Méliès. But to counterpose it to narrative does not take account of the way that the idea of the stage picture functioned within the nineteenth-century theatrical tradition, which we will argue conceived of narrative as a series of pictorially representable moments, nor with the way this tradition was taken up and transformed in the feature film of the 1910s.

Kristin Thompson has proposed another way of understanding the development of various uses of *mise-en-scène* as well as cinematic devices in the films of the 1910s.[58] She argues that prior to about 1912–13, stylistic devices were introduced in order to ensure narrative clarity, for example the cut-in to reveal a vital detail of a scene, or eye-line matches to specify the direction of a character's glance. By the early 1910s, filmmakers had mastered devices for telling stories clearly, and began to experiment with the use of devices for their expressive qualities as opposed to what was strictly necessary for the comprehension of a story. For example, she argues that in two films of 1913, Paul von Woringen's *Die Landstrasse* (The Highroad) and Victor Sjöström's *Ingeborg Holm*, filmmakers withhold explicit depictions of emotion for expressive purposes. In *Die Landstrasse*, an escaped convict commits a murder, but a passing tramp is arrested and falsely convicted. As the trial scene ends and the courtroom empties, the convict speaks with the defendant's lawyer, his back remaining to camera. Similarly, the painful separation of the eponymous Ingeborg Holm from her young son is staged in a single take without cut-ins and with the actress's back to the camera for much of the scene. The boy is having trouble tearing himself away from her, and Ingeborg ducks inside a doorway when he is not looking to make him think she has gone, waits until he has exited, and then emerges from the doorway and faints. The withholding of a central character's facial expression is not essential for the conveyance of narrative information, indeed it might be thought to interfere with clear exposition, but Thompson argues that this kind of staging functions expressively, to create suspense in the first case, and, in the second, to increase the sense of Ingeborg's anguish.

We agree with Thompson that there are decisive changes in film style and structure around the years 1912–13. But her explanation of this periodization assumes much too rigid a distinction between the textual elements that convey information about narrative action and those elements that do something more or other than simply describe what happens. While the pair narrative clarity/expressivity may not be the precise equivalent of denotation/connotation

as used by Roland Barthes, his argument about the latter applies to the former as well, namely, denotation or the straightforward conveyance of information, does not operate apart from, or prior to, connotation or expressivity.[59] One understands the denoted action of a scene, Ingeborg Holm ducking inside a doorway for example, through and because of its connotations, our typologies of maternal love and grief. And, in denoting certain events, even the earliest film narratives mobilize connotations in this way — indeed, given the early weakness of devices to convey spatio-temporal information, they had to rely even more on connotations to tell their stories. For example, *The Kleptomaniac* (Porter for Edison, 1905) has two separate lines of action, one centered on a rich woman, the other on a poor one, both of whom are arrested for shoplifting. But the use of a simple scene-by-scene construction with each story told separately means that there is not, until the final two scenes, any clear account of the spatio-temporal relations between these stories. Nevertheless, the film is perfectly clear, because the parallelism can be correlated with a familiar moral schema, which is confirmed by the final emblematic shot of a statue of justice, its blindfold awry and its scales unbalanced by money. The clear connotation sustains an unclear denotation, rather than the connotative structure being added to a clear denotation.

Moreover, it is not simply that new stylistic options for telling stories evolved in the period 1912–13. There was a change in the kinds of stories that could be told. Developments in staging and acting style as well as other aspects of film technique constitute part of the development of longer, more complex plots that was attendant upon the transition to features. Thus, it is necessary to examine the ways in which filmmakers handled stories in this period if one is to understand new uses of *mise-en-scène*. It is in this context that the techniques of play construction developed in the nineteenth-century theatre become particularly important for film.

For nineteenth-century writers on the theatre in England and America, the Crummles troupe of actors in Charles Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* became a byword for a particular kind of dramaturgy:

> The plot was most interesting. It belonged to no particular age, people, or country, and was perhaps the more delightful on that account, as nobody's previous information could afford the remotest glimmering of what would ever come of it. An outlaw had been very successful in doing something somewhere, and came home in triumph, to the sound of shouts and fiddles, to greet his wife — a lady of masculine mind, who talked a good deal about her father's bones, which it seemed were unburied, though whether from a peculiar taste on the part of the old gentleman himself, or the reprehensible neglect of his relations, did not appear. This outlaw's wife was somehow or other mixed up with a patriarch, living in a castle a long way off, and this patriarch was the father of several of the characters, but he didn't exactly know which, and was uncertain whether he had brought up the right ones in his castle, or the wrong ones, but rather inclined to the latter opinion, and being uneasy, relieved his mind with a banquet, during which solemnity somebody in a cloak said "Beware!" which somebody was known by nobody (except the audience) to be the outlaw himself, who had come there for reasons unexplained, but possibly with an eye to the spoons. [. . .] At last it came out that the patriarch was the man who had treated the bones of the outlaw's father-in-law with so much disrespect, for which cause and reason the outlaw's wife repaired to his castle to kill him, and so got into a dark room, where, after a great deal of groping in the dark, everybody got hold of everybody else, and took them for somebody besides, which occasioned a vast quantity of confusion, with some pistolling, loss of life, and torchlight; after which the patriarch came forward, and observing, with a knowing look, that he knew all about his children now, and would tell them when they got inside, said that there could not be a more appropriate occasion for marrying the young people, with the full consent of the indefatigable page, who (being the only other person surviving) pointed with his cap into the clouds, and his right hand to the ground; thereby invoking a blessing and giving the cue for the curtain to come down, which it did, amidst general applause.[60]

Considered with respect to the canons of classical narrative, the stage melodrama so described appears deficient or risible due to an overabundance of "action," that is, an overly complex plot in which an accumulation of reversals and recognitions strains the limits of credibility, even comprehension. In the play put on by the Crummles troupe this complexity is partly the result of multiple lines of action whose interconnections only gradually become apparent. Thus, the connection between the outlaw's wife and the patriarch — his failure to bury her father's bones — is not immediately revealed, nor is the nature of the outlaw's own crimes. The plot summarized in *Nicholas Nickleby* is also complicated by a large number of misrecognitions — the misplaced children of the patriarch, the patriarch's own occulted identity as persecutor of the dead father, the outlaw in disguise at the banquet, and the final darkness in which "everybody got hold of everybody else and took them for somebody besides." Although this is not emphasized in Dickens's parody, the melodramatic plot has also been characterized by frequent and startling reversals. The nineteenth-century drama critic William Archer makes this point in the context of an essay on Victor Hugo's plays. "In which of these plays, again, are there any scenes of magniloquence and magnificence comparable with the third and fourth acts of 'Hernani'? In which is the action so crisp, so rapid, so irresistible? It passes from suspense to surprise, from surprise to suspense, without an instant's pause. The tables are always being turned upon some one; and is not that the central secret of melodrama?"[61] To take a less contentious example than Hugo, in the conclusion to Pixerécourt's *Le Fanal de Messine* (1812), the villain Aymar arranges the wreck of the boat of the heroine, Phrosine. As she clings to a rock, he gives the signal for one of his soldiers to push her into the sea. The hero, Mélidore, betrays himself by his cries; he is captured, disarmed and tied to a column. But then, Phrosine reappears to beg for his life, having been rescued by Mélidore's servant, Fidelio. The two

lovers are about to be killed when the sailors of the fleet arrive, having been alerted by Fidelio, and effect their rescue.[62] Fidelio thus engineers two reversals offstage in the course of but three scenes.

The kind of plot frequently stigmatized as "melodramatic," then, is not simply one involving violence or spectacular incidents, but one with a characteristic structure, with the multiple recognitions and abrupt reversals that have been discussed (and frequently deplored) by dramatists and drama critics since the nineteenth century. This conception of the melodramatic plot survives well into the twentieth century, as in a 1919 photoplay-writing manual: "Melodrama is of a less exacting quality of plot than the true drama. In its best aspects it is no less plausible than the drama, yet in movement and in vigor of action it strikes a much swifter pace."[63]

Implicit in this usage is a negative definition of the melodramatic plot. That is, it is understood as a failure to motivate a complex series of reversals and recognitions properly, hence, as a grotesque or inept variant of the classical model of tragic narrative. However, the melodramatic plot has also been conceived in terms that do not call so directly on the categories of Aristotle's *Poetics*. A model of plot as a series of discrete moments called "situations" was quite prevalent in nineteenth-century dramaturgy and it survives, although in a modified form, until well into the twentieth. In present-day usage, "situation" usually refers to a narrative premise, as in this *New York Times* review of *Love Potion No. 9*: "The situation is this: Paul (Tate Donovan), a shy biochemist, and Diane (Sandra Bullock), an animal psychologist who is also shy, find themselves in possession of a love potion that works on chimpanzees."[64] The designation "situation comedy" also employs the term in this sense. Although there are earlier examples of this usage, in the nineteenth century the term was usually used to refer to parts of a story rather than the premise of the narrative as a whole. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "a particular conjunction of circumstances (esp. one of a striking or exciting nature) under which the characters are presented in the course of a novel or play," citing the earliest usage in 1779 in Sheridan's *The Critic*, an example worth quoting at length. The playwright Puff demonstrates a scene from his latest work to the critic Sneer, in which two girls, rivals for the affections of Don Whiskerandos, both confront him at dagger point. Their respective uncles enter the scene:

> PUFF. Now, gentlemen, this scene goes entirely for what we call SITUATION and STAGE EFFECT, by which the greatest applause may be obtained, without the assistance of language, sentiment or character: pray mark! . . .
> *(The two Uncles at the instant with their two swords drawn, catch their two nieces' arms, and turn the points of their swords to* WHISKERANDOS, *who immediately draws two daggers, and holds them to the two nieces' bosoms.)*
> PUFF. There's situation for you! — there's an heroic group! — You see the ladies can't stab Whiskerandos — he durst not strike them for fear of their uncles — the uncles durst not kill him, because of their nieces — I have them all at a dead lock! — for every one of them is afraid to let go first.
> SNEER. Why, then they must stand there for ever.
> PUFF. So they would, if I hadn't a very fine contrivance for't — Now mind —
> *(Enter* BEEFEATER *with his Halberd.)*
> BEEFEATER. In the Queen's name I charge you all to drop
> Your swords and daggers!
> *(They drop their swords and daggers.)*
> SNEER. That is a contrivance indeed.
> PUFF. Aye — in the Queen's name.[65]

The situation in Puff's play takes the form of a tableau, and as Martin Meisel has persuasively demonstrated, situations were frequently marked by such pictorial effects, to the extent that, at least during the early nineteenth century, situation and effect were used interchangeably to refer to stage pictures.[66] This point is underscored by a modern source: *An International Dictionary of Theatre Language* (1985) defines situation not only as "the state of events in a play" but also, in British usage, "the position of the performers on the stage at any particular moment."[67] But apparently this equation of situation and picture was not limited to Britain, as the *Grand Larousse de la langue française* gives the following definition of "*personnage en situation*": "characters placed in the scene in a manner to produce an effect on the spectators."[68] And the Littré *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1875) illustrates its definition of the term with a citation of Louis de Cahusac: "Every truly theatrical situation is nothing but a living picture (*tableau vivant*)."[69]

In fact, for eighteenth-century commentators, with the characteristic exception of Diderot, the terms "*tableau*" or "picture" and "*coup de théâtre*" (the English equivalent of which seems to have been Puff's "stage effect") form an associated group with the term "situation." Each writer distinguishes between these terms, but uses them in such a way that what is a situation for one will be a picture for another, and so on. Voltaire sees the defining characteristic of a stage picture as the fact that it is an effective part of the drama that is conveyed visually, not by words.[70] Similarly, François Riccoboni, discussing "*le jeu pantomime*," notes that because it cannot make recourse to language, pantomime is not effectual for the purposes of exposition, or detailing a character's thoughts; it can only show situations and thus express sentiments.[71] On the other hand, Joseph de la Porte and Sébastien-Roch-Nicholas Chamfort, in their *Dictionnaire dramatique* of 1776, define "*tableau*" as a descriptive speech — the kind of speech needed especially for "*récits*," narrations by characters of crucial events which, for reasons of practicability or decorum, take place off stage: "*Tableaux* are particularly necessary in *récits*: as the action described cannot take place before the spectator's eyes, it must at least be painted to

his mind with images so striking that they make the same impression on him as if he saw them with his bodily eyes."[72] For them, as for Voltaire and Riccoboni, it is "situation" that characterizes significant moments of drama that are not conveyed in characters' speeches, because the character does not know that there is a situation, or else because the situation so tears the character that he or she is left speechless or speech is superfluous to the spectator's appreciation of the position. Situations are distinguished from "*coups de théâtre*" because the latter are transitory surprises and relatively superficial (in anachronistic language, a matter of *syuzhet* rather than of *fabula*), whereas situations are lasting and "much more closely bound up with the action."[73] Puff does not use "picture"— he refers to what would certainly be a stage picture to a nineteenth-century dramatist by the sculptural metaphor "an heroic group"— but he vaunts the same moment of the play as "what we call SITUATION and STAGE EFFECT, by which the greatest applause may be obtained, without the assistance of language." Thus, when one of these terms appears explicitly in an eighteenth or nineteenth-century source, one can generally assume that the others are implicit in the context.

Our concern here is to demonstrate the extent to which playwriting technique, and later script construction for films, made use of a conception of plot as a series of situations. In this context, "situation" should not be assimilated to either narrative or spectacle as these concepts are currently invoked. Rather, the term crosses this divide. Situations were conceived of as static states of affairs, an atemporality that made them particularly amenable to pictorial representation. The way they mobilize the visual register can perhaps best be understood in comparison with the "fruitful moments" defined by Lessing with respect to the visual arts and discussed in Chapter 1 above, moments that should be selected for representation because they anticipate or sum up a series of cause and effect relationships. Insofar as film and theatre, unlike painting, depend upon a linear, temporal unfolding, the production of a stage picture that encapsulates a situation can require an interruption of narrative flow. Nonetheless, the interruption only makes sense as part of what it interrupts. There may be a cessation of temporal continuity in the stage picture, but the system of cause and effect, and the diegetic world this system entails, does not "fade," indeed, it is often made much more palpable.

It should be noted that despite its evident usefulness to playwrights and screenwriters, the situational model of plot construction has frequently been derided by critics, perhaps because it is potentially in conflict with the Aristotelian model, as will be discussed below. The example of *The Critic* suggests that the word was already current as part of a specialized technical vocabulary (parodied by Sheridan). This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by reviews of the play, referring to "the trick of Stage Situation" or satire directed against "stage-trick, situation and pantomime."[74] Littré cites another use of the term, from Voltaire, which is also technical: "It is almost always situation (*la situation*) that makes for success in the theatre."[75] This usage can also be found in later English playwriting manuals. For example *How to Write a Good Play* (1892): "A careful study of plays that have been successful in a marked degree, will show that each period has handed down to its successor many 'situations' and incidents which, when skillfully developed by good acting, have been made acceptable"; and, in a manual of 1888: "The would-be dramatist is urged to note 'situations' which grip him; note how the playwright built up to the situation and what its 'motive' was."[76] Significantly, when the term is used by critics, it is frequently identified with hack work (indeed this is the whole thrust of Sheridan's parody). The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites two examples of this kind of usage, one explicitly referring to melodrama: "It has some striking scenes, but I think the 'situations' are produced by rather extravagant means"; and "It [a book] is wildly melodramatic, and full of 'situations' from beginning to end."[77] Even one of the writing manuals evidences a similar distrust of the concept: "The more literal phase of the Crummles system, writing up to certain 'situations,' scenes, and 'effects,' needs but the slightest allusion."[78]

The dislike of situations arises from the sense that they are stereotyped or mechanical contrivances. But it is precisely their stereotypical nature that makes them useful as an aid in plot construction. Invention becomes a matter of combining pre-existing situations, of motivating them and, as Frank Archer notes, making them acceptable to contemporary audiences if they are likely to be found "unacceptable," which may mean either "morally repugnant" or "overly familiar." Both playwriting manuals, such as Archer's and, later, photoplay-writing manuals such as Palmer's *The Photoplay Plot Encyclopedia* and Wycliff A. Hill's *Ten Million Photoplay Plots*, provide extensive lists of situations.[79] In its most scholarly versions this way of thinking about plot construction gives rise to attempts to derive a narrative lexicon — a comprehensive list of the situations of which all known plots, and all the as yet unwritten plots, are comprised. The *locus classicus* for this view is a remark of Goethe's recorded in the *Conversations with Eckermann*: "Gozzi believed that there were only thirty-six tragic situations; Schiller thought there must be more, but he was unable to find even so many as Gozzi."[80] In 1895, writing what he hoped would be an impetus to the generation of more original plots, Georges Polti took Goethe at his word (but generalized from "tragic" to "dramatic") and tried to list the thirty-six dramatic situations, basing his study upon both classical and modern European works, as well as Indian and Chinese narratives.[81] Each situation is described with relevant examples and several variants, and takes the form of a condition specified in terms of the necessary agents or what he calls

"dynamic elements." Thus, the first situation, Supplication, requires that the roles of Persecutor, Suppliant and Power in Authority be distributed among one or more characters. Étienne Souriau's *Les Deux cent milles situations dramatiques* continues in this same tradition, although he obviously calculates the number of situations in the narrative lexicon somewhat differently than does Polti.[82]

While the attempt to catalog all possible situations gives rise to some dubious categorical distinctions (as, for example, Polti's distinction between situation thirteen, enmity of kinsmen, and situation fourteen, rivalry of kinsmen),[83] much of this work is animated by a strong sense of what constitutes the structure, as opposed to the content, of a situation. Polti describes situations as the states that precede and follow a reversal:

> Aristotle has taught us to distinguish between "simple" tragedy (in which the superiority remains upon the same side until the end, and in which, consequently, there is no sudden change of fortune, no surprise) and "complex" tragedy (the tragedy of surprise, of vicissitude), wherein this superiority passes from one camp to the other. [. . .] What is any keen surprise if not the passing from a state of calm into a Dramatic Situation, or from one Situation into another, or again into a state of calm?[84]

Situations thus exist on the cusp of actions; they give rise to actions and are in turn altered by them. The photoplay-writing manuals make similar definitions of the situation as that which precedes or delays action. Wycliff A. Hill explains: "By suspense we mean the sustaining of a dramatic situation. Every climax in the story must be preceded by an element of suspense or uncertainty as to what the outcome of the situation will be, and the spectator must be 'kept guessing' what the final result of the series of dramatic situations that he is witnessing will be."[85] Palmer defines situation as "when the characters are so brought together that their contrasts and conflicts are clear and dramatic, that the central character is placed in a dilemma in which he must make a choice, or in a predicament in which a change will be suffered, or is confronted with an obstacle to overcome."[86]

Souriau gives what is perhaps the most carefully worked out definition of the situation as an unstable constellation of forces precariously held in check but nonetheless liable to break out into action:

> It is between these two [the initial situation and the denouement] — and to take us from the former to the latter — that the dramatic spring should be at work: most specifically in those moments of extreme tension when the microcosm, the group of essential characters, seem braced against each other as if held by lockjaw, constituting a kind of jam, a locking into place that would apparently bring everything to a halt, were there not precisely in the situation itself something that forces it to rebound: that obliges one or other character to act, to break the architecture in order for another one to arise later.[87]

Souriau argues that in the best plots the reasons for the modification of the situation arise logically from the forces in conflict and notes with scorn that some dramatists break up seemingly insoluble situations by an arbitrary intervention, without any preparation or internal motivation: "Thus, the heroine is arbitrarily made to fall ill, or the inconvenient husband to die, or the dangerous lover to be called away."[88] One is reminded of *The Critic*, in which Puff resolves the narrative impasse with the device of the guard who orders everyone to drop their weapons in the Queen's name.

The body of writing on the situation thus encompasses a variety of definitions of the term — as a deadlock, a temporary suspension of the action, a point of equilibrium among the forces that propel the narrative. Common to all of these is a sense that the linear progress of the narrative is arrested or blocked. Of course, most narratives employ devices for delaying the final resolution, and pose obstacles that the protagonist must overcome. But an obstacle is precisely understood in relation to the hero's goals and narrative trajectory and is therefore clearly bound to the sequential logic of the plot. To think of a story in terms of situations, as opposed to a series of obstacles, grants a certain autonomy to each discrete state of affairs. Situations can be thought of independently of the particular plots and characters that motivate them, as the lists of situations in plot encyclopedias attest. A weakening or even disregard of narrative continuity and logic is thus implicit in the concept.

The conception of plot as a series of situations would seem to invite the kind of criticism that Aristotle makes of the episodic plot, which he defines as a "plot in which the episodes do not follow each other probably or inevitably," and condemns with the comment that "Bad poets write such plays because they cannot help it, and good poets write them to please the actors."[89] Nonetheless, modern critics and practitioners have been at pains to reconcile an analysis of plot in terms of situation with the norms of narrative continuity and logic. Often the student of dramatic writing is advised, in the words of the Palmer encyclopedia, that situations are merely the "backbone" of the drama but not its "flesh and blood." Close attention to the motivation and resolution of situations is frequently recommended. In a formulation that will be echoed by many subsequent critics, Alexandre Dumas *fils* writes: "But a situation is not an idea. An idea has a beginning, a middle and an end, an exposition, a development and a conclusion. Anyone can invent a dramatic situation, but it has to be prepared, made acceptable, made possible, above all it must be resolved (*dénoué*)."[90] And, from Alfred Hennequin's *The Art of Playwriting*:

> Do not use a striking situation as a climax just because it has elements of strength. A "strong" situation is a fine thing; and, once found or imagined, it should be placed where it can be laid hold of at a moment's notice. But, as part of an actual play, it will be worse than wasted unless it is the natural outcome of all the action that has preceded. The grand climax must not be tacked on at the end of a row of incidents; it must appear to grow out

> of them as naturally and inevitably as a flower from its bud.[91]

The *Photoplay Plot Encylopedia* stresses the importance of being able to combine situations in appropriate ways:

> If a writer starts a play effectively, but then allows it to become dull and lifeless and undramatic (as many beginners do), it indicates that he has been unable to combine situations. The most practical use of a work of reference of this kind becomes apparent in such a case. Having begun a story on a plane of dramatic interest, let us say that the writer is unable to find a situation which will logically follow the first, that he is "stumped" for further plot developments. By referring to the classified situations he will find all of the possible developments from that beginning, and will be able to make an intelligent and dramatic choice.[92]

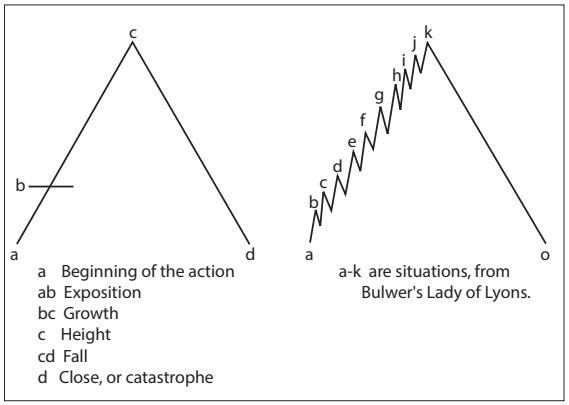
One of the clearest attempts to graft the situational model of plot onto one more classically conceived may be found in the attempts in several handbooks to graph or chart a narrative. They divide plot into a beginning, middle and end, structured around a crisis or climax that culminates at the close of the middle section. Graphically, this takes the form of a pyramid or rising curve that peaks at the climax and falls off rapidly thereafter.[93] However, both Hennequin's *Art of Playwriting* and the *Palmer Handbook of Scenario Construction* go on to subdivide the rising line or curve into a series of smaller peaks, each of which is conceived as a distinct situation (Figure 1.1).[94] Hennequin writes: "If the story grows continually in interest, the introduction of the various characters, with their conflicting aims, will lead to a series of situations and climaxes, which themselves will be arranged in a climax."[95] Although such graphs do unite the two ways of thinking about plot, it should be clear that if the individual peaks representing situations become too "strong," or "high," then they risk obliterating the shape of the rising curve representing the plot as a whole. Indeed, Hennequin notes:

> The rage for strong situations, so prevalent at the present day, has led to the construction of plays in which there are two or more grand climaxes of apparently equal importance. Indeed, in not a few of our most successful plays, the growth and fall take up but a brief portion at the beginning and end; all the remainder consisting of a series of grand climaxes following one another as rapidly as the writer can manage to bring them about. Plays thus constructed must be regarded as inartistic, though here, as everywhere, success must inspire a certain degree of respect. It is this class of plays that appeals most strongly to the uncultured. The "gallery" does not know very much about art, but it can tell a strong situation as unerringly as can the parquet. A good play, from the standpoint of the gallery, is one made up of a succession of knock-down effects; and so long as the gallery exists as a paying institution, so long will such plays be in demand.[96]

Being a practical man, Hennequin goes on to provide a series of models for the dramatist who wishes to construct multiple-climax plots, warning only against the anti-climax, in which the final situation is less powerful than those that have preceded it (Figure 1.2). The shape of these graphs indicates how the emphasis on each distinct state of affairs can ultimately break up the rising line of the plot, the emotional and logical continuity of the linear chain of cause and effect.

One of the frequent objections to popular, spectacular theatre was that it introduced powerful situations in arbitrary or mechanical ways simply to create "effects," a term that was used to refer variously to moments of emotional intensity, of suspense, and of spectacular display. For critics such as William Archer, and later Souriau, the problem was the sacrifice of narrative logic to the creation of such thrilling situations, or their resolution. For example, in the context of a discussion of the proper uses of coincidence in play construction, Archer writes:

> Madame X. has had a child, of whom she has lost sight for more than twenty years, during which she has lived abroad. She returns to France, and immediately on landing at Bordeaux she kills a man who accompanies her. The court assigns her defence to a young advocate, and this young advocate happens to be her son. We have



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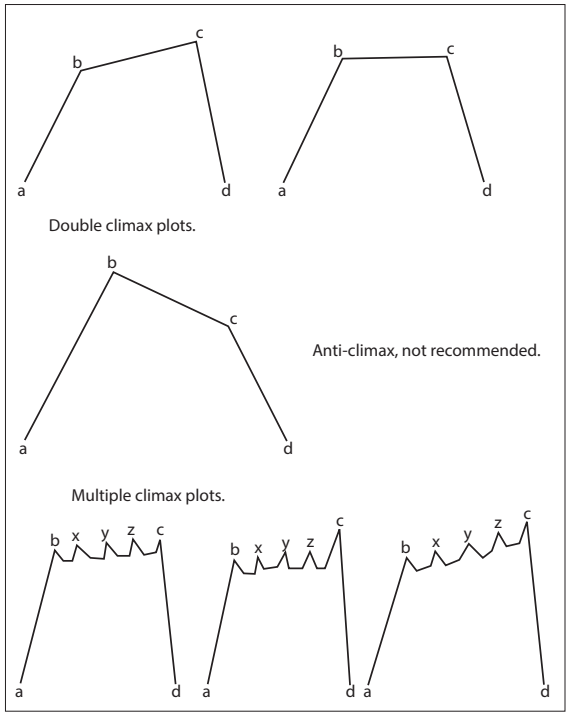

1.2

> here a piling of chance upon chance, in which the long arm of coincidence is very apparent. The coincidence would have been less startling had she returned to the place where she left her son and where she believed him to be. But no! she left him in Paris, and it is only by a series of pure chances that he happens to be in Bordeaux, where she happens to land, and happens to shoot a man. For the sake of a certain order of emotional effect, a certain order of audience is willing to accept this piling up of chances; but it relegates the play to a low and childish plane of art.[97]

And, in another context, Archer stigmatizes as melodramatic plays that allowed what he considered much too wide a latitude in the motivation of situations.

> Melodrama is illogical and sometimes irrational tragedy. It subordinates character to situation, consistency to impressiveness. It aims at startling, not at convincing, and is little concerned with causes so long as it attains effects. Developments of character are beyond its province, its personages being all ready-made, and subject at most to revolutions of feeling. Necessity and law it replaces by coincidence and fatality, exactitude by exaggeration, subtlety by emphasis.[98]

A similar attitude toward the melodramatic plot is evident in the passage in the photoplay manual already cited that defines melodrama as "of a less exacting quality of plot than the true drama." And, from a 1907 essay "The Melodrama": "To attempt to give an account of the plot would be useless. The more you examine it, the less there is. There is an abundance, an inordinate abundance, of situation; but there lies the distinction. The play is made up of a succession of exciting scenes, punctuated by comic episodes; but when you try to work out interrelations you are doomed to failure. [. . .] To feel the real spell of the play, you must slough off sophistication and let logic go, allowing yourself to be concerned exclusively in the situation of the moment."[99]

The nature of melodramatic implausibility remains difficult to specify, however, insofar as an audience's sense of what is realistic or convincing is itself historically and generically bound.[100] Thus, Archer may find melodrama implausible because he disapproves of the genre, whereas its traditional audience, spectators whose expectations were formed by the genre, might well find it more convincing. But it does seem clear that, in relation to the ideals of plausibility and verisimilitude adopted by the critics of the respectable theatre, melodrama is "less exacting"; that is, it frequently has recourse to external or arbitrary incidents as a means of creating and resolving situations. Providential recognitions, of the sort that Dickens mocks in the Crummles troupe's play from *Nicholas Nickleby*, are one such means of resolving situations. This is a device that Dickens himself employs at the end of this very novel, when the wicked patriarch Ralph Nickleby is driven to suicide by the discovery that the runaway boy Smike, whom he has hounded to death as a means of getting revenge on his nephew Nicholas, is in fact his own son.

It might be argued that the incidents that bring about a happy resolution at the end of plays are implicitly motivated by a notion of divine order or what Peter Brooks calls the moral occult.[101] But melodrama makes use of coincidence to set up situations as well as to resolve them, and these are not motivated as providential occurrences (unless one assumes a particularly malign Deity). As James Smith notes: "Each situation is more or less self-contained, and the dramatist sweeps us from one thrill to the next without bothering to explain the logical links between them. Often there are none, for when the persecution of innocence is at stake the conventions of melodrama allow plausibility and common sense to be violated with impunity. [. . .] To postpone a happy meeting, separated sisters suffer untimely fainting fits or sudden arrest, and both parents of *The Foundling of the Forest* regularly relapse into insensibility, delirium or stark madness whenever the plot threatens a premature family reunion."[102] The example of *Les Deux Orphelines* to which Smith alludes is worth a closer examination as it provides a strikingly complex instance of a situation created by the multiplication of coincidences, both fortunate and unfortunate. The orphaned Henriette refuses to marry the hero, Roger de Vaudrey, because his guardians, the Count and Countess de Linières, object to their union. In ignorance of Henriette's refusal, Madame de Linières comes in disguise to Henriette's apartment to investigate her and, pleased with the girl, reveals her true identity and asks about Henriette's past. Henriette tells the story of her adopted sister Louise, from whom she has been separated (unbeknownst to Henriette, the blind Louise has been kidnapped and is forced by her captors to beg in the streets). Henriette describes a token found on the baby Louise that Madame de Linières recognizes as identifying the illegitimate daughter taken from her years before. As they talk, singing is heard in the street below, and Henriette recognizes Louise's voice. Just as she is about to rush outside, the police knock at the door and prevent Henriette from leaving. As Louise's voice fades into the distance, the Count de Linières has Henriette arrested on a false charge to prevent her marrying his ward. The tortuousness of the description necessary to explain this single scene is indicative of the complexity of the plotting. Three lines of action — Henriette's search for Louise, Madame de Linières's recognition of her daughter, and the obstacle that the Linières pose to the marriage of Roger and Henriette — are woven together through coincidence to form a single situation.

Thus, *pace* Archer,[103] who claims that melodramas are badly plotted, the concatenation of arbitrary circumstances that create the situation just described in *Les Deux Orphelines* is quite skillfully contrived. But, in general, melodrama provides little or no motivation of the coincidences that create interesting or powerful impasses, apart from Agathon's justification, cited by Aristotle, that "it is likely that many quite unlikely things should happen."[104]

It is not only the wide latitude in the motivation

and resolution of situations that makes stage melodrama the (negative) exemplar of situational dramaturgy, but also, famously, its reliance on strong or emphatic situations accompanied by highly spectacular staging. While tableaux are the most common (and the cheapest to stage), other forms of spectacular staging could also be brought to bear, usually at moments of suspenseful impasse, such as the approaching train that threatens Snorkey tied by the villain to the railroad tracks in *Under the Gaslight* (Augustin Daly, 1867) or, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (George Aiken, 1853), the raging snow storm that initially prevents Eliza and little Harry, pursued by slavecatchers, from crossing the Ohio River to safety. The 1850s are usually given as the period when this kind of staging escalates, at least in England and America, when the final acts of melodramas come to be organized around a sensation scene, as in the burning building in Boucicault's *The Poor of New York* (1857), or the sea-cave with rising tide that threatens the life of the heroine in the penultimate act of his *The Colleen Bawn* (1860). In 1862, referring to this latter sensation scene in the opera by Julius Benedict from Boucicault's play, a music journal quotes the *London Athenaeum*'s rather huffy view of the libretto: "The tale seems to us fitter for a play with ballads or songs, than for a work which is to be entirely conducted in music. The great situation is hardly to be treated, save in the most melo-dramatic form by carpentry and gymnastic work."[105] Despite critical disapproval, however, by the last third of the century melodramas frequently included more than one sensation scene per play, giving rise to the multiple-climax structure to which Hennequin refers.[106] The Drury Lane autumn drama is the epitome of this type of theatre. For example, Michael Booth describes the Augustus Harris and Henry Pettitt spectacle *Pluck* (1882) as having "wearied critics with seven long acts and interminable waits, despite a scene with two train wrecks, a snowstorm in Piccadilly Circus, a mob breaking real glass bank windows, and a burning building."[107]

Writing in 1870, Percy Fitzgerald complained about the trend for sensation scenes: "The taste of the town now requiring great scenic *tours de force*, and the theatres competing with each other in the attraction of objects from outside, which seemed to defy reproduction on the stage, it was necessary that the writer should, like Mr. Crummles' dramatist, construct his piece in the interest of 'the pump and washing-tubs', or kindred objects. Hence the panorama of fires, underground railways, music halls, steamboat piers, dry arches and such things."[108] It should be noted that for Fitzgerald the problem is not that the spectacular sets somehow swamp or "stop" the narrative, but rather that the play has been built around situations that themselves have been chosen to exploit some capacity of *mise-en-scène*. There is some evidence to support this account of the priority accorded to *mise-en-scène* in nineteenth-century play construction. David Mayer suggests that Henry Herman, credited with the story for Wilson Barrett's *Claudian* (1883), had devised machinery intended to simulate an earthquake prior to inventing this plot, and thus was provided with the play's climactic scene, and the end of the second act.[109] Clearly, the wide latitude allowed by melodrama in the motivation of situations helped to further this approach to play construction, so that it was relatively easy to work in a fire or train wreck or horse race, scenic elements that were the stock-in-trade of theatres like Drury Lane in this period. Similarly, stories could be chosen for adaptation, or old plays for revival, because they contained situations that gave scope for new developments in staging. For example, Stephen Holland suggests that one reason for the adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that appeared at the Britannia, Hoxton, early in 1854 so soon after the publication of the novel in England lay in the development of techniques for staging the movement of ice floes on a river, and characters crushed or dragged under beneath them. According to Holland, this technique was initially developed for a melodrama at the Ambigu-Comique in Paris that opened on 20 October 1853. The play was adapted in England with similar staging as *The Thirst of Gold, or The Lost Ship and the Wild Flower of Mexico* (Ben Webster, Adelphi, 4 December 1853) and *A Struggle for Gold, or The Orphan of the Frozen Sea* (Edward Stirling, City of London Theatre, 23 January 1854 and Marylebone Theatre, 20 February 1854).[110] Percy Fitzgerald describes the staging used in the British productions as a combination of white canvas to represent moving ice, and black bombazine to represent the murky waters, and Holland's evidence suggests that traps were also used to give the illusion of the villains being "engulfed" by the ice.[111] In the 1854 Britannia production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the action of the pursuit across the ice was rewritten to show slavecatchers sinking between ice floes, an effect that does not occur in the novel, nor in the American theatrical versions, but was probably dictated by the staging borrowed from the Ambigu-Comique.[112] Thus, in this instance, possibilities for staging seem to have played a large role in determining the selection of the novel for adaptation, and the specific choices made about how to adapt the story for the stage.

We would emphasize that the kind of spectacular staging associated with melodrama in the latter half of the nineteenth century was not simply a function of violent or impressive spectacle, but of introducing such devices within a particular narrative context. This is not to deny that there were moments of pure spectacle with little narrative import; such moments occur quite frequently in the "discovery" scenes in which a curtain or flat is raised to reveal a spectacular full stage set, often at the beginning of an act.[113] Nonetheless, in their most important structural role, as climaxes and scene or act ends, stage pictures derived from situations. Most of the playwriting manuals strongly recommend ending acts on situations,[114] and these in turn were usually given in the form of a tableau. The strength of this convention is indicated by William Archer's

complaint about it in 1913 in a discussion of what he regarded as old-fashioned act-endings:

> Some modern playwrights have fled in a sort of panic from the old "picture-poster situation" to the other extreme of always dropping their curtain when the audience least expects it. This is not a practice to be commended.[. . .] I am far from pleading for the conventional tableau at the end of each act, with all the characters petrified, as it were, in penny-plain-twopence-coloured attitudes. But it is certainly desirable that the fall of the curtain should not take an audience entirely by surprise.[115]

Similarly, sensation scenes, although they are and were typically discussed solely in terms of their staging, did have a powerful narrative rationale and function, at least when a situational model of plot is taken into account. For example, the tenement fire in *The Poor of New York* produces one of the strongest situations in the play.[116] Act 4 ends with Badger fainting and thus unable to reveal to Paul Fairweather the location of the receipt that would prove that the villain Bloodgood stole a fortune from Paul's father some twenty years earlier. The fifth and final act opens with Bloodgood having bought the tenement in which the receipt is stashed, and Badger, living elsewhere and now acting on behalf of Paul and his family, eager to re-enter the building to retrieve it. The fire in the penultimate scene is set by Bloodgood to destroy the receipt which he could not find. Like the fainting of Badger at the end of Act 4, then, the fire delays the moment in which he is able definitively to weigh in against the villain on Paul's behalf. Indeed, the play holds this moment in suspense until the final wedding scene: Dan rescues Badger's body from the flames in the penultimate scene but it is not clear whether or not the receipt has been retrieved, or if Badger even lives. The sensation scene thus encompasses the climactic situation of the play, with the Fairweathers' last recourse at risk, and seemingly beyond reach due to the ferocity of the blaze. Not only is it visually the most powerful moment in the act but also the moment of the most compelling impasse.

William Archer eloquently articulates the modern reaction to this kind of structure when he recommends that in the serious drama that "depicts social phenomenon or environment" there should be no marked crisis, and "just enough story to afford a plausible excuse for raising and lowering the curtain."[117] More generally, by the turn of the century, the situational dramaturgy that Archer sought to moderate was often identified with melodrama (and less problematically with farce) and opposed to what should be done on the legitimate stage. But it would be a mistake to regard this way of thinking about the relationship between story and picture as exclusively or even primarily limited to the "low" theatrical genres. We agree with Michael Booth that in the late nineteenth century the taste for the spectacular and the picturesque cut across all social classes, and was as likely to be found at the Lyceum as the Standard.[118] Moreover, the evidence of the playwriting manuals and plot encyclopedias suggests that the notion of the situation was found useful as an aid in plot construction in many theatrical genres. Indeed, one can see why this would be the case, given that the situation was central to the way writers and most critics conceived of the dramatic climax, and the structure of scene and act ends. The concept played a crucial role not only in inventing stories designed for any medium, but more crucially, in establishing the rhythm and pacing of the theatrical plot in particular. As Hennequin notes, each act required a climax, and each climax a picture, and this became the way stories were built up for the theatre, scene by scene and act by act. This way of thinking about play structure was even enshrined in the playbills for nineteenth-century dramas, which listed the big scenes and tableaux, and in some theatre programs even the time at which they would occur.

The "politer" drama might make use of less sensational spectacular effects — Belasco's or Irving's celebrated "aesthetic" lighting as opposed to train crashes and exploding volcanoes, for example — nonetheless, the way of organizing the plot and introducing pictorial elements was not fundamentally different.[119] Thus, the much-praised fourteen-minute lighting transformation that represents the coming of dawn in *Madame Butterfly* (Belasco, 1900) fits precisely Georges Polti's definition of a situation as a state of suspense that precedes a dramatic reversal. After a three-year hiatus, and having seen her lover Pinkerton's ship sail into the distant harbor, Cho-Cho San eagerly awaits the dawn and his return; with it, we await her discovery of his betrayal. This may not be melodrama of the Drury Lane sort: the situation depends more on a sense of character psychology; it is, by the standards of the legitimate stage, "better" motivated and prepared. But, considered as a means of orchestrating a climax through a particular congruence of suspense and pictorial effect it surely bears comparison to the scene of Snorkey tied to the railroad tracks, or of Badger and Dan faced with the burning tenement.[120]

In his essay on the cinema of attractions, Tom Gunning cites a review of the 1926 film version of *Ben-Hur* that listed the following "tableaux vivants": "8:35 The Star of Bethlehem/ 8:40 Jerusalem Restored/ 8:59 Fall of the House of Hur/ 10:29 The Last Supper/ 10:50 Reunion."[121] We see this, not as a survival of the cinema of attractions within the context of the Hollywood feature film, but rather as the continuation of a theatrical tradition in which stories are divided into big scenes or situations themselves pictorially conceived, staged, and even advertised.[122] The example is perhaps too easy, given the powerful stage tradition at work in this case, and the even older iconographic tradition around representations of the Last Supper and other incidents from the Passion. But we would argue that this model of dramatic narrative was more generally operative in early narrative filmmaking, becom-

ing especially important in the 1910s during the transition to features.

What survives from the popular nineteenth-century theatre in the 1910s feature is not simply a conception of plot as a series of situations (a mode and model of plot construction which it might be argued remains operative even in Hollywood today) but more importantly, a set of staging practices linked with situational dramaturgy. In classical Hollywood cinema editing works against the construction of a scene around powerful, epitomizing pictures; rather, the scene is broken down into a series of shots that interact with one another in complex ways to create a sense of space, of the pacing of the scene and of its significance. But, as has already been noted, editing was by no means accorded this prominence in the cinema of the 1910s. Within this context pictorial effects developed along the lines of theatrical models were important because they provided ways of underscoring the dramatic action and punctuating the scene's duration. While spectacular staging of the sort discussed by Vardac and others as "proto-cinematic" is perhaps the most obvious place to look for connections of this sort between theatre and cinema, it seems appropriate to begin instead with an investigation of the tableau. As we have suggested, "situation" and "tableau" were used as equivalent terms for much of the nineteenth century; and, as a device, the tableau is the literal embodiment of the idea that situations should take the form of pictures.

Notes to Part One

1 *Film Technique and Film Acting: The Cinematic Writings of V.I. Pudovkin*, trans. Ivor Montagu, intro. Lewis Jacobs (New York: Lear Publishers, 1949), pp. xiv–xv. This edition of Pudovkin's writings combines two previous books, *Film Technique* and *Film Editing*, each of which has its own pagination. All the references in *Theatre to Cinema* are to the first of these books.

2 John Emerson and Anita Loos, *How to Write Photoplays* (New York: James A. McCann Co., 1920), 54. Film scripts have generally followed these prescriptions of Loos and Emerson ever since.

3 See David Bordwell, "The Introduction of Sound," in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985), 298–308, esp. 308.

4 Pudovkin, *Film Technique*, 23.

5 *The Struggle for the Film*, trans. Ben Brewster (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1986), 65. Richter's second book on the cinema was written in the later 1930s, but not published until the German edition appeared in 1976. Henny Porten is not currently credited with appearing in an adaptation of *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn*; see Corinna Müller, "Filmografie," in Helga Belach, *Henny Porten, der erste deutsche Filmstar, 1890–1960* (Berlin: Haude and Spener, 1986), 171–232.

6 Pudovkin, *Film Technique*, 51–2.

7 *Histoire générale du cinéma* (Paris: Denoël, 1948; repr. 1973), vol. 2: *Les Pionniers du cinéma (de Méliès à Pathé), 1897–1909*, 402.

8 *Histoire du cinéma: Art et industrie* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1967), vol 1: *1895–1914*, 408. Mitry's account is critically discussed by Tom Gunning in *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 34.

9 Anne Hollander, *Moving Pictures* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 50.

10 This point was made before 1978 by John Fell in his book *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975).

11 See Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 186–201; Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectators, and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8, no. 3/4 (Fall, 1986): 63–70, repr. in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker, eds., *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London, British Film Institute, 1990), 56–62.

12 Although Kristin Thompson is careful to discuss the relations between drama and the transition to the classical American narrative cinema in part 3 of Bordwell et al., *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, she argues there (pp. 163–73) that it became standard practice to develop film scripts from story outlines, whether deriving from plays or from narrative sources, and hence a short narrative form underlies even the most direct theatrical adaptations in the cinema. Moreover, the general account of classical cinema given by David Bordwell in part 1 of the same work draws so heavily on literary narratology as to make the literary influences more salient.

13 An important exception is Barry Salt, who has always insisted on the influence of Reinhardt's theatrical productions and the German operetta on Lubitsch's films, e.g., in "The World inside Ernst Lubitsch," in *Moving into Pictures: More on Film History, Style, and Analysis* (London: Starword, 2006), 174–8 (a paper originally presented at the conference "Silent Cinema 1916–26: Space, Frame, Narrative" held at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, in 1983), and in "From German Stage to German Screen," ibid., 179–89, first published in Paolo Cherchi Usai and Lorenzo Codelli, eds., *Prima di Caligari: Cinema tedesco 1895–1920* (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 1990), 402–22, and emphasized the adoption of theatrical prescriptions by filmmakers in America (in ch. 10 of the second edition of his *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starword, 1992), 111–13). Rick Altman, too, has deplored the neglect by film historians of the stage adaptations that usually intervene between nineteenth-century novels and twentieth-century film adaptations; see "Dickens, Griffith, and Film Theory Today," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 321–59.

14 The early synchronized sound films made with the Gaumont Chronophone, Messter Tonbild, and other processes were mostly of songs or operatic arias, and relate to variety theatre performance more than they do to straight drama, though at least one of the surviving films made for the Edison Kinetophone in 1913 was a comic playlet, *The Politician*. However, very few of these films have yet been recombined with their soundtracks (which were recorded separately on phonograph cylinders or discs, so surviving films often lack their discs and vice versa), so they do not yet constitute a source that would supply this difficulty.

15 See David Mayer, "The Victorian Stage on Film. A Description and a Selective List of Holdings in the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection," *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1988): 111–22; and Stephen Johnson, "Evaluating Early Film as a Document of Theatre History: The 1896 Footage of Joseph Jefferson's *Rip Van Winkle*," *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 20, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 101–22.

16 A. Nicholas Vardac, *Stage to Screen — Theatrical Origins of Early Film: From Garrick to Griffith* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949). Hassan El Nouty has made a similar case for French nineteenth-century theatre in *Théâtre et pré-cinéma: Essai sur la problématique du spectacle au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: A.-G. Nizet, 1978). Although his is in many ways a more subtle and interesting account of the nature of nineteenth-century French drama than Vardac's is of English and American, his sources are principally the texts of the plays themselves rather than direct evidence of their staging, and he is even less specific about the early cinema and how it borrowed from or realized nineteenth-century theatrical aims than Vardac is. His discussion of the nature of theatrical and cinematic space will be examined in Part 4, but here we have restricted our argument about the overall connections between theatre and cinema to the example of Vardac.

17 "Romantic conceptions of the playwrights might become more and more exaggerated in their never-ending quest for escape, but it would never do for the scene-builder to follow a similar pattern. His job was to render believable upon the stage the increasingly glamorous, unreal, and spectacular ideas of the romantic playwrights. The more romantic the subject matter the more realistic must be its presentation upon the boards, else the entire effect would be lost" (*Stage to Screen*, p. xx).

18 Martin Meisel similarly refers in passing to "Dion Boucicault, the most cinematic of English melodramatists" (*Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 51).

19 David Mayer, ed., *Playing Out the Empire: Ben-Hur and Other Toga Plays and Films, 1883–1908, A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. xi. The fact that Klaw and Erlanger, the owners of the theatrical rights to Lew Wallace's book, sued Kalem for copyright infringement over this film, thereby establishing the important precedent that a film screening was the equivalent for copyright purposes of the performance of a stage adaptation, might suggest that they feared competition from the cinema. However, rights holders sue infringers they do not take seriously as competitors, and, as Mayer notes, another motive claimed in this case was a concern that the very weakness of the cinematic adaptation might damage the reputation of their play.

20 *San Francisco Examiner*, 7 Jan. 1906, cit. Vardac, *Stage to Screen*, 84.

21 "Why I Stayed Out and Why I Went into the Movies," *New York Times*, 31 May 1914, section VII: 8, col. 3.

22 E.g., Vardac, *Stage to Screen*, 29–30 (*Arrah-na-Pogue*), 33 (*Little Emily*), 37 (*Oliver Twist*).

23 See Michel Chion, "Quiet Revolution . . . and Rigid Stagnation," *October* 58 (Fall 1991): 69–80, esp. 71.

24 Although cameras and projectors were built, films taken, and demonstration shows successfully mounted, fire inspectors refused to allow the Cinéorama to open at the Exposition. See Jacques Deslandes and Jacques Richard, *Histoire comparée du cinéma*, vol. 2: *Du cinématographe au cinéma, 1896–1906* (Paris: Casterman, 1968), 39–55.

25 See *Life to Those Shadows*, 6–42, and esp. 39–40. For a general account of the relation between the recording technologies of the cinema and realism, see Ben Brewster, "Film," in Michael Irwin and Daniel Cohn-Sherbok, eds., *Exploring Reality* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 145–67.

26 "Zu einem Kinodramen, Anmerkungen," *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten* 112, 27 Apr. 1913, 1st ed., 1; repr. in Jörg Schweinitz, ed., *Prolog vor dem Film. Nachdenken über ein neues Medium 1909–1914* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1992), 365.

27 According to Plutarch, an actor's attempt to imitate the squealing of a pig was condemned as "not as good as Parmeno's pig." When he revealed that the sound was coming from a real piglet concealed under his cloak, his critics remained unimpressed — they still preferred Parmeno's pig. For Plutarch, "this plainly demonstrates that the very same sensation will not produce a corresponding effect a second time in people's minds unless they believe that intelligence or conscious striving is involved in the performance" (*Table-Talk*, part 5, 1, 674, trans. Herbert B. Hoffleit, *Plutarch's Moralia*, Loeb's Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1969), 8:383). Traditional commentators disagree as to whether Parmeno was an actor esteemed for his vocal mimicry or a painter who had painted a pig so life-like that viewers thought they heard it squeal.

28 See Michael Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850–1910* (London: Routledge, 1981), ch. 4 and plates 15, 16, 19, and 20.

29 "The restaurant is done in the usual white tiling. The egg boiler, steaming coffee urn, steaming hot water heater, wheat cake griddle, egg frying apparatus, etc. are all in evidence. In fact, the place is exactly reproduced in every detail. The piles of oranges, apples, grapefruit, etc., are all arranged in the window. The pastry counter is well stacked, not forgetting the bowl of doughnuts. Baked apples and prunes are set out. Thick crockery dishes, cups, saucers, pitchers, small individual platters, etc. are in evidence. A lamp hangs over the Cashier's desk. Hooks are placed at intervals on the wall for the hats and coats of customers and signs are tacked up notifying the guests to 'Look out for your overcoat.' Some of the tables have the card 'Reserved.' Other tables are roped off and stacked with chairs, showing that business is virtually over and that although the place will be open until midnight (this being Saturday) only a few stray guests are expected owing to the weather. Some of the lights are turned off" (Belasco's promptbook, cit. Lise-Lone Marker, *David Belasco: Naturalism in the American Theatre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 62. See also ill. 3). A souvenir program for the play in its file in the Museum of the City of New York (*The Story of the Governor's Lady Told in Pictures*) proclaims: "Someone has said of *The Governor's Lady* that 'its fidelity to life is photographic.'"

30 The actinic properties of motion picture film do not accommodate the latitude of lighting levels that would allow a fourteen-minute dawn (as in *Madame Butterfly*) or an eclipse of the sun over most of an act (*The Wife*, 1887). See Lea Jacobs, "Belasco, DeMille and the Development of Lasky Lighting," *Film History* 5, no. 4 (1993): 405–18.

31 Aristotle, *The Poetics*, ch. 6, 28, in Aristotle, *The Poetics*, Longinus, *On the Sublime* and Demetrius, *On Style*, trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe and W. Rhys Roberts, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927), 29.

32 Fried mentions the cinema in passing, via a reference to Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (New York: Viking Press, 1971); see *Absorption and Theatricality, Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 182n13.

33 Hollander, *Moving Pictures*, 25.

34 Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), esp. 324–7.

35 *Entretiens sur Le Fils Naturel*, in *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, vol. 10: *Le Drame bourgeois*, ed. Jacques Chouillet and Anne-Marie Chouillet (Paris: Hermann, 1980), 92; cit. Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 95.

36 *Le Fils naturel*, in *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, x: *Le Drame bourgeois*, ed. Jacques Chouillet and Anne-Marie Chouillet (Paris: Hermann, 1980), 16.

37 François Quesnay, *Tableau économique, avec ses explications*, separately paginated part 8 of Victor Riqueti, marquis de Mirabeau, *L'Ami des hommes, ou traité de la population*, rev. ed. (Avignon, 1758–61). The same tabular impulse seems to be behind Dorval's demand for the representation of conditions or estates rather than characters: "[*Dorval*]: Up to now, character has, in comedy, been the main object, and condition only accessory. Character was the source of the whole plot. The general circumstances that would bring it out were sought for, and then linked end to end. It is condition, its duties, advantages, awkwardnesses, which ought to provide the basis for the work. [. . . .] [*Me*]: So you want to see acted the man of letters, the philosopher, the trader, the judge, the lawyer, the politician, the citizen, the magistrate, the financier, the great lord, the steward. [*Dorval*]: Add to the list all the relationships: the father, the husband, the sister, the brothers" (*Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel*, 144–5).

38 *The Art of Describing: Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. xix. The paper is "Describe or Narrate? A Problem in Realistic Representation," *New Literary History* 8 (1976–7): 15–41; for Fried's reference, see *Absorption and Theatricality*, 194n88.

39 "I agree with those who connect this decisive change with the new role of the popular preacher in the thirteenth century. It was the friars who took the Gospel story to the people and spared no effort to make the faithful re-live and re-enact it in their minds. It is well known that St Francis celebrated Christmas at Greccio in this way, actually bringing an ox and ass into the church, and maybe also a live baby. It was in the Franciscan tradition also that there grew up that important technique of devotion which involves this kind of imaginative identification. That great historian of Christian iconography, Émile Mâle, stressed the critical importance in this context of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* by the Pseudo-Bonaventura, and of the miracle plays. He has been accused of overstatement, and no doubt there were other factors, but I still think he had the right intuition, and that the change of attitude to the sacred narrative engendered by the new conception of teaching and preaching cannot be left out of the history of art" (E. H. Gombrich, *Means and Ends: Reflections on the History of Fresco Painting*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 33–4.). Gombrich has also linked the rise of perspective in the ancient world to a theatrical influence: "It is surely no accident that the tricks of illusionist art, perspective and modeling in light and shade, were connected in classical antiquity with the design of theatrical scenery. It is here, in the context of plays based on the ancient mythical tales, that the re-enactment of events according to the poet's vision and insight comes to its climax and is increasingly assisted by the illusions of art" (Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion, A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, rev. ed. (New York: Bollingen Foundation/Pantheon Books, 1961), 131).

40 "Color is used here as a term referring to their [Rembrandt's and Carravaggio's] absorption in the act of representation or imitation" ("Describe or Narrate?": 26–8). The work by de Piles referred to is *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris: J. Estienne, 1708; repr. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), 14–17, also discussed by Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 92.

41 Anne-Claude-Philippe de Turbières, comte de Caylus, *Tableaux tirés de l'Iliade, de l'Odyssée d'Homère et de l'Énéide de Virgile, avec des observations générales sur le*

costume (Paris: Tilliard, 1757), p. xiii, cit. Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 215n90.

42 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön, An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (first published 1766), trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 19.

43 Kirsten Gram Holmström, *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants: Studies on some trends of theatrical fashion 1770–1815* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri, 1967), 11–39, esp. 21–3.

44 *Appel à toutes les nations de l'Europe, des jugemens d'un écrivain anglais; ou, manifeste au sujet des honneurs du pavillon entre les théâtres de Londres et de Paris* (1761), in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 24: *Mélanges*, part 3 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1879), 219; cit. Holmström, *Monodrama*, 22.

45 Edward Mayhew, *Stage Effect; or, the Principles which Command Dramatic Success in the Theatre* (London: Mitchell, 1840), 52, cit. Meisel, *Realizations*, 39–40. The citations from *Othello* follow Mayhew rather than standard modern editions.

46 *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*, 103.

47 "Ueber die gegenwärtige Französische tragische Bühne. Aus Briefen," first published in *Propyläen* 3, no. 1 (1800), cited from *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Schriften, ed. Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 2, part 1: *Werke* (ed. Albert Leitzmann), vol. 2: *1796–1799* (Berlin: B. Behr's Verlag, 1904), 399. The characterization of Diderot's conception of the theatre as a "peep-show" is from Holmström, *Monodrama*, 39; her use of the term derives from the twentieth-century German theatrical reformers' critique of the naturalistic theatre as a "*Guckkästchentheater*".

48 Philadelphe Maurice Alhoy, François Antoine Harel, and Auguste Jal, *Dictionnaire théâtral* (Paris: J.-N. Barba, 1824); cit. Arthur Pougin, *Dictionnaire historique et pittoresque du théâtre* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin-Didot et Cie., 1885), art. "tableau".

49 Christian Metz, "Story/Discourse (A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism)," in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (London: Macmillan, 1982), 96.

50 "The Imaginary Signifier," in *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (London: Macmillan, 1982), 62–3.

51 "The Cinema of Attractions," in Elsaesser and Barker, *Early Cinema*, 59. The paragraph containing this passage is absent from the first publication of the article.

52 *D.W. Griffith*, 264. Fried's book is cited as a reference to this passage.

53 Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, 146–7. The contrast may be even greater than these figures imply, because he counts intertitles as separate shots, so a single take with two dialogue intertitles inserted will be counted as five shots. European films often hold a scene in this way, shooting it from a single setup and then inserting intertitles *ad libitum*; American films, on the contrary, tend to use a characteristic "dialogue" micro-sequence, with two shots of the character speaking the lines (usually the two ends of a single "take," i.e., one and the same moving photograph) bracketing an inserted title, and to alternate such micro-sequences with equivalents for each conversational partner.

54 In this book, we refer to films by the title used at first release in the country of production. At the first mention of a non-English title, we give a translation in brackets. This is a translation of the original title, not necessarily (or even usually) the original English or American release title.

55 Ben Brewster, "La mise en scène en profondeur dans les films français de 1900 à 1914," in Pierre Guibbert, ed., *Les Premiers ans du cinéma français* (Perpignan: Institut Jean Vigo, 1985), 209–11 (in English in Elsaesser and Barker, *Early Cinema*, 49–52).

56 Meisel, *Realizations*, 247–51 and 265–71.

57 Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions," in Elsaesser and Barker, *Early Cinema*, 59.

58 Kristin Thompson, "The International Exploration of Cinematic Expressivity," in Karel Dibbets and Bert Hogenkamp, eds., *Film in the First World War* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 65–85.

59 Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970), 13–16.

60 Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Penguin, 1978), 378–9.

61 "The Plays of Victor Hugo," in *About the Theatre: Essays and Studies* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1886), 308.

62 This touches on just a portion of the plot summary that may be found in its entirety in Willie G. Hartog, *Guilbert de Pixerécourt: Sa vie, son mélodrame, sa technique et son influence* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1913), 156–61.

63 A. Van Buren Powell, *The Photoplay Synopsis* (Springfield, Mass.: The Home Correspondence School, 1919), 40.

64 *New York Times*, 13 Nov. 1992: B9.

65 *The Critic*, in *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, ed. Cecil Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 2:543ff.

66 Meisel, *Realizations*, esp. 38–51.

67 Joel Trapido, ed., *An International Dictionary of Theatre Language* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 794.

68 *Grand Larousse de la langue française*, ed. Louis Guilbert, René Lagane, and Georges Niobey (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1971–8), 6:5547.

69 Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris: Hachette, 1875), art. "Situation, Terme de Littérature," citing Louis de Cahusac, *La Danse ancienne et moderne ou Traité historique de la danse* (The Hague [in fact Paris]: Jean Neaulme, 1754), 3:150; repr. in *Épitre sur les dangers de la poésie suivie de La Danse ancienne et moderne ou Traité historique de la danse* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), 174.

70 Voltaire, *Appel à toutes les nations*, 219–20; cit. Holmström, *Monodrama*, 22.

71 François Riccoboni, *L'Art du théâtre, suivi d'une lettre de M. Riccoboni fils à M*** au sujet de l'art du théâtre* (Paris: Simon et Giffart, 1750; repr. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), 83.

72 *Dictionnaire dramatique* (Paris: Lacombe, 1776), 1:314. Dene Barnett points out in *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of 18th Century Acting* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1987), 34: "Both imitative and indicative gestures were used with vivid effect to depict, to bring before the eyes, indeed to recreate on stage the distant, past or imagined events — battles, warriors and dragons — which were the subjects of descriptive passages and narratives." As his examples on pages 215–20 indicate, the difference between a *récit* and a wordless picture was thus less than might be imagined.

73 *Dictionnaire dramatique*, 3:152.

74 A review in *The Public Advertiser*, 1 Nov. 1779; "Hah! to Mr. Sheridan," *St. James's Chronicle*, 11–13 Nov. 1779; both cited in *Dramatic Works of Sheridan*, 2:478 and 2:481.

75 Littré, *Dictionnaire*, art. "Situation," citing Voltaire, "[Remarques sur] *Ariane*, Tragédie [de Thomas Corneille]," in *Les Œuvres complètes de Voltaire/The Complete Works of Voltaire*, vol. 55: *Commentaires sur Corneille*, critical ed. by David Williams, part III (Banbury: Voltaire Foundation, 1975), 988.

76 Frank Archer, *How to Write a Good Play* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1892), 96; *Playwriting: A Handbook for Would-be Dramatic Authors by "A Dramatist"* (London: Macrae, Curtice & Co., 1888), 12–13.

77 "Situation," definition 9 b: citing from 1830, W. Irving, *Life and Letters* (1864), 2:446; and from 1864, G. A. Lawrence, *M. Dering*, p. i.

78 Archer, *How to Write a Good Play*, 96.

79 Ibid.; Frederick Palmer, *Photoplay Plot Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Palmer Photoplay Corporation, 1922); Wycliff A. Hill, *Ten Million Photoplay Plots* (Los Angeles: Feature Photodrama Company, 1919; repr. New York: Garland Publishing, 1978). All of these sources list both comic and tragic situations. To give just one example, Palmer's "Twenty-eighth Situation — Obstacles to Love"

is broken down into "A (1) — Marriage Prevented by Inequality of Rank. (2) — Inequality of Fortune an Impediment to Marriage. B — Marriage Prevented by Enemies and Contingent Obstacles. C (1) — Marriage Forbidden on Account of the Young Woman's Previous Betrothal to Another. (2) — The Same Case, Complicated by an Imaginary Marriage of the Beloved Object. D (1) — A Free Union Impeded by the Opposition of Relatives. (2) — Family Affection Disturbed by the Parents-in-law. E — By the Incompatibility of Temper of the Lovers" (page 43).

80 The conversation of 14 Feb. 1830, *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, 1:394, in Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Gedenkausgabe der Werke: Briefe und Gespräche*, ed. Ernst Beutler (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1949). Eckermann in fact borrowed the record of this conversation from Frédéric-Jacob Soret, *Conversations avec Goethe*. See *Goethes Gespräche*, vol. 3, part 2 (Zurich/Stuttgart: Artemis Verlag, 1971), 565, fragment no. 6506. There is a record of a very similar remark of Goethe's in an earlier conversation of 25 Sept. 1823, recorded by Friedrich Kanzler von Müller (*Goethes Gespräche* vol. 3, part 1, 584, fragment no. 5266): "Gozzi claimed there were only thirty-six motifs (*Motive*) for a tragedy." No commentator on these passages seems to offer any source for the Gozzi attribution, though the context makes it clear it was Carlo Gozzi Goethe was thinking of.

81 Georges Polti, *Les Trente-six situations dramatiques* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1895). Subsequent citations refer to *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*, trans. Lucile Ray (Franklin, Oh.: James Knapp Reeve, 1924).

82 Étienne Souriau, *Les Deux cent mille situations dramatiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1950).

83 Polti, *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*, 44 and 48.

84 Ibid., 121.

85 Hill, *Ten Million Photoplay Plots*, 75. The most common definition of the situation in the photoplay manuals is in terms of suspense. See also Henry Albert Phillips, *The Photodrama* (New York: Stanhope-Dodge Publishing Co., 1914; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1970), 161 and 167; Victor Oscar Freeburg, *The Art of Photoplay Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), 240; and Jeanie MacPherson, *Preparation and Motivation*, one of a series of lectures especially prepared for student-members of the Palmer Course and Service (Hollywood: Palmer Photoplay Corporation, 1923), 8–9.

86 Palmer, *Photoplay Plot Encyclopedia*, 12.

87 Souriau, *Les Deux cent mille situations dramatiques*, 45.

88 Ibid., 46.

89 *Poetics*, 39.

90 Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *Histoire du supplice d'une femme; Réponse à M. Émile de Girardin* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1865), 5.

91 Alfred Hennequin, *The Art of Playwriting: Being a Practical Treatise on the Elements of Dramatic Construction Intended for the Playwright, the Student and the Dramatic Critic* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1897), 119. Although he does not draw the same conclusions about Hennequin's references to situations, Barry Salt (*Film Style and Technology*, 111–13) discusses his text in relation to the development of the early feature.

92 Palmer, *Photoplay Plot Encyclopedia*, 13.

93 For an early example of this representation of narrative as a pyramid, see Gustav Freytag, *Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*, trans. Elias J. MacEwan (Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co, 1894), 115 (original German publication 1863).

94 Hennequin, *Art of Playwriting*, 99 and 116; *Palmer Handbook of Scenario Construction* (Hollywood: Palmer Photoplay Corporation, n.d. [1922?]), 2:160–2.

95 Hennequin, *Art of Playwriting*, 116.

96 Ibid., 121.

97 William Archer, *Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1913), 219.

98 *About the Theatre*, 320.

99 Harry James Smith, "The Melodrama," *Atlantic Monthly* 99 (Mar. 1907): 324. We are indebted to Ben Singer for this reference.

100 See Gérard Genette, "Vraisemblance et motivation," in *Figures II* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), 71–99.

101 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

102 James Smith, *Melodrama* (London: Methuen, 1973), 24.

103 This is not just Archer's view, of course. For another example see Souriau, *Les Deux cent mille situations dramatiques*, 43–6, esp. the remarks on *La Muette de Portici*, 43.

104 *Poetics*, 71.

105 "Mr. Benedict's 'Lily of Killarney,'" *Dwight's Journal of Music* (29 Mar. 1862): 413.

106 See also Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, 63: "Thus well before the middle of the century processions, lavish display, large numbers of actors (and horses), and catastrophe and conflict by land and sea were already features of spectacle melodrama. Improving technology, increased resources, and a stress in melodramatic writing on the spectacular event led to spectacle scenes becoming the pivot of much staging, the centre or — when sensations and spectacles occurred in each act — centres around which the play was constructed, scenic pegs on which to hang a connecting narrative."

107 Ibid., 70.

108 Percy Fitzgerald, *Principles of Comedy and Dramatic Effect* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1870), 23–4.

109 Mayer, *Playing Out the Empire*, 30.

110 Robert Stephen Holland, ed., "Introduction to the play by Colin Hazlewood, *The Christian Slave; or, The Life and Death of Uncle Tom, A Drama in two Acts*, A parallel diplomatic text based on unpublished manuscripts in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection in the British Library (BL Add 52958X) and the Frank Pettingell Collection in the University of Kent at Canterbury Library," MA Thesis (University of Kent at Canterbury 1983), p. viii.

111 Percy Fitzgerald, *The World Behind the Scenes* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1881; repr. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972), 68.

112 Holland, "Introduction to Hazlewood," p. ix.

113 Michael Booth, *Victorian Specacular Theatre*, 65–6, cites a compelling example, the opening of the Prologue of Wilson Barrett's production of *Claudian* (W. G. Wills and Henry Herman, 1883) at the Princess's, London, where the curtain rose to display an impressive set of a slave market in Byzantium prior to the action of the play. On the pulling back of the curtain to "discover" a scenic picture see Meisel, *Realizations*, 46–7, and Part 4, below.

114 *Playwriting: A Handbook*, 18: "Pay great attention to your curtain. In melodrama it should certainly be upon a situation of some sort"; Frank Archer, *How to Write a Good Play*, 92, comments approvingly that Acts 1 and 4 of *The Favourite of Fortune* (Westland Marston, 1866) end on strong situations; Hennequin, *Art of Playwriting*, 177–8, recommends that the conclusion of an act should be a "climax," noting further that "Since the action of the play is to be interrupted, in order to hold the attention of the audience over the intervening period, the conclusion of the act must be so arranged as to leave the spectator in a state of strong suspense."

115 William Archer, *Play-Making*, 250–1.

116 Dion Boucicault, "The Poor of New York," in Daniel C. Gerould, ed., *American Melodrama* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983), 31–74.

117 William Archer, *Play-Making*, 38.

118 Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, 3.

119 Booth, ibid., 124, discusses the prestige accorded Irving's lighting effects; see also Lise-Lone Marker, *David Belasco*, 78–98.

120 Similarly, for an analysis of the importance of situation and pictorial effect in the more culturally ambitious plays of Henry Arthur Jones see Joel H. Kaplan, "Henry Arthur Jones and the Lime-lit Imagination," *Nineteenth Century Theatre* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1987): 115–41.

121 Gunning, in Elsaesser and Barker, *Early Cinema*, 61, citing Vardac, *Stage to Screen*, 232.

122 Advertising based upon the big situations and tableaux of a play is most pronounced in early and mid-nineteenth century playbills. For example, a playbill advertising a benefit for Frank Towers, Royal Victoria Theatre, 15 Mar. 1860, in the Pettingell Collection of the University of Kent at Canterbury Library, lists

among other items on the program a two-act drama, *Red Rover, or the Mutiny of the Dolphin*, which is divided into the following big scenes: "Ancient Harbour of Newport, with the Rover's Vessel Floating Out to Sea./ The Sea Shore. The Females prepare to embark on board the Pirate Ship./ Wilder's Heroic Conduct./ Broadside View on the Red Rover!/ The Unsuspecting Females led into the Lion's Den./ Preparations for Sailing./ The Tailor turned Sailor./ TABLEAU. Fore & Aft Deck of the Rover's Vessel." An American example can be found in a playbill for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Grand Opera House, New York City, 27 Oct. 1877, held in the Museum of the City of New York, in which the list of major sets and songs is accompanied by a running plot summary, with the biggest scenes set off by capital letters: "Sold in Bondage. Mr. Shelby's Plantation. A Winter Night's rejoicing of the Slaves. SONG AND CHORUS, 'Is Massa gwine to sell us today?' By the Jubilee Singers/ Tavern on the banks of the Ohio. Eliza followed by the bloodhounds. A hundred dollars for a boat. View of the Ohio River./ ESCAPE OF ELIZA ON THE FLOATING ICE./ AND THE BAFFLED PURSUERS. THRILLING TABLEAU./ Chant and Chorus, 'The Gospel Train, or git on board, children,' By the Jubilee Singers/ St. Clair's House and Grounds on Lake Pontchartrain./ A CORRECT REPRESENTATION OF A SOUTHERN HOME!/ SONGS BY MISS GEORGIE ALLEN. Miss Ophelia's first appearance in the South. Babies under foot — how shiftless. Topsy's History. De Chile dat never was born./ SONG AND BREAKDOWN, 'I'SE SO WICKED.'/ Tavern by the River. The Kentuckian. 'That's my mind on it.' Meeting of George and Eliza. Rocky Pass. The Pursuers. Escape of George and Eliza. 'Friend, Thee's not wanted here.' Thrilling Tableau. Sunset on the lake. Eva and Uncle Tom. 'I see a Band of Spirits Bright.' Eva's Bed-Chamber — Love, Joy Peace!/ DEATH OF EVA./ Solemn and Impressive Tableau. Hymn, 'The Sweet Bye and Bye.' Song 'Tell me where my Eva's Gone?' — By the Jubilee Singers. Topsy and the Stockings. 'I isn't half so wicked as I used to was.' St. Clair to Eva in Heaven. Topsy and Aunt Ophelia. The death of St. Clair./ SLAVE MARKET IN NEW ORLEANS./ The Beautiful Plantation Slave Melody, 'Massa's in the Cold, Cold ground,' by the Jubilee Singers. Uncle Tom sold to Legree. Courtship of Aunt Ophelia and the Deacon. Legree's house. The Mississippi River by Moonlight. Parlors of Aunt Ophelia Vermont./ GREAT PLANTATION SCENE./ By the Georgia Jubilee Singers. The Jubilee Singers in their Chants and Shouts of 'Old Sheep know de Road — de young lambs must learn de way,' 'The Old Home aint what it used to be,' and 'Dat sweet ham bone.' Plantation Festival Scene by Jubilee Singers, and the/ WONDERFUL BANJO SOLOS by the great HORACE WESTON and WARREN GRIFFIN./ Arrival of the flat boat with Congo Melodists. Street in New Orleans. Young Shelby searching for Uncle Tom. A Lawyer's information never gratis. Legree's house. Cassy and Legree. The Lock of Hair. The workings of a Guilty Conscience. 'Do you know that I have made up my mind to kill you?' The last blow. Retribution. The old shed./ DEATH OF UNCLE TOM./ 'I've got the Victory, the Lord has given it to me, Glory be to His Name.' 'Nearer, my God to Thee.' — Jubilee Singers. Magnificent Allegorical Tableau, 'Eva in Heaven.'"