

West's, Characters, in Aladdin or the Wonderful Lamp, Price 2<sup>d</sup> — Plain.



Aladdin, 3<sup>d</sup> Drefs.



Genie of the Lamp.



Obrock.



Princess Badroulbour,



Zobeide.

William West  
& the  
**REGENCY  
TOY  
THEATRE**



Kazrack,



Kazim Azack.



Aladdin, 2<sup>d</sup> Drefs.



Abanazar 2<sup>d</sup> Drefs.

SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM AND NATIONAL TOUR  
2004-2005

AN EXHIBITION IN ASSOCIATION WITH POLLOCK'S TOY MUSEUM

*William West and the Regency Toy Theatre*

an exhibition at Sir John Soane's Museum

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and a national tour 2004–2005

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Frontispiece of peepshow entitled *Theatrorama or a Peep at the Playhouse* (Collection of David Robinson)

## FOREWORD

William West was 27 years old when he laid the foundations of the toy theatre. His 'Juvenile Drama' (as he called it) originated in 1811 when he published his first sheet of half a dozen characters from a popular play being performed in a London theatre. His young customers, not content with mere souvenirs, then began to cut out the figures and perform the plays themselves. This encouraged West to produce characters and scenes that

could be fitted into a little stage, each sheet costing 'a penny plain or twopence coloured'. He went on to produce 146 plays, with many of the sheets executed to a very high standard by accomplished artists. This timely exhibition assembles, for the first time, the best of West's prints, offering a beguiling insight into the childhood pursuits, scenic art, production style and popular culture of the Regency.

GEORGE SPEAIGHT

## PREFACE

The subject of Regency toy theatres is a strangely relevant one to the Museum as John Soane himself was closely involved with the world of the Regency theatre. In 1819 he had accepted the post of supervisory architect to the Theatre Royal Drury Lane and his younger son, the wayward George Soane, had variable successes throughout his long career as a theatrical dramatist and manager. It is also true to say that the Regency theatre, as reflected in toy theatre, helps us to understand the romantic and spectacular side of the architecture of the period, including the Soane Museum itself.

We are, therefore, delighted to be able to hold this exhibition in association with Pollock's Toy Museum, of Scala Street, London W1, the only museum in Britain with a specialism in

toy theatres. The research and selection have been undertaken by Barry Clarke, David Powell, Horatio Blood and Alan Powers. Particular thanks also go to David Robinson, a Trustee of Pollock's, who is the principal lender to the exhibition, as well as to George Speaight, Peter Baldwin and to the lenders who are listed below. Will Palin, our Assistant Curator, has organised the exhibition with his customary energy and enthusiasm.

Finally the exhibition would not have been possible without the generous support of the Heritage Lottery Fund which will enable these entertaining designs to be seen by a much wider audience on a national tour.

MARGARET RICHARDSON  
*Curator, December 2003*

## LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

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## INTRODUCTION

There can be few of Georgian London's small-time stationers, circulating library proprietors, minor publishers and under-the-counter pornographers who have left a more vivid portrait than William West. We know that he was born in 1783 and died in 1854. In this catalogue David Powell recounts his career from the time he took over his mother's circulating library and, in 1811, started in business as a publisher of theatrical prints; to 1850 when he was interviewed at length by Henry Mayhew. A sketch showing an anxious wizened face behind round spectacles, and surmounted by a folded paper hat, bears out Mayhew's description of 'a little spare man whose clothes hung loose about him'. Another recollection describes West and the lady supposed to be his wife (though she could have been a certain Mrs Stokes) as 'a couple of shrivelled up creatures, having the appearance of octogenarian misers. They were always shabbily clad, although reputed to be well off, and seldom indulged in the luxury of a clean face.' The same account attributes to the pair a pet fox and a taste for gin. Mayhew and Edward Draper concur in their accounts of poor West's chronic asthma. Mayhew found him 'confined to his room . . . in a huge armchair, embedded in blankets, with a white night-cap on his head'. Draper recalled that a short time before his death, 'the poor old man could be heard gasping behind a simple screen which divided his death-bed from the public portion of the shop'.

Mayhew delighted in West's pre-Dickensian low London diction, with the authentic Welleresque confusion of 'v' and 'w'. Astley of Amphitheatre fame becomes, on West's lips, 'Mr Hashley of the Hamphitheayter'. He is properly proud of his 'prints of osses' and his proscenia with their 'liptic harch fronts'.

Yet it is to this modest cockney entrepreneur that we owe the remarkable iconography of the late Georgian theatre that is celebrated in this exhibition, in engravings that at their best, and gloriously coloured, combine elegance, grace and charm with documentary devotion. Mayhew's interview reveals West's sensitive discrimination about the abilities of his artists, along with the finesse of the printing, the consistent care to use excellent drawing paper which has stood the test of almost two centuries, and his scorn of cheapjacks 'lowering the purfession'. Though he signed a lot of the prints, there is no proof that he could actually draw, but he certainly knew an artist when he found one who would take his pound a plate. All this links West and his productions with the craft tradition of the pre-industrial era when a simple artisan, making a chair or a pitcher, a drinking-glass or a door for a house, quite simply and

unselfconsciously made things that were right and beautiful.

West's first theatre prints were intended strictly as souvenirs of the current stage successes and their stars. According to his own account, it was his customers who first had the idea of cutting out the lively little figures and setting them up on model stages to evoke an even more vivid memory of the show. In turn, West responded by producing sets of prints that reproduced every character, every costume and every scene, so that his customers could perform the entire play in miniature. Finally he began to build the actual stages and publish suitably abbreviated versions of the play texts. The generic phrase he coined for these productions was 'West's Juvenile Drama'. Though inevitably his miniature theatres – and those of his many successors – soon found their way into the children's play-room, William West, living and working in close proximity to London's theatres, never compromised his aim of documentary record.

West's productions coincide precisely with the Regency and the Regent's succession and reign as George IV. They chronicle a very distinctive moment in the history of the British stage. Generally disregarded by historians as the nadir of British *drama*, it should rather be revalued and celebrated as a wondrous flowering of British *theatre*. The stage of those years was shaped by social conditions. The industrial revolution brought new masses flooding into the cities. In the first four decades of the nineteenth century the population of London doubled. And the newcomers turned in large extent to the theatres for relaxation and amusement. 'There is a range of imagination in most of us, which no amount of steam-engines will satisfy . . .', wrote Dickens, describing the audience of the New Cut. 'The entertainment that this new popular audience demanded', George Speaight tells us, 'was frankly escapist; they did not want philosophical debate, or smart witty dialogue; they did not want plays about the problems of contemporary life; they wanted richness, where their lives were poor; they wanted colour, where their lives were grey; they wanted excitement, where their lives were dull'.

This audience and these hungers uncannily parallel the early nickelodeon years of the American cinema, less than a century later. Neither the Regency theatre nor the nickelodeon favoured verbal drama. The first films were without sound, and in any case a large part of their audience was made up of immigrants still struggling to master the language of their new land. The Patent Theatres of Regency London, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, had been rebuilt so large that it is hard to imagine how even the most stentorian actors

made themselves audible to the gallery. In both cases, the outcome was an emphasis on the visual. In America, David Wark Griffith and his contemporaries discovered subtle means of telling stories through mute moving images. The Regency theatres gave their public the visual thrills of spectacle and the exotic. It was nothing new. Eighteen hundred years before, Horace had complained,

You'd think you heard the Gargan forest roar  
Or Tuscan billows break upon the shore,  
So loud the tumult waxes when they see  
The show, the pomp, the foreign finery.  
Soon as the actor, thus bedizened, stands  
In public view, clap go ten thousand hands.  
'What said he?' 'Naught'. 'Then what's the attraction?'  
Why,

Yon woollen mantle with the violet dye.

Contemporary and domestic stories were not much in demand in the Regency theatre. The new dramatic form of melodrama preferred to find its settings in romance, medievalism, ancient history and recent battles, the exotic orient, Arabia, tales of pirates and *banditti*. Nautical and equine dramas respectively gave employment to Sadler's Wells' great water tank and the circus ring of Astley's Amphitheatre. The Battle of Waterloo and the Coronation of George IV were swiftly turned into best-selling theatre shows. Scenic designers like the Grieve family brought stage settings to new heights of realism. The extravagance of costumiers knew no bounds, and the pantomime removed all constraints to their fantasies.

All this is faithfully recorded in West's pictorial chronicle – the stages themselves, with their 'liptic harch fronts' and wealth of highly coloured and gilt plasterwork; the scenery, from the classical glories of *Coriolanus* to the final conflagration in *The Miller and His Men*, the most famous image of the entire Juvenile Drama as it was styled from the 1820s; the sumptuous

costumes, whether portrayed in the play sheets or the greater detail of the individual portraits. It is a measure of the reliability of West's representations that his prints were used as patterns by the provincial costumiers: 'The wardrobe people at the minor theatres and masquerade people used to buy a great many to make their dresses from.'

The living centre of the visual spectacle was finally the actor. The great size alike of the theatres and of the emotions played out upon their stages demanded a special style of acting (just as did the early, silent cinema) which would give physical expression to the inner psychology of the characters. A superficial examination of West's prints might mislead us into supposing that the actors' poses are merely a convention of the draughtsmen – the straddled legs or bent knees, arms raised high or extended, body thrown proudly back or abjectly bent forward from the waist, hands open, the palms facing forwards (only occasionally will an anguished or more often sinister character clench a fist).

On the contrary, here is a true representation of the acting modes of the English theatre in the first decades of the nineteenth century. A theoretical test is to compare these postures with the advice of Henry Siddons' 1807 manual *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action; Adapted to the English Drama* (itself adapted from a work by the German philosopher Johann Jacob Engel). A fascinating practical experiment is fearlessly to copy the poses, and feel one's own body yield and expand to the larger-than-life emotions they seek to express in a way that will convey them to the distant multitudes in the 'gods'.

For those who have fantasy enough to enter, like Alice, into this tiny wonderland of William West's imagery, there is a rare chance to catch just a whiff of the heady, haunted aura of the Regency playhouse.

DAVID ROBINSON



Fig. 1 Anonymous pen and wash portrait of William West, autographed by the sitter (Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library)

## WILLIAM WEST AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOY THEATRE

In August 1812 'J.C.' submitted to a monthly magazine a poem about the latest fashionable pastime for boys, the toy theatre:

'AN ADDRESS.

WRITTEN FOR MY LITTLE BOY'S PLAYHOUSE.

[The *Characters* to pass on the Stage in the Order in  
which they are mentioned.]

Gentlemen welcome! – Welcome Ladies fair,  
To our *new Theatre* in *Brunswick-square*:  
'Tis true, we have nor *Siddons's*, nor *Kemble*,  
To shake your nerves, and make our *Treasury* tremble;  
But, – let me tell all envious detractors –  
We *here* can boast – of *real pasteboard* actors!

And so on.<sup>1</sup> Two years earlier such a poem could not have been written, since no such thing as a little boy's playhouse was known. Yet within this very short time the juvenile stage had emerged as a toy that was to delight successive generations of youthful performers and their audiences. And these toys now offer a fascinating glimpse into one of the richest yet least remembered or understood periods of the British theatre.<sup>2</sup>

No discussion of this subject can afford to neglect the interview which William West, as 'a celebrated publisher of penny theatrical characters and maker of toy theatres', gave to the journalist Henry Mayhew in 1850. The interview was only published as a newspaper article, and not included in the final version of Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, so was completely forgotten until its rediscovery and partial publication in 1971<sup>3</sup> and republication in full the following year.<sup>4</sup> Its recovery was more epoch-making than even some of those responsible seem to have realised, and its implications have not yet been fully absorbed into toy theatre history. To begin with, the interview names 'children's lottery prints' as the inspiration and model for the 'first cheap theatrical print' published by West early in 1811. Lottery prints and lottery books occupy a somewhat mysterious corner of the history of children's publishing. The children's book expert Sydney Roscoe once invited the readers of *The Library* (the organ of that furiously learned body, the Bibliographical Society) to enlighten him as to their origin and purpose, but a deafening silence was the response. The 'Royal Oak Lottery' is referred to by John Locke, and may have been the model for other publications of the same type. It seems likely that the original use of these was to play a game in the manner of lotto (or the modern bingo) which encouraged children to match up images with their names or initial letters.<sup>5</sup> 'Lotteries' were

known in France, Germany and Italy as well as Britain, where by the late Georgian period the expression was so synonymous with illustrated alphabet books and prints, that no one bothered about the oddity of the name. So ubiquitous were the lotteries, that both Thomas Bewick and George Cruikshank got some of their earliest paid employment from designing them. (They must be sharply distinguished from the illustrated advertisements for public, money-prize lotteries, though these too gave work to many artists until lotteries were abolished in 1826) (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 A children's lottery print, with characters in boxes and rhymed captions

When historians first began to investigate the origins of the toy theatre, and tried to think of precedents for paper toys of a theatrical kind, the best they could come up with were the peep-shows and Christmas crib sheets of eighteenth-century Germany, and the toy theatre plays of nineteenth-century Germany. But the plays were too late to influence their English counterparts, and no one could establish any direct line of influence from the other toys.<sup>6</sup> Back in Georgian England there was one very good precedent for a paper toy with links to the contemporary theatre, and this was the Turn-ups, a species of moveable book marketed by Robert Sayer and other publishers in the 1770s, and again by T. Hughes and other publishers in the 1800s. Turn-ups so often relied on the pantomimes of the period for their subject-matter that they were regularly referred to as a 'harlequinades', an inaccurate but understandable description. And indeed one advertisement for the turn-ups published by Hughes sounds almost like a manifesto for the toy theatre that was soon to emerge: 'The Juvenile Theatre: or, Dramatic Delineations, with expositions in verse, of all the most Favourite Spectacles, Pantomimes, Ballets, and other

Grand and Picturesque Performances at the Theatres-Royal; entirely adapted to the comprehension and amusement of Youth. To be continued occasionally.<sup>7</sup> But again there was no evidence of actual influence to be found. When George Speaight published the first edition of his history of the toy theatre in 1946, he was inclined to think that the earliest toy theatre prints derived from theatrical portraits such as those published by Robert Dighton, the character sheets being in effect several miniature portraits of the Dighton type engraved on one plate.<sup>8</sup> By the time of his second edition (1969) Speaight was able to point also to the publications of the *agences théâtrales*, sheets of characters and scenes issued to help the theatre-managers of the French provinces imitate the latest productions of the Parisian theatres.<sup>9</sup> Here the similarity of appearance to some of the earliest toy theatre sheets was certainly uncanny. But Speaight effectively scuppered his own theories in 1972 when he brought the Mayhew interview back into the discussion. For this interview makes it quite clear that CHILDREN'S LOTTERY PRINTS were the inspiration for what West (with commendable precision) called 'the first juvenile theatrical print'. The main legacy of the lottery prints was in fact one that West's theatrical prints shook off within a matter of months: the placing of each character in a separate box, with a caption (sometimes a rhyming one) in a smaller box underneath. Had historians known that this is what they were looking for, they might have noticed the lottery prints,<sup>10</sup> and likewise various other species of prints which arrange images and captions in the same way: for instance, the frontispieces and engraved title pages of some seventeenth-century books, or else the novelty packs of playing cards, such as those commemorating the Popish Plot, the South Sea Bubble, or (if you want a theatrical example) *The Beggar's Opera*. The parallel with playing cards becomes even closer, when we remember that these novelty packs could also be bought printed on a single sheet, for use as a wall-decoration. Nearer to West's own time, the *genre* of Twelfth Night Characters, originally promoted by Fairburn in the 1790s, supplied a precedent for sheets that consisted (as the frontispieces and playing cards usually did not) entirely of CHARACTERS.<sup>11</sup>

The 'first cheap theatrical print' was published by William West in early 1811. The Christmas pantomime season was still running, and *Mother Goose* was the subject of the print (Fig. 3). In style, it was exactly like a small lottery print, being divided into eight boxes, each occupied by a single character, and each having one line of a rhyming couplet inscribed underneath by way of caption. The rhymes even adopt the vocabulary of the lottery print, the figure of Clown being described as 'Zany', an expression popular with the alphabetical type of lottery, because there are very few picturesque objects beginning with a Z, once Zeno and Zebras have begun to pall. So there was

nothing new about the form of the print, only the content WHOLLY DERIVED FROM THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE being an innovation, though this must have been the key ingredient that caught the imagination of the juvenile public. The ordinary lottery prints sometimes contain theatrical elements, but these tend to be generalised images such as figures from Shakespeare, *commedia dell'arte* characters, or street performers, not specific, topical images from current stage successes. Moreover, these theatrical elements almost never occupy a whole sheet to themselves.

It seems likely that the idea for the sheet was brought to West by John Green, a twenty-year-old engraver's apprentice, who was looking forward to being out of his indentures in a few months' time. For the time being he was still articled to Mr Simkins in Denmark Court, Strand, a short distance away from the haberdasher's shop in Exeter Street which West had inherited from his mother. If Green had the idea for the print (*invenit*, 'invented [it]', in contemporary printsellers' parlance) and likewise etched the images on to the copper plate (*sculpsit*, 'engraved [it]'), we cannot add *delineavit*, 'drew [it]', since he boasted no drawing skills worth mentioning. Instead, he made careful reductions of eight images from a variety of existing printed sources. When West made large profits from his idea, but refused to give him any further employment, Green started on a life-long quest to get his own back on those who had stolen his thunder. He spent an unsuccessful year or two trying to establish himself as a publisher, but this was mostly with designs which were copied from the work of the superior artists now patronised by West. Then, according to the only definite information we have, Green enlisted in the Army,<sup>12</sup> and perhaps fought in the last part of the Peninsular campaign (in later years he sometimes brought out publications on April 10, the anniversary of the Battle of Toulouse). In



Fig. 3 The 'first cheap theatrical print' (Cat. 3)

1832 he suddenly re-appeared in civilian life, announcing himself as 'the original inventor and publisher of juvenile theatrical prints, established 1808'. His second career as a toy theatre publisher lasted until his death in 1860, and the plays he published form the basis of the stock in which Pollock's Toy Theatres Ltd still deals.

Of West's run-away success with his first print and its immediate successors, there can be no doubt:

'I brought out this print, you'll understand, to please the children. The lottery things was so bad, and sold so well, that the idea struck me that something theatrical would sell. And so it did – went like wildfire among the young folks. Shopkeepers came to me far and near for 'em.'<sup>13</sup>

'I dare say I sold right off as many as 5,000. It was printed many times over, and every edition I know was a thousand. We don't do so many now. It was sold at a penny plain, and twopence coloured . . . The success of the theatrical prints was so great, I was obliged to get three presses to print them fast enough. I brought out a new one every day, as I told you before.'<sup>14</sup>

The price of 'a penny plain, and twopence coloured' quickly became synonymous with juvenile dramatic prints, and was destined to go into the language, albeit rather unfairly, as a label for anything cheap and tawdry. In fact, the value for money offered by West was amazing, especially when compared with the broadsides sold in the streets by the 'Seven Dials' type of publisher (of whom Pitts and Catnach were the most famous), which were sold for the same sort of price, but only by compromising at every turn when it came to quality. West was exceptionally sensitive to the artistic quality of his productions and his attitude to the pricing of his prints is very instructive. They were not (as it is easy to assume) sold at an unvarying price of 1d. plain. Rather, when West thought that the quality was above average, the price would go up to 1½d., and when he thought it was below average, it would come down to a mere ½d. West's aesthetic sensitivity also comes out in his interview, which betrays a sheepish acknowledgement of the poor quality of some of his earliest prints, and an appreciation of the steadily-improving artistic quality of his subsequent efforts.

'Bad as the drawing of these here is, I assure you it was a great advance on the children's halfpenny lotteries.'<sup>15</sup>

'I can show you the print on it – you must see it, for it was a great advance in my purfession, sir.'<sup>16</sup>

'This is a late production, so you can see the improvement.'<sup>17</sup>

But what were the children doing with his sheets? The little children who were his first customers probably cut out the

figures and jiggled them up and down on the floor or the table, imagining themselves as spectators at the theatre, or else pretending to be the actors whose likenesses they held in their hands. Small children are less literal-minded than older ones, and they find approximate representation perfectly satisfying, without requiring exact imitation of the thing being represented.<sup>18</sup> But when their older brothers took over (one imagines them charging into the nursery and wresting the coveted images from their helpless and distraught younger brothers and sisters), exact imitation of the most literal kind was just what they demanded. Hence the call for stage fronts, wooden stages, and scenery.

Once the toy theatre was established as a juvenile pastime, it quickly became the preserve of boys in their early teens. Girls, and little children generally, were not encouraged to participate. In view of this development, it seems worth emphasizing that, of the three publishers whose businesses were firmly established in 1811, two were women (Mrs Hebbard and Mrs Jameson) and the other, West, had inherited his mother's business. All three operated in very feminine environments – circulating libraries and haber-dashers' shops, and their aim was to target the small children who tagged along with their mothers to these places, and to induce them to buy one of their cheap toys (Fig. 4).

'I am a maker of children's theatres, and a theatrical print publisher. I have been in the line ever since 1811. The first time I began to publish anything of the kind was when the pantomime of *Mother Goose* was performing. I was the first in the line. I think I had the business all to myself for two years. Mrs J[ameson], who lived in Duke's court, Bow street, took to it after that. She sold my prints at first, and then she began to print and publish for herself . . . I was originally in the circulating library and haberdashery line. My mother was in the haberdashery way, and I continued it. We had a glass case of toys as well, and among the toys we sold children's halfpenny lottery prints – common things that were done in those days, sir. Well, you see, my parents used to be at Covent Garden Theatre, and I took it in my head to have a print done of *Mother Goose*, I can show you the original print by me. You shall see, sir, the first theatrical print ever published. (He here produced a bundle of impressions.)'<sup>19</sup>

T. J. Dibdin's *Harlequin and Mother Goose; or, The Golden Egg* was first performed at Covent Garden in 1806, and established Joseph Grimaldi as the greatest of all pantomime clowns. Unlike most pantomimes, which were tending towards the modern pattern of being produced for the Christmas season and then forgotten, *Mother Goose* stayed in the repertory and



Fig. 4 West's original shop, from a plate of pantomime tricks

was given frequent revivals. Thus it remained a good subject for a children's toy even in 1811. But West was wrong about having the business all to himself for two years, since both Mrs Jameson and Mrs Hebbard started to publish in the same year that he did, as did the unfortunate Green, with others (such as Burtenshaw, Perkins, and Slee) appearing the following year. Indeed, after two or three years, West's rivals actually started to fall away, with no great increase in numbers till the end of the decade.

There is a second point that must be emphasized, and this is perhaps the most important revelation that the interview has to offer (other than the debt owed to lottery prints). This is the accidental support which West gives to the claims of Green. Mayhew has not asked West about Green, and evidently does not realise that he is a still-living competitor of his interviewee, or else he would have blanked out Green's name or reduced it to a G—. Yet West justifies his conduct towards Green in a way that only serves to underline his obvious feelings of guilt in the matter:

'These two figures here in the corner, you see, a'n't so bad, but they're nothing to what we do now. This plate was done by a 'prentice of the name of Green, who worked at Mr. Simkins', an engraver in Denmark-court.

He used to do them in his overtime. He was obliged to have something to look at to copy. He was no draughtsman himself, you know. This here picture of Mother Goose he took from a large print of Mr. Simmonds in that there character published by Ackerman, and sold in Covent-garden at 2s. 6d. plain, and 5s. coloured; the others was all copied from large prints of the day. . . . Young Green only did me two plates. He was such a bad draughtsman he couldn't do anything without a copy, and I was forced to get permission of the better printsellers for all he did. I gave Green 30s. or £2 for each plate he did for me. He was very dear, 'cause he was so slow over the engravings.'<sup>20</sup>

By 'overtime' West means what would now be called 'spare time'. And some of his detailed recollections need to be corrected. Ackermann did indeed publish a large print of Simmonds as Mother Goose, but it was not used for the 'picture of Mother Goose', which appears to derive from something less distinguished. It was the 'two figures here in the corner' which were copied from an Ackermann print and which, as West rightly says, 'a'n't so bad'. If West's memory was fallible, his artistic eye was still as sharp as ever. There were also things that he was trying his best to forget, however, and he makes it painfully clear that his ungenerous treatment of Green was one of them: 'He was obliged to have something to

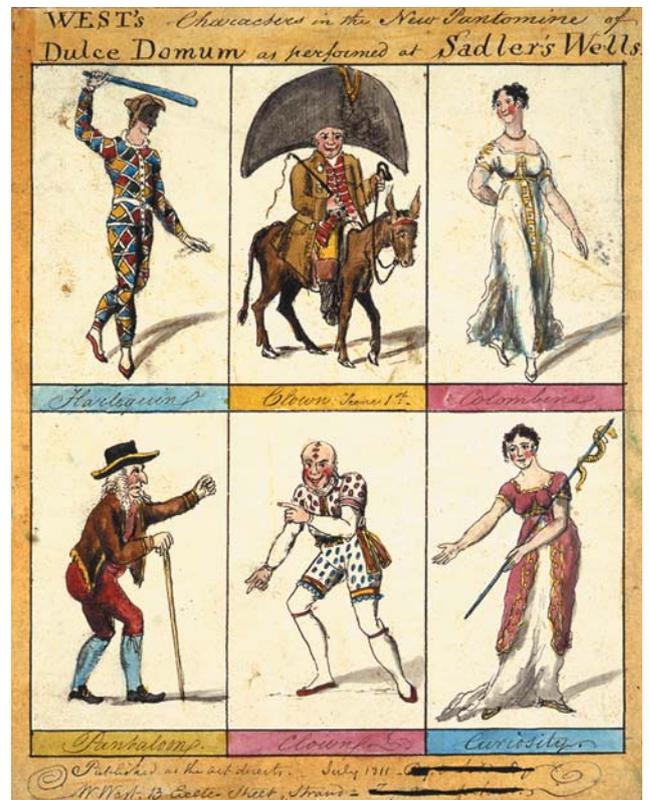


Fig. 5 Original drawing for a single sheet of characters in the 'box' style (British Museum, London)

look at to copy' – 'He was no draughtsman himself, *you know*' (How could Mayhew know anything about it?) – 'He was such a bad draughtsman he couldn't do anything without a copy' – 'I was forced to get permission of the better printsellers for all he did' – 'He was very dear' – 'he was so slow'. What else can we make of such repeated self-justification in a matter which no one has actually raised, except to see it as an inadvertent proclamation of guilt? Irving in *The Bells* was nothing to this.

During the early months of 1811, the 'box' style (left over from the lottery prints) (Fig. 5) gradually gave way to an 'open' style, and as many as two sheets of characters (rarely three) were sometimes produced for a popular new play. For the first eight months the characters were sometimes parallel to the long side of the sheet, and sometimes parallel to the short side. But then a new style emerged, with the characters always arranged parallel to the short side, an arrangement which allowed each character to be bigger and more impressive, and gave the sheets their classic look for the next two decades. This change was very likely due to William Heath, a brilliant

artist-engraver not yet out of his teens. He was the illegitimate son of the engraver James Heath, and had been recommended to West by John Astley (of Astley's Amphitheatre). Another development belonging to the end of 1811 involved the placing of appropriate scenery behind the two characters of the upper row, and different scenery behind those of the lower row (*The Iron Chest*); or else the taking over of whole plates by a scene, in front of which two or three characters went through their paces (*Don Juan*), an interesting anticipation of the need which would soon be felt to produce separate sheets of scenery to go with the characters (Fig. 6). By the beginning of 1812, engraved stage fronts and wooden stages were being produced, and, by the middle of that year, scenery was at last being issued, albeit rather haphazardly. Very gradually, the characters and scenes offered for each play tended more towards completeness, though completeness was still the exception rather than the rule for at least the first decade of West's career.

Nothing is more important in all this than to understand the essentially passive and reactive character of West's response to

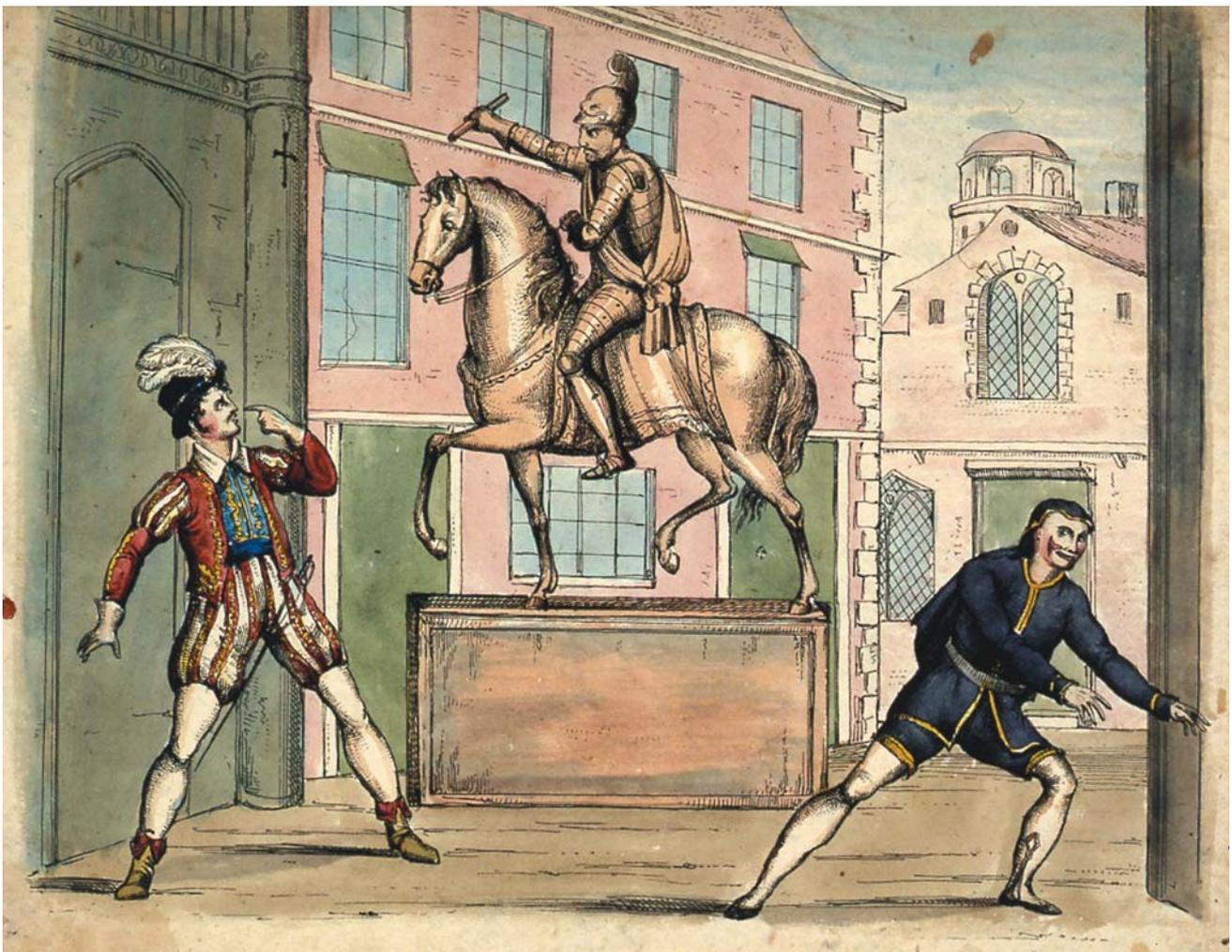


Fig. 6 Original drawing for plate 1 of characters in *Don Juan*, with scenery behind the figures (British Museum, London)

his success. In sharp contrast with the modern business world, which is constantly attempting to make consumers want things they didn't previously know they wanted, West persists in hoping that his public will be able to manage things for themselves, and then grudgingly accedes to their requests when finally compelled to admit that they actually want him to produce new articles for sale:

'At first, you see, we didn't do any but the principal characters in a piece, 'cause we didn't think of making theaters then, and went on as we begun for two years. After that we was asked by the customers for theaters to put the characters in, so I got up the print of a stage front, thinking that the customers would get the woodwork done themselves. But after the stage front they wanted the theaters themselves of me more than ever, so that I was obliged to keep three carpenters to make 'em for me. One was a horgan builder and could make anything in machinery. I turned out the first toy theater for children as ever was got up for sale, and that was in the year 1813. . . . After I made a few I was hobligated to make scenery, and to do the sets of characters complete. Nobody but me made toy theaters for a long while; nor did they do the scenery. One man used to do me three dozen theaters a week; and another man did me a dozen more of the small. The larger theaters took a longer time, and I don't think I made more than a dozen of them in a year. I used to make, I think, about fifty toy theaters a week. I always had a room full of them upstairs, except at Christmas, when we couldn't turn them out fast enough. I think I must have sold about 2,500 every year of 'em. Some theaters I made came to as much as £20 a piece. I have made about four of them, I think, in my life time. They was fitted up with very handsome fronts – generally 'liptic harch fronts, built all out of wood, with ornaments all over it – and they had machinery to move the side wings on and off; lamps in front, to rise and fall with machinery, and side lamps to turn on and off to darken the stage, and trick sliders to work the characters on and change the pantomime tricks; then there was machinery to make the borders rise and fall as well, and cut traps to open for the scenery to go up and down through the stage.'<sup>21</sup>

As before, West's sense of chronology is not quite reliable. It was after one year, not two, that he started to print stage fronts. He started to produce scenery in April 1812, so that, if wooden stages came between stage fronts and scenery, these too must have begun to be produced in early 1812, not 1813. It appears that West's head for figures was better than his head for dates, and that his numbers, amazing though they seem, are probably

to be relied on. Likewise with sums of money, for which he produces documentary evidence, and could no doubt have produced more:

'He showed me also an account of the expense of making a toy theatre that he had made to be sent out to Australia. It was for the children of the Chief Judge there. He had made two for the same party. The second was the best, and came to £16-12-6½.'<sup>22</sup>

Toy stages were not completely unprecedented, though ownership of them had previously been confined to boys who were hopelessly stage-struck (Thomas Dibdin, 1785–87),<sup>23</sup> or whose families had theatrical connections (the young Macready, c. 1802).<sup>24</sup> And West himself (born 1783, so c. 1790) had once come into the latter category:

'You see my father was the under property-man at Covent Garden Theatre, and I had a sister a dancer there, and another sister belonging to the fruit-office in the boxes – so we was all theatrical; and when I was about seven years old, I got my father's 'prentice in the shop to make me a wooden theater – he was uncommon clever at carpenter work, and the painters and carpenters of Covent Garden used to come and see it when we exhibited in our one-pair back three times a week. We used to charge 2d. a piece. It was thought a great thing in those days; and so many people used to come to see it, that father and mother wouldn't allow it after a time; so it was put up as a raffle, and it was won by a young man, who took it with him to Scotland.

'It was that as gave me the hidea of making toy theaters for sale.'<sup>25</sup>

In short, it seems that we should not think of the toy theatre as having been 'invented' by anyone. 'Juvenile theatrical prints' may indeed have been invented by Green and exploited by West, but the thing we call the toy theatre was developed by a sort of dialogue between West and his young customers. The transformation of the typical West sheet during his first year of publishing is remarkable: we move from the single sheet of characters in boxes, to the two- or three-sheet souvenir of characters not in boxes (perhaps with vignettes of scenery behind them), to the four-sheet souvenir with full scenery drawn behind the characters. But these changes seem motivated more by an abstract concern for aesthetics than by practical considerations, and were very likely the result of West's being able to employ better (and more pretentious) artists as the months went by. We have his own word for it that all the innovations of practical importance (stage fronts, wooden stages, scenery and even the expansion of the

character sheets to cover more than 'principal' characters) were the result of pressure from his customers. The main practical development that had not yet appeared (viz, specially-printed playbooks) was, as we shall see, the initiative of a rival publisher, and one that West, true to form, seems to have adopted with no great alacrity or enthusiasm.

One area which West does seem to have cultivated with vigour during his early years was what the toy theatre collector F. B. Brady called 'juvenile sundries', in other words a range of prints produced in the same size and shape as the toy theatre sheets, and drawn by the same artists in the same style of art, but having no theatrical connections, being merely intended for decoration and amusement of a more general kind. Thus, during West's first three or four years, there poured from his presses sheets of rocking horses, military bands, Lord Mayor's Processions, and what have you. Many of these prints probably do not survive, being only known to us from West's Catalogue Sheet. Typical of the lost prints is 'Temple of Concord and Pagoda'. This title has found its way into modern lists of West's toy theatre plays (and what visions such a title conjures up!). But 'Temple of Concord and Pagoda' is not the name of any known stage piece, and almost certainly indicates a pair of souvenir sheets commemorating the Peace Celebrations of 1814, sheets which may yet survive in some grand collection devoted to festivals and festivities.



Fig. 7 A plate of characters by George Cruikshank (Cat. 170)

In between these completely non-theatrical publications and the toy theatre sheets proper, come theatrical sundries of one kind or another. West always published these alongside his characters and scenes, for instance single portraits of actors in different roles, Combats, and sheets of Pantomime Tricks. He also published sheets of miscellaneous theatrical characters. Under the name of 'fours' and 'sixes', these became a familiar part of the later publishers' repertory, but although West issued a few prints as early as 1811 that were sixes (and eights) in all but name, he left it to others to exploit this type of thing, so that for practical purposes Park and Golding initiated the *genre* of 'Sixes' in about 1830, to which 'Fours' and other arrangements were added within a few years.

Many artist-etchers of the period worked for West and the other toy theatre publishers. The most eminent were the brothers George and (Isaac) Robert Cruikshank. George in his old age admitted to having worked for West, though he did not like his flat fee of a pound per quarto plate.<sup>26</sup> Among plays that have been attributed to him, West's *Harlequin Whittington* is one of the most credible (Fig. 7), and (as explained below) he may actually have invented the *genre* of miniature characters. Robert Cruikshank signed most of Mrs Jameson's twopenny portraits and some of West's, and (as the evidence of signed original drawings suggests) did enormous amounts of work,

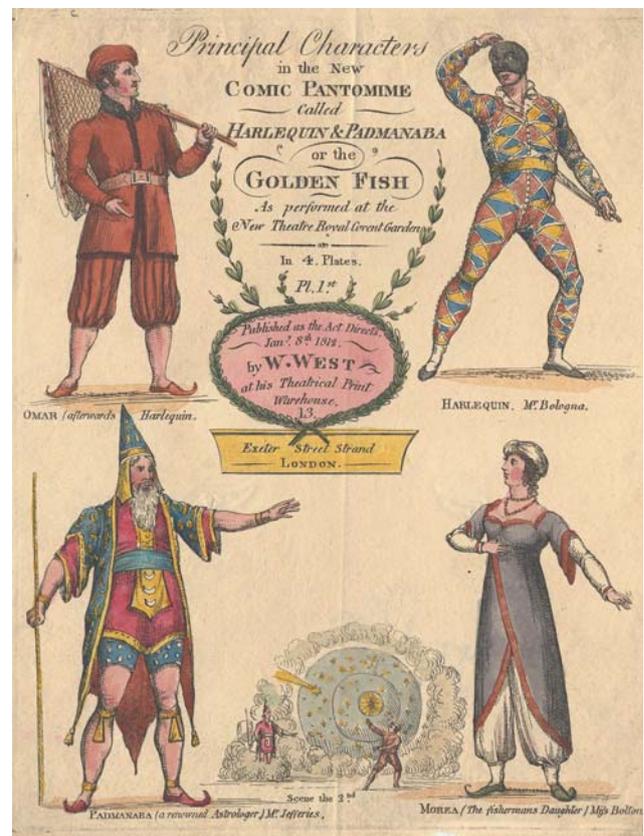


Fig. 8 A plate of characters in William Heath's early style (Cat. 155)

both theatrical and otherwise, for Fairburn, Marks, Orlando Hodgson, and others.

Denis Dighton, son of the egregious Robert Dighton, and best known as a battle-painter, did a small amount of work for the toy theatre, but the brothers William and Henry Heath worked hand over fist for West and Hodgson. In particular, it seems that William Heath may have given West's prints the initial push towards the marked superiority which they started to achieve over other publishers' work towards the end of 1811 (Fig. 8). He seems to have worked intermittently for West for ten years or so (Fig. 9), finally returning in the mid-1820s (after a sojourn in Scotland) to accomplish the even greater artistic triumphs of West's later work, where elegance is found allied with forcefulness in an unsurpassable combination. At the same period, Heath was establishing himself as the foremost practitioner of English caricature during the time of its final flourishing. This was in the years before John Doyle (the dreaded HB) and the Reform Act tamed the genre, and confined it within bounds of gentleness and gentility.<sup>27</sup> William's brother Henry was never an artist of the same quality, though he was equally prolific in the same areas. In particular he drew large quantities of characters for Hodgson and Co., where his strange dumpy women (with hair never quite securely attached to their heads) can be spotted a mile off.

One thing that the present exhibition seeks to reaffirm is the position of the toy theatre within the field of popular art (as opposed to folk art, where its admirers have too often positioned it). The toy theatre was by no means the only inhabitant of this terrain, and some of its immediate neighbours (playing cards, lottery prints, Twelfth Night characters) have already been mentioned. Although the artists who created the toy theatre style (including the likes of Robert and George Cruikshank, William and Henry Heath, Denis Dighton and Charles Tomkins) were self-taught and parentally-taught, rather than academically trained, this was perfectly usual for the period. Moreover, they were in constant contact with the world of high culture, and did not work apart from it, as we might have expected if they had been artists of the naïve tradition. Rather, they were the sons of men such as Isaac Cruikshank and Robert Dighton, who had helped to forge the *style populaire*; they were the successors to men such as Gillray and Rowlandson, who had operated at its highest levels; and they were themselves men (especially Robert Cruikshank) who would make significant contributions to its later, luxuriant growth.

The bursting of William Heath into West's life is almost certainly the subject of the following two passages:

'Well, I think I had done about seven prints – they were bad-uns – only copies, and badly done too – all by



Fig. 9 A plate of characters in William Heath's middle style (Cat. 47)

apprentices, when Mr. Hashley, of the Hamphitheayter, sent young — [Heath?] with a drawing to show me. It was uncommon well done; oh, such a beautiful picture! he got on to be one of the first-rate artists afterwards, and drew half-crown caricatures; he did all the battle-pieces of them times – all Bonaparte's battles and Nelson's shipping. Well I gave him an order directly for the whole of the characters in the *Blood Red Knight*, wot Hashley was performing at that time. I can show you the print on it – you must see it, for it was a great advance in my purfession, sir. . . .<sup>28</sup>

'There's the first plate — [Heath?] did for me. It's the principal characters in *The Lady of the Lake*, as produced at the Surrey, and a great advance it is on the others. After that he did the *Blood-red Knight*. Here's one of his first prints of osses. It's *Baghvanho*, as performed at Hashley's. Here's the first battle he ever drew. He did it unbeknown to me on a copper of mine, thinking I would like it; but it was quite out of my line. It was that there as got him all J[enkins]'s battles to do. He showed it to him, and J[enkins] giv him an order directly. After that he had ten pound a week from J[enkins], and ten pound a week from me too. He had 30s. a plate, and never did less than six in the week; and for the bigger ones he

had more. I found the copper. Why, I used to pay my coppersmith £70 and £80 a year for plates only.’<sup>29</sup>

The reference to ‘half-crown caricatures’ (thirty times more expensive, by the way, than West’s penny prints) suits Heath perfectly, as does the more specific reference to ‘all J——’s battles’, since *The Martial Achievements of Great Britain and her Allies from 1799 to 1815* was one of Heath’s first big successes. Originally published by James Jenkins in 1814–15, it contained 60 aquatints after Heath’s drawings, and was frequently reprinted. As to Heath’s ‘first battle’, drawn ‘on a copper of mine’, this might have been ‘The Battle of Krasnoi’ (fought in November, 1812), a title which appears in West’s catalogue, but which, like ‘Temple of Concord and Pagoda’, is not the name of any known play. As for the plays which he names as being the work of Heath, West published two sheets of characters in *The Lady of the Lake* in August, 1811, and various souvenirs of *Baghvan-Ho* (including four little plates of horses) in February and March, 1812. Surprisingly, his three plates of characters in *The Blood Red Knight* are dated September, 1813, so that they do not fit easily into the chronology implied by his account. There seems to be the hint of a delay or hitch with this play (it was the first to be commissioned, but not the first to be published), and perhaps the delay was longer than a first reading of his words would suggest: two years rather than two weeks or two months.

During his early years, although West saw a number of competitors come and go, he does not seem to have been much worried by them. In quantity he was easily able to outstrip them, and increasingly in quality too. By the time of the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, only West and Mrs Jameson were left on the scene. Mrs Jameson’s prints never matched the quality of West’s, however, her main point of distinction being a tendency to undersell her rival. Thus, if West’s souvenir of a play consisted of three plates of characters, she would publish one of two plates, and so on. However, West had few spurs to innovation, other than his own sharply-defined artistic tastes and contempt for poor quality. His most conspicuous new idea of the pre-Waterloo years came in 1814, when he started to publish sheets of miniature characters. (‘Small’ characters was his own term, but I defer to modern usage.) In a return to the methods of 1811, a play would sometimes be dealt with in a single sheet, but in other cases there were multiple sheets, so that changes of pose and costume were dealt with as thoroughly as in the full-size (‘large’) characters. Until the later 1820s, West was consistent in producing large scenes to go with his full-size characters and small ones to go with the miniature ones; after that he more usually published sets of large and small scenes but only full-size characters. A number of the earliest sheets of miniature characters have been attrib-

uted to George Cruikshank, and it seems not unlikely that Cruikshank was the inventor of this *genre*. He was always inclined to be sulky when not on best terms with an employer or collaborator, and would resort to producing work that was less detailed and less polished than usual. And the miniature characters may well have been Cruikshank’s solution to the problem of how he could do as little as possible for West’s pound per plate. In any case, they were enormously popular, as the figures quoted by Mayhew show. (By chance, it was West’s register of miniature characters and small scenes that Mayhew happened to look into.)

‘He then showed me his books. They were all indexed alphabetically. First came the small characters under A – *Aladdin*; then came those in B – *Blue Beard*, *Battle of Waterloo* (of this nearly 10,000 had been printed), and *Bottle Imp*; under C were *Comus* and *Coriolanus*; under F was the *Forty Thieves*; under H *Harlequin Brilliant*; under I came *Ivanhoe*; under M the *Miller and his Men*, *Maid and the Magpie*, *Montrose*, and *Midsummer Night’s Dream*; under O was the *Old Oak Chest* and *Olympic Revels*; under R, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Rob Roy*; and under T, *Timour the Tartar*. Then came the index of the scenes in the same plays, arranged in a similar manner, with the number of impressions attached.’<sup>30</sup>

Oddly enough, there has been a conspiracy of silence among historians and collectors about these miniature characters, apparently springing from a refusal to believe that such tiny figures were really played with by boys, at least before the degenerate ‘penny packets’ of the later Victorian period. But the nearly 10,000 copies of *The Battle of Waterloo* tell their own tale, as does the fact that West continued to issue miniature characters for nearly twenty years. They were enthusiastically taken up by Mrs Jameson and other publishers (though not Hodgson, who only produced one play in this size), and apparently lasted until 1835, when Green issued a miniature version (now lost, but known from his advertisements) of *The Miller and his Men*.

The immediate aftermath of Napoleon’s defeat was defined by economic depression and political repression, symbolized by Spa Fields and Peterloo. However, towards the end of the decade there were signs of economic recovery, and this showed up in the toy theatre trade when West found that the competition of his rivals was starting to be irksome. This especially applied to G. Creed, who in 1818 set up shop in Exeter Street a few doors away from West and started issuing large numbers of theatrical portraits and combats, *genres* in which West himself was just starting to renew his interest. A combat showed the hero and villain of the play in question displaying their powers of swordsmanship, a highly popular feature

of the real theatre commemorated in an equally popular type of print. West's annoyance is plain from the phrase which he printed on some of his penny portraits at this time: 'Superior to Creed's at 2d.' But he got over his bad temper, and later printings usually have the vainglorious boast removed. Sensibly, he concentrated on making sure that his own series of prints were better-drawn, more numerous, and longer-lasting than his new rival's. And after a couple of years or so, Creed disappeared from the scene.

West's interest in combats seems to have arisen at about the time the Coburg Theatre opened its doors, and these displays certainly seem to have been a speciality of that house. His understanding of the importance of the *genre* (though he doesn't mention the word 'combat') is made clear by his remarks on the best-selling theatrical portraits:

'I remarked that he had printed a great many prints of Mr. Bradley? He said that gentleman was such a great favourite with the children – he made himself up so murderous looking – and then he was such a fine swordsman with T. P. Cooke, you'd think they were going to kill one another. It was quite beautiful to see 'em – people used to go on purpose (Fig. 10). He told me he had printed more portraits of Huntley, Bradley, and Blanchard, than of any other members of the theatrical profession – with the exception of Kean in *Richard* (Fig. 11). He hadn't done anything particular with the others.'<sup>31</sup>

Even the placid Mrs Jameson had been flexing her muscles in early 1818, when she initiated a series of superior portraits, with special attention to facial resemblance, these being mainly drawn for her (and signed) by Robert Cruikshank. The portraits were priced, like some of Creed's work, at twopence plain, rather than the traditional penny, but nevertheless succeeded with the public, and obviously gave West a jolt. He did not issue any trumpet-blasts against Mrs Jameson (or at least none that have survived), but he did start his own rival series, in some cases even issuing a portrait of the same actor in the same role as the equivalent number in the Jameson series. Very occasionally he even employed Robert Cruikshank, but that artist, though willing to sell himself more cheaply than his younger brother, was never such a favourite with West as with Mrs Jameson. In the end, it was the same as with Creed and the combats: West had more staying-power, and had soon issued many more portraits than Mrs Jameson, and better ones, too. This series was obviously important to West, who thought of them as 'likenesses' (as opposed to the penny portraits, which were only characters in costume) and headed each print with 'West's Portraits No. [so-and-so]' (as opposed to the penny portraits, which were issued without numbers):



Fig. 10 Mr Bradley ready to do battle (Cat. 60)

'The small ones wasn't likenesses – they were merely characters to give the costumes. We didn't make likenesses till very late. The wardrobe people at the minor theatres and masquerade people used to buy a great many to make their dresses from.'<sup>32</sup>

'I'll give you the date of the first likeness as ever I did; I've got it here handy . . . Here's all my large portraits – there's 111 large of them (Fig. 12). This here's one of — [Robert Cruikshank's?]. It's Liston, as Moll Flaggon, you see (Fig. 13). That there one is done by Mr. — [?], the royal academician. It's Mr. H. Johnston as Glaffier. I think the part was in a tragedy called *Hillusion*. That was the werry first portrait as I published. Here's one by — [?], done about the same time. That's Mrs Egerton, as Hellen Macgregor. The portraits I have just been showing you are 2d. plain, and 4d. coloured – but they don't sell now, the penny has quite knocked them up. Then there's other people wot makes as low as a halfpenny, but they a'nt like the performance at all.'<sup>33</sup>

'Mr. H. Johnston as Glaffier' is indeed the title of No. 1 in West's twopenny series, published in 1818; and the series does indeed go up to No. 111. (Of the unnumbered penny series I have seen more than a hundred, and perhaps something like a hundred and fifty of these were actually published.) But 'Glaffier' is an engraver's error for 'Giaffier', and West's



Fig. 11 One of West's many portraits of Richard III (Cat. 24)

conjecture that 'the part was in a tragedy called *Hillusion*' is somewhat wide of the mark. (He is bluffing, as we all tend to do in interviews.) *Illusion*, adapted from Mrs Sheridan's novel of *Nourjahad*, was staged some four years earlier than the print under discussion. Giaffier is actually a character in *The Corsair*, a play adapted from Byron's narrative poem, and neither piece was a tragedy. West has made identification of 'the royal academician' who drew the print more difficult than it need have been by *signing the print himself*. This was something that he tended to do in his later years with prints that specially pleased him, this mark of appropriation being affixed to designs in many different styles, including some that we can put names to. The portrait of Liston as Moll Flaggon is signed 'JRC', which must indicate Isaac Robert Cruikshank, though the great West collector Ralph Thomas managed to persuade himself (and, alarmingly, some Cruikshank experts) that the print was by Robert's better-esteemed brother George. The print of Mrs Egerton as Helen Macgregor (in *Rob Roy*) I have not managed

to see a copy of, though it may well turn out to be signed (preferably not by West) or be otherwise open to identification.

From time to time, an unusually good artist would offer West his services. During the half-decade leading up to 1820, two such artists were briefly associated with him. The mysterious 'W.B.', whose name appears on a few of West's most charming prints, including his show card (Fig. 14), has always excited interest because of an old theory (now quite exploded) that he might have been William Blake.<sup>34</sup> The present writer is firmly convinced that 'W.B.' is the same artist who in other areas, such as book illustration, signs himself 'W.H.B.', or in other words, William Henry Brooke. The judgement is made on the evidence both of artistic style and of the characteristic way the artist signs his initials.

The other new artist was Charles Tomkins, who came (like so many of those we have mentioned) from a family of artists and engravers, but was destined to find his niche as a scene-painter. Thanks to Tomkins, the year 1819 became something

of a phenomenon in West's career. With the exception of the years 1814–15 (which had been bumper years owing to all the plays issued in miniature characters), the quantity of prints which West issued per year had slowed down considerably, even when allowance is made for the fact that many more sheets per title were being issued than in the early days. But for a period of rather more than a year (late 1818 to early 1820) there was an extraordinary outpouring of material (characters, single portraits, pairs, combats) in Tomkins's distinctive style. Despite elements of *grotesquerie* in his wildly-gesticulating, monkey-faced people, it is difficult not to be carried away the dash and vigour of Tomkins's engraved line, and by the verve and theatricality of his creations (Fig.15). One further oddity must be noted: despite the general tendency towards more complete treatments of plays, and despite the fact that Tomkins's later career was as a scene-painter, virtually all the titles issued during this period are of a few sheets of principal characters only, with no scenes at all, *Robinson Crusoe* being the principal exception, and a glorious one, too.<sup>35</sup> As a scene painter, Tomkins was at the Coburg Theatre in the early 1820s, where J. R. Planché remembered seeing 'two lads playing at leap-frog' on the stage; on closer inspection, they turned out to be Tomkins and Clarkson Stanfield. Tomkins afterwards

went to the Surrey, and finally to the Adelphi, 'where he attained considerable reputation; but was unfortunately compelled to relinquish his profession in 1838, from the effects of sunstroke, and died shortly afterwards in the prime of life.'<sup>36</sup> Though the identification is perhaps not as certain as in William Heath's case, West seems to have left his approval of Tomkins on record:

'— [Tomkins?], the artist and scene painter, did a great many for me, and he was the only one as turned out grateful to me. All the others got such great men they wouldn't look on me.'<sup>37</sup>

Apart from being the only one of West's regular artists we know to whom the double description 'artist and scene painter' applies, Tomkins seems to have been the sort of jolly and well-liked individual who might indeed have 'turned out grateful' to his old employer. Another scene-painter with whom West was briefly associated at the same period was R. Scruton (of the Coburg Theatre), who drew some scenes for West's *El Hyder* in 1818 (signed 'R.S.'), and in 1821 published some scene-designs for a revival of *Lodoiska*. The latter were printed by lithography, and named West as the agent from whom the prints could be obtained. But Scruton's connection

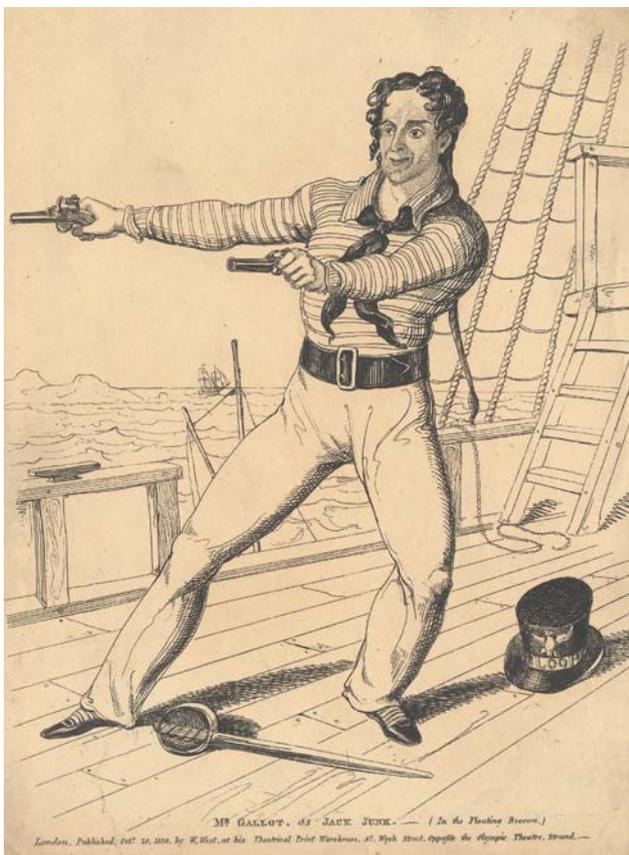


Fig. 12 The last of West's twopenny portraits (Cat. 111)



Fig. 13 A portrait signed 'JRC' (Isaac Robert Cruikshank) (Cat. 107)

with West was very slight, so that his gratitude or ingratitude would perhaps not be a matter for much concern.

The reversion to 'principal characters' only was not destined to last, however. If the years leading up to 1820 saw a gradual quickening of the economic pulse, the years following saw a positive boom. In the toy theatre trade this boom was represented by the extraordinary career of the firm of Hodgson & Co. They were not a new business (old William Hodgson's career as a stationer stretched back into the previous century), but in 1821 they started to dabble in the toy theatre trade, and in 1822 they moved to smart new premises in Newgate Street, where within three or four years they had issued no fewer than seventy plays for the toy theatre, as well as scores of portraits, combats and miscellaneous sheets. Each play, moreover, was absolutely complete, with a full complement of characters and scenes (the scenes often being available in a choice of three different sizes), and a specially-adapted book of words, the latter being issued under the title of 'Hodgson's Juvenile Drama', a phrase that would stick to the toy theatre for ever afterwards. This somewhat pompous expression stems from the desire to be respectable, a desire which was a keynote of the Hodgson enterprise. 'Juvenile Drama' was not a newly-invented term, since it had been used on occasion for collections of plays written by high-minded educationalists for children's use and edification. It was borrowed in much the same way that 'Music Hall' (originally meaning a concert hall) was borrowed by the proprietors of singing rooms attached to pubs in order to bestow an air of gentility on their establishments. In both cases the borrowing has been so successful as to consign the original meaning to oblivion. 'Juvenile Drama' was originally applied by Hodgson and other publishers to their abridged texts only, but it would eventually (though perhaps not for several decades) come to be (mis-)applied to the toy theatre as a whole. It is possible that

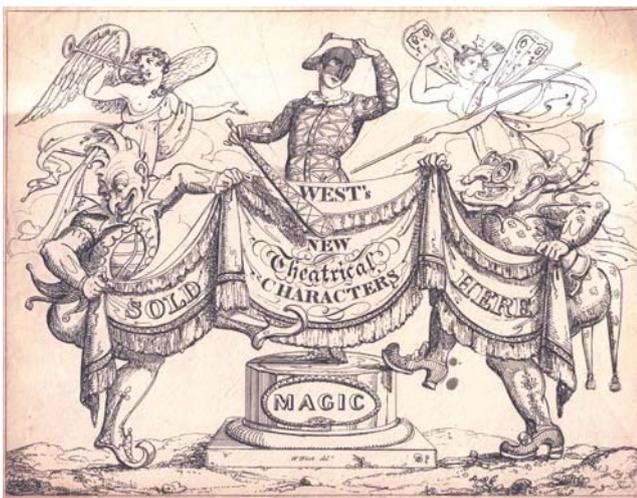


Fig. 14 West's Show Card, engraved by 'W.B.' (Cat. 1)

Redington, with his yellow covers headed 'THE JUVENILE DRAMA', was the first publisher to take this step, all his predecessors having referred only to 'Theatrical Characters' or 'Characters and Scenes'. And finally 'Juvenile Drama' became the name best loved by the old school of collectors for the object of their affections – the 'J. D.'

The extraordinary boom of the early '20s was followed by the bust of 1825–26, with its attendant bankruptcies, among which (apparently) Hodgson & Co. found themselves, for in 1825 they were taken over by Cole, a former employee, who continued for a few years, selling off the old stock but producing little new work. In any case, West had made little immediate attempt to respond to the Hodgson challenge, though his later patterns of publication would include complete plays, a choice of two sizes of scenery (never three), and specially-issued (though not very much adapted) play-books, so that the influence of Hodgson & Co.'s methods was certainly felt by him. In the meantime, while they were going up in the world, West seemed to be going down, for in 1823 he moved his own premises, from Exeter Street (the grandly-titled Exeter House) to a presumably cheaper site in picturesque but disreputable Wych Street, whose ancient shops, like those of the adjacent Holywell Street, were starting to acquire a reputation for pornographic books and prints. In the immediate wake of his move, West's publications almost dried up altogether, his main occupation being to have the Exeter Street address hitherto engraved on all his copper plates altered to his new Wych Street one. Few of his fellow-publishers bothered to do this when they changed addresses, but West was obviously determined that his customers should know where to find him. As part of the re-addressing process, he also re-dated most of the sheets, and in consequence a large number of his pre-1823 productions are more commonly found bearing the date 1824 (or, but less often, 1823 or 1825). This has led to much confusion among historians, collectors, and those who use West's prints to illustrate books on the theatre. As a rule of thumb, it may be asserted that, because West published so few new designs during these years, almost anything of his that bears the date 1824 must be regarded as a reprint, likewise anything from 1823, and likewise (but increased caution starts to be necessary here) anything from 1825.

One development in the trade which must have begun about this time revolved round the fashion for 'tinselling' theatrical portraits. West evidently felt obliged to cater for this taste, without going so far as to approve of it:

'You see the cheap shops makes up the dresses with silk, and tinsel, and foil, but I never did. My customers used to do some: but, to my mind, it spoilt the figures,

and took away the good drawing from 'em. Formerly they used to cut out the parts of the figures, and stick pieces of silk, and tinsel, and lace behind them. Then the boys used to make all their own dots and ornaments themselves; and I used to sell punches expressly for doing 'em, and arter that I sold the ornaments themselves. Now the ornaments are sold in large quantities by these halfpenny printsellers. They are punched out by children I think – they make them as low as a half-penny a packet.’<sup>38</sup>

The later development, by which tinsel ornaments were specially manufactured for sale, is well known (J. Webb, the uncle of W. Webb, being the chief supplier), and the earliest phase, in which boys made their own ornaments without professional help, is a more or less necessary conjecture. The intermediate stage, however, in which shopkeepers such as West sold punches with which to stamp out appropriately-shaped ornaments, would not have been guessed at, without this statement of West’s. His words also confirm a final stage, in which ready-tinselled portraits were offered for sale. Furthermore, West’s contempt for those who employed child labour has a relevance for an aspect of his trade never explicitly mentioned in the Mayhew interview, but which is of obvious interest to us, namely the colouring of the ‘twopence coloured’

sheets. The quality of the colouring of West’s sheets (dashing and vigorous, yet at times exquisite) makes a strong contrast with the bold blocks of primary colour that characterise the later toy theatre style of colouring. The natural assumption, therefore, is that West employed adults who were skilled and (by his standards) well-paid, and that he did not stoop to the use of low-paid, unskilled families of child-colourists, a practice which is well attested both for the toy theatre trade and for other cheap forms of printing in later years. To this assumption West’s remark about the tinsel-manufacturers gives strong, if indirect, support.

When the world started to recover from the financial panic of the mid-1820s, there was a more cautious climate than in the over-confident early years of the decade. In the toy theatre trade this new spirit was represented by a trio of new firms, namely Dyer, Straker, and Lloyd. Their methods were not radically different from the pattern set by Hodgson and Co., though they continued the move towards completeness of coverage and easy-to-follow playbooks, as well as introducing some practical innovations, such as the ‘flat or built’ stage front, and the orchestra strip. Above all, they breathed a spirit of economy and comparative cheapness. They did not actually reduce their prices below a penny a sheet; rather, they fitted more characters on to a sheet by altering the alignment of the figures to being (as with West’s earliest prints) parallel to the long side of the sheet. This pattern, once established, was destined to remain the standard for toy theatre sheets right up to the present day.

The years 1829–32 were characterised by feverish agitation for Reform, beginning with Catholic Emancipation and culminating in the Reform Act itself. The move from aristocracy to democracy is mirrored with great precision in the toy theatre world of the period, which saw the basic price per (plain) sheet lowered from a penny to a halfpenny. This change could not have been achieved without two things: an enormous increase in sales, and a distinct reduction in the quality of workmanship. It was the firm of Park & Golding (a partnership which only lasted from 1830 to 1832) which in 1831 first brought down the price of theatrical portraits to a halfpenny, though they continued to issue penny portraits in a separate series, as well as penny characters and scenes. A howl went up from Marks (a rascally publisher who went back to the early '20s), Lloyd (who had taken over the toy theatre side of Straker’s business after a fire), and Dyer: ‘Whereas several spurious and piratical prints have lately been sold and hawked for sale, this is to give notice that the undersigned publishers most respectfully solicit the trade, that should anything of the kind be again offered from this date, they will have the goodness to reject them, as it is their intention to take LEGAL PROCEEDINGS against any person or persons who sell the same, they being

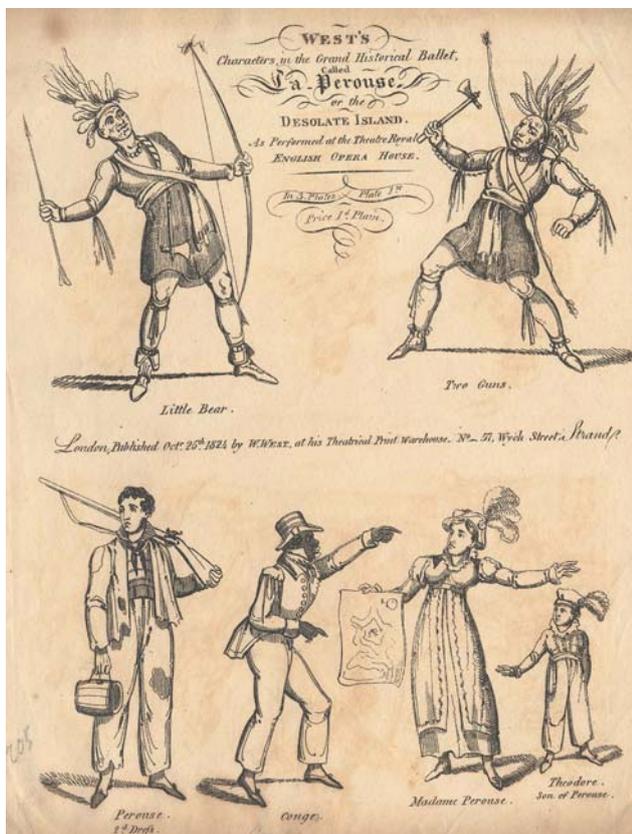


Fig. 15 A typical plate of characters by Charles Tomkins (Cat. 110)

vile copies of some of the plates of the undersigned, published and sold at one half the price of the original, with the malicious intent of defrauding the same.' Park and Golding issued a counter-accusation: 'As the above CAUTION no doubt AS [sic] been widely circulated in the true spirit of malice, and for the express purpose of intimidating and compelling the trade to refuse all such publications as may be offered to them, through any other hands than those employed by the above named, of whose Notorious Piracies WE the undersigned beg to call not only their attention but that of the trade also . . .', the gist being that Park and Golding guaranteed to reimburse the costs of any action that a trader might be involved in as a result of purchasing any of their prints.<sup>39</sup>

'The most curious feature of this acrimonious exchange is that the witness to Park and Golding's reply was none other than William West.'<sup>40</sup> It may seem strange that West should have supported Park in this matter, but a number of factors need to be borne in mind. Park, who worked as a free-lance artist for many years before setting up in business on his own, had been employed by West as far back as 1818 (he signed a few of West's portraits in that year), and the two men had presumably remained on good terms. West had issued halfpenny sheets himself from time to time, and probably could not see any crime in Park's following suit. He may also have thought that anyone who annoyed the awful trinity of Marks, Lloyd and Dyer was worth supporting.

Awful or not, Marks, Lloyd and Dyer were right to be alarmed. The innovation which had begun with the portraits soon spread to the characters and scenes. Towards the end of 1832 the Skelt family, a Huguenot family of shoemakers, launched themselves into the toy theatre business, publishing plays at a halfpenny per sheet from the very beginning.<sup>41</sup> By the later 1830s the revolution started by Park was complete, the price of a toy theatre sheet was firmly established at a halfpenny, and the name of Skelt was becoming as synonymous with toy theatres as that of West had been to a previous generation. West's response to the halfpenny menace was almost non-existent. He dusted off three double plates of portraits, and re-issued them as six single plates at a halfpenny each, but that was about the limit of his attempt to fight back. To do West justice, other publishers showed no more spirit. In 1834 Dyer issued one play in halfpenny sheets before giving up altogether; and in 1836 Orlando Hodgson (who had re-founded the bankrupt Hodgson enterprise with some success) issued a short series of halfpenny portraits before retiring to Isleworth, where he set up as a general printer, with no special theatrical connections.

There was another reason for West's feebleness of response – he was apparently on the verge of bankruptcy himself. There seems to be no other reason for his decision to cease trading

under the name of West at the end of 1831. He continued his business (from the beginning of 1832 till the end of 1833, and as late as 1838 for some purposes) under the name of Stokes (Fig. 16). Sarah Stokes, who died in 1844, aged 54, was West's 'house-keeper',<sup>42</sup> but she may well have been the same person known by courtesy as Mrs West. As Richard Findlater points out in his biography of Grimaldi, the Georgians were often very vague about whether people were legally wedded or not;<sup>43</sup> and this brings to mind Gillray and his publisher Hannah Humphrey, who, after living together for many years, got half-way to church before deciding that they were better off as they were. There is no difference in quality between the work issued by West as West and the work issued by West as Stokes (William Heath was still there to see to that); but the change does not seem to have solved West's financial problems, and during the two Stokes years his publications become more and more infrequent until they finally peter out altogether. Thus 1833 marks the real end of West's creative life in the toy theatre trade. His own feelings on the matter were confided to Mayhew:

'I haven't published a new set of characters for this seven year. You see they began to make halfpenny plates – they used to copy my penny ones and sell 'em at half-price, so I thought it high time to give over. I had come down in my large portraits from 2d. to 1d., and I wasn't going to

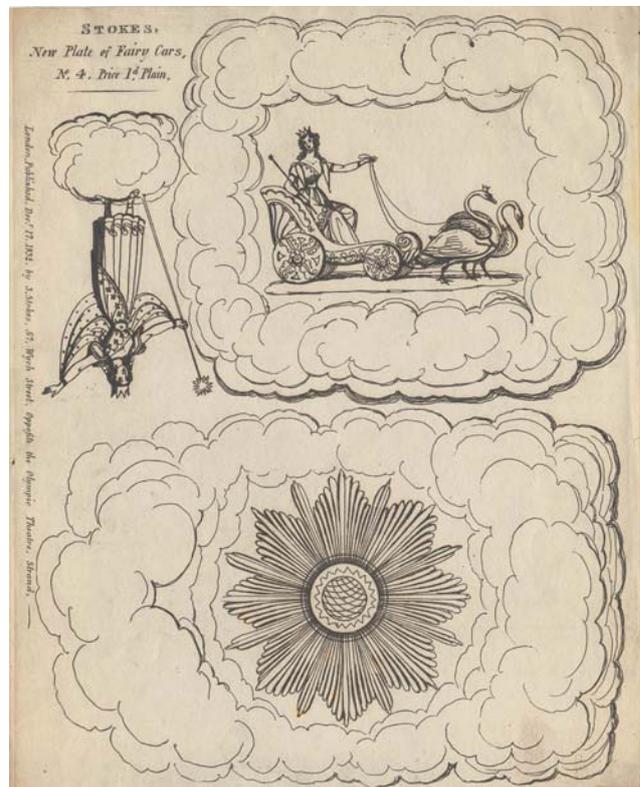


Fig. 16 A sheet published under the name of Stokes (Cat. 5)

reduce to halfpenny – not I. It seemed like lowering the purfession to me – besides, the theayters themselves couldn't make a do of it, so I gave over publishing. The decline of the drama is hawful, and it's just the same with the toy theayters as it is with the real ones.<sup>44</sup>

'Seven year' is a bit surprising. 'Seventeen' would be more like it, at least so far as 'characters' are concerned, though West had issued a few new scenes as recently as three years ago. His statement that he had 'come down' in his portraits from twopence to a penny is slightly misleading, since he had issued penny portraits for seven years before embarking on his twopenny series in 1818, and continued to issue both types in parallel. He no doubt refers to the fact that he suspended the twopenny series in 1830, and only issued penny portraits after that.

When fate closes a door, so folk wisdom assures us, somewhere a window will be found open. West's new window seems to have opened almost immediately. As the inhabitant of an area famous for its trade in pornography, he cannot have failed to notice the lucrative nature of some parts of that business. And though the trade was a dangerous one, it was not yet as hopeless as the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 would eventually make it. In particular, West must have been struck by the popularity of a new class of pornographic booklet: the bawdy songster, issued in tiny 32mo at sixpence or a shilling, offering the latest smutty ditties from the song-and-supper rooms (as these early music halls were called), with the added enticement of a suggestive frontispiece. The frontispiece was folded into three (or it would have been no size at all) and was also, to use a phrase much favoured by the advertisements for pornography at this period, 'HIGHLY COLOURED'. The main publishers of this sort of thing were William Dugdale, who between 1823 and his death in 1868 was the most prolific of English pornographers, and John Duncombe, who was the proprietor of *Duncombe's British Theatre*, one of the more important acting editions of the period, but also a very slippery customer and a man with strong links to the world of pornography (his brother Edward seems to have equalled Dugdale's number of imprisonments for selling the stuff).

If the conjectural dates assigned to the bawdy songsters in the catalogue of the British Library can be relied on, Duncombe was already issuing these booklets by about 1833, and West began in about 1834, which was the first year since 1811 in which he had initiated no other publications. He began with a spurt of more than half-a-dozen titles, after which he issued about two or so per year until about 1842.<sup>45</sup> He did not usually put his name as publisher to the songsters, but rather as printer. Hitherto all his letterpress printing had been put out

to a variety of local printers, and so, if he really was the printer of the booklets, he must have acquired a small common press for the purpose. At all events he seems to have believed that 'printing' would sound like a lesser offence than 'publishing' if he were prosecuted for his efforts, though in reality the law had never shown any reluctance to pursue both publishers and printers where necessary. For the frontispieces he did not retain the services of William Heath, even though, with the waning of Heath's popularity as a caricaturist, Heath was almost certainly in need of employment. He may have refused to descend to such work, or he may have asked (as some artists did) to be paid extra 'for the shame', an arrangement that would scarcely have suited West's ideas of economy. Instead the publisher seems to have turned to an artist whose style of engraving is recognizably the same as that found in many of Green's plays at this period (such as *Wapping Old Stairs* and *Jack Sheppard*). The dash and vigour of his engraved line are very characteristic, as are certain minor quirks such as the rather flat, round noses he gives to some of his creations. No name has hitherto been associated with this body of work, but Frederic Boase, in mentioning *Jack Sheppard* as the longest play ever published for the toy theatre, adds that the designs are by W. Hornegold.<sup>46</sup> William Hornegold has long been known as one of the colourful 'characters' of the toy theatre world, mainly because his drunken antics made him one of the curiosities of St Clement Danes and earned him a brief write-up in a history of that parish published the year after his death by the printer-antiquarian John Diprose. No more than a few portraits, signed 'W Horngold del.' or 'WH' (a source of confusion, because this is also William Heath's frequent signature), have ever been mentioned as being his work, a quite insignificant *œuvre* for such a celebrated name.<sup>47</sup> However, when we add to the *Jack Sheppard* information another statement by Boase, namely that Hornegold 'drew the illustrations for comic songs' (euphemism for 'bawdy songs?')<sup>48</sup>, and when we remember that the present writer's association of the two areas of artistic work was made PURELY ON GROUNDS OF STYLE, without any help from Boase (whose information he did not discover till later), the possibility that we can now put a name to the man responsible for both of them seems at least very strong (Fig. 17).

The 1840s are a difficult decade to characterise in economic terms. They have often been called the 'hungry 40s', though the appropriateness of this term has been disputed. Some economic indicators show an enormous boom in the middle of the decade, but it did not feel like a boom to many people. Certainly the toy theatre trade went very quiet during at this time, and some artists and publishers (including West's old employee Arthur Park and William Heath's brother Henry) actually went so far as to emigrate. It is thus interesting that

West's publication of bawdy songsters seems to stop in about 1842, just when his fellow toy theatre publishers were grinding to a halt, and when Hornegold (if indeed it was he) seems to have deserted Green, leaving two of the latter's projects uncompleted.<sup>49</sup> As there is no suggestion that Hornegold ever emigrated, this leaves us to guess that an unusually protracted bout of drunkenness may have helped to bring West's last publishing project to an end. If this seems a little extreme, we must remember that in West's day Bohemianism was a genuine way of life, pursued with ardour, and not the affectation that it became in later, more namby-pamby times.

J. F. Wilson describes West's premises at the end of the 1830s as 'a very melancholy shop' next door to Valentine's, an old curiosity shop kept by a Jew, in which journalists were very fond of foregathering; he goes on to describe West and his wife as 'a couple of shrivelled-up creatures, having the appearance of octogenarian misers. They were always shabbily clad, and seldom indulged in the luxury of a clean face (Fig. 1). Their counters and shelves in the shop were crowded with old stock, covered with dust, and their only pleasure seemed to consist in petting a tame fox which was always with them, and drinking of Mother Trimby's best.'<sup>50</sup> As Speaight explains, "Mother Trimby" was a buxom widow who kept the Duke of Wellington tavern in Drury Lane, at which the poor hack writers, artists, and printers of the district were wont to congregate.<sup>51</sup> Was this also the house of call where West

picked up the inexpensive artist-engravers who were the ideal employees of his bustling heyday?

His flirtation with forbidden fruit behind him, West returned to toy theatre publishing in a very small way. Back in 1838 he had done a small amount of reprinting, still under the name of Stokes. But in 1844 Mrs Stokes died, and West was left on his own. In 1847, with the toy theatre trade starting to revive again after what had been its worst downturn ever, he issued a few new scenes for old plays, but these were his last efforts of all. His final years were not prosperous:

'He told me that his receipts used to be in his best times as much as £30 a week for theatres and penny and twopenny plates of characters only. Now he only takes about 3s. 6d. or 4s. 6d. a day, or from £1 to £1 5s. a week.'<sup>52</sup>

In 1850 West made his will. He also gave his interview to Henry Mayhew, whose impression of him was as follows:

'One among those whom I visited was a celebrated publisher of penny theatrical characters and maker of toy theatres. He is the person to whom the children of the present generation are indebted for the invention. I found him confined to his room with asthma. He sat in a huge armchair, embedded in blankets, with a white night-cap on his head. He evidently was very proud of having been the original inventor of the toy theatres, and



Fig. 17 Folding frontispiece and title page of one of West's songsters (Cat. 195)

he would insist upon presenting me with the earliest prints in connection with the mimic stage. He was a little spare man whose clothes hung loose about him.<sup>53</sup>

Modern devotees of the toy theatre, who would dearly love anyone to present them 'with the earliest prints in connection with the mimic stage', cannot read Mayhew's 'he would insist' without amusement. Yet the journalist's stolid resistance to being button-holed by his interviewee did not prevent him from putting on record huge amounts of detail that can have had little significance for him, but meant a great deal to West, and are of enormous value to us. So our amusement must give way to a heartfelt sense of gratitude.

A final glimpse of West comes from Edward Draper, who was solicitor to many of the theatrical and literary folk who populated the Bohemian haunts of mid-Victorian London: 'It is now many years,' he wrote in 1868, 'since poor Willy West . . . finally closed his little dark shop, whence had emanated so much salutary amusement to the boys of a former age. A short time before his death, he commenced selling off his stock at ridiculously low prices. The poor old man could be heard gasping behind the simple screen which divided his death-bed from the public portion of the shop. There might then be had, capitally drawn, and, when coloured, gorgeous as summer flowers, engraved character portraits of all the dramatic celebrities of a past generation; . . . the bright colouring of such a series as *Blue Beard*, *The Elephant of Siam*, and the other oriental plays was specially wonderful. The scenery was unrivalled in its picturesqueness.'<sup>54</sup>

West died on 28 November, 1854. 'After his death', Frederic Boase tells us, 'there was a sale of his prints which ended 24 March 1855, the prints were sold at less than half price and the copper plates were all broken up'.<sup>55</sup> Yet the breaking up of the plates has sometimes been doubted, with Speaight declaring that 'there seems to be a legend that [West] had them broken up rather than allow sacrilegious hands to lay hold of them; but there is no reference to any such injunction in his will'.<sup>56</sup> But if Boase is right (and the exact date he gives leads one to suppose that he is reporting facts) it sounds as if the plates were destroyed, not for reasons of pride or sentiment, but for practical business motives: as part of the sale, as a guarantee of its unrepeatable nature, and the consequent value of what was being offered.

Even if West had lived longer, little of the news from the world of toy theatre publishing would have cheered him up. The early 1860s brought a downturn in trade even more

permanent than that of the early 1840s. Soon boys' magazines were giving toy theatre sheets away free, and 'penny packet' publishers were printing an entire play on one enormous sheet of paper and selling the result for a penny. By the 1880s only two representatives of the genuine trade were left: Webb in Old Street, and Pollock in Hoxton Street. Incredibly, both these men carried on until the 1930s, Pollock's business being bought from his daughters in 1944 and becoming (after various vicissitudes) the present Pollock's Toy Museum, founded by Marguerite Fawdry in 1956.

One thing that posterity had to offer might have pleased the old man – the attention of historians. Like many in the toy theatre trade, West had a strong sense of history. A year after his interview with Mayhew, his old employee Green put himself down in the census of 1851 as 'historical engraver'. Green wasn't a historical engraver, of course, in the way that people in his youth had been appointed Historical Engravers to the King or the Prince of Wales, but he meant that his work had its place in history. And thirty years or so later, when Webb, former apprentice to West's old employee Park, had his famous quarrel with Robert Louis Stevenson, it was not merely about payment for the prints which Webb had assembled to illustrate Stevenson's article in *The Magazine of Art*, but about Webb's sense of disappointment that Stevenson was going to write – not the full history of the toy theatre that he and others had yearned for, but only an essay in the manner of Charles Lamb. West has just the same attitude:

'You had better take that there impression with you. It's a curiosity, and a bit of the history of one's country – yes, that it is, sir.'<sup>57</sup>

So it is difficult not to believe that West would have been pleased by certain developments of the late Victorian period. By this time there were enthusiasts (of whom Ralph Thomas was the chief) who made a speciality out of collecting West prints, and who were prepared to discourse on the finer points of their historical interest and artistic quality in the pages of *Notes and Queries*. It is equally difficult to avoid the conclusion that West would have been flattered by the present exhibition, which allows his prints to be displayed in the classical environs of Sir John Soane's Museum and other auspicious venues in England. Here at last his spirit can wander at ease, without the distress of having to associate with artists who are not 'good at architect'.<sup>58</sup>

- 1 *The Mirror* (?) (c. September, 1812), of which the leaf containing the poem is preserved in a scrapbook formerly belonging to Herbert Hinkins. In recent years photocopies of this leaf have circulated among collectors, though unfortunately without full identification of the original source.
- 2 The standard treatment of the toy theatre is George Speaight, *The History of the English Toy Theatre* (1969) [= Speaight 1969], to which all who wish to pursue the subject are recommended. During the present essay I shall be obliged to dissent, both explicitly and implicitly, from some of the conclusions in Speaight's book, but this is only because this unparalleled work is the standard by which all new interpretations need to be measured. For my own tribute to it, see the Appendix to [Barry Clarke and David Powell.] *George Speaight: A Life in the Toy Theatre* (2003). The indispensable companion to the toy theatre publications of West is Desmond Seaton-Reid, *William West* (1969) [= Seaton-Reid 1969]. This catalogue, the record of a lifetime spent searching for the prints of a single publisher, has only ever circulated in a few typescript copies.
- 3 *The Unknown Mayhew: Selections from the 'Morning Chronicle' 1849–1850*. Edited and introduced by E. P. Thompson and Eileen Ye0 (1971).
- 4 Gerald Morice and George Speaight, 'New Light on the Juvenile Drama', in *Theatre Notebook*, xxvi (1971–72), pp. 115–121. This consists of a reprint of Henry Mayhew, 'Letter XXXVIII – 25 February 1850' [=Mayhew interview 1850/1972], with a brief introduction and commentary.
- 5 For other suggestions, see Bridget Ann Henisch, *Cakes and Characters* (1984), pp. 73–74. (This discussion of lottery prints, though brief, is the most substantial I have found in English.)
- 6 A. E. Wilson, *Penny Plain Two Pence Coloured* (1932), pp. 33–34; Speaight 1969, pp. 13–14.
- 7 Percy Muir, *English Children's Books 1600 to 1900* (1954, 4th impression 1985), p. 209.
- 8 George Speaight, *Juvenile Drama* (1946) pp. 16–19, partly repeated in Speaight 1969, pp. 10–11.
- 9 Speaight 1969, p. 14.
- 10 Genuine examples of these are rare, but a series of prints published by Bowles and Carver (1790s and earlier) has for some years been available in a Dover reprint as *Catchpenny Prints* (1970). [N.B. The current printing of this volume has been re-titled *Old English Cuts and Illustrations for Artists and Craftspeople*.] It seems reasonable to suppose that many of the prints in this series would have been classified as Lottery Prints, though neither the prints themselves nor the anonymous Publisher's Note which introduces the reprint ever use the expression.
- 11 Henisch 1984 (as note 5), *passim*.
- 12 Frederic Boase, *Modern English Biography*, Volume VI (1921), col. 457, part of an entry for John Redington (Green's agent during the 1850s, and the father-in-law of Benjamin Pollock). Much of Boase's information here was contributed by Ralph Thomas, who seems to have talked to someone (Redington? or Pollock?), who knew the basic facts of Green's career.
- 13 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, pp. 116–117.
- 14 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 117.
- 15 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 117.
- 16 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 117.
- 17 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 118.
- 18 A conversation which I had many years ago with Mrs Dodie Masterman lies behind these ideas.
- 19 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, pp. 115–116.
- 20 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, pp. 116–117.
- 21 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, pp. 118–119.
- 22 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 120.
- 23 Speaight 1969, pp. 91–92, on the authority of Charles Kent.
- 24 T. J. Dibdin, *Reminiscences* (1827), Volume I, pp. 25–29, quoted in Thomas Walton, 'Notes for the History of the Juvenile Drama', in *Theatre Notebook*, iii (1948–49), pp. 64–66.
- 25 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 118.
- 26 Speaight 1969, p. 71, on the authority of Ralph Thomas.
- 27 H. D. Spencer, 'The Juvenile Drama Artists: William Heath's Early Sheets', in *Theatre Notebook* v (1950–51), pp. 43–44. This pioneering work deals with Heath's early association with West. For the later years, see Seaton-Reid 1969, *passim*.
- 28 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 117.
- 29 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 118.
- 30 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 120.
- 31 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 120.
- 32 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 117.
- 33 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 119.
- 34 M. W. Stone, 'William Blake and the Juvenile Drama', in *Theatre Notebook* i (1945–47), p. 41. For further details see Seaton-Reid 1969, s.v. 'Guy Mannering' (and other titles mentioned there).
- 35 H. D. Spencer, 'A West Artist', in *Theatre Notebook* iv (1949–50), pp. 37–38. This is the pioneering work on Tomkins's association with West. For further details see Seaton-Reid 1969, *passim*.
- 36 James Robinson Planché, *Recollections and Reflections* (1901), quoted in Spencer (see previous note).
- 37 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 118.
- 38 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, pp. 119–120.
- 39 Speaight 1969, pp. 55–56.
- 40 Speaight 1969, p. 56.
- 41 This statement goes against the commonly received belief, mainly based on the evidence of trade directories, that the Skelt toy theatre business did not start until 1835. My own judgement is that the internal evidence of the Skelts' own publications, which are undated but not undatable, is so strong that this long-standing opinion must be revised. Until I am able to publish the evidence in full, I must beg the reader to take my word on this matter.
- 42 Speaight 1969, p. 195.
- 43 Richard Findlater, *Joe Grimaldi, his Life and Theatre* (2nd ed., 1978), p. 229, n. 4, his opinion supported by a quotation from A. F. Fremantle.
- 44 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 120.
- 45 West's songsters are mentioned in Speaight 1969, pp. 41–42. For a more extended treatment see *Bawdy Songs of the Early Music Hall*. Selected, with an introduction, by George Speaight (1975). Speaight does not attempt to date the songsters other than by internal evidence, though what he finds is consistent with the British Library dates. I am grateful to Patricia Raine, who at my request brought her enviable knowledge of costume history to bear on the illustrations of the songsters. The evidence she found tends to point to a range of dates in the mid-1830s, another confirmation of the British Library dates, though she assures me that 'dumplings were never boiling over in quite such a way' in the fashionable dress of ordinary life.
- 46 Speaight 1969, p. 74, quoting John Diprose, *Some Account of the Parish of St. Clement Danes Past and Present* (1868–76), Volume I, pp. 165–166.
- 47 Frederic Boase, *Modern English Biography*, Volume VI (1921), col. 457, part of the entry for John Redington. See note 13 for the authority on which Boase's information rests.
- 48 Frederic Boase, *Modern English Biography*, Volume I (1892), col. 1523, entry for William Hornygold [sic] (1797–1867). The only authority Boase cites is Diprose, but Diprose's information seems to have been corrected and added to, and I suspect that Ralph Thomas, though unmentioned, may once again be lurking in the background (very usefully so, it must be said).
- 49 Of these, *The Battle of Waterloo* was finished off by another hand, while a single plate of *The Woodman's Hut* remains to tantalise us with visions of what might have been.
- 50 *A Few Personal Recollections, by an Old Printer* [J. F. Wilson], 1896, quoted in Speaight 1969, pp. 42–43.
- 51 Speaight 1969, p. 43.
- 52 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 120.
- 53 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 115.
- 54 Edward Draper, 'Characters and Scenes', in *The Savage Club Papers*, 1868, quoted in Speaight 1969, p. 43.
- 55 Frederic Boase, *Modern English Biography*, Volume III (1901), col. 1280.
- 56 Speaight 1969, p. 43.
- 57 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 117.
- 58 Mayhew interview 1850/1972, p. 117. (See p. 29).

Opposite: Fig. 18 West's catalogue sheet first published in 1811, signed 'Turnbull Sc.' (British Museum, London)



## GENERAL

'We can't turn 'em out fast enough!'

### 1. Show card, *West's New Theatrical Characters sold here*

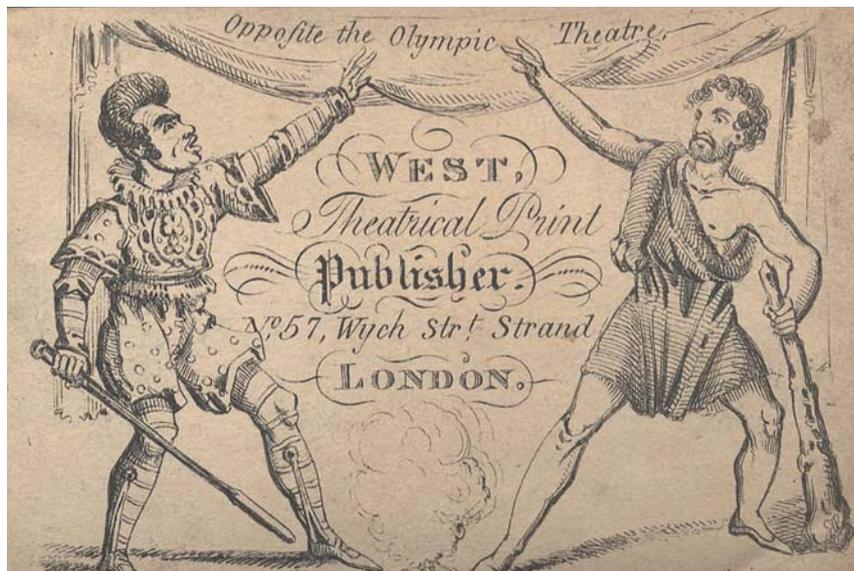
(210 × 270). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

This card was evidently designed for display in the windows of those shops (typically newsagents and stationers) that retailed West's prints. On the card Harlequin prepares to work his wonders ('MAGIC'), while a Clown and Pantaloon of magnificent grotesqueness contemplate the mischief that can be extracted from a length of drapery. Bare-breasted embodiments of fame and some other virtue (this is Art, so we need have no prudery) urge us all forward to new heights of lofty endeavour. The plate has been signed by the engraver, 'W. B. fecit', a clue to its date, since W. B. is only known to have worked for West during the years 1816 and 1817. (For the much-disputed identity of this artist, see p.18.) The calligrapher has then added 'W. West del.', which is either a genuine indication that the design was worked up by W. B. from West's rough sketch or the result of West's usual habit of putting his mark on prints he found especially pleasing.

### 2. Trade Card, *West Theatrical Print Publisher*

(61 × 91). Plain  
Collection of George Speaight

Here we have the twin pillars of the toy theatre repertory, Clown (with red-hot poker) representing pantomime, and Orson (the Wild Man) representing melodrama. The character of Orson is from *Valentine and Orson*, an interesting example of the romantic spirit that permeated the theatre after 1800. *Valentine and Orson* was a medieval romance, turned into a successful stage piece by T. J. Dibdin and produced at Covent Garden in 1804. Its mixture of mime and dialogue, typical of early melodrama, provided several generations of pantomimists with meaty dramatic roles. Our Orson might be taken for John Bologna, one of the famous Harlequins of the period, just as Clown recalls Grimaldi, the ultimate representative of that role. Clown in particular suggests the hand of Charles Tomkins, who worked solidly for West from late 1818 until early 1820 (see pp. 18–20). The fact that the card bears West's post-1823 address is not a problem: this has doubtless been altered. For a different, and more intriguing, identification of the actor playing Orson, see no. 7.



### 3. *The Golden Egg & Mother Goose*

M. W. Stone Collection, Theatre Museum, V&A  
(205 × 288). Plain

This 'first cheap theatrical print' is intended to be a souvenir of *Mother Goose*, the most successful pantomime of the era. The production was first performed at Covent Garden in 1806 and was still a popular repertory piece four years later. The sheet is divided into eight boxes, in the manner of a children's lottery print, with each box containing a figure, some more relevant to the subject than others. The four images of the upper row show Mr Simmons as Mother Goose; a driver representing Grimaldi in his 'Bang-up' song (from the Sadler's Wells pantomime of summer 1810); a Harlequin representing John Bologna in that part, and a Punch, whose saltbox and rolling-pin are perhaps meant to recall the burlesque music made by Grimaldi in the Vauxhall Gardens scene of *Mother Goose*. All these images were copied from previously existing prints, though none of the originals has as yet been firmly identified. The two on the right of the lower row are copied from an Ackermann print showing Grimaldi and Bologna (the latter disguised as a St Giles's fruit girl) in the comic *pas de deux* which was one of the best-known features of *Mother Goose*. The two figures on the lower left show Punch and his wife, and are copied from *Peter Pry's Puppet Show for Good Children*, a little book published by Tegg, n.d. [1810], with illustrations attributed to Rowlandson. The latter two are probably intended to represent Grimaldi as Punch and Bologna as Joan in the 'whimsical *pas de deux*' which they performed in *Harlequin in his Element*, the Covent Garden pantomime of 1807 (the follow-up to *Mother Goose*). There may also be a reference to

Grimaldi's more recent appearance as 'Jeudy or Punch's Wife' in *Harlequin and Asmodeus*, the pantomime being performed at Covent Garden when the sheet was produced.

### 4. *Copper Plate of Creed's Combat in Richard III, 1818*

(177 × 223). Collection of David Robinson

West's copper plates were supposedly all broken up after his death. Here is a rare example of a surviving plate from the 'penny' period, bearing the name of Creed, West's neighbour and hated rival. It was from plates of this sort that all the work published by West was laboriously printed. West's plates were more usually folio in size, from which two quarto plates side by side or head to head could be printed.

It would appear that one of West's plates was kept back from the general destruction. Copies of West's earliest productions are nearly all excessively rare, but examples of the *Mother Goose* sheet (no. 3) are to be found in most large West collections, often printed on over-large sheets of good quality paper, as typically used by modern printers to take pulls from old plates. This suggests that the plate survived somewhere until well into the twentieth century. If so, its present location is unknown.

### 5. *New Plate of Fairy Cars No. 4*

(235 × 190). Plain  
Collection of George Speaight

Though his business was in decline, West (here operating under the name of Stokes) continued to produce images that were as lovely as any he had put his name to in more prosperous times.

## 6. *The Wild Boy of Bohemia*

First and Fifth Scenes. (190 × 235). Plain  
Collection of George Speaight

One of West's last publications of all: see nos 61–62.

## THE MAKING OF A WEST ARTIST: Early drawings by Charles Tomkins

*'The only one as turned out  
grateful to me'*

Charles F. Tomkins (1798?–1844) worked as a scene-painter, draughtsman, and caricaturist. In 1812–13, when the following five sketches were made, Tomkins was an apprentice scene-painter at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, where he had frequent opportunity to observe performers at both Patent Houses. In addition to working in the scene shop, Tomkins was already an accomplished watercolourist and used his talents to record his impressions of his favourite performers.

Tomkins later worked at the Olympic Theatre for Charles Mathews the younger and Eliza Vestris, and subsequently was employed as a leading painter at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, during the tenure of W. C. Macready. He also provided illustrations for early issues of *Punch*. Some of his watercolours were exhibited at the British Institution. From about 1817 he started to work for West (see pp. 18–20).

## 7. Joseph Grimaldi as Orson in *Valentine and Orson*

Signed: C. Tomkins  
(190 × 110). Watercolour  
Collection of Professor David Mayer

Grimaldi, best known as Clown in the Covent Garden and Sadler's Wells pantomimes, was also an accomplished actor and mime, and had played a dwarf in *Valentine and Orson* as early as 1794. In 1805, at Covent Garden, he took over the mute role of Orson, separated at birth from his educated, gently-raised brother Valentine and raised in the wild by bears. His performance was highly praised for its expressiveness and for the wild man's innate sensitivity and nobility.

This watercolour has been used for William West's trade card (no.2) on which Grimaldi thus appears both as Orson and as Clown, although the gesture and club hand

are there reversed. The drawings might be classed as 'studies' for the trade card but were perhaps originally made for their own sake, and then adapted a few years later (c. 1817–20) for use on the card commissioned by West.

## 8. James Kirby in the double roles of Lacky/Lackey, afterwards Clown, in *Jack and Jill*

Signed: C. Tomkins  
(175 × 190). Watercolour  
Collection of Professor David Mayer

Kirby, more successful as an acrobat and dancer than a comic figure, was associated with Lyceum (the temporary home of the Drury Lane company) and Drury Lane pantomimes in the years 1810–1813. In 1814 he emigrated to Philadelphia, at that date the world's second largest English-speaking city, and appeared in circuses and pantomimes. Kirby died in New York in 1826. For *Jack and Jill* see nos 159–160.

## 9. Kirby as Lacky/Lackey in the opening of *Jack and Jill*

Unsigned  
(210 × 150). Watercolour  
Collection of Professor David Mayer

## 10. Kirby as Clown in *Harlequin Harper*

(210 × 125). Watercolour  
Collection of Professor David Mayer

T. J. Dibdin's *Harlequin Harper; or A Jump from Japan* was the Christmas offering at Drury Lane, 1813, playing against Covent Garden's *Harlequin and the Swans* (see nos 168–169).

## 11. Head of a Pantaloon, probably James Barnes

Signed: C. Tomkins  
(210 × 155). Watercolour  
Collection of Professor David Mayer

Richard Findlater, Grimaldi's biographer, describes Barnes as equal to Grimaldi in pantomimic skill, citing his maliciously shrewd glances, his aggressive grunts, his nimbleness, and his ability to absorb comic beatings. At the date of the other Charles Tomkins images, Barnes was at Drury Lane, paired with Kirby, but in 1814 he moved to Covent Garden and thereafter worked with Grimaldi until Grimaldi's illness-enforced retirement in early 1824.

## THEATRES

*'Veluti in speculum'*

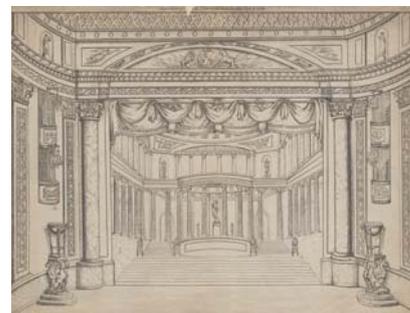
*He here brought out another brown parcel of prints. 'Look here, sir', he said, as he turned over the impressions – 'here's one of the stage fronts we do now – it's only part of it, you'll understand. It's done by a real architectural designer – but he's dead too: I suppose I shall go next. — did this here stage-front of Drury-lane as it was after the fire; and he did Covent-garden for me, as well, but he wasn't good at architect. This here, sir, was the first stage front we begun to make. It's the large impression; we had a small one out as well. The date, you see, is 1812 – and it wasn't quite a year after I published my first print. I got liberty from the master carpenter to go and make the drawing of the front as soon as ever it was up after the fire.'* (HM pp. 117–118.)

West's Catalogue Sheet lists one Stage Front which must (from its position on the sheet) belong to early 1812 or before: 'The Stage Front of the Surrey Theatre' (at 6d. plain). Then come two from 1812: 'Stage Front of the New Theatre Royal Drury Lane' (6d. again), and 'The Stage Front of the New Theatre Royal, Covent Garden' (at 4½d.). Covent Garden had been destroyed by fire in September 1808 and Drury Lane in February 1809. The new buildings re-opened in September 1809 and October 1812 respectively. Later entries in the catalogue (1814–15, for example) include 'Stage Front of the New Lyceum' (no price given) and 'Astley's new Stage Front' (at 3d.).

## 12. *Stage Front of the New Theatre Royal Drury Lane*

(412 × 520). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

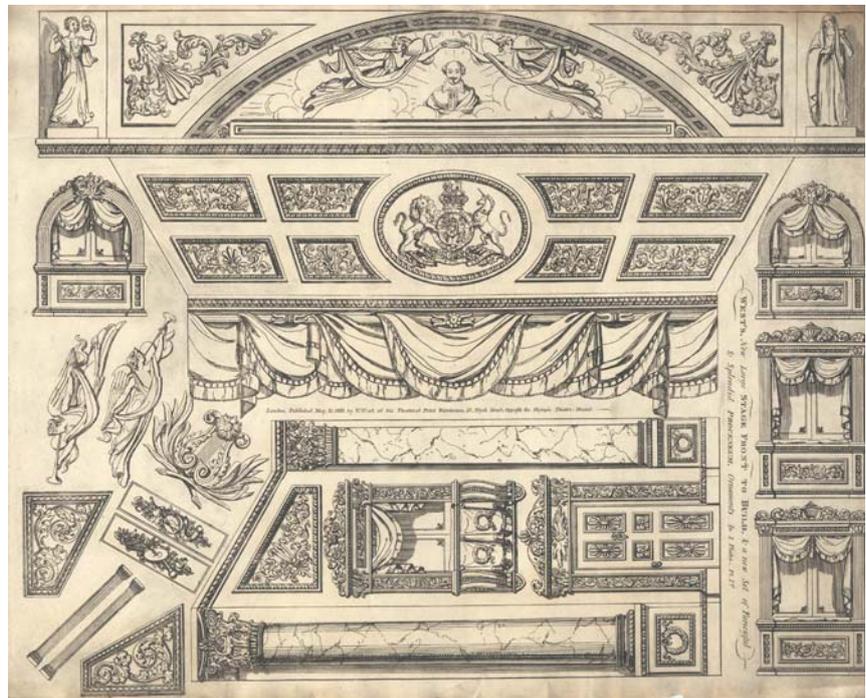
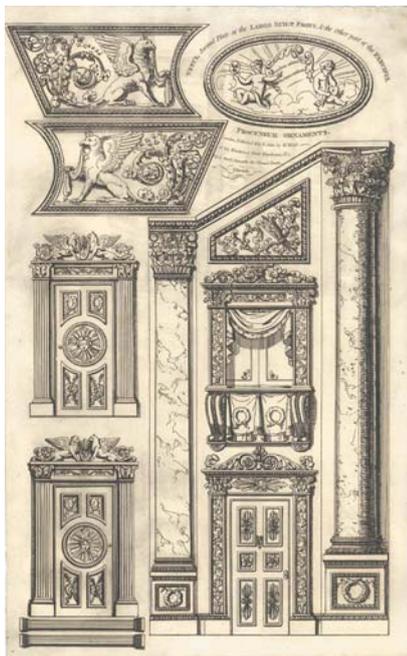
This is the work of the artist who 'wasn't good at architect'. It is listed on West's Catalogue Sheet at 1s. coloured, therefore 6d. plain.



**13–15. *West's New Large Stage Front to build & A New Set of Fancyful & Splendid Proceneum Ornaments.* May 21st 1829**

(486 × 601; 485 × 298; 536 × 414). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

One of West's later efforts, this stage front no longer purports to be the picture of a named theatre, but applies the general principles of contemporary theatre design to the needs of a toy stage. The quality of the design well justifies West's comment that 'it's done by a real architectural designer', and its generous scale (which means that the component parts have to be spread over several plates) explains West's further comment to Mayhew that 'it's only part of it, you'll understand'. The designs were originally issued as one enormous sheet (plate 1) and a half-sheet (plate 2), and are complete in this form. But sheer exuberance led to the subsequent addition of an extra, medium-sized, sheet (plate 3). By contrast with later stage fronts, where the customer was always given as much decorative material as he needed, and no more, the purchaser of West's sheets was left free to produce his own design from the different elements, after which he would find that he had enough bits and pieces left over to carry out re-decorations at some future date. (This was just like the managers of the real theatres, who constantly adjusted their interior décor as part of the struggle to attract and keep a fashionable audience.)



**16. Toy theatre with West decorations**

Wood and paper. (790 × 765 × 610)  
Pollock's Toy Museum

Very few wooden stages from the West era survive. Photographs exist of a stage used for display purposes by the Hodgson family (with some decorative details taken from West's designs) but the stage itself is lost. Another stage, similar to the one about to be described, is in the collection of Peter Baldwin, and is still used for performances. Of the thousands of wooden stages made by West himself there are no survivals.

The present exhibit is an over-sized toy stage, decorated by someone who had access to a set (or rather two sets) of West's New Large Stage Front (nos 13–15). The colouring, though now very faded, seems to have been well done, and might even be as sold by West. Various elements have been selected from West's designs (much as West intended, no doubt) and applied to a wooden proscenium. Some parts of that proscenium have been left bare (behind the trumpet-blowing figures of Fame for example), and some details, such as the curtains at the top of the proscenium opening, have been painted freehand. The way in which the stage floor increases in width to accommodate the proscenium indicates that it was assembled by someone who was aware of the conventions of juvenile stage carpentry.

The metal clamps at the very front appear to have been for electric lamps – the usual trough for colza-oil footlights is not there.

**17. Toy theatre (proscenium only, no stage) with West and other decorations**

Wood and paper. (620 × 700 × 120)  
Pollock's Toy Museum

This stage front is a sort of 'other half' of no. 16. Again over-sized, it has been decorated by using further elements selected from West's New Large Stage Front, to which has been added, for a grander effect, an assortment of details from a number of Skelt prints, as originally published in the 1830s and early 1840s. The more surprising of these additions include some demon caryatids from a scene in Skelt's pantomime of *Harlequin and Old Dame Trot*, and some figures in armour from the wings in Skelt's version of *The Wood Daemon* (see no. 142). The maker of this theatre has had access to multiple copies of some of these sheets, with the shield of Mr Hicks as Roderick Dhu (from Skelt's portrait) being used twice, left and right, and the eight clusters of dots from round its circumference being used a third time, four at each side.

Who was responsible for this eccentric pair of theatres? The name usually put forward is that of H. J. Webb, son of W. Webb (see p. 21). There is no doubt that the younger Mr Webb did a lot of special work for favoured customers, and this is just the sort of job he might have undertaken. As the inheritor of an enormous collection of old sheets going back to the West period, as well as many of Skelt's copper plates, he certainly had the means at his disposal. However, the

constituent parts are cobbled together in a way that seems unworthy of a traditional craftsman such as Webb.

In addition to the usual fixtures, the complete stage is supplied with a patent method of scene-changing, known to have been the invention of a Dr Hughes (of Broadstairs, Kent, fl. 1920s). This might point to Dr Hughes as the builder of this entire theatre and its less complete companion.

## SHAKESPEARE

### 'Richard's himself again!'

The plays of Shakespeare are almost the only part of the toy theatre repertoire still known in detail to modern theatre-goers, and because of this they necessarily form the principal point of comparison between then and now.

Despite the adulation conventionally heaped on Shakespeare, every generation has tended ruthlessly to re-fashion him to suit its own self-image. The latter half of the twentieth century favoured obsessively authentic texts, combined with ostentatiously inauthentic stage productions. Modern students tend to be shocked, therefore, by the more honest and straightforward approach of our ancestors, who took their pruning-knives to Shakespeare's words, but did not use their stage productions to subvert the texts that remained. Nahum Tate's *King Lear* (with happy ending), Dryden's *Tempest* (with the humours of Hippolito and Dorinda), Davenant's *Macbeth* (with much emphasis on singing witches), and Cibber's *Richard III* (a radically simplified and melodramatized version of an already melodramatic original) all continued to hold the stage in the Regency period. Indeed, Cibber's *Richard* continued well into the Victorian period, and lasted in parts of the Empire (such as Ireland and Canada) until the early twentieth century. It even survives, to the extent of a few lines, in Olivier's celebrated film of 1955.

### 18–22. *Richard III*

Plates 2 (245 × 198) & 5 (242 × 196) of characters. Coloured Scenes 1 1 (198 × 247); 1 2 (201 × 247). Coloured Collection of Barry Clarke  
Scene II 3 (198 × 243). Plain Collection of David Robinson

### 23. *Richard III*

Tent Scene. (229 × 297). Coloured Collection of Barry Clarke



Cibber's *Richard III* is of central importance to the drama of the Regency period, since it gave Edmund Kean, the most characteristic actor of the period, his most characteristic part. Accordingly, it went on to become the most popular Shakespearean play in the toy theatre repertory, from West to the penny packets. Kean made his London debut as Shylock at Drury Lane on 26 January 1814. His *Richard III* followed on 2 February, playing 25 times that season, and 24 times during the next. In this context, West's several attempts to tackle the play are all, by his standards, disappointing. The five plates of characters he published in 1817 are harsh and unappealing, whilst the single plate (1814) and set of three plates of miniature characters (date uncertain) are little better. West always seems to have been willing to give an artist a chance, and to publish the

results, however unsatisfactory, even if he then let the association lapse. As Lilian Baylis once said to a soprano who had deputised in a leading role at short notice, 'Well, dear, you've had your chance, and you've missed it.'

West published a set of small scenes to go with the miniature characters (1814, with additions in 1817 and 1821) and a set of large scenes to go with the others (1817–18).

### 24. *Mr Kean as Richard III*

(187 × 237). Coloured Collection of David Robinson

*He told me he had printed more portraits of Huntley, Bradley, and Blanchard, than of any other members of the theatrical profession – with the exception of Kean in Richard. He hadn't done anything particular with the others.* (HM p. 120.)

More portraits of Kean as *Richard III* were published by West and his fellow toy theatre publishers than of any other actor in any other character. These penny and twopenny portraits were in addition to all the shilling and half-crown images produced by the fashionable print sellers at the West End of town. In common with the other icon of his age, Grimaldi, Kean's celebrity status ensured that portraits of the actor continued to come off the presses even after his death. The depiction of *Richard* wounded (as in this penny portrait) is perhaps surprising, even for a tragic character, but it is not unique to West, and serves to demonstrate the extent to which every stage of Kean's performance in the part impressed itself on those who saw him.



*Mr. Kean as Richard the Third. Price 1<sup>d</sup> Plain. London, Published, Dec. 8. 1817, by W. West, at his Theatrical-Print-Warehouse, 57, West Street, Opposite the Olympic Theatre, Strand.*

## 25. *Mr Kean as Richard III*

(284 × 197). Coloured and tinselled  
M. W. Stone Collection, Theatre Museum, V&A

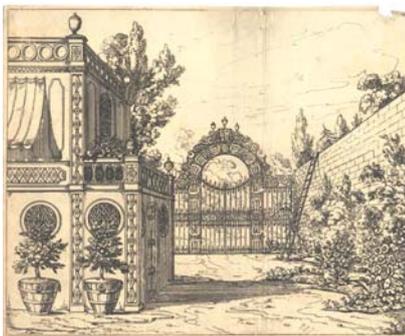
This is a rather unusual example of a 'tinsel portrait', in that the silks used are said to have come from the coronation robes of George IV. The art of tinselling, which West so disliked (see pp. 20–21), was evidently being applied to his portraits as early as the 1820s. The present portrait is the earliest example of tinselling that we have, with its link to the great event of 1821.

In fact, tinsel prints suffer from the same problem as wooden stages; many magnificent examples survive, but very few of them are genuine products of the nineteenth century. In the case of the tinsel prints, there is reason to suspect that many of the extant examples, perhaps even the majority, were made up by H. J. Webb (see no. 17) in the early part of the twentieth century, using the stocks of tinsel inherited from his uncle, J. Webb, and the magnificent Johnson (ex Fairburn) portraits, the copper plates for which he had also inherited. Though many nineteenth-century tinsels can be found, they are often rather dingy and unimpressive compared to the expert and well-preserved productions of Mr Webb. This magnificent example is an exception: it shows why so many customers chose to ignore West's grumbles and to indulge the art of tinselling at the expense of 'the good drawing' he was so proud of.

## 26. *Romeo and Juliet*

Balcony Scene. Plain (248 × 300)  
Collection of David Robinson

The Regency *Romeo and Juliet* was different from modern productions not so much in its matter as in its manner. Whereas modern producers lay great stress on the fact that the lovers are confused adolescents in an ordinary and recognisable urban situation, on the Georgian stage they were grandly romantic adults, and this was mirrored by a lavish and opulent background. West published a single plate of miniature charac-



ters and a set of eight small scenes for the play in 1815.

No large scenes by West have hitherto been recorded for this play, nor any characters with which large scenery could be associated. The only publisher other than West who tackled *Romeo and Juliet* was Hodgson and Co. in 1823 (nos 29–32). Relatively few of West's large scenes have survived, and of those an unusually high proportion have been cut down ready for mounting on cardboard, with the title and imprint often removed.

## 27 & 28. *Romeo and Juliet*

Scenes V 1 (190 × 228) & Last (186 × 232). Plain  
Collection of Peter Baldwin

## 29–32. Hodgson & Co., *Romeo and Juliet*

Plates 4 (237 × 189) & 11 (230 × 190) of characters. Plain  
Plates 1 (239 × 194) & 6 (236 × 194) of procession  
Coloured  
Collection of Barry Clarke

Processions formed an important feature of Georgian stage productions, being one of the great carrots (along with songs and dances between the acts) used to lure easily-bored patrons into the theatre. Since the mid-eighteenth century, Drury Lane and Covent Garden had vied with each other in the lavishness with which they staged Juliet's funeral, both commissioning Dirges to accompany the proceedings. The masquerades in *The Merchant of Venice* and here in *Romeo and Juliet* gave the Georgian theatre the opportunity to indulge in lavish display, both visual and musical (the score written by Arthur Sullivan for a production of *The Merchant of Venice* in Manchester dates from as late as 1871, but still consists largely of music for the masquerade scene). Hodgson and Co.'s *Romeo and Juliet* (1823) shows the masquerade in some detail, with an even fuller treatment (in six additional plates) of the traditional funeral procession.

## 33–36. *Coriolanus*

Scene No. 1. Coloured. (198 × 247)  
Scenes Nos 2 (196 × 247) 6 (199 × 247) 8 (195 × 248)  
Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

West produced a single plate of miniature characters and a set of ten small scenes for this play in 1815. This was a bumper year for Shakespeare, since West's new invention of miniature characters allowed him to increase the variety of projects he tackled, and to include plays that might not ordinarily have commended themselves to the juvenile stage.



Scholars have established a number of important connections between the scenery of the theatre and that of the juvenile stage. Sybil Rosenfeld in *Georgian Scene Painters and Scene Painting* (p. 146) identifies West's *Coriolanus* scenery as deriving from John Philip Kemble's production at Covent Garden in 1811. 'We have one original design by Hodgins of a street in Rome ... which was reproduced in a set of ten for the play in West's juvenile drama ... The scenes, attributed to Phillips, Pugh and Whitmore, are severely classical and particularly the Forum accurately observed the laws of perspective. *The Times* picked out the triumphal-arch scene for praise, though the whole "succession of Roman architecture" exceeded any the critic had witnessed. The period was, however, not that of the Consuls but of the Caesars so that marble could be simulated.'



## MODERN LITERATURE: SCOTT

*'Hail to the Chief who in triumph  
advances!'*

The overwhelming influence of Sir Walter Scott on his contemporaries (not just in entertaining them, but in using romance to give them a sense of history) is difficult to appreciate today. In West's time no author better exemplified the ever-important connection between current literature and the theatre. It was in his narrative poems that Scott first provided regular inspiration for the stage. In 1810 *The Lady of the Lake* was dramatised at the Surrey Theatre by T. J. Dibdin, with music by James Sanderson. The latter's setting of Scott's lyric 'Hail to the Chief!', soon forgotten on this side of the Atlantic, established itself in the United States as a sort of unofficial Presidential Anthem. Played by bands good, bad and indifferent, it has ensured that each succeeding president 'shall have music wherever he goes'. But the poems were really rehearsals for the novels to come, and each of the *Waverley* series was eagerly snapped up by stage-adapters.

### 37. *Guy Mannering*

Plate 1 of characters. Plain. (243 × 197)  
Collection of George Speaight

Some of the most successful Scott productions were at Covent Garden where the actor Daniel Terry dramatised the novels (or 'Terryfied' them, to use Scott's own description) to great effect. *Guy Mannering*; or, *The Gipsy's Prophecy* was adapted by Terry with assistance from the author himself, and presented at Covent Garden in March 1816. Many of this theatre's adaptations from Scott stood half-way between melodrama and opera, especially under the musical direction of Bishop. As a result, *Guy Mannering* held the stage as a vehicle for Victorian singers, such as Sims Reeves, long after it might have been forgotten as an ordinary play, and Bishop's overture (it is more of a medley, in fact) was performed by amateur pianists until recent years. The play also contains music by T. Attwood and J. Whitaker, the latter setting 'Oh, hush thee, my baby', which became a drawing-room favourite and is parodied in J. P. Collier's 1828 text of *Punch and Judy*. West's version of the play consists of three plates of characters

and a set of large scenes, unsigned, but in a style identical to that of the mysterious 'W.B.' (see p.18). West and his artist give us the play in the first flush of its youthful beauty, a reminder of the delicate and tender romanticism of the early nineteenth century, so different from the coarser variety of subsequent decades. Versions of the play were produced by a number of West's contemporaries, but it did not enter the later toy theatre repertory.

### 38. *Guy Mannering*

Scene No. 2. (293 × 417). Plain  
Collection of George Speaight

### 39. *Rob Roy*

Plate 3 of characters. (252 × 193). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

*Rob Roy Macgregor*; or, *Auld Lang Syne!* is another Covent Garden version of Scott. This time the adaptation was by Isaac Pocock (one of his greatest successes after *The Miller and his Men*), with the music by John Davy (of 'Bay of Biscay' fame). Scott failed to provide enough lyrics in his novel to satisfy Pocock and Davy, so the two men found additional material in the poetical works of Burns and Wordsworth. The title-role provided William Charles Maccready ('moral, grave, sublime') with one of his earliest successes, but, Maccready being Maccready, he was furious at having to appear night after night in a part so completely beneath his talents.

West obviously found *Rob Roy* to be a good selling title, since the four plates of

characters he produced in 1818 (possibly the work of William Heath) were followed by six plates of 'new miscellaneous characters' (almost certainly the work of William Heath) and ten scenes in 1822. A set of small scenes was afterwards cobbled together. Plates 2 and 3 of the 'new miscellaneous characters' have had West's own signature added to them. It was originally added to Plate 1 as well, but was afterwards removed, perhaps as the result of a protest from Heath, whose name (not to mention his various pseudonyms) was one that other publishers were proud to put on their prints.

### 40 & 41. *Rob Roy*

Scenes Nos 2 (263 × 299) & 8 (268 × 299). Coloured  
Collection of George Speaight

### 42. *Montrose*

Plate 9 of characters (fragment) (150 × 226).  
Coloured & tinselled  
Collection of Horatio Blood

Not all of Scott's novels were satisfactorily adapted at the first attempt. *A Legend of Montrose* was published in 1819, but success did not come until 1822 when Covent Garden tackled the play. *Montrose*; or, *The Children of the Mist* was again adapted by Pocock, with the music parcelled out, as was common in this period, among a team of composers, including Bishop, the musical director; Ware, long-standing leader of the orchestra, and Watson, a more obscure figure. West did this play proud, issuing twelve plates of characters in 1822, and five folio plates of miniature characters in 1827.



Both sets of characters have been ascribed to William Heath. Versions of the play were also brought out by Hodgson and J. L. Marks.

This group of characters is offered as a discreet example of tinselling, the art of which West so disapproved (see pp.20–21). Although tinselling was most famously applied to single portraits of actors and actresses, it was also used from time to time on smaller items, such as plates of Fours and Sixes, and even (as here) on whole sets of toy theatre characters.

#### 43 & 44. *Ivanhoe; or, The Jew of York*

Plates 2 (248 × 198) & 3 (245 × 193) of characters. Plain. Collection of David Robinson

*Ivanhoe*, with its English subject, is not the best of Scott's novels, and will never be the connoisseur's favourite. It was always popular in England, however, and more London theatres attempted productions of the novel than of any of its predecessors, just as film-makers and television producers have continued to turn to it ahead of Scott's other works. West's sheets draw on at least two different productions – the version by T. J. Dibdin at the Surrey Theatre (sub-titled *The Jew of York*) and that of Samuel Beazley, Junior, at Covent Garden (sub-titled *The Knight Templar*). The latter had music by John Parry, whose composition 'Jenny Jones' has often been mistaken for a Welsh folk-air. West published two plates of miniature characters and a set of scenes in the Covent Garden version, together with four plates of characters and six large scenes in the Surrey version. All these have been attributed to William Heath.



#### 45. *Mr Payne as Robin Hood, 1824*

(265 × 209). Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

One of the more important side-effects of Scott's *Ivanhoe* was to establish the reign of Richard I as the most psychologically satisfying epoch in which to locate the legend of Robin Hood. This is now so well established as to be taken for granted, as demonstrated in the modern pantomime of *The Babes in the Wood*, and in television series such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *Robin of Sherwood*. West seems to have published four twopenny portraits of the more important characters from the Covent Garden *Ivanhoe* in April 1820, four being the maximum number usually produced to commemorate a single production. In May, however, West followed this quartet with a fifth twopenny portrait, viz. the likeness of Mr Payne as Robin Hood. This fifth portrait seems to have been something of an afterthought, perhaps a response to popular demand. Robin is only a minor character in *Ivanhoe*, and Mr Payne was not really a star actor, but the combination of the two was evidently well liked, since portraits of Payne as Robin Hood were published by West and Hodgson in the early 1820s, and were still being produced by Park and Skelt in the late 1830s.

#### 46–48. *The Abbot*

Plates 1 (248 × 198) 2 (245 × 193) & 3 (142 × 196) of characters. Plain. Collection of David Robinson

In 1815 some members of the Roxby family, who mostly acted under the name of Beverley, assumed the management of a little theatre in Tottenham Street (behind the present Goodge Street Station, and indeed behind the present Pollock's Toy Museum). They re-named it the Regency Theatre, and afterwards the Regency Theatre of Variety,

an early use of this name in England, and one which might misleadingly suggest a music hall to the modern ear. In this bijou theatre the Beverleys mounted a series of small-scale productions with considerable flair, including H. R. Beverley's adaptation of Scott's *The Abbot*, performed at the Regency in September, 1820, with music by John Kerr. Playbills and other evidence of the Beverleys' tenure of the theatre survive rather poorly, and some of the plays are either 'not in Nicoll',\* or else very imperfectly recorded there. West obviously liked the Beverleys' efforts, and issued some modest but suitably stylish souvenirs of their productions. For *The Abbot* he produced four plates of characters. These are attributed to William Heath, who at this middle period of his career had thrown off his rough-but-vigorous early style to produce the smooth-but-rather-dainty style that we see here. This would in due course give way to a final style in which vigour and elegance were brought together in an unsurpassable combination.



\* 'Nicoll' is shorthand for the invaluable lists of plays appended to the various volumes of Allardyce Nicoll's *A History of English Drama, 1660–1900*.

#### 49. *Characters in the Abbot, or Mary Queen of Scots*

Proof before letters and finished print. Photographic print of original in Ralph Thomas Collection, Department of Prints and Drawings, British Museum

Plate 2 of characters from the same play, shown before and after the plate had been handed over to the calligrapher. Like most categories of prints, with the exception of caricatures, toy theatre sheets were not usually lettered by those responsible for the drawing and engraving, but were given to a specialist letter-engraver for a professional touch.

## OSSIAN

*'Let the hero arise in thy dreams!'*

The material and intellectual prosperity of Scotland in the reign of George III seemed to demand a heroic past for the nation. James Macpherson attempted to provide this with the epic poetry of Ossian, Scotland's Homer, poetry which Macpherson had translated (or so he said) from the ancient Gaelic. He was in good company, for the 1760s saw the forgeries of Chatterton, the mystifications of Horace Walpole and James Ridley, and the cobblings-together of Bishop Percy. These appeared in such rapid succession that forgery and romanticism started to seem uncomfortably close. Dr Johnson and others exposed Macpherson's dishonest dealings, or at least sowed the seeds of doubt in the genius of Ossian. On the continent, where people enjoyed, as they still do, the benefit of not speaking English as a first language, belief in Ossian continued undisturbed, and Napoleon had Ossianic operas written for him and Ossianic decorations for his apartments. In Britain, however, the flood of Ossian readers became a trickle, leaving those who still enjoyed him to point out in vain that his prose-poetry was actually 'much better than likely'.

### 50-52. *Malvina*

Plate 1 of characters (243 × 200). Plain  
Plate 7 of characters (246 × 200). Coloured  
Plate 1 of processions (241 × 388). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

Even in 1826 this Ossianic 'dramatic opera' from Drury Lane seems a rather strange survival. Its author was George Macfarren,



who wrote many excellent stage pieces, not a few of them adapted for the toy theatre and one of them, *Guy Fawkes*, an evergreen classic of the juvenile stage. The music was by Thomas Simpson Cooke, a singer, conductor and composer who over a period of many years made himself thoroughly useful in the theatres and concert halls of London and elsewhere. West's plates show the very interesting cross-over between heroic armour and feathered bonnets which the theatre employed to conjure up the Scotch-epic world of Ossian. West immediately issued six plates of characters and twelve scenes. The characters presumably sold well, as two extra plates were added two years later. The scenes are the work of William Heath, and the characters are probably his also. No other publisher attempted a toy theatre version.

## GOTHIC

*'Drear forests, ruin'd aisles, and haunted towers'*

If there is one reason why the English theatre of the nineteenth century is a scholarly wilderness, it is that during this period successful plays were rarely literary, while literary plays were rarely successful. Of course, a similar situation has not prevented film studies from rising to extravagant heights of prestige and popularity, but the study of film, unlike that of theatre, has not traditionally been pursued under the aegis of English Literature. Nevertheless, a number of plays by the great writers of the period did at least enjoy a modicum of success, and some of these efforts (such as Coleridge's *Remorse*) even made it as far as the miniature stage. Most successful of the Gothic writers from a stage point of view was 'Monk' Lewis, whether in his original plays, *The Castle Spectre* – *Rugantino*; or, *The Bravo of Venice* – *One o'Clock*; or, *The Wood Daemon* (see no. 142) – *Timour the Tartar* (see no. 93), or in plays adapted by others from his novels and poems, *Raymond and Agnes*; or, *The Travellers Benighted*, from an episode in *The Monk*.

### 53 & 54. *Ferdinand of Spain*

Plates 1 (246 × 200) & 2 (202 × 243) of characters. Plain  
Collection of Peter Baldwin

*Ferdinand of Spain*; or, *Ancient Chivalry* was produced at Astley's on Easter Monday 1813. According to *The Times* of the following

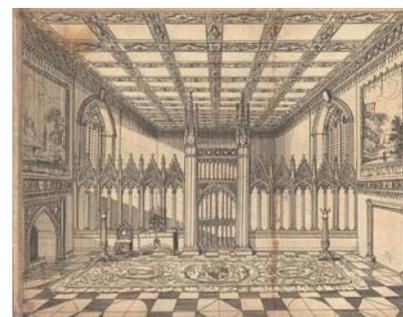


day, the play was chiefly remarkable for its 'splendid scene of conflagration': 'the falling beams, enveloped in masses of flame, – the explosion, – the ruinous confusion, – together with the clashing of swords, and the trampling of horses, formed one of the most striking combinations that we have ever witnessed'. The piece would run until the end of August, and West immediately produced a three-plate souvenir, 'From Original Drawings in the Possession of J. Astley, Esq<sup>r</sup>, Published by his permission'. As an added attraction there were two plates of Horse and Foot Soldiers, but there were no scenes. All the plates have been attributed to William Heath.

### 55 & 56. *Bertram*

Scene No. 3 (240 × 135). Coloured  
Collection of Barry Clarke  
Scene No. 5 (265 × 323). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

Charles Robert Maturin is remembered as the author of the cult gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*, the hero of which inspired the pseudonym, 'Sebastian Melmoth', used by Oscar Wilde during his final years of exile. Few of Maturin's attempts to follow up the novel were at all popular, but he had already written a surprisingly successful tragedy for Edmund Kean, then in the first flush of his success. This was *Bertram*; or, *The Castle of St*



*Aldobrand*, produced at Drury Lane in 1816, with music by Cooke. West immediately produced three plates of characters and some large scenes. In 1818 he brought out a single plate of miniature characters. Unusually for West, this second version is not an independent view of the play; the miniature characters are copied, in reverse, from the full-size version. The play was also covered by Mrs Jameson.

### 57. *Edward the Black Prince*

Plates 1 & 2 of characters (double plate). (237 × 385)  
Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, two circuses established themselves on the south bank of the Thames: Astley's Amphitheatre and the Royal Circus. Astley's continued to be a successful circus throughout the nineteenth century, while the Royal Circus transformed itself into the Surrey Theatre. The happy duopoly established by these institutions was threatened when the Coburg Theatre (the present 'Old Vic') appeared on the scene in 1818. Its productions were bigger and better than those of its rivals, and for a time it bore away all the glory. Accordingly, if one were to extract all the Coburg and Covent Garden productions of the 1820s from the repertory of West and Hodgson, there would be surprisingly little left. This is in contrast to the paucity of productions from the Surrey or Drury Lane. West seems to have enjoyed a particularly close relationship with the original proprietor of the Coburg, Joseph Glossop. Glossop, an ancestor of Augustus 'Druriolanus' Harris, was a gentleman-amateur, and in all likelihood more affable and easy-going than many of the theatre people with whom West had dealings. William



Barrymore, Glossop's stage-manager, was a talented man who presided over a succession of brilliant productions, many of them graced by his beautiful wife, somewhat austere billed as Mrs W. Barrymore. But Barrymore was a rude and overbearing man, inclined to put his name to plays which other men had written, and to dismiss protests with the pompous assertion that the stage-manager was the 'real author' of any piece. So, inevitably, Glossop's departure, which left Barrymore in charge, resulted in the flying of sparks. Some of these sparks evidently singed West, who no doubt turned up one day to ask for the usual permission to make drawings of the new Coburg piece, only to find himself being rebuffed with contumely. His revenge, in the form of the phrase 'Done without the Permission of Mr. W. Barrymore' engraved in graceful calligraphy on every plate of characters, seems a particularly delicious one.

*Edward the Black Prince*; or, *The Glories of England in 1356* is by George Macfarren, whose immortal *Guy Fawkes* was destined to be performed at the same theatre only the following month. West's souvenir of *Edward the Black Prince* consists of ten plates of characters and twelve large scenes. Several of the plates are signed 'W. West fecit.', but they are probably the work of William Heath. A contemporary version was brought out by Hodgson & Co.

### 58. *Edward the Black Prince*

First Scene No 3. (263 × 421). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

### 59. *Edward the Black Prince, 1823*

(268 × 213). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

Apart from his characters and scenes, West brought out four twopenny portraits of characters from the play, and some penny ones also. (See no. 141).

### 60. *Mr Bradly as Geoffrey de Charny*

(269 × 215). Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

*I remarked that he had printed a great many prints of Mr. Bradley? He said that gentleman was such a great favourite with the children – he made himself up so murderous looking – and then he was such a fine swordsman with T. P. Cooke, you'd think they were going to kill one another. It was quite beautiful to see 'em – people used to go on purpose. He told me he had printed more portraits of Huntley, Bradley, and Blanchard, than of any other members of the theatrical profession – with the exception of Kean in Richard. He hadn't done anything particular with the others. (HM p. 120.)*

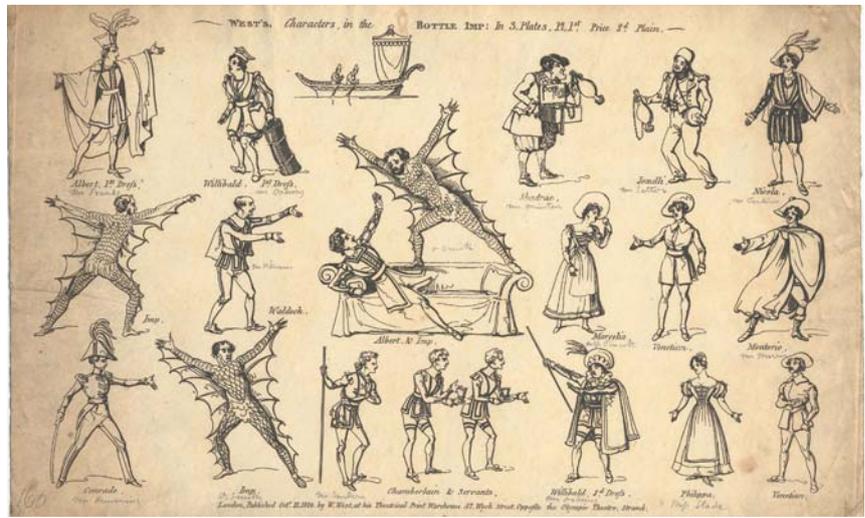
### 61 & 62. *The Wild Boy of Bohemia*

Plates 1 (252 × 397) & 6 (242 × 389) of characters (double plates). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

The Olympic Theatre was built by Philip Astley as a northerly outpost of his Amphitheatre. When West moved from Exeter Street to a shop 'opposite the Olympic Theatre' in Wych Street, Astley's enterprise was somewhat in the doldrums. Conventional theatre wisdom has it that the reputation of the Olympic was only revived when Madame Vestris, 'the witch of Wych Street', shed her glamour over the theatre in



1831. Even in the 1820s, however, the theatre had some lucid intervals, and John Walker's melodrama, *The Wild Boy of Bohemia*, produced at the Olympic in 1827, was certainly one of them. West immediately published five large folio plates of characters (with a sixth added the following year), together with a set of large scenes. Seaton-Reid attributes these to William Heath although they are more commonly associated with George Cruikshank. The play was not treated by any other publisher, but was evidently a continuing favourite with West, who re-published some of his large scenes in 1838 (under the name of Stokes), and as late as 1847 produced a set of small scenes for the play, most probably his very last bit of publishing for the toy theatre. (See no. 5).



**63. The Bottle Imp**

Plate 1 of characters (double plate). (216 x 342). Plain Collection of David Robinson

*The Bottle Imp* is not quite a classic of the toy theatre, since all four juvenile versions were produced shortly after the first production, and none were available from the halfpenny

or penny packet publishers. On visual grounds, however, it certainly deserves classic status. It was written by Richard Brinsley Peake (a godson of Sheridan), and had music composed by George Herbert Rodwell. Edward Fitzball, whose long list of plays includes one called *The Devil's Elixir*, complains in his memoirs that Peake's

melodrama is merely another version of E. T. A. Hoffmann's tale of the same name, with additions from Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* (also a classic of German romanticism). Yet it is the image of the Bottle Imp himself that gives the play its distinctive quality, however third-hand its theme. West's version consists of three folio plates of miniature characters, but no scenes.



#### 64. *Saint George & the Dragon*, 1823

(216 × 273). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

The medieval legend of Saint George and the Dragon, which has its recognised place in the *Golden Legend* and other hagiographical collections, took a new turn in 1598 when the hack-writer Richard Johnson published his prose romance *The Seven Champions of Christendom*. Johnson brought together the patron saints of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, France, Spain and Italy (who were by no means contemporaries in their earthly lives) and sent them off on a series of adventures. *The Seven Champions of Christendom* was part of an outpouring of naïve popular literature, contemporary with the Shakespearean theatre, which is all too often ignored by historians of literature and popular culture. Johnson's farrago was hugely popular, being versified into ballads, condensed into chapbooks, and infantilised into children's books. It also had its influence on the mummies' play, and was increasingly turned to as a source for the regular stage. The response of the toy theatre publishers was to issue sets of theatrical portraits of the Seven Champions on horseback. The most famous stage version of *Saint George and the Dragon* was probably Andrew Ducrow's at Drury Lane in 1833, although some of the portrait-sets (like the present *Combat*) date from before this production. It was probably the prolific Dibdin family who were responsible for the outpouring of prints, T. J. Dibdin writing his *Seven Champions of Christendom* for the Surrey Theatre in 1821, and his brother Charles producing his version at Astley's the following year. West's combat is dated 1823, but has evidently been re-dated from something slightly earlier.



#### THE MILLER AND HIS MEN

The ultimate toy theatre play: almost from its first production in 1813, this melodrama (with its finale of the exploding mill) was the favourite choice for toy theatre performances. Dozens of toy theatre versions of the play appeared before, alongside and after West's, though admittedly some were only re-issues or copies of previous ones, so that the number of independent reportings of the play is fewer than such a large total might suggest.

#### 65 & 66. *The Miller and his Men*

Cave Scene (242 × 390) & Explosion Scene (275 × 317)  
Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

*The Miller and his Men has sold better than any other play I ever published. I wore out a whole set of copper plates of that there. I must have sold at least five thousand of that play, all complete. It's the last scene, with the grand explosion of the mill, as pleases the young 'uns, uncommon. Some on 'em greases the last scene with butter – that gives a werry good effect with a light behind; but warnish is best, I can't abear butter. Some of them explosions we had made in wood work, and so arranged that the mill can fly to pieces; they comes to about 4s. 6d. a piece.* (HM p. 119.)

The publishing history of West's various versions of the play is confusing to a degree unusual even for him. He seems to have attempted miniature versions in 1815 (in one plate and again in three plates), 1820 (two plates) and 1827 (double plate of miscellaneous characters). Small scenes were then added at various dates, beginning in 1815 and culminating in 1828, the whole being crowned by an explosion scene in 1831. His large characters began with a set of three

plates by Charles Tomkins in 1819, expanded by William Heath in 1820 (Plates 4 and 5) and 1828 (Plates 6 to 9). For a similar pattern of publishing, compare *The Forty Thieves*, nos 88–92, where Tomkins's work of 1819 was expanded by Heath in 1827. West's large scenes in the *Miller*, which, as so often, survive very poorly, seem to go back as far as 1817, though it is not obvious what characters they would have been accompanying at this early date. During West's two years of publishing under the name of Stokes (1832–33) one of his last publications was a *Trick Mill*, cheaper at 1d. than his four-and-sixpenny wooden one.

#### 67. *The Miller and his Men*

Trick Explosion (238 × 198). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

#### 68 & 69. *The Miller and his Men*

Plate 8 of characters (253 × 200). Coloured  
Plate 9 of characters (235 × 191). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

#### 70. *Mr Farley as Grindoff the Miller*, 1824

(265 × 208). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

Charles Farley is a fascinating figure of the



late Georgian theatre. He rose from call-boy at Covent Garden to leading actor in melodrama, his portly frame supporting a surprising variety of roles. He also became the deviser and producer of Covent Garden's Christmas pantomimes and Easter melodramas (in which he relied heavily on the mime skills of the pantomime performers). Farley rarely put his name as author to the pieces he concocted, though, thanks to the investigations of Professor David Mayer, a

long list of his productions can be found in the latest version of *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (3rd edition of Volume IV, 2000). Of all the unctuously villainous parts in which he revelled, Grindoff the Miller must be allowed to be the quintessence. West's twopenny portrait of Farley in the role was issued (surprisingly enough) as a pair to one of Kean as Brutus. It was originally published in 1819, though the present example is re-dated to 1824.

## GEORGE SOANE, BLACK SHEEP & PLAYWRIGHT

*'The youngest is unluckily smitten with a passion for dramatic writing'*

George Soane was the younger surviving son of Sir John Soane, and was born in 1789. As an undergraduate at Cambridge he started to accumulate debts, and the habit never left him. His enthusiasm for the theatre led to an acquaintance with James Boaden, journalist and theatrical biographer. It also led to a determination to marry Boaden's daughter Agnes, against the wishes of his parents. He was imprisoned for debt towards the end of 1814 (his house was afterwards sold), the sums owing being paid eventually by his long-suffering mother in January 1815. In September that year George wrote two articles abusing his father's architecture which were then published anonymously in the *Champion* magazine. This was followed closely by the death of his mother (George did not attend the funeral). John Soane never forgave his son and had the offending articles framed with the caption 'Death Blows'.

1812 saw the publication of George's first efforts at fiction, *The Eve of St Marco* and the ultra-romantic *The Knight Dæmon and Robber Chief*, and he was destined to scribble for his living from then until his death in 1860. It was not until after the death of his mother that two highly popular melodramas, *The Innkeeper's Daughter* and *The Falls of Clyde*, established him as a man of the theatre. These early successes were not destined to be often repeated, however, and by the 1830s he had descended from superior melodramas at the patent theatres to low-sounding pieces at the minors, such as

*Lilian, the Show Girl*, produced at the Surrey Theatre in 1836.

George was never completely disowned by his father, even though his domestic arrangements went from bad to worse. He lived in a *ménage à trois* with his wife and her sister, who bore him a son, George Manfred. Sir John continued to give George basic financial support, and arranged for the education of his legitimate son Frederick.

George's linguistic abilities naturally led him to the operatic stage, where there was always plenty of translating to be done. Many of the arias sung in early Victorian drawing rooms had the benefit of words by 'George Soane, A.B.', some of his lyrics being translations and some being free compositions which substituted sweetly-pretty thoughts for the more robust sentiments of the foreign originals. He was also called upon to write libretti for English composers to set, most successfully in *The Night Dancers*, an operatic treatment of the *Giselle* story, set to music by E. J. Loder and performed at the Princess's Theatre in 1846. Though now forgotten, this piece outlived the original ballet in the affections of Victorian theatre-goers.

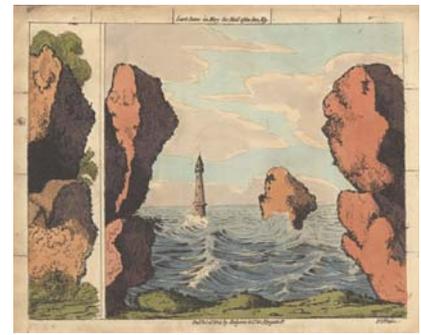
### 71. Hodgson and Co., *Mary the Maid of the Inn*

Plate 2 of characters (fragment) (123 × 198). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

### 72. Jameson, *Mary the Maid of the Inn*

Last Scene (198 × 243). Coloured  
Collection of Barry Clarke

The publication of Percy's *Reliques* in 1765



both encouraged a taste for old ballads, and initiated a vogue for composing new ones. Robert Southey was one of the most successful ballad-mongers, and two of his miniature masterpieces, *The Inchcape Rock* and *Mary the Maid of the Inn*, spawned toy theatre plays (Southey's unlikely inspiration for the latter being an account in Dr Plot's *History of Staffordshire*). The dramatic possibilities of *Mary the Maid of the Inn* were first spotted by Miss Scott, an actress-dramatist who presided over the Sans Pareil Theatre (afterwards the Adelphi), and her adaptation, *Mary, the Maid of the Inn; or, The Bough of Yew* was produced there in 1809. It was George Soane, however, who produced the classic treatment of the subject at Drury Lane on Easter Monday 1817. It had to compete with the first performance of Pocock's *Robinson Crusoe* at Covent Garden, though the competition harmed neither play, and both found favour with their holiday audiences. Originally called *The Innkeeper's Daughter*, Soane's melodrama (which had music by T. S. Cooke) was his most successful piece, becoming a stock piece in the real theatre and a classic of the toy one, where it survived until the period of penny packets and boys' magazines. West seems to have commissioned drawings from William Heath, whose watercolour sketch



for plate 2 of characters survives in the British Museum, but no publication ensued (a common reason for the survival of a drawing). There was no lack of interest, however, among other publishers, and a sample of their efforts is here displayed.

**73. Pair, *The Falls of Clyde***

(213 x 275). Plain  
Collection of Barry Clarke

*The Falls of Clyde* was George Soane's next piece after *Mary, the Maid of the Inn*, and was to prove his next most successful. Another melodrama, it was produced at Drury Lane in 1817 and like *Mary* enjoyed the benefit of Cooke's music. West commissioned a set of characters (in 3 plates) from William Heath and, once again, nothing was printed, though drawings for two plates survive in the British Museum. West did however issue some miniature characters and small scenes in 1818 and these are evidently the work of his new protégé Charles Tomkins – perhaps Heath disappeared for a while at this period, leaving these two projects unfinished.

West also issued the 'pair' displayed here, which is signed with the monogram 'CT', and is also in the style of Tomkins. As a genre, 'pairs' did not really take off in the way that 'fours' and 'sixes' were afterwards to do, though Webb produced a few as late as the 1840s.

**74. Jameson, *The Falls of Clyde***

Plate 3 of characters (249 x 198). Plain  
Collection of Barry Clarke

In place of West's unexecuted version, this is one of the sheets issued by Mrs Jameson. Somewhat harsh in character, though highly detailed and interesting, it is probably the work of Robert Cruikshank, who generally worked in this style at this period, at least where theatrical portraiture was concerned.



**75-77. Hodgson and Co., *Faustus***

Plates 2 (238 x 196) 4 (240 x 197) & 8 (238 x 195)  
of characters. Coloured  
Collection of Barry Clarke

George Soane had a good knowledge of German, a rare accomplishment at this period. One of the uses to which his knowledge was put was in translating parts of Goethe's *Faust* to accompany a set of Retzch's engravings of scenes from the drama, as published in 1820. Five years later Soane collaborated with Daniel Terry (the adapter of Scott) on a romantic drama *Faustus*. The production was staged at Drury Lane with music by Bishop, Horn (composer of 'Cherry Ripe') and Cooke. West (for whom the year 1825 was almost an *annus non*) took no notice, and in fact the only publisher to produce a toy theatre version was Hodgson and Co., a firm which had recently passed into the hands of William Cole, hence the apparent discrepancy between heading and imprint.



## ORIENTAL

'Match me such marvel save in Eastern clime!'

In the seventeenth century, a literary time-bomb was set in motion, finally to explode at the start of the nineteenth. In the 1690s, Fairy Tales started to be published by Perrault, Mme d'Aulnoy and their contemporaries, and were translated into English shortly after. These were read first by the general run of novel-readers and then increasingly by children. The basic French repertory took its place alongside traditional English tales, and was later augmented by borrowings from the German romantic writers, such as Musäus and E. T. A. Hoffmann. Hard on the heels of the French vogue for fairy tales came the French vogue for Oriental Tales, beginning with the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (now known as *The Thousand and One Nights*). Many imitations followed, some genuinely oriental, others not. Of these, *The Thousand and One Days* was the ultimate source of *Turandot* and, in the toy theatre, of *Harlequin and Riddle-me-ree*.

The best of this oriental repertory was translated into English, and followed the same course (read first by ordinary novel-readers and afterwards by children) as the fairy tales. There were also English imitations, of which *Nourjahad*, by Frances Sheridan, mother of the playwright, enjoyed great fame, and gave us the play of *Illusion* (which West wrongly remembered to be the source of his first twopenny portrait). The most successful imitation, however, was James Ridley's *Tales of the Genii*, an important source for *The Forty Thieves* (see nos 88–92).

### 78. Aladdin

Plate 2 of miniature characters (338 × 192). Coloured Collection of Barry Clarke

*Aladdin* was one of the very few pieces that Charles Farley ever put his name to as author, though he was the moving spirit behind many others (see no. 70). First produced at Covent Garden on Easter Monday 1813 (with music by H. Condell and W. Ware), the play had a long career both in the real and the toy theatre. Although not a pantomime (it is, rather, a Grand Oriental Spectacle), Farley's piece went on to exert a profound influence on Victorian and modern pantomime versions of the story



and the name Abanazar was invented by Farley for the 'African Magician', the part he was intending to play. As so often with the best-known toy theatre titles, West's response was surprisingly muted. Perhaps because he had issued sheets for a previous dramatization of the story produced at the New Theatre, Tottenham Street, in 1811, his

only response to one of the biggest events of 1813 was to produce some portraits and a couple of sheets of processions. Fortunately West's rivals (Hebberd, Jameson and Perkins) were less cautious. At length, in 1816, West produced some miniature characters and small scenes.

### 79. *Aladdin*

Cottage Scene (243 × 298). Coloured  
Collection of Peter Baldwin

### 80–82. *The Casket of Gloriana*

Plates 1 (243 × 197) 2 (243 × 198) & 3 (243 × 198) of characters. Plain. Collection of David Robinson

H. R. Beverley's *The Casket of Gloriana; or, The Geni and the Black Enchanter* was produced at the Regency Theatre, Tottenham Street, in 1819. The theatre (previously known as the New Theatre: see no. 78) was currently being run by the Beverley family (see nos 46–48), and this was one of the excellent productions eagerly seized on by West. His current artist, Charles Tomkins, produced three plates of characters (but no scenes) in fine style. The combination of a Tottenham Street production and a Tomkins set of characters, as found in *Jack the Giant Killer* (see no. 176), invariably produces a treat.



### ORIENTAL ON HORSEBACK

In 1811 lovers of the classic drama (a diminishing but very vocal band of theatre-goers and critics) were outraged when the hallowed boards of Drury Lane and Covent Garden were opened to troops of horses from Astley's Amphitheatre, as the chief attraction in specially-written or specially-adapted equine spectacles. Two of the earliest equestrianised pieces were the oriental favourites, *Blue Beard* and *The Forty Thieves*.

*The next most taking play out of my shop [after The Miller and his Men] has been Blue*

*Beard. That the boys like for the purcession over the mountain – a coming to take Fatima away – and then there's the blue champer with the skelingtons in it – that's werry good too – and has an uncommon pretty effect with a little blue fire, though it in general sets all the haudience a sneezing. The next best after that was The Forty Thieves – they likes that there, for the fairy grotto and the scenery is werry pretty throughout. Then again, the story pleases the children uncommon – it's a werry good one I call it.* (HM p. 119.)

### 83. *Blue Beard*

Plate 1 of characters (double plate). (238 × 338). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

The tale of *Bluebeard* is from the French fairy-tale repertoire. Like *Cinderella*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Little Red Riding Hood*, it is one of the 'Mother Goose' stories of Charles Perrault. The fairy-tale vogue and the oriental vogue, which ran parallel with each other during the eighteenth century, were apt to exert a mutual influence. In 1771 Grétry's operatic treatment of *Beauty and the Beast* placed the story in an oriental setting, a sea-change which influenced many English stage treatments and illustrations of the same story. Grétry left *Bluebeard* as a Frenchman in his *Raoul Barbe-bleue* (1789), but in 1798 George Colman the Younger out-orientalised the French by producing his operatic drama *Blue Beard* as an eastern spectacle. The influence of this metamorphosis was both immediate and permanent, so that both on stage and in children's

books *Bluebeard* remained 'the thousand and second Arabian Night' throughout the nineteenth century.

The earliest illustrations in children's books not only show theatrical influence, but sometimes advertise it in a surprisingly explicit manner. Thus Tabart's edition of *Blue Beard* (1804) is adorned with 'plates, taken from the splendid pageant represented at the Theatre-Royal Drury Lane', in other words from Colman's play.

As with all the 'most taking' plays in West's repertory, the history of his various versions of *Blue Beard* is very complicated. The play was revived at Covent Garden in February 1811, and in March was made the subject of one of West's earliest souvenir sheets. It is divided into boxes and marked 'Pl. 5', because this is before West 'left off numbering' his prints. The following year he issued four plates of Grand Procession, four little plates of horses, and five large scenes (some of the earliest ever published). Yet it was not until 1821–22 that he issued four plates of characters in a more worthy style. As far as miniature characters are concerned, West issued three plates of Grand Procession and one of horses in c.1814, a plate of characters and a different (smaller) plate of characters both in 1815, and a folio plate and a quarto plate of characters both in 1825. A set of five small scenes seems to have been issued c.1815, and a further set of eight plus wings in 1821–22. The latter, and also both lots of 1825 characters, are signed by T. Layton (see no. 146).



#### 84. *Blue Beard*

Scene No. 2 (with two wings). (245 × 396). Plain  
Collection of George Speaight

#### 85. *Blue Beard*

Scene No. 5 (with wing). (195 × 233). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

#### 86. *Blue Beard*

Battlements Scene (mounted, and wing removed)  
(177 × 177). Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

#### 87. *Combat in Blue Beard, 1818*

Inscribed: *Perf. at Regency Th. with unbounded applause  
Blue Beard Mr H. Beverly/ Abdellak the Prince Mr Lewis/  
W West Del.* (255 × 348). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

#### 88–90. *The Forty Thieves*

Plates 6 (246 × 195) 7 (243 × 195) & 8 (245 × 195)  
of characters. Coloured  
Collection of Peter Baldwin

Like *Aladdin*, *The Forty Thieves* is one of the best-known stories in the *Arabian Nights*. The present adaptation was conceived by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, though his rough notes were worked up by other hands, originally by his son-in-law C. Ward. Ward's efforts, however, proved somewhat feeble, and the project had to be finished off by George Colman the younger, who, as the author of *Blue Beard*, was suitably experienced. The resulting conglomeration was performed (with the authorship left anonymous) at Drury Lane in 1806, and became a long-lived and influential piece. *The Forty Thieves* borrowed the idea of having embodiments of good and evil to preside over the action from James Ridley's *Tales of the Genii*, one of the more successful English imitations of the *Nights*. The device was adopted by pantomime, possibly via the present play, and has given us Fairy Queens and Demon Kings by the thousand.



The publishing history of West's *Forty Thieves* is again rather complicated. In 1819 West commissioned Charles Tomkins to produce five plates of full-size characters and three plates of miniature characters in the piece. The larger characters were evidently so successful that in 1825 West added two plates of Horse and Foot Banditti, and in 1827 got William Heath to produce three further plates of characters to go with Tomkins's original five. The styles of the two artists do not match especially well, but both produced excellent work, so that the result is a somewhat two-headed masterpiece. West also added scenes to both large and small characters by a number of different artists at a variety of dates. The play was taken up by nearly all the later toy theatre publishers, and became another of the great classics of the juvenile stage.

#### 91. *The Forty Thieves*

Plate 3 of miniature characters. (245 × 195). Plain  
Collection of Peter Baldwin

#### 92. *The Forty Thieves*

Scene (259 × 307). Coloured  
Collection of Peter Baldwin

#### 93. *Timour the Tartar*

Plate 3 of miniature characters. (212 × 341). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

One of the earliest and most successful of the specially-written equestrian pieces was 'Monk' Lewis's *Timour the Tartar*, produced at Covent Garden in April 1811. In May, West produced two plates of characters, engraved by Wright of 32 Duke Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. In March 1812 the piece, which had dismayed its opponents by being extravagantly successful, was revived at the same theatre, and in April West responded by publishing some large scenes and wings. This appears to be the first set of scenery ever published for the toy theatre. In 1827 West published three folio plates of miniature characters, but this time there were no accompanying scenes.



## ORIENTAL: TIPPOO SAHIB

When Hyder Ali became Sultan of Mysore in 1761, the British Empire in India found it had a powerful enemy. Hyder was succeeded by his son Tippoo Sahib in 1782, but the conflict was not resolved until the storming of Seringapatam and the death of Tippoo in 1799. The reaction of the London theatres to Indian matters during Tippoo's lifetime, such as the storming of Bangalore in 1791, had tended towards the facetious. In 1823, however, two decades after the end of the Sultan's reign, H. M. Milner's *Tippoo Sahib; or, The Storming of Seringapatam* was produced at the Coburg Theatre. Not that the theatre was incapable of contemporary *reportage*, for the same period also saw J. H. Amherst's *The Death of Christophe, King of Haiti* produced at the Coburg in 1821, and J. H. Payne and J. R. Planché's *Ali Pacha; or, The Signet Ring* at Covent Garden in 1822. A toy theatre version of *The Death of Christophe* was published by West, and versions of *Ali Pacha* and *Tippoo Sahib* by Hodgson and Co. Hodgson also published a penny portrait of Mr Anderton as Tippoo Sahib, but later, when Milner's piece was revived at Astley's, West published a portrait of Mr Cartlich in the same role. John Cartlich, a product of the Richardson's Show school of acting, was fair of form and loud of voice, embodying

in one person the contradictions of the tutelary genius of Astley's.

Sir John Soane's collection includes ivory and bone chairs (of Indo-Portuguese workmanship) captured from Tippoo's palace after the storming of Seringapatam.

### 94. *Combat, Tippoo Saib*

(218 × 252). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

### 95. *Hodgson and Co., Mr Anderton as Tippoo Saib*

(238 × 190). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

### 96. *Mr Cartlich as Tippoo Saib*

(238 × 187). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson



## OPERATIC

*'As a dashing white sergeant I'd  
march away.'*

Music was an essential part of the theatrical experience at this period, and most London theatres kept singers and dancers on their payroll in addition to the regular acting company. The music used to accompany performances was very eclectic. By the late Georgian period the canon of Shakespeare's plays was encrusted with successive layers of music going back to the period of Locke and Purcell. More recent additions were by Arne (whose Shakespeare settings are still familiar as concert items), Boyce, Linley, Davy, Bishop, Cooke and numerous others. Most plays had at least a modicum of incidental music, and there was a concurrent tradition of English 'comic opera'. There is a problem of terminology with what English composers of this period would have called their 'operas'. These pieces tended to have more music in them than we should now expect in a spoken play, but less than we should demand in an opera. As far as Bishop was concerned, his setting of *The Miller and his Men* was an opera, despite having only four sung pieces in the first act and none in the second. For more full-blooded operatic fare, the English stage looked to the Italian Opera, and adapted the more promising pieces, often very heavily, to suit its own requirements. Thus English composers, such as Bishop and Cooke, as well as writing their own music, were kept busy tinkering with that of their foreign rivals.

### 97 & 98. *The Libertine*

Castle Scene (255 × 305) & Statue Scene (241 × 303)  
(cut down for mounting). Coloured  
Collection of Barry Clarke

Despite the ease with which they now tower over their contemporaries, the operas of Mozart were slow to make headway in the English-speaking world. *Don Giovanni*, which dates from 1787, was not presented at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket (home of Italian opera) until April 1817, although it then took only six weeks for it to be presented in an English form. This first English adaptation was made by the ever-busy Pocock, and produced at Covent Garden. It was called *The Libertine*, because Pocock used



Shadwell's old play of that name (itself a derivative of Molière's *Le festin de pierre*) as the foundation of his version. To suit the mixed company of actors and singers maintained by the theatre, the piece was part-sung and part-spoken. The result has been endlessly vilified by historians of opera, but it was entirely characteristic of its period, and thoroughly successful, marking the real beginning of the vogue for Mozart's operas in this country. West's version is normally said to consist of three sheets of characters and no scenes, but two scenes attributed to West survive in the collection of Barry Clarke. Both these scenes have lost their titles, but 'The Libertine' has been added in pencil on the verso of each sheet. Apart from West, only Mrs Jameson produced a version of the piece, unless we include *Don Giovanni*; or, *A Spectre on Horseback* (T. J. Dibdin's burlesque), which was covered by Hodgson and Co., and *The Feast of the Statue*; or, *Harlequin Libertine*, a Drury Lane pantomime which was again covered by Mrs Jameson.

### 99. Mr T. P. Cooke as Zamiel

(268 × 212). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

When Weber's *Der Freischütz* was produced in Berlin in 1821, it spread round the theatres of Germany like wildfire. It reached London three years later, theatre after theatre producing its own version of the piece. Neither West, nor Jameson, nor Hodgson produced a toy theatre version of this key romantic work (some of them, perhaps all, were having business difficulties just at that point), though later publishers more than made up for the omission. However, West did produce a twopenny portrait of T. P. Cooke as Zamiel, the dark huntsman, one of the supernatural roles in which the actor specialised before becoming associated with nautical characters. It is from the English Opera House (Lyceum) version of the piece, which was the first and most influential English production.



### 100. Signor Velluta as Armand D'Orville, 1826

(268 × 208). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

*Il Crociato in Egitto* was first produced in Venice in March 1824, and came to the

King's Theatre in the Haymarket, London, in July 1825. Its interest is as much sociological as musical, in that the part of Armand d'Orville was specially written by Meyerbeer for Giovanni Battista Velluti, the last of the *castrati* to appear on the opera stage. (The *castrato* tradition was maintained for nearly a century longer in the less fashion-conscious environment of the Sistine Chapel.) The toy theatre publishers rarely went directly to the opera house for inspiration, and usually waited for operas and ballets to be adopted (and adapted) by the regular theatres before taking any notice of them. The present venture by West (albeit a twopenny portrait, and therefore aimed at a slightly superior class of purchaser) comes as a surprise therefore. The mis-spelling of the singer's name is characteristic of the period, in so far that, because even upper-class speakers were very careless about the pronunciation of final syllables of this sort, there was a consequent vagueness when words had to be written down.



**101. Mr Braham as Sir Huon of Bordeaux in Oberon, 1826**

(269 × 218). Plain  
Collection of Peter Baldwin

The run-away success of *Der Freischütz* encouraged the admirers of Weber's music to hope that *Oberon*, a piece specially composed for England, might be successful. This opera was to be Weber's swan-song (he was gravely ill by this time). The libretto of *Oberon*; or, *The Elf-King's Oath* was written by J. R. Planché, whose work was based on a poem by C. M. Wieland, and the result was performed at Covent Garden in 1826, with the composer conducting. It was well received, though the excitement generated by the ultra-romantic *Der Freischütz* was not recaptured. *Oberon* was extravagantly mounted, perhaps too extravagantly to be a candidate for the juvenile stage, but West produced four twopenny portraits of the principal performers. All are probably the work of William Heath, and three are signed 'WH'.

**102. Mr Hemming as Robert, Duke of Normandy, 1832**

(244 × 198). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* (Paris, 1831) is no less a key romantic work than *Der Freischütz*, though it is even more neglected by opera houses and recording companies today. The original Paris production inaugurated, at one blow, the reign of Grand Opera and the era of the Romantic Ballet. As with Weber's piece, versions of *Robert the Devil* were attempted at a number of London theatres during the season of 1831–32, but, sadly, no version was ever transferred to the toy theatre. The Adelphi production, *Robert le Diable*; or, *The Devil's Son*, by Edward Fitzball



and J. B. Buckstone, was the most stylish, and inspired a number of theatrical portraits, including West's penny one of Mr Hemmings. The mystic cypress-branch, which features so importantly in the ballet scenes of the opera, is very much in evidence here, and may be fruitfully compared with the two branches of myrtle hurled into the wings by Myrthe, Queen of the Wilis, at the beginning of the second act of *Giselle*. West was now operating under the name of Stokes, and a companion portrait from the same piece (Mr Yates as the Fiend) may actually have been the last single portrait published by him under any name.

It is interesting that in his portrait of Mr Hemming, West strikingly anticipates the typical posture ('with one leg straight and one leg bent') and naïve drawing of so many portraits by later publishers.

**LIGHT OPERATIC**

**103 & 104. Olympic Revels**

Plate 1 of characters. (191 × 238). Coloured  
Scene 3 (202 × 252). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

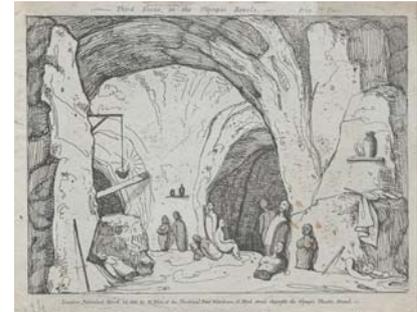
This sprightly piece of classical burlesque celebrates the fact that Madame Vestris had just become the first ever female lessee of a London theatre. She took on the Olympic Theatre, opposite West's shop, and *Olympic Revels*; or, *Prometheus and Pandora* was written by J. R. Planché and Charles Dance for the grand re-opening of the theatre just after New Year 1831. It was the first of a long series of 'extravanzas' by Planché, which were highly successful, exerting an enormous influence over the allied genre of pantomime. Considering that West's business seems to have been in some difficulties at the time, his response was commendably whole-hearted. He immediately produced a set of miniature characters and small scenes, and the next year (by which time he was operating under the name of Stokes) a further set of full-size characters and large scenes. All these characters and scenes are probably by



William Heath, and the two successive versions bring West's career as an impresario of the toy stage to a brilliant artistic (if not commercial) conclusion.

**105. Olympic Revels**

Scene 2 (258 × 318) with playbook. Coloured  
Collection of Barry Clarke



**106. New Miniature Portraits of Mme Vestris, 1831**

(162 × 379). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

The enterprising firm of Park & Golding had recently begun producing 'Sixes', six miscellaneous theatrical characters on one sheet ('Fours' were to follow by the mid-1830s). The present sheet seems to be West's unorthodox response to this challenge. Taking arithmetic as one's guide, the sheet can only be classified as one of Fours, but the arrangement, with all four figures in a long line, is both without precedent and without successor. Technicalities apart, the print is a charming evocation of Madame Vestris, 'lessee-lady' of the Olympic Theatre, and the most captivating female 'star' of the period. The roles in which she is depicted not only show us something of Vestris's range (three female parts and one 'principal boy'), but also the range of light operatic fare that was available to the English theatre-goers of her day. Blonda in *The Seraglio* is from the earliest English adaptation of Mozart's *Il Seraglio* (known now as *Die Entführung*), while Elizabeth in *The Sublime and Beautiful* is from a home-grown musical piece. Apollo in *Midas* is from Kane O'Hara's old ballad opera, and Pandora in *Olympic Revels* from Planché's new extravaganza, though both new and old works are pieces of classical burlesque, which look forward to Offenbach's *Orphée aux Enfers* and Gilbert and Sullivan's *Thespis*.



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**1c7. Mr Liston as Moll Flaggon, 1824**

(265 x 203). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

*The Lord of the Manor* is a 'comic opera', in other words a light musical piece written to a libretto in English. The type was enormously prevalent on the Georgian stage, though it tends to be overlooked by historians of the theatre. The present piece was originally written by General Burgoyne, fresh from his lack of triumphs in America, and performed at Drury Lane in 1780. The music was by William Jackson, known in church music circles as 'Jackson of Exeter'. A revised version of the piece was produced in 1812 by Charles Dibdin the younger. The Napoleonic wars were by then in full swing, and one of Dibdin's new lyrics was 'The Dashing White Sergeant', with music by Bishop. The song became a lasting success, and its tune survives in the Scottish country dance repertory, as well as on the parade ground. John Liston, Covent Garden's great low comedian, is here seen, as so often, in 'drag'. His part is that of Moll Flaggon the sutler (or *vivandière*, as this species of camp-follower was known to the Victorians). It is often assumed that the tradition of 'dame' and 'principal boy' parts belongs in some special way to the world of pantomime, but it would be nearer the truth to say that pantomime is the last resting-place for an ancient tradition of theatrical cross-dressing, which extends back to the Restoration (in the case of women-as-boys) and infinitely beyond (in that of men-as-old-women).

**NAUTICAL**

*'All in the Downs the fleet was moor'd.'*

The English stage-sailor existed in embryo as far back as the character of Ben in Congreve's *Love for Love*, but it was towards the end of the eighteenth century that the character finally became established in the public mind. This was the result not only of Britain's increasing dominance at sea, finally confirmed by the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, but also of the numberless nautical songs written and performed by Charles Dibdin (father of the two dramatists so often mentioned in these notes) in his one-man entertainments. The greatest outpouring of nautical drama did not come until the 1820s. South of the Thames, it was associated with the Surrey Theatre (hence 'transpontine melodrama'), but the Adelphi created something of a speciality by offering West End audiences a stylish and sophisticated version of the same thing. The genre lasted for the rest of the century, and was still a sitting target for Gilbert and Sullivan in H.M.S. *'Pinafore'*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, and *Ruddigore*.

**1c8. Robinson Crusoe, 1819**

Plate 1 of characters. (238 x 188). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

It was the habit of Covent Garden to stage an Easter melodrama, in which those performers who had adorned the theatre's pantomime at Christmas could give full vent to

their otherwise under-exploited mime skills. Farley's *Aladdin* of 1813 was a very successful example, as were later productions such as *Undine* and *Cherry and Fair Star*. *Robinson Crusoe; or, The Bold Bucaniers* was taken by Isaac Pocock from the French of Pixierécourt, whose play was taken from Defoe's novel. The resulting piece is a genuine melodrama (or 'melo-drame', as the word was still written), mixing dialogue with mimed action. It was a lasting success, with West only the first of many toy theatre publishers to seize on it. As so often, his response was slightly delayed, but magnificent when it came. In 1819 he published two versions simultaneously: three plates of full-size characters, and a single plate of miniature characters (with a set of small scenes). These all appear to be the work of Charles Tomkins, and provide a rare example of toy theatre scenery drawn by



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this artist-engraver who would soon be finding fame as a scene-painter in the real theatre. No large scenes by West are recorded for this play, and, with the exception of a pre-Farley version by Mrs Jameson (which is unlikely to have had scenery), the only version by a contemporary of West is that of Hodgson and Co. The play was later tackled by Skelt and some of the penny packet publishers.

### 109. *Robinson Crusoe*

Scene 7. (198 × 245). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

### 110. *La Perouse*

Plate 1 of characters. (147 × 196). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

La Perouse was an explorer, whose mysterious disappearance left room for dramatists (notably the arch-romantic Kotzebue) to speculate on his fate. A very successful serio-pantomime was created from the story at Covent Garden in 1801; but West's *La Perouse* is the 'Grand Historical Ballet' performed at the English Opera House (the Lyceum, in other words) in 1818. His three plates of characters are evidently the work of Charles Tomkins. The play was also treated by Mrs Jameson.

### 111. *Mr Gallot as Jack Junk (In the Floating Beacon), 1830*

(257 × 188). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

John Howison was a minor member of the

circle of Walter Scott, and spent much time in various parts of the colonies. Two of the short stories which he contributed to the newly-founded *Blackwood's Magazine* were to have an immense influence of the real and toy stages. The more important was 'Vanderdecken's Message Home', which led to Fitzball's (and hence to Wagner's) *Flying Dutchman*. The less important was 'The Floating Beacon', which led to Fitzball's melodrama of the same name, though the brooding menace and undertones of sexual violence which distinguish Howison's original tale are ruthlessly excised by Fitzball, and the result is a jolly, if rather pointless, nautical piece. *The Floating Beacon; or, The Norwegian Wreckers* was produced at the Surrey Theatre on Easter Monday 1824, and the role of Jack Junk became popular with several generations of actors. Mr Gallot was the stage-manager of the Adelphi, and performed the part when the piece was revived at that theatre in 1829. West produced no toy theatre version, (an omission repaired by later publishers), but in 1830 he did issue this portrait as no. 111 of his twopenny series of 'likenesses'. As West reveals in his interview with Mayhew, this was to be the very last entry in the series – he would soon be finding it difficult to sell prints at so high a price as a penny.

### 112. *The Pilot*

Plate 5. (238 × 197). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

Oddly enough, the origins of the English stage-sailor were not always very English.

Two early novels by the American author James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover*, provided an inspiration to the English stage, although many readers professed to find them impenetrable. Fitzball's *The Pilot; or, A Tale of the Sea* was performed at the Adelphi in 1825, and was immediately successful in the real and toy theatres, although it only just made it into the 'halfpenny' period of the latter. West published a set of full-size characters and large scenes in 1828–29, to which he added a set of small scenes (mostly published under the name of Stokes) in 1831–33. Probably all of these characters and scenes are the work of William Heath.

### 113 & 114. *Casco Bay*

Plates 1 (242 × 195) & 5 (241 × 198) of characters  
Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

*Casco Bay; or, The Mutineers of 1727* is based on an almost-forgotten incident which took place in North America a hundred years before the play was produced. This centenary melodrama was written by William Bayle Bernard, and performed at the Olympic Theatre in 1827. Like *The Wild Man of Bohemia*, it shows that all was not gloom at the theatre opposite West's shop before Vestris appeared on the scene. The fate of the play was a strange one: it has a place in theatre history for being the first piece to run 140 nights consecutively, yet no one ever seems to have attempted a revival once the record-breaking initial run was over. (*The Beggar's Opera* held the record throughout the eighteenth century with 62 nights, and in 1821–22 the Adelphi version of *Life in London* had been the first piece to run 100 nights.) At all events West produced excellent souvenirs of the play, and immedi-



ately published eight plates of full-size characters, with sets of large and small scenes. All these appear to be the work of William Heath. As with *The Pilot*, there seem to be no miniature characters to go with the small scenes.

**115. *The Red Rover***

Plate 2 of characters. (243 x 196). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

*The Red Rover; or, The Mutiny of the Dolphin* was Fitzball's second successful dramatization of a novel by Cooper, and was produced at the Adelphi in 1829. West's response (a mixed one, by his earlier standards) was eight plates of full-size characters and a set of small scenes. All seem to be the work of William Heath. The play went on to become a major classic of the toy theatre, right up to the age of the boys' magazines and penny packets.

**116. *The Red Rover***

Explosion Scene. (197 x 245). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

**117. *Mr Yates as the Red Rover, 1829***

(238 x 192). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

**118. *Black Eyed Susan***

Plate 6 of characters. (238 x 197). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

John Gay is now popularly regarded as a one-work author, on account of his perennial *Beggar's Opera*. However, many of his other writings retained their popularity into the nineteenth century, including his verse *Fables* and his ballad of 'Black-Ey'd Susan', an early attempt at literary ballad-writing. Unlike many literary ballads, people actually sang it, and it was set to music by at least three composers during Gay's own brief lifetime. The production liked best by posterity was the one by Leveridge (of 'The



Roast Beef of England' celebrity), no doubt because it best captured the 'folk' quality of Gay's lyric. It was this century-old ballad which Douglas Jerrold used as the basis for what was to become the most popular of all nautical dramas, *Black Eyed Susan; or, All in the Downs*, produced at the Surrey Theatre on Whit Monday 1829. West's toy theatre version followed immediately, and was evidently successful because, having announced six plates of full-size characters, he went on to produce eight, adding a set of large scenes, and a further set of small scenes. Such is the quality of Jerrold's writing, that his drama not only became a classic of the real and toy theatres, but is a unique example of a play of the period still regularly performed by both live and cardboard thespians.



**119. *Mr T. P. Cooke as William in Black Eyed Susan, 1827***

(265 x 213). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

West's penny portrait of T. P. Cooke as 'William that married Susan' shows this fine actor in his most famous part, which he played an astonishing 750 times.



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**12c. The Red Rover**

(200 x 242). Wings. Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson



**BRIGANDS**

*'Away to the mountain's brow!'*

The grit in the oyster of romanticism was regularly supplied by the histories of criminals which could be found collected



in *The Newgate Calendar* and *The Lives of the Pirates and Highwaymen*. From such sources came *Blackbeard the Pirate*, *Lolonois*; or, *The Bucaniers of 1660* and *The Dutch Pirate Charles de Voldeck*, as well as *Jack Sheppard*, *Richard Turpin* and *Jonathan Bradford*. Even an unpromising work such as *Dr Moseley's Treatise on Sugar* could come up trumps, in this case providing the basis for *Obi*; or, *Three-Fingered Jack*, a tale of voodoo and slave rebellion. However, our native pirates and highwayman faced formidable rivalry in the form of the exotic (and therefore even more romantic) figure of the Brigand.

**121 & 122. The Brigand**

Plate 3 (191 x 242) and another, of characters & 'Brigands, going to Battle' character sheet. (183 x 242) Plain. Collection of David Robinson



Brigands had been a theme of art ever since Salvator Rosa, but the Swiss painter Léopold Robert had more recently brought them into fashion again and during West's time there was a vogue, in artistic circles, for *genre* pictures of brigands standing guard, giving battle, carousing, reposing, or just posing. In brigand-infested Italy itself the prints of Pinelli catered to this taste, while back at home the paintings of Charles Eastlake, who had drawn his brigands from real-life specimens, did much the same thing, albeit with the underlying eroticism of the subject suppressed. In the theatre a fashion for embodying paintings on the stage was about to emerge (Douglas Jerrold's *The Rent Day*, 1831, based on a pair of pictures by David Wilkie, is an early, text-book example), and J. R. Planché foreshadowed this fashion with *The Brigand Chief*, a play which puts Eastlake's brigands on stage, but allows us to view part of the story through the eyes of a pair of art-students who wander helplessly in and out of the action. A great feature of the piece was that the situations of Eastlake's paintings, all the better known for being available as mezzotint reproductions, were realised from time to time in the stage action. The play was staged at Drury Lane in 1829, and by the time West produced his toy theatre version in 1831 the title had been abbreviated to its more familiar form, *The Brigand*. West's prints follow the usual pattern of his later career: eight plates of full-size characters with a set of large scenes, followed by a set of small scenes (with no accompanying miniature characters). A number of versions by other publishers followed, including that of Skelt, which appears to derive from a quite different version of the play, possibly a rival version staged at the Surrey or one of the other minor theatres.

**HORSES:  
DUCROW**

*'Cut the dialect and come to the 'osses!'*

When juvenile prints started to be published, the attitude of theatre managers varied between support and hostility, as the story of Glossop and Barrymore (see no. 57) illustrates. The situation can be compared to the arrival of gramophone records at the end of the century: should they be regarded as a threat to live entertainment, or as a form of free publicity? There was never any doubt, however, about the enduring good relations which existed between Astley's Amphitheatre

and the toy theatre publishers. The happy partnership began when John Astley, son of the original proprietor Philip, advised the ambitious young artist William Heath to take his drawings to West. This partnership continued until the era of the Crimean war, when Green's version of *The Battles of Balaklava and Inkerman* was proudly headed 'As Performed at ASTLEY'S Royal Amphitheatre'. In the 1820s, when Andrew Ducrow took over the direction of the theatre, West had an even more sympathetic friend at court. Ducrow had nursed artistic interests as a child, though these had been crushed by his brutal father who was determined that his son should follow in his footsteps as a circus performer. Frustration is often a spur to achievement, however, and Ducrow had taken his inherited trade of trick-riding and turned it into a universally admired theatrical art. The author is here indebted to Professor A. H. Saxon's *The Life and Art of Andrew Ducrow and the Romantic Age of the English Circus* (1978).

**123. M. Ducrow's Equestrian Scene of the Indian & Wild Horses**

(332 x 463). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

'This here print', he continued as he turned over the different copies before him, 'was done for me by a Royal Academician of the name of Mr. —; it's Ducrow in the scene of the 'Injun [Injun?] and the Wild Oss.' You see, sir, Mr. Ducrow paid for it being done by my man, and giv it away on his benefit night, and I had the plate of him afterwards. This is a late production, so you can see the improvement.' (HM p. 118.)

The Indian Hunter is one of Ducrow's 'equestrian scenes in the circle'. During these mini-dramas on horseback Ducrow could display his genius as a rider and as an artistic performer. It was in about 1820, during a protracted visit to France, that he started to perform these 'histories on horseback'. 'Le Chasseur indien' was one of a number of acts developed in France during the early 1820s, and subsequently brought to England. During this act Ducrow did the splits (or *grand écart*) while straddling two horses at once. It was presumably for a benefit night in the mid-1820s that Ducrow commissioned this large print from West. This impression may be one of the prints given away on that occasion, since it is printed rather untidily (the sides of the plate not having been wiped clean all round),



perhaps a result of the haste that was necessary to have many hundreds of copies ready to be given away all at once. When the print was published in the regular way by West, no imprint was ever added, since there was insufficient space, and such a grand print would have been spoiled by having lettering added at the top or side.

**124. Skelt's Mr Ducrow as the Courier of St Petersburg**

(177 x 315). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

From two horses to three was a natural progression, and in 'The Chinese Enchanter', first performed at Astley's in 1826, Ducrow, attired in a splendid oriental costume, rode three horses abreast, standing with a foot on each of the outside ones. He then shifted his footing as the animals repeatedly changed

places. Eventually he would relinquish one of them, and continue the performance on the remaining two, 'terminating with the GRAND ÉCART'. The scene was no mere exhibition of trick horsemanship, however, since it also boasted a plot almost too complicated to be expressed in mime.

After three horses, what next? 'The Courier of St Petersburg' was first performed for Ducrow's benefit at his Fashionable Arena in Manchester on 19 March 1827. In it he was announced to ride 'Four Ramping Horses at once, put out at their fleetest speed.' At Astley's, where he first performed the scene on 7 May, he increased the number of horses to five. The climax of the act was when Ducrow gathered up the reins and, in a pose worthy of the Colossus of Rhodes, actually straddled the backs of five rushing horses. The





act continued to develop as the season progressed. In July first one and eventually as many as four more horses were let into the ring bringing the total to than nine, with Ducrow snatching up the reins of the new arrivals as they passed between his legs. The scene was performed to specially-composed music by Chevalier Lorentio.

One of Ducrow's distinctions as a performer was that of being the only *artiste* to have a whole series of portraits devoted to him. About twenty of these penny horse portraits were published c.1830 by Lloyd, after the designs of W. Cocking (or, less often, his brother R. Cocking). They were republished c.1835 by the Skelt family, who got their own artists to add a few further portraits, as well as issuing a separate series of halfpenny prints. Plates 17 and 18 of the original series are Nos 1 and 2 of Ducrow as the Courier of St Petersburg, and Plate 18 (No. 2) served as a pattern for the celebrated 'Ducrow clock'.

### 125. The 'Ducrow clock'

Rosewood and inlaid brass (431 x 356 x 152)  
Collection of David Robinson

The representation of Ducrow in 'The Courier of St Petersburg' corresponds exactly to one of the Lloyd (afterwards Skelt) prints of him in this role. It is therefore obvious that the print served as a pattern for this elegant clock design, which most probably dates from the early 1830s.

There are a number of other examples of this clock some, like this, with the figures executed in brass on wood, and others with wood inlaid into brass, with the eyes, buttons, and harness trappings of rider and horses highlighted by brass and copper nails. In these two types of clock, the figures travel in different directions. Evidently the thrifty cabinetmaker, after cutting out the

brass design for one clock, then went on to use the discarded rectangular plate for a second. As the plate had probably been scratched on the one side while cutting out the inlay for the first clock, it was turned over for use in the second, with the result that the direction taken by Ducrow and his horses became reversed. In theory, therefore, there should be a positive clock for each negative one.

There seems to have been less economy and more variety employed in the design of the rest of the clock. Few of the extant clocks possess their original movements, nor do they tend to survive in working order.

### 126. Mr Ducrow as Omrah with his Charger, 1828

(241 x 201). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

At Astley's in July 1828, Ducrow presented a showy scene entitled 'Regee Päk; or, The Omrah's Charger'. This was devised as a way of introducing a Persian steed he had recently brought up and trained. The scene featured the pampered animal being escorted and waited on by a numerous train of grooms, guards and footmen in oriental costumes with Ducrow himself among

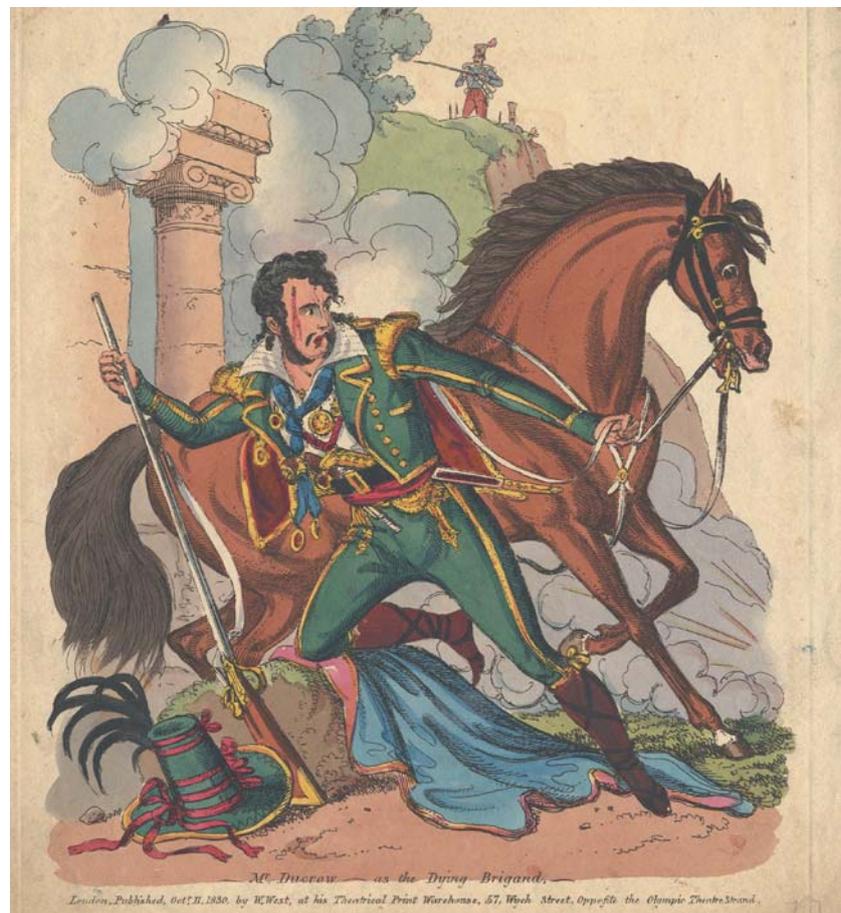
them as Meerza-Beg, Meer-Akhoor, or Master of the Horse. West's penny portrait was issued some two months later.

## BRIGANDS ON HORSEBACK: DUCROW

### 127. Mr Ducrow as the Dying Brigand, 1830

(253 x 215). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

'The Guerilla's Steed; or, The Death of the Brigand' was produced for Ducrow's benefit at Astley's on 13 September 1830. A month or so later West issued two penny portraits, one showing the brigand at full gallop and the other showing him dying by his horse's side. Like Planché's play *The Brigand*, Ducrow's equestrian scene was based on Eastlake's 'banditti' pictures. It was asserted to be 'his Thirty-eighth Scenic Invention of the Arena'.



## ARMIES ON HORSEBACK: BATTLE PLAYS

'Gloires militaires'

### 128. *The Invasion of Russia*

Plate 6 of miniature characters. (209 × 335). Coloured  
Collection of Barry Clarke

On Easter Monday 1824, Astley's Amphitheatre (then operating as Davis's) enjoyed one of its greatest and most lasting successes with *The Battle of Waterloo*. Toy theatre versions were duly produced by West and other publishers, and the play has rarely been out of print. For its Easter Monday opening the following year, the Amphitheatre staged *Buonaparte's Invasion of Russia*. Like all follow-ups, it was lavishly mounted, with great hopes of repeating the success of the previous piece. It was no match for its predecessor, however, and though West and Jameson both produced versions, it did not go into the later toy theatre repertory. West's treatment was in 6 sheets of miniature characters and 16 small scenes, so that full justice was done to the lavishness of the staging. The characters are attributed to William Heath, and the scenes, though all signed 'W. West. Fect.' are no doubt by Heath also.

### 129 & 130. *The Invasion of Russia*

Scenes 9 (179 × 215) & 11 (179 × 215). Coloured  
Collection of Barry Clarke



## OTHER ANIMALS

'Bring forth the Royal Elephant!'

Horses were not the only animals to grace the Regency stage. Dogs had their day, notably in *The Forest of Bondy*, while a mechanical bird was essential to *The Maid and the Magpie* (Rossini's *La gazza ladra*). A man in a monkey skin was the mainstay of *The Dumb Savoyard* (also, though less famously, of *La Perouse*: see no. 110). Even lions and tigers were 'encountered' by their tamers in specially-written dramas, so that it comes as no surprise to find so docile a creature as the elephant starring in a series of spectacular pieces from *Harlequin and Padmanaba* (see no. 155) onwards.

### 131. *The Elephant of Siam*

Plate 11 of characters. (243 × 200). Coloured  
Collection of George Speaight

*The Elephant of Siam; or, The Fire-Fiend*, by Samuel Beazley junior, was produced at the Adelphi just before Christmas 1829, and was derived from a piece presented the previous July at the Cirque Olympique, Paris. West's version of this spectacle was announced as being 'in 12 Plates' of characters, but a further two were added, a sure sign that West liked the play and that it sold well. The characters are arranged so that the star of the show, Chuny the Elephant, appears on every sheet. The characters are almost certainly the work of William Heath, though several plates are signed 'W. West'. A set of large scenes accompanies the characters, and all of them are signed 'W. West'. The only other toy theatre version was produced by Marks.

### 132. *The Elephant of Siam*

Plate 12 of characters. (241 × 388). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson



### 133. *The Elephant of Siam*

Scene 9th. (241 × 388). Coloured  
Collection of George Speaight



## REPORTAGE: THE CORONATION

'God save the King!'

The reputation which the British now enjoy for brilliantly staged ceremonial does not in reality date back much further than the Edwardian era. Queen Victoria's coronation was a somewhat bungled affair (some people forgetting things, others falling over), and her predecessor William IV seriously asked whether the ceremony could not be dispensed with altogether. The only exception to this wave of Hanoverian indifference was George IV, whose love of display found its natural expression in a coronation which he not only required to be done well, but turned into something poised between theatrical event and historical reconstruction.

The desire of the British people to see their monarch crowned was never fully satisfied until 1953, when the occasion was lovingly televised by the BBC and feverishly viewed by the nation. Back in the Georgian era, the usual response of Drury Lane and Covent Garden to an impending coronation was to stage Shakespeare's *Henry IV (Part Two)* or *Henry VIII* and to pay more than usual attention to the coronation scene in the play chosen. In anticipation of the coronation of George IV on 19 July 1821, Covent Garden duly revived *Henry IV* on 25 June. An extraordinary coronation demanded an extraordinary response, however, and this was supplied by Robert William Elliston, one of the more eccentric actor-managers of the period, who was currently presiding over the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. There, on 1 August 1821, he staged an exact recreation of the recent coronation, a re-enactment so successful that the theatre was kept open during the summer months, when the patent theatres normally gave up the struggle to attract audiences. Elliston's display was a notable piece of *reportage* of a current event, far superior (for instance) to what cinema-goers were offered by Méliès eighty years later, when French film actors, including a lavatory attendant in the part of the King, attempted to stage the coronation of Edward VII against a painted backdrop of Westminster Abbey.

### 134. *The Champion withdrawing from the Royal Presence with the Gold Cup, 1821*

(263 × 209). Coloured. Collection of David Robinson



The added date shows that this print and its companion were intended as souvenirs of the actual coronation (or rather the banquet which followed it), not the Drury Lane re-creation. The championship, hereditary in the Dymoke family, was instituted at the coronation of Richard II in 1377. It was the duty of the champion to ride into Westminster Hall in full armour, and to challenge any one who should deny the title of the sovereign to the crown. Portraits of the champion 'with the Cup' and 'with the Glove' continued to be produced for many years afterwards by the toy theatre publishers who followed West, and were evidently as much a favourite with the portrait-buying public as the Seven Champions of Christendom.

### 135. *Champion with Glove, 1821*

(263 × 215). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson



### 136–139. *The Coronation*

Plates 4 (245 × 400) 5 (237 × 389) & 6 (242 × 389) of miniature procession, with Scene 2 (266 × 413). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

West's souvenir of *The Coronation* at Drury Lane took the form of six folio plates of miniature characters and a set of large scenes. Surprisingly, in view of the topicality of the production, West did not proceed with any great haste. Publication of the characters was between October 1821 and February 1822; the scenes started to appear in May 1822 and continued until at least July. The only other toy theatre publisher to tackle *The Coronation* was Love, who in July 1823 produced one double plate of miniature characters.





**140. Mr Elliston as King George IV in the Coronation at Drury Lane Theatre, 1821**

(270 × 217). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

Back in July 1821, West had acted more speedily in publishing two twopenny portraits from the revival of *Henry IV* at Covent Garden: 'Mr C. Kemble as Prince of Wales in the Coronation' (in other words as Prince Hal, now Henry V and about to be crowned) and Mr Abbott as Prince John. Then, in November, having started to publish his miniature characters from the Drury Lane *Coronation*, he published three twopenny portraits from the production: Elliston as the King, Mr Cooper as Prince Leopold and Mr Smith as the Marquis of Salisbury. Elliston was a strange actor, part fine gentleman and part buffoon. However, as a staunch Tory and one of the minority of people who actually had any sympathy for George IV (an exceptionally unpopular monarch), he threw himself with enthusiasm into his part, and is said to have wept every night when he blessed the assembled populace.

## MISCELLANEOUS

*'And a Great Variety of other things,  
too numerous to mention'*

**141. King John of France, 1823**

(268 × 208). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

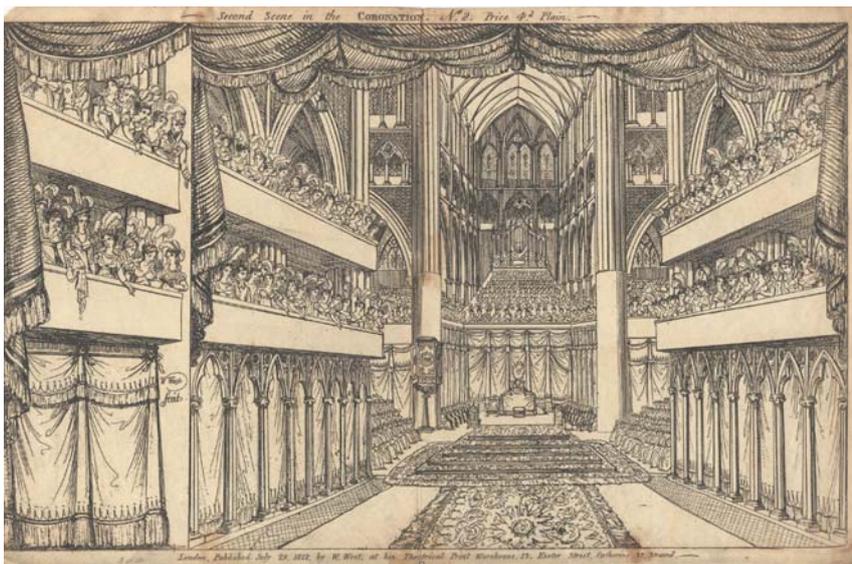
From *Edward the Black Prince* (see nos 57–59).

**142. Mr Cobham as Hardyknute in the Knight and the Wood Daemon, 1829**

(262 × 212). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

Mathew Gregory Lewis became famous with his gothic novel *The Monk* in 1796. He also wrote a successful gothic drama, *The Castle Spectre*, in 1798, and compiled the volume of gothic poems *Tales of Wonder* in 1801. *The Monk* was several times adapted to the stage, in whole or in part, and many of the poems inspired stage pieces. Lewis also penned gothic melodramas, of which *The Wood Daemon* was first produced at Drury Lane in 1807, and then in a drastically rewritten form at the Lyceum (where the Drury Lane company were performing after their fire) in 1811. The music of the first production was by Michael Kelly, to which was added music by Miles Peter King in the second. West immediately produced

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a two-plate souvenir of the 1811 production, which has been attributed to Robert Cruikshank. This was during the first mad summer of West's success, but he never again returned to the play, so that it was left to the publishers who came after him to turn it into a classic of the toy theatre. Thomas Cobham was a star of the minor theatres, and Hardyknute was one of his most admired parts, if the number of theatrical portraits of him in the role is any guide. He was appearing at the Coburg when West's penny portrait was issued, so it probably commemorates a revival of *The Wood Daemon* at that house.

#### 143. Mr Smith as the Black Vulture

(248 × 198). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

Edward Fitzball's *The Black Vulture; or, The Wheel of Death* was produced in October 1830 at the Adelphi, the theatre in which West took the greatest interest at this period. The piece was partially founded on Byron's



unfinished drama, *The Deformed Transformed*, and had music by G. H. Rodwell. The resulting concoction was only a moderate success, but West must have thought it promising, as he issued four penny portraits in quick succession. O. Smith, who appeared as the Black Vulture (Demon of the Mountains) was really Richard John Smith, his nickname 'Obi' being derived from an early success in the part of the Obi Woman in *Obi; or Three Fingered Jack*.

#### 144. Mr Yates as the Skimmer of the Sea, 1830

(235 × 185). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

*The Water Witch; or, The Skimmer of the Sea* was written by W. B. Bernard (author of *Casco Bay*), and produced at the Adelphi in November 1830, only a month or so after *The Black Vulture*. It is another adaptation from a novel of Fenimore Cooper and, though not a success on the scale of *The Pilot* or *The Red Rover*, obviously had its attractions, as West's portrait of Mr Yates as Thomas Tiller, the Skimmer of the Sea, shows. Frederick Yates (with a series of partners) managed the Adelphi throughout its most stylish and successful period, and his wife Elizabeth was one of the great melodramatic heroines of the era. West published two penny portraits from the play, the other being of Miss Daly as Endora.

#### 145. Combat in The Crusaders, 1824

(198 × 245). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

This combat is from *The Crusaders; or, Jerusalem Delivered*, a melodrama produced at the Coburg Theatre on Easter Monday 1820. It is dated 1824, but shows signs of redating, and may well have been published a week after the first performance of the play in 1820.

#### 146. Combat in The Knight & Dragon of Wantly, 1825

(205 × 245). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

Dragons have a significant place in English folklore, though that place is often a comic one, as with the Geordie epic of the Lambton Worm, or the old ballad of the Dragon of Wantley. Like many of these effusions, the poem is essentially a burlesque affair, and its most notable stage incarnation was in Henry Carey's comic opera *The Dragon of Wantley*, which was also written in the burlesque mode. Carey's piece had long since ceased to hold the stage (both the ballad and the opera being somewhat



coarse by Regency standards), but other adaptations, especially pantomimes, appeared from time to time. Charles Farley's *Harlequin and the Dragon of Wantley; or, More of More Hall* was the Covent Garden pantomime of Christmas 1824. West's *Combat*, published in January 1825, suggests that the actors managed to get plenty of good, clean fun out of a rather disreputable old subject. The plate is signed 'TL', and is the work of T. Layton, an artist not on a par with Heath, Tomkins or the Cruikshanks in terms of quality, but one of the few minor talents of the toy theatre to whom a large body of work can confidently be attributed. Layton drew only a small amount for West, but produced enormous quantities, especially penny and twopenny scenes, for Hodgson and Co. With that firm's publishing spree coming to an end, Layton was now available to work for West. But, with William Heath back in the fold, West had little need of Layton's meagre talent.



## PANTOMIME

*'This bat receive, with fairy favours  
graced!'*

Many nations have made their own contribution to the history of the *commedia dell'arte*, and Pantomime is our English interpretation. The history of English pantomime divides sharply into three phases. In the first, which goes back to the early eighteenth century, the *commedia* characters played their part in a story from classical mythology or modern legend, and Harlequin (with his wonder-working wooden sword) always took the part of the hero (hence the typical form of title, *Harlequin So-and-so*). The second phase, to which all the toy theatre pantomimes belong, was initiated by *Robinson Crusoe* (a pantomime of Sheridan's devising) in 1780. Here the entertainment was split down the middle, so that the 'opening' told a story from mythology, history, the fairy tale repertory, or more modern sources, but always brought that story to an *impasse*. At this point hero and heroine were magically changed to Harlequin and Columbine, the heroine's father and servant became Pantaloon and Clown, and the 'comic scenes' of the Harlequinade began. The phenomenal success of Grimaldi in the part of Clown eventually disturbed the balance of the drama, though it was not until the late Victorian period that the Harlequinade started to be dispensed with altogether. The third phase of pantomime, which is still with us, dates from about 1880, when Augustus Harris (of Drury Lane) sought to revivify the genre by employing music hall stars in the principal roles. These eventually gave way to radio stars, pop stars and soap stars. Harris's basic formula has proved very enduring.

*We only did the characters in the pantomime at Christmas time.* (HM p. 117.)

This statement of West's needs qualification. During his first four or five years of publishing (the period covered by his catalogue sheet) West not only followed the Christmas pantomimes of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, but also those which the minor theatres produced during their summer seasons, which typically ran from Easter Monday to Michaelmas. For

the rest of his first decade he mainly (though not entirely) confined himself to the Christmas pantomimes at the patent theatres, so that for this period only does his statement make some sense. After 1820, when 'principal characters' gave way to full treatments of plays, pantomimes (which were very lavish and often ran to as many as twenty different scenes) seemed less possible in the toy theatre, and West gave them up altogether, except for a few portraits and a large number of Pantomime Tricks (for which see nos 177–188). Indeed, no toy theatre publisher attempted a pantomime again until the mid-1830s, when Skelt published *Harlequin Little King Pippin* and thus inaugurated another quarter-century of toy theatre excursions to the realms of unbridled fantasy.

### 147. Mr Ellar as Harlequin, 1828

(239 × 195). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

The costume worn by Harlequins of this period was introduced by James Byrne at the beginning of the century, as a replacement for the traditional outfit, which had been floppy and covered in patches. In the new costume, which was elegant and tight-fitting, the patches survived as diamond shapes outlined with spangles, and the battered sombrero of old gave way to an opera hat. Thomas Ellar was one of the greatest Harlequins of the Grimaldi era. Only John Bologna, perhaps, can be mentioned in the same breath. In his impoverished decline, Ellar appealed to Dickens to write his life-story, as the latter had done for Grimaldi. Dickens had hated his involvement with the biography of the clown, however, and declined, leaving Ellar to die



'with a wife and children totally unprovided for', as the all-too-common phrase of the period ran. This penny portrait was issued by West in February 1828, towards the end of the Christmas pantomime season.

### 148. Miss Romer as Columbine, 1829

(260 × 212). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

Miss Romer was not an especially famous performer, but Columbines came and went more quickly than male pantomimists, and few of them attained the sort of pre-eminence attached to Ellar or Grimaldi. This portrait, the work of William Heath, was probably intended as one of a pair with Mr T. Ridgway, in the pantomime of *The Enchanters*, produced at the Olympic on Boxing Day 1828.



### 149. Mr Grimaldi as Clown, 1829

(238 × 197). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

The figures who best represent the late-Georgian theatre are undoubtedly Edmund Kean, who elevated tragedy to new, romantic, melodramatic heights; Joseph Grimaldi, whose performance as Clown in pantomime elicited paeans of praise from the most fastidious critics; and Andrew Ducrow, whose graceful histrionics on horseback united the romantic theatre and the romantic circus in a way we can now only read about with astonishment and awe. While Ducrow was given his very own series of theatrical portraits (see nos 126–127), Grimaldi shared with Kean the honour of having further portraits of himself in character produced after his retirement and even after his death. The clown did not die until 1837, but ill-health forced him to retire after the pantomime



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season of 1822–23, and his farewell benefit took place in 1828, the year before this print was issued by West.

### 150. *New Pantomimical Characters, 1811*

Plate 2. (198 × 242). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

One of the many miscellaneous sheets issued by West in his early days, this print is not only full of interest in its subject-matter, but also fascinatingly eccentric in its style of drawing and engraving. Few of the artists employed by West during his first year managed to produce work such lively work. Grimaldi is depicted in his various guises as Clown, including alternative versions of his two *pas de deux* with Bologna (see no. 147).

### 151 & 152. *New Clowns, 1811*

Plates 1 (255 × 206) & 2 (258 × 198). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

### 153. *The Mandarin*

Plate 2 of characters. (239 × 195). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

*The Mandarin; or, Harlequin in China* was produced at Astley's during the summer of 1811. As ever, the theatre co-operated enthusiastically with West as the inscription reveals, 'From Original Drawings, in the possession of J. Astley, Esq<sup>r</sup> & Published by his permission'. In common with all the minor theatres at this period, the Astley's season only lasted for the summer months, so there were no Christmas pantomimes. However, Easter Monday (the usual day on which the minor theatres began their operations) and Whit Monday brought enormous holiday crowds, so on these days at least a new pantomime would be staged, and the present one appeared even later in the season. West quickly produced two plates of characters, and plate 1 is signed 'Turnbull Sc'. A few months later Turnbull would also engrave West's catalogue sheet (see Fig. 18).

### 154. *The White Cat*

Plate 2 of characters. (243 × 193). Coloured  
Collection of Peter Baldwin

The pre-eminence of the pantomimes produced at Covent Garden, with Grimaldi as their chief support, meant that the Drury Lane company were tempted not to offer any competition at all in this field. In any case they were currently operating in exile at the Lyceum after their fire (see p. 29). At Christmas 1811, however, they steeled themselves to one last attempt, and the result was surprisingly successful. *The White Cat; or, Harlequin in the Fairy Wood* was based on a story from the French fairy-tale repertoire. Mme d'Aulnoy's stories are now practically forgotten, though in her day she was a formidable rival to Perrault, and in the Georgian nursery played 'Mother Bunch' to his 'Mother Goose'. It was barely a year since West had started out as a print-publisher, but his four sheets of characters in *The White Cat* were one of his best efforts so far, and an indication of even better things to come. A version was also produced by Mrs Jameson.

### 155. *Harlequin and Padmanaba*

Plate 1 of characters. (244 × 195). Coloured  
Collection of David Robinson

*Harlequin and Padmanaba; or, The Golden Fish* was the Covent Garden pantomime against which *The White Cat* was playing. It was adapted by Charles Farley from a story in the *Arabian Nights*, and, at the end of year when horses on the Covent Garden stage had outraged traditionally-minded theatre-goers, went one better by introducing an elephant. West's response was very enthusiastic: four plates of characters (which have been attributed to William Heath), two further plates of processions, and three miscellaneous souvenir sheets, including one devoted to the elephantine star of the piece. Burtenshaw, one of West's briefly-flourishing early rivals, also published a version of *The Golden Fish*, preferring (as some of West's prints do) the sub-title to the main one, which involved what the plain-speaking Georgians would no doubt have called 'a damned hard foreign name'.

### 156. *Old Beelzebub and Harlequin; or, Taffy in Holland, 1812*

Plate 2 of characters. (245 × 200). Plain  
Collection of David Robinson

West originally advertised four sheets of characters in this mad conglomeration, but this was afterwards altered to two. Evidently the production was less successful (or the demand for souvenirs less overwhelming)

than West had hoped, and Beelzebub was obliged to draw in his horns. According to West's catalogue sheet, he also published a 'comic scene' in the pantomime.

### 157 & 158. *Harlequin Colossus*

Plates 1 (244 × 198) & 4 (242 × 198) of characters. Plain. Collection of David Robinson

*Harlequin Colossus; or, The Seven Wonders of the World* was one of T. J. Dibdin's offerings at the Surrey Theatre during the summer of 1812. Since not all of the ancient marvels in question managed to survive into modern times, considerable speculation had always



raged as to their exact appearance. The Colossus of Rhodes, for example, prompted a ticklish question: did it or did it not bestraddle the harbour? Now the pantomime was able to add its widow's mite to the attempt at recreation, and a production of exceptional visual interest demanded an exceptional response. It was only a few months since West had issued his first scenes for the toy theatre, but in addition to four sheets of characters (still a rather generous allowance at this period) he issued a number of large scenes, though the exact total is not certain. Not many seem to survive (in fact their survival rate is rather worse than the ancient monuments they illustrate), but there *may* have been as many as thirteen – an enormous quantity at this stage of the toy theatre's development.

### 159 & 160. *Jack and Jill*

Plates 2 (275 × 205) & 3 (262 × 208) of characters. Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

As will have become apparent, the pantomimes of this period searched far and wide for their themes, and were by no means confined (as they have been ever since the



1870s) to a small number of fairy-tale subjects. Nevertheless, a reliance on fairy tales and other juvenile reading-matter was just starting to show itself at this period, and *Jack and Jill; or, The Clown's Disasters* is interesting as an early example of a pantomime based on a nursery rhyme. Georgian children knew a long version of 'Jack and Jill', which like several of its companions had been extended to a length that would fill a tiny illustrated 'toy book'. The pantomime was produced during the summer of 1812 at the Lyceum Theatre, which was now operating independently, since the Drury Lane company had moved back to the re-built theatre whose exterior and ante-rooms still survive. The piece was anonymous, though as West's version was 'Published with permission of Mr. Kirby', we can presume that Kirby, the theatre's clown and scene-painter, was at least the producer of it. West not only issued four plates of characters and a set of large scenes, but also three portraits of Kirby himself. Two of the portraits proclaim themselves to be 'Drawn & Etched by W. Heath', and the same artist is presumed to be responsible for the character-sheets.

### 161. *Mr Kirby as Lacquey, 1812*

(241 × 188). Plain. Collection of David Robinson

Pre-eminent though Grimaldi was in the role of Clown, the number of London theatres, and the importance of pantomime as a *genre*, meant that he had many fellow Clowns, even if few of them were strictly his rivals. Kirby seems to have been one of the more inventive of the also-rans, and West's prints give some idea of his comic style, which evidently placed a heavy reliance on gargantuan accessories. Unlike Grimaldi,



Kirby appeared with circuses as well as in the theatre, and further exercised his talents as a scene-painter wherever he went.

### 162. *Mr Kirby as Clown in the New Comic Pantomime of Jack & Jill or the Clown's Disasters, 1812*

(246 × 189). Plain. Collection of David Robinson

### 163 & 164. *Harlequin and Humpo*

Plates 1 (244 × 203) & 3 (248 × 204) of characters. Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

*Harlequin and Humpo; or, Columbine by Candlelight* was written by T. J. Dibdin, and produced at Drury Lane on Boxing Day 1812. It was the first Christmas offering in the newly-built theatre, and after the success of *The White Cat*, the company were determined to mount a serious challenge to Covent Garden's annual triumph. They certainly succeeded as far as West was concerned. He issued three plays of characters and a set of large scenes. The scenes were originally advertised as being six in number, but this was afterwards extended to ten. Either this was one of the pieces that West 'fell in love with' (as some commentators allege), or else it was more than usually popular with his customers.

### 165–167. *Harlequin and the Red Dwarf*

Plates 1 (248 × 200) & 3 (263 × 189) of characters, and extra unnumbered plate of Comic Characters (249 × 210). Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

*Harlequin and the Red Dwarf; or, The Adamant Rock* was the Covent Garden rival to *Harlequin and Humpo*. It was written and produced by Charles Farley, and is evidently a treatment of Mme d'Aulnoy's *Cherry and Fair Star*, a theme to which Farley was to



**170 & 171. Harlequin Whittington**

Plates 1 (241 x 196) and 3 (243 x 198) of characters Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

The story of *Harlequin Whittington; or, The Lord Mayor of London* is still part of the pantomime repertoire, in which *Dick Whittington* (though not on a level with *Cinderella* or *Aladdin*) ranks alongside *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Babes in the Wood* in terms of popularity. Richard Whittington is a genuine historical figure, but his story has acquired considerable legendary accretions. The present version, the first-ever pantomime treatment, was written and produced by Charles Farley at Covent Garden on Boxing Day 1814. West issued three plates of characters and six large scenes. The characters are by George Cruikshank, and form one of the few sets of full-size characters that can be attributed to him with any confidence. The scenes are a little crude, but may well also be his work.

**172. The High-Mettled Racer**

Scene No. 6. (193 x 188). Plain Collection of Peter Baldwin

Many of Charles Dibdin's nautical songs inspired nautical dramas (most of them slightly later than West's heyday), but here one of his many non-nautical songs, 'The High-Mettled Racer' is made the subject of a pantomime produced at Astley's on Easter Monday 1815. *The Life, Death and Restoration of the High Mettled Racer; or, Harlequin on Horseback* was by T. J. Dibdin, Charles Dibdin's younger son. Dibdin senior had died the previous year, but both his sons, though illegitimate and studiously ignored by their father, were very proud of their association with him, and did everything they could to help keep his memory green. Souvenirs of the present piece were produced both by West and by Mrs Jameson. West's version consists of four plates of miniature characters (a genre only invented the previous year) and a set of



return at the same theatre in 1822, when he produced an Easter melodrama on the subject. West published three plates of characters (to which a fourth, unnumbered, plate was afterwards added) and six large scenes. The characters are by William Heath, and enjoy the added distinction of having been disowned by George Cruikshank. The Jonathan King Collection, Museum of London, has a copy of plate 1, with the pencil inscription 'Not by me. G.Ck.'

**168 & 169. Harlequin and the Swans**

Plates 3 (249 x 210) and 4 (257 x 203) of characters Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

*Popular Tales of the Germans*, translated from the original of Musäus was the source of *Number Nip* and other tales well known to nineteenth-century readers. It was also the source of *The Enchanted Veil*, a story which lies behind two pantomimes, *The Mystic Coffin; or, Harlequin and the Swan Queen*, and

*Harlequin and the Swans; or, The Bath of Beauty*. The former was produced at the Royalty Theatre, Wellclose Square, in 1812, and the latter was written by Charles Farley and produced by him at Covent Garden at Christmas, 1813. It would seem that Farley did not mind keeping an eye on the productions of the humble minor theatres, nor did he mind combining his sources, for he crosses Musäus's tale with the theme of St Winifred's Well. Musäus's *The Enchanted Veil* ought to be world-famous, since it went on to be the source of the ballet *Swan Lake*, though this fact has only been re-discovered quite recently, such is the obscurity into which this once-famous and still-influential author has been allowed to fall. Mrs Jameson produced souvenirs of both 'Swan' pantomimes, but West only covered the Covent Garden production, issuing four sheets of characters and a set of large scenes and wings.

small scenes and wings. It has been suggested that they are the work of George Cruikshank.

### 173 & 174. *Harlequin Gulliver*

Plates 3 (239 × 195) and 4 (239 × 197) of characters Coloured. Collection of David Robinson

*Gulliver's Travels* was a favourite for stage adaptation in the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth has continued to provide subject-matter for the large and small screen alike. Unlike Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, however, Swift's novel never quite made it into the charmed circle of modern pantomime subjects, though in the later Victorian period it came close. *Harlequin Gulliver*; or, *The Flying Island* was written and produced by Charles Farley at Covent Garden on Boxing Day 1817, and was covered by both West and Mrs Jameson. West's version consists of four plates of characters, but has no accompanying scenes. The characters are by Charles Tomkins, and are some of that artist's earliest work for West.

### 175. *Pope Joan*

Plate 2 of characters. (258 × 203). Coloured Collection of David Robinson

This is a pantomime from the earlier days of the Coburg, when kindly Mr Glossop was still there to give West permission to publish his version, which runs to three plates of characters (evidently by Charles Tomkins), but no scenes. *Pope Joan*; or, *Harlequin on Card Island* was 'Written and produced by Mr. W. Barrymore', according to the inscription on the sheets themselves, and must have appeared on Easter Monday or a little earlier. The piece is fascinating, using as it does a card game as its subject, with a glance back at the medieval legend to which the name of the game apparently refers. The legend concerns a woman who passed herself off as a monk and was elected Pope, only to disgrace herself by giving birth during a procession through the streets of Rome. Pope Joan, the card game, was a great favourite of the Georgian and Victorian periods, though its connection with the female pontiff is more apparent than real. The game was known in eighteenth-century France as *Nain Jaune* ('Yellow Dwarf', after another of Mme d'Aulnoy's fairy-tales), a name that no-nonsense English folk altered (perhaps via 'Nun Joan') to something more pronounceable and more amusing. The pantomime seems to have been both amusing and inventive, with the card characters treated in a manner which anticipates *Alice in Wonderland*.



### 176. *Jack the Giant Killer*

Plate 1 of characters. (237 × 196). Coloured Collection of Peter Baldwin

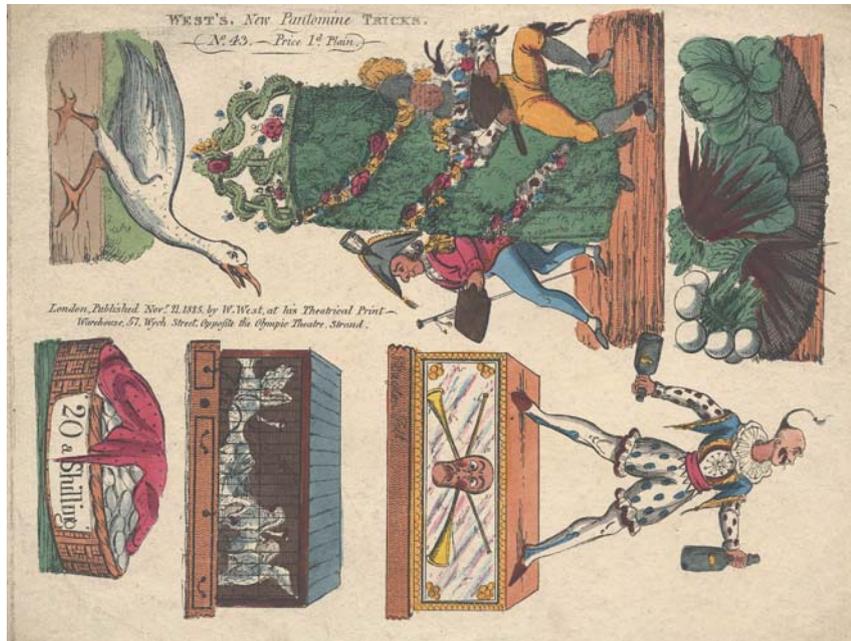
*Jack the Giant Killer* was produced by the Beverley family at the Regency Theatre in 1819. The story is one of the great themes from the English fairy-tale tradition. Like Swift's *Gulliver*, Jack almost made it into the modern pantomime repertory in the later Victorian period, but his namesake *Jack and the Beanstalk* was preferred. West only produced two sheets of characters for the piece (the work of Charles Tomkins), with nearly six months between them. There must be a story behind this delay, but it is impossible, in our present state of knowledge, to guess what it might be.



## PANTOMIME TRICKS

He had made upwards of 1,000 pantomime tricks. He was fond of doing them for the children. Now he has scarcely any call for them. This Christmas has been a little better – he didn't know why. (HM p.120.)

Pantomime tricks showed the amusing and sometimes satirical transformations produced by Harlequin's magic sword. In



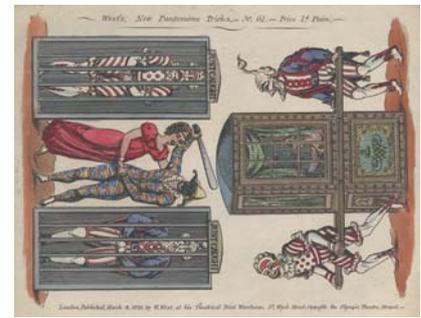
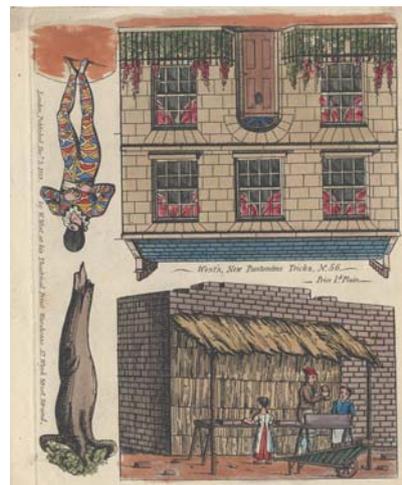
the real theatre a stroke of the bat (which was a slapstick, constructed of two pieces of wood so as to make the maximum noise when it hit anyone or anything) would be the cue for ropes to be pulled and canvas flaps to fall. In the toy theatre string and cardboard produced the same effects, and there is no greater satisfaction in toy theatre performing than the moment when a trick works, and the astonishment of the audience is heard. However, since West went on producing tricks in large numbers long after he gave up adapting pantomimes to the toy stage, and since publishers such as Park (who never issued a single pantomime) did likewise in later years, they must have found favour as a table-top amusement as well as an ingredient of toy theatre performances. Some of the images are interesting in their own right, even without trick changes. Here we can enjoy, for instance, fascinating views of street entertainment, such as the peep

show and the Punch and Judy booth. (With the latter, note the 'interpreter' and his wand, and the Italian baroque garden of the scenery, identical with that used by the great Punchman Piccini.) There are also precious glimpses of popular customs, such as the excellent 'Jack-in-the-Green', an image which is part of a plate signed by T. Layton (for whom see no. 146), and which we recommend to the attention of folklorists.

## 177–188. Pantomime Tricks

Collection of David Robinson

- No. 15 *Beehive & statue* (198 238). Plain
- No. 29 *Twinnings* (236 × 195). Plain
- No. 31 *Temple Bar* (202 × 247). Plain
- No. 36 *Punch & Judy booth* (241 × 198). Plain
- No. 43 *Jack-in-the-Green* (198 × 242). Coloured



- No. 46 *Bears Grease* (195 × 237). Plain
- No. 49 *Bookshop & Marine Store* (195 × 245). Plain
- No. 56 *Harlequin* (202 × 243). Coloured
- No. 60 *Peepshow* (247 × 198). Plain
- No. 61 *Harlequin & Columbine* (195 × 238). Coloured
- No. 70 *Father Time* (198 × 238). Plain
- No. 71 *Clowns & Paganini* (195 × 240). Plain

## HOME PERFORMANCE

'Welcome . . . To our new Theatre in Brunswick-square'

### 189. *The British Stage, in Miniature* c.1826

Printed sheet. (340 × 190)  
Maritime Museum, Ramsgate

William Cole succeeded to the Hodgson and Co. business c.1825 (see p. 20 and nos 75–77). For a few years he sold off their old stock, but added very little new material. He also continued to cultivate the same respectable and would-be-educational tone that the firm favoured, as well as emphasizing the Shakespearean element in the toy theatre repertory. But, whereas many of his fellow-publishers seem almost to have scorned anything like self-advertisement, Cole certainly believed in puffing his products. It was to this commercial end that he commissioned 'The British Stage in Miniature', a poem about the toy theatre, together with an accompanying wood engraving, which is the earliest illustration we possess of a toy theatre performance in progress. The poem and its illustration were first included in Volume 2 of Cole's collection of verses *The Parent's Poetical Present* (undated), but they are here used to decorate one of his advertisements, where they are complemented by a series of 'Directions for Using the Theatres', which likewise constitute the earliest piece of how-to-do-it material to have survived. A similar, but less elaborate, advertisement is found in Cole's *Youthful Days* (c.1827).

19c. John Leech, *Young Troublesome*

1845

Disbound volume with colour plates. (185 x 275)

Collection of Barry Clarke

John Leech is one of the artists whose caricatures and book-illustrations found more favour with early Victorian purchasers than their more robust predecessors, such as the Cruikshanks and Heaths (let alone Rowlandson and Gillray). He records the ups-and-downs of middle-class domestic life with the same gentle irony that George du Maurier brought to bear on an even later generation. He is now best remembered for the illustrations he contributed to Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, where his visualisation of the Ghost of Christmas Present makes an obvious contribution to the modern conception of Father Christmas. Like the *Christmas Carol* illustrations, the series of drawings published under the title of *Young Troublesome* was available both plain and coloured, appropriately enough for a series in which the toy theatre figures so prominently.

**BAWDY  
SONGSTERS**

*'There's no shove like the first shove!'*

These songsters constitute the greatest surprise that West's output has to offer us. Children's playthings and what we now euphemize as 'adult' reading matter seem to occupy opposite poles even in the modern publishing world. In the early Victorian era, which these publications by West helped to usher in, we find ourselves shocked to discover that reading matter of such blatant obscenity existed at all. The ditties collected in these booklets emanate from the 'Song-and-supper rooms', prototypes of the music hall, but with dining tables in front of the stage and an all-male *clientèle*, which ranged from teenage boys to the most elderly of debauchees. In one guise or another these gatherings had existed since the Restoration period, notably in the form of Catch Clubs and Glee Clubs, whose rudenesses Purcell had been happy to set to music. And it was not Victorian propriety alone but rather its combination with capitalism that put an end to this sort of thing. The search for profits led to the construction of music halls on a much larger scale than before, and larger halls demanded larger audi-

ences. This prompted managers to take the fatal step of admitting women into their establishments, with a consequent alteration in the nature of the repertoire. A certain naughtiness would always cling to the music hall, but it would never return to the unashamed coarseness that these booklets so vividly preserve for us.

Men often repaired to the Coal Hole or the Cider Cellars after the evening's entertainment at Drury Lane or Covent Garden had finished, and lesser actors at the theatres often eked out their income by performing at these night haunts. So West was not straying very far from his usual round, either spatially or socially, in attempting to provide souvenirs of these convivial gatherings – he had, after all, been providing souvenirs of the entertainments that took place earlier in the evening for more than two decades. As for those who bought his pamphlets, were they his usual customers grown a bit older (or a lot older)? Only West could tell us. At all events he seems to have been the most enthusiastic caterer to this taste, and the list of his known songsters is far longer than those of his two principal rivals (Duncombe and Dugdale) put together. For their publishing history, and a suggestion that the artist responsible

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for their frontispieces might be William Hornegold, see pp.23–24.

In view of the exceptionally poor survival rate from which pornography suffers, we are very lucky that the British Library possesses so large a number of West's songsters (twenty-two in the general collection, with four duplicates in the Private Case). H. S. Ashbee, the largest donor to the Private Case, lists thirty-two songsters by West, a dozen or so by Dugdale and six by Duncombe in his *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (1877), but, if he ever owned all the titles he lists, many of them have subsequently disappeared. By one of the stranger coincidences of West scholarship, Ralph Thomas, the greatest Victorian collector of West's prints, was a close friend of Ashbee, the greatest Victorian collector of pornography, and helped to proof-read his bibliography. It was at a dinner-party at Ashbee's

that Thomas managed to corner George Cruikshank and talk to him about his work for West (see p.14). As so often happens when studying the nineteenth century, an investigation of discrete areas of interest reveals THE SAME PEOPLE WEARING DIFFERENT HATS.

**191. *The Flash Chaunter.*  
*An out-and-out collection***

W. West, London, 1834. Printed pamphlet with fold-out, coloured title page. (100 × 220 open)  
British Library

**192. *The Libertine's Songster***

W. West, London, 1834. Printed pamphlet with fold-out, coloured title page. (100 × 220 open)  
British Library

**193. *The Randy Songster***

W. West, London, 1834. Printed pamphlet with fold-out, coloured title page. (100 × 220 open)  
British Library

**194. *The Gentleman's Sparkling Songster, nothin but regular good ... amatory ditties***

W. West, London, 1838. Printed pamphlet with fold-out, coloured title page. (100 × 220 open)  
British Library

**195. *The Gentleman's Spicy Songster***

W. West, London, 1841. Printed pamphlet with fold-out, coloured title page. (100 × 220 open)  
British Library

**195. *The Nobby Songster, a prime collection as now singing at Offley's Cider Cellar: Coal Hole***

W. West, London, 1842. Printed pamphlet with fold-out, coloured title page. (100 × 220 open)  
British Library



Fig. 19 Original drawing by 'W. B.' for West's Show Card (British Museum, London)