ACTOR EDWIN FORREST (1806-1872) MAY BE REGARDED AS ONE OF AMERICA’S FIRST ICONS. A MAN OF THE PEOPLE BORN TO A FAMILY OF IMMIGRANTS, HE FERVENTLY SUPPORTED THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY—he even delivered a speech on the occasion of the 62nd anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, a celebration held under the auspices of the Democratic Party in 1838 (Alger 1877, 339). It is therefore no surprise that this self-taught man became extremely popular among the working-class and small craftsmen, to whom he held up an idealized image of the American citizen through his “muscular acting style” (Kimmel 2006, 28) and the values he was meant to embody. In order to be offered parts that would suit his ego and promote his democratic political ideals, he created the Edwin Forrest Prize, which rewarded nine plays written for him between 1828 and 1847. The Gladiator (1831) and Jack Cade (1841) were awarded the prize and both plays were first performed in New York at

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This article explores the paradoxes of masculinity in two Forrest-Prize plays and aims at making visible socially constructed heteronormative gender relations in both works. Whereas they respectively dramatized a slave rebellion and a medieval revolt, they were self-conscious vehicles of Jacksonian ideology, and for a largely male and working-class audience, Forrest’s Cade and Spartacus came to symbolize the very essence of the nation’s masculine values and democratic ethos. Yet not only does Jacksonian masculinity partly undermine the revolutionary and democratic ideals it was to promote, but it also suggests that masculinity in these two plays manifests itself as an elusive and heterogeneous realm of experience involving different forms of performance which prove incompatible.

Actor Edwin Forrest (1806-1872) may be regarded as one of America’s first icons. A man of the people born to a family of immigrants, he fervently supported the Democratic Party—he even delivered a speech on the occasion of the 62nd anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, a celebration held under the auspices of the Democratic Party in 1838 (Alger 1877, 339). It is therefore no surprise that this self-taught man became extremely popular among the working-class and small craftsmen, to whom he held up an idealized image of the American citizen through his “muscular acting style” (Kimmel 2006, 28) and the values he was meant to embody. In order to be offered parts that would suit his ego and promote his democratic political ideals, he created the Edwin Forrest Prize, which rewarded nine plays written for him between 1828 and 1847. The Gladiator (1831) and Jack Cade (1841) were awarded the prize and both plays were first performed in New York at
the Park Theatre. They became his most successful parts in American plays—along with *Metamora*.

The plots of both plays show undeniable similarities. Robert Montgomery Bird’s *The Gladiator* relates the rebellion led by Spartacus at the end of the Roman Republic. After being captured by the Roman Army, the Thracian shepherd accepts to serve Bracchius and to become a gladiator only if his new master also buys his son and wife. During his first fight in the arena, he is asked to confront his own brother, Phasarius. They refuse to fight and start a rebellion. Spartacus and his followers win the first battles against the Romans, but his army is soon plagued by inner divisions and the hero is deserted by some of his men. His wife and son are murdered after being freed from a Roman camp and Phasarius is slain, but manages to reach his brother’s camp to bring him the news. Spartacus, who is overcome with grief, decides to take his revenge on Rome and refuses Praetor Crassus’s pardon. He convinces his men to fight one last battle. He is eventually killed in Crassus’s camp, but the praetor decides to have him buried as a free man, thus paying a tribute to his honour and bravery.

Robert Conrad’s *Jack Cade* focuses on a fifteenth-century rebellion that is dramatised in the fourth act of *2 Henry VI*, but the play was intended to be a political response to Shakespeare’s treatment of the rebellion: while the Elizabethan playwright depicted the rebel as illiterate and bloodthirsty, Conrad’s hero is a learned and benevolent man who fights for justice and individual freedom. In the American play, Cade has to go into self-imposed exile to Italy, after standing up to Lord Say, who killed his father. He comes back to England under the name of Aylmere at the beginning of the play. In order to free his countrymen who are oppressed by a cruel aristocracy, he decides to lead a rebellion. The king eventually accepts to grant yeomen a certain number of rights, but Cade’s mother, wife and son are the victims of Say’s men and die during the rebellion. The rebel himself is wounded to death and passes away just after he is informed that the king has signed the charter.

These parts enabled Forrest to perform and to extol the masculine values of Jackson’s presidency, but what this phrase encapsulates is less coherent and totalizing than is often believed. Although the parts Forrest impersonated were meant to be unambiguous—yet invisible—vehicles of Jacksonian ideology, the form of masculinity embodied in the parts of Spartacus and Cade was not as homogeneous as it seems. This overtly democratic type of masculinity was to be displayed onstage, but as it aimed at naturalizing socially constructed heteronormative gender relations, it also partly operated invisibly. The aim of this article is precisely to shed light on these ideological models, and thus to make them “more” visible. Central to this study is also the idea that “the context of the broader social organization and representation of gender” must be taken into account in order to understand the way masculinities are constructed (Chauncey 1994, 28). An analysis of the ways in which masculinity is given shape—with special attention to space—may reveal to what extent the political and ideological content of these plays are ambivalent and often contradictory gendered constructs. Jacksonian masculinity laid emphasis on action, independence, self-advancement, courage and physical strength, but also championed a democratic and clearly anti-elitist stance which materialized for instance in a distrust of federal institutions such as the Bank of America (Anthony Rotundo, in Mangan, 1987, 36; Wilentz, 2005, 2, 8; Pugh, 1983, 3-4). In what follows, I will argue that not only does Jacksonian masculinity partly undermine the revo-
olutionary and democratic values or ideals it was to promote, but it also suggests that the kind of masculinity at work in these two plays might turn out to be an unstable experience involving different forms of performance which may prove incompatible.

SPARTACUS, CADE AND THE ATTRIBUTES OF JACKSONIAN MASCULINITY

The Pastoral and Social Mobility

Blurring the distinction between the actor and his most famous parts, Forrest’s biographer, William Rounseville Alger, called him “the authentic hero” (Alger 1877, 53). Like the frontiersman, the Indian fighter or the mountain man who were as many “prototypes for the manly ethos” in Jacksonian America (Yacovone 1990, 85), Cade or Spartacus enabled Forrest to perform an idealised vision of Jacksonian masculinity recalling the model of the Heroic Artisan defined by Michael Kimmel (Kimmel 2006, 13, 20)—a performance involving political, ideological and class issues.

Cade’s words on liberty are anchored in a Jeffersonian tradition extolling individual virtue and a pastoral ideal:

When we are free, Jack Cade
Will back unto his hills, and proudly smile
Down on the spangled meanness of the court,
Claiming a title higher than their highest,—
An honest man—a freeman! (IV.ii 510)

He and his followers advocate a rural society protected from the vices and corruption of cities. A shepherd missing his Thracian hills and fighting Rome’s imperialism, Spartacus also embodies an ideal that is reminiscent of Jeffersonian virtue. However, one may notice that despite the pastoral mode at work in The Gladiator and Jack Cade, the shepherd and the yeoman turn into the bravest of all soldiers.

Following a Jacksonian ideological line, both heroes are symbols of social mobility. Cade “sought / The gentle fruits of science,” “was graced / With the mind’s title of nobility,” and is now “known as Doctor Aylmere” (I.iv 478). Although he is but a shepherd, Spartacus defeats the most experienced officers of the Roman army and is presented as a self-made general of sorts. As Jovius, a Roman centurion, acknowledges:

He has formed,
Out of this slavish, ragged scum, an army;
Arms it and feeds it at his foeman’s cost,
Recruits it in his foeman’s territory;
Which foe is renowned Rome, resistless Rome,
Rome the great head and empress of the world!
Is he not then a general? (III.i 199)

The shift from the present perfect to the present simple lays emphasis on action and performance as a constituent element of masculinity. Spartacus’s military value—his courage, his skills as leader as well as his ability to overcome any or-
deal—encapsulates some of the “masculine” values of the Jacksonian era and sharply contrasts with the behaviour of traditional urban elites representing “decadent institutions that signaled Europeanized overcivilization” (Kimmel 2006, 24).

It is therefore not surprising that both plays clearly endorse an anti-aristocratic stance. Political power in Republican Rome is confiscated by patricians who manipulate the people and their economic power relies on the exploitation of enslaved populations. The English nobility treat their serfs like dogs and prey on young girls to indulge in their lustful pleasures. When he encounters Cade in the forest, Lord Say—who killed the hero’s father when he was a child—claims his titles of nobility to dissuade the rebel from attacking him, but the latter retorts that he believes in another form of nobility: “The people are God’s own / Nobility; and wear their stars not on / Their breasts, but in them!” (III.iv 502). In Conrad’s play, this ideological stand consists in challenging the social legitimacy of the nobility by questioning their masculinity, as they are called “minions” on two occasions by the rebels. The image dismisses their manhood all the more so as Clifford himself later calls Mariamne an “insolent minion” when she refuses to accept his advances. Spartacus also challenges his opponents’ masculinity when he calls them “sheep” after he invades Consul Gellius’s camp. As it is evocative of gentleness and weakness, the term undermines the Romans’ virtus. Such strategies recall Jackson’s “vent[ing] his manly rage at “effete” bankers and “infantilized” Indians,” stating his own manhood while questioning that of his opponents (Kimmel 2005, 4). The combination of pastoral motifs and American values thus enables both heroes to position themselves as men.

As masculine champions of individual freedom and self-reliance, Spartacus and Cade express a desire to gain their independence by taking up arms against their oppressors—respectively Rome and the English aristocracy. Independence being a central element to the shaping of the Jacksonian masculine ethos—this was particularly visible when Jackson declared war on big government and on the Bank of America—, both rebels’ insurrectionary movements may be regarded as gendered performances through which their masculinity is tested, proved and achieved. In this reading, the political rebellion contributes to the promotion of gendered values and is indissociable from the shaping of the masculine ethos in 19th-century America.2

The Performativity of Physical Strength

This Jacksonian ideal of masculinity is made visible through the two heroes’ as well as Forrest’s amazing physical strength. Both Spartacus and Cade turn out to be outstanding soldiers. The gladiator is described as “unconquerable” and of “extraordinary prowess” (I.i 177). Lentulus, a master of gladiators, recalls that he sent a man to attack the Thracian with a weapon, but the latter “struck the assailant with his fist, and felled him as one would a wall with a battering ram” (I.i 178). In fact, the Romans only managed to capture him in his sleep. Cade’s physical strength is less emphasized than Spartacus’s, but the rebel proves to be a formidable opponent. Although he was but a child, he struck Say “to his feet” (I.ii 472) to avenge his father’s death. By refusing to capitulate or to be bribed by the aristocracy, both characters are also models of military honour and courage. This combination of physical strength and moral worth may foreshadow the phenomenon of muscular Christianity which became central to the definition of masculinity at the
turn of the 20th century (Mangan 1987, 3) and may be read in line with the growing emphasis on physical health and strength in the 19th century, for instance with the development of physical exercise in young men’s education and the “game-playing cult” (Roberta J. Park, in Mangan 1987, 8, 10).

Edwin Forrest himself came to symbolize self-improvement and individual effort. Alger’s biography is particularly revealing in this respect: a self-taught man, “Forrest did not inherit that herculean poise of power which for half a century made him such a massive mark of popular admiration. He attained it by training,” for instance by taking boxing lessons (Alger 1877, 159, 161). To paraphrase Elisabeth Badinter, the man is here presented as “an artefact” (Badinter 1986, 15). This emphasis on physical strength was also visible in the acting style developed by the actor, who scorned Macready’s “effete” style (Levine 1988, 67). According to Richard Moody in his well-documented biography of the actor, The Gladiator offered Forrest “abundant opportunities for muscular exertions, ferocious passions” (Moody 1960, 104). As the Courier and Enquirer wrote about Metamora and The Gladiator: “in these roles he has no rival. They require a physical energy, an almost awful power and vigor which we doubt if any actor on earth but himself can put forth.” The Democratic Mirror also compared his powerful voice with a raging hurricane (Ibid. 167-8; 398).

The many engravings in Alger’s biography representing the actor in his most famous parts (Spartacus, Jack Cade, Metamora, but also Shakespeare’s tragic heroes) emphasized his muscular strength and turned him into an ideal of Jacksonian masculinity. They were like mirrors held up to Forrest’s audience, offering them an image of masculinity which could be attained “by gaining self-control (over one’s body and its physical expression)” (Flood 2007, 130). Yet these images are more ambivalent than they seem. Not only do they glorify self-improvement and individual effort, but they also simultaneously legitimize gender difference and inequality as they paradoxically naturalize a socially constructed gender identity.

The Limits of Democracy

Because of their outstanding physical abilities and moral fortitude, Cade and Spartacus seem to have little in common with their fellow counterparts—despite the democratic values they embody—and sometimes stand alone in their heroic masculinity. In V.1, Spartacus, who has been deserted by thousands of his men, laments that:

But yestermorn, [he] was a conqueror,
On the high verge and pinnacle of renown;
Today a skulking, trembling, despised man,
Thrust in a pit. (V.i 224)

The passage recalls the wheel of fortune, which symbolised the rise and fall of great men in the Middle-Ages and in the Renaissance, and hardly fits into a democratic scheme. It is also the case later in the same scene when the Thracian tries to reassure his wife, who does not want to part from him:

A cloud is on my path, but my ambition
Has glory in’t: as travellers who stand
On mountains, view upon some neighbouring peak,
Among the mists, a figure of themselves,
Traced in sublimer characters; so I
Here see the vapory image of myself,
Distant and dim, but giantlike—I’ll make
These perils glories. (V.i 227)

Although Cade shows less appetite for power and glory, the plot of the play is almost entirely focused on its central character, who does not even need anyone’s help to escape from Say’s castle. Indeed, when Straw asks Worthy if they have freed Cade, his companion answers: “No, by my troth; / He freed himself” (IV.ii 508). The two heroes’ “imperial self-reliance”—the term is used by William Rounseville Alger to refer to Edwin Forrest himself—and overwhelming presence make them central, almost ubiquitous, figures around which text and performance revolve. The two larger-than-life heroes impersonated by Forrest were meant to champion democracy and equality, but the type of masculinity involved in the plays may paradoxically undermine these very ideals.

**Gendered Masculinity**

**Men as Protectors and Providers**

As male domination seems to be inherent in the democratic stance of both *The Gladiator* and *Jack Cade*, this pattern of domination and exclusion is also relevant to the treatment of gender relations in both plays. Drawing on L. Fielder’s *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Michael Kimmel reminds us that classic “American novels are marked by the absence of sexuality, the absence of marriage and families—the virtual absence of women entirely” (Kimmel 2005, 25). However, this statement may not apply to antebellum melodrama. Although the heroes take part in the public sphere, they are generally depicted as loving husbands and fathers. The first time he appears in the play, Cade is knocking at his mother’s door and accompanied by his family. As he is first brought onstage, Spartacus accepts to fight for Bracchius only because the latter has promised to free his wife Senona and his son. The aim of such scenes was obviously to humanize the two characters. Yet Spartacus’s third line in I.i may lend itself to a more ambivalent interpretation. As Lentulus and Bracchius mock him for his asking how far from his native land Rome is, Spartacus replies: “Have Romans father, and wives, and children?” (I.i 179). This emphasis on domesticity and family life enabled Bird to extol individual liberty and address the question of Rome’s imperialism from an individual and domestic perspective—thus making it easier for the audience to identify with the play’s ideological leanings. It was also a way of dismissing the idea that the rebel may be nothing but an agent of chaos. Yet Spartacus’s address is more ambivalent than it seems and may be regarded as a performance of masculinity within the domestic sphere. His words are clearly anchored in a patriarchal vision according to which “to be manly was to accept responsibilities as a provider, producer, and protector of a family” (Kimmel 2005, 38).

The first scene of *Jack Cade* stresses the impossibility for men to perform their part as protectors and providers. Straw and Pembroke lament over their living conditions: while the former mentions what little corn they have, the latter reminds him
that “Yet must he feed, from this, his wife and children” and adds a few lines later: “Would we were not men, / But brutes—they are used kindlier!” (I.i 465). The semantic ambiguity of the term “men”—meaning both “human beings” and “male human beings”—allows us to venture two interpretations of the passage. It emphasizes the plight of the yeomen, who are but animals to the nobility, but it also suggests that this economic subjection questions their own masculinity. Later in the same scene, Pembroke asks Courtlay (one of Say’s men) to give him food only to feed his children, thus placing himself outside this form of dependence and humiliation. Women are no more autonomous than children and presented on several occasions as frail beings that are to be taken care of. Pembroke, for instance, “must watch by” his wife: “O’ercome with toil, she fainted / I’ the field” and is now “sick to death” (I.i 466-7). In the second act, he informs Father Lacy, a priest who supports the rebellion, that “she’s in her grave,” “beyond the whip and chain.” (II.iii 490). Although many men die in battle during the rebellion, none of them starves to death, no matter how little food they may be given.

Lines which do not address domestic issues and seem to revolve entirely around political matters are also relevant to the vision of gender relations conveyed in the play. At the end of Act I, Cade recalls a stormy night during which he knelt to the genius of his country and swore “to make the bondman free” (I.iv 480):

O’er the tempest’s din,
I heard the genius of my country shriek
Amid the ruins, calling on her son—
On me! (I.iv 479)

England is clearly identified as a maternal figure, yet one that can no longer protect her children. With the depiction of political fight in domestic terms and the use of grammatical gender, two forms of male domination—a political one and a domestic one—are mutually justified: on the one hand, man must protect the nation the way he must look after his ageing mother, but on the other one, if man is to be the protector of the nation, then he must look after women. These discursive strategies may thus be regarded as almost invisible performances of a hegemonic form of masculinity which champions political change while legitimising domestic conservatism.

Controlling Space

One of the main instruments of this male domination is space control. The characters’ relations to space are relevant to the treatment of gender relations in the play and involve concepts of power, exclusion and domination. In The Gladiator, Spartacus accepts to serve Lentulus and Bracchius, on condition that they buy his wife and son and do not part them from him:

SPARTACUS: Well, it is not chains alone
That make the slave. What will my master have?
LENTULUS: I’ll have thee exercise thine arm in practice.
Thou wilt have brave men to contend with.
SPARTACUS: Well,
I will do so: but speak it not before my wife. (I.i 184)
While these lines stress—yet not quite invisibly—Spartacus’s desire to protect his wife, they also suggest that Senona is not to interfere in a negotiation in which her future lot is to be determined. Submission in this scene may thus be analysed according to ethnicity—Romans against Thracians—, class—a powerful elite subjugating masses—, but also according to gender. The performance of masculinity may not tolerate the intrusion of women, who must remain invisible and whose exclusion from a male-controlled space is literally dramatised onstage.

This control of space is also exemplified at the end of Act III, when Spartacus frees his wife, who has been captured by Gellius’s men. As soon as the latter is informed that his camp is being attacked, all the Romans escape whereas Senona and her child stay where they are. While she is denied the possibility to regain her freedom, except through the intervention of her husband, men—both Thracians and Romans—are depicted in terms of mobility and women in terms of immobility. The Thracian rebel suddenly bursts onto the stage and exclaims:

Victory! Ha! ha!
Romans are sheep—search every tent—ah! Jove!
I have found ye wife, aye, and have ransomed ye.
What, did you think I had deserted you?
Look, I have found you in a noble hour:
When last we met I was a slave: and now
In a Consul’s camp I stand a conqueror! (III.iv 210)

Central to the masculine and democratic ethos performed by Forrest are female subjection and military prowess: Spartacus is no longer a “slave” but a “conqueror” because he obviously defeated his enemies, but also because he performed his role as protector of his family. The gladiator may function as a complete antithesis of Roman citizens and patricians, the liberty he fights and dies for only involves men within the public arena, thus perpetuating the domination of men within the family sphere.

Space in Jack Cade turns out to be a gendered construct too. Shortly after the start of the rebellion, the rebel and his family find refuge in the forest. His wife, Mariamne, remains hidden in a cave with her son while Cade has gone in search of food. She suddenly hears branches rustle:

Am I discovered? Heaven protect me!—Yet
It may be Aylmere—now ’tis nearer!—nearer!
Ha! my husband! (III.iii 499)

Once her husband is back, it seems that a divine intervention is no longer required to protect her. Although the characters have left their home and hide in the forest—a space that is only partly domesticated by man—the passage relocates traditional 19th-century gender relations but never reconfigures them: the home is turned into a cave and the rest of the forest is the territory on which men have to confront ordeals in the outer world. The wild space with which the public sphere was often compared at the time is here literalised. Paradoxically, this form of spatial displacement—caused by the insurrection—only confirms and naturalises pre-existing heterosexual norms which naturalize the subordination of women. While Mariamne has not left the cave, Cade has “been far / And ha[s] suffered much”
It is significant that he does not tell his wife where he actually went: Mariamne is denied access to the outer world both physically and discursively. The space where Cade fights for his people’s freedom remains invisible to her.

Such spatial configurations recall the Cult of True Womanhood, an ideological and discursive apparatus according to which:

Women were not to be excluded from participation in the public sphere as much as exempted from participation in such competitive and ugly world. Delicate and fragile, women were not subservient but “chosen vessels” requiring protection from the world, said Henry Harrington in *Ladies Companion* in 1838. (Kimmel 2006, 37)

The performance of masculinity therefore requires a performance of femininity that suits this model of gender relations. Yet the separation between private and public spheres is disrupted by the unfolding of events in both plays.

**The Impossible Performance of Masculinity: The Public and the Private Spheres**

As loving fathers and husbands as well as warriors and leaders of riots in which women have no role to play—except that of frail beings to be protected—Spartacus and Cade participate both in the private and public spheres. Following a melodramatic line of development, the bloody dénouements of the plays are precisely triggered by the overlapping of these two spheres. By subverting the distinction between public and private spaces, the melodramatic mode creates conditions in which the model of masculinity performed by the two heroes can no longer be sustained.

From the very start, political stakes and family matters are intertwined in *The Gladiator*. Spartacus accepts to fight for Bracchius only on condition that the latter then frees his wife and son; his refusal to fight his younger brother, whom he recognizes in the arena—the scene is characteristic of the melodramatic genre—is what triggers the rebellion at the end of Act II. Later in the play, Phasarius’s desertion and his failure to protect Senona and her son, who are both killed by Lentulus’s men, precipitate Spartacus’s fall. Consequently, the unfolding of events in the play suggests the impossibility for the masculine hero to perform the different parts incumbent upon him—the leader of a rebellion and a protective father and son. Private and political stakes are also linked in the dénouement of Conrad’s play. After she stabs Clifford, Mariamne is driven to madness and eventually dies. In both plays, it thus seems that women are “the ultimate victims of the painful contradictions in the gender system that regulates men” (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1985, 134) from which women are excluded. Consequently, masculinity proves to be a contradictory and heterogeneous realm of experience which requires the performance of different parts that can hardly be reconciled. Both Bird’s and Conrad’s heroes are torn between a benevolent ideal of masculinity to be performed within the domestic sphere and their military role, but the latter turns into an untameable form of violence once the domestic and public spheres overlap.

Although Conrad’s Cade was meant to be a clear response to Shakespeare’s depiction of the rebel in *2 Henry VI*, the American playwright’s hero also shows a potentially destructive energy. Two scenes involving his wife are particularly revealing in this regard. In Act II, Clifford tries to seduce Mariamne, but she
adamantly refuses his advances. Cade bursts onto the stage and threatens to kill the lustful aristocrat, who has no other choice but to leave. When the rebel swears to take his revenge on Clifford—although it is not clear whether he wants to avenge his honour or his wife’s—Mariamne tries to appease him, assuring him that “now [she] is with [him], [She] care[s] not for this wrong” (II.i 486). Cade suddenly puts an end to the discussion, asking his wife on two occasions to go back into his mother’s house:

AYLMERE: “Tis well—very well! But get thee in.
MARIANME: Thou’rt not in anger with me?
AYLMERE: With thee, love!
Why was I ever? Nay girl, get thee in. (II.i 487)

As soon as he is left alone, he immediately expresses his intention to chastise Clifford for what he has done. Once again, male domination is a matter of space: by sending Mariamne into the house, not only does he confine his wife to an enclosed domestic space, but he also takes control of a space where women may not interfere with his more violent drives. In the final scene, Say confronts Cade and ironically asks him how Mariamne fares. Suddenly seized with anger, Cade immediately stabs his foe, who has reminded him of his failure as a provider and protector for his family.

In The Gladiator, Phasarius’s thirst for Roman blood is referred to in the first scene of the play and so is his brother’s raging energy. Spartacus’s concluding words in Act II are a testament of the character’s ambivalence:

Death to the Roman fiends, that make their mirth
Out of the groans of bleeding misery!
Ho, slaves, arise! it is your hour to kill!
Kill and spare not—For wrath and liberty!—
Freedom for bondmen—freedom and revenge! (II.iii 198)

He later invokes lex talionis when he is informed by Phasarius that Senona and his child have been murdered by Lentulus and tells his men to slay any Roman woman or child they may encounter. Such violence points to the impossibility for the two heroes to perform their different parts, but also to a failure in exercising self control, one of the main patterns shaping the masculine ethos in 19th-century America (Kimmel 2006, 31-35). Once the reassuring domestic world is disrupted—Cade’s mother dies when Say’s men set her cottage on fire and Spartacus’s own cottage is also burned down by Roman soldiers—it seems that Cade and Spartacus can no longer conciliate their roles in the private and in the public spheres. Under these circumstances, the performance of masculinity operates in a particularly visible way and is turned into an unstable experience. In this respect, both plays question the viability of a model of masculinity that needed to rest on stable grounds, although 19th-century American men were confronted with social and economic evolutions to which they had to adapt in order to preserve and prove their masculinity. Once again, such changes point to the idea developed for instance by Gail Bederman that masculinity is a process which is constantly redefined.

During this period the United States underwent major economic changes which had an impact on the definition of manhood. As the market economy developed,
the world in which men evolved grew more unstable and less secure (Sellers 1991, 239). Yet it was in this restless sphere that man was to prove his manhod, with the risk of failure always looming ahead. This evolution challenged the model of the Genteel Patriarch, whose masculine identity was manifested through “property ownership and a benevolent patriarchal authority at home” (Kimmel 2006, 13), but also that of the Heroic Artisan, which is celebrated in *Jack Cade* and *The Gladiator* (Ibid., 6, 22).

**From the Pastoral to the Market Economy**

Whereas these two models referred to different social groups, they linked identity with a sense of place and stability. Both Spartacus and Cade define their identity in relation to their native land. In Conrada’s play, Mariamne remembers how Cade told her about his native land when they were still in Italy. It is no coincidence that Spartacus’s Thrace and Cade’s England are associated with the pastoral mode. In his first line, the gladiator expresses his desire to return to his country, when he asks Brachius and Lentulus: “Is it a thousand leagues away from Thrace?” (I.i 179). He also evokes the Thracian hills and the cottage where he grew up on several occasions, while Cade refers to his country as “our green merry England” (II.i 481) and Mariamne wonders at “the loveliest grove [she] found,—trellised with flowers, / And ‘neath its trembling shade, the brightest stream” (Ibid.).

This pastoral mode which creates a form of timelessness is often combined with a sense of loss, as if the places the two characters long for may be nothing more than a remembrance of things past, never to be restored. Cade was forced to leave his native land after he defied Say. Once his mother is murdered, he must flee once again. Spartacus has been captured and sent to Rome against his will. Both heroes thus testify to a model of masculinity that can no longer be anchored in a stable place. The last words uttered by the Thracian as he is dying are particularly telling:

Well—never heed the tempest—
There are green valleys in our mountains yet.—
Set forth the sails.—We'll be in Thrace anon.—[Dies.] (V.iv 440)

This return to his native land proves an impossible enterprise, except in the imagination of the fatally wounded hero. His dying just after these three lines is emblematic of a model of masculinity which appealed to Jackson’s supporters and yet was becoming obsolescent and progressively threatened by the figure of the self-made man, whose masculinity was to be proved constantly in the economic arena. It may be no coincidence that *Jack Cade* and *The Gladiator* champion a form of individualism and self-reliance which does not fit into a capitalistic framework. Indeed, both plays show a form of distrust towards the market economy and the power of economic and political elites, whose wealth is derived from the work of oppressed masses of workers, yeomen and craftsmen.

While the gendered political performance at work in *Jack Cade* and *The Gladiator* does not question normative gender relations—and also glorifies the figure of Edwin Forrest—its paradoxically excessive visibility points to the contradictions inherent in the heroic and democratic form of masculinity it was meant to champion through the actor’s impersonation of the two heroes. In other words, it aims at producing an “intelligible gender ... instituting and maintaining relations of
coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire,” but is haunted by “the spectres of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence” (Butler 1999, 23). Both plays map out gender relations and the place of men in society. Yet the masculinity they aim at proves to be an elusive experience performed in an ever-changing social and economic world and is crushed under the weight of conflicting forms of performance which point to the idea that masculinity is not a stable set of categories, but an ever-changing process involving different forms of combinations. It ultimately seems that the performance of the invisible is not only the mode through which a dominant masculine ideology operates, but also the sign that this ideological apparatus may be threatened by other ideological constructs and might lose its central position in society. The hypervisibility of the performance of this masculine world may thus ultimately testify to a form of insecurity and hint at its constant redefinition.

Notes

1 For more information on the unmasking of gender, see Gail Bederman’s Manliness and Civilization (1995, 7).

2 In his essay on Edwin Forrest, David A. Gerstner explored the link between the actor’s body, democracy and masculinity (especially p. 10-12, 38-39). Yet his analysis deals with another kind of performance since it focuses on a biographical episode involving a Native-American companion’s body. Gerstner comments on the way homoerotic references are evacuated from this episode.

3 This passion for individual effort and physical exercise is mentioned on several occasions by 20th-century biographers of Forrest, especially by Richard Moody (Moody 1960, 76-77). According to the author, Forrest’s fascination with circus performers may shed light on his taste for physical culture.

4 Although most American actors at the time developed a vigorous and physical acting style—as if the actors and characters were on the verge of madness—Lawrence W. Levine points out that Forrest “carried this romantic tradition to its logical culmination” (Levine 1988, 38).

5 This form of hypervisibility ultimately reveals the social processes into which bodies are brought in “the reproductive arena” (Connell 2002, 9) as well as the performativity of Forrest’s masculinity, “a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (Butler 1999, xv).

6 Straw and Worthy are two of Cade’s companions. So is Pembroke, who is referred to later in this essay.

7 According to such a line of interpretation, the play may thus indirectly suggest that only in a democratic nation can a man of the people perform his masculinity.

8 For more information on the way the body is a construction which comes into being “through the marks of gender,” see Butler (1999, 13).

9 It is also referred to as a feminine entity earlier in the speech.

10 For further information on the link between hegemonic masculinity and the subordination of women, see Margaret Wetherell’s and Nigel Edley’s article entitled “Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: Imaginary Positions and Psycho-Discursive Practices” (especially p. 336).

11 The scene also shows that masculinities and femininities are not produced separately, but together (see Connell 2005, 38).

12 For more theoretical information about gender as “an ongoing process impl[y]ing constant contradiction, change and renegotiation,” see Bederman (1995, 7-12).
These destructions of individual property may also be seen as an attack on the heroes' masculinity.

REFERENCES


