

*Melinda and Her Sisters: Reconsidering a Suffrage Operetta
as Pageantry*

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Abstract

This thesis claims that the *sui generis* classification of Belmont and Maxwell's *Melinda and Her Sisters* as a suffrage operetta is to blame for the lack of extant scholarship on the work. In its place, I offer the analytical framework of pageantry. Relying on contemporaneous press and practical guides and recent histories of each genre, I reconstruct the commercial and critical atmosphere in the year the work was created, 1916. I also draw on suffrage propaganda, government documents, and court cases to convey the sociopolitical tension of the historical moment. By placing the two genres in dialogue, I reveal a chiasmus of gender and class coding attendant to each. I conclude that it was the relatively high cultural capital of "suffrage operetta," and not its aptness of description, that ultimately led the creators to market their work as such. As a genre case study, this thesis comments on the impact that ontology has on reception.

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Introduction

Strolling through the halls of Marble House—one of the many famous gilded era mansions in Newport, Rhode Island—I glimpsed artifacts of the past and listened to a pre-recorded audioguide describe each item’s significance. It was November 2013, and the docents and crowds of summer had long since retired for the season. One glass display case contained a handwritten book, a diary, lying open on a desk that overlooked the property’s frosty grounds and the grey ocean beyond. The male voice in my headphones reported that the diary belonged to the lady of the house, Alva Vanderbilt Belmont, and that the entry conveyed her excitement about that evening’s premiere of her own suffrage operetta. Who could have predicted that a serendipitous encounter with a museum artifact encased in glass would set events into motion that eventually led to the creation of this very document? This is just the latest chapter in the story of *Melinda and Her Sisters* that began over one hundred years ago.

On the evening of Friday February 18, 1916, members of the New York City social elite crowded into the Waldorf Astoria Hotel ballroom to witness the one-night-only performance of *Melinda and Her Sisters*. It took the work’s creators, amateur playwright Alva Vanderbilt Belmont and semi-professional songwriter Elsa Maxwell, less than four months to mount the production—beginning with musical development of Belmont’s preexisting script, through auditions and rehearsals, and ending with a single performance. Utilizing an entirely volunteer, predominantly amateur cast of some seventy socialites and debutantes, the music-

drama satirized high society in an attempt to disseminate the women's suffrage movement ideology to a financially and politically influential audience. Through the sale of tickets, programs, sheet music to original songs, and suffrage paraphernalia, the event generated nearly \$8,000 for the suffrage cause.¹ This was a timely endeavor, as the movement had been gaining momentum steadily both statewide and nationally for over half a century, and, unbeknownst to them in February 1916, the state of New York was less than two years away from voting full suffrage for its female citizens into law.² Universal full suffrage for American women would follow with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution on August 18, 1920.³

The drama joins the fictional Pepper family on the evening of a gala to celebrate their eight daughters' return from finishing school abroad and subsequent debut in Oshkosh, Wisconsin society. While away, each young woman had mastered a necessary skill—social dance, poetry, sport, singing, etc.—to become proper marriageable young ladies in the eyes of the local tastemakers. The biggest and brightest stars of the Oshkoshian elite—each satirically named to suit their societal role—are in attendance. There are the matronly, old-money gossips, Mrs.

¹ Neither contemporaneous journalism nor Belmont's biographical retrospectives indicate which suffrage organization(s) received this money.

² On November 6, 1917, the majority of ballots cast voted "yes" on Question No. 1, which read, "Shall the proposed amendment to section one of article two of the [N.Y. State] Constitution, conferring equal suffrage upon women, be approved?" quoted in Susan Ingalls Lewis, "Women Win the Right to Vote in New York State | New York Rediscovered," accessed January 25, 2017, <https://sites.newpaltz.edu/nyrediscovered/2013/11/06/women-win-the-right-to-vote-in-new-york-state/>.

³ The Amendment reads, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation." U.S. Constitution, Amendment XIX, § 1-2.

Grundy and Mrs. Malaprop;⁴ the town physician, Dr. Doolittle; the honorable Mayor Dooless; the Reverend Wontstop; the teacher, Mrs. Knowitall; and the veterinarian, Mr. Vermifuge. The Peppers' youngest daughter, Melinda, is conspicuously absent from the event. We learn from Mrs. Grundy that she is "the skeleton in the closet" of her parents.⁵ Halfway through the narrative she bursts in with her entourage, throwing the celebration into chaos. Melinda has become the worst thing imaginable in her mother's eyes: a suffragette. Her musical antics and stirring rhetoric expose the backwardness of the family's and society's valuation of women. Ultimately, Melinda successfully converts her mother, sisters, and neighbors—men and women alike—into suffragists and suffragettes.

Thanks to Belmont's status as one of the richest and most politically active women in New York City, *Melinda and Her Sisters* regularly appeared in local and regional newspapers in the weeks leading up to the performance.⁶ After the performance however, it all but disappeared from print, save for a single article recounting the scandalous events of a two-week custody battle over sheet music that had taken place between Belmont and one of the show's stars, professional

⁴ Belmont borrows these unusual names from 18th century dramas. The former is an unseen priggish character lifted from the pages of Thomas Morton's 1798 play, *Speed the Plough*, and whose name has become synonymous with tiresome adherence to propriety. Similarly, a Mrs. Malaprop appears in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's 1775 play, *The Rivals*. It is from this source that we derive the term *malapropism*, defined in Merriam-Webster as the "usually unintentionally humorous misuse or distortion of a word or phrase, especially the use of a word sounding somewhat like the one intended but ludicrously wrong in the context."

⁵ Alva E. Smith Belmont and Elsa Maxwell, *Melinda and Her Sisters* (New York, R.J. Shores, 1916), 8.

⁶ In her insightful biography of Belmont, Sylvia Hoffert credits Belmont's social and political successes to her savvy, and yet unprecedented, cultivation of celebrity via frequent visibility in the media. Sylvia Hoffert, *Alva Vanderbilt Belmont: Unlikely Champion of Women's Rights* (Indiana University Press, 2012), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt16gzkqz>.

actress, Marie Dressler.⁷ In the century since its premiere, there have been two revivals of the work: one in Oshkosh, Wisconsin—the setting of the drama—and one in Newport, Rhode Island, where Belmont had written and staged the original non-musical version in her summer home in 1915. These revivals were mounted as commemorative novelties and received minimal critical coverage. With such limited performance and reception histories, it is unsurprising that there has yet to be a comprehensive musicological study of the work. But, as this research will show, this is just the first of more substantial issues that problematize any attempts at a serviceable study of the work.

The first issue is that a definitive, holistic primary source for *Melinda and Her Sisters* does not exist. When Belmont copyrighted and published the work immediately following the performance, she did so in a piecemeal fashion. She sent the score to G. Schirmer and the script to Robert J. Shores, both New York City-based publishers.⁸ Furthermore, these halves cannot neatly be knitted together because of their frequent disparities. The score contains eighteen songs distributed equally across two acts, but the script does not delineate any nominal divisions between acts or scenes. Although the score numbers the songs, it disagrees on several occasions with the performance order set down in the script. The most alarming example is that the script cues “Carry On! (A Marching Song)” as the

⁷ “DRESSLER-BELMONT STAGE ARTS CLASH: Actress Takes Back Suffragist’s ‘Unfinished Gift’ and Honeyed Words Turn Acid. ALL ABOUT ‘MELINDA’ OPERA Singer Keeps Score of One Song Which She Claims, and Lawyer Is Ordered to Go After It.,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1916.

⁸ For the sake of clarity, when it is necessary to refer to one publication specifically rather than the performance or the work in general, I will apply the terms “book/script” and “score/sheet music” appropriately.

rousing finale immediately after “Girls, Girls!” but the score gives the same as nos. 10 and 18, respectively. This contradicts the script’s instructions in every possible way; it presents these songs in reverse order, displaces them from each other by seven additional songs, and inverts the finale into the opening number of Act II. Moreover, the script’s musical cues are a nightmare. In the first place, there are only fifteen music cues in the script, three short of the number of songs in the score. It is probable that the unaccounted-for songs are given as intermezzi or divertissements outside of the proper narrative because the *dramatis personae* lists Special Parts for four performers. Nevertheless, without cues, it is impossible to know where these special numbers would have been interpolated. Of the fifteen total music cues, only six actually contain song titles, and of those six, four of the songs are absent from the score!⁹

The remaining nine “cues” are nothing more than frustratingly cryptic descriptions of the musical style or aesthetic, such as “the orchestra strikes up popular tunes”¹⁰ and “a rather gay daring little song and dance.”¹¹ In some cases it is possible to interpret these cues by cross-referencing them with the newspaper accounts of the performance. For example, the *New York Times* review of the

⁹ Two of the missing songs are duets: “Don’t Gossip,” for Mrs. Grundy and Mrs. Malaprop, and “Since I Was a Boy and a Girl,” for Mr. and Mrs. Pepper. The other two numbers, “Our Friend Melinda Has Promised,” for the children and factory workers, and the eponymous “I Am Melinda,” likely merged and evolved at some point into the extant “Melinda’s Song,” in which the melody passes from the heroine to the chorus. Additionally, “Ballet Russe”—the song from the aforementioned squabble—is lost entirely: it was never recovered from Miss Dressler for the publication of the score, nor is there a cue for it in the script.

¹⁰ Belmont, *Melinda and Her Sisters*, 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

performance states that “there was a pretty letter box song by Bessie Pepper,”¹² which means that that “rather gay daring little” number can only be “The Love-Letter.” Unfortunately, descriptive and prescriptive reconstructions such as these can and do just as easily exacerbate the confusion, as in the case of Mollie Pepper’s song. According to the script’s *dramatis personae*, Mollie’s cultivated talent is sports. Her unusually specific music cue is consistent with this fact: “Enter MOLLY [sic]...dressed in sport costume or bathing dress. She has a lively song with burlesque of bathing or golf.”¹³ The score does not contain any music about swimming, so this can only point to no.6, entitled “Golfing.”

All three sources—the script, score, and published cast list—agree that Miss Emmy Wehlen played the role of Mollie Pepper on February 18, 1916. Curiously, though, the performance review on February 19th congratulates Wehlen on the “cleverness” of her “Hello! Hello!” a humorous song about falling in love over a party line. The score’s *dramatis personae* corroborates the journalistic account of the performance—and contradicts the script—with the “Hello Song,” not “Golfing,” assigned to Mollie and played by Wehlen. Amazingly, the final pre-performance advertisement for *Melinda and Her Sisters* on February 18th can’t even agree with itself on the Wehlen-Mollie song. In paragraph two we are told that Wehlen is to “sing and dance gayly [sic] through a comic opera part.”¹⁴ Toward the end of the article, it is no longer Wehlen-as-Mollie who will sing the special *opera*

¹² “SOCIETY SATIRIZED IN SUFFRAGE OPERA; Mrs. Belmont’s ‘Melinda and Her Sisters’ Given by Professionals and Amateurs. DEBUTANTES IN THE CHORUS Miss Marie Dressier in the Leading Role -- Miss Marie Doro Leads Suffragists’ Parade.” *The New York Times*, February 19, 1916.

¹³ Belmont (Shores), *Melinda and Her Sisters*, 22.

¹⁴ “SUFFRAGE OPERA TONIGHT: Big Audience Assured for Mrs. Belmont’s ‘Melinda and Her Sisters.’” *New York Times*, February 18, 1916.

bouffe part, but Mlle. Odette le Fontenay in the role of Dollie—this, following that same article’s boast that le Fontenay is expected to “do some serious” (i.e. not comic) singing. While it is possible to spin out many more discrepancies, I refrain from doing so here. The two examples above are proof enough of the irreconcilability of the two prescriptive sources—book and score—and the descriptive ones—performance reviews.

Another issue that hampers scholarly or historical study of *Melinda and Her Sisters* is the limited availability of the materials, specifically the score. As property of the public domain, the script has been reprinted by several publishers in the last decade beginning with an electronic edition in 2007.¹⁵ Although this productivity appears to signal a renewed interest in the piece, not one of these publishers has attempted anything more than a facsimile reprint of the original 1916 Shores edition. This is especially disheartening given that some publishers claim to offer a “Scholar’s” version, yet provide neither revisions, nor prefatory material, nor annotations. If publishers truly believe that “this work is important enough to be preserved, reproduced, and made generally available to the public,” as the Scholar’s Choice edition asserts, then it is possible that true *new* editions with new insights may surface in the near future. Unfortunately, there is no sign of a forthcoming, comparable resurgence of the score: the original 1916 Schirmer remains the only edition. So, one hundred years after the separate first edition publications of the problematic script and score, we are no closer to a congruent, unified urtext suitable

¹⁵ Recent reissues include: Alexander Street Press electronic edition (2007), BiblioLife (2009), Nabu Press (2010), Hardpress Publishing (2012); and several centennial releases: Leopold Classic Library (2015), Scholar’s Choice (2015), and Scholar’s Select by Palala Press (2015). This list is not comprehensive.

for scholarly analysis. I believe that the creation of such an edition is a worthwhile endeavor, but one that I will not attempt herein. Instead, the current work aims to resolve another equally important analytical conundrum facing music scholars and suffrage historians.

The reader will have noticed that so far in the present document, I have avoided identifiers for *Melinda and Her Sisters* beyond *work*, *piece*, and *production*. This is strategic. It prevents the reader from growing attached to the current genre classification of the work, which I believe—and this research will argue—is *the* fundamental reason that *Melinda and Her Sisters* has been misrepresented at best and entirely overlooked at worst in both musicological and American women’s suffrage discourses.

Overwhelmingly, *Melinda and Her Sisters* has been labelled an operetta by its creators, critics, and chroniclers alike. Yet, *Melinda and Her Sisters* does not appear in any history, study, or bibliography of that genre. Richard Traubner’s foundational *Operetta: A Theatrical History* traces the cultural evolution and dissemination of the genre.¹⁶ It is nevertheless conspicuously light on American and English-language contributions to the genre, citing the preponderance of such texts already in existence and the need for a comprehensive English text on works and composers outside of the English-speaking world. One might then look to Gerald Martin Bordman’s more geographically and temporally focused *American Operetta: From H.M.S. Pinafore to Sweeney Todd*, only to find that it is limited to

¹⁶ Richard Traubner, *Operetta: A Theatrical History* (Taylor & Francis, 2003).

major works by major American composers.¹⁷ Even the *Cross-Index Title Guide to Opera and Operetta*, a bibliography containing over 1,400 titles does not include *Melinda and Her Sisters*.¹⁸ Clearly, as a standalone work by amateur composers—women no less—*Melinda and Her Sisters* would never make the grade for scholarship on a rather unappreciated music genre.

Where musicological discourse has not bothered to document (let alone study) the operetta *Melinda and Her Sisters*, the discourse on the role of arts in the woman's suffrage movement has at least tried to do so. However well-intentioned, those attempts at documentation have been inconsistent and incomplete. Again, I believe this to be the unfortunate result of an ill-fitting genre classification. Taken as a suffrage operetta, *Melinda and Her Sisters* is *sui generis*. This is problematic for compilers of suffrage anthologies in two opposing ways. On the one hand, any author whose compilation aims to provide a cross-section of suffrage propaganda by genre may not encounter the lone suffrage operetta. This is likely the cause of its absence *Treacherous Texts: An Anthology of U.S. Suffrage Literature, 1846-1946*.¹⁹ Editors Mary Chapman and Angela Mills include chapters from novels, short stories, plays, poems, treatises, and letters in order to:

trace the development of a heretofore neglected tradition of intersecting activism and art and to illustrate the inventiveness of writers/activists who...adapted and innovated strategies in response to changing political and social realities. Conveying the ingenuity and diversity of the creative campaign for U.S. woman suffrage in terms of authors, genres, and strategies, the texts collected here point to the depth and breadth of intellectual and creative energy invested in the protracted, hard-fought woman suffrage campaign. The texts also highlight how this campaign relied on writing in its many guises—creative as well as

¹⁷ Gerald Martin Bordman, *American Operetta: From H.M.S. Pinafore to Sweeney Todd* (Oxford University Press, 1981).

¹⁸ Steven G. Pallay, *Cross Index Title Guide to Opera and Operetta* (Greenwood Press, 1989).

¹⁹ Mary Chapman and Angela Mills, eds., *Treacherous Texts: An Anthology of U.S. Suffrage Literature, 1846-1946* (Rutgers University Press, 2011).

informational and hortatory—to persuade an often recalcitrant populace of women’s right to vote.²⁰

With the editors’ clear concern for inclusivity and variety, the omission of *Melinda and Her Sisters* from this source is an especially unfortunate consequence of the work being in a genre of its own; the authors simply may not have realized that a suffrage operetta existed.

On the other hand, anyone who wishes to use genre as a criterion for their anthological study must make a choice when faced with a *sui generis* operetta. For example, Leslie Petty’s *Romancing the Vote: Feminist Activism in American Fiction, 1870-1920* [emphasis added] is practically limited to novels, to the exclusion of plays, short stories, and other fictional prose.²¹ The tension of this genre issue is most visible in collections whose subject is plays of the suffrage era. One solution is to exclude *Melinda and Her Sisters* on the grounds that it is not, strictly speaking, a play. This opinion could have guided Sheila Stowell in her book *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era*.²² Another solution is to disregard the musical aspects of *Melinda and Her Sisters*, and treat it as a drama. This is quite pragmatic, considering that the dialogue and music already exist separately, and the work was originally conceived as a play. Bettina Friedl chose to include the work as a play in *On to Victory: Propaganda Plays of the Woman Suffrage Movement*.²³ Although both authors determined to catalog plays,

²⁰ Ibid, 6.

²¹ Leslie Petty, *Romancing the Vote: Feminist Activism in American Fiction, 1870-1920* (University of Georgia Press, 2011).

²² Sheila Stowell, *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era* (University of Michigan Press, 1992).

²³ Bettina Friedl, ed., *On to Victory: Propaganda Plays of the Woman Suffrage Movement* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987).

there is very little overlap in materials between Stowell's and Friedl's texts. This is because each has set the additional limiter of professionalism. Unlike Stowell, whose book focuses on published plays by members of the Women Writers' Suffrage League, Friedl aims to inject plays from the tradition of amateur parlor theatricals into the larger body of suffrage stage works. With this goal in mind, *Melinda and Her Sisters*' amateurism is a more salient merit for its inclusion than its music is grounds for exclusion. The unfortunate consequence of Friedl's choice to treat *Melinda* as a play is that it erases the unique way in which the music contributes to the work as a whole.

My research has only revealed one source that considers *Melinda and Her Sisters* as a specifically musical piece: Danny Crew's illustrated catalog, *Suffragist Sheet Music*.²⁴ The book indexes hundreds of songs and other works that take up the topic of women's rights and/or suffrage in America. Its chronology reaches as far back as 1795 and includes all extant, published music through 1921, one year after the ratification of the 19th Amendment. His facsimile illustrations are a generous inclusion beyond what we would normally expect from a bibliography. These are decorative covers (whenever available) and one page of sheet music when no cover exists. For *Melinda and Her Sisters*, whose score is nearly seventy pages in length, Crew's reprint of a single sheet of music is tantalizing, but incomplete and unavailing. The same can be said of Crew's editorial choice to include complete lyrics for each entry. For his *Melinda and Her Sisters* entry, the

²⁴ Danny O. Crew, *Suffragist Sheet Music: An Illustrated Catalog of Published Music Associated with the Women's Rights and Suffrage Movement in America, 1795-1921, with Complete Lyrics* (McFarland, 2002).

complete lyrics for “Carry On!” appear, but without any caveat to the reader that this is just one of eighteen songs from the work and that it is not representative of the musical style, lyrical tone, and content of the entire work. Crew’s stated goal of creating a bibliography for suffrage music ultimately limits its usefulness for the critic or scholar of any individual piece.

So, the question becomes, how do we recover *Melinda and Her Sisters* for ubiquitous, uniform inclusion in the anthological history of the women’s suffrage movement while simultaneously opening a door for musicological scholarship on this piece? I believe that the first step is to reclaim the work from its misclassification as an operetta. In its place, I propose analyzing *Melinda and Her Sisters* as a pageant. Treating the work in this way would be appropriate for the time, as pageants were a popular amateur theatrical form. Because the conventions of each genre denote the same basic formal features—namely, that the work be comprised of vernacular dialogue with interspersed song and dance and intended for live performance on stage (as *Melinda and Her Sisters* is)—making the switch from operetta to pageant is purely conceptual. Given the century of rhetoric propping up the operetta classification, this is no easy task.

In Chapter One, I begin by destabilizing the inherited objective truth that *Melinda and Her Sisters* is an operetta.²⁵ Although the classification is accurate for certain characteristics of structure and style, one could easily arrive at a different classification citing exactly the same characteristics. More to the point, I demonstrate that those characteristics which pointed to *operetta* neglect more

²⁵ By “objective truth” I refer to the complete lack of a scholarly debate on the matter of genre classification at this time.

salient aspects of the work, its gestation, and its performative function. Having debunked the objective truth of *operetta*, I argue that this classification was a marketing strategy. As such, the connotative idea of operetta (and its substantial cultural capital) would have been more important to the creators than the denotative meaning of the word. I reveal how the production prospered in the moment because of classist connotations *and* suggest that it suffered in the long run because of gendered ones.

In Chapter Two, I advance my classification of *Melinda and Her Sisters* as a pageant. I begin with a history of the genre that recounts its double-life as a community pastime with strong ties to the women's home-arts and social club tradition on the one hand and as a medium for vociferous protests and strikes in both the suffrage and the contemporaneous labor movement on the other. Bearing these functions in mind, I enumerate the ways in which *Melinda and Her Sisters* pursues goals common to both types of pageants—namely: collaborative, amateur music-making, civic engagement, dissemination of ideas and value systems, and fundraising. As women who came of age during the height of women's club culture and who were living in the city with some of the fiercest suffrage and labor campaigns, I must believe that Alva Belmont and Elsa Maxwell recognized the pageantry in their product. I argue that the operetta marketing strategy was undertaken, in part, to anticipate, redirect, and suppress recognition of the same by members of the consumer and media public. Pageantry had its own set of connotative biases that would have negatively impacted the public's opinion of the work. Like operetta, those biases operated on axes of gender and class.

Taking the current research as a case study for the tangible effects of genre (mis)classification, the Conclusion addresses how the larger community of both music and suffrage scholars might use discretion in their bibliographies and anthologies. The Conclusion also proposes further research on *Melinda and Her Sisters*.

Chapter One

Reassessing the Operetta Classification

Melinda and Her Sisters as Operetta

Although no musicologist has yet set his or her seal of approval on the operetta classification of *Melinda and Her Sisters*, the reasons for genre choice are immediately apparent. The work adheres to many conventions typical of operettas in terms of its structure and style. As *operetta* is etymologically the diminutive form of *opera*, lexical semantics necessitate that operettas be smaller than their full-sized counterparts which frequently span well over two and as many as four hours. With a libretto of just over thirty pages and a score of eighteen songs, it is unlikely that the performance of *Melinda and Her Sisters* would have lasted more than two hours.²⁶ While three to five acts are standard for operas, operettas of the late 19th and early 20th century were nearly always written in two acts, and *Melinda and Her Sisters* is no exception.²⁷

The littleness of operetta applied not only to the length of the work, but also to its theatrical home. According to Richard Traubner's research into "most" musical dictionaries from the mid to late 19th century, "there was substantial

²⁶ In the absence of a recording or a documented account of the duration of the performance, I have relied on the admittedly arbitrary but generous rates of two minutes per page of libretto (2 x 34) and three minutes per song (3 x 18) to arrive at what I believe to be an outside estimate of a 122-minute runtime, excluding intermission.

²⁷ As I have previewed in the Introduction and as will continue to be the case throughout this research, the separate publications of the book and score for *Melinda and Her Sisters* are frequently in disagreement. In this case, the score definitively organizes the work into two acts, but there is no corroborating division in the script either in the form of a scene plot in the front matter or as stage directions embedded in the text. However, the *New York Times*' performance review confirms that "the operetta was [given] in two acts or divided in two parts."

agreement that operettas were performed in little theaters or salons,” as opposed to full-size opera houses.²⁸ There is certainly nothing little about the ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel where *Melinda and Her Sisters* premiered (pictured below), but neither is it an imposing opera house.

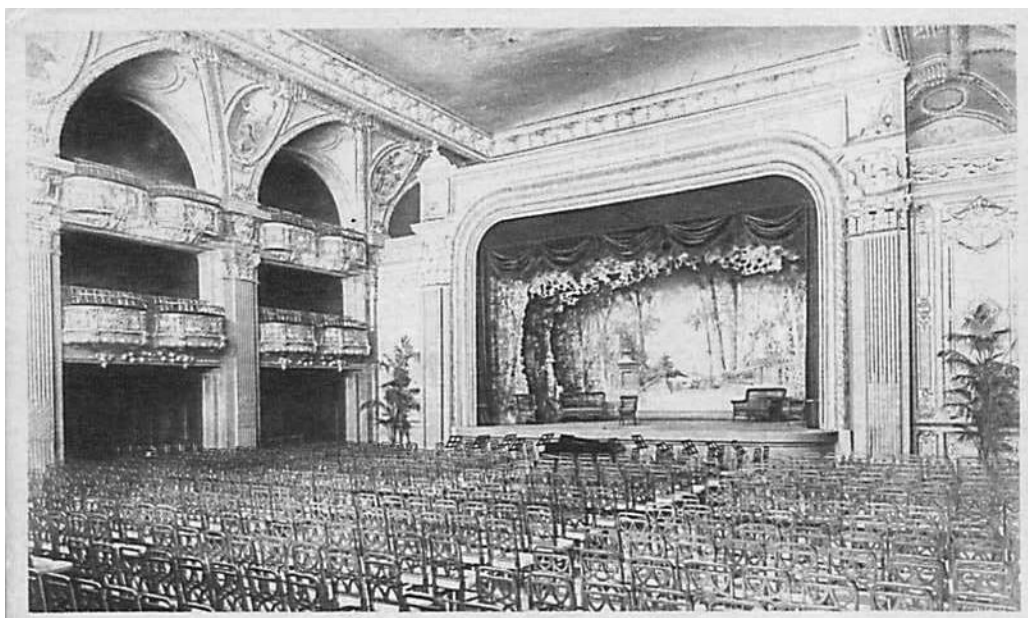


Figure 1: The Waldorf Astoria Ballroom arranged for private theatricals, ca. 1910

The hotel ballroom boasts three alcoves on each side with second- and third-level private box seating (only two are pictured) and a designated area at the foot of the stage for a grand piano and/or an ensemble of up to a dozen players. The room’s proscenium arch and stage were not part of the architecture of building, but were a portable façade that could be installed upon request.²⁹ The addition of one thousand banquet chairs in rows on the main floor of the ballroom transforms the space into a functional theater.³⁰ Although the Waldorf Astoria ballroom was much grander

²⁸ Richard Traubner, *Operetta: A Theatrical History, Revised Edition*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

²⁹ William Alan Morrison, *Waldorf Astoria, Images of America* (Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 40.

³⁰ Indeed, the *New York Times*’ February 19th performance review commends the production for “remarkable smoothness” despite the lack of complete theater amenities.

than any salon in private American estates—including the impressive one at Belmont’s own Marble House mansion where the non-musical version premiered in the summer of 1915—with seating for well over three thousand patrons on six stories, the original Metropolitan Opera House nevertheless easily dwarfed the hotel venue on every metric.³¹

Grove Music Online further abstracts the etymological diminution beyond durational and locational littleness to the nebulous idea that operettas were considered “otherwise less ambitious derivatives of opera.”³² Traubner rightly resists such connotative definitions as unfairly implying “a lack of musical thought or preparation, while assuming [operetta] is in some way a variant of grand opera.”³³ Furthermore, this definition demeans not only the works themselves, but also dismisses the skills of operettas’ composers and librettists as well as the tastes of its consumers as being somehow underdeveloped. Understood strictly as derivation, this definition also denies operetta composers the autonomy to set, meet, and exceed their own artistic objectives. *The Oxford Companion to Music* definition of operetta—by Peter Gammond and Andrew Lamb—admirably attempts to restore that agency, stating that operetta is “a form of light opera in which spoken dialogue replaced recitative.”³⁴ The idea of replacement frees operetta from the yoke of

³¹ For comparison, see the sketch and photograph of what has been referred to as The Old Met since its relocation to Lincoln Center in 1966, but that was commonly called The New Met in 1916 following a significant remodel in 1903. These are included in the Appendix of Figures.

³² Andrew Lamb, “Operetta,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, (Oxford University Press), accessed February 3, 2017. It should be noted that this language applies to the opinions historically held by 19th-century opera creators, critics, and consumers and does not reflect the entry author’s (i.e. Lamb’s) own views.

³³ Traubner, *Operetta*, x.

³⁴ Peter Gammond and Andrew Lamb, “Operetta,” ed. Alison Latham, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, n.d, accessed August 28, 2017.

operatic norms and legitimizes operetta's dialogue as a stylistic difference and not as a derivative shortcoming. Of the current major musical dictionaries, only *The Oxford Dictionary of Music* defines operetta in non-derivational terms: "Little opera. Strictly a play with ov[erture], songs, entr'actes, and dances, but the term has become synonymous with 'light opera.'"³⁵ This definition begins by acknowledging the inescapable etymological relationship between operetta and opera, but then skillfully sidesteps the trap of transplanting that relationship onto musical qualities by broaching the description from the theatrical, rather than the musical side.

Whether it is considered a bastardization of opera's pristine artistry or a cognitive thread stringing together songs, the centrality of dialogue to operetta's identity cannot be understated. With *Melinda and Her Sisters'* inception as a play, the retention of its dialogue in the finished product is perhaps the work's strongest claim to the operetta genre.³⁶ Furthermore, throughout Europe and the United States, performances of foreign-language operettas were frequently translated into the local vernacular. This, coupled with the then recent popular successes of Gilbert and Sullivan and Victor Herbert, meant that American audiences could reasonably expect Belmont and Maxwell's operetta to be given in English.

Beyond its trademark use of dialogue, operettas tend to follow other certain "less ambitious" conventions of tone, narrative content, and musical style. If operatic tone resides somewhere on a spectrum between solemnity and devastating

³⁵ Michael Kennedy, ed., "Operetta," *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, n.d, accessed August 28, 2017.

³⁶ By the same token one could argue that the *addition* of songs makes this work a musical, and not an operetta.

tragedy, then operettas are certainly not ambitious in that regard. Critics and scholars of operetta agree that the genre exhibits a lightness of tone that further distinguishes it from opera. This lightness has contributed to the synonymy between operetta and light opera. Regardless, lightness is not to be mistaken for frivolity. In fact, the tone of operettas is frequently satirical, broaching immediate sociopolitical issues with a fictionalized and entertaining narrative. Satire's humorous, ironic, and ridiculous elements help to ease the discomfort that the candid discussion of weighty topics—such as suffrage and gender equality in the case of *Melinda and Her Sisters*—might cause. It is rarely meant to devalue or trivialize. In his delightfully opinionated practical guide to mounting a successful operetta production, author Frank Beach recommends that one must ask whether the work in question “contain[s] the element of humor or of light-heartedness in a sufficient degree to lift the operetta above a too-serious level.”³⁷ Traubner succinctly adds that “most importantly, [operettas] should not be pretentious.”³⁸ Notice how positionality impacts perspective on the merit of tone; what may have struck some 19th-century opera aficionados as “less ambitious” is simultaneously heralded by modern operetta experts as one of the surest signs of a winning piece.³⁹ With ceaseless pre-production promises for society satirized, the operetta label fit and stuck to *Melinda and Her Sisters*.

³⁷ Frank A. Beach, *Preparation and Presentation of the Operetta*, (Boston & New York: Oliver Ditson Company, 1930), 33.

³⁸ Traubner, *Operetta*, x.

³⁹ It is interesting to note that parody was an essential comedic tool in early European operettas, so for opera composers, scholars, and fans to have taken offense and developed disdain for the genre is not surprising.

In service to the goal of providing satirical sociopolitical commentary, operetta narratives tend to forgo the mythological, legendary, or otherwise heroic people and events that populate operatic stages.⁴⁰ Establishing verisimilitude instead is crucial to the successful deployment of satire, especially when hyperbole is used. Therefore, operettas showcase the happenings of daily life for realistic characters in the present day, or recent past. Beach's practical guide asserts that a quality operetta will permit its assessor to answer in the affirmative to the following questions of content: "Does the story develop in a lifelike manner? Are the situations natural?"⁴¹ Because the plot of *Melinda and Her Sisters* can be summarized as the story of a youngest child who ruins a family gathering with her outlandish political ideologies, the narrative content can be said to conform to conventions of operetta.

Satire's use of exaggeration welcomes operetta characters who are hyperbolized, essentialized types exhibiting little depth and growth. Take for example *Melinda's* Mrs. Grundy and Mrs. Malaprop, the village gossips. Their compulsive urge to exchange rumors expedites the exposition of the operetta while their keen eye for scandal exaggerates the drama of the climax upon Melinda's arrival. Beyond these two instances in which the authors skillfully leverage an archetype for narrative ends, the two characters serve only as the embodiment of an unproductive society and the poisonous women who inhabit it. The authors

⁴⁰ Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers* and *La belle Hélène* (both on popular Greek myths) and Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Sorcerer* and *Iolanthe* (both containing elements of magic) are notable exceptions that prove the rule. These four examples also happen to be some of the more heavy-handed parodies of famous operas: see Elisabeth Cook and Stanley Sadie, "Parody (iii) | Grove Music," accessed January 10, 2018, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O007203>.

⁴¹ Beach, *Preparation and Presentation of the Operetta*, 32-33.

complete their picture of a dysfunctional, impotent society with a cast of villagers plagued by ignorance, arrogance, and indifference. In naming her characters Dr. Doolittle, Mayor Dooless, Reverend Wontstop, and the teacher, Mrs. Knowitall, Belmont indicts leaders in the fields of medicine, politics, religion, and education for failing to effect positive change for women. It is occasionally the case that operetta characters are thinly veiled caricatures of real, prominent figures.⁴² It may have been too risky to lampoon the guest of honor, New York Governor Charles Whitman, in the guise of Mayor Dooless without the counterbalancing effect of Mrs. Pepper's parody of Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont herself.⁴³

Although *Melinda and Her Sisters* fits the operetta mold in so many ways, the aforementioned structural and stylistic elements cannot point to one specific genre to the exclusion of all others. They can do no more than narrow the field to a handful of possibilities that, as a group is defined by shared traits *and* by dissimilarities to other styles. Ergo, the above criteria could also be indicative of a work of comic opera, *opera comique*, *opera boufffa*, musical comedy, and even such outliers as burlesque, vaudeville, and parody. Tellingly, the imperfect nature of genre classification is already entrenched in the history of *Melinda and Her Sisters*. Table 1 contains tallies for every genre classification of the work over the course of its tenure in the *New York Times*.

⁴² For example, Gilbert and Sullivan famously spoofed Sir Garnet Wolseley in the creation of *The Pirates of Penzance*'s Major-General Stanley.

⁴³ The resemblance between the creator and the character on the points of having middle-class roots, wanting to be always in the public eye, having a domineering personality—especially in marriage, maintaining a rocky relationship with a daughter, and awakening all at once to the virtues of fighting for suffrage would have been enough to confirm the likeness for the performance's audience.

	12/28	12/29	12/31	1/12	1/23	1/30	2/6	2/18	2/19	3/5	Total
<i>Opera</i>	8	3	3	3	X	X	1	2	1	4	25
<i>Operetta</i>	1	X	X	X	3	5	3	1	2	4	19
<i>Opera Comique</i>	1	1	1	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	5
<i>Comic Opera</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	1
<i>Satire</i> ⁴⁴	2	X	X	1	2	X	X	X	1	X	6
<i>Play</i> ⁴⁵	X	1	X	X	1	X	4	1	X	X	7

Table 1: Instances of Genre Identifications in New York Times Articles

This exercise highlights the aforementioned fluidity and imprecision of genre classification. Clearly, the work experienced marked volatility and uncertainty with regard to genre. Even Belmont herself flipflopped; in letters to Marie Dressler reprinted in the March 5th article she called it first “this little comic opera” and then “the opera, *Melinda and Her Sisters*.”⁴⁶ Beginning in late-January, *operetta* came to be the preferred—if not the only—genre classification for *Melinda and Her Sisters*. That current historians and anthologists have perpetuated the operetta classification comes as no surprise; after all, this seems to have been where the dust settled on the matter, and, more importantly, it is the classification that Belmont and Maxwell chose when they marketed the published version of their work.⁴⁷

Despite the late-breaking popularity of *operetta*, Table 1 demonstrates that the work was in fact most frequently touted as an opera in newsprint. Considering the diminution and devaluation of operettas described in the previous pages, the

⁴⁴ Here, I have only tallied *satire* when its context denotes a theatrical genre.

⁴⁵ In each of the tallied instances, *play* refers to the version of the work that was performed on February 18, 1916. References to the earlier straight play version of the work have been omitted.

⁴⁶ The first letter is dated February 20th and the second is dated March 1st.

⁴⁷ See Figure 4a for an advertisement of the Schirmer score.

opera appellation might seem a victory that legitimizes the work. Unfortunately, this rose had its thorn. When labeled an opera in the press, *Melinda and Her Sisters* was, more often than not, saddled with a qualifier that insulated the untouchable masterworks of the genre from this aspiring specimen. In so doing, journalists effectively “othered” this work. Moreover, each of the favorite qualifiers—suffrage opera, Belmont opera, and ‘Melinda’ opera—*feminizes* the work, and, as we shall see in a later section, the feminization of art is a sure way to devalue it.

Operetta Classification as Strategy

While I believe the operetta classification to be of limited scholarly use today, Belmont and Maxwell must have seen something valuable in it for their purposes in their time. I contend that the two women strategically presented *Melinda and Her Sisters* as an operetta because of the cultural capital that that genre contributed to the musical/theatrical product and to the suffrage cause at large. The following pages will demonstrate that although the project undoubtedly benefitted from the leveraged cultural capital of *operetta*, this genre choice also exposes unsightly classism and reinscribes traditional, sexist ideology of gender propriety.

Because of operetta’s pedigree in the Western art music tradition, this genre connoted high levels of artistry and professionalism unmatched by other popular genre contenders, such as musical and pageant. This would have been an important factor for Elsa Maxwell personally, who, at the time of her collaboration with Alva Belmont, wished to be ranked among the elite few women composers of her day. With credentials to boot enumerated in her January 23rd interview with the *New York Times*, her professionalism cannot easily be refuted. Admittedly, her domestic hits were few, but she was “better known in London, where her revues [were]

produced at all the West End theaters.”⁴⁸ Nestled among performers and productions named-dropped, one paragraph of the *Times* interview confirms that a conceptual divide existed between songwriters, like Maxwell, and “legitimate” composers:

Miss Maxwell commenced her professional work in New York, doing some dramatic criticism and working at serious ballads, words and music. Then, being a businesslike woman as well as a musician, she concluded that there was more opportunity and money in popular songs than in anything else in her line of work, and she also decided that in England there would be less competition and a better chance for success.

The line in the sand between art music and commercial music (like Maxwell’s) had been drawn.

In the case of *Melinda and Her Sisters*, the distinction is particularly puzzling. At no point in its history had music scholars and critics regarded operetta as an art-for-art’s-sake genre. Even the giants of the genre—Offenbach and Gilbert and Sullivan among them—were contractually obligated to produce new works according to a schedule set by the proprietors of the performance halls where their works premiered.⁴⁹ Their musical products were a means to a monetary end making idea of professionalism inescapably bound up with commercialism in this genre. Furthermore, *Melinda and Her Sisters* was always explicitly a money-making venture, not for the creators, but for the organizations that advocated for women in America. The first sentence of the very article in question reaffirms that the piece is “to be produced as a suffrage benefit.”⁵⁰ Despite these two contradictory

⁴⁸ “CROSSED THE OCEAN TO COMPOSE AND OPERETTA,” *New York Times*, January 23, 1916.

⁴⁹ The topicality of the situations and the humor of operettas indicates that the creators were concerned with immediacy and not with posterity. See Traubner, *Operetta*, 2003.

⁵⁰ “MRS. BELMONT HITS SOCIETY IN OPERETTA,” *New York Times*, December 28, 1915.

complications—the longstanding commercialism associated with the genre and *Melinda*'s fundraising initiatives—Maxwell nevertheless *believed* that by composing an operetta, she would be transitioning from the role of a sellout songwriter to legitimate composer.

Operetta's dual associations of artistry and professionalism also gave Belmont and Maxwell the leverage to recruit some high caliber talent for the production. The show's two leading ladies—Marie Dressler as Mrs. Pepper and Marie Doro as the eponymous heroine—were celebrities of the stage and screen long before the *Melinda* project came about. Both women had had years of professional experience throughout the United States in the operetta and light/comic opera genres prior to this engagement.⁵¹ Although Dressler actively pursued work in both the stage and film industries throughout her career, Doro reports having given up stage performances altogether when her longtime mentor, Charles Frohman, perished with the sinking of the *RMS Lusitania* in May of 1915.⁵² Her decision to join the cast of *Melinda* nearly seven months after that tragedy attests to both the quality of the piece and the importance of the suffrage cause.

From her interview with the *New York Times*:

Miss Doro is enthusiastic. She has grown a suffragist in a rush. "I did not know that suffrage meant all that," said Miss Doro, yesterday, when she heard a reading of the libretto. "It appeals to the very highest and best there is in me. I love the part of Melinda."⁵³

⁵¹ For information on Marie Dressler's career, see Matthew Kennedy, *Marie Dressler: A Biography, with a Listing of Major Stage Performances, a Filmography and a Discography*, (McFarland, 2006). For complete stage appearances and select filmography on Marie Doro, see Daniel Blum, "#48, Marie Doro," in *Great Stars of the American Stage: A Pictorial Record* (Grosset & Dunlap, 1954).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ "MARIE DORO IN 'MELINDA,'" *New York Times*, December 31, 1915.

If, as the paper reported, Miss Doro truly was “the prettiest, brightest, and cleverest young star on the professional stage,”⁵⁴ then her faith in the quality of *Melinda* would have been invaluable in marketing the work. The same can be said of Marie Dressler’s testimony, which included such sentiments as “the plot is A1”⁵⁵ and “the lines were all so good that there would have to be first-class actors to make them score.”⁵⁶ That both professionals took on leading roles without compensation demonstrates the entire team’s commitment to fundraising for the suffrage cause. Even in her outrage at the regrettable dispute with Belmont, Dressler inadvertently reinforces the impact of this gesture: “I gave six weeks of my time to rehearse ‘Melinda and Her Sisters’ and coach the cast—I wouldn’t have sold that time to anyone.”⁵⁷

In addition to the two comediennes, Belmont and Maxwell also engaged what the *Times* frequently called “serious” talents for the show’s Special Parts.⁵⁸ Among them were Frances Alda, Ada Androva, and Albert Lindquist. What separates this group from Doro and Dressler is their extensive experience as singers of art music. Ada Androva (aka Ada Chambers) toured the U.S. and abroad as the soprano soloist with John Philip Sousa’s band before landing a spot in the Boston Opera Company.⁵⁹ By 1916, she had given up ensembles for a career as a freelance recital soloist. Albert Lindquest (who would later change his name and become the

⁵⁴ “SUFFRAGE JINGLES IN BELMONT OPERA,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1915.

⁵⁵ “Mrs. Belmont Hits Society...” *New York Times*, December 28, 1915.

⁵⁶ “Suffrage Jingles...” *New York Times*, December 29, 1915.

⁵⁷ “DRESSLER-BELMONT STAGE ARTS CLASH,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1916.

⁵⁸ From the front matter of the book and score, it appears that the Special Parts were non-narrative divertissements. It is unclear whether they were given before, after, and/or during the performance.

⁵⁹ “Theater and Amusements,” in *The Index* v.15, 1915.

great voice teacher, Alan Rogers Lindquest) was a famous concert tenor and recording artist for the Edison Company.⁶⁰ Although his early successes were in performances of oratorios, he is now remembered principally for his vaudeville career and exquisite recordings of European folk songs. Frances Alda was the biggest star of them all. At the time of *Melinda and Her Sisters*, she already had close to a decade of performances as a leading soprano with the Met and several seasons on the biggest stages throughout Europe before that on her resume.⁶¹

I believe that without the inflated grandeur that the operetta label afforded to the project, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to secure these art music stars for *Melinda and Her Sisters*. In fact, the operetta classification may not have been enough. Recall from Table 1 that *opera*, *opera comique*, and *satire* all outpaced *operetta* as preferred genres in the earliest stages of the casting and rehearsal processes. It was not until January 30th that the rhetoric pivoted sharply toward operetta. This conveniently coincides with the first announcement that Frances Alda and Ada Androva would be joining the cast. Albert Lindquest's participation had already been announced unceremoniously in the final paragraph of the January 12th article entitled "Whitman Suffrage Patron Will Occupy Best Seat at Mrs. Belmont's Opera Comique." Nevertheless, he seems to have been courted for the project from the beginning, as indicated by the December 28th teaser: "There is to be one male voice in the opera, which Caruso recommends as one of

⁶⁰ David Jones, "The Voice Teacher," accessed October 25, 2017, <http://www.voiceteacher.com/lindquist.html>.

⁶¹ Adrienne Simpson, "Alda, Frances," *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, 2010, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3a9/alda-frances>.

the greatest promise.”⁶² It is possible that Alda and Androva, like Lindquest, were also approached for roles far in advance of the January 30th announcement. If true, it seems that Belmont and Maxwell strategically maintained the impression of highest artistry and professionalism through an overabundance of *opera* in the press in order to appeal to artists in this field. They walked back their claims about the production to the more accurate *operetta* standards only after the stars’ commitment had been made public.

In addition to attracting two distinct classes of professional performers, *operetta* also served the interests of the amateur cast as well. In the first place, the genre’s aforementioned claims to high artistry would have flattered the nonprofessionals who volunteered to participate. It is easy to imagine the pride that an amateur, quite possibly a first-time actress, would feel at performing in an operetta, alongside veritable celebrities no less. More importantly, *operetta* was a genre that had long been embraced as a refined and studied musical art by the upper classes of American society. Practitioners of the style were artists: talented and above reproach. That the genre’s summoned notions of respectability were then transferred onto the performers meant *operetta* insulated the participants from any suspicions or accusations of promiscuity that haunted performers on the stages of lesser theatrical styles. Ipso facto, elite women and debutantes of New York City would be admired, not rebuked, for their participation in the suffrage operetta.

⁶² “Mrs. Belmont Hits Society...” *New York Times*, December 28, 1915. Lindquest had sought out famed tenor Enrico Caruso as a vocal coach upon his arrival in New York City in 1914, and Caruso’s enthusiasm for Lindquest’s voice was well known. See Ann de Renais, “Biographical Outline: Alan Lindquest,” http://www.swedish-italianschoolofsinging.net/pdfs/alan_lindquest.pdf.

This insulation and elevation was especially important because it extended beyond the participants themselves to their families, which were some of the most visible and headed by the most powerful men in America. We should not assume that the wives and daughters of tycoons necessarily had the agency to decide for themselves whether they would participate in *Melinda*; but, we can grant that the aegis of *operetta* certainly would have made the endeavor more palatable to them and to the husbands and fathers who were (if not in the habit of) at least in the position to police their actions.

The operetta genre entitled the production to privileged coverage in the press. Like other operettas (and works of other art music genres) written by more established composers and given at more prestigious venues, *Melinda and Her Sisters* enjoyed full exposure in the press from pre-production casting calls, hype articles, interviews, and complete cast list, to performance reviews and even a post-production scandal. Contrastingly, Broadway and vaudeville productions at the time would publish the same display ad day after day. Each contained a small box of text, possibly illustrated, that conveyed only the essential information: title, location and time, price of admission, and a tagline or perhaps the name of a headlining performer.⁶³ Because the press treated *Melinda and Her Sisters* more like its art music ancestors and less like its commercial cousins, it subtly legitimized the operetta classification not only for readers and would-be viewers at the time *but also* for subsequent generations of historians and scholars.

⁶³ See Figure 3 for examples.

The nature of the news coverage that *Melinda and Her Sisters* received helped fulfill several of Mrs. Belmont's goals. In the first place, the extensive media coverage ensured that the public was not only informed but also excited about the upcoming production, which would help to drive ticket sales. Ticket sales in turn ensured on the one hand that the performance would generate significant proceeds with which suffrage organizations could fund their operations. On the other hand, robust ticket sales would ensure that the suffrage ideology embedded within the narrative reached as large an audience as possible. Secondly, less noble but no less true, the ongoing press coverage of *Melinda and Her Sisters* ensured that Alva Belmont's name and her undertakings regularly resided in the forefront of New Yorkers' collective mind, which, as Hoffert's biography details, was of paramount importance to her.

Although the thorough press coverage ensured the immediate commercial success of the production, its placement in the Society pages of the paper preordained its equally immediate dismissal from the critical history of the genre. While the coverage of *Melinda and Her Sisters* resembled that of art music recitals, symphonies, operas, and the like in terms of frequency, length, and content, it was not afforded a place alongside these in the newspaper's Arts section. Falling outside the pages and purview of the Arts section, the *Melinda* articles were not authored by a trusted name in the field of music and/or theater criticism.⁶⁴ As such, the uncredited author(s) of the *Melinda and Her Sisters* articles assume a tone that is descriptive instead of analytical, complimentary instead of discerning. Without

⁶⁴ Indeed, it is unclear whether the author of the *Melinda* series of articles is a single reporter, a team of reporters, or, if they are press releases authored by Belmont and her team.

having attended the performance or possessing a score in hand, there is little to be learned about the music and its critical reception from such vague accounts as: “a nice lilting lay,” “a jolly little song;” “pretty,” and “delightful.”

The consistent emptiness of the review may have catalyzed its premature disappearance from the papers and, by extension, from the musical record. It seems that everyone from creator to critic to consumer agreed that *Melinda and Her Sisters* was “nice;” without provocative reviews to be debated, dissenting opinions to be weighed, what point could there be in spilling more ink on the matter? Without the suffrage battle still to be waged not even two years after its premiere, what sense would there be in revival productions of the work? Without remarkable musicality, notable authorship, or substantial performance history, what could merit its preservation in the musical record? In short, as an overhyped, underdelivered operetta, *Melinda and Her Sisters* is destined to remain underappreciated.

It could be that Belmont and Maxwell preferred to publish in the Society pages because there they could reach a wider audience, one not limited to connoisseurs of music and theater, but inclusive of all those interested in New York’s thriving social scene. This strategy would pay off in two phases of the production cycle: first in the casting phase, and later in the ticketing phase. Because the production relied on a large cast of amateur volunteers, the casting call needed to reach readers who weren’t explicitly seeking paid employment as entertainers and who had leisure time to devote to rehearsals. Because the production’s primary initiative was fundraising, the hype and hard-sell needed to reach readers who had the capital to devote to philanthropic endeavors. The Society pages (not the Arts

section) was the appropriate place to publicize a benefit fundraiser. For both purposes, readers of the Society pages fit the bill. With this single repository, Belmont and Maxwell's advertising could simultaneously recruit young socialites on the rise as participants and their affectionate, wealthy families as willing patrons.

Considering the first article as a representative sample, it is clear that the marketing strategy for *Melinda and Her Sisters* ostracized middle- and working-class participants and audiences as decisively as it targeted high- and elite-class ones.⁶⁵ That the first public announcement categorized the work as an opera eight times—more than any other source by a wide margin—immediately associates the work with a traditionally class-exclusive art form. Even when later articles walked back those associations to operetta—a traditionally middle-class entertainment—other evidence of elitism remained. The obvious differences between full-length articles for *Melinda and Her Sisters* and the inexpensive classified ads for popular middle-class entertainments such as vaudeville, burlesque, cabaret, and Broadway, coupled with their physical separation in the newspaper echoes and reinforces the classist boundaries between genres.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the selection of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel ballroom as the performance venue creates an implicit barrier to entry for middle- and working-class audiences. As the largest and most luxurious hotel in the world at the time of its construction, the Waldorf Astoria was effectively

⁶⁵ While suffragists would not have wanted to draw class lines between recipients of their ideology, Belmont and Maxwell nevertheless needed to exclude all but the richest and most powerful citizens of New York City in order for *Melinda and Her Sisters* to be an effective one-off fundraiser.

⁶⁶ In truth, Belmont did issue one so-called Display Ad for *Melinda and Her Sisters* which ran on the day of the performance. I believe this strategy ensured that the performance received maximum visibility on this crucial date. The display ad is included in the Appendix of Figures.

synonymous with socioeconomic exclusivity.⁶⁷ Finally, the articles stated in no uncertain terms that *Melinda and Her Sisters* was by and for social elites only: “the characters will be cast among prominent women of New York.”⁶⁸ With auditions and rehearsals held in her opulent home on Madison Avenue, it is unlikely that Mrs. Belmont would admit anyone not already known to her.

Undoubtedly the clearest indication of targeted marketing in this production is the cost prohibitive ticketing. At a staggering \$10 per seat and \$125 – 150 for a box, only the rich could afford such a luxury as attending the performance of *Melinda and Her Sisters*. By comparison, the cost to attend Broadway performances ranged between \$.15 and \$.75. That single tickets to this amateur production cost even more than the \$3 – 7 required to attend a world-class performance at the Metropolitan Opera attests to the centrality of the fundraising initiative. Only the rich who were attending more to enjoy a night of philanthropy in performance by their peers than to revel in the beauty of high-caliber art and artists would be willing to pay such a price. To emphasize the enormity of the expense, Table 2 translates the actual prices of the relevant entertainments into modern values using the most current inflation rate data available at the time of this research as published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Consumer Price Index.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ward Morehouse III, *The Waldorf Astoria: America's Gilded Dream* (XLibris, 1991), 21.

⁶⁸ “Mrs. Belmont Hits Society...” *New York Times*, December 28, 1915.

⁶⁹ The CPI Inflation Calculator can be found here: Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Databases, Tables, and Calculators: CPI Calculator,” https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

	Actual Cost (US\$) ⁷⁰	Dec. 2017 Buying Power (US\$)
<i>Melinda and Her Sisters</i> (Single)	10	237
<i>Melinda and Her Sisters</i> (Box)	125 – 150	2,963 – 3,556
Broadway Theaters	.15 – .75	3.56 – 17.78
Metropolitan Opera (Single)	3 – 7	71.11 – 166
Paterson Strike Pageant (Single)	.10 – 2	2.37 – 47.41
Paterson Strike Pageant (Box)	10 – 20	252 - 503

Table 2: 2017 Buying Power of Various Entertainments' Actual Costs

The nuances of inflation across various types of expenditures necessarily renders the resultant December 2017 totals as inaccurate representations of actual market values for these entertainments. Still, to pay over \$3,000 for only a few hours of entertainment and socializing is as outrageously cost-prohibitive for the average consumer today as \$125 was in 1916. It is evidence of the primacy of the production's fundraising initiative.

Although the amateur quality of the production could hardly demand these rates, there nevertheless was a significant pool of New Yorkers who would be willing to pay that much and more for a good cause. There was an even greater number of New Yorkers for whom the expense was well outside the realm of possibility. The United States Treasury Department Office of Internal Revenue compiled a *Statistics of Income* retrospective report in 1916 intending to demonstrate that the Federal Individual Income Tax legislation passed by Congress

⁷⁰ To ensure the most accurate comparison to the cost of attending *Melinda and Her Sisters*, the Actual Costs for Broadway and Metropolitan Opera are also for February 1916. The Paterson Strike Pageant Actual Cost is for the only performance in June 1913. Note that the \$10 for a box at Paterson in June 1913 has more buying power than the same \$10 for a single seat at *Melinda* over two years later.

in 1913 was in fact generating more operational funds for the government, boosting the economy, and increasing the American Gross Domestic Product as predicted.⁷¹ For the purposes of this research, the data on regional distribution of wealth is illuminating. The following chart extracts data from the *Statistics of Income* report to reconstruct the extremes of socioeconomic stratification in the year that Belmont and Maxwell dared to charge \$10 a ticket for their charity event.

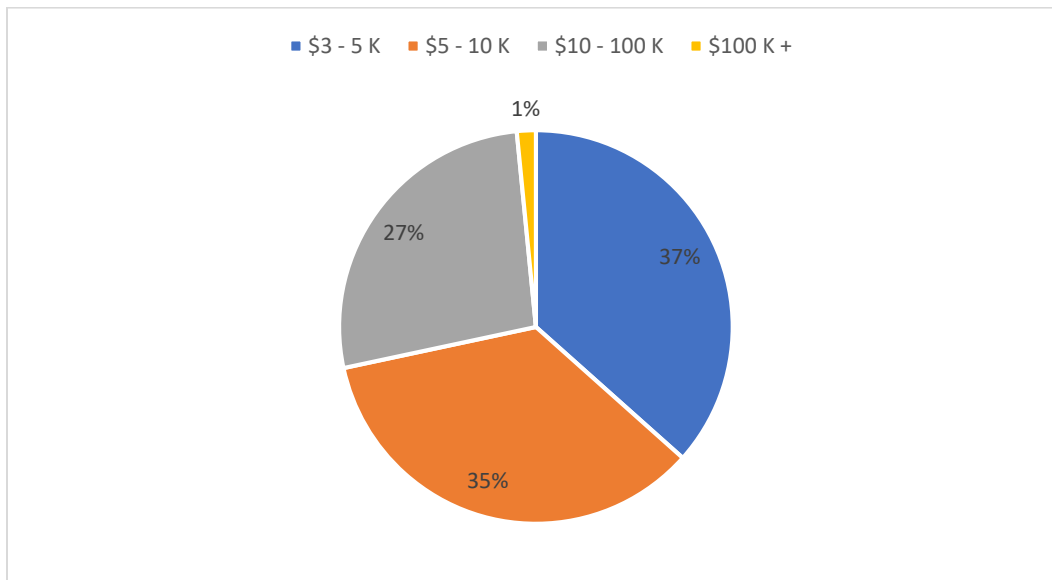


Table 3: Annual Gross Household Income in 1916⁷²

According to the data, close to half of American households in 1916 earned \$5,000 or less annually.⁷³ Parsed out over a calendar year, these households would have been living on between \$57 – 96 per week. Accordingly, in order to purchase a single ticket to attend *Melinda and Her Sisters*, these earners would have to forfeit 10 – 18% of their entire weekly budget. It is safe to assume that no one from this

⁷¹ The document also reveals socioeconomic disparities across gender, class, race, region, and other identity factors that continue to disadvantage certain American groups today.

⁷² Based on the 429,401 federal personal income tax returns filed in 1916.

⁷³ NB: The United States did not assess federal income tax for households earning less than \$3,000 annually. Those households were not required to report income at the federal level at all. My 50% estimate attempts to restore them to the financial record of this country.

socioeconomic bracket did so, and confirms that they clearly were not the work's intended audience.

The Treasury Department's report stratified the 6,633 personal income tax returns that comprise the top 1% of earners in the U.S. even further.⁷⁴ Those brackets are listed across the top row of Table 4. The second row represents the total number of returns per income class filed in the United States. The third row provides the New York state totals in each category, while the final row is my own calculation translating the ratio into a simple percentage. This exercise demonstrates the extreme wealth concentrated in New York. In addition to the subdivided tax brackets of the top 1%, I have provided figures those 37% of Americans who filed federal personal income tax returns at the other socioeconomic extreme (bold).

⁷⁴ See Table 2 and Table 5, *Statistics of Income*.

Income Class	All Classes	\$3 – 5 K	\$100 - 150 K	\$150 – 200 K	\$200 – 250 K	\$250 – 300 K	\$300 – 400 K	\$400 – 500 K	\$500 K – 1 M	\$1 - 1.5 M	\$1.5 – 2 M	\$2 – 3 M	\$3 – 4 M	\$4 – 5 M	\$5 M +
Federal Returns Totals	429,401	157,149	2,900	1,284	726	427	469	425	376	97	42	34	14	9	10
New York State Totals	90,701	28,854	1006	467	304	165	191	99	187	54	23	20	11	6	5
N.Y. Totals as % of U.S. Totals	21.1	18.4	34.7	36.4	41.9	38.6	40.7	23.3	49.7	55.7	54.8	58.8	78.6	66.7	50

Table 4: Distribution of Extreme Wealth in NY v. National Totals

With just over 20% of the tax-eligible population filing federal returns from New York state, it should not be surprising that just under 20% of the nation’s lowest earners also filed from New York.⁷⁵ While New York state should not be conflated with New York City, it is worth noting that the 1910 census tallies nearly 7.2 million of New York state’s inhabitants—fully 79%—as urbanites,⁷⁶ and that 4.75 million of those resided “in New York City proper.”⁷⁷ The number of tax

⁷⁵ The most recent census at the time (that of 1910) corroborates this evidence, stating that New York’s 9.1 million inhabitants comprised nearly 10% of the total population. Of course, millions of these citizens are children and others whose existence is subsumed into a single household’s federal income tax return, or who are otherwise not responsible for filing a federal income tax return.

⁷⁶ Table 36, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Table 50, p. 74. The 1910 census defines the term “in city proper” as synonymous with the “municipal boundaries” of the city, and, relevant to the case of NYC, its boroughs. The census incorporates an additional 1.7 million to the population of NYC’s “metropolitan district,” defined

returns filed in New York state more than doubled that of the second most populous state, Pennsylvania, whose Philadelphia metro area also contained over 1 million residents at the time of the 1910 census. Therefore, it is appropriate to attribute many tens of thousands of New York state's total tax returns to the New York City metro area. It is also worth noting that low-income and impoverished populations tend to settle (and get stuck) in urban areas and that a substantial percentage of New York City's population would accordingly fall below the \$3,000 threshold for taxation and remain undocumented. This data culled from the 1916 *Statistics of Income* report and the 1910 census proves is that at the time of the *Melinda and Her Sisters* performance, there were hundreds of thousands, even millions, of Americans in the immediate area who might have attended the show were it not for the exorbitant cost.

While the above data supports the notion that pricing was an insurmountable barrier to entry for entire socioeconomic brackets of the city's population, I am more interested in what this data—the ratios in particular—reveals about the distribution of the highest wealth in the country. Unlike New York's lowest taxable classes whose percentile is within a reasonable margin to New York's total representation in the United States, New York's highest earners comprise a disproportionate percentage of the national totals. The \$3 – 4 million bracket in New York is the most extreme example, with close to 80% of the nation's earners residing there. For these highest socioeconomic classes, the mean of New York's

as “those sections of the adjacent territory [up to a 10 mi. radius] which may be considered as urban in character.” This algorithm subsumes an additional 30 cities (including Newark and Jersey City, each of which has its own municipal population of over 200,000) into the NYC metropolitan district. Ergo, 90% of New York state's total urban population resided in NYC.

returns to the national totals is 44%. With over 2,500 of the country's wealthiest people living in New York state—which at this point can certainly be synonymous with New York City—Belmont and Maxwell would not have struggled to fill the Waldorf Astoria ballroom's 1,200 seats at \$10 each. All of this data proves that the creators of *Melinda and Her Sisters* sought to target the top 1% of earners who resided in New York City.

Operetta for Equality

Despite the financial exclusivity of the event, the performance-fundraiser nevertheless served the pursuit of equality externally. Although it shut out middle- and low-class citizens from the performance, the funds generated by those who could afford to attend ultimately benefitted American women across class boundaries. The operetta strategy was also an artistic victory for women's equality. At the time of its creation, *Melinda and Her Sisters* was one of just a handful of operas—let alone the lesser operetta category—composed by women. The work therefore *demonstrates* women's equal capacity for musical composition while its narrative content simultaneously *demands* women's equality in all other aspects of life. If *Melinda and Her Sisters* the operetta had been a critical, as well as a commercial, success, it would only have reinforced this equality.

Earlier I argued that the satirical tone is one of the work's prominent features that justifies its claim to the operetta genre. While this may be true, it is also possible that Belmont and Maxwell chose *operetta* for the protection that its reputation as lighthearted cultural satire provided. Citing the convention of satirical tone, Belmont and Maxwell could infuse their project with controversial, even radical ideologies and then casually deflect any suspicion of having created populist

propaganda. It would be speculation only to assert that the creation of populist propaganda was or was not their objective. But, it is likely that the accusation of having created populist propaganda would have jeopardized the success of the project. Therefore, Belmont and Maxwell could not have afforded to take the chance of *Melinda* seeming to be too sincere in its hyperbole. To have done so might have offended or frightened the patrons and put them off from making donations and supporting the suffrage cause, which would surely have had repercussions when the performance ended and the rich and powerful people poured back out onto New York's cold city streets. In that *operetta* could simultaneously maximize license for radical sociopolitical criticism and minimize the politicization of the work itself, the genre classification strategy for equality is ingenious.

Does ingenuity translate to success, inadvertent failures notwithstanding? The divergent record of *Melinda and Her Sisters* in suffrage anthology versus musicological analyses suggests that the answer depends on perspective. In the following chapter, I argue for an alternative genre classification of the work that may offer a solution on which both academic fields can agree.

Chapter Two

A Case for Pageantry

The argument for genre reclassification relies heavily on the centrality of certain salient features and functions of pageantry from this historical moment that appear in *Melinda and Her Sisters*. These are 1) collaborative, amateur music-making, 2) education and celebration, and 3) fundraising. The third item in this list differentiates political pageantry from what I will collectively call community pageantry, but which scholars have often sorted into two types—civic and historical. All three types of pageantry were popular at the time of *Melinda and Her Sisters*' conception and performance, so a portion of this chapter will be given over to outlining the slight variations between the types. Each of the two broad categories of pageantry—community and political—are plagued with extramusical associations and attendant biases that operate on axes of gender and class, respectively. Had Belmont and Maxwell chosen to market their work as a pageant, these connotations would have negatively impacted the reception, dissemination, and financial success of *Melinda and Her Sisters*. I argue that because of its ambitious fundraising initiatives, *Melinda and Her Sisters* must be aligned with the political variety of pageantry that had already so successfully advanced the ideologies of the concurrent suffrage and labor reform movements.

Pageantry: History and Definition

Pageantry, as a form of public theater, has a genealogy reaching as far back and as far away as Medieval Europe when a variety of public performances were given at celebrations of holidays, festivals, anniversaries, and coronations. Not a

genre in itself so much as an umbrella term for the many processions, parades, and morality and mystery plays that would occur at such occasions, pageantry experienced a renaissance and reinvention in the late 19th century. In his expert opinion as the Chairman of the Department of Pageants and Festivals for the Drama League of America and Director of the American Pageant Association (1921), Dr. Linwood Taft concludes that "the modern pageant is the direct outgrowth of the mystery play of the late middle ages."⁷⁸ He cites the continued synonymy of the genres in standard dictionaries of the era as conclusive evidence of pageantry's ancestry. A slightly earlier scholar, England's Louis Napoleon Parker, whose 1905 *Pageant of Sherbourne* is cited by his contemporaries as the model for early-20th-century American pageantry, argues for a more immediate lineage found in Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* because it models the unification of the arts and successful integration of "indigenous material."⁷⁹ Arthur Farwell, a respected composer of original pageantry music, echoed Parker's views and during the height of his own career, he looked to Native American traditions for source material.⁸⁰

Regardless of direct or ostensible connections, both authors agree that 19th- and 20th-century American pageants differ significantly from their early modern European predecessors in that they are strictly historical, democratic, and secular, valorizing not the actions of individuals in myth or scripture, but rather a

⁷⁸ Linwood Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1921), 5.

⁷⁹ Naima Prevots, *American Pageantry: A Movement for Art and Democracy*, Theater and Dramatic Studies 61 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), 5. As a matter of difference of opinion, what Parker sees as unification, Taft derides as "hodge-podge."

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 159 – 161. Farwell's efforts to seek indigenous material often unfairly misrepresented the groups—primarily "Indians" and "Negroes," to borrow his own dated and insensitive language—whose traditions he appropriated. Exploration of this topic is at the heart of Vana Pietroniro's Master's thesis, "Propaganda and Misrepresentation in Early Twentieth Century American Historical and Civic Pageantry" (Tufts University, 1998).

community of citizens and their shared humanity. I sense in Parker's view an anxiety that dogma could pervade the genre if the early modern heritage was embraced too emphatically. For Taft, however, it is precisely the dramatization of "those rare moments of human experience when existence was transformed and glorified through contact with the divine"⁸¹ that infused mystery plays with their moral authority. Modern creators of pageants need only substitute worldly "exalted moments when men [sic] are inspired by lofty and unselfish motives"⁸² to achieve the same didactic effect.

This revival inspired the creation of hundreds of pageants across the country from the late 19th century to the late 1920s when the form suddenly fell out of fashion. In 1913 at the height of pageantry's popularity, the newly-formed American Pageant Association attempted to categorize these into two main types. First, they identified historical pageants as those "having either a local or national appeal;" second, the civic pageant "based upon developing historically, realistically, or symbolically, a social, religious, or civic ideal."⁸³ Semantically, these descriptions are not mutually exclusive—for example, a pageant meant to cultivate patriotism would undoubtedly also have local and national appeal—and therefore the difference requires additional explanation. In creating these categories, the APA meant to highlight performance occasion. Historical pageants are those explicitly occasioned for commemoration of events or anniversaries of

⁸¹ Taft, *Technique of Pageantry*, 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸³ American Pageantry Association Bulletin, as quoted in Vana Pietroniro, "Propaganda and Misrepresentation in Early Twentieth Century American Historical and Civic Pageantry" (Tufts University, 1998), 5.

either local or national importance, such as the incorporation of a town or the 4th of July. These may well have had recurrent themes of patriotism, brotherhood, freedom, and the like, but the episodes chosen to dramatize those themes would have overt connections to the history of the place. Civic pageants however, could be and frequently were performed independent of specific occasions. Lotta Clark's 1908 *Pageant of Education* is one such example. By virtue of their universalizing content and without overt ties to a specific location, civic pageants sampled freely from global history.

It should be noted that the APA's definitions of pageantry only acknowledged the civic and historical varieties to the exclusion of the political type despite the latter's recently having grown in number, popularity, and significance in the early 20th century. The pageantry definitions mandated upon the 1913 formation of the APA and reiterated with the publication of Taft's text in 1921 indicate efforts to quell the co-opting of the genre for political purposes. It was only political activists and later historians who recognized the value and encouraged the use of pageantry in political propaganda campaigns.

As an outgrowth of community pageantry, political pageantry echoes its progenitor. It, too, champions an ideal that the work's creators would have as a universal truth. Unlike patriotism, gratitude, and the like, the ideals of political pageantry were hotly contested values, such as gender equality and socialism. For political movements, then, pageantry was a medium through which to instill new values rather than reinforce existing ones. In its selection of events to dramatize, political pageantry followed the same guiding principles as community pageantry.

For those civically-minded political pageants that strove to dramatize an abstract principle—such as women’s noble contributions to society—the whole temporal and geographic expanse of human history was at their disposal. Other political pageants maintained a narrower focus on a particular group, event, or location. Hazel MacKaye’s *The Allegory* and the Paterson Strike Pageant epitomize these two types and will be considered in depth in a later section.

The dramatization of past events as entertaining commentary on the state of the present was common to all three types of pageants. Via its selective and constructed chronology of “exalted moments,” pageantry inspired continued excellence from its citizenry in both their present and future actions, which was its highest purpose. Brevity is not Mr. William Chauncey Langdon’s strength (nor his concern), but he enunciates this principle emphatically:

If, as they ought to be, all episodes of the past are focused on the present, are dramatized with the present ever in mind...then the fire of the present will gleam back over the past...Really, the only use of the past is to sing the song of the present in continually varied strains...All lies in the present...Now, the future...As sure as a pageant dramatizes with any success...the public questions of the present, the vital problem of a community [via the past], it must go on to state, to suggest, or at least to imply the possibility of an answer to those public questions, the solution of that problem...It follows, of course, instantly that all that has just been said about focusing the past on the present is shifted onto the future. The whole pageant looks forward to the future and the ideal life of which man [sic] always has made and always will make his futures.⁸⁴

Regardless of occasion and the superficial sub-classifications, all pageants sought to dramatize and celebrate "the history and life of a community. As such, its interest is based upon community character development."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ William Chauncey Langdon, “The Creative Power of Pageantry,” *Atlantic Education Journal*, December 1912, 16. He would go on to serve as APA President.

⁸⁵ Prevots, *American Pageantry*, 7.

It is this democratic concern for the good of the community that made pageantry a perfect fit for the epithet, “the drama of the people, by the people, for the people.”⁸⁶ Prevots’ use of the familiar tripartite adage echoes sentiments first espoused by George Pierce Baker. In a 1913 *Art and Progress* article, this drama scholar and Harvard professor of English wrote “let us . . . make pageantry the drama of our people as a people.”⁸⁷ As the linchpin of its function, the sense of democratic community is present in so many of pageantry’s defining structures and procedures. These conventions unify the three types of pageantry and distinguish them from traditional theatrical styles. In the following pages, I enumerate several of these that will be useful later in supporting my argument for the reclassification of *Melinda and Her Sisters*.

*Performance Space and
Redefinition of the Performer-Spectator Relationship*

Perhaps as a vestige of or homage to the processional and parade varieties of medieval pageantry, most Progressive Era pageants took place outside. Often, a spacious public park or city street closed to vehicular traffic would become the pageantry stage. These provided ample space for performers and audiences alike. When weather necessitated an indoor performance, pageanters typically chose locations that echoed the democratic and educational initiatives of the genre, such as a school gymnasium, armory, or other public gathering place.⁸⁸ By selecting the Waldorf Astoria Hotel for their midwinter performance that couldn’t possibly have

⁸⁶ Ibid, 3.

⁸⁷ George P. Baker, “Pageantry,” *Art and Progress* 4, no. 3 (1913): 834.

⁸⁸ Prevots, *American Pageantry*, 3. Churches and other religious houses were avoided, perhaps in keeping with Parker’s apprehension about religiosity pervading pageantry’s democracy.

been held outside, Belmont fulfills the democratic ideal of place. The Waldorf Astoria was a known supporter of women's rights and suffrage; it hosted many charity dinners and conventions for the cause. Demonstrating its commitment to equality of the sexes, the Waldorf Astoria was also one of the first hotels and dining rooms in the country to admit women without an escort.⁸⁹

Whether outdoors or indoors, these places and spaces uniformly redefine the spectator's relationship to the performers and to the work itself. Unlike a theater whose elevated stage, proscenium arch, and unseen wings and backstage area house an imagined world entirely apart from the one the audience inhabits, a pageant space should "secure a feeling of sympathetic participation on the part of the audience."⁹⁰ Free from the restrictive architecture of the theatre, "the whole pageant space is considered as stage space and utilized as such as occasion warrants."⁹¹ This capacity to make spectators feel themselves to be enveloped in the drama and subsequently incited to action would later make pageantry an attractive medium for political propaganda. *Melinda's* processional entering the ballroom from behind the audience and marching up to the stage may have had this enveloping effect.⁹² Of course, the atypical theatrical locations are also an elegant solution to pageantry's immediate issue of scale.

⁸⁹ Morrison, *Waldorf Astoria*, 40.

⁹⁰ Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 8.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹² It will be considered in depth in a later section.

Community Engagement and Amateurism

As communal enterprises, it was generally expected that a significant percentage of citizens would participate in pageants as performers and the remainder would assume the role of spectators. For this reason, it was not uncommon for pageants to have several hundred to several thousand performers and several thousand to several tens of thousands of spectators.⁹³ With less than one hundred performers and barely more than twelve hundred in the audience, *Melinda and Her Sisters* would be tiny by pageantry's standards. But, as I have already fixed the population of the targeted socioeconomic community at approximately 2,500, the combined performer/spectator participation *rate* of nearly 50% is appropriate. Surely there are few, if any, proper theater houses in America that could accommodate casts and crowds the size of the community. Hence the appeal of more flexible indoor spaces and limitless outdoor ones. Taft explains:

Except for the difficulty of seating the audience and for the uncertainty of the weather every argument is in favor of an out-of-door performance. Unlimited space for a stage, long avenues of approach for groups of characters, the possibility of using large groups without producing the effect of crowding, greater ease in disposing of groups when off the stage, and many other features are all in favor of the out-of-door pageant. Then there is the emotional appeal to a pageant given in the open that is lacking when the performance has to be compressed to the limitations of a building.⁹⁴

Taft does not go on to explain what he means by emotional appeal, but the fact that outdoor performance sites were often chosen for their real or symbolic connection to the event or virtue being celebrated could point to it. APA President Langdon,

⁹³ Prevots, *American Pageantry*, 3. These numbers are necessarily proportionate to the overall population of the host community.

⁹⁴ Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 9.

famously quipped “the pageant is a drama in which the place is the hero and the development of the community is the plot.”⁹⁵ Germane to the current research are the many examples of suffrage pageants performed in locations of political and historical significance: Washington D.C., Seneca Falls and Rochester, N.Y., and most notably the March 3, 1913 performance of Hazel MacKaye’s *The Allegory* on the steps of the Treasury Building.⁹⁶ More than aptness of place, Taft’s emphasis on extremes of scale in both numbers and space reinforces the ideals of democratic inclusivity and dramatic freedom that defined pageantry.⁹⁷

As collaborative, community-wide enterprises, pageants developed around the dramatic and musical abilities of non-professionals. Typically, there would be only a few major speaking roles in a pageant assigned not necessarily to those with the most talent, but to those with the most zeal for the project. Taft asserts that the endeavor of community glorification imbues an amateur citizen’s performance with a genuine fervor that cannot be approximated by even the most experienced professional.⁹⁸ The majority of characters are non-speaking and not individuated: large groups of a type—children, Pilgrims, soldiers, etc.—arranged into choruses and crowds. As such, it is not their words but their actions—“expressive and

⁹⁵ David Glassberg reinforces the power of this statement when he quotes its central ideas as the titles to chapters 3 and 4 of his 1990 book, *American Historical Pageantry*.

⁹⁶ It is worth noting that although this is a decidedly political pageant in terms of content, it premiered by design on the eve of Woodrow Wilson’s presidential inauguration. Karen J. Blair, *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930* (Indiana University Press, 1994), 138-139. See also Karen J. Blair, “Pageantry for Women’s Rights: The Career of Hazel MacKaye, 1913-1923,” *Theater Survey* 31 (May 1994): 23–46.

⁹⁷ For democratic ideals in pageantry, see Naima Prevots, “Pageantry: Theater of the People, by the People, for the People,” in *American Pageantry*, 1-12.

⁹⁸ Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 5.

symbolic movement and group pantomime”—that contribute to the drama.⁹⁹ As to the musical abilities of the participants, this depended upon whether the individual was a performer on the stage or a member of the orchestra. "Fairly proficient" instrumentalists selected from the citizenry were preferable to professional players because, in Taft's opinion, they were non-union performers and therefore could be employed at little to no cost to the production.¹⁰⁰ Although music and song were essential to pageantry, singing ability seems to have been inessential to the casting process. Productions included instrumental underscoring throughout the performance and songs in the prologue and recessional at least.¹⁰¹ These opening and closing numbers were always congregational with the cast and spectators alike joining in. With no call for solo singing, there was no need to cast with singing ability in mind.

The non-professional nature of pageantry applied not only to the performers and performance, but to the production team and creative process as well. Committees fulfilled the duties of playwright, director, costumers, set builders, lighting designers and the like instead of specialized individuals, as would have been the case in professional productions.¹⁰² Those with general skills would tackle the equivalent theatrical application of their trades: electricians would become lighting designers, as it were. Those in the community with leadership and

⁹⁹ Prevots, *American Pageantry*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 59.

¹⁰¹ For Taft, songs should be introduced into the episodes of the pageant only when they are "intrinsically related" to the subject at hand. Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 62.

¹⁰² In the years after the formation of the APA, standard practice was to hire one of the Association's approved Pageant Masters (for a fee) and secure rights (for another fee) to mount a production of a professionally written pageant. These developments undermined the amateur collaborative spirit that had been at the very heart of the movement and foreshadowed its swift self-destruction.

managerial experience would be suited for other pre-production tasks, such as budgeting, planning, programming, marketing, and more. Many of the organizers of community pageants were women who participated as individualized or as club affiliates. This fact will be covered in more detail in a later section.

In *Melinda and Her Sisters*, Belmont and Maxwell honored the pageantry tradition of amateurism, but only in certain areas of the production. Without question, Belmont was an amateur playwright; Maxwell's amateur status is more tenuous because she had already had some of her songs published, but neither was she a full-time composer by trade. Similar blending of professional and amateur talent occurred in the cast, with famous career entertainers assuming the two female lead roles and all four of the Special Parts and amateurs filling out the ensemble. Although *Melinda and Her Sisters* lacked the thoroughly amateur cast typical of pageants, its use of any amateur talent at all would have been equally uncommon for an operetta.

Episodic Structure

Pageantry's signature episodic structure lent it unmatched dramatic freedom. Usually numbering from four to eight, and with prologue and recessional, each episode was entirely self-contained.¹⁰³ Unlike traditional theatrical forms wherein interaction between a limited number of characters advances a specific plot, pageantry was not held to such standards of narrative continuity. It was to be expected that each episode introduced a new set of characters in a situation, time, and place all its own. A single pageant could therefore span many hundreds or

¹⁰³ Soon after its formation, the American Pageantry Association would six episodes, prologue, and recessional as the standard format.

thousands of years of local or global history. Taft writes that "unity of idea is the only unity the preservation of which is essential" in the creation of an effective pageant.¹⁰⁴ Generally, this was accomplished by the omnipresent personification of one or more aspects of the unified idea. In *A Pageant of Thanksgiving*, a work of Dr. Taft's own creation, these are characters called Hope, Despair, and the Spirit of Thanksgiving who narrate and commentate each episode. Accordingly, creators of pageants were free to dramatize any event in history—real or stylized—that embodied the central theme of the pageant.¹⁰⁵ Even with its episodic structure, a pageant usually elapsed in a "steady, uninterrupted" stream. Taft summarizes:

In the drama it is often advisable to lower the curtain to indicate the passage of time. This is not necessary in a pageant as it is taken for granted that long periods of time elapse between episodes and since the lapse of time between episodes does not have to do with the development of an individual character but with an impersonal force or a locality personified by the central figures present on the stage throughout the performance there is no confusion in the minds of the spectators.¹⁰⁶

Some, including Taft and Langdon, believed that the episodic narratives and continuous flow of action made pageantry a particularly effective didactic tool because it could reliably hold children's attention as both audience members and performers.¹⁰⁷ The introduction of new people and places every few minutes allegedly reinvigorates their imagination and focus during the performance and beyond. It bears stating in plain terms that, universally, pageants were arranged in

¹⁰⁴ Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 2.

¹⁰⁵ For an overview of the debate over historical accuracy vs. dramatic license, see Prevots, "Working Together by Playing Together," *American Pageantry*, 13 – 28.

¹⁰⁶ Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 29.

¹⁰⁷ For children as audience, see Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 105 – 106 and Langdon, "The Creative Power of Pageantry," 15. For children as participants, see Taft, "Discipline," *The Technique of Pageantry*, 98.

chronological order. The forward momentum inherent in ordered scenes is advantageous for all three types of pageantry which shared the common goal of inspiring or renewing an audience's commitment to bettering themselves and their community. Once a pageant text was established, therefore, its episodes were not discrete units that could be rearranged or omitted at will.¹⁰⁸ Although "it would mean no loss of continuity" to eliminate one episode or another, it would nevertheless sully the unity of the idea because "one facet of the theme would be unexplored."¹⁰⁹

The pageantry convention of episodic structure naturally raises the question of *Melinda and Her Sisters*' fitness for the genre. It is not episodic, but continuously plot-driven. I propose that in this case, the work's obvious participation in didacticism outweighs its structural transgression. If, as Taft and Langdon believe, the episodic structure—for didactic purposes—primarily serves the children in the audience, then it would not have been an appropriate format for Belmont and Maxwell's audience of adults. Furthermore, as I will continue to show, *Melinda and Her Sisters* adheres to many of the other conventions of the genre, especially those belonging to the sub-category of political pageantry.

Political Pageantry

The Suffrage Movement

Pageantry's eventual adoption by the women's suffrage movement comes as no surprise, given that both pageantry and feminist ideologies can claim direct

¹⁰⁸ As the pageantry movement evolved, fewer new texts were being created because the APA had created a central repository from which communities could purchase rights to produce extant pageants. The added threat of copyright infringement under this system effectively dispensed with the practice of modification altogether.

¹⁰⁹ Prevots, *American Pageantry*, 4.

lineage to the women's club phenomenon of the mid- to late-19th century. Changes in the sociopolitical fabric of America throughout the Reconstruction period led to increased popularity, visibility, and functionality of women's social, activity-based, and philanthropic clubs.¹¹⁰ Often, it was a women's club with concern for cultural enrichment that sponsored and/or created the pageant. One of the two sample pageants provided in Part II of Taft's book, *The Progress of Liberty*, was given under the auspices of the Woman's Committee: Missouri Division in June of an unspecified year. Accordingly, women (presumably affiliated with the Committee) held leadership positions in the execution of Dr. Taft's pageant, serving as directors of all but one of the work's ten episodes and pageant master.¹¹¹ Women's clubs not only supplied pageants with skilled presidents, treasurers, secretaries, and committee chairpersons, but also with women whose talents were indispensable. Activity-based clubs such as those for music, art, literature, and quilting/sewing cultivated an army of women up to the task of serving as set painters, writers, musicians, and seamstresses.

Regardless of the nominal purpose of the club—be it social, activity-based, philanthropic, or educational—these organizations were exclusively feminine spaces that cultivated the uninhibited and uncensored exchange of knowledge and ideas between women. As institutions that united women in collective action toward betterment of self and society while incubating their sociopolitical ideologies, women's clubs can be viewed as the birthplace of first-wave feminist

¹¹⁰ See Karen J. Blair, "Introduction," *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930* (Indiana University Press, 1994).

¹¹¹ Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 163-167. Mrs. Houck McHenry was chairperson of the sponsoring organization and Mrs. Chester Platt was the production's pageant master.

activism. That activism took many forms, and pageantry was among the most impactful of them. It was also a familiar form for their political propaganda to take because of the genre's connections to the clubs from which first-wave feminism coalesced.

Although suffrage leaders had called on activists to use any (nonviolent) means and media at their disposal to disseminate the ideology, none promoted pageantry as strongly as Hazel MacKaye.¹¹² Unlike Langdon's flowery, meandering case for pageantry's social advantages, MacKaye takes a direct, all-business approach in an article for *The Suffragist* magazine:

Four very practical problems must be solved daily by every suffrage organization in the country in its campaign for the vote. These are:

To convert people to suffrage

To keep the movement constantly before the public.

To stimulate interest and cooperation among members.

To make money to carry on the campaign.

Now, I believe that in organized pageantry we find the elements which successfully solve all four of these problems.¹¹³

To the first point of conversion, MacKaye holds that as a "forceful and vivid form of drama," pageantry "has more power to convince people of the truth of our cause than any other means." Like Parker and Farwell, MacKaye believes that pageantry derives its power to captivate an audience from the unification of many performative and visual arts. Like Taft and Langdon, she believes pageant creators can harness that power for persuasion. To the second point of publicity, MacKaye

¹¹² We must not overlook MacKaye's identity when assessing her endorsement. As a preeminent creator of pageants, she stood to reap financial gains and accolades from an increased number of pageants on the suffrage scene. At the same time, we must recognize her unique expertise and avoid dismissing her opinion under suspicion of selfish motivations.

¹¹³ Hazel MacKaye, "Pageantry as a Means of Suffrage Propaganda," *The Suffragist*, vol. 2, no.48, 1914, 6.

calls pageantry a “news-provoker...second to none.” Thanks to their short life-cycle from germ to performance and broadly participatory nature, journalists couldn’t help but keep a pageant in the papers day after day. The reader is already acutely aware of *Melinda and Her Sisters*’ omnipresence in the *New York Times*.¹¹⁴

MacKaye tackles the third point in two halves. First, she maintains that the allure of the stage, drama, and role-playing “makes our blood tingle...and our hearts beat” more than any speech or other demonstration could. Recall Marie Doro’s enthusiasm for *Melinda and Her Sisters*: “It appeals to the very highest and best there is in me.”¹¹⁵ Her castmates undoubtedly would have seconded her opinion, and they all would have aspired to rouse similar feelings from their audience. Cooperation speaks to the point of the theatrical, democratic ideal. MacKaye, like Taft, stresses the importance of amateurism and the danger that professional ego poses to egalitarian cooperation. She claims that by subordinating personal emphasis to cooperation in the work, participants can create meaningful friendship and commune with the spirit of feminism.¹¹⁶

MacKaye’s final point of fundraising occupies nearly twice as much space in the article as any of the other “problems.” Perhaps the idea of making money by a pageant was a tough sell, especially since MacKaye goes to the trouble of enumerating the variety of initial and ongoing expenses associated with mounting a production. Her solution to turning a profit despite the immense costs elegantly

¹¹⁴ Refer to Table 1 on pg. 26 for the dates during the six-week production cycle that *Melinda and Her Sisters* appeared in the papers.

¹¹⁵ “Marie Doro in ‘Melinda,’” *New York Times*, December 31, 1915.

¹¹⁶ MacKaye, “Pageantry as a Means of Suffrage Propaganda,” *The Suffragist*, 7. *Melinda*’s obvious departure from strictly non-professional casting will be taken up in a later section.

reinforces the importance of the other three problems. She suggests that by coordinating the efforts of organizations and individuals from across the country, suffragist pageantry can be maximally informative, publicized, cooperative and stimulating, *and* profitable. With a single pageant that travels from place to place, the cast and production team would have exponentially more time and opportunity to make lasting friendships. The pageant's message would reach many more times the number of people that the same pageant performed in a single location could. A travelling pageant would continue to generate publicity as it moved around the country. And finally, thanks to cost-sharing, the ability to pay only once for items that can be used over and over (such as costumes), and ticket sales from multiple performances in multiple venues paying into the same coffers, a travelling pageant would be able to clear expenses and turn a profit many times over.

Although pageantry had already become an established technique of suffragist propagandizing, MacKaye closes her article with an additional call to action. She proposes that a national conference be planned to establish a National Bureau of Suffrage Pageants. Like the APA, it would manage a library of pageants. More importantly, the Bureau would also serve as a switchboard, a network connecting groups and communities across the country through the medium of pageantry. Just as women's clubs took to pageantry as a service to their communities, so did suffragists seize upon the genre as a service to themselves and their cause.

The Labor Movement

Before proceeding to an analysis of pageantry's role in the labor movement, it is first necessary to establish why the labor movement matters in this discussion at all. As they had done with abolitionism in the 1830s – 1860s, toward the end of the 19th century, suffragists aligned themselves with labor reform activists. Both groups benefited from the alliance: laborers (i.e. men) could exert the power of their votes at the polls to women's advantage while the white, middle- to upper-class suffragists (many of whom pursued activism, rather than work, full-time) could advocate the labor reform agenda in their suffrage demonstrations. Among the demands common to both campaigns were workplace safety, fair wages and hours, and child labor reform.¹¹⁷ These nuanced, later issues resonate with the calls for a right to wages, equal access to jobs, and occupational training for women that were first voiced in the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848, largely considered to be the charter of first wave of feminism:

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns...
 He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration.
 He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction, which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.¹¹⁸

In the 1872 presidential election, labor reform issues constituted part of Victoria Woodhull's platform with the Equal Rights Party.

The synchrony of these two sociopolitical movements is not the only reason to include labor reform in the current discussion. For the purposes of the current

¹¹⁷ See Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920*.

¹¹⁸ Nos. 6, 10 & 11 from "Declaration of Sentiments," reprinted in Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., *History of Woman Suffrage 1848-1861*, vol. 1 (Ayer Company, 1985), 70-71.

research, the movement's use of pageantry reinforces the political and propagandist application of the genre. At the same time, its use in this movement illustrates nuanced differences from the civic, historical, and suffrage varieties. Finally, that pageantry figured into the labor reform movement imbues the genre with working-class associations. These underlie my argument that Belmont and Maxwell's operetta classification of the work was strategic on the issue of class.

For laborers on strike, pageantry served several purposes. Simply, it was something for out-of-work strikers to do to keep busy. In this regard, pageantry kept morale high and forged strong bonds of camaraderie as they rehearsed and performed together.¹¹⁹ As our experts Taft and MacKaye have warned, staging a pageant can be a huge expense, so few strikes actually endeavored to create a pageant. The decision to incorporate a pageant into a strike meant gambling that the ticket sales would surpass the expenditures of creating and staging the work. The short production cycle of community pageants was meant to accommodate participants' schedules, but it also minimized the potential to make back the money that went into production costs. Because strikers did not have to schedule their production around work, they could opt to give more performances over a longer period, thereby increasing the likelihood that the work could generate a profit. If and when the pageant generated a profit, the money would be divided among all of the strikers to compensate them for lost wages.

Two famous examples represent the extremes of financial success and failure: *Pins and Needles* and the Paterson Strike Pageant. *Pins and Needles* (1937)

¹¹⁹ Recall MacKaye's third point.

is generally considered a revue rather than a pageant because the participants created new material periodically to keep the work topical and relevant.¹²⁰ I include it because the structure of skits and songs and political content enable an analysis by pageantry's standards. At the time of its premiere, the *Pins and Needles* cast was not actually on strike. The piece is an outgrowth of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union's regular business meetings that happened to convene in New York City's Princess Theater. Performances took place on Friday and Saturday nights, avoiding the scheduled weekday shifts of the worker-participants. Eventually, the show got to be so popular that the ILGWU members quit their day jobs and moved the production to a Broadway theater where it ran eight performances a week for two-and-a-half years.¹²¹ When the production closed on June 27, 1940 after 1,108 performances, it was the longest-running musical on Broadway.¹²²

At the other end of the spectrum is the Paterson Strike Pageant of 1913. Because of its chronological proximity to *Melinda and Her Sisters* and typically short performance run, this is the more useful of the two labor pageant comparisons. The pageant was spearheaded by journalist John Reed who worked with Bill Haywood—the leader of the Industrial Workers of the World organization that had backed the Paterson strike—to secure financial backing for the project from the

¹²⁰ John Kenrick, "Stage 1930s III – Revues: *Pins and Needles*," accessed October 27, 2017, <http://www.musicals101.com/1930bway3.htm#Pins>.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² "'Pins and Needles' Ends Run Tonight: Sets a Record for Musicals with 1,108 Performances--Began Here Nov. 27, 1937," *The New York Times*, June 22, 1940.

wealthy art patron, Mabel Dodge.¹²³ Over one thousand strikers gave a one-night-only performance on June 7 at Madison Square Garden. Single tickets ranged in price from \$.10 – 2.00; boxes sold for \$10 and \$20.¹²⁴ Unlike the *Melinda* performance, the Paterson Pageant offered ticket for every budget. Even still, the pageant could not generate enough capital to clear expenses and ended up with a deficit of \$2,000. The overhead costs of renting the venue, creating the famous 90-foot backdrop, and printing programs and tickets were largely to blame for the loss.

Aside from the all-important fundraising initiatives, the labor movement utilized pageantry for its didacticism. In the cases of Paterson and *Pins and Needles*, pageantry allowed workers to enlighten an audience of outsiders to their plight. They dramatized working conditions, individuals and corporations, strike events, and visions for a brighter future. Although *Pins and Needles* was not a bona-fide strike pageant, it displayed strong pro-union, anti-capitalist, and socialist messages. Following the norm, the Paterson Strike Pageant contains six episodes, all loosely based on events in and around the Paterson, New Jersey silk mills and the strike. The scene description reads in part “the pulpit thunders denunciation and the press screams lies,” pointing to the vital educational—or at least documentary—function of pageantry.¹²⁵ Laborers felt that they needed to reach consumers and laborers in other industries directly, without an intermediary. Because workers could control

¹²³ “The Paterson Strike Pageant Program,” accessed September 29, 2017, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5649/>.

¹²⁴ See the poster in the Appendix of Figures. Refer to Table 2 on pg. 38 for modern conversions.

¹²⁵ The complete program is available online at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5649/>. It can also be found in print in Joyce L. Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), 210–214.

every aspect of the production from creation to performance, pageantry was an ideal medium in which to embed and disseminate their message.

Melinda and Her Sisters as Pageant

Formal Considerations

That pageantry had an established history as the preferred musical-dramatic medium in both of the major sociopolitical movements of the time period begs the question: why didn't Belmont and Maxwell hop on the bandwagon, as it were? In the structuralist opinion, the reasons for this are obvious: *Melinda and Her Sisters* does not adhere to certain conventions of form and content typical of pageants. Not only is it not episodic in structure, but it is a decidedly plot- and character-driven work. These features, we have seen, were thought to undermine the universality of the message and the democratic inclusivity of both the process and product.

Its only structural element that is reminiscent of the pageantry genre is the suffrage parade. But even in this, *Melinda and Her Sisters* is not quite true to form. In a proper pageant, the parade is a recessional in lieu of a curtain call. It is an elegant solution to issues of overcrowding and pacing that would undoubtedly occur if the entire cast were to take traditional bows. Of the recessional, Taft writes that it is “a very impressive closing for a pageant...[wherein] the groups, usually in the order in which they came onto the stage, will march out, preferably down the main aisle, into the corridor and then directly to the dressing rooms.”¹²⁶ *Melinda's* parade, however, is neither the finale, nor a recessional, nor inclusive of all the

¹²⁶ Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 101. I find his use of theater anatomy in these instructions amusing, given his disdain for theaters as pageantry venues.

characters. For a clearer sense of *Melinda*'s suffrage parade, I have reprinted both the script's stage direction (left) and the *New York Times*' report (right) in their entirety, below:¹²⁷

At that moment the noise of a brass band is heard at the back of the theater in the foyer. There is cheering and shouting of people and MELINDA appears dressed very plainly but attractively and carrying a suffrage flag with children of the poor holding onto her skirt and men and women in every walk of life following her in the procession: laborers, factory girls, salesladies, etc. Neither looking to the left nor the right, MELINDA marches down the center aisle with her little army and onto the stage to the amazement of everyone present. MELINDA'S sisters are shocked and horrified.¹²⁸

The suffrage parade came in from one side of the ballroom, marched across the room, and up the center of the stage. It carried torchlights, banners, and soap boxes. Marie Doro [as Melinda] led it, preceded by a band. She was followed by a number of Red Cross nurses, and then came what had been kept secret in advance, that ardent suffragist and peace advocate, Mrs. Inez Milholland Boissevain [as herself], carrying a large American flag, and as the procession reached the stage her tall figure dominated the scene.¹²⁹

At an earlier point in the *New York Times*' account, the reviewer asserts that the suffrage parade described above bisected the performance, but my analysis of the script and score contradicts this and places the event much closer to the final quarter of the performance.¹³⁰ While one could then make the case that the parade so placed is the penultimate event, it is nevertheless decidedly not the finale. Furthermore, *Melinda*'s parade is a *processional*, not a *recessional*. Although Taft allows that pageant parades may introduce "some" new characters, I believe this work's

¹²⁷ As the sources are largely in agreement as to the nature of the parade, I will not give over space to a discussion of their disparities. It is more prudent to discuss how they, together, attest to the myriad ways in which *Melinda* breaks with traditions as laid out in Taft's practical guide.

¹²⁸ Belmont, (Shores), *Melinda*, 24.

¹²⁹ "Society Satirized..." *New York Times*, February 19, 1916.

¹³⁰ The stage direction cue for the suffrage processional occurs on pg. 24 of a 34-page script, almost exactly two-thirds of the way through the dialogue. Moreover, there are only four song cues after the processional meaning that over three-quarters of the production's music has already happened by the time the suffrage parade enters.

processional of entirely new characters—the eponymous heroine among them—would be too outrageous for his taste.

Bucking the norms still, among the participants in Melinda’s processional are a diegetic band and a current real-world figure.¹³¹ Many considered tenacious and beautiful Inez Milholland to be the face of American suffrage, and, following her organizational contributions to notable suffrage parades and protests through the early years of the 1910s, the *New York Sun* concluded that “no suffrage parade was complete without Inez Milholland.”¹³² None of the fifty-five sections of Taft’s guide broaches the seamless integration of a current, real-world figure into a pageant. Furthermore, a diegetic band seems entirely antithetical to Taft’s many recommendations for the music. Chief among them is that the source of pageantry’s music, the orchestra, should always be out of the audience’s sight. His “Placing the Orchestra” section posits that the traditional theater arrangement with the orchestra at the foot of (and in some cases, partially beneath) the stage physically disrupts the crucial direct communication between the drama and the audience. Ideally, Taft would have the pageant’s orchestra *behind* the audience but admits that beside the audience or beside the stage would suffice, so long as the players are hidden from view.¹³³ From this description, it is clear that Taft’s orchestra is comparable to that of film: heard but not seen. *Melinda and Her Sisters’* band and guest star are

¹³¹ That the script assigns Melinda to the task of flagbearer and the review holds that Inez Milholland in a cameo appearance performed that duty suggests the latter’s participation could have been a last-minute addition. Alternatively, by directing Melinda (and not a special guest) to be the flagbearer in the published stage directions, Belmont and Maxwell ensure replicability of their work in any subsequent performances.

¹³² Quoted in Linda J. Lumsden, *Inez: The Life and Times of Inez Milholland* (Indiana University Press, 2004), 70.

¹³³ See Taft, “Placing the Orchestra,” *The Technique of Pageantry*, 60-61.

therefore unprecedented choices directly opposed to the pageant conventions Taft describes.

Dr. Linwood Taft would also scold *Melinda's* preponderance of songs as an intrusion by what he believed should be decorative accompaniment to the foregrounded action. The following criticism of a hypothetically music-heavy pageant would no doubt apply to the case of *Melinda and Her Sisters*.

...one is fairly safe in assuming that the author has not followed the pageant form very closely but has used a mixture of dramatic forms and has called the result a pageant...As a matter of fact such a so-called pageant would better be discarded entirely or else largely rewritten. The alternative to this is to make the music the important feature and subordinate the action to it. The result may be pleasing but it is not pageantry in the proper sense of the term.¹³⁴

In the face of such vehement rejection, admitting defeat would be easy and understandable, but I wish to press the motive behind these words. As a purist who represented the interests of the American Pageant Association, Taft is obligated to "establish and define the scope of pageantry" in his writing.¹³⁵ Works that did not adhere to the organization's specific formal and functional definition of pageantry constituted a very real threat to both its authority and its continued financial success as a purveyor of pageants. That Taft saw fit to indulge this hairsplitting diatribe on the "mixture of dramatic forms" confirms the very practice in question to have been ubiquitous by the publication of his text in 1921. For this reason, Belmont and Maxwell reasonably could have called *Melinda and Her Sisters* a pageant—albeit, not a “proper” one.

¹³⁴ Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 55 – 56.

¹³⁵ Brown, "APA, A New Force...." *Drama* 9 (Feb. 1913), 178.

There is more to the discussion of songs and music in pageantry than Taft allows in his (and by extension, the APA's) opinion. If we can imagine a body of music for pageants, it would chiefly contain hymns, folk songs, and selections from the Western art music canon. To be sure, the sparing use of pre-existing musical material appealed to many pageant directors for a variety of reasons. From a practical standpoint preexisting music was inexpensive and easy to procure. It could be borrowed or rented (at a low cost) from a local school, church, or independent ensemble. Also, as this music tended to be popular for other purposes as well—religious holidays, patriotic events, etc.—musical directors could often select the arrangement or transcription that suited configuration and skill-level of their pageant's orchestra from several already in existence. In this way, preexisting music saved a pageant committee the cost of hiring a composer *and* an arranger.

This method also absolved the APA from the messy business of securing usage rights and paying royalties to composers for original scores. They, the Association, could simply answer a community's request for pageant materials with a script and list of "Suggested Music Appropriate for the Pageant," leaving the legwork of locating the necessary scores and paying any associated fees to the music director and committee. Furthermore, this music, being in all likelihood already known to the singers and instrumentalists, expedited the musical rehearsal process. Most importantly, because the spectators would also know the borrowed music, it epitomized the democratic, maximally participatory ideal of pageantry; when the familiar "America," "Old Hundred," or "Hallelujah Chorus" rang out, the

barriers between spectator and performer would dissolve in their shared music-making.

When all of these strikes against *Melinda and Her Sisters* are considered, the pageantry classification does seem unlikely. However, these factors represent only part of the equation. Beyond formal conventions, pageantry was marked by its unique collaborative creation by amateurs, overtly sociopolitical didacticism, and fundraising initiatives. In all of these respects, *Melinda and Her Sisters* very closely resembles a pageant.

Functional Considerations

At first glance, the story of *Melinda and Her Sisters*' authorship by Belmont and Maxwell is straightforward and as minimally collaborative as possible. Belmont wrote the script in the summer of 1915 and immediately submitted it to *Suffragist* magazine for free and open reproduction. Then in November of that year, she brought Maxwell on as the composer who would set the script to music for the February 1916 performance. Accordingly, only Belmont's and Maxwell's names appear on the publications of *Melinda and Her Sisters*. Upon closer inspection, however, it appears that co-authorship may drastically understate the number of other collaborators and the extent to which they contributed to the development of this work.

The December 28th announcement of the project implies that Maxwell had *already* written the score—which we would expect of a work scheduled to be performed less than two months later, but which is also a bit surprising given that only one month prior to allegedly having completed the project, she was in London utterly unaware of its existence. The article that followed on December 29th clarifies

that Maxwell had composed several of the songs independently of this project and these were to be “partially rewritten” for use in *Melinda*. This clarification does lend more credibility to the timeline of events. Still, from the accounts that follow, it is clear that the score was far from fixed and finished when Maxwell and the *New York Times* reported it to be. The first correction appeared in Maxwell’s January 23rd tell-all with the *New York Times* whose subtitle read in part: “[Maxwell] First Heard of It Last November—Now Score is Finished.” If, as this article implies, the score was still subject to revisions during rehearsals throughout December and January, it certainly would not make Maxwell the first composer to have prematurely announced the finality of her score.¹³⁶ Changes ranged from small lyrical adjustments to the addition of new numbers and the subtraction of others.¹³⁷

So far, this evidence only demonstrates that the score was not finished when rehearsals began, not that it was being finished by anyone other than Maxwell. For proof of that, I turn to the final episode in the *Melinda and Her Sisters* saga. On March 5th, the *Times* published Marie Dressler’s retelling of a protracted battle

¹³⁶ I am reminded of many staged works from both the operatic and Broadway repertoire whose scores have been revised even during the first run or for revival productions.

¹³⁷ Among the major revisions, two are striking. First, the December 28th announcement promises “one male [singing] voice” in the work, which the January 12th article reveals to be tenor Albert Lindquest. Because the script contains an exchange between Mr. and Mrs. Pepper that leads into a musical cue for the duet, “Since I Was a Boy and a Girl,” we must assume that Mr. Pepper (played by Albert Lindquest), was intended to be a singing role. Yet, on February 6th we are told that Lindquest will undertake a Special Part singing “The U.S. Volunteer.” Although the script retains the music cue for the duet and preserves its lyrics in the back matter, its sheet music is omitted from the score and the *New York Times* does not report on its having been performed. And, from the January 12th article, we are told that “a number of new men’s voices” were added to the performance, including Paul Draper, tenor, and Felice de Gregoric, baritone. So, the number and variety of men’s voices changed from conception to performance. A second major change to the score is the omission of “The Woman’s Song.” Excerpted lyrics appear in the December 29th article and complete lyrics are provided in the back matter of the script under the new title “The Nurse’s Song.” Like the duet, this song is not included in the score and was not reported on in the performance review.

between Belmont and herself over one of *Melinda*'s songs, "The Ballet Russe." The long and short of it is that each woman believed the song—both the physical score and the rights of ownership—to be her sole property. Belmont held that because she and Maxwell had "copyrighted the whole of *Melinda and Her Sisters*...the music and orchestration of the songs belong[ed] to the opera" and by extension to her.¹³⁸ The *Times* paraphrased Dressler's opposing case as follows,

...it ["The Ballet Russe"] was hers, she said, *largely written and composed by her*, and it was agreed between her and Miss Maxwell, the composer of the music for the operetta, that it was to be her property...Miss Josephine Hall, Miss Florence Joliffe, and the others who were *present at the conception* of "The Ballet Russe" and heard the agreement made with Miss Maxwell, are witnesses, she says, of *her part in the song* and of Miss Maxwell's agreement that it was hers.¹³⁹ [emphasis added]

For our purposes, the debacle illuminates three important details about the process by which "The Ballet Russe" came into existence that cast doubt on the Belmont-Maxwell co-authorship narrative. In the first place, the testimony proves that the compositional process for *Melinda and Her Sisters* did not end on December 28th (before rehearsals began). Dressler testifies that several other cast members were present "at the conception" of the song *during* the rehearsal process. The February 6th article—which reports that "The Ballet Russe" was given a tryout at a charity event the week before—suggests that the moment of conception to which Dressler refers occurred sometime in January.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, Dressler's account demonstrates that Maxwell did not compose in a vacuum: "The Ballet Russe," at least, resulted from organic, spontaneous experimentation between two or more

¹³⁸ Alva Belmont in a March 1st letter addressed to Marie Dressler, quoted in "Dressler-Belmont Stage Arts Clash," *New York Times*, March 5, 1916.

¹³⁹ "Dressler-Belmont Stage Arts Clash," *New York Times*, March 5, 1916.

¹⁴⁰ See "A Suffrage Opera Feature," *New York Times*, February 6, 1916.

parties during the rehearsal process. Finally, Dressler gives herself, not Maxwell, majority credit for the music and lyrics of this song, and, we are told that Maxwell is amenable to that decision. In at least the case of “The Ballet Russe,” Maxwell’s role seems to have been that of scribe and not composer. Are we to believe that this role-reversal and collaboration was an isolated incident? From the documentation that the public record provides, we are obliged to do just that. However, given the clear mutability of the work during the rehearsal period and the rigorous rehearsal schedule which would have limited the time that Maxwell had to make these changes individually, we must at least entertain the idea that the collaborative case of “The Ballet Russe” was not unique to the development of the whole production.

Didacticism

Two tenets of feminism and the suffrage ideology are at the forefront of the work. The first is the belief that women should aspire to something more than the role of wife and mother. The second is that American women deserve to be enfranchised.¹⁴¹ Belmont deploys two strategies to dramatize these arguments: satire and Socratic dialectics. By way of these devices, Belmont effects a change in dramatic tone that isolates these issues from the superficial narrative that encases them. In this way, she draws the audience’s attention to the essential, educational material. Although a form of the Socratic method is common to both didactic points, the presence of satire in only one of them necessitates independent analyses.

¹⁴¹ Of course, these are not the only tenets of first-wave feminism, but they are two fundamental beliefs that were hot-button issues in the final decade before the ratification of the 19th Amendment. For a general introduction to the major suffrage organizations, their stances on a variety of issues, and their activism tactics, see Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

Elapsing over eight-pages of the script, the first dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Pepper delivers on the promise of a “satire on foibles.” Using her characters as proxies, Belmont critiques the elite society of which she is a part for having distracted women from making productive contributions to the community. The couple’s argument is rooted in an assessment of the traditional wife-and-mother role.¹⁴² For Belmont, the problem is not the role in and of itself, but that by the inertia and mania of empty social ambitions, this once respectable position had lost all functionality and left high-class and elite women impotent to *any* task, including the contentious traditional task of supporting and nurturing their families. Mrs. Pepper believes that marriage is the highest calling for her daughters. True to the Socratic method, Mr. Pepper’s challenges to her opinion are based on reasonable statements about marriage and motherhood that most people at the time (and in the audience) would have accepted. Accordingly, Mrs. Pepper’s responses reveal her views to be riddled with inherent contradictions and undesirable assumptions.

¹⁴² Organizations in the suffrage effort differed on the issue of marriage. The most radical view held that the institution of marriage could never be egalitarian, was antithetical to the advancement of women, and therefore should not be entered into by any woman. More conservative groups considered marriage to be a valuable microcosm in which a man and woman (father and mother) could live equality and by that demonstration raise a generation of empowered, cooperative citizens.

MR. PEPPER

But, my dear, there is surely something else in life for our girls than merely to make good matches.

But haven't our girls been brought up to learn to become good wives and mothers?

I thought at least when two young people married they lived for children and each other.

MRS. PEPPER

More?...What more could there be in life than that our girls should enjoy themselves, find amusement, and associate with the best people?

No well-bred woman...ever associates motherhood with marriage. The duty of young people who marry is to give more expensive luncheons than their neighbors...

Each other? How vulgar!

Mrs. Pepper's retorts show no reverence for the traditionally admirable responsibility of directing the private-sphere operations of a household. Instead, they reveal a selfish imagination of the leisure such a position affords.

The humor and satire of the scene arise from each character's failure to perform their roles in the Socratic exchange with the proper attitude. As the Socrates in the scenario, Mr. Pepper should be the intellectual and moral superior and able to direct the conversation according to his goals. The *dramatis personae* and first stage direction for Mr. Pepper personify him as anything but: "An honest, shy, sad sort of man" and "meek and depressed with a deprecatory manner and near-sighted." Although the viewing audience is not privy to these exact descriptions, Mr. Pepper nevertheless proves himself to be unfit for the task when he makes three separate attempts to steer the conversation toward Melinda's absence from the party; once he is ignored and twice he is forbidden to mention his youngest daughter:

MR. PEPPER

Where is Melinda?

But Melinda...

Where is Melinda?

MRS. PEPPER

[*Stopping him peremptorily*] Hush!
 ⇨ Don't speak of Melinda today.

⇨ Think of [*Annie's*] new tea gown—how
 that will dazzle the village vet!

⇨ I told you we would not discuss Melinda
 today.

For her part as the unfortunate interlocuter, Mrs. Pepper is meant to recognize her fallacy but never does despite its plainness to her husband and to the audience. By subverting the familiar formula of the Socratic method with inept participants, Belmont effectively injects humor into the scene. The hyperbole of the scene is meant to satirize the behaviors and opinions of members of the elite classes (who are in the audience) in the hopes that they might reform.

Shortly after Melinda's late entrance reveals her to be a suffragette, the Mayor—a dramatic allegory for politicians and the political climate of the period—attempts to refute her ideas and triggers the second Socratic dialogue. This time, when the right to vote is at stake, there is no satire. In her indictment of the Mayor and the values he holds, Melinda proves herself to be a worthier debater than her father. True to form, she expertly guides the Mayor to self-discovery of multiple layers of contradictions that underlie his firmly-held belief that women should not have the right to vote. After she correctly attributes the Mayor's stagnating performance in office to his fear of retaliation from the electorate, she challenges him to define the voting populace, to which the Mayor replies, "the citizens of this

community.” But, as Melinda shrewdly points out, the female citizens of Oshkosh do not have the power to vote.¹⁴³

MAYOR: Every Tom, Dick, and Harry has a vote in this town and they use it too, worse luck.

MELINDA: All the blacks, the negroes, they also are allowed their vote?

MAYOR: Yes.

MELINDA: And imbeciles, if they are allowed at large, even they can vote?

MAYOR: Absolutely, yes.

MELINDA: And any farm hand or railroad laborer, even if he can't spell or write, but can just make his mark—he can vote?

MAYOR: Of course.¹⁴⁴

Although Belmont's dialogue does not broach the subject directly, this exchange on the ethics of voter restriction recalls the devastating 1875 Supreme Court case of *Minor v. Happersett*.¹⁴⁵ This forty-year old decision represented a major judicial obstacle to legislative reform and, as such, was a recurring topic of suffrage debates. As part of a multistate suffragist initiative in 1872, Virginia Minor had attempted to register to vote and cast a ballot for the first female presidential candidate Victoria Woodhull. Minor sued the registrar in her Missouri hometown who had denied her application in accordance with the state laws restricting voting rights to men. Believing suffrage to be a right of citizenship, Minor held that the Missouri laws violated the Constitution, specifically, the 14th Amendment's privileges and

¹⁴³ As a point of interest, when *Melinda and Her Sisters* premiered, Wisconsin women had suffered several painful losses in previous years, including a suffrage referendum in 1911 with nearly two-thirds against women's suffrage, two subsequent referenda that the state's legislature had authorized but the governor vetoed, and retaliating legislation that eliminated elective boards of education where women had won numerous school board positions. Wisconsin later vindicated its long-suffering citizens by becoming the first state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. “The Woman's Suffrage Movement: How Years of Failure Led to Success,” Wisconsin Historical Society, August 3, 2012, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS419>.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 30-31.

¹⁴⁵ Although the U.S. District Court case of *United States v. Susan B. Anthony* (1873) which charged and convicted Anthony of unlawful voting was more widely publicized, Virginia Minor's case was a much more definitive reading of the nation's pulse regarding women's suffrage.

immunities clause.¹⁴⁶ Upholding the decision of the Missouri Supreme Court, the Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that although Minor was undeniably an American citizen the Constitution did not explicitly name the right to vote as an inherent “privilege” of that citizenship. In the opinion on behalf of the Court, Chief Justice Morrison Waite wrote “it cannot for a moment be doubted that if it had been intended to make all citizens of the United States voters, the framers of the Constitution would not have left it to implication.”¹⁴⁷

In the absence of an explicit Constitutional definition of the privileges and immunities of citizenship, the Court looked to states’ constitutions for confirmation of the same. Finding that the practice of restricting the voting populace to certain persons and classes was common to most states, the Court felt it could not recognize suffrage as an unalienable right of citizenship at the federal level. To this point Waite wrote “The [14th] amendment did not add to the privileges and immunities of a citizen. It simply furnished an additional guaranty for the protection of such as he [sic] already had.”¹⁴⁸ Amazingly, the consequence of this interpretation meant that the precedent of voter restriction was justification for the practice to continue. The factors that appear in Belmont’s dialogue—race, mental and physical capacity, literacy, and class/employment status—are some of the same controversial voter qualifications that the Court cited in its decision.¹⁴⁹ Suffragists often recalled them

¹⁴⁶ The clause in question reads “No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States.” U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 1, cl. 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 U.S. 162 (1875), 174.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 172.

¹⁴⁹ Several of the qualifications included in their decision but not included in Belmont’s scene are still used (in some form) today: residency, age, national origin, and criminal status. Others, such as minimal financial and landownership requirements, were deemed discriminatory and have been discarded.

to emphasize the lowly position of the disenfranchised woman and to make an ethical argument for extending the right to vote to women.

Next, Melinda makes a personal, emotional appeal to the Mayor.¹⁵⁰ She asks whether the Mayor's late wife was intelligent. When he boasts that she was so bright he relied on her to write his campaign speeches, Melinda accuses him of having neglected his wife's intelligence and "insulting her memory" by denying other intelligent women the right to vote. The invocation of personal relations such as this was another favorite suffrage tactic;¹⁵¹ while it was easy for men to say women in general should not be allowed to vote, many found it much more difficult to deny that right to their own sisters and mothers.¹⁵²

Finally, Melinda uses reason and logic to persuade the Mayor.

MELINDA: [*returning to the attack*] Mayor, what exactly constitutes a citizen of a country and a member of a community?

MAYOR: [*promptly*] A man who pays his taxes.

MELINDA: But women pay taxes just the same as men and yet they have no rights. How do you explain that?¹⁵³

Instead of explaining "that" as Melinda directly required him to do, the Mayor changes the subject. Belmont may have intended his evasion to read as proof that a logical defense for disenfranchising female citizens did not exist. This third exchange essentializes another argument suffragists used, one that invokes the

¹⁵⁰ Belmont (Shores), *Melinda*, 31-32.

¹⁵¹ Pathos arguments such as these were particularly effective in suffrage music. They capitalized on the sympathy that could be leveraged from sibling, parental and filial relationships. Spousal relationships are uncommon in suffragist music. See Crew, "Title Index" & "Subject Index," *Suffragist Sheet Music*, for the frequency of familial roles/relationships in suffrage music.

¹⁵² Belmont's choice to identify the woman in question as a wife is quite bold. She—the wife—was a frequent target in anti-suffrage arguments claiming that the right to vote would cause her to neglect her husband, children, home and all its responsibilities. It seems that because the Mayor is a widower and his late wife is not vulnerable to such slippage, his feelings are tender and reverential, not skeptical.

¹⁵³ Belmont (Shores), *Melinda*, 32-33.

same Revolutionary-era demand for “no taxation without representation.” Like colonists to the British crown, American women felt that dutifully paying taxes to the government entitled them to certain reciprocal considerations. In fact, the Court’s opinion in *Minor v. Happersett* begins with a description of the relationship between citizens and the nation: “[The citizen] owes [the nation] allegiance and is entitled to its protection. Allegiance and protection are, in this connection, reciprocal obligations. The one is a compensation for the other; allegiance for protection and protection for allegiance.” It fell to suffragists to demonstrate that paying taxes was a form of allegiance whose *equivalent*, reciprocal protection was the unabridged right to vote.¹⁵⁴

Belmont used the recognizable structure of the Socratic method (and satire, in the case of the Mr. and Mrs. Pepper scene) to teach her audience fundamental principles of feminism and suffrage ideology. Although these sophisticated literary and rhetorical devices are uncommon in community pageantry, they are appropriate for her curated audience. Because that audience was comprised entirely of high-class, well-educated adults, Belmont did not need to rely on the heavy-handed moralizing of community pageants that principally benefitted the children (and less-well-educated adults) present in unfiltered audiences. As such, these devices effected a sudden shift in dramatic tone which Belmont must have deemed significant enough to alert her audience to the didactic nature of the two scenes.

¹⁵⁴ It should be noted that the state constitutions of New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Georgia *already explicitly* established equal exchange between taxation and enfranchisement because exemption from or failure to pay taxes disqualified their citizens from elective franchise. See *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 U.S. 162 (1875), 172-3.

*Fundraising*¹⁵⁵

For the civic and historic pageants of Taft's ideal, "there will be no attempt to make money...[but] there will be a definite attempt to make it a self-supporting enterprise."¹⁵⁶ By charging \$10 for a single ticket and \$125 – 150 for box seating, the creators of the work clearly attempted to make money off of *Melinda and Her Sisters*. Thanks to these ticket sales (and savings via expenses covered out of pocket by the creators, cast, and sympathetic organizations) the production was not only self-supporting, but generated a profit in excess of \$8,000 that was donated to an unidentified suffrage organization. It is interesting to note that despite Taft's strong disavowal of profit-seeking, his book nevertheless recalls several instances of pageants that managed to clear a profit. Among them is this description of an unnamed pageant that, save for the multiple performances, is remarkably similar to *Melinda and Her Sisters*:

One produced several times in and near New York recently is reported as having netted a very large sum for charitable purposes but in this case the expenses were practically all taken care of by persons interested in the charity and hence the gross receipts and the net receipts were very nearly the same.¹⁵⁷

Despite his assertion and *Melinda*'s clear rejection of it, we cannot forget that Taft's ideal is limited to civic and historical pageants. The purview of his book does not extend to pageants staged for propagandist purposes although they had become popular long before the publication of his text. This exclusion is also in the interest

¹⁵⁵ The previous chapter thoroughly demonstrated the centrality of monetary initiatives to *Melinda and Her Sisters*. Here, I provide a synopsis.

¹⁵⁶ Taft, *The Technique of Pageantry*, 16.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

of the APA that Taft represents; it protects the organization from associations with controversial ideologies that could hurt their business of selling pageants.

For the political variety of pageantry, making money was a goal to which each and every production aspired. Hazel MacKaye included the potential of profiting from pageantry as her fourth and final reason that the form should be adopted by suffragists. In the labor movement, too, pageants were staged with the *express* purpose of generating funds by which laborers could maintain their strike. That such pageants were often unsuccessful in that regard is beside the point. Although fundraising may not have fit into Taft and the APA's ideal of community pageantry, it was a central part of propagandist, political pageantry. Because Belmont marketed *Melinda and Her Sisters* to the richest New Yorkers exclusively, fundraising must have been of the highest importance. Because it shares the same profit-seeking goal as other political pageants, the work can be analyzed according to the conventions of the genre.

Avoiding Pageantry as a Strategy

The strong similarities that *Melinda and Her Sisters* bears to the sub-genre of political pageantry—collaborative creation and development of a staged musical work by amateurs, didacticism and propaganda, and fundraising—beg the question “why didn't Belmont and Maxwell market the project they directed as a pageant?” One superficial defense for the not-pageant-as-strategy argument could be formulated around a basic fact of Alva Belmont's life. She, as Hoffert tells us, meticulously curated her every action in pursuit of her ideal public identity.¹⁵⁸ With

¹⁵⁸ Sylvia D. Hoffert, *Alva Vanderbilt Belmont: Unlikely Champion of Women's Rights* (Indiana University Press, 2011).

this motivation in mind, it follows that authoring *another* suffrage pageant would not satisfy this pioneering celebrity activist. After all, *Melinda and Her Sisters* the pageant would have been born into the long shadows of the Washington D.C. Women’s Pageant and Parade of 1913 and the New York City Suffrage Parade of 1915.¹⁵⁹ It is easy to imagine Belmont’s starry-eyed hunger for the publicity that would surely be rained on the first and only suffrage operetta and, not to mention, on its creator.

In the same vein, the pageantry genre would not have advanced Maxwell’s career either. She had expressed ambitions to be taken seriously as a composer of “serious” music, as her *New York Times* interview (discussed in the previous chapter) showed. The current chapter has demonstrated music criticism’s disregard for the pageantry genre whose amateurism was immediate grounds for dismissal from the canon of sanctioned compositional styles and genres. If *Melinda and Her Sisters* had been touted as a pageant—even a successful, ingenious one—this would not have translated into a professional win for Maxwell. She still would have been categorized as a writer of commercial, superficial songs. It is difficult to predict with any certainty what the critical reaction to her *pageant* would have been. However, given the hollowness of the *operetta* reviews, it is unlikely that the same work called a pageant would have received any more substantive or laudatory comments in the press.

Beyond even these egotistical concerns, the women may have felt that the pageantry genre undersold what they had created. From the language Belmont and

¹⁵⁹ As a point of interest, Inez Milholland who made a surprise guest appearance in the *Melinda* performance was also a high-level organizer of and participant in both events.

Maxwell use to describe the project in progress, it is clear that they believed their work to be of the highest standards of artistry. From Belmont's script to Maxwell's music and lyrics, it was all "A1" and "tops" in their eyes. Even the *New York Times* allowed that the work was "a great success." One difficulty is the glaring commercialism of the characteristics by which everyone judged the musical and dramatic quality of their work. Belmont's outrageous but firmly held belief that the work could net profits in excess of one million dollars coupled with the report that the women were "[unable to] sleep nights because of telephone calls and telegraph messages from managers all over the country who want to get a chance to produce it"¹⁶⁰ directly engages the *commercial* appeal of the product. Yet in all this, there is the sense that they viewed commercial success as an indicator of the work's artistic quality. That is, by their estimation, something of inferior quality surely could not succeed in a commercial *or* artistic market. This line of reasoning circles back to the idea that pageantry undersells the product.

Perhaps in Belmont and Maxwell's opinion, the spirit of amateurism embedded so deeply into the idea of pageantry skirted too close to the possibility of amateurishness. The women strove for the highest level of professional quality in every aspect of the production, so pageantry's connotation as an amateur theatrical form would have demeaned their efforts undeservedly. After all, Maxwell was already a professional songwriter with dozens of popular credits to her name in England. And hadn't they recruited renowned professionals for all of the principal roles? Hadn't they fleshed out their cast with only the prettiest and most

¹⁶⁰ "Marie Doro in 'Melinda,'" *New York Times*, December 31, 1915.

talented young women of New York City? The December 28th casting call seeking only applicants with “good looks and good voices” sets a barrier to entry based on standards of aesthetic beauty—both visually and aurally. Talent and beauty notwithstanding, the debutantes were still amateurs in the strictest sense of the word as the opposite of professional.¹⁶¹ The creators’ casting decisions fly in the face of Taft’s prescription for amateurs, particularly those without traditionally cultivated grace and talent. For Taft, it is the sincerity and transparency with which true amateurs can communicate ideals to the audience that makes them preferable for pageantry.

The choice to avoid the pageantry classification may similarly reflect a desire to distance their work from the genre of community entertainment. Along with amateurism (or amateurishness), pageantry was also saddled with a lasting dismissive feminization, especially to those who were not disciples of the craft. Women and their social clubs had been among the earliest and most fervent supporters of community pageants, and criticism of the genre frequently cited this as evidence of pageantry’s triviality and femininity. The popularity of political pageants for women’s suffrage didn’t help alleviate or combat the perception of the genre as feminine.

It could be that by rejecting the pageantry classification, Belmont and Maxwell were making a statement against the genre’s unfortunate habit of perpetuating traditional constructions of femininity. Even advocates of pageantry would have to admit that there is some truth to the critical feminization of

¹⁶¹ Even Dressler, Doro, and the other career performers who participated in *Melinda and Her Sisters* pro bono were, denotatively, amateurs for that production.

community pageantry. Female characters rarely demonstrate anything other than the proprietary femininity of the Victorian era. They are demure, obedient, delicate, and graceful: veritable Angels of the Home plucked from their sphere and transplanted onto the stage. Even dramatizations of the historically powerful heroines—Athena, Joan of Arc, etc.—were tamed into alignment with dominant gender norms. In *Melinda and Her Sisters*, precisely these norms are the object of the “satire of foibles.” Seven of Mrs. Pepper’s daughters exactly embody the Victorian ideal of femininity. Their studies abroad appear to have cultivated intelligent, cultured, and well-mannered beauties, but Melinda accuses them—and all other women like them—of being empty-headed, selfish, spineless, and vain: the picture of ugliness. Melinda (and the real-world suffragists she represents) stands in direct opposition to this feminine tradition. The picture of the modern woman, she and others like her are informed and empowered to achieve their fullest potential.

To the charge of triviality, it is true that 19th-century pageants didn’t have much at stake: they were written as part of celebration festivities and to reinforce the value of cooperation, education, reverence, etc. to the community youth. These were hardly contentious occasions and moral lessons. However, this allegedly feminized and trivialized genre had done a lot of growing up in the first two decades of the 20th century when *Melinda and Her Sisters* premiered. Hazel MacKaye’s body of work epitomizes pageantry’s evolution into a medium for high-stakes commentative theater. Of her many creations, the aptly-titled *Allegory* is most demonstrative of this shift. *The Allegory* is a pageant for the achievements of

women. While the work is true to form in its episodic structure, it is aggressively defiant of conventions in its tone. In its condemnation of America's oppression of women and its radical implication that they become the masters of their own fate by seizing political rights, *The Allegory* takes Langdon's beliefs about dramatizing the past to commentate the present and empower the future to new and unexpected extremes. Nevertheless, it is possible that Belmont and Maxwell held that the pageantry genre was not edgy or robust enough for the direct (not allegorical) critique of American society's mistreatment of its female citizens.

On the other hand, it could be that the genre was *too* edgy. For this interpretation, I must return to the political pageants of the labor movement. These contained socialist and even communist ideologies that foreshadow Belmont and Maxwell's classist biases. Many of the high-powered, super-rich clientele that patronized *Melinda and Her Sisters* had amassed outrageous fortunes thanks to capitalist labor structures. For them, the political pageantry of the labor movement threatened the hierarchical distribution of wealth and power that had served them so well. The pageantry classification of *Melinda and Her Sisters* would have roused associations to the labor movement that would have pained their dignity. This in turn might have turned those valuable donors against the suffrage cause. If Belmont and Maxwell made their operetta classification with these concerns in mind, it betrays a level of classism on par with the racism that pervaded the movement.¹⁶²

¹⁶² That first-wave feminist activism did not often make room for African-American activists or advocate for African-American and other minority groups' equality needs not be proven here. That the movement was largely fought by and for the benefit of the middle- and upper-classes has also been the subject of many studies. My research into the case of *Melinda and Her Sisters* merely reinforces the fact.

Conclusion

In undertaking the current research, my singular purpose has been to introduce an obscure work to an appreciative audience of music, drama, and American women's history scholars. The Introduction presented the work as we have come to know it through the anthological record: as a suffrage operetta. But while *Melinda and Her Sisters* is nearly always *called* an operetta, it is nearly always *treated* like a play; that is, suffrage and drama anthologies neglect its score. On the musicological side, the work proves to be an unruly operetta and therefore has been neglected. Chapter One proposed that the operetta classification was a strategy attendant to the cultural capital that that genre brought to the production rather than a *de facto* condition of the work. Chapter Two looked to political propagandist pageantry for a more effective and appropriate genre classification of the work. All that remains is to declare a winner.

My research demonstrates that pageantry is an ontological classification that works just as well as operetta, if not decidedly better. The formal analyses according to each genre framework reveal that *Melinda and Her Sisters* adheres to and defies conventions of operetta and pageantry in equal share. Despite this nonconformity being common to both genre classifications, I nevertheless hold pageantry to be a fruitful option. When the analytical framework of pageantry is applied, we are better able to examine the work holistically. This genre is better able to accommodate the amateurism, collaboration, propagandizing, and fundraising aspects that define the work. *Melinda and Her Sisters*, the pageant, would not be a fixed artifact—that is, a script and a score—but a musical-theatrical

happening whose final form on February 18, 1916 was the culmination of a series of interpersonal actions.

Perhaps, it is best not to box *Melinda and Her Sisters* into one category to the exclusion of all others. As the press records show, the creators seem to have assigned the work to several related genres at various points during the production process for various reasons that had as much to do with their marketing objectives as with the precise quantification of the work ontologically. If the research herein succeeds in anything, it is in exposing the elasticity and permeability of genre boundaries in the New York City music scene at the start of the 20th century. *Melinda and Her Sisters* is neither wholly operetta nor wholly pageantry; it borrows freely from the conventions of each genre to create something that is truly *sui generis*. Scholars who wish to undertake analyses of this work must remain similarly flexible, especially when they broach the perilous tasks of assessing efficacy or ascribing value.

Taken as a case study, my research also exemplifies the stakes of genre classification. In the cases of both *operetta* and *pageantry*, the politics of genre on axes of gender and class informed how the creators and journalists alike classified and so marketed the work to a specific audience in a particular social and political moment. For Belmont and Maxwell, assigning *Melinda and Her Sisters* to operetta—rightly or wrongly—set certain events into motion that determined not only the immediate but also the lasting reception of the work. Had they called their work a pageant (or even a musical or simply a theatrical fundraiser) the academic conversation around this piece one hundred years hence would surely look very

different. The lesson herein is that any genre classification is a non-neutral act and not without consequences. These markers immediately give license to the audience—both the viewing and the critical ones—to make certain assumptions about a work’s formal, functional, and artistic credentials. Then, we have not far to go from assumptions to conclusions and to judgments.

For *Melinda and Her Sisters*, bearing these considerations in mind liberates future scholars to engage with it in new and exciting ways. For example, as an operetta, Maxwell’s music lacks a cohesive compositional identity, which may have contributed to the scholarly dismissal of her score as unfocused, derivative, and sophomoric. But by blending operetta’s conventional parody with pageantry’s pastiche of song styles, an analyst would be free to reinterpret her eclectic score as a display of musical acrobatics by which she was able to subsume her own authorial intentions to the collective creative mind of the cast. The issue of racial bias in *Melinda and Her Sisters* has lurked throughout the current research, but must be left to another publication. Scholars might address the hypocrisy of the racial uniformity of the work and production—that is, its whiteness—with its reliance on several racially coded musical styles, its off-color racial humor, and its stated goal of advocating equality. The work begs for a study employing the analytical lens of queer theory. Maxwell’s intimate partnership with singer Dorothy Fellowes-Gordon—who made a cameo Special Part appearance in *Melinda and Her Sisters* to perform “Shine, Little Searchlight”—is well documented, as is her obsession with singer Maria Callas.¹⁶³ Dressler’s biographers have also theorized that her

¹⁶³ See Sam Staggs, *Inventing Elsa Maxwell: How an Irrepressible Nobody Conquered High Society, Hollywood, the Press, and the World* (St. Martin’s Press, 2012).

three failed marriages may be attributed to closeted lesbianism. Aside from these biographical reasons, the work's predominantly female cast and unabashed parading of young female bodies to a male gaze conjures many matrices of desire ripe for analysis.

I also feel that future, more thorough research attempting to quantify the impact that *Melinda and Her Sisters* had on the suffrage movement would be worthwhile. Here, I can only speculate. The *New York Times* reported that the production generated \$8,000 for "the suffrage cause," a number that Hoffert's biography corroborates. But where did that money actually go? Neither the posthumous biography nor the press publicly announced the lucky beneficiary or beneficiaries. Due to Belmont's extensive involvement with multiple suffrage organizations that also had many other revenue streams, it is difficult to know for certain where the money ended up. At the time of the project, Belmont had spent years working with the National American Woman Suffrage Association and its burgeoning offshoot, the Congressional Union. She was also simultaneously in the process of establishing the National Woman's Party with Alice Paul.

Although these are all worthy contenders, I speculate that the evasive language in Belmont's public statements suggests she intended to invest the money in the Political Equality League, which she founded in 1909. The organization stressed racial as well as gender equality in New York City and state, and boasted large numbers of African-American members.¹⁶⁴ This integration was somewhat

¹⁶⁴ Brooke Kroeger, "When the Suffrage Movement Got Its Makeover On," The Gotham Center for New York City History, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://www.gothamcenter.org/1/post/2017/11/when-the-suffrage-movement-got-its-makeover-on.html>.

radical and would explain Belmont's reluctance to name it as a recipient of the *Melinda* profits. Marie Dressler's account of the events surrounding the fight over "The Ballet Russe" strongly suggests that the Political Equality League had been the intended recipient of the donation. As evidence of her mistreatment in the ordeal, she provides the *Times* with notes from both Belmont and her secretary that happen to have been written on Political Equality League letterhead.¹⁶⁵ Upon receipt of these letters, Dressler reports having run over to the Belmont Suffrage Headquarters at 13-15 East 41st Street, the origin of the letters and assuredly the home of the League.¹⁶⁶ Throughout the *Times*' coverage of *Melinda and Her Sisters*, this address—along with Belmont's home address at 447 Madison Avenue—is listed as the location of various readings and rehearsals. Resolving the question of who received the \$8,000 once and for all would be a satisfying research victory in and of itself, but the case as I have outlined it offers a starting point for a broader study on the complicated issues of racial dynamics in the suffrage campaign, New York's elite social circles, and its thriving arts scene.

Among those musicological discourses with which the current research dialogues are the study of women composers and their works, gender performance in music and on stage, and women's domestic music-making. A new trend is emerging in musicology; it may clumsily be described as an interest in feminist music for political activism. The current decade is full of centennials for pivotal

¹⁶⁵ "Dressler-Belmont Stage Arts Clash," *New York Times*, March 5, 1916.

¹⁶⁶ Belmont had orchestrated and financed the relocation of NAWSA's headquarters from Ohio to New York City in 1909. Those Headquarters were situated at 505 5th Avenue. As financier and ranking member, Belmont would have kept offices with each organization at their respective locations.

milestones in American women's pursuit of equality, including that of the ratification of the 19th Constitutional Amendment, now less than three years away. The musicological community is responding with new compositions and analyses of extant compositions in earnest. The latest annual conference of the American Musicological Society featured three separate sessions on the intersections of music and women's navigation of the changing American sociopolitical environment.¹⁶⁷

Even without the neatness and convenience of aligning suffrage music scholarship to such significant anniversaries, my research resonates with larger issues in society today. Women in America and abroad continue to suffer social injustices, and they still make music to challenge the status quo. Moreover, as lines between American politics, social media, and pop culture dissolve—perhaps irreparably so—it behooves us all to discuss music's political functions. *Melinda and Her Sisters* is just one of the many works that should inspire us to do just that.

¹⁶⁷ The sessions were entitled “Antebellum Women,” “American Women’s Voices,” and “Victoria Bond’s *Mrs. President: Celebrating 100 Years of Women’s Suffrage in Rochester*.” For abstracts, see Jonathan Glixton, ed., *Program and Abstracts of Papers Read*, Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society 83 (New York: AMS, Inc., 2017).

Appendix of Figures

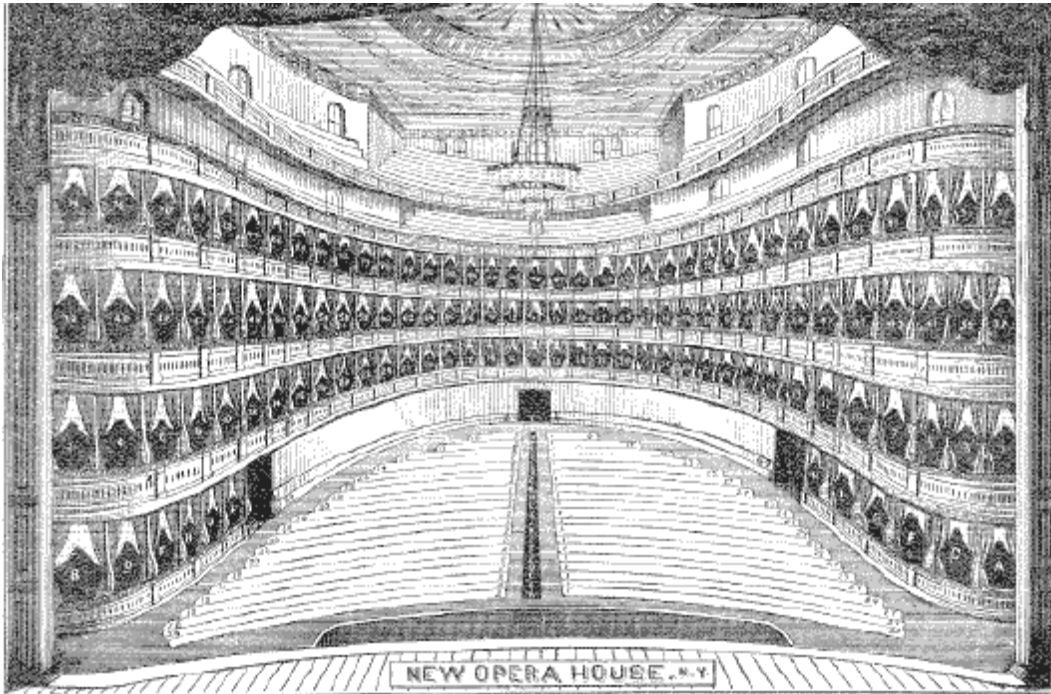


Figure 1: Sketch of the view from the stage in the original Metropolitan Opera House. From *Pictorial Diagrams of New York Theaters – 1883*, New York: Lansing and Co., 1883.



Figure 2: Photograph by Jack E. Boucher of the view from the orchestra just prior to the demolition of the remodeled, original Metropolitan Opera House in May 1966.

NEW YORK'S LEADING THEATRES. EMPIRE B'way & 40th St. Evenings at 8:20. Mats. Tom'w, Tues. & Wed. 2:20. MAUDE ADAMS In J. M. Barrie's "THE LITTLE MINISTER."		 THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL Broadway & 81st St. Phone 3580 Schuyler. TRIANGLE FILM PLAYS DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS in "HIS PICTURE IN THE PAPERS." WILLIAM COLLIER in "BETTER LATE THAN NEVER" Next BILLIE BURKE Week in "PEGGY" Splendid Vaudeville New Program every Mon. & Thurs. MAT. TO-DAY, 10 & 15c. EVENINGS, 15c, 25c, 50c.
LYCEUM West 45th St. Evenings at 8:20. Mats. Tom'w, Tues. & Thurs. 2:20. ETHEL BARRYMORE in the New Comedy. "OUR MRS. McCHESNEY."		
NEW AMSTERDAM W. 42 St. Evs. 8:15. Mats. Tom'w & Wed. Extra Matinee Washington's Birthday. ELSIE FERGUSON in Hall Caine's MARGARET SCHILLER Great Success.		WEBER'S 30th & Broadway. 11 A.M. to 11 P.M. N. Y. STAATS-ZEITUNG Presents GERMANY'S GREATEST BATTLES Duvbovough's Stupendous War Films. ADMISSION, 25 CENTS
After the Play Visit Atop New Amsterdam Thea. ZIEGFELD MEETING PLACE MIDNIGHT OF THE WORLD FROLIC		
LIBERTY West 42d St. Evenings 8 sharp. Mats. Tom'w, Tues. & Wed. at 2. JULIA SANDERSON DONALD BRIAN JOSEPH CAWTHORN in the Triumphant Musical Comedy, SYBIL		Punch & Judy Theatre, 49th St. E. of B'way Charles Hopkins Mrs. Hopkins TREASURE ISLAND Evs. 8:30. Mats. Day & Sat. 2:30. Tel. 1366 Circle.
GEO. COHAN'S THEATRE, B'way, 43d St. M. Mats. Tom'w, Tues. & Wed. OTIS SKINNER in Henry Arthur Jones's Comedy, "Cock o' the Walk"		
GAIETY B'way, 46 St. Ev. 8:25 Mats. To'w & Wed. 2:25 Extra Mat. Washington's Birthday. MRS. FISKE in a deliciously humorous comedy about Pennsylvania Dutch. ERSTWHILE SUSAN		GARDEN 27th St., Mad. Ave. 4559 Mad. Sq. Evs. 8:15. Mats. Wed. (Pop.)—Sat. 7:15. LAST TWO WEEKS The Weavers

Figure 3: A portion of the Broadway theater display ads page from the *New York Times*, February 18, 1916.

COMIC OPERA
MELINDA AND HER SISTERS,
 By
MRS. OLIVER H. P. BELMONT and
ELSA MAXWELL
 To be given at the Waldorf-Astoria tonight.
 Tickets sold at 15 East 41st St. Phone Murray Hill—13. Also at the Information and Public Service Bureau, R. H. Macy & Co., Friday.

Figure 4: The only display ad for *Melinda and Her Sisters* which appeared adjacent to those pictured above in the *New York Times* on the day of the performance.

"Melinda and Her Sisters"
 Music and words of the
 OPERETTA
 Produced at the Waldorf-Astoria, New York
 and written by
Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont
 and
Miss Elsa Maxwell
 Price \$2.10 from CONGRESSIONAL UNION,
 LAFAYETTE SQUARE, WASHINGTON, D. C.
 "Every Suffragist should possess
 a copy of this enchanting work."

Figure 4a: Advertisement for the sale of the *Melinda and Her Sisters* score (Schirmer) in *The Suffragist* vol. 4, iss. 21, 10.



Figure 5: Paterson Strike Pageant poster designed by Robert Edmund Jones. Courtesy of the New York Historical Society.



Miss Marion Tiffany and Miss Maud Kahn
in "Melinda and her Sisters"

Figure 6: Supplement to *The Suffragist* magazine's reprint of the *New York Times* performance review, February 26, 1916.

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