

Ethnographic Spectacle and Trans-Atlantic Performance: Unravelling the Costumes of Vaudeville's 'Queen', Eva Tanguay

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Introducing Eva, the 'Queen' of Vaudeville

"There are many who see in Eva Tanguay an unsolvable mystery. Maybe she is. But the chances are that she is one of the shrewdest and most calculating young women who have appeared before the footlights in this country in years" (Anon: 1913).

Eva Tanguay (1878 – 1947), although little known today, was one of the most famous and wealthy actresses on the American vaudeville stage in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Earning the title the 'Queen' of vaudeville at the height of her fame, Tanguay became one of the country's most highly paid actresses, making \$3,500 per week between 1908 and 1918 (Erdman 2012: 110). Tanguay's success was built on her stage presence as a wild, racialized, financially, sexually and socially emancipated woman, who was nonetheless affectionate and warm.; a persona she carefully honed over the thirty-plus years that she dominated American popular entertainment. Scholarship to date has considered how Tanguay, a white, French Canadian performer, built her persona as a wild, successful 'New Woman', a financially independent, sexually assertive figure who emerged in America in the 1890s (Brayshaw 2014: 163). It has also considered how she used the hateful, ubiquitous stereotype of the 'Coon' to achieve her huge commercial success (Casey 2015, 2010; Erdmann 2004, 2012; Glenn 2000; Trav 2005). Tanguay's bodily comportment and physical features reflected this stereotype that depicted African Americans as grotesque, grinning, frizzy-haired, uneducated and highly-sexed. In 1915, for example, when Tanguay was riding the peak of her professional success, a small review appeared in the New York theatre press that outlined her 'Coon' act, stating, 'Eva Tanguay captivated a large audience last night with her amusing songs, her grotesque gestures and mannerisms, her stunning costumes, her pleasing figure, her winning smile, her tousled hair' (Anon 1915: 11).

Figure 1: *Eva Tanguay*, c. 1907. Courtesy of the Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library, The New York Public Library Digital Collections.

Less attention, however, has been paid to the ways in which Tanguay deliberately used the materiality of her costumes that expressed the 'Coon' and the 'New Woman' within her act. Tanguay also incorporated other popular, racialized performance styles of the era, which helped to cement her position in early-twentieth-century American popular entertainment. This article, therefore, shows how Tanguay's costumes and comportment incorporated material and performance elements developed by the showman Phineas Taylor 'P.T.' Barnum (1810 – 1891) and displayed at the vast American expositions of the nineteenth century. It also shows how Tanguay incorporated a popular French performance style in her act, the *chanteuse épileptique*, which was based on the bodily comportment of Parisian cancan dancers who were influenced in part by France's experiences of ethnographic entertainment (Gordon 2009). These influences, which Tanguay incorporated into her costuming and act from early in her career, contributed to the creation of her hugely successful, wild persona.

Tanguay designed many of her costumes throughout her career, including those for her New York debut in 1895, which she complemented with a notoriously frenzied performance style (Erdman 2004: 135). It was standard practice for many actresses of the era to design and pay for their own costumes when in secondary or chorus parts (Erdman 2012: 55). Many actresses also used this practice to distinguish themselves from rival performers. It was also common for famous actresses, for example, to spend thousands of dollars each year on the fashionable gowns and jewelry that they wore on stage and publicize that knowledge, to cement their positions within the profession and impress their fans (Schweitzer 2009: 100). Tanguay, who similarly wore fashionable gowns on stage early in her career, however, gradually moved away from displays of expensive fashions on the stage. This article charts how, by wearing performance costumes that reflected American social tensions around immigration, segregation and feminism Tanguay astutely reinforced her vaudeville popularity and transcended the demands of fashion on the female public figure in America between 1900 and 1925. Tanguay's popularity became so great that she, and her costumes, were imitated on vaudeville stages across North America as other actresses and producers sought to capitalize on her fame.

Freaky, savage Hoo-doo on display

Tanguay's first New York theatrical appearance was as, 'Coloma, the Hoo-doo, a bare-footed Fiji Islander with a flimsy voile slit skirt' in a production called *The Engineer* (1895) (Erdman 2004: 135). Her costume included her frizzy hair, 'rhinestone ankle bracelets and hardly any bodice at all' and she claimed to have danced wildly because she did not want the audience to see her legs (Erdman 2012: 266). However, there was more to Tanguay's representation of Coloma than ostensible modesty; the imagery and materiality of Tanguay's flimsily-dressed Fijian can be traced via the ethnographic displays of the era's vast World's Fairs to the racialized travelling 'freak shows' of the late-nineteenth century. These shows included the highly influential displays of four Fijians promoted by Barnum between 1871 and 1873 (Berglund 2006: 1). Barnum's hugely successful travelling shows and circuses quickly expanded and, from 1884, regularly included an 'Ethnological Congress of Savage and Barbarous Tribes' presented 'as a major addition to the *Greatest Show on Earth*' (Goodall 2002: 97). Barnum's Ethnological Congress was held again in 1895, the same year that Tanguay performed as 'Coloma'.

The term 'freak show' was first used in America in 1887 and quickly came to describe dime museum and circus displays of people with physical and mental disabilities and peoples whose bodies did not conform to Western canons of beauty that privileged pale skin (Merriam-Webster Online 2018). This notion of the racialized 'freak' in entertainment was also partly derived from living ethnological displays at Congresses like Barnum's that were designed to demonstrate the progress narrative of Social Darwinism, the modern name applied to theories developed by the British philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820 – 1903). Spencer posited that human society and economics was a struggle ruled by the 'survival of the fittest' and his theories achieved great popularity in the 1870s and 1880s in America. Men such as the influential anthropologist WJ McGee (1853 – 1912), for example, used them to reflect their own preconceptions about races and their 'places' in the world (Parezo and Fowler 2007: 47). Social Darwinism was also a popular theory among wealthy, white Americans; it positioned them as the pinnacle of evolution, compared with people of colour who were situated as 'savages' (Rydell 1984: 56). Barnum adopted this narrative in 1871 to promote the Fijians, whom he billed as 'Cannibals'. He carefully managed their public representation and took pains

to illustrate their bloodthirsty nature, while noting that ‘one of the Fijians was Christianized and read the Bible to the others’ (Berglund 2006: 4). The Social Darwinist narrative and Barnum’s publicity meant that the Fijians embodied white America’s worst fears about the ‘savage’, while the tensions between their Christianity and alleged cannibalism fuelled the public’s interest and engendered social debates about race.

Americans’ curiosity about the Fijians was piqued by countless newspaper reports about their alleged savagery and the widespread distribution of their images on postcards and *cartes-de-visite* (CDVs), photographs collected and traded among friends that became a common fixture in nineteenth-century parlors. This media attention, and Barnum’s sustained promotion, saw the Fijians become known as curiosities in homes across America. CDVs of the Fijians shot around 1872 by prominent American portrait and Civil War photographer, Mathew Brady (1822 – 1896), and renowned New York photographer, Charles Eisenmann (1855 – 1927), showed the Fijians with natural, afro-textured hair, fringed grass skirts, spears, headdresses, large necklaces of bone or shell, bare chests, legs and feet. Berkin writes that Americans, ‘were not simply interested in ... CDVs as expressions of the objective “truth” of a performer’s character or as documentation of a theatrical event, but, as with celebrity tabloids today, in the space between the truth and illusion’ (in Schweitzer and Zerdy 2014: 56). Discussions and opinions of the Fijians grounded in popular entertainment and influenced by Barnum’s primitivist cannibal narratives and the nascent mass media did not always seek to determine the “truth” of the Fijians’ characters; rather they helped to fix American expectations of how ‘Savages’ behaved, looked and dressed.

Barnum’s displays of the Fijians also coincided with the global boom in the 1870s of vast ethnographic and technical expositions, also known as ‘World’s Fairs’. By the late-nineteenth century, the World’s Fairs included displays of different human races featuring living people, which was in line with political, academic and popular interests in anthropology in Europe and America. In Paris, for example, the influential *Expositions Universelle* of 1889 and 1900 both included display villages of living peoples from France’s colonies, including countries in the South Pacific. Rydell charts how the expositions legitimized racial exploitation in the United States; nearly 100 million people visited expositions held across America between 1876 and 1916 (1984: 2). This

included the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, known also as the Chicago World's Fair, which saw nearly 22 million paid admissions (Truman 1893: 601). The Fair was one of the first times in United States history that millions of Americans were introduced to Social Darwinism through a section called the Midway Plaisance, which housed a so-called South Sea Island village alongside other amusements, including the world's first giant Ferris wheel (Truman 1893: 571, 583).

The Chicago World's Fair's organizers reused the concept of display villages from the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, which had attracted more than 30 million visitors, as templates for the creation of living ethnological displays. A Samoan display village (which also housed Wallis Islanders and Fijians) was included at the Midway, where spectators could view the inhabitants performing traditional songs and dances. These performances drew 'equally on Barnum's model [of entertainment] and on a [...] tradition of ethnological display that went back to the Crystal Palace Exhibition [in London] of 1851' (Goodall 2002: 99). These displays offered the pleasure of viewing bodies and comportment that transgressed cultural codes, as Truman wrote:

The Samoans are big fellows, of stout build, yellow in colour. [They][...] dress for the stage in breechclouts of cocoanut cloth with bunches of the same and of sea grass fastened about the loins and standing out like short and stiffly-starched shirts. [...] Their naked feet come down upon the stage in perfect time with tremendous slaps. [...] From the loins up, and from the knees down, the men were naked and greasy (1893: 571, 572).

The Midway's organizers underscored the Samoans' 'savage' cultural ties to the Fijians and, like Barnum, titillated paying American audiences with claims that the Samoans had borrowed their 'cannibal dance' from the Fijians (Truman 1893: 572). These 1893 performances, which echoed Barnum's earlier Fijian displays and which reached millions of Americans, were still fresh in the public imagination, when Tanguay launched her 'Coloma' in New York in 1895. The materiality of Tanguay's Coloma costume and her wild dancing therefore recalled decades of ethnographic performance conventions and encompassed, 'political and cultural pressures that [included] ... conventions of bodily display... [and] racist conventions sanctioned by state power' (Diamond 2006 [1996]: 13). This, however, also meant that Tanguay, as Coloma, also

appeared on stage dressed in what Monks calls 'invisible inverted commas' (2010: 39). In other words, dancing wildly in her Coloma costume transformed Tanguay into a generalized, idealized social figure of the metonymic 'Savage'.

Tanguay's transformation into the metonymic 'Savage' was a calculated effort to, 'fashion a role around [herself] rather than steeping into a character's shoes [...] for this was the way to become a hit solo player in vaudeville' (Erdman 2012: 49). It was also common practice during the era for chorus members to design their own costumes, giving Tanguay agency in how she would present herself on stage (Erdman 2012: 55). Tanguay's rhinestone ankle bracelets would have flashed in the stage lights, calling attention to her bare feet and emphasizing her wild, physical distortions. However, the woman in Brady's 1872 CDV of the Fijians wears a modest 'Mother Hubbard', a long, wide, loose-fitting gown with long sleeves and a high neck that introduced by nineteenth-century missionaries in Polynesia. The Samoan women at the Chicago World's Fair were also modestly dressed in, 'waists [shirts] of colored cloth made from bark', compared with the village's bare-chested men (Truman 1893: 572). In contrast to these modestly-dressed women, Tanguay's voile skirt and flimsy bodice showed off her near naked body and, combined with the signifiers of her bare legs and frizzy hair, drew on public expectations of how the male 'Savage' should look. Tanguay therefore imbued Coloma with a masculine 'savagery' and thrilled audiences by costuming herself across her race and gender. Tanguay's agency in costuming and performing Coloma, however, saw her incorporate other, popular, vaudeville genres, which imbued her act with the potency that defined her career.

'Epileptic' stars: Paris, New York and the 'nervous' 'Coon' shouters of vaudeville

American vaudeville was a highly popular entertainment format similar to the era's English and French music hall variety shows. It rose from late-nineteenth century beginnings to become, 'a great network of famous circuits that stretched from Canada to America's southern-most precincts' and brought the 'same quality professional entertainment' to all Americans (Trav 2005: 95, 96). By the 1890s, the vaudeville format was so successful that big New York producers like Frederick F. Proctor (1851 – 1929) could afford to import international acts, including the French- Algerian actress Émilie Marie Bouchaud (1874 – 1939), known as Polaire. American audiences were captivated

by Polaire's performance at Proctor's Pleasure Palace in New York in October 1895 and the press described her as, 'one of those Parisian importations known as "chanteuses eccentricques [sic]"' (Anon 1895b: Oct.). It also claimed that, 'Everybody [...] in the up-to-date New-York music halls knows what that means' (Anon 1895a: Nov.). The press was referring to the *chanteuse épileptique* ('Epileptic' singer), one of the most popular performance genres of Parisian night-life between 1875 and the early 1900s that fused 'a style of sexual lewdness combined with clowning, corporeal contortions and grimaces' and the 'gestures of epileptics and hysterics' (Gordon 2004: 270, 271). The style was mostly associated in Paris with cancan dancers and became known in America as the 'eccentric' style where it referred to dance and comedy routines. Tanguay also evidently adopted features of this genre within her Coloma act.

The 'epileptic' genre was originally based on the medical discourse surrounding female hysteria and epilepsy in French newspapers and magazines (Gordon 2001: 524). However, the popularity of black, female bodily displays at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle* also meant that 'highly sexualized savages and cannibals populated the imaginations of the French people' during the *Belle Époque* and contributed to the genre (Gordon 2004: 268). As Gordon (2004) also demonstrates, the French media likened the *chanteuses épileptiques*' grotesque gestures and mannerisms to ethnographic performance, which shaped a popular perception that white, scantily-clad cancan dancers were akin to black 'Savages'. Polaire's skin was dark, rather than black, but she used her body and costumes and her Algerian parentage to play the metonymic 'Savage'. This included her cropped, tousled hair and dark, kohl-ringed eyes, which she combined with deliberately revealing garments and 'epileptic' comportment to communicate her wild persona on stage. Like the ethnographic display villages' inhabitants at the vast Parisian expositions, Polaire gave 'Savage' performances for popular pleasure.

Tanguay's signature dance redolent of the 'epileptic' cancan: she was known to, 'careen from one corner of the set to the other, wriggling her hips, wagging her breasts, kicking her legs wildly and shaking her derriere' (Westerfield cited in Erdman 2004: 135). American descriptions of racialized performance styles, however, often used a similar vocabulary to the 'epileptic' genre, which is evident in accounts of Tanguay's later acts. Truman's account of the 'cannibal' dance at the Chicago World's Fair, for example, states

that the Samoans, 'hopped high into the air and [...] faced the audience with a nervous jump and twisted their countenances into ferocious contortions. They went into convulsions that threatened to unjoint their bodies' (1893: 572). One spectator described Tanguay in 1902 as, 'jerky, grotesque, nervous' (Erdman 2012: 58). The press wrote in 1906, 'Miss Tanguay is the most remarkable bunch of nerves on the stage today. [...] She is a combination of agility and awkwardness, developing new oddities at every turn. Her gestures and grimaces, movements and mouthings are such as no predecessor in comic work has ever exploited' (Anon 1906b: Nov). Tanguay, therefore, drew equally on the costuming and comportment of the cancan girl and the ethnographic 'Savage' for her stage success. The complexity of her act, however, meant that Tanguay drew on the highly popular American genre of 'Coon' shouting to cement her popularity as her career progressed.

In the 1890s, the 'epicentre of the ['Coon shouting'] craze was [...] the New York stage, home of the white female "Coon shouter"' (Miller 2010: 125). The term 'Coon shouting' referred to how 'Coon songs' were delivered. 'Coon' songs built on the American history of blackface minstrelsy popularized in the mid-1830s by the performers Thomas D. Rice (1808 – 1860) with his song 'Jump Jim Crow' and blackface performer George Dixon (1801? – 1861) who created the character of 'Zip Coon'. The spectres of Zip Coon and Jim Crow loomed large over American popular culture at the turn of the twentieth-century in the light of growing segregation that had been ushered into American society in 1877 at the end of Reconstruction, the period in United States history where the American South was rebuilt after the American Civil War (1861 – 1865). 'Coon' songs of the 1890s were typically delivered in a 'bricolage of vocal styles and physical gestures, including eccentric costumes [... bodily contortions] and an imitation of a patient with the St. Vitus twitch' (Brown Lavitt 1999: 258). The 'St. Vitus twitch' alluded to Sydenham's chorea, a disorder that takes its name from the rapid, involuntary jerks of the patient's face and body. The 'Coon shouter' style therefore also bore striking similarities to the racialized, 'epileptic' genre of cancan dancers and to descriptions of ethnographic performances. In 1902, Tanguay's costumes and comportment in *The Chaperones* (1902) combined features of the ethnographic, epileptic and 'Coon shouter' styles, which granted her huge success, despite not being the show's lead.

Tanguay's 'Sambo' costumes in *The Chaperones* included her frizzy hair, 'tattered trousers' and almost see through shirts and an outfit of 'spangles hanging on beads', although her costumes did not include blackface (Erdman 2012: 55). Tanguay's tattered trousers were a material allusion to the ragged costume of 'Jim Crow', while her spangles commanded the audiences' visual attention and her sheer shirts displayed her body, alluding to the highly-sexed stereotype of the 'Coon'. Performing 'Coon' songs while not wearing blackface allowed white actresses a degree of sexual freedom by delivering risqué lyrics that might not have existed in other roles (Miller 2010: 125). If, as the press claimed in 1902 Tanguay had developed a 'new style', then it was born of her shrewd understanding of how to combine popular racialized performance and costuming styles for maximum effect (Anon 1902: 14). As Tanguay's star rose, however, her costuming and comportment increasingly also included the 'invisible inverted commas' of the metonymic 'New Woman' (Monks 2010: 39). This helped to position Tanguay as 'a key figure in the socio-sexual upheavals of the early 1900s' (Erdman 2004: 150). It also contributed significantly to Tanguay's distinctive performance style and helped to launch the song that defined her career, 'I Don't Care' (1905).

The independent, 'I Don't Care' Girl

The 'New Woman' was a figure generally associated in America with the upper classes who exercised control over her own personal, social and economic matters and who was outspoken about gender equality. Like the figures of the 'Coon', the 'Savage' and cancan girls, however, the 'New Woman' was also associated in the American popular imagination with unevolved, masculine 'savages'. For example, December 1901 essay, 'The Evolution of Sex in Mind', that appeared in *The Independent* by the music critic Henry T. Finck (1854 – 1926) stated:

If the so-called New Woman, who is so eager to support herself and to be [...] everything that man is, had any sense of humor, she would see in the mirror of these anthropologic and historic facts [of Social Darwinism] that she is [...] a very old fashioned, primitive [...] sort of a woman. Like the squaw and the peasant woman, she has taken to smoking again, and [...] is even more mannish than the savage woman [who] leaves at least hunting and politics to the men (in Patterson 2008: 285).

Finck's essay reflected American social fears at the turn of the twentieth century that the successful 'New Woman' would corrupt traditional gender roles that dictated white, middle class women should be refined, restrained, economically dependent home makers. These anxieties were partly fuelled by what was considered the corrupting influences of mass immigration and migration; the population of the United States increased sharply from about 17 million in 1840 to 62.9 million by 1890 (Ward in McIlwraith & Muller (eds) 2001: 285). Migration also changed the face of America's cities: more than 90 per cent of Black Americans lived in the rural South in 1890, but by 1900 more than 250,000 Black Americans had moved to the industrial North seeking work and freedom from increasing segregation (Ward in McIlwraith & Muller (eds) 2001: 295). Many wealthy actresses, in response to social anxieties around migration, race and gender roles in America, guaranteed their stardom and 'whiteness' by adopting expensive, 'fashionable dress and a stylish body' on and off the stage (Schweitzer 2009: 99). In 1905 Tanguay wore twelve different 'stunning costumes, all of which are the most recent Parisian creations', on stage in her musical comedy, *The Sambo Girl* (Anon 1906: 7).

The Sambo Girl (1905), which was grounded in the 'Coon shouting' genre, saw Tanguay exploit the era's social tensions around race and gender within her costuming and comportment. It was based on the play *The Blonde in Black* (1903) and about an American girl who goes to Paris to teach the Cake Walk, an African American ragtime dance that was extremely popular among wealthy, white, New York elites at the turn of the century. The Cake Walk was introduced by the American couple, Mr and Mrs Elks in the revue *Les Heures Nègres* (1902) at the *Nouveau Cirque* and popularized by Polaire. 'Sambo' was a pejorative term used in America at the time to describe a person of mixed-race that also had 'connotations between animal and human, especially between monkey and African' (Boskin 1986: 38). *The Sambo Girl*, therefore, deliberately, 'intended to stir up allusions to a fuzzy racial otherness' (Casey 2015: 103). Tanguay enhanced this by playing on the fact that she was the child of impoverished French-Canadian immigrants. American theories of Social Darwinism in the late-nineteenth century considered French Canadians little more 'evolved' than African Americans because they had been 'corrupted' by the 'indolence' of the Native Americans and 'other "savage" customs' (Munns and Richards 1999: 127). Tanguay also alluded to her

'Savage' heritage through her wild, frizzy hair, which was, 'widely perceived to be a feature particularly revealing of racial ancestry' (Casey 2015: 90). This perception was reflected on the stage where racialized costumes used dark, frizzy wigs known as 'savage' wigs to denote the metonymic 'Primitive'. For example, a letter to the successful Broadway theatrical impresarios, the Brothers Lee and J.J. Shubert (Emmons 1916) includes a costume inventory which notes that bin number 104 contained, among other items, seven 'Savage' wigs.

McClintock writes that, 'Clothes are the visible signs of social identity, but are also permanently subject to disarrangement and symbolic theft. For this reason, the cross-dresser can be invested with potent and subversive powers' (1995: 67). Tanguay's "Sambo Girl" costume in Figure 2 demonstrates her particular style of figurative black face and how she dressed across her 'race' to achieve an effect that was highly appealing to audiences in 1905. Early-twentieth century photographs of actors in blackface show ill-fitting costumes that have exaggerated lines for comic effect. Typical features of blackface costumes included trousers cut too short or sleeves cut too long, which flattens the actors into caricatures. Figure 2 shows Tanguay posing with her upper back highly-arched, which is a feature of Cake Walk choreography. Her shirt sleeves are a little too long, her hair is too wild and her grin is undoubtedly cheeky. As Monks writes, 'clothing anchors and produces the social body and embeds that body within a web of social and economic relations', which extends to the stage (2010: 10). Using her cheeky grin and wild hair as a part of her 'Savage' and 'Coon' costumes was a practice that Tanguay had used in the ten years since playing Coloma and which she continued throughout her career. This usage shows how Tanguay adeptly used her own body as a feature of her 'cross dressing' costumes to embed herself, to powerful effect, within the web of racial tensions evident in social and economic relations in early-twentieth-century America.

Figure 2: *Eva Tanguay as "The Sambo Girl"*, c. 1905. Credit. The American Vaudeville Museum Collection (MS 421), MS 421 Box 66 Folder 1, [azu_ms421_b66_f1_pg078a002_m.jpg](#). Courtesy of University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections.

Tanguay's costume in Figure 2, also demonstrated how she successfully played with gender representations when dressing for the stage. Her tailored walking suit and shirt, which are lacking ornamentation, point to the metonymic 'New Woman'. Middle-class women increasingly entered the male-dominated work force in the early twentieth century and so austere, tailored suits became popular for women's office wear around 1905. Such suits appeared more masculine than women's fashionable tailored suits, which feminised suit jackets with details like embroidery and trimmings. The way in which Tanguay dressed in the invisible inverted commas of the 'New Woman', therefore also pointed to additional anxieties around gender in America at the turn of the century. Tanguay, as the blond 'New Woman' in blackface was ready to take charge of her own fate and fortune and dressed the part. Despite her heavily racialized, almost masculine appearance in *The Sambo Girl* however, Tanguay used the visual power of her expensive Parisian gowns on stage, to reassure audiences of her 'whiteness' and desirability and reinforce her status as a vaudeville star (Anon 1906a: 7). Tanguay underscored this reassurance in *The Sambo Girl* with the song that became her greatest hit, 'I Don't Care' (1905), which she performed throughout her career in the 'Coon shouter' style. The song was almost an anthem for the 'New Woman' and included the lyrics, 'You see I'm sort of independent, Of a clever race descendent, My star is on the ascendant, That's why I don't care'.

Blazing sequins, floating feathers and the animal in the zoo

A popular feature of Tanguay's costumes throughout her career was the heavy use of sequins, which she claimed looked like 'a blaze of dancing lights' under the spotlight (Erdman 2012: 55). This blaze likely helped Tanguay remain the centre of attention on stage. Tanguay is sporting this look on the sheet music cover of her song, 'The Tanguay Rag' (1910), in a heavily sequined beret and spangled, tight body suit that features short, fringed sleeves made of a metallic, twisted braids and a knee-length fringe at the back in a similar braid. As seen in Figure 3, the metallic fringing on her costume, like the sequins would have caught the stage lights, while their movement would have enhanced Tanguay's frenetic dancing. Tanguay's body suit is similar in cut to the one-piece bathing suit that the professional swimmer and vaudeville star, Annette Kellerman (1887 – 1975) popularized during her 1907 performances at the New York Hippodrome. This also likely signalled that Tanguay belonged to the new generation of

female performers who wished to be physically unrestricted by long and heavy costumes. Tanguay is standing, staring directly at the camera with a hint of a smile, her arms by her side and her legs together. Her index fingers are crooked back, as though she is about to flick away the fringing and launch into her trademark cyclonic dance at any moment.

Figure 3: *Tanguay Rag*, 1910. Credit: The Frances G. Spencer Collection of American Popular Sheet Music. Custodian: Baylor University – Crouch Fine Arts Library.

Tanguay's love of sequins and the importance she placed on movement is also found in the only extant example of her stage wear, a pre-1917 costume in the collection of The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The costume includes a tight, knee-length, bright red, silk body suit lined with grey cotton and covered entirely in large, round red sequins. The costume is fastened at the back by medium-sized wire hook-and-eye fasteners, suggesting it was made before the widespread commercial availability of zippers. Its neckline and thin shoulder straps are decorated with fringes made of red bugle beads and a 25cm long row of bright red ostrich feathers runs down the back of each leg. The red sequins would have blazed like fire under theatrical lights, even as the lights dimmed, as dimmer lights make objects on stage appear reddish, while the tight suit, like that on the cover of the 'Tanguay Rag' would have showed off her form. In addition, ostrich feathers are characterized by their 'lack of coherency. The barbules are not attached to each other, which makes them look loose or evaporated' (Brokken et al. 2014: 66). Abrevaya Stein (2008) has linked the plume's appeal in Europe and America in the early twentieth century to the symbolism of its African origins and raw physicality. This would have underscored Tanguay's wild 'savagery'. The era's fashion critics, however, also called ostrich plumes, 'sinuous and sensual and noted that, when moored to [accessories] lent their wearer the impression of movement and freedom. Like the modern woman, who moved and encountered space in new ways, the plume embodied emancipation and mobility' (Abrevaya Stein 2008: 22). The movement and symbolisms of the red ostrich feathers, combined with the dazzling red sequins emphasized, therefore, that Tanguay belonged to the class of women who dominated public space.

From the late 1900s, Tanguay appears to have moved away from wearing fashionable clothes on stage and instead increasingly wore a series of 'stunning' costumes in her performances, such as her 'Tanguay Rag' suit and likely her red, sequined garment. One likely reason for this was the rise of the, 'tall, slim, youthful fashion mannequin with her aloof countenance, and her counterpart the showgirl' for whom the Parisian fashions were now designed (Brayshaw 2014: 163, 164). These types were in direct contrast to Tanguay, who embodied the petite, wild, curvaceous, 'New Woman' of the Edwardian era. Tanguay, who was now in her thirties and no longer considered youthful, needed to adapt her costuming to remain relevant to her audiences. For someone who claimed 'I Don't Care', Tanguay cared greatly about cultivating her look, informing public of the work and cost involved in making her costumes. In 1909, for example, she stated that, 'It takes hours of thought to design a costume, and to plan six or seven means brain work. The expense attached to them only myself would believe' (Anon 1909: 5,6). By 1910 her identity as a fashionable, 'New Woman' had, therefore, been eroded by age and changes in fashion. Her identification as the wild and savage 'Eva Tanguay' was now dependent on the continuity of her social body, her comportment and her guarantee to the audiences of outlandish performance costumes.

Tanguay made a calculated effort to appear more 'savage' as her star ascended, although her persona remained tempered by her whiteness. She continued to refer to her wild hair, including in her popular song, 'I'd Like to Be an Animal in the Zoo' (1911). The song's sheet music features a photograph of a scruffy-haired Tanguay wearing a short dress trimmed with sequins and what appear to be two birds appliqued in sequins. The crests of the birds' heads meet at the centre of her décolletage, drawing attention to her sexualized form. The song's lyrics state that she wants to let the boys 'smooth my hair and love me too [...] in a private cage out in the zoo', the implication being that taming her hair would 'domesticate' her. The song referenced the American trend of exhibiting people of colour in zoos for public amusement that had its roots in the era's vast ethnographic exhibitions. In 1906 for example, a Congolese man, Ota Benga, was exhibited in an enclosure alongside chimpanzees at the Bronx Zoo and billed as the 'missing link' between humans and apes in human evolution. Tanguay's act in 1913 continued to draw comparisons between the 'epileptic/eccentric' and the 'Savage', noting that Tanguay, 'cavorts about the stage like a crazy woman [...] Nothing more

needs to be said except that she wears a number of eccentric costumes, mostly white, wears her yellow hair in the fashion of the wild man of Borneo [...]’ (Anon 1913: Feb). With her frizzy hair and desire to ‘be an animal in the zoo’, Tanguay continued to capitalize on America’s desire to be amused by a racialized, sexualized, ‘Savage’ who, perhaps like Barnum’s Christian ‘cannibal’, nonetheless longed to be domesticated.

Tanguay continued to use the symbolic tension of other feathered performance costumes and her gendered, racialized social body into the 1920s to link herself to current events. This allowed her remain relevant to white vaudeville audiences long after many other Edwardian actresses had peaked in popularity. A photograph of Tanguay taken in 1921, for example, shows her dressed in a bizarre swan costume staring at the camera with her open-mouthed grin and frizzy hair, her legs akimbo and her hands curled like monkey paws, alluding to racialized performance genres. Her costume has wings protruding from her head, bust and hips and her stockings are rolled just below the knee like those worn by the women illustrated by the American cartoonist and costume designer, John Held, Jr. (1899–1958) on his cover of *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922) by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940). As Charmé writes, ‘[t]he vulgar is unapologetically glory in a level of stimulation that frightens those with “good taste”’ (1991: 21). The Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova (1881-1931), had toured America many times since 1910, often sharing the stage with vaudeville acts and was famous for her graceful solo, ‘The Dying Swan’, performed to ‘Le cygnet’ from *The Carnival of the Animals* by the French composer, Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921) (Hohman 2011: 66). Pavlova toured America again in 1921-22 and it is easy to imagine Tanguay in her swan costume grabbing headlines and amusing vaudeville audiences by vulgarly ‘Coon shouting’ the ballet, a dance form associated with Pavlova’s whiteness, beauty and grace.

Limitations and legacies

Tanguay’s popularity, health and fortunes declined in the late-1920s. In 1928 she was plagued by several serious illnesses that prevented her from performing; the stock market crash of 1929 saw her lose almost two million dollars. She died in 1947, blind and bedridden, after living for years on a fixed income (Erdman 2012: 230—241). The costumes mentioned here, however, are only a few of the performance outfits Tanguay

wore during her career, indicating the need for an analysis of her other costumes from the perspective of a dedicated costume scholar, rather than a theatre historian or biographer. These might include her famous 'Lincoln Penny' costume of 1910, which was made to commemorate the coin's launch in 1909, or her costumes that were made of pads of paper and pencils or flags. Such costumes, although not perhaps as overtly 'racialized' as the costumes discussed here, nonetheless contributed to the Tanguay brand of notoriety. There is also scope to discuss Tanguay's influence in establishing her performance style as a genre in its own right in America. For example, her act and costumes were widely copied, although producers were often reluctant to spend the amount of money required to reproduce her costumes authentically, meaning that audiences were not always enthusiastic about these copycat acts (Anon 1909: 5).

The trajectory traced here demonstrates how Tanguay dressed across her race, gender and class on stage to embody the social identities of the dime museum 'freak', the 'Savage', the 'Coon' and the 'New Woman' in early-twentieth-century America. Tanguay's costuming and comportment also carried the erotic potency of the Parisian *chanteuses épileptique* whose performance identities were French cultural responses to images of black 'savagery' prevalent in the *Belle Époque* and realized through their frenetic dancing and feather-clad, cross-racial dressing. Tanguay tempered her 'savagery', however, with expensive costumes, her bloneness and whiteness, which reminded audiences of her supposed racial superiority in an era saturated with notions of Social Darwinism. Tanguay continued to use her combination of costumes and comportment throughout her career to great commercial success. This is evident in her deliberate shift towards increasingly spectacular performance costumes to cement her popularity in the 1910s and 1920s, as the era's fashions became increasingly suited to younger, thinner actresses. Tanguay, therefore, may have been seen by some observers as an 'unsolvable mystery' during her day. This article, however, has argued that Tanguay's great appeal lay, in part, in her calculated use of the materiality and symbolisms of her costumes that drew on five of the era's most notorious performance genres. Tanguay's costumes also underscored the deliberately constructed tensions between her biological and socialized bodies to express American concerns around race and gender in the first three decades of the twentieth century, thereby cementing her position as the 'Queen' of Vaudeville.

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