THE LIFE AND PLAYS OF

RICHARD BRINSLEY PEAKE (1792-1847)

A Thesis

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for the Degree Master of Arts

by

Douglas W. Hoehn, B.A.

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Approved by

[Signature]

Adviser
Department of Theatre
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Richard Brinsley Peake was a popular dramatist of the London stage from 1818 to 1847. As a commercial playwright, he responded to the desires and interests of audiences in several individual theatres. Peake's plays served the functions common to all popular drama: providing much-needed entertainment for the public, upholding generally accepted ethical standards, and supplying an outlet for some of the suppressed emotional impulses shared by members of a community.\(^1\) The premise of this study is not that Richard Brinsley Peake was a dramatist of great importance in the history of dramatic literature, but rather, that his career and his plays can offer some insights into the popular London theatre of the first half of the nineteenth century. While Peake had many unique attributes as a playwright, he did not so much contribute to the development of drama in his time as he did develop with it. This introductory chapter is intended to establish a general familiarity with the theatre of London in Peake's time, particularly introducing information relevant to the theatres and the actresses and actors most often associated with Peake's work. The first section of the chapter will examine the conditions of the London stage in the time of Peake; these

\(^1\)For a much more thorough analysis of the popular drama than can be offered in this thesis, see J. S. R. Goodlad, The Sociology of Popular Drama (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1971).
conditions had direct bearing on the form and tone of Peake's work and that of other popular playwrights. The second section of the chapter will provide an introduction to the dramatic literature of Peake's time, indicating the trends in four varieties of drama in which Peake himself was adept. To conclude this introduction, a justification will be offered for the study of Richard Brinsley Peake as an individual dramatist.

The London Stage During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

The theatre in London during the early part of the last century experienced three major currents of change that were interdependent and causally connected to the rapidly growing population of the city. One of these movements was the growth of the minor theatres, both in number and in legal status. Influencing this development was a simultaneous change in the nature of the London theatre audience from the turn of the century through the early years of Queen Victoria's reign. A third trend in the early nineteenth-century theatre, existing in a reciprocal relationship with the change in the theatre audience, was the development of elaborate technology for scenic purposes. Benefitting from the first two trends, and adjusting to the imposition of the third, was a generation of vivacious and highly-popular actors and actresses whose special abilities lent themselves to low comic and romantic drama. These three changes in theatrical conditions and the presence of this new generation of performers significantly influenced dramatic writing in this period.
The Growth of the Minor Theatre

The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a tripling of the population of London and a doubling of the number of theatres in that city. This numerical growth of both places of entertainment and an available audience illustrates a simple supply-and-demand factor in the developing London theatre. But far more important than the increase in the number of theatres was the struggle of the newly established theatres for official acceptance. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Theatres Royal in Drury Lane and Covent Garden were the only theatres in the city of London legally permitted to stage spoken drama; it was not until 1843, through the Theatre Regulation Act, that the minor theatres officially were allowed the same opportunity. From their inceptions to their final triumph in the destruction of the theatrical monopoly, the minor theatres attempted to widen their public appeal by the circumvention of legal restrictions placed upon them. While the efforts of some of the minor theatres may be viewed as conducive to artistic development for dramatists and actors, it should be clear that the primary desire of the management of the new theatres was for commercial success. The goals of the minor theatre were the procurement of audiences from the growing population and the freedom to offer those audiences the legitimate dramatic entertainment to which the public

2 Approximately one million people lived in London in 1800; the count was 2,831,950 people in 1854. Eleven theatres were in operation in 1807; by 1861 there were twenty-two. Ernest Bradlee Watson, Sheridan to Robertson: A Study of the Nineteenth Century London Stage (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 3.

3 Ibid., p. 20.

4 Ibid., p. 49.
responded with enthusiasm at the Covent Garden and the Drury Lane. In general, the challenge of the new theatres was directed not against the conditions of English drama and theatrical performance as represented by the two patent theatres, but against archaic legal prohibitions that precluded fair competition with those theatres. While many of the dramatists and actors in these new theatrical companies displayed imagination and innovation, they are best appreciated as contributors to a burgeoning popular theatre, sensitive to general and local trends in public taste.

Representative of the minor theatre movement, and of enormous significance to the career of Richard Brinsley Peake, was the Lyceum theatre, at times known as the English Opera House. This theatre, located on Wellington Street, Strand, had originated in 1794, under the direction of Dr. Samuel Arnold. During the first fifteen years of its existence, the Lyceum was permitted only to offer non-dramatic entertainment, such as equestrian performances, concerts, and exhibitions, although a company of amateur actors performed Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved* for a single night in 1806, with the support of a very powerful patron. But in 1809 the Lyceum obtained a new legal and artistic status. In that year, the destruction of the Drury Lane by fire led its company to negotiate with the new manager of the Lyceum, Dr. Arnold's son, Samuel James Arnold, for the use of his theatre. Arnold received a license for his theatre to offer operas and light dramatic entertainment during the summer months; in return, the Drury Lane company was permitted the use of the Lyceum during the regular theatrical season, until the Drury Lane theatre was rebuilt. Arnold renamed the theatre the English Opera House,
although it continued to be popularly referred to as "the Lyceum." This theatre was rebuilt in 1816, and introduced the use of gas in stage lighting in 1817. Through the 1820's the English Opera House presented a summer fare consisting of ballad operas, pantomimes, extravaganzas, musical farces, and melodramas with incidental music, in addition to extremely popular one-actor performances, variously described as dramatic monologues and monopo101CX3ues, featuring Charles Mathews. During the months of the regular season the theatre featured lecturers, and later, a visiting French company. It was while the theatre was being occupied by this group of French players, in February, 1830, that it was destroyed by a fire of unknown origin. Arnold opened a new building in the summer of 1834, after having won an extension from the Loard Chancellor of four months to his season. Serious financial reversals led Arnold to turn the theatre over to a commonwealth formed by members of the company in 1835; this commonwealth was generally in control of the theatre until the Theatre Regulation Act was passed.\(^5\) The struggle of Arnold and the managers of other minor theatres resulted in legal concessions, such as the expansion of seasons, and eventually brought about the downfall of the theatrical monopoly, but for most of the first half of the century these "illegitimate" theatres could produce no standard drama.\(^6\) However, the English Opera House, following the lead of Robert Elliston's Surrey

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\(^5\) For a detailed history, see A. E. Wilson, *The Lyceum* (Dennis Yates Publications, Ltd., 1952).

\(^6\) The Haymarket Theatre was permitted to produce legitimate drama during the summer months, but almost invariably its performances were reproductions of works recently done in the major theatres. Watson, p. 63.
Theatre, adopted a means by which new dramas could be presented within the limits of the London law; it is this dramaturgical victory, and not the gradual emancipation of the minor theatres, that is most important to a study of any playwright connected with those theatres.

It has been noted that Arnold's theatre presented several varieties of entertainment besides opera. Within the legal restrictions placed upon the minor theatres any dramatic performance was possible, so long as it was not completely spoken. Elliston's evasion of the monopoly was achieved through the development of the ''burletta'' form of drama. Essentially, a burletta was a play with music integral to its performance. Although the precise definition of the term varied over the years of legal struggle by the minor theatres, the burletta in its generally prescribed form during the 1820's and 1830's was characterized by "the restriction to three acts, the singing of five songs in each act, and the sounding throughout of a musical accompaniment." By means of this type of dramatic performance, the minor theatres were able to present melodramas, comedies, and farces written by contemporary English authors, as well as ever-popular foreign operas and non-dramatic forms of entertainment.

The general growth of the new theatres from ignominy to an accepted status encompassed a variety of individual developments and standards

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7 Ibid., p. 32.
8 Ibid., p. 40.
reflective of each theatre's patronage. While the English Opera House offered a wide range of theatrical performances, including, on occasion, drama of mature insight, several other minor theatres presented only specific genre with a high emphasis on spectacular performance. For example, the Sadler's Wells Theatre concentrated its efforts on 'water dramas' that made use of a large tank on its stage,9 and the Adelphi Theatre devoted most of its time and expense to the production of sensational melodrama.10 The Royal Coburg Theatre, later named the Royal Victoria, responded to a growing working class patronage with ribald and gory entertainment,11 and the Olympic Theatre, under the management of Madame Vestris and Charles Mathews the younger, was most successful in the performance of burlesque.12 The illegitimate theatre movement in London was dependent upon popular support, and consequently mirrored the interests of local audiences in its own diversity.

**Theatre Audiences**

In general, the audiences of the new theatres, as well as the audiences of the Drury Lane and the Covent Garden, were representative of the increasing middle class and working class of the city in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Although considerable patronage

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9Ibid., p. 68.

10Ibid., p. 74.


12Watson, p. 73.
by the upper class continued at the major theatres, the Haymarket, and the Lyceum, it was the influence of the new consensus of theatre goers that had the greater bearing on dramatic standards.\textsuperscript{13} The new audiences desired the diversions of farce and melodrama, and particularly enjoyed the elaborate spectacle available in the latter. A major historian of the London theatre in this period describes the change in the composition of the audience in vivid, if snobbish language:

At the turn of the century the theatres succumbed to the rabble as a weakened constitution might to a virulent disease. The inflection was immediate and complete. The theatres seemed to invite the masses as never before, and the masses had soon made the theatres almost exclusively their own; for the aristocracy and the intellectuals gradually withdrew as the populace advanced.\textsuperscript{14}

Technical Developments

The demand of the new classes of theatre patrons was for the visual: exciting melodramatic action, extravagant scenic effects, and low-comic business. This pattern of taste reflects an unpretentious desire for entertainment on the part of the theatre-going public, but it also may be viewed as the indirect result of population growth. It is possible that the predisposition to the spectacular displayed by early nineteenth-century audiences was influenced by physical changes in the two major theatres. In 1792, the Covent Garden was reconstructed in order to provide space for an enlarging audience; in 1794, the Drury Lane underwent a similar modification. Each house was made to accommodate over

\textsuperscript{13} Barker, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{14} Watson, pp. 6-7.
three thousand patrons.\textsuperscript{15} While the renovations in the patent houses did not result in an enormous increase in the average distance between stage and spectator, they inevitably encouraged an emphasis upon larger-than-life performances and stage effects as the best means to compensate for the distractions of the crowded auditoriums. As the Covent Garden and the Drury Lane were the two theatres solely entrusted with the production of the spoken drama, dramatic standards were subsequently altered. In making provisions for a greater number of potential audience members, the managements of the Covent Garden and the Drury Lane discouraged those members of the public who had enjoyed the subtleties of eighteenth-century dramatic performance, and created an unalterable set of expectations for the newer theatre goers. The London theatre, despite some serious artistic efforts, became a realm of technological marvels and gifted melodramatic and low-comic performers.

The water tank of the Sadler's Wells provided maritime spectacle with actual boats; naval battles and shipwrecks were represented with great detail for enthusiastic audiences.\textsuperscript{16} Other exciting stage effects of the London theatre included waterfalls, exploding buildings, and storm effects, such as trees that bent while the wind blew in an 1820 Drury Lane production of \textit{King Lear}.\textsuperscript{17} The technical expertise of the set designers was not limited to the reproduction of natural and

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 7.


\textsuperscript{17}Spectacular developments in scenery and costumes are described in Oscar G. Brockett, \textit{History of the Theatre}, 3rd edition (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1977), pp. 394-395.
man-made events. In the production of James Robinson Planché's *The Vampire* at the Lyceum in 1820, a special device was used for preternatural appearances and disappearances. This mechanism, known as the "vampire trap," enjoyed wide popularity in subsequent years. Whether the scene represented was realistic or fantastic, the concern of the designers was for startling illusion. By no means should the development of early nineteenth-century stagecraft be viewed as a series of inventions in the service of melodramatic action. Along with the creation of special effects there existed a concern for pictorial accuracy in domestic settings; this concern led to the construction of practical stage units, and, eventually, box sets. Nevertheless, theatre technology provided both pleasure for the public and opportunities for the exercise of current playwrights' imagination.

**Popular Performers**

The popular London theatre was conducive to the establishment of reputations for a large number of actors of melodrama and farce. Despite the importance of these performers in the public's appreciation of the theatre, and their influence on the form and characters of many new dramatic texts, most of these actors and actresses are either disregarded or only briefly mentioned by theatre historians. Audiences inevitably responded to promoted appearances of their favorite performers, thus encouraging the chances for financial success of theatre managers, who were rarely safe with available dramatic material standing on its own merits. An excellent example of a popular actor bringing large and

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18 Vampire traps became a feature of pantomimes that called for appearances by demons. Wilson, p. 46.
enthusiastic audiences and considerable monetary gains to a theatre is the series of appearances at the Lyceum of Charles Mathews.\textsuperscript{19} Not only did popular actors influence the reactions of audiences; they also helped to determine the characters and conflicts of plays written by dramatists with those same actors in mind. The extent of this influence varied. Some roles were written for particular actors. Some dramatists, especially writers of farce, allowed or even encouraged improvisation by players in sections of their works. One historian has described the London stage of the early nineteenth century as "unusually blessed with low-comedy actors" working "creative miracles with farce and low-comedy materials."\textsuperscript{20} An awareness of casting played no small part in the dramatic composition of any popular writer.

Of the many popular actors of the London stage whose creativity has been only casually examined in studies of the nineteenth-century English theatre, only some of those most effected by, or having an effect upon, the career of Richard Brinsley Peake will be mentioned in this introduction. The body of the study will contain references to several other players of considerable reputation in their time. By far the most significant performers of the plays of Peake were the low-comic Robert Keeley (1793-1869), his wife, Mary Ann Goward Keeley (1806-1899), an actress most adept in pathetic roles, and O. Smith, a melodramatic and low-comic actor about whose life very little information is available.

\textsuperscript{19}Williams, p. 134.

Figure 1: Robert Keeley as Jacob Earwig in *Boots at the Swan*. (From *The Keeleys: On the Stage and at Home.*)
Robert Keeley began his career at the Olympic Theatre in 1818, and in subsequent years performed at the Adelphi, the Sadler's Wells, and the Lyceum. Among his famous roles during his early years was Jemmy Green in Tom and Jerry. His success as a comic actor was partly due to his "stolid look and slow, jerky speech." He later earned an even greater reputation in Boots at the Swan, as Jacob Earwig. He also performed at the major theatres, and earned special praise for his characterization of Dogberry in Much Ado About Nothing. Keeley entertained the public through a characteristic broad humor; he also brought a sense of mild pathos to many of his roles. Charles Dickens complimented Keeley for his "homely tenderness" and ability to make his audience cry as well as laugh. "He never strained that chord too far, but struck it, as it were, in passing, relying upon delicate ears to catch the sound as it fell. . . . Keeley is remembered as among the most touching, as well as the drollest, of actors."

Mary Ann Goward joined the Lyceum company in 1825. She performed with Keeley in several plays at both the English Opera House and the Covent Garden before the two were married in 1829. Her most popular performances occurred in the late 1830's: Smike in Nicolas Nickleby, and the title role in Jack Sheppard, both at the Adelphi. These roles


22 For a detailed account of the acting career of Keeley, and for the complete remarks of Dickens, see Walter Goodman, The Keeleys: On the Stage and at Home (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1895), pp. 148-165.

23 The first joint triumph of Keeley and Goward was in The Sergeant's Wife, at the Lyceum in 1827. Goodman, p. 109.
Figure 2: Mary Ann Goward Keeley, center, and O. Smith, left, in Nicholas Nickleby. (From The Keeleys: On the Stage and at Home.)
called upon her ability to impersonate young boys, and particularly demonstrated her capacity to arouse audiences' sympathy. Until her retirement upon her husband's death, Mrs. Keeley was a favorite of both dramatists and audiences in romantic roles in both farce and melodrama.

Richard John O. Smith (1786-1855) was particularly called upon for the portrayal of villainous characters, although he performed in several farces by Peake. His powers to startle and terrify audiences can mostly be judged by the parts in which he was cast. (Keeley was once given a line that called for an "O. Smithish" laugh: a hollow, ghost-like cackle. Little else is recorded of Smith's stage mannerisms.) Besides playing a number of demons and criminals, O. Smith portrayed Newman Noggs in the 1838 production of Nicholas Nickleby.

Better known than O. Smith was T. P. Cooke (1786-1864). Cooke was one of the most popular melodramatic actors of the early nineteenth-century English theatre. Having been a sailor during the early part of the Napoleonic Wars, Cooke benefitted by a powerful physique. His greatest assets are described by a current historian as "a capacity to unite bravado and affection" and an "ability to strike effective poses or attitudes of both body and countenance..." He played Ruthven in Planché's The Vampire and other supernatural roles at the Lyceum.

24 Ibid., p. 30.
25 See Appendix A.
26 Goodman, p. 150.
27 Ibid., p. 34.
Cooke became most famous for his characterization of William in Douglas Jerrold's *Black-Eyed Susan*, a role that he first performed in 1829 at the Surrey. He also played the part of the sentimental sailor in several other nautical melodramas of the 1820's and 1830's.²⁹

Another popular melodramatic actor of this period was James William Wallack (1791-1864). He attained great attention in Planche's *The Brigand* at the Drury Lane in 1820. Public recognition of his talent in melodrama virtually assigned him to play only in that genre, despite his ambition to perform in great tragic and comic roles.³⁰ Although Wallack did not match the strength and agility of Cooke, he was a robust and physically attractive performer.

Frances Maria Kelley (1790-1882) sang and acted in London theatres from the age of seven. Although she is most mentioned by historians for her creation of a school for actresses on her retirement, she was, for thirty-six years, the most popular melodramatic actress at the Drury Lane.³¹

Two important comic actors of the burgeoning theatre were William Blanchard (1769-1835), and John Liston (1776-1846). Blanchard was famous for playing drunkards and elderly men. Among his more notable performances during his thirty-five year career at the Covent Garden were Sir...

²⁹Cooke played Long Tom Coffin in *The Pilot* at the Adelphi in 1825; ten years later he portrayed Harry Halyard in *My Poll* and *My Partner Joe*. Ibid., 78.


Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*, and Mungo in *The Padlock*. Liston, who was often depressed off-stage and prone to heavy drinking, was the first comic actor to earn a salary that was higher than that of London's tragic actors. He was so adept in farce that at least one of his characterizations was unabashedly imitated by other noted actors. He was remembered for his performance as Sheepface, in *The Village Lawyer*, at the Haymarket in 1805.

Summary

The popular appeal of these and many other actors was nurtured by the triple movement toward a theatre for the general London public. The new theatres created new forms for the theatre experience; the changing population determined new standards of taste in drama and performance; the developments in technology resulting from the Industrial Revolution led to new possibilities for mass entertainment. An increased number of people demanded an increase in theatrical activity, but the area of expansion in the London theatre was the most restricted in terms of purely dramatic activity. Even without the monopoly by the Covent Garden and the Drury Lane, the proprietors and managers of London's minor theatres would have had to respond to the desires of the inter-class audience; these desires were for the very exciting and the very humorous. Mechanical accomplishments were at the service of this new trend of

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32 Ibid., p. 83.

33 Ibid., p. 478.

taste, as were a large number of actors and actresses. It is for this popular theatre that the dramatic authors of the early nineteenth century planned and produced their plays.

**English Drama During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century**

Any survey of the English drama produced between the triumphs of Richard Brinsley Sheridan in the 1770's and the innovations of Thomas William Robertson in the 1860's suffers the dangers of two over-simplifications. The first is a general dismissal of this work on the grounds that it is not great dramatic literature; the second is the antithetical supposition that these plays are of value only as gauges of audience tastes and actor skills. While the drama of the early nineteenth century was clearly designed for commercial success in a popular theatre, and not for any significant, comprehensive view of nineteenth-century English life, it nevertheless reflects conditions and values of its time. Michael R. Booth suggests a connection between the sentimentality and sensationalism of the early nineteenth-century comedies and melodramas and the current social conditions of England:

In fact, these characteristics admirably reflect, in a manner that had to be non-political and socially harmless in order to satisfy the Examiner of Plays, the general sense of being unsettled, of restlessness and social unease after the French Revolution, the breakdown of traditional standards of gentility and graceful living, the fashionable liberal sentimentalism, the upthrust into a less stable society of a vulgar and poorly-educated class of people with flamboyant artistic tastes, and the developing moral sense that was to culminate in a Victorian ethic.35

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The drama of Peake and his contemporaries may best be appreciated as theatrical entertainment with a governing purpose of maintaining conventional moral values. Without the detail or the insight of later, realistic dramatists, the early nineteenth-century English playwrights responded to the social realities of their time, while providing thrills and amusement for the public. Individual dramatists varied in the earnestness or the tact with which they offered reflections on the moral and social changes of the century; some were as didactic as legally permissible, while others scarcely maintained a social function by the reassurance they produced in the resolution of stage conflicts. As playwrights of a populist theatre, these writers were as sensitive to social aggravations as they were to the public's imagination.

**Melodrama**

Melodrama in the first half of the nineteenth century was largely dependent upon spectacle. As it utilized stage technology for both extravagant action sequences and supernatural events, this form of drama included two sub-types that will be referred to in this study as Conventional and Gothic. Conventional melodramas are those in which events and characters are natural and complications are exciting for the audience. Gothic melodramas are those in which some character or event is preternatural and complications are horrifying for the audience. Of course, this distinction is only one possible arbitrary way of dividing the melodramatic genre. These sub-types share a large number

36 Goodlad (p. 192) divides this observable tendency of popular drama into two separate functions: the observation and recording of ethical values, and the actual impression of those values upon an audience.
of qualities: characters that are rigidly defined as either moral or evil, fast-paced action, minimal dialogue in sections of the text where picturization is a better means of furthering the action, and reliance upon special stage-effects. Conventional melodrama contains its own sub-types, such as the nautical plays, and includes a range of treatment by individual writers. But for the purpose of this study, melodrama will be classified according to its treatment of the supernatural and the emotional response of the audience to that approach.

Gothic melodrama on the English stage was introduced in M. G. "Monk" Lewis's Castle Spectre (1797). This play established a pattern of horror and sensation that persisted through the first few decades of the nineteenth century, influencing not only melodrama, but also some attempts at writing tragedy, so that "any tragedy which contained neither ghost, ruined castle, moonlight mountain pass, nor conflagration was almost predestined to failure." The popularity of the Gothic melodrama is attested to by the enthusiastic response of Lyceum audiences to The Vampire in 1820 and Adelphi audiences to Valmondi in 1824. The latter play was described by one reviewer as "one of the most terrific pieces ever produced on the stage..." Its finale was a shocking representation of hell. Weber's opera Der Freischutz appeared at the Lyceum in 1824, running almost without interruption for over two months.

38 Ibid., p. 119.
39 Theatrical Observer #934, 26 November 1824, quoted in Watson, p. 74.
While much of the success of the production can be ascribed to the German composer's music, the public was thrilled by the spectacular staging of its incantation sequence, and by the vigorous performance of T. P. Cooke as the demon Zamiel.\textsuperscript{40} The readiness of the London audience to see the horrifying consequences of human intrusion into the domain of the supernatural preordained the serious efforts of Peake and other writers to adapt Mary Shelley's novel \textit{Frankenstein} to the stage.

The conventional melodrama was the main attraction of early nineteenth-century theatre bills, especially at the minor theatres.\textsuperscript{41} This form of drama offered the London public not only entertainment, but very often a means of viewing contemporary life. Ernest Reynolds credits the melodrama for its frequent reliance on modern life for its subject matter, drawing a connection between the "hack" melodramatic writers and the accomplishments of Robertson in utilizing current English life in his dramatic writing. The authors of popular melodramas, says Reynolds, played a more important part in shaping dramatic standards than did the ambitious writers of historical and poetic tragedies.\textsuperscript{42} Conventional melodramas at times shed light on social problems, reinforcing the values of those whose only diversion was the stage. "Melodrama protested about drink, homelessness, poverty, the poor laws, the game laws, naval discipline, slavery, attitudes to ex-convicts, and a wide range of social injustices."\textsuperscript{43} Even the most action-oriented variety of

\textsuperscript{40}Wilson, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{41}Booth, "Early Victorian Farce," p. 96.
\textsuperscript{42}Reynolds, p. 136.
conventional melodrama, the nautical play, offered instances of social protest. C. A. Somerset's The Sea (1834) includes a brief but determined denunciation of naval floggings by a suitably patriotic central character. While the conventional melodrama of the early nineteenth century was clearly capable of expressing indignation about various social evils, it would be incorrect to characterize these plays as a body of realistic social drama. The most important function of the melodrama was to entertain; within the limitations of its focus on action and suspense, the genre also served a purpose of supporting newly-defined moral values. The melodrama of the 1820's and 1830's was heavily influenced by romantic interests and tastes, providing its audience with an escape from immediate concerns. The romantic tendency is most obvious in the many adaptations of the novels of Sir Walter Scott, particularly those by Edward Fitzball. Exotic or wild settings provide the background in many of the melodramas of Douglas Jerrold and J. B. Buckstone. Jerrold, most remembered for his nautical melodramas, wrote a popular adaptation of Scott's Guy Mannering for the Sadler's Wells in 1821; Buckstone's triumph was The Dream at Sea, produced at the Adelphi in 1835.

Just as important as atmosphere in the melodrama was the integration of farcical characters and sub-plots. Booth writes, "A notable feature

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45 Reynolds, p. 129.
46 Ibid., p. 131.
47 This play features the "romantic shore of Cornwall" for its setting. Ibid., p. 134.
of melodrama is the presence of comic man, comic woman, and scenes of low comedy juxtaposed with scenes of violence and pathos.\textsuperscript{48} The mixing of generic traits within individual plays reflects the balance of audience tastes already influential in the composition of theatre bills. The usual melodrama of an evening's entertainment was almost always followed by a short farce. At times, a farce would be the curtain-raiser of a theatre's bill. The demand for farce caused a number of dramatic authors to develop skills in writing both serious plays and plays with broad humor; indeed, the economic dilemma of many playwrights necessitated versatility to insure success.\textsuperscript{49}

Farce

Farce in the early nineteenth century was propelled by the same combination of general audience tastes and practical theatrical considerations that established the pattern for Gothic and conventional melodrama. The public enjoyed a theatrical diversion without intellectual pretensions. In addition to this audience influence, the increased size of the legitimate theatres helped determine the nature of comic performance. Melodramatic actors were by necessity, (and later, by convention,) larger-than-life; the emergence of farce coincided with a similar broadening of comic acting style. The farce was an energetic form of entertainment that emphasized buffoonery and physical humor. Reynolds dubs it the "Comedy of No Manners," praising its lively humor.

\textsuperscript{48}Booth, "Early Victorian Farce," p. 96.

\textsuperscript{49}For a detailed examination of financial problems of playwrights in this period, see Watson, pp. 434-436.
and contrasting that humor with the bland offerings of most full-length
comedies of the first half of the century.50 The degree of coarseness
in farce varied from one theatre to another, but overall the English
farce was tinged with sentimentality and domestic idealism. The English
farce, especially during the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, was
non-satirical and modest. At a time when French farce was developing a
bitter flavor and an aggressive approach to contemporary life, the farces
of the London stage were riotous, but under the general control of a
system of values accepted by both dramatists and audiences and enforced
by the Lord Chamberlain.51 The sentimental qualities of English farce
and the moral code that governed the form did not prevent its depiction
of an absurd world, for while English farce was disciplined it was
intentionally very funny.

The comic futility of man's existence is demonstrated by his
ridiculous helplessness in the toils of seemingly malignant
chance, chance that governs a universe whose sole purpose is
to drive him to the verge of sanity, to entrap him in incom-
prehensibility, to make doubt his identity, to turn his
perfectly ordinary domestic life into a maelstrom of prepos-
terous contretemps and desperate entanglements, all entirely
beyond his own control.52

Comedy

The preceding description of the world of farce adequately character-
izes some twentieth-century drama; while the behavior in the English
farce of the nineteenth century is purely ludicrous and without ambiguous

50 Reynolds, p. 61.
critical interpretation, the form epitomizes a view of a chaotic life in which no convention is reliable. This treatment of life and human action as bizarre is not shared by the legitimate English comedy of either the late eighteenth century or the 1860's: the former focused on elegant and generally restrained segments of society, while the latter focused on ordinary middle-class life and behavior. It is important to realize that the distinction between farce and comedy is largely based upon an amount of emphasis on physical action. Many of the comedies of the early part of the nineteenth century rely a great deal upon puns and exaggerated characterizations, attracting more attention to an individual actor's mannerisms and delivery than to the playwright's wit or insight. For this reason, critics of the period vigorously complained about the "deterioration" of comedy to a state hardly distinguishable from farce. Obviously, the proportion of farcical matter in pre-Robertson comedies was determined by audience tastes. In addition, the restrictions placed upon the minor theatres before 1843 precluded many efforts to write traditional comedy: by its very nature, the burletta emphasized the performance rather than the text.

Plays of the first half of the nineteenth century that were labelled by their authors as comedies were often patterned after George Colman successful John Bull (1803). This play featured a loose plot structure and sentimental, stereotypical characters. Although Colman wrote the play in five acts, it contained material similar to that of the one-act farces that appealed to the public. In its emphasis on the domestic

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53 Booth, English Plays, p. 3.
and its representation of middle-class ideals, *John Bull* can be considered the model for both full-length comedies and the shorter farces of the next four decades.\(^{54}\) After the passage of the Theatre Regulation Act in 1843, there at least was an increased opportunity for English playwrights to develop a mature comedy of manners. But, despite some efforts by actors on the London stage to incorporate more realism into their characterizations, the nature of English comedy did not visibly change until Robertson's *Society* (1865), and *Caste* (1867).\(^{55}\) Popular dramatists were free to write plays without music after 1843 for the minor theatres, but the full-length comedies they produced remained dependent upon farcical conventions of performance.

**Summary**

This survey of early nineteenth-century drama has been organized to provide a background for the ensuing study of the plays of Richard Brinsley Peake. By no means is the overview provided in this introduction exhaustive; besides the various forms of melodrama, the farce, and the comedy, there were several types of dramatic entertainment written during this period. Extravaganzas and burlesques were very popular. Some playwrights wrote historical or neo-Elizabethan tragedies. However, the range of Peake's work did not extend into these forms. In defining the various genre of the period, and in categorizing the plays of Peake or those of any other dramatist, it should be noted that the

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\(^{54}\) Ibid., p. 61.

\(^{55}\) Reynolds, p. 60.
boundaries between those genre were not distinct. The early nineteenth-century English drama was both diverse in its general forms and homogeneous in its specific traits.

**Reasons For This Study**

The dismissal of the popular London theatre and English drama of the first half of the nineteenth century by most historians and critics is based on the "failure" of the dramatists of that period to embody a comprehensive view of life. Playwrights were versatile and prolific, but they produced few works that seemingly transcended the demands of their audience for entertainment. Nevertheless, these dramatists responded to popular tastes with imagination and skill, despite the restrictions caused by the theatrical monopoly. A study of the popular theatre and its representative figures may illuminate the conceptions and attitudes of the populace; it may also reveal the point of view of the well-educated theatre goers who were not satisfied with the conditions of current drama.

This study will approach several of the plays of Richard Brinsley Peake with special reference to popular reaction and responsible criticism. As the theatrical career of Peake spanned a period of approximately thirty years, insights may be gained on the developments of both audience tastes and critical standards from the Regency period through the first decade of the reign of Queen Victoria. Peake wrote for several theatres; his plays, and their acceptance or rejection by the local audiences for which they were written, may expose variances in public interests according to economic and social backgrounds.
Peake is of interest partly because he is representative of popular dramatists of his time. His plays were written for the enjoyment of the public and for his own commercial success. Like many other dramatic writers, Peake suffered financially, even while his plays were successfully produced. Also, Peake frequently wrote adaptations of non-dramatic material, both English and French, as did many of his contemporaries. In the course of three decades of writing, Peake, though never profound or revolutionary, experienced a maturation of dramatic skill and human insight that reflects the gradual movement of the London theatre from raucous entertainment to significant dramatic offerings.

Planche credited Peake for his "happy knack" for writing roles for popular actors.\(^{56}\) Many of Peake's plays helped build the reputations of current actors and actresses, and certainly those performers reciprocated by insuring the success of Peake's plays. The relation of Peake's plays to the careers of low-comic and melodramatic performers will be explored in the body of this thesis. Another aspect of Peake's work what is unique is that Planche describes as "a grotesque combination of ideas..."\(^{57}\) Peake's humor depends largely upon puns and word-play, often placed in sections of his plays where such banter is unexpected. This particular quality of Peake's writing, along with his imaginative use of stage technology and his uneasy integration of

\(^{56}\) Planche, p. 77.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.
the grim and the ridiculous, will be considered in view of Peake's successes and failures with the London theatre audience.
Richard Brinsley Peake was born in London, on 19 February, 1792. He was the son of the highly-respected Drury Lane treasurer, Richard Peake. The elder Peake may have discouraged any early efforts on the part of his son to seek a career in the theatre; this supposition is based upon the apprenticeship of Richard Brinsley Peake to the engraver James Heath. The younger Peake studied to be an artist until 1815, when he became treasurer of the English Opera House. Peake was named after Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and his bearing of that familiar appellation undoubtedly promoted his later dramatic work. One critic was to call upon Peake to use the memory of the great eighteenth-century playwright to impel improvements in his own work and "to set his brother dramatists a good example."  

The influence of Peake's father on his son's universally well-liked personality is attested to by fond recollections of the elder Peake by his Drury Lane acquaintances. Frances Kelly, while performing in her childhood, developed a close rapport with the "good old gentleman" who doled out the often insufficient wages of the war years to actors and stage hands. She recalled

1George Daniel, ed., Cumberland's British Theatre (London: John Cumberland, 1827), 16:8. (Daniel's remarks and criticisms are contained in his preface to Peake's Amateurs and Actors.)

2Ibid., p. 7.
an incident that represented the good nature of Richard Peake in a letter to Charles Kent, written in 1875. During a confusing pay-day when Frances was nine years old, the treasurer mistakenly presented her with a two-pound note instead of the usual single pound. The bank-note was tattered and worn, but Frances was nonetheless horrified when she discovered the error. She returned the note to Peake, who not only received the girl with kindness, but gave her a one-pound note that was new and presentable. This story may seem trite, but it indicates a quality of generosity in the elder Peake that was reproduced by his son on a much more serious occasion.

The years of Richard Brinsley Peake's assignment as treasurer of the English Opera House were formative of a close friendship between Peake and Samuel James Arnold. Peake was to model at least one character in his plays after Arnold, but the extent of Peake's devotion to his employer is most evidenced by his actions during and after the 1830 fire. Arnold's losses through this calamity were enormous; because of high premiums for theatres Arnold had not obtained insurance for his property. The fire destroyed all of the costumes and properties belonging to the theatre, and the building was gutted. It was through the efforts of Peake that the books and papers of Arnold was saved. On the day following the fire, Peake took a bond for two hundred pounds

\[\text{\cite{L. E. Holman, \textit{Lamb's 'Barbara S---'} (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1935), pp. 77-79.}}\]

\[\text{\cite{Arnold's total loss was valued at forty thousand pounds. \textit{Theatrical Observer} \#2554, 18 February 1830.}}\]

\[\text{\cite{The \textit{London Times}, 17 February 1830, p. 6.}}\]
that Arnold had recently given him in gratitude for his fifteen years of service and tossed it into a breakfast-room fire, telling his friend, "You have lost all by fire, let this go too." The loss of this bond was not the only adverse effect of the fire upon Peake. He had invested the earnings of a dozen years of playwriting in the theatre. Peake served as treasurer for the Lyceum company for several more years, and augmented his income with the modest returns of his new plays, but he never attained a position of financial security for himself and his family.

In order to alleviate the financial burdens of playwrights, a group of dramatists, including Planché, Jerrold, and Peake, formed in 1830 the Dramatic Author's Society. This organization attempted to secure more performance rights for dramatists, effecting the passage of the Authors' Act of 1833. Despite the intentions and efforts of this organization of playwrights, there was no guarantee of appropriate financial returns for playwrights until the 1860's. The most a dramatic writer could expect in the way of royalties was a fee paid by the manager for the playwright's manuscript and an additional sum provided as a bonus if the play was successful. Neither of these payments was large, and it was rare that any dramatist received returns after the ninth performance of his play. Even the much-heralded Authors' Act, which provided for exclusive acting rights for each play's author, was made ineffectual by a court ruling that transferred

performance rights from dramatists to publishers. Under these conditions Peake and his fellow playwrights were obligated to consider the nature of the London public's tastes and interests; a very popular piece might insure a modest financial return, but a play that was perceived as uninteresting by a manager or an audience would be a waste of effort on the part of its writer. For Peake, these financial difficulties were compounded by the burden of a family that was constantly growing.

Peake's involvement in the affairs of the theatrical world is also attested to by his membership in the Beefsteak Club, a social organization that included, in its one hundred and thirty-two year history, some of the foremost personages of the aristocratic, literary, musical, and theatrical worlds. This club met weekly, originally at the Covent Garden, and later at the Lyceum, and provided a forum for an amiable exchange of views on the London theatre.

Most of Peake's pre-1830 plays were produced at the Lyceum. His very first play was a two-act musical farce titled Amateurs and Actors, produced during both the 1818 and 1819 seasons. This play was revived several times in the 1820's, at both the Lyceum and the Covent Garden. Amateurs and Actors featured many of the devices for which Peake's farces would become popular. It is hinged upon a bizarre case of

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7 Watson, pp. 434-436.

8 Planché (p. 78) records that on more than one occasion Peake learned that he was the father of twins on an opening night; whether or not this particular account of Peake is accurate, his obituaries indicated that he was survived by many children.

9 Williams, pp. 120-121.
mistaken identity, and it is full of word-play and other verbal humor. This farce is also characteristic of Peake in that it includes roles that were written for particular players. The part of Geoffry Muffincap was originally played by an actor named Wilkinson, whose "peculiarities of person, voice, and manner" were in harmony with the traits of the character. Interestingly, the later productions of Amateurs and Actors featured Keeley in this low-comic role; this was a rare instance in which Keeley was not the actor for whom Peake created a role with broad physical humor. This play has a theatrical setting, and reflects some of the aggravations of running a theatre in a manner that may have been only slightly exaggerated. In the following dialogue, a theatre manager, appropriately named Bustle, converses with a sympathetic friend; the exchange may parallel an actual discussion between a distraught Arnold and Peake:

**Bustle:** Patience; exemplify the word!—Patience! take a rod in your hand, and go a fishing—there's patience! or take a rod in your hand, and keep a school—there's patience! but a manager! alack, he is broiling on a red-hot gridiron from morning till night.

**Wing:** Poor fellow! and so he is indeed! especially if he happens to be an author too; for what with the audience before the curtain, and the actors behind—with sometimes a morning does of critical severity in the newspapers, he may think himself well off, if, having per chance escape the King's Bench, he does not end his uneasy days in Bedlam. But what's the matter just now?

**Bustle:** Matter!—a matter of magnitude! Would you believe it? A stupid rascal of a tailor has been stuffing King Richard's hump with hay instead of horse-hair!

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10 Planche, p. 77.
Wing: Fie! Mr. Bustle, keep your temper--don't set your back up, about a hump--when a man gets into a passion he's apt to lose his temper; and a manager without temper is like a tragedy actor without talent,--sure to get laughed at by the company.

Bustle: Such errant stupidity! When I was younger, I undertook every department in a Theatre, and never failed--videlicet, "Stuck bills, kept box-book, white-washed Pit entrance, counted checks, scower'd gallery stairs, lit lamps, assisted in first music, dressed Prince Edward and the Duke of York, kept places, spoke occasional address, prompted play, then on for Buskin in the Farce...."

Peake never again used his professional experience as a background for a play, although thirty years after Amateurs and Actors, in his comedy The Title Deeds, he created the character Peter Hush, a hungry and regretful playwright who expresses the misgivings of Peake in a manner that is humorous but stinging.

Through the 1820's, Peake established his reputation in the London theatre community. He wrote several farces and his most notable Gothic melodramas during this period. In March of 1827, Peake introduced two farces in the major theatres: The Hundred-Pound Note, at the Covent Garden, and Comfortable Lodgings; or Paris in 1750, at the Drury Lane. Although critical reviews of Peake's plays at both the Lyceum and the patent theatres were never completely favorable, audience reactions were usually positive. Even the most disdainful of Peake's critics in the 1820's admitted that his plays engendered enthusiasm in the public; the most adamant of those critics consequently assailed the public for its unrefined standards.

11Richard Brinsley Peake, Amateurs and Actors, in Cumberland's British Theatre, vol. 16, p. 27.
The destruction of the English Opera House in 1830 forced Arnold and his company to rent other theatres for performances. The Lyceum company was alternately housed at the Adelphi and the Olympic. Plays by Peake were available to new audiences, although this fact doubtless offered little compensation to the financially-ruined playwright. The Evil Eye, one of Peake's most spectacular melodramas, was produced in 1831 at the Adelphi; the following year witnessed the successful production of Peake's comic drama The Climbing Boy at the Olympic. Meanwhile, Peake had written at least one play, The Chancery Suit, for the Covent Garden. Throughout the 1830's Peake was writing for several theatres, including the new English Opera House. Peake wrote his earliest comedies during this decade, as well as some one-act farces and well-received romantic melodramas. Criticism of Peake was less harsh than it had been in the previous decade. There may be a variety of causes for this mellowing of critical response to Peake: the plays of Peake displayed more careful structuring and better dramatic sensibility as the writer matured, the style of his play-writing became acceptable as he advanced in age and respectability, and the critics themselves grew more tolerant toward the popular theatre.

In the 1840's, Peake expended much effort in non-dramatic writing. His most ambitious ventures of this period were his two-volume Memoirs of the Colman Family (1841) and his three-volume novel Cartouche, the Celebrated French Robber (1844). The former is an exhaustive account of the lives of George Colman, the elder, and

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12 Wilson, p. 54.
George Colman, the younger, tracing their history from the 1720's through the 1830's. In his preface to the biography, Peake acknowledges the use of a large amount of material provided him by other figures in the theatrical world; in fact, actual narrative by Peake appears only intermittently in the text, the majority of both volumes consisting of letters and anecdotes. Nevertheless, the work displays considerable research and organization. *Cartouche* is a fictional account of an actual French highwayman, Louis Dominique Cartouche, who was executed in 1721. In his preface to this book, Peake admits some indebtedness to a Spanish author, Don Francisco De Quevedo Villegas. However, the novel is largely the product of Peake's own imagination. The action in the novel is fast-paced, and its tone fluctuates between sentimentality and hilarity, much like the tone of Peake's melodramas. *Cartouche* incorporates both situational humor and Peake's inevitable use of word-play. The novel also assumes a didactic function. The final chapters are without humor, and Peake concludes with a lament on the errors in Cartouche's life.

Also during the 1840's, Peake wrote several articles and short stories for *Bentley's Miscellany*. Notable among these writings were two Gothic horror stories, "The Cobbler Physician" and "Transylvannian Anatomie!", both printed in 1840. In these stories Peake arrives at the same balance of the terrifying and the absurd that had characterized his earlier Gothic plays. The vividness of Peake's narratives illustrates the imagination that had so taxed the technical expertise of the London theatres in *Presumption!* and *The Bottle Imp*.

Peake continued to write for the theatre in the 1840's, especially after the Theatre Regulation Act removed the restrictions on legitimate
drama. In this period he wrote his most mature comedies, The Sheriff of the County (1845) and The Title Deeds (1847). The success of the latter play probably gratified Peake in a special way, as it is likely that he suspected it would be his last dramatic work. His playwright character, Peter Hush, introduces a sombre note at the end of a humorous speech about his lack of nourishment:

My soul hath felt a secret weight,
A warning of approaching fate;
Firm as a flint I face mine end,
My heart may burst, but cannot bent. 13

Richard Brinsley Peake died on 4 October 1847. His widow and children were left in a severe financial bind. Within a few weeks of Peake's death a subscription was set up and a benefit performance given to assist his family. 14 Obituaries were praising toward Peake's years of writing and toward his warm personality, "more generous when generosity was indeed a hardship towards himself." 15 One writer described the attitude of the public toward the deceased playwright as one of great esteem and appreciation for "the unceasing amusement he afforded them during many years." 16

For thirty years, Richard Brinsley Peake provided entertainment for London public. His concern for popular acceptance and commercial success may have precluded his becoming a great dramatists, but it

14Theatrical Journal #409, 16 October 1847.
15Ibid.
16The Times (London), 7 October 1847, p. 5.
did not guarantee him the financial rewards that such a practical position may seem to imply. Peake was a dramatic writer in a time when dramatic standards invited no innovations and theatrical and economic realities offered few benefits to playwrights. Peake, who continued to write plays until the last year of his life, responded to and helped pattern changes in the popular London theatre with an interest and enthusiasm that was not mercenary in nature.
CHAPTER III

PEAKE'S GOTHIC MELODRAMA

Presumption!: or, The Fate of Frankenstein (1823)

The year 1823 witnessed the first adaptations of Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus, to the London Stage. Thematically, Mary Shelley's tale offered several points of interest for the theatre audiences of the early nineteenth century. Integral to Frankenstein is a question of the moral boundaries to the human pursuit of knowledge. This concern, brought about by the investigations of the natural sciences, was important to the Romantic poets and to the philosophers of the time; it undoubtedly was a question of significance to the educated theatre goers. It was not merely the scrutiny of Nature by the developing sciences that concerned the artists and thinkers of the period, but, rather, the prospect of the manipulation of Nature. In the preface to her 1818 novel, Mary Shelley acknowledges the inquiries of Dr. Erasmus Darwin, the grand-father of Charles Darwin, and "some of the physiological writers of Germany"\footnote{Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus (New York: Airmont Publishing Company, 1963), p. 9.} as influences on her story. The progress of the natural sciences was one movement that prompted philosophical speculation and concern in the early nineteenth century; equally important to ethical debate and artistic expression was the fruition of the Industrial Revolution.
The rapid growth of London's population, chiefly among the working class, paralleled what many Romantic artists identified as an evolving dehumanized social order.² The technological developments of the period were altering Man's relation to his environment, while scientific inquiry was leading to new conclusions about the physical universe. Romanticism can be viewed, in part, as a reflection of a desire to keep some fragment of life mysterious. As the subtitle of the novel indicates, the theme of the life-giver, the ideally responsible and benevolent creator and provider, was of major interest to Mary Shelley. This concern embodies both the sense of mystery desired by the Romantics—in this context defined as anyone rejecting the standards of an impersonal industrial society—and an important question about the nature of evil. Frankenstein can be interpreted as an allegory of the relationship between Man and God; consequently, the novel raises the question of the connection between a violent and brutal human life and the withholding of love by an irresponsible parent/God figure. A feature of Frankenstein that made it appealing on a less philosophical level was the character of the unloved monster. Frankenstein's creature, as presented in the novel, earns sympathy as a natural being who seeks approval and affection, but is spurned because of his ugliness. The tale predates Victor Hugo's The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1831), perhaps the quintessential treatment of this subject in Romantic literature, but the monster in Frankenstein

has its own precursors on the English stage, such as Bremo in *Mucedorus* (1598), and Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611). Frankenstein's creation fits into a tradition of deformed outcasts, although its character is particularly shaped by early nineteenth-century philosophic and sentimental concerns. Another quality of the novel that appealed to the Romantic imagination was its exotic atmosphere, including descriptions of extraordinary foreign terrain and of thrilling action. This last characteristic of *Frankenstein* is what most lent it to theatrical adaptation. A stage version of the story could compel an audience to either reaffirm or reconsider its values, but far more importantly for the popular theatre, it could excite and startle that audience for an evening's diversion.

Richard Brinsley Peake was the first London dramatist to write an adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel. His play was titled *Presumption! or, The Fate of Frankenstein*. This melodrama was presented at the English Opera House during the late summer of 1823. During the autumn of the same year, another original adaptation, called *Frankenstein; or, The Danger of Presumption*, played at the Royal West London Theatre, and either a third version or a production of one of the other two adaptations appeared at the Coburg. The Coburg production has been wrongly identified by some historians as the adaptation by H. M. Milner, called *Frankenstein; or, The Man and The Monster*, which did

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play at the Coburg, but not until the summer of 1826. At the same time that the first serious stage adaptations of the Frankenstein story thrilled London audiences, three parodies of the tale appeared in various London theatres. *Frank-in-Steam, or, The Modern Promise to Pay*, which played at the Adelphi, featured an overly-ambitious young medical student; the Surrey offered a character named Frankenstitch (the Needle Prometheus), who was a tailor with a plan for sewing together pieces of several bodies; and a monster played by a dwarf was the attraction of a burlesque at the David-Royal Amphitheatre. It is likely that the enthusiasm that made this variety of interpretations possible was due to the vociferous response accorded Peake's version during the summer. *Presumption!* was not only the first theatrical version of the tale to appear, but also, it played in the most respectable and publicized of the minor theatres.

Peake's adaptation alters Mary Shelley's text in order to have several love affairs in progress. Elizabeth, the adopted sister and bride of Frankenstein in the novel, is engaged in the play to Frankenstein's friend Clerval. Frankenstein is engaged to Agatha DeLacey, whose brother Felix is in love with the Arabian girl, Safie. This variety of romantic relationships alleviates the dismal ending of the story without modifying the moral implications of Frankenstein's actions; Frankenstein and his lover suffer, but the audience is

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4 Originally published in London by J. Duncombe; available in the McDowell Film Archives: Film #378.

assured that the other couples will survive and be happy. Each of these relationships features songs as part of its development. The music for these songs is attributed to a Mr. Watson, and Peake apparently wrote the lyrics. Adding a fourth relationship and considerable comic material to the play, Peake created the character Fritz, a cow-loving former peasant who is now Frankenstein's domestic servant, and Fritz's wife, Madame Ninon, a brawny governess for Frankenstein's brother William.

Peake's farcical ability is well-represented in Presumption! When the violent action of the play is not immediately evident, as when Fritz paces nervously through Frankenstein's home on an unpleasant night, or when he confronts his wife on his return to the countryside, the humor either welcomey or unwelcomey disrupts the suspenseful mood of the melodrama. When the terrifying action is in progress, the humor becomes that of a black comedy or a deliberate self-parody. One instance of this intrusive mockery occurs when young William is carried off by the Monster, leaving Fritz as a distraught witness. His wife and the rest of the household join him.

**Madame Ninon:** I sent him to that Fritz, that he might be out of the way.

**Fritz:** Yes; and now he's out of everybody's way. 6

Not all of the play's humor is delivered by Fritz. At another tense moment in the play's action, the gypsy Hammerpan describes to a horrified Frankenstein the passage of the Monster through the woods,

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and claims that he saw it with his "one eye," explaining that his other eye had once been struck by a pebble and that he has been 'stone' blind ever since." Undoubtedly, the word-play and exaggerated behavior of some of the characters in the play reflects Peake's efficiency in utilizing the individual talents of the Lyceum company as much as his own mirthfulness. But the choice to offer comic diversion within the framework of a terrifying melodrama indicates a disregard for generic purity for the purpose of gaining audience enthusiasm by every possible means. Peake would continue to mix humor and suspense in his melodramas, gradually acquiring a sense of balance and proportion that eliminated the danger of neutralizing a moment of tension for the sake of a joke.

Peake also alters Mary Shelley's story by leaving the Monster mute. The creature in Peake's play signals both sentimentality and rage by means of pantomime, at one point in the action evoking audience sympathy by attempting to capture musical notes out of the air with his bare hands, and at another point, shocking the audience with an expression of macabre delight as he kidnaps the child William. The play also calls for a large amount of practical scenery, special visual effects, and exciting physical action. Although the laboratory of Frankenstein is concealed from the audience, the creature has a startling entrance from the laboratory doorway on a gallery above the stage. The door of laboratory breaks to pieces with a loud crash---red fire within.---The Monster discovered at the door entrance in smoke, which evaporates---the red flame continues visible.

7 Ibid., p. 11.
The Monster advances forward, breaks through the balustrade or railing of gallery immediately facing door of laboratory, jumps on the table beneath, and from thence leaps on the stage. . . .

Later scenes represent the burning of the DeLacey cottage by the Monster and the daring escape of its occupants, and the climactic confrontation of Frankenstein and the creature on the slope of a snow-covered mountain, which ends with an avalanche that buries them both. However, there are no on-stage murders in Peake's adaptation. The Monster strangles William in the woods and shoots Agatha with a stolen pistol, but the audience must wait to be informed of these killings after other characters have discovered the bodies. Interestingly, Milner's Coburg version displays the interior of the laboratory and several brutal killings on the stage. Peake succeeds in preserving the sense of mystery of the novel, in which Frankenstein, as narrator, witnesses only the aftermath of each crime. It is also likely that Peake took into consideration the tastes of the English Opera House patronage, which were less favorable to vividly represented murder and mayhem than were the tastes of working-class audiences at the Coburg. Milner's depiction of the laboratory is simple, and its main asset seems to be the "entrance" of the Monster by sitting up on a table on which he has been lying, covered by a sheet.

The appearance of the Monster was bizarre, but somewhat more ethereal than hideous. As in the case of the 'wretch' described by Frankenstein in the novel, the creature of Presumption had lengthy black hair. The Monster's skin was light blue, perhaps to achieve a

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8 Ibid., p. 7.
more striking effect than that which would have been produced by the pale yellow described in the novel. The attire of the creature consisted of a close-fitting cotton dress or tunic, and a larger robe or toga that was removed during the performance. The scanty dress of the Monster facilitated actor movement; it also served to display the physique of the actor playing the role.

The part of the Monster in the 1823 production was taken by T. P. Cooke, whose well-developed body and skills in stage movement and facial expression provided an excellent vehicle for Peake's energetic creature. Victor Frankenstein was played by James Wallack, perhaps the most recognized of the Lyceum's coterie of leading men. Robert Keeley was appropriately cast as the clownish Fritz. Only the most agitated and purely subjective critics of the production would fail to acknowledge the service rendered Peake's script by the combined talents of these three actors. Of the three, Cooke undoubtedly benefited the most from Presumption!, as his role offered the most unique challenge of the production and certainly received the largest share of audience attention.

Presumption! opened on Monday, 28 July, at the head of a program that included two farces, The Rival Soldiers and Sharp and Flat. That the opening night audience was more than satisfied with the novelties of the production was frankly, if disparagingly, noted in the reviews. The Theatrical Observer's reviewer pointed out the theme of man's irresponsible use of science "in attempting to exceed the limits of man's prescribed powers, by trespassing on the work of the universal
Figure 3: Theatre bill announcing the opening night of Peake's *Presumption!* (From the *Theatrical Observer*.)
Theatre Royal English Opera House.

This Evening will be performed, (first time) a new Romance, with new
Music, Scenes, Dresses, and Decorations, to be called

Presumption;
Or, the Fate of Frankenstein.

The new Music, composed by Mr. WATSON.
Frankenstein, Mr WALLACK.
De Lacey, a banished Gentleman, Mr ROWBOTHAM.
Felix De Lacey, (his son) Mr PEARMAN.
Clerval, Mr J. BLAND, Fritz, Mr KEELEY,
Hammerpan, Mr SALTER, Tanskin, Mr SHIELD,
Gypsy, Mr. H. PHILLIPS,
(........) Mr. T. P. COOKE,
Elizabeth, [Sister of Frankenstein] Mrs AUSTIN,
Agatha de Lacey, Miss L. DANCE,
Madame Ninon, [Wife of Fritz] Mrs J. WEIPPERT,
Satie, [an Arabian Girl] Miss POVEY.

After which, the Musical Entertainment of

The Rival Soldiers.

Captain Cruizer, Mr ROWBOTHAM, Lenox, Mr BLAND,
Major Tactic, Mr W. BENNETT, Corporal, Mr M. E. A.R.S,
Sinclair, Mr PEARMAN,
Nipperkin, Mr W. CHAPMAN, who will sing, The Nightingale Club.
Mary, Miss HOLDA WAY.

To conclude with the Operatic Force of

SHARP and FLAT.

Sir Peter Probable, Mr W. BENNETT,
Captain Delrose, Mr BROADHURST,
Solomon Sharpwit, (2nd time) Mr W. CHAPMAN,
Nikey, (2nd. time) Mr KEELEY,
Brisk, Mr SALTER, James, Mr LODGE,
Rosabel, Miss HOLDA WAY,
Jenny, (2nd time) Mrs J. WEIPPERT,

The reviewer expressed misgivings about the effort to dramatize Mary Shelley's novel, but admitted that the play has value as a "curiosity." The same writer recommended that Peake's melodrama should continue to be performed "as long as the town will come to see it," and suggested, with a note of disdain, that visitors from the provinces touring the Zoological Gardens near the theatre would be interested in seeing the monster on the stage as well as the animals in captivity. The reviewer continued,

It was received throughout with marked attention, and although there was an apposition, the great majority were decidedly in favor of the repetition of this extraordinary affair. Nothing could be more excellent than the acting of Mr. T. P. Cooke, as the nameless monster, in marking the first effects of some of the most striking objects of art and nature upon his newly-created faculties.

The review in the *Times* was almost completely hostile. Cooke was praised for his pantomimic abilities, but the reviewer found the Monster, as drawn by Peake, uncomfortably inconsistent. Demanding a more tangible moral statement from the play, the reviewer objected to the creature's moments of gentleness. The writer indicated no interest in the Monster as a human being with emotions; his only concern was for the Monster's dramatic function in bringing about the downfall of the impious Victor. This reviewer also vigorously assaulted Watson's music, complaining that it was dull, and that it contained "at least thirteen movements which we have heard in every melo-drama for the last five-and-twenty years."10 The scenery was faulted in this review

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9 *Theatrical Observer* #524, 29 July 1823.

10 *The London Times* 29 July 1823, p. 3.
because the laboratory was not depicted. In conclusion, the Times writer expressed his opinion that the production was almost worthless, but, he added, "that, as times go, will be no great obstacle to its success. The galleries, when the curtain fell, called loudly for Mr. T. P. Cooke."

The reviewer for the Literary Gazette devoted some space in his account of the opening performance to a reassurance of himself and the public of the existence of a moral message in Presumption!, but subsequently analyzed the production with more insight than that exhibited in either the Theatrical Observer or the Times. The first complaint of this review was that the production had been over-rated in the management's publicity. The reviewer thought the play satisfactory, but undeserving of the excitement its producers had tried to engender. Cooke, Wallack, and Keeley were each highly praised, but the humor of Keeley's character was regarded by this writer as an annoyance. "To be relished this Drama ought to have been entirely of the preternatural and terrible cast, with such variety as softer emotions and music could have given." The Literary Gazette reviewer assailed the humor in the play not only because it created an emotional imbalance, but also because it contributed to a general lack of sensitivity in Peake's treatment of the characters. The reviewer was not inclined to feel sympathetic toward the Monster; nor did he find much in the way of human feeling in Victor Frankenstein.

11The London Literary Gazette #341, 2 August 1823, p. 493.
The Examiner critic also faulted the play for losing some of the compassion evident in the novel. In fact, the sudden deaths of both Victor and the "fiend" preclude the final regrets of both that Mary Shelley had used in the termination of her novel. The alteration may be a dramatic expediency for a faster-paced action; the focus of Peake seems to be more on the exciting spectacle and melodramatic action of the material than on the development of either Frankenstein's character for elaborate regrets and moral commentary or the character of the Monster for great pathos and philosophical reflection. It is obvious that the majority of the theatre's patrons were satisfied with this balance of action and rhetoric, but the Examiner reviewer desired more sensitivity than sensationalism. "All the poetry in this eccentric flight is lost, and we merely witness a revengeful North American savage, painted blue, waiting about a house to kidnap a boy and murder a girl. . . .' The same critic expressed no difficulty with the humor in the play. Rather, he praised the comicality of Fritz as one of the production's strong points.

Almost half of the space of the Examiner review was devoted to speculation about the philosophical questions raised by the subject matter of the play. Two major points were made by the writer. The first was that the utilization of scientific knowledge for the creation of new human beings is both conceivable outside an artistic metaworld and quite moral. "We do not like the pursuit of attainable knowledge

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12 The Examiner #810, 3 August 1823, p. 504.
to be termed impious or presumptuous."³ The second point of the
writer was the first acknowledgment in the reviews of the Monster as
a representative human being:

"We were half-disposed, on Monday night, to regard this drama
as a satire on our Irish system, which creates monsters
exactly like the overly-curious Frankenstein, and in the
same manner runs about shooting them for being precisely
what they have been made, and that with a persevering
complacency—an immovable self-satisfaction, which could
only be produced by the practice of successive generations,
and the steadiness of nerve which is its consequence. The
dramatic monster too was willing to work hard, to cut wood
and bear heavy burthens, then; but the system stood in his
way. His kindness was repulsed, his unavoidable prejudices
treated roughly, and in revenge, he sets fire to a cottage!
The disguise is too shallow; it is certainly a satire!

The conclusion of the reviewer was hasty and not fully-supported.
Nevertheless, his frame of reference for judging the merits of the
tale and the consequent liabilities of Peake's stage version was far-
sighted and humanitarian. There was no warning in this review about
"the danger of presumption." Rather, the article exhibited a respect
for imagination and human sentiments.

The 30 July issue of the Theatrical Observer reported that the
second night's performance "drew an overflowing house . . . and its
reception was decidedly favorable by the greater portion of the
audience."¹⁴ The same issue contained a letter from a Mr. John Brown,
who found the Theatrical Observer too lenient on Peake's play, and who
vocalized at least one complaint of the minority of English Opera

¹³Ibid., p. 505.

¹⁴Theatrical Observer #525, 30 July 1823.
House patrons who hissed the play. Brown spoke of the novel unfavorably, but reserved most of his attack for "Mr. Parentheses" (a reference to the representation of the Monster's character on the bill of the play by a pair of empty parentheses). Brown called Cooke's character "a raw-head and bloody-bones," and vowed that he would not take his pregnant wife to see him. Brown's primary consideration seemed not to have been the morals or meanings of Presumption! as much as the virile spectacle of the scantily-clad ex-sailor, T. P. Cooke.

A confrontation developed in early August between the management of the theatre and a self-described "few zealous friends of morality." A placard was circulated throughout London, condemning the play as being of "a decidedly immoral tendency" and warning against its "dangerous doctrines." The response by Samuel James Arnold was immediate and stern. Citing the remarkable attendance at the theatre by very respectable audiences and the official sanction of the Lord Chamberlain, Arnold's rebuttal undermined the self-righteous attack on the play and concluded with a threat of legal action.

Arnold's claim of support for the play from fashionable quarters was supported by several reports in the Theatrical Observer of notables filling the galleries and private boxes. The fourth performance of Presumption! was attended by the Duke and the Duchess of Somerset and several distinguished Lords and Ladies; the eighth performance was

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15 Theatrical Observer #534, 9 August 1823.
16 Theatrical Observer #536, 12 August 1823.
17 Theatrical Observer #527, 1 August 1823.
attended by Lady Ellenborough, the Countess of Stanhope, and a number of other representatives of the aristocracy. In addition to these members of the upper class, the production was attended by Frankenstein's author. Mary Shelley was greatly impressed with Cooke and Wallack, although she did not like Peake's adaptation of the story. Her reservations about the quality of Peake's script were outweighed by her enthusiasm for the attention that her novel received through the public discussion of the dramatization.

Presumption! continued to play with great success through the first half of August, always heading the program and followed by other melodramas, farces, or musical comedies. Its eighteenth performance, on Monday, 18 August, marked the first instance in which it concluded an evening's entertainment. This shift of the melodrama's position on the Lyceum bill was probably not due as much to a decrease in Presumption!'s popularity as to the arrival at the theatre of the popular Charles Mathews. Peake's play followed two of Mathew's vehicles: The Polly Packet and Monsieur Tonson. During the final six weeks of the theatre's season, Presumption! continued to be frequently played but never again with top billing. The principal attraction of the English Opera House during these few weeks was Mathews in his dramatic monologues and most popular roles.

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18 Theatrical Observer #532, 7 August 1823.

19 Glut (p. 32) records Mary Shelley's comments on the performance without identifying his source. Mary Shelley's letters and personal accounts are available in F. Jones, ed., Letters of Mary Shelley, 2 vols., 1944, and Mary Shelley's Journal, 1947.
The success of *Presumption!* was very likely a major reason for a revival of James Robertson Planché's *The Vampire* for two performances near the end of the 1823 season. Cooke, already terrifying audiences as the Monster, returned to the role of Ruthven, the vampire, which he had made popular three years earlier. This revival was well-received by the public, and the first of the two performances was under the patronage of the Duke of York. Clearly the Gothic melodrama had attained a widespread popularity by the Autumn of 1823, and *Presumption!* was the most immediate cause for this trend in taste.

*Presumption!*'s final performance of the 1823 season took place on the closing night of the theatre, Saturday, 4 October. The play followed the melodrama *The Miller's Maid* and preceded *Gretna Green*, a musical farce. This was the thirty-seventh performance of *Presumption!* Peake's play was done again, for eighty nights, at the Porte St. Martin in Paris, delighting French audiences that were as vocal in their enthusiasm as the English had been.\(^{20}\) It appeared in New York City in January, 1825, and played for one week to excited audiences.\(^{21}\) In London, the popular and distinguished support for *Presumption!* had not abated by 1824, as it was performed three times at the Covent Garden with considerable success. The *Theatrical Observer* reported the popular reception of Peake's play at the Covent Garden with the assurance that "modesty is as prevalent in this theatre


as any one. The 1824 performances were presented by a substantially altered cast, but Cooke and Keeley continued to play their roles from the previous season. Throughout the 1820's, Cooke would play the part of the Monster in more than one dramatization of Frankenstein, eventually portraying the character 365 times. Presumption! continued to be played at the Lyceum as an occasional afterpiece; it was performed for several evenings in 1827, with William Bennett as Frankenstein, O. Smith as the Monster, and Keeley continuing in the role of Fritz.

The influence of Presumption! on the London theatre may account for the enthusiastic reception accorded Valmondi at the Adelphi and Der Freischutz at the English Opera House in 1824. However, Peake's play was itself a response to a growing proclivity on the part of theatre audiences toward the eerie. Presumption! succeeded in entertaining its escape-seeking audience by offering bizarre spectacle and horrifying action. A number of reviewers indicated that another factor in the success of Presumption! was its representation of Mary Shelley's theme of human interference in the affairs of nature. Peake did nothing to articulate this concern in a manner stronger than that of the novel's author, but the tale of Frankenstein presupposes a moral order that the nineteenth-century theatre audience could recognize. Perhaps the Examiner critic and certain audience members saw through the simply proscriptive side of this question to a more fundamental concern about the responsibilities of being human; when Man has

22 Theatrical Observer #817, 12 July 1824.
23 Glut, p. 29.
24 Theatrical Observer #1764, 4 August 1827.
authority over another creature, he must exercise his dominion with love. Compounding this altruistic concern is the compassion that may be felt for the rejected Monster; undoubtedly Cooke evoked the sentiments of some audience members, but Peake's characterization of the Monster as a mute and his catastrophic ending severely limited the possibilities for pathos. More than one reviewer criticized Peake for failing to develop the dramatic potential of the Shelley novel beyond its shocking features. Peake's melodrama succeeded in those areas where the playwright was mostly concerned as a popular commercial writer: it thrilled an audience that included both working class and nobility; it harnessed the abilities of three of London's most accomplished actors and broadened the popular recognition of those actors; and it made excellent use of theatrical technology to project its illusions. For Peake, these accomplishments, along with the furor that developed during the play's run, insured a greater acceptance and recognition among the London public.

The Bottle Imp (1828)

The Gothic melodrama by Richard Brinsley Peake that is most often mentioned in historical surveys of the 1820's is The Bottle Imp. While the source for this melodrama is not as familiar to twentieth-century readers as Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, the play itself has warranted a significant amount of attention by its technological feats and its enormous popularity. In several ways, the composition and success of the production of The Bottle Imp paralleled the circumstances of the production of Presumption!. The Bottle Imp blended horror, pathos, and humor for a multi-faceted evening of entertainment. It utilized
extravagant scenery, striking costumes, and marvelous special effects. The play was received by its 1828 audience with enthusiasm, and it was vigorously attacked by most London critics. In addition, The Bottle Imp was carried in its initial production by some of the talented actors for whom Peake developed certain roles. However, in the five years between the writing of Presumption! and the creation of The Bottle Imp, Peake had experienced a maturation of theatrical sensibility that had made him more attuned to public interests and expectations. While, as many reviewers did not hesitate to point out, there is much in the humor of the play that is unimaginative, there is nevertheless a balance between the play's comicality and its tension, so that there is a minimal amount of macabre humor. Also, Peake wrote The Bottle Imp with a sense for spectacular visual effects that was not as evident in his earlier horror play. Finally, by 1828 Peake had an even greater sensitivity to the potential of Robert Keeley; accordingly, Keeley's role in The Bottle Imp provided for a large amount of comic business, some of it improvisational.

The Bottle Imp is an adaptation of a German folk tale that had been recently printed in English in a volume titled Popular Tales of the Northern Nations. The story is set in sixteenth-century Venice. A German traveler, Albert, and his bumpkin valet de chambre, Willibald, arrive in the city to almost immediately fall prey to the vindictive Nicola, a nobleman who possesses a demon enclosed in a glass bottle. Nicola is served by this bottle imp, but must be rid of it before the moment of his death. The only way a possessor of this demon can get rid of it is to sell it at a price smaller than that at which it was
bought. Nicola sells the imp to the unsuspecting Albert for a mere five ducats; the remainder of the complication involves a series of purchases of the bottle at progressively lower prices, with Albert constantly regaining the fiend against his own will. Finally, in a scene within a burning prison, Nicola buys what he believes is a canteen full of water from Albert with a coin of the smallest possible value. The canteen is actually the bottle containing the imp. As the prison collapses in flames, the bottle imp carries Nicola off to Hell.

The 1828 Lyceum production of *The Bottle Imp* exercised the scenic and technical expertise of the theatre at that time. The scenery for that production was the responsibility of the team of Tomkins and Pitt; among their accomplishments was the representation of the Venetian canals, with moving gondolas, in the play's opening scene. The script called for supernatural effects as well as impressive settings. Special traps were employed for scenes in which the bottle either appears or changes into a canteen. "Vampire" traps were used for the sudden appearances of the demon in human size. The arrival or departure of the imp was masked by blue fire and smoke.²⁵

The demon's costume was sea green in color and was tightly fitted to the actor's body. The headpiece included horns and a horrid mask, and a huge wing connected the wrists of the costume to its hips. It is apparent that the actor playing this role, O. Smith, took great

²⁵An 1838 Boston production of *The Bottle Imp* apparently used specially treated magnesium for the blue fire effect; it is possible that the London technicians used the same means. Sara A. Kile, "John B. Wright's Staging at The National Theatre, Boston, 1836 to 1853" (M.A. thesis, Ohio State University, 1959), p. 76.
advantage of this flexible wing in projecting a frightening stage picture.

The humor in the play is almost entirely Willibald's, as this part was written for and played by Keeley. Willibald delivers both inane remarks and physical blunders for comic relief. Observing the canals of Venice upon his arrival, Willibald comments, "how often they water the streets here!" At another point in the play, he breaks up a graceful waltz by mistakenly entering a ballroom with Albert's luggage. However, the scene that was most enjoyed by the 1828 audience involves the use of nationality humor. Willibald, examining a dissertation on demons and the supernatural, takes out a large sausage and a knife and begins to eat. The humor of the scene depends upon the contrast between the philosophical subject matter and the gross behavior with which it is delivered, a contrast that was effectively rendered by the clownish Keeley; the scene also relies upon a prototypical picture of the German character. Willibald is not the only character in the play who represents a popular conception of a nationality group. Nicola, the villain of the melodrama, is Spanish; another character, a peddler named Shadrack, is Jewish. Peake received no formal criticism for these stage caricatures, probably because they were considered by the public and press as harmless comic or serious types. Over a year before The Bottle Imp was produced, a farce by Peake, titled Comfortable Lodgings, was hissed by audience members and assailed by critics for its representation of Frenchmen.

as licentious. Apparently, Peake's depiction of nationalities in The Bottle Imp was acceptable to his audience so long as it represented either the most discreet foibles or the most reprehensible villainy of each character.  

The Bottle Imp includes sentimentality as well as the eerie and the ridiculous. A love interest is developed between Albert and Marcelia, a girl whom Albert had abandoned before coming to Venice. The songs that are incorporated within the romantic sections of the play were written by George Herbert Bonaparte Rodwell. Most notable of these songs is a canzonet sung by Albert in the second act. This song was loudly encored on almost every evening of the play's first season, and the actor playing Albert, Mr. Wood, was praised by most reviewers for his feeling in its delivery. Another feature of the melodrama that brings some variety to the emotional composition of its conflicts is the development of pathos for Nicola. At one point in the play the Spaniard appears hungry and destitute on the street, and must beg for money. Although Nicola is guilty of parricide and countless seductions, he is more than once represented as suffering from either physical or spiritual want. The dimension of Nicola's character is not such that his final punishment seems unwarranted, but there is more to his stage actions than pure deviousness. In the original production, the role of Nicola was played by James Vining,

27 Although Comfortable Lodgings was a Drury Lane piece, and therefore subject to greater expectations, its hostile reception in the journals was much more pointed than the reactions of the same reviewers to Peake's nationality humor in The Bottle Imp. See Theatrical Observer #1640, 12 March 1827.
the most accomplished player of suave miscreants in the English Opera House company; there is no indication in the accounts of the play that Vining highlighted the pathetic moments of the character to the expense of Nicola's evil qualities.

The *Bottle Imp* opened on Monday, 7 July, 1828, followed by the melodrama *The Sergeant's Wife*, and the comic operetta *Military Tactics*. The review in the *Theatrical Observer* of the following day stated that *The Bottle Imp* was enthusiastically received by the audience, with no audible dissent. The critic himself was appalled at the 'wretched attempts at wit' in Peake's comic scenes, accusing Peake not only of a poor sense of humor, but of some plagiarism as well. The reviewer balanced his sharp attack on the humorous scenes with extensive praise of Peake's handling of the serious side of the story. Wood was commended in this review for his rendition of the canzonet, and Rodwell's music was generally approved. The critic found Vining to be sufficiently threatening as the villain, but noted in his review that this actor overplayed one of his more diabolical scenes, excusing that impropriety with a reference to Vining's country background. The greatest attention in the *Theatrical Observer* review was given to O. Smith and Keeley. Smith was praised for his vocal quality and gestures, which succeeded in projecting the horrifying nature of the imp. The reviewer expressed approval for Keeley's characterization, despite his disdain for the material given that actor. According to this writer, Keeley delivered not only comic lines and business but also expressions of terror with

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28 *Theatrical Observer* #2051, 8 July 1828.
Figure 4: Theatre bill announcing the opening night of Peake's The Bottle Imp. (From the Theatrical Observer.)
Theatre Royal, English Opera.
This Evening, (first time) an Operatic Romance, in two acts, called

The Bottle-Imp.

Albert, (a German Traveller) Mr. WOOD,
Willibald, (his servant) Mr. KEELEY,
Nicola, (a Spaniard) Mr. JAMES VINING, Waldeck, Mr. EVANS,
Conrado, (his son) Mr. BAKER,
Shadrac, (a Jew, Pedlar) Mr. MINTON,
Cinell, (a servant) Mr. BALTER,
Serjeant, Mr. EAST, Inquisitor, Mr. IRWIN,
Ploutesio, Mr. J. COOPER, Chamberlain, Mr. BRATH.
The Bottle Imp, Mr. O. SMITH.

Marchesa, (Daughter of Waldeck) Miss CAWS.
Lucrata, (a Venetian Lady) Miss WESTON,
Philippa, (her Attendant) Miss H. CAWS.

New Scenery.


After which, the Drama of

The Serjeant’s Wife.

Mozart’s Grand Overture to ZAUBERFLOTE.

Old Cartouch, Mr. BARTLEY,
Frederick Cartouch, (the Serjeant) Mr. THORNE,
Robin, Mr. KEELEY,
Dennis, Mr. EVANS, Gaspard, Mr. O. SMITH.
Margot, Miss GOWARD,
Lisette, (the Serjeant’s Wife) Miss KELLY.

In Act 1—A New Quadrille, by Mrs. Wells, &c.

To conclude with the Comic Operetta of

Military Tactics.

With Kreutzer’s popular Overture to LODOISKA.
great impact on the opening night audience. "Keeley is the soul of the piece, we have rarely seen this admirable actor to so much advantage."

The critics from the Literary Gazette and the Times concurred that the performance of Robert Keeley was outstanding among the various features of Peake's newest play, although they disagreed as to the merits of the play itself. Peake was praised in the Literary Gazette review for "ingeniously" constructing the melodrama from the original material of the story.\textsuperscript{29} The Times review acknowledged the potential of the original story, but continued with a berating treatment of Peake's efforts. "We cannot pretend to give a correct outline of a piece the incidents of which had no visible link, and were in many parts involved in a chaos which defied the power of divination."\textsuperscript{30} Rodwell's music was dismissed, and Keeley was the only performer to receive mention, let alone praise. As a conclusion to his disparaging comments, the Times critic admitted that the public was undisturbed by the play's defects, and that \textit{The Bottle Imp} would have a successful run.

The Examiner critic detailed the flaws of the play with more insight than the other reviewers. His first criticism was that Peake, and most other English writers who had emulated the triumph of Continental operas of the supernatural, failed to deal with the subject of demons and the Devil with a seriousness that could allow for an

\textsuperscript{29}The \textit{London Literary Gazette} #600, 12 July 1828, p. 445.

\textsuperscript{30}The \textit{London Times}, 8 July 1828, p. 3.
emotional response from their audience. This reviewer found the humor of the play, though not immediately intrusive upon the grim elements, symptomatic of a lack of earnestness on the part of Peake; he assailed Rodwell's music for being similarly uninspired. Keeley, of course, was commended for his stage antics, but the rest of the cast was described as uninteresting. "As for Mr. Wood, his favourable reception from the town is the severest commentary on its taste that we know."

The reviewer also addressed the lack of imagination in Peake's work:

The Dramatists and Composer of the Bottle Imp has shown skill enough in the mechanical part of theatrical business to make him a useful appendage to a theatre; but, besides sweet melody, choice harmony, and band effects he must get variety in the models of his pieces. Propriety of expression is the essence of dramatic composition.

Despite the negative remarks of educated reviewers, The Bottle Imp was very popular with the Lyceum audiences. By the time the theatre closed for the season, the melodrama had been performed forty-three times. On Friday, 17 October, two weeks after the closing of the Lyceum, the play was introduced at the Covent Garden with its original cast. The Bottle Imp was performed between a Charles Kemble vehicle, the comedy Charles the Second, and a "Grand Serious Ballet of Action" titled Raymond and Agnes; or, The Bleeding Nun. An elegant audience received all three pieces with enthusiasm, but seemed especially pleased with Peake's play. The critic from the Theatrical Observer noted this favorable response, but complained that minor

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31 The standard of comparison for this critic was the recent success of Weber's Der Freischutz and Mozart's Don Juan in London theatres. The Examiner #1067, 13 July 1828, p. 452.

32 Ibid., p. 453.
theatre pieces were generally underplayed when performed in the major houses, and that The Bottle Imp suffered at the Covent Garden because of the increased size of the audience. The melodrama was performed at the Covent Garden on several other evenings during the 1828-1829 season, and was frequently produced at the Lyceum over the next few years. It was staged at the National Theatre of Boston, in 1838, by John B. Wright. The play retained some measure of popularity through the middle of the century, and inspired at least one deplorable imitation, with the same title, in the early 1850's.

The success of The Bottle Imp can be attributed to its combination of thrilling actions and sentimentality, its many mysterious and startling stage effects, and the humor of its characterization of Willibald. Most importantly, the play was specially tailored for the abilities of two popular actors, Smith and Keeley. The role of Willibald is an ideal example of Peake's ability to create a role for an individual actor; the speech, the mannerisms, and the opportunities for spurious business of the character of Willibald suited the qualities and imagination of Keeley, thus insuring both a new triumph for the performer and an audience attraction for the new play.

Peake's Other Gothic Melodramas

Although Richard Brinsley Peake incorporated supernatural effects in several of his melodramas, these effects were usually part of

33 Theatrical Observer #2139, 18 October 1828.

34 Wright gave a great deal of attention to the play's special effects, going so far as to add some devices of his own. See McDowell Film Archives: Promptbook #1863.

deceptions created by malicious or joking characters, and not instances of the supernatural to be accepted by the audience as part of any play's scheme of probability. (See Chapter IV.) Peake's actual work in the area of Gothic melodrama did not extend far beyond Presumption! and The Bottle Imp. This was probably due to the element of self-parody that weakened the dramatic effects of those supernatural plays; Peake undoubtedly felt more comfortable with a dramatic formula that allowed for marvelous visual effects while not asking the audience to extend its credulousness. A modern historian reports that a play by Peake titled The Skeleton Lover played for twenty-three performances at the Adelphi during the 1829-1830 season.\(^{36}\) It is possible that this play served as the basis for Peake's short story "Transylvannian Anatomie!," published in 1840. The central character of that tale is a vampire who periodically changes into a skeleton; the complication of the story concerns the efforts of that vampire to marry a young virgin. In December of 1836, Peake's dramatic ballet, The Devil on Two Sticks, was played to a receptive audience at the Drury Lane. This play, based upon a story by Alain-Rene Lesage, features a dwarfish demon on crutches in a confusing plot; the original production was embellished with splendid dancing, music, scenery and costumes.\(^{37}\) There is much humor in Peake's script, and the demon is generally

\(\text{\footnotesize \(^{36}\)Don Albert Watters, "The Pictorial in English Theatrical Staging, 1773-1833" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1954), p. 351.}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize \(^{37}\)Theatrical Observer #4686, 23 December 1836.}\)
good-natured. Other plays by Peake that have titles suggestive of the preternatural are not Gothic melodramas. The Haunted Inn (1829) is a farce, The Evil Eye (1831) is a conventional melodrama, and The Devil in London (1840) is a satirical drama.

Peake's Gothic melodrama constitutes only a small percentage of the writer's total dramatic output. However, the success of Presumption! and The Bottle Imp reflects the favorable attitude of the London audience in the 1820's toward melodramas with a supernatural character or event. The two plays predate most of Peake's conventional melodramas, and the mixture of grim action and broad humor that characterizes the horror plays is repeated in the later works. The farcical content of these plays is, of itself, representative of the humor to be found in Peake's numerous farces. Presumption! and The Bottle Imp are also representative of Peake's work in that they are constructed with special consideration for the talents of individual actors. Despite the infrequency and the self-mockery of Peake's excursions into the Gothic melodrama, his supernatural plays at the Lyceum exercised the playwright's theatrical craftsmanship and brought him a greater measure of public recognition.

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38 Dick's Standard Plays #734. (McDowell Film Archives: Promptbook #1445.)
The dislocation of the Lyceum company due to the burning of the English Opera House in 1830 provided Richard Brinsley Peake with an opportunity to write a melodrama of greater technical demands than any of his previous serious plays. During the summer of 1831, the Lyceum players were housed in the Adelphi, the regular season of which annually commenced in October. The Adelphi stage was outfitted with elaborate machinery for the representation of spectacular action sequences. It was at this theatre that Edward Fitzball saw most of his nautical melodramas staged.\textsuperscript{1} Along with the opportunity to take advantage of the Adelphi's proficiency in staging ship and battle scenes, Peake benefitted by a public recognition that would insure any of his plays an interested opening night audience. In over a dozen years of writing Peake had been gradually developing his dramatic skills, effectively writing both farcical and serious material in individual plays, and frequently combining the two in a single work. These three factors, a different stage, a reputation for entertaining his audiences, and a maturing sense of dramatic composition,

\textsuperscript{1}Andrew T. Tsai, "The British Nautical Drama (1824-1843)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1964), p. 128.
resulted in Peake's most universally acclaimed production, *The Evil Eye*.

Unlike the earlier melodramas of Peake, *The Evil Eye* is an original story, its only inspiration being accounts by Lord Byron of certain superstitions of the eastern Mediterranean region. The play is subtitled *A Legend of the Levant*. The significance of folk tales about supernatural powers to Peake's play is not in the creation of a framework of the supernatural for the play's events and characters, but rather in the establishment of dramatic probability for the terror of certain characters. The evils in Peake's play are human vindictiveness and irrational fears.

The play unfolds in the Turkish-held Greek city of Napoli. Kara Mustapha, an officer of Jannisaries, brings a pair of captives off a newly-arrived ship. The prisoners are comforted by the outspoken Helena, a local housewife who has already infuriated the Turkish authorities on several occasions. The waywode of Napoli, a Greek traitor in the service of the Turks, decides to cruelly torment Helena and her husband, Demetrius, by playing on their fears of the legendary Evil Eye. The waywode, Mavroyeni, is also the landlord of Helena and Demetrius, and hopes to frighten them not only into subservience to the Turks, but also into paying their debts. Mavroyeni and the other authorities do not know that Helena is sheltering a youth named Marco, a member of a clan that is being ruthlessly exterminated by the Turks. In carrying out his plan for punishing Helena, Mavroyeni enlists the aid of a felon, Baruzzi. In a scene that embodies Peake's ability for
melodramatic character construction with a facetious overtone,

Mavroyeni interviews the just-released criminal in a chamber of a
castle:

Mav.: Fellow have you learned to amend? Has confinement improved your morals?

Bar.: Truly I never had any morals to improve.

Mav.: A candid ruffian. Of what duration has been your present confinement?

Bar.: I know not—for a long time I had only one sign! Under my straw, a rat I petted, has become an anxious mother eighteen times: ten in a litter: she is old now, and grey muzzled. I have had a world to do, to keep them off my skin and bones.

Mav.: Jacob, you are the most accomplished rogue that was ever sent to prison.

Bar.: Psha! I hate flattery. Will your excellency give me some coin to live on? If not, I must steal and go back to my rats. What the poor creatures will do without me I don't know.

Mav.: You shall have money—but to my purpose.

Bar.: Oh, there is a purpose! I thought it was not my innocence alone that could liberate me. Well, the purpose? I am ready—do you wish a church to be fired? or a child to be strangled or a well to be poisoned, so that I may distribute death wholesale?2

Mavroyeni's plan is to send Baruzzi to Helena's house in the guise of a legendary demon, the Evil Eye. Additional complications beset Helena; her husband mistakenly gambles away a winning Paris lottery ticket that could provide a means for the troubled household to escape from Turkish territory.

Helena is terrorized by Baruzzi, but the latter's threat is quelled by a drinking partner of Demetrius, Zane Kiebabs, who also manages to regain the lost lottery ticket for his friends. Baruzzi

2Richard Brinsley Peake, The Evil Eye (Dick's Standard Plays #540. The Lilly Library of Indiana University), pp. 4-5.
informs Mavroyeni and Kara that he has discovered the location of the hunted Marco. Helena and Marco flee from the pursuing authorities, and Zane clubs Kara to insure their escape. Marco's brother Andrea conveniently arrives with a shipload of Greek patriots and attacks the castle in which Demetrius and other loyal Greeks have been confined by Mavroyeni. On the verge of being rescued, Helena and Marco are accosted by Baruzzi. Marco shoots Baruzzi, and he and Helena board the ship. Baruzzi, mortally-wounded, experiences a change of heart and stabs Mavroyeni as the latter arrives with Turkish troops. The play ends with the sympathetic characters safely aboard the ship, and Andrea's troops defeating the Turks in pitched battle.

The Adelphi production was Peake's most colorful. The finale was accomplished with much display of mock fire power; cannons were seen firing from both the ship and the castle. Costumes were flamboyant, including native Greek and Turkish dress, and the fiendish disguise of Baruzzi. In addition to special effects and detailed costumes, the spectacular aspects of the performance included several chases and acts of violence. The role of the villainous Baruzzi was played by a favorite of both Peake and the London audience, O. Smith. Playing the part of Helena was another well-recognized performer of the London stage, the melodramatic actress Frances Kelly.

There was more to please the Adelphi audience than sensational visual effects and popular players. Peake's play offered his celebrated combination of thrills and humor in a balance that both audience members and critics found enjoyable. Certain scenes of The Evil Eye are constructed to produce a maximum of tension among its
spectators. Prominent among these moments of tension is the search by Helena for the missing lottery ticket and the interruption of that search by Mavroyeni and his men; the audience must wait for the angry landlord to depart before Helena will discover that the ticket is gone. Other scenes of The Evil Eye are purely farcical. At one point in the play, Demetrius and Zane returned to the former's house after a night of drinking. Zane tells his friend, "I am about three parts drunk." Demetrius replies, "So I see." "Then I am six parts drunk, for you see double." responds Zane. The character of Zane Kiebabs, one of the few low-comic roles that Peake did not create expressly for Robert Keeley, was perhaps as amusing to the 1831 audience for his out of place Dutch name and appearance as he was for his vulgarity. The diversity of the characters in the play undoubtedly delighted the audience. Besides valiant heroes, distressed victims, and a comic sub-character, the play offered three recognizable antagonists.

The Evil Eye opened on Thursday, 18 August, accompanied by the operetta Arrangement and the melodrama The Sister of Charity. Reviewers and the public alike received the production with complete approval and enthusiasm. The critic from the Theatrical Observer praised Peake for his "neat and often pointed dialogue" and "highly dramatic situations." The Examiner reviewer, while explaining to his readers Peake's misunderstandings about the legend of the Evil Eye, expressed great enthusiasm for the play and its production. He commended the

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3 Ibid., p. 7.
4 Theatrical Observer #3019, 19 August 1831.
acting of O. Smith as the ruffian/demon. "We are curious to be informed as to the course of this gentleman's studies, and of the schools in which he has pursued them . . . he has culled and compounded all the essence of devilry." Also praised in this review was the actor who took the role of Zane Kiebabs, John Reeve. The reviewer lauded Reeve's characterization of the witty Kiebabs, pointing out both the humor of Peake's lines and the frequency of Reeve's ad-libbing.

The play continued to be successfully performed at the Adelphi, becoming the most popular play of the Lyceum company during the 1831 season. No other play by Peake earned as much attention in the London journals in the course of a run. The actors in the play were frequently praised; Frances Kelly received very favorable attention for her "quiet touches of genius" in her portrayal of Helena. Peake received a large amount of personal mention. One writer said that the melodrama's author "is not only one of the most prolific and uniformly successful of our modern dramatists, but, what is much more to his credit, he is a most amiable and worthy man." The overwhelming success of The Evil Eye with the London public and critics encouraged Samuel James Arnold to produce several other plays by Peake during the remainder of the season. In mid-September, the new melodrama was accompanied on one evening by two of Peake's best known farces, The Middle Temple and Jonathan in England, prompting a reviewer to acclaim Peake's abilities as a writer for the popular stage:

5The Examiner #1229, 21 August 1831, p. 534.
6Theatrical Observer #3020, 20 August 1831.
7Theatrical Observer #3023, 24 August 1831.
The number and variety of pieces Mr. Peake has produced clearly demonstrates that he possesses a highly vigorous genius;--and it is our opinion, that he has it in his power to rank his name with the best dramatic writers of our country. We have not the personal knowledge of Mr. Peake, but our motto is 'Palmam qui meruit,' and by his works we judge him.8

On other evenings in September, The Evil Eye shared the bill with The Bottle Imp; the enthusiasm engendered by the new play and the greater reputation of Peake insured the revival of The Bottle Imp a reception by critics much warmer than that of its first appearance.9

The Evil Eye played for thirty-six consecutive performances, closing on the final night of the Lyceum company's stay at the Adelphi, with Jonathan in England as an afterpiece. Although negotiations between Peake and the managers of the Adelphi to continue the production of The Evil Eye during the regular season of the theatre did not prove fruitful, the Adelphi opened on 1 October with a "burletta spectacle," The Sea Serpent, featuring two of the principal players of The Evil Eye, Smith and Reeve.10

The success of The Evil Eye can be attributed to several factors. The production took advantage of the most spectacular scenery, costumes, and machinery available at the Adelphi. The reputation of Richard Brinsley Peake had been established among the theatre-going public, so that a lavish production of an original Peake play would inevitably draw both audiences and curious critics. The most important

8Theatrical Observer #3044, 17 September 1831.
9See The London Literary Gazette #765, 17 September 1831, p. 605.
10The London Times, 29 September 1831, p. 2.
determinant in the popular reception of *The Evil Eye* was Peake's own theatrical imagination. The play is based on an original idea and features an exotic setting, suspenseful action, and a heterogeneous cast of characters. Peake integrates humor into a serious dramatic action without undermining the play's tension. The playwright also incorporates domestic concerns into his melodrama of war and intrigue; his audience may see the locale and action of the play as remote, but drunkenness, irresponsible gambling, and unfair landlords help create an air of familiarity to hold the audience's interest more completely. As important as any of these achievements in winning acceptance for his new play was Peake's foresight in creating particular roles for individual actors, particularly the romantic heroine, Helena, the bandit/monster, Baruzzi, and the good-natured oaf, Zane Kiebabs. The players of the first two roles, Frances Kelly and O. Smith, were popular with the London public long before *The Evil Eye* was produced, and their presence contributed much to the play's success. John Reeve, who played Zane, made an enormous impact on the audiences at the Adelphi through his energy and imagination; Peake's play benefitted from Reeve's skills, and there is no doubt that Reeve gained a considerable amount of recognition through this particular role.\(^\text{11}\) Although there are implausibilities in the text of *The Evil Eye*, Peake succeeded admirably in entertaining his audience. One reviewer acknowledged that Peake's abilities as yet were flawed, but added, "no

\(^\text{11}\) The Theatrical Observer #3054, 28 September 1831, reported that this play greatly increased the popularity of Reeve, assuring him a future as a comic performer.
one can accuse him of the greatest of all possible faults in dramatic composition--dullness!!12

Blanche of Jersey (1837)

The plays of Richard Brinsley Peake continued to be performed with great frequency after the new Lyceum English Opera House was erected in 1834. Although by the late 1830's Peake had had several of his melodramas and farces produced at the Drury Lane, the Covent Garden, and the Adelphi, his long association and familiarity with the Lyceum company provided him with both a body of players accustomed to his style and a regular audience grateful for past entertainment. It was not unusual for an original play by Peake to open on a bill that also included a revival of an older Peake play. In 1837, two new plays by Richard Brinsley Peake, the farce A Quarter to Nine and the melodrama Blanche of Jersey, were introduced at the Lyceum; each play appeared on some evenings with Peake's The Bottle Imp as an afterpiece. The new management of the Lyceum took full advantage of the popularity of Peake's name and past successes.

Blanche of Jersey is set during the James II period on the Isle of Jersey. A feud has been ensuring for a number of years between the Rose party of D'Harcourt and the Laurel party of La Croix. The two men make amends in order to undertake a hunt together. While they are in the forest, D'Harcourt and La Croix become separated, and La Croix is murdered by an old enemy, the smuggler Claude Crusso1.

12Theatrical Observer #3020, 20 August 1831.
Through the efforts of a scheming lawyer, Bethune, who stands to profit from D'Harancourt's death, a warrant for the execution of D'Harancourt is obtained from the King. The daughter of the prisoner, Blanche, endeavors to save his life by masquerading as a peasant and intercepting the death warrant before it arrives at the jail. Blanche encounters the letter-carrier at a roadside inn late at night. She waits for the man to dose, then attempts unsuccessfully to remove his letter bag without waking him. She considers taking the man's life as a last resort, but decides her safest course of action is to disarm his pistols and overtake him on the road. In the next scene, the letter-carrier is held at gun-point by Blanche on a deserted stretch of moonlit road. The letter-carrier attempts to shoot his antagonist, but finds that both his pistols have been tampered with. Blanche safely procures the King's letter and destroys it. The heroic efforts of Blanche prove fruitless, as Bethune persuades the authorities to hang D'Harancourt without the written warrant. However, Crussol is confronted by his blind mother, Barbara, who knows the true circumstances of La Croix's death by her psychic powers. Barbara, in great anguish, convinces her son to give himself up. D'Harancourt is saved only moments before his scheduled execution. Crussol follows his confession with a revelation of past crimes committed by Bethune, and the play concludes with the jailing of both the smuggler and the vindictive lawyer.¹³

¹³Richard Brinsley Peake, Blanche of Jersey (London: Webster's Acting National Drama #14. Ohio State University Theatre Research Institute McDowell Film Archives: Film #598.)
Blanche of Jersey differs from many Peake's earlier melodramas in its lesser emphasis upon spectacle. The play is action-oriented, and calls for atmospheric scenery, but there are no large-scale special effects or practical scenic units demanded by the action. One reason for this omission of ostentatious stage-effects may be the financial disabilities of the theatre; Samuel James Arnold had relinquished control of the Lyceum two years previously because of monetary problems, and the present manager, Alfred Bunn, would soon return the theatre to a company commonwealth for the same reason. However, the theatre was able to mount the spectacular The Bottle Imp during the 1837 season, in addition to elaborate operas, such as Balfe's Catherine Grey. While expenditure could have been one consideration in the writing of Blanche of Jersey, Peake clearly underscores the domestic elements of the story that would have been diminished in importance by grandiose visual effects. Two scenes are contingent upon ethical choices by characters: Blanche, in the inn sequence, must decide if she can commit murder to save her father's life, and Barbara is faced by a choice between keeping her son's guilt a secret and compelling her son to surrender in order to save an innocent man's life. In each case, the playwright supplies an easy escape for the troubled character. Blanche makes an expedient decision not to kill the letter-carrier; Barbara succeeds with relative ease in convincing Claude to give himself over to the authorities.

15Ibid., p. 156.
Despite the contrived nature of the situations in the play, Peake develops pathos and fear for several characters. This building of emotional intensity through character suffering is accompanied by a sense of mystery and physical danger, but it is not eclipsed by lavish scenery or special effects.

Blanche of Jersey opened on Wednesday, 9 August, 1837, followed by A Quarter to Nine and The Bottle Imp. A reviewer reported that the play was received with "tumultous applause." The play's reviews were highly favorable. The Literary Gazette critic lauded the play for its interesting material and the skill of Peake's composition; the reviewer from the Times found the plot unoriginal, but praised Peake's theatrical sensibility. Every review of the play mentioned the performance of Elizabeth Romer as Blanche with enthusiasm:

Hers was, indeed, a highly meritorious performance. The imitation of what is truly excellent (not the imitation of a mimic, but that of one able to conceive and re-embody the beauties of the original) is in itself a mark of no common mind, and when the touches and spirit of the model are preserved, a young artiste is deserving the very highest commendation.

The Theatrical Observer reviewer praised Charles Diddear for his performance as Crussol, comparing this performance to his portrayal of Wolf in Sheridan Knowles's Wrecker's Daughter, a recent Drury Lane

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16 Theatrical Observer #4881, 10 August 1837.
17 The London Literary Gazette #1073, 12 August 1837, p. 518; The London Times 10 August 1837, p. 3.
18 Ibid.
success. The critics were divided as to the merits of the various songs written for the play by John Barnett, but expressed pleasure over the rendition of those songs by the players. All accounts of the play described the approval of the audience for most of the songs.

Blanche of Jersey, along with other Peake pieces, drew large houses through the month of August. It alternated with La Sonnambula, another vehicle for Miss. Romer, as the second piece on the Lyceum bill during the last two weeks of August, then moved to the bottom of the bill for several performances in September. It appeared for the last time during the 1837 season on 26 September, following the melodrama Highland Cateran and the "Nautical Extravaganza" The Spitfire. This was the twenty-fourth performance of Blanche of Jersey in the course of seven weeks.

The popularity of Blanche of Jersey reflects the power of Peake's reputation to attract audiences in the late 1830's. It also indicates the responsiveness of Lyceum audiences to melodramas with a minimum of spectacular effects. This play offered the sensationalism of murder and highway robbery, but also represented a degree of believable human suffering compounded by difficult ethical choices. The sentimental qualities of the play were received with favor by Peake's audience; while those qualities precluded character development beyond the level of suffering, they held the attention of the audience without an abundance of scenic or technical effects.

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19 Theatrical Observer #4881, 10 August 1837.
20 Theatrical Observer #4922, 26 September 1837.
Other Melodramas by Peake

The melodramas of Richard Brinsley Peake were welcomed by audiences in several London theatres. The English Opera House, which originally produced Peake's early Gothic melodramas, The Evil Eye (while the company resided at the Adelphi), and Blanche of Jersey, also presented Peake's The Spring Lock (1829). The somewhat more exclusive audience of the Covent Garden was the first to see Peake's The Smuggler Boy (1833). Introduced at the less fashionable Adelphi were The Chain of Gold; or, A Daughter's Devotion (1834), and The Devil of Marseilles; or, The Spirit of Avarice (1846). The Bequeathed Heart (1841) first appeared at the Royal Victoria (formerly the Coburg), a theatre with a working-class audience. The popularity of Peake's melodramas was not confined to any local audience or social class. While this widespread enthusiasm for Peake's work partly reflects the playwright's facility in writing particular plays for individual theatres, there is not a sufficient amount of variation in Peake's melodramatic output to explain this popularity without reference to general trends of taste in London theatre audiences. Peake's melodramas offered his audiences adventure, pathos, humor, and spectacle, whether in the form of special visual effects, violent action, or atmospheric locale. Moreover, these plays were performed by actors and actresses who were familiar to audiences from previous successes; the public had its expectations for certain performers, and Peake wrote with those expectations in mind.

A melodrama that is representative of Peake's complex theatrical imagination is The Spring Lock. This play, based in part on two
unidentified Italian novels, develops both a serious and a comic plot, intertwining the action of the two at the conclusion. The serious plot, involving the impending forced marriage of the heroine, reaches its greatest point of complication when the young lady is accidentally trapped in a cabinet with a spring lock. The comic plot, centering on the buffoonery of a character named Dr. Manante, comes to a climax when the door is deceived by other characters that he is being tormented by demons; in a scene that is heavily dependent upon traps and special visual and sound effects, Manante is hounded by servants disguised as devils. Thus Peake incorporates a variety of elements within a single melodrama: pathos for the sentimental heroine separated from the man she truly loves; excitement for the same character as her life is in danger; broad humor with the pompous doctor and his nagging wife; and supernatural effects reminiscent of *The Bottle Imp*. The initial production of *The Spring Lock* featured music by G. H. B. Rodwell and a strong singer, Harriet Cawse, as the romantic lead. Robert Keeley played Dr. Manante, and O. Smith, in one of his occasional farcical characterizations, played Manante's rival, Dr. Flamingo. The play was received by its 1829 audience with great enthusiasm, although a "dirty allusion" by a female character was hissed. Critics lauded Keeley for sustaining the humor of the play and compensating for the "extraordinary melange" of Peake's plot.

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21 The remark, delivered by the wife of Dr. Manante in a comic exchange with her husband, was judiciously removed by Peake for the second performance. *Theatrical Observer* #2398, 19 August 1829.

22 *The London Times*, 19 August 1829, p. 3.
Overall, the reviews of this Lyceum production were praising toward the accomplishments of the actors; however, the Examiner critic asked Peake to "recommend your heroine... to be less mindful of her jewelry, satin, shoes, and friends in the boxes...." 23 The Spring Lock, despite the condescension of reviewers toward its complexity, and the indifference of its leading player toward theatrical propriety, succeeded in entertaining London audiences. This exercise of Peake's various dramatic abilities drew favorable houses through its final performance. 24

The multifarious entertainment afforded by The Spring Lock is the most radical example of fluctuating tone in those plays of Richard Brinsley Peake that are essentially melodramatic; the play develops humorous situations into a diverting sub-plot. In contrast to the capricious qualities of this 1829 play is the heaviness of The Bequeathed Heart, which Peake wrote eleven years later. This Royal Victoria piece has only two comic servants for a small measure of relief from its macabre tension. It also is the only melodrama by Peake in which a romantic lead is murdered. The hero, Fitzgerald O'Carrol, falls in love with Gabrielli, an Italian actress. The Irish gentleman, in response to a frivolous request by the actress to bequeath her his heart, draws up a will to honor that request. A treacherous Milanese lawyer, Valdarno, arranges a confrontation between O'Carrol and a French officer that results in a duel.

23 The Examiner #1125, 23 August 1829, p. 532.

24 The London Times, 3 October 1829, p. 3.
O'Carrol, at this point a sympathetic character, is mortally wounded, and dies in the arms of Gabrielli. The remainder of the play is concerned with the efforts of Valdarno to blackmail the family of O'Carrol by threatening to execute the provisions of the will; his efforts are thwarted by the arrival in Ireland of Gabrielli herself. The Bequeathed Heart is the most pessimistic of Peake's melodramas. Although the primary conflict is resolved favorably, the establishment of that conflict is achieved by the undeserved death of a developed character. The reasons for this somber quality in the 1841 play may be the desire of this particular theatre audience for sensationalism, and the development of Peake's own disdain for undisturbed hopefulness, a disdain that is even more evident in his comedy The Title Deeds (1847). (See Chapter VI.)

The conventional melodramas of Richard Brinsley Peake are generally characterized by sentimentality, thrilling action, and broad humor. The variance among Peake's melodramas is largely the result of the playwright's efforts to balance these three elements in order to meet the expectations of respective theatre audiences. Blanche of Jersey, written for the English Opera House, features no on-stage violence, but a considerable development of pathos; The Evil Eye, first performed at the Adelphi for an audience that certainly included local middle class and working class residents, involves much physical action, including several visible beatings and killings, as well as elaborate special effects. A Covent Garden piece, The Smuggler Boy, was praised in reviews for its balance of touching scenes and
humorous elements; a Royal Victoria piece, *The Bequeathed Heart*, ignored by London critics because of its place of production, develops both sentiment and comicality, but chiefly as appendages to a story of grim irony and violent action. All of Peake's melodramatic plays were received by audiences with enthusiasm, and the body of Peake's conventional melodrama, produced in the 1830's and 1840's, was accepted by critics with general approval and some warmth. While the irrepressible humor of Peake minimizes the potential for a sense of danger and suspense in some of his plays, it very frequently offers a relief from rapidly-mounting tension. Perhaps as important to Peake's audiences as this need for humorous diversion was the appearance of well-liked farcical performers in roles written by Peake especially for them; within the confines of a full-length romantic drama, legitimized by the inclusion of several musical numbers, the London audiences could expect not only sentiment and sensation, but hilarity in the appearance of actors such as the Keeleys and John Reeve as secondary characters.

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25 *Theatrical Observer* #3477, 6 February 1833.
CHAPTER V

PEAKE'S FARCE

The Hundred-Pound Note (1827)

Of the many farces written by Richard Brinsley Peake between 1818 and 1839, *The Hundred-Pound Note* merits special attention. First, this play was introduced at the Covent Garden, a theatre that was both legitimate in the eyes of London authorities and possessing of an audience that could discern between insubstantial entertainment and carefully constructed drama. At the time of the production of *The Hundred Pound-Note* in 1827, Peake's reputation as a dramatist had not been fully established among theatre goers; Peake had had several successes at the English Opera House, but the exposure of his work at the major theatres had been limited to reproductions of his most popular English Opera House pieces. *The Hundred-Pound Note*, along with *Comfortable Lodgings*, which appeared at the Drury Lane almost simultaneously, marks the first instance in which the legitimate theatres of London ventured to produce an original Peake play. A second historically significant aspect of the production of *The Hundred-Pound Note* is the participation of Madame Vestris, undoubtedly the most famous performer to act in any Peake play. The performance of this actress contributed greatly to the measure of critical and audience approval bestowed upon Peake's farce, and Peake provided Madame Vestris with an opportunity to showcase her talents.
While it is impossible to separate an analysis of the dramatic choices of any popular dramatist from the cultural milieu of that dramatist, there are features of *The Hundred-Pound Note* that warrant attention from a critical point of view. This play incorporates the verbal humor characteristic of most of Peake's farces, particularly developing farcical caricatures by means of oral automatisms and conundrums. As this play is a full-length farce, it offers numerous examples not only of Peake's talent for comic diction but also of the writer's propensity for bizarre situational humor. *The Hundred-Pound Note* features instances of mistaken identity and misinterpretation, devices that appear in both earlier and later farces by Peake, sometimes as the central situations of single-act afterpieces. Although episodic, *The Hundred-Pound Note* is a synthesis of Peake's talents for humor. The play is too dependent upon broad characterizations, physical appearances, and self-justified jokes to be analyzed as a comedy instead of a farce; however, the ambitious scope of this farce prefigures Peake's efforts in the writing of comedy with dimensional characters and believable complications.

A brief plot description will illustrate the contortions of Peake's story and the colorful nature of his characters. At a countryside inn, a roguish but good-natured character named Montmorency takes on the identity of a lawyer named Morgan in order to assure himself better credit. The real Morgan is in the same vicinity, escorting the widow Mrs. Arlington to London. Montmorency is in love with Miss Harriet Arlington, who is also in the vicinity of the inn. Montmorency sends a love-letter and a note for one hundred pounds to Harriet, but his bungling servant, Grady O'Shocknessy, delivers the letter to Mrs.
Arlington by mistake. Montmorency's troubles are compounded by the arrival at the inn of constables in search of a stolen horse that he possesses, and Harriet and her aunt, Lady Pedigree, who suspect that Montmorency may not be faithful. In addition to these difficulties, Montmorency is in trouble for paying a bill with a counterfeit note. All of the complications are resolved at the play's end by the trustworthy Mr. Morgan.

Peake wrote The Hundred-Pound Note for a cast that included some of the best-known low-comic and character actors of the London theatre of the 1820's. Playing Harriet Arlington was Madame Vestris. This actress had gained a great amount of public recognition through her talent as a singer. One of her most famous songs was titled "The Bavarian Girls Song," or, "Buy a Broom!," by D. A. O'Meara, with music by Alexander Lee. Many song-sheets were printed in England with Madame Vestris in a Bavarian costume represented on the title page; the song was frequently rendered by Madame Vestris in London theatres as an individual piece between plays.¹ Peake provided an opportunity for the actress to sing "Buy a Broom!" while playing Harriet. (Harriet must test the faithfulness of Montmorency; to do this, she disguises herself as a charming Bavarian broomseller and woos him.) Montmorency was played by a popular Covent Garden actor, Richard Jones. The lawyer Morgan was played by one of the post popular "old men" of the London stage at this time, William Blanchard. Supplying the largest portion of physical humor in the 1827 production were Tyrone Power, Clifford John Williams, Madame Vestris: A Theatrical Biography (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1973), pp. 72-74.
Figure 5: Poster advertising Madame Vestris singing "Buy a Broom!," from Peake's The Hundred-Pound Note. (From Madame Vestris: A Theatrical Biography.)
in the role of Grady, and Robert Keeley, cast as a servant at the inn, Billy Black.

Verbal humor in the play derives from two principal sources, Montmorency and Billy Black. The former's dialogue includes an automatism of speech pattern that reflects the character's hazardous self-assurance. At nine instances during the farce, Montmorency delivers platitudes beginning with the phrase "If I have a _______ in the world, it is. . . ." This mannerism becomes a feature of the character looked forward to by the audience. It comes to its most ludicrous instance when Montmorency confronts the Bavarian girl, who is, of course, Harriet in disguise. Says Montmorency, "If I have a predilection in the world, it is for a pretty little girl." Montmorency's automatisms are almost equalled in number by the conundrums of Billy. The inn servant repeatedly asks other characters 'Why and because' riddles; when Montmorency is furious with Grady, Billy asks, "Why is Mr. O'Shocknessy like a corn-sheaf? Do you give it up? Because he's going to be threshed." The conundrums of Keeley's character in The Hundred-Pound Note may have been a major factor in the ensuing popularity of such riddles in London periodicals and burlesques; according to James Robinson Planché, the use of conundrums in Christy Minstrel entertainments was prompted by the enthusiasm of Covent Garden audiences for Keeley's "Do you give it up?" riddles in The Hundred-Pound

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3Ibid., p. 8.
Note. In addition to the humor derived from the diction of Montmorency and Billy Black, there is some amount of comicality based on the Irish speech patterns of Grady O'Shocknessy.

The instances of misunderstanding in the play lead to an encounter between Montmorency and Lady Pedigree. The two characters talk at cross-purposes regarding Harriet. The aunt endeavors to justify the behavior of Harriet in disguising herself as a Bavarian broom-girl to investigate Montmorency's fidelity. Montmorency, having heard that the widow, Mrs. Arlington, has with her a small child, believes that Harriet has been unchaste. This dialogue is very clear in terms of Montmorency's own suspicions of illicit sexual conduct; it is possible that it was one cause for the cool reception given the play by many audience members.

Lady P.: I have ventured down quite unknown to my dear Harriet; I am aware of the little trick she has played you.
Mont.: Are you, madam? So am I. (Aside) Little trick! Little baby! Exceedingly cool.
Lady P.: It was very ill-contrived and silly, I must say. I was quite against it, but Harriet was obstinate, and would have her own way.
Mont.: Yes, where there is a will, there's a way.
Lady P.: In fact, I told her that disguise was quite unnecessary.
Mont.: Did you, madam? It does you credit, madam!
Lady P.: I perceive, Mr. Montmorency, that you are more than half offended at the discovery; but I will take excellent care that such an event shall not again occur.
Mont.: I hope not, Lady Pedigree.
Lady P.: This little assumption of character can scarcely be called a foible, Mr. Montmorency.
Mont.: Assumption of character!—Egad! I am apprehensive that the character is but indifferently supported.

Lady P.: That I am willing to allow. (Laughing) Ha! ha! ha! --Very childish, I may say!
Mont.: Very childish! --And for that reason I shall beg to decline the honour of all farther communication with Miss Arlington.
Lady P.: I am ashamed of you; you argue like a great boy!
Mont.: When there is a little boy in the case, I think it quite time to argue, Lady Pedigree. Farewell, madam! no more! Live and repent!5

It is not inconceivable that Peake wrote this exchange with a conscious purpose of satirizing the severity of current attitudes toward unmarried mothers; characters with self-righteous attitudes are frequently criticized in Peake's work. However, the fury of Montmorency is directed primarily against a supposed personal wrong, and only secondarily against a breach of social convention; the scene serves the representation of a personal chaos in the affairs of the play's protagonist.

The Hundred-Pound Note opened on Wednesday, 7 February, as a long afterpiece for a production of Romeo and Juliet. The play was received with much hissing and other expressions of disapproval.6 When the audience was asked to give its approval to a repetition of the play, a sizeable minority spoke out against it.7 Reviewers attending the opening production found the acting to be energetic; the Times reviewer was particularly pleased with Madame Vestris. The Theatrical Observer critic suggested that Peake cut some material out of the text, and felt that the play could survive with this "curtailment." The most forceful defense of the play's first performance came from the Literary

5Peake, pp. 11-12.
6Theatrical Observer #1613, 8 February 1827.
7The London Times 8 February 1827, p. 2.
Gazette critic. This reviewer wrote, "although The Hundred-Pound Note cannot be called a good farce, it is most assuredly much better than many we have seen that have been crowned with success. 'The enlightened public' is sometimes too fastidious for its own amusement." This production was perhaps the first of a Peake play in which the press took a more lenient position than the opposition in the audience. Despite the hostile reactions in the audience, the management of the Covent Garden evidently believed that the proponents of the play were a majority and that Peake could delete material that seemed to elicit disfavor. The Hundred-Pound Note appeared on the following evening, playing between the opera The White Maid and a Harlequin pantomime. The presence of a play less distinguished than Romeo and Juliet as a precedent undoubtedly helped the farce; also helpful were some cuts in the text by Peake. On this evening, The Hundred-Pound Note was greeted with "the greatest applause." The critic from the Examiner attended this performance, and in his account described the piece as a whole as "irresistibly laughable." This writer indicated that Madame Vestris was provided by Peake with several opportunities in the play to ad-lib dialogue. This use of improvisation, along with her characterization of Harriet and her rendition of "Buy a Broom!," contributed to the warming of Covent Garden audiences to the play.

The Hundred-Pound Note was not frequently performed during the remaining four months of the Covent Garden season. Its final performance,

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8The London Literary Gazette #525, 10 February 1827, p. 93.
9Theatrical Observer #1614, 9 February 1827.
10The Examiner #993, 11 February 1827, p. 86.
on 5 June, was only the twentieth time the play appeared. Compared to
the thirty-seven performance run of *Presumption!* at the Lyceum three
and a half years previously, the success of *The Hundred-Pound Note*
appears modest; the difference between the two productions’ respective
runs becomes more obvious when the limited season of the Lyceum is
contrasted with that of the Covent Garden. However, *The Hundred-Pound
Note* was performed at an average frequency of once per week during the
spring of 1827. When this run is considered in the light of the under­
takings of the major theatres to produce both classics and legitimate
nineteenth-century drama in the course of a season, the success of
Peake’s play seems considerable. Whenever the play appeared, it drew
a delighted audience. Perhaps *The Hundred-Pound Note* was perceived by
some theatre goers as at least partly satirical; one writer suggested
that the puns and conundrums delivered by Keeley in the production were
purposefully exaggerated as a commentary on the general condition of
farcical writing at this time.11

*The Hundred-Pound Note* was revived on several occasions at the
Covent Garden through the 1830’s. Henry Crabb Robinson attended a
performance of the play in April of 1833. In his account, he praised
Madame Vestris, Power, Blanchard, and Jones, who were still performing
in the roles they had introduced six years earlier.12 An 1836 revival
of the farce was performed with a Miss Vincent as Harriet Arlington,

11 *Theatrical Observer* #1615, 10 February 1827.

12 *The London Theatre, 1811-1866 - Sections from the Diary of Henry
John Webster as Montmorency, and Henry Wallack as O'Shocknessy.\textsuperscript{13} The re-appearances of this play suggest the popularity of Peake's work during the 1830's, but also reflect on the theatricality of the play itself. \textit{The Hundred-Pound Note} offered the London audience diversion in the form of contrived situations and an assortment of ludicrous characters. As one of the most complicated of Peake's farces, involving his most extensive use of verbal humor, \textit{The Hundred-Pound Note} represents the vibrancy of Peake's style better than any other single work. While it is clear that a considerable portion of the Covent Garden audience on the opening night of the play demanded more finesse than Richard Brinsley Peake could offer, the subsequent success of the play demonstrates the enthusiasm of even London's most fastidious theatre audiences for Peake's whimsical humor.

\textbf{General Characteristics}

The buoyancy of the farces of Richard Brinsley Peake results from the writer's sense for ludicrous misunderstandings and double entendre, puns and word-play, and buffoonish stage figures, including popularly-accepted national caricatures. Some of the farces introduced by Peake are his own translations or adaptations of French pieces; among these are \textit{Comfortable Lodgings} (1827) and \textit{Gemini} (1838). While these re-workings of French farces do not display originality of structure, they utilize the verbal humor and stage-business characteristic of Peake's "original" farces. Occasionally, jokes, puns, and character

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Theatrical Observer} #4683, 20 December 1836.
expressions in one farce by Peake appear verbatim in another, and one farce by Peake, *Americans Abroad* (1824), was reproduced as *Jonathan in England*. Despite the fluidity of some of Peake's material between individual titles, his farces show diversity in specific situation and locale; the audience of London in the 1820's and 1830's evidently accepted that diversity while enjoying Peake's standard formulas for humor.

In *The Duel; or, My Two Nephews*, first presented at the Covent Garden in 1828, Peake develops a dialogue between an English gentleman and an Irish boxer based on the former's misunderstanding about a recent contest. This scene represents both the ingenuity of Peake in creating ludicrous character exchanges and Peake's most serious weakness as a humorist, an almost condescending amplification of character reactions that prevents subtle playing and thoughtful audience appreciation:

Sir Pryer:  
(Aside) Fatal duel!

O'Mauley:  
They wanted me to be bottle-holder, but I would not.

Sir Pryer:  
Bottle-holder!...did they drink, then, in such a desperate situation?

O'Mauley:  
Washed their mouths, merely--it was a brave stand-up fight--half-minute time.

Sir Pryer:  
Terrible and vindictive combatants!--half minute!  
(Apart) fired their pistols every half-minute, I suppose--I've heard of minute guns, but never of half-minute pistols.  
(To O'Mauley) And--I dread to ask--your antagonist fell?

O'Mauley:  
He fell very often, but they picked him up again.

Sir Pryer:  
Good heavens! why, sir, this was a barbarous murder.

O'Mauley:  
Not a bit of it--he said as how he hadn't his belly full.

Sir Pryer:  
Fired balls every half-minute--and hadn't his belly full!

O'Mauley:  
Though he went down so often, he stood if fifteen rounds.
Sir Pryer: (Apart) Stood, after fifteen rounds were fired—ah, cruel work!—how very retentive of life the captain must have been. 14

The exaggerated qualities of double entendre dialogue in the farces of Peake may reflect Peake's own perceptions of his audience's intelligence. Very often the misunderstandings or jokes of characters in Peake's farcical plays are over-explained by the dramatist. It is quite likely that many experienced theatre goers took exception to the elaborations in Peake's humorous dialogue.

The farces of Peake are replete with bizarre puns, figures of speech, and insults. In an 1838 Lyceum piece, Lying in Ordinary, the ex-sailor Peter describes the illegitimate daughter of another character as "launched in the smuggling service." 15 In another Lyceum piece of the same year, Gemini, the recently-fired apprentice of an apothecary curses his employer with the wish that the "whole jar of live leeches" will visit him as he sleeps. 16 An enumeration of instances of word-play and jokes in the farces of Peake would become tedious; what is important is that Peake uses these devices as by-play, rather than as incidents of dramatic action. The frequency of these instances of verbal humor may be due as much to Peake's desire to give popular actors material to fit their talents as to his private sense of the ridiculous.


16 Richard Brinsley Peake, Gemini (London: Webster's Acting National Drama #52. McDowell Film Archives: Film #674), p. 10.
Of the many farcical characters created by Peake along preconceived nationality lines, the most developed is Jonathan Doubikans, the central character of the 1824 _Americans Abroad; or, Notes and Notations_. Jonathan is an American frontiersman who travels to England. He is described in the text as wearing long red hair and smoking a cigar. The dialogue of Jonathan is characterized by extremely naive statements on British culture and wistful longings for his home country; his speech is awkward and ungrammatical:

> A pretty considerable cursed jolting I've had over the salt sea, I guess—oh, Jonathan, Jonathan, you'd a better a staid at home with your mother, brother Josiah, sister Deborah, cousin Jenima, poor little Aminadab, and the rest; not forgetting old granny, bent somewheres about half double... 17

The buffoonish nature of this representative American is strained to the point of vulgarity at at least one moment in the action of _Americans Abroad_. Doubikans refuses to sell his slave, Agamemnon, to an emancipation-supporting Englishman on grounds that he believes the intention of the buyer is cannibalism. As grotesque as the humor of this scene may be, it highlights an even more reprehensible feature of Peake's drama, and, inevitably, the audience for which Peake wrote. The character of Agamemnon is not a national caricature consciously strained for audience delight, but an unchallenged stereotype of a black man. Agamemnon is slow-witted and completely dependent upon Jonathan. The issue of slavery is offered no serious consideration, although Peake mocks the economics of slavery in his unfavorable

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17 Richard Brinsley Peake, _Americans Abroad; or, Notes and Notations_ (London: Dick's Standard Plays #589. The LILLY Library of Indiana University), p. 3.
picture of the American traveler. When considered in the light of Peake's rare but determined forays against English social evils, the absence of indictments against slavery in this farce can only reflect the aloof and insensitive attitude of Peake and the London public toward blacks. There is no indication that audiences of this play were displeased with the depiction of Agamemnon as little more than a child and the depiction of slavery as little more than a peculiarity.

In general, these three features characterize the farces of Richard Brinsley Peake: ludicrous situations based upon misunderstandings between characters; extensive use of puns and other types of word-play; and absurd characters developed from cultural models or nationality types. However, the great success of Peake's farces with the London audiences owed at least as much to the skills of the performers enacting those farces as to the dramatic ability of Peake. Perhaps the greatest service Peake rendered through his many farces was the creation of roles for the most accomplished low-comic actors and actresses of the 1820's and 1830's.

**Popular Actors in Farces by Peake**

The success of Madame Vestris in *The Hundred-Pound Note* was not duplicated by another of London's star performers, John Liston, as he ventured to play a leading character in Peake's *Master's Rival; or, A Day at Boulogne*. The latter play opened in February of 1829 at the Drury Lane. Liston, whose career was marred by a serious drinking problem, attempted to play the character of Paul Shack while heavily intoxicated. The farce was played for three nights, then was removed. Accounts of Liston's opening night performance by reviewers and by
Peake himself stated that Liston could scarcely remember his lines; whether or not the actor was in better condition on the next two evenings, the public evidently would have nothing to do with the production. Peake understandably blamed Liston for the failure of the production, but graciously wrote, in an introduction to a published edition of the play, that "every professor is subject to occasional mishaps." The play reappeared three months later, at the Covent Garden, with Robert Keeley in the role of Paul Shack. Reviewers lauded Peake's play, bestowed praise upon the marvelous work of Keeley, and snidely commented on the earlier performance of Liston, "Under the influence of the 'Bottle Imp!' ..." The embarrassment of John Liston by the Master's Rival incident did not terminate his career; in fact, this actor's greatest financial success came about in the 1830's. However, the failure of this accomplished comic performer in Peake's farce signalled the personal dilemma with which he struggled for a number of years. The misfortune of Liston and the subsequent triumph of Keeley in the same role further illustrate the reliance of Peake's farces upon the abilities of their performers. Reviews of Peake farces abound in references to the superiority of some actors to the material given them by Peake, but there are no comments on Peake's work that suggest it could entertain an audience primarily through its own merits.

18 Cumberland's British Theatre, 22:7.

19 Theatrical Observer #2309, 7 May 1829.

The farces of Peake were usually presented at the English Opera House, for which Peake continued to serve as treasurer through the 1830's. Members of the English Opera House company inevitably played in several Peake farces, and became identified with certain character types recurrent in those farces. Charles Mathews played Jonathan Doubikans in *Americans Abroad* and Nicholas Trefail in *Before Breakfast* (1827), both roles calling upon the lively mimic ability that characterized this actor's dramatic monologues. William Bennett sometimes took the parts of elderly gentlemen in Peake's farces, and John Reeve was popular with critics and audiences for his buffoonish servants. However, the two actors who most frequently appeared in the farces of Peake, and for whom the playwright created the largest number of roles, were Robert Keeley and Mary Ann Goward Keeley.

In the previous two chapters, some insight has been offered into the importance of Keeley in the success of some of Peake's melodramas. Robert Keeley's blend of childlike innocence and riotous behavior provided an amusing counterpoint to grim action in those melodramas; that same talent rescued even the least imaginative farces of Peake from ignominy. The roles written for Keeley by Peake were very often lower-class servants or rustics, allowing for a maximum of course jokes and exaggerated facial expressions. In *Americans Abroad*, Keeley enacted the part of Natty Larkspur, a rogue and petty thief from Liverpool who takes on the identity of Jonathan Doubikans. In *The Duel*, Keeley played the role of Mr. Rumfit, whose name signifies the character's carousing; in *The Middle Temple; or, Which is My Son* (1828), Keeley took the part of a character with an even more suggestive ticket name,
Brutus Hairbrain. In the latter play, Brutus, a footman, exchanges identities with his employer, an unsuccessful lawyer named Briefless. While Briefless is impersonating Brutus, he is pursued by the determined maid Penelope, who has fallen in love with this unusually refined footman. Meanwhile, the real Brutus Hairbrain is discovered and taken in by the natural father of Briefless, who is frustrated with his "son's" apparent lack of gentlemanly traits.

The role of the romantic maid in The Middle Temple, Penelope, was taken by Mary Ann Goward, who married Keeley during the run of the play. Although actual contact between Brutus and Penelope in the action of the play is minimal, the efforts of the Keeleys in the two servant roles contributed greatly to the farce's original success. The special talent of Mary Ann Goward Keeley for sentimental but mettlesome peasants and maids was used by Peake in several plays, sometimes in concert with the abilities of Robert Keeley. Of the farces of Peake that featured Mrs. Keeley, one of the most popular was a "Dramatic Caricature in One Act" titled H. B., which appeared at the Adelphi in 1839. In this play, Mary Ann Goward Keeley played a brazen, unwashed Cockney housemaid named Betty Nangle.

The exaggerated qualities of Peake's farces and occasional extravaganzas demanded energetic performances; some of the exaggerated characters in those plays were designed for players whose vivacity was well known to the London public. The farces of Peake were credited by his contemporaries for their liveliness, if not always for their

ingenuity, and Peake's talent for verbal humor earned him the praise of reviewers, but there was no greater factor in the popularity of these plays as curtain-raisers or afterpieces than their enactment by experienced and well-liked performers. Richard Brinsley Peake provided vehicles for many of the most popular low-comic performers in his time, contributing to the establishment of his own reputation, but also bolstering the careers of those actors.
CHAPTER VI

PEAKE'S COMEDY

Overview

The various improbabilities and self-indulgent jokes of the farces of Richard Brinsley Peake satisfied the wants of a sizeable portion of the London theatre audience. Despite the complaints of critics from the London journals, Peake devoted most of his energy to the writing of farces with contorted plots, numerous instances of word-play that fell short of wit, and ridiculous characters developed little beyond the level of caricature. However, in some essentially humorous plays, Peake endeavored to offer his audiences more than the necessary frivolity. These plays were labeled by Peake as comedies, and although they utilize many of the devices of Peake's farces, they are unmistakably more ambitious than the body of Peake's dramatic output. The comedies of Peake are more carefully structured and plausible than the farces of Peake; there is a greater development of character and plot in the comedies, and less of a reliance upon the physicalization for humorous effect that is so integral to Peake's farces. In general, the comedies of Peake represent the work of the second half of his theatrical career, and the most developed of these comedies were written in the 1840's, within a few years of his death. Thus Peake's comedies reflect not only the maturation of the writer's dramatic skills, but also the personal growth that made that maturation possible. By the time The
Climbing Boy was produced in 1832, Peake had acquired some sensitivity to the potential of the theatre for social commentary, a sensitivity evident not only in that play but also in the 1837 melodrama Blanche of Jersey. There are undercurrents of serious action in the comedies of Peake, sometimes structured around social evils. In The Chancery Suit (1830), a threat is posed toward a young heiress by a scheming lawyer; in The Sheriff of the County (1845), a military recruit is sentenced to be executed for striking an officer who insulted his sister. A different kind of serious concern underlies some of the action of Peake's last play, The Title Deeds (1847); instead of social protest, this play expresses a personal wistfulness suggesting Peake's awareness of his approaching death. These various subplots and expositions are never so prolonged as to undermine the humor of the comedies, but they are contributory toward a mature and compassionate view of human problems that co-exists with comicality.

Peake's first comedy was The Chancery Suit. The introduction of this play at the Covent Garden prompted some of the most earnest debates over the quality of Peake's work ever to appear in the London journals. The Times reviewer extended his evaluation of Peake's merits as a playwright to a perusal of the condition of London's drama and theatre:

We do not live in a time when dramatic productions can be strictly criticized: if we did, we should be condemned to pass sentence upon 99 out of the 100 that are brought forth. Although, therefore, there would be abundant ground for disputing the right of this piece to be called a comedy, it deserves to rank respectably among the farces, long and short, which should seem to be the utmost efforts that living dramatists are capable of.¹

¹The London Times, 1 December 1830, p. 2.
The Literary Gazette reviewer offered a greater defense for Peake's newest effort, praising the play for its lively language and dismissing his "hypercritical brethren" in the press. The reviewer concluded his favorable account of The Chancery Suit with encouragement for Peake's aspirations:

... if, in writing this comedy, you sometimes fancied you were writing a farce, the next time you think you are writing a farce, be sure you are writing a comedy, and you will escape the only rock that ever threatens your dramatic craft, and on which they have sometimes struck at the very mouth of the haven.²

A very negative view of the play was expressed by the Examiner critic; his review was less devoted to rhetorical speculations on the generic position of the play and more to its actual weaknesses. The most severe fault of this play, and of much of Peake's writing, suggested this critic, is an overabundance of extraneous comic incidents.³ The very diversity and intensity of critical opinions on The Chancery Suit indicates the significance of the play as an initiative of Peake. This comedy made use of the physical humor and stock characters featured in the farces of Peake, and even the most friendly of Peake's critics could not characterize the play's language as witty. But The Chancery Suit was the longest humorous play Peake had written up to this point in his career, and it accordingly offered a more comprehensive treatment of life than that of his farces.

In the remainder of this chapter, two comedies by Peake will be examined in terms of their structure, and, more importantly, their

²The London Literary Gazette #724, 4 December 1830, p. 787.
³The Examiner #1192, 5 December 1830, p. 773.
impact on the London theatre audience. The first, The Climbing Boy (1832), warrants attention as it contains Peake's most vehement attacks on political and social evils in England. The second, The Title Deeds (1847), is significant for the intricacy of its dramatic structure and the introspection it offers as Peake's final creative effort.

The Climbing Boy (1832)

Richard Brinsley Peake wrote The Climbing Boy during the period in the 1830's when the English Opera House company was without a home. This "comic drama with music" was presented at the Royal Olympic Theatre forty-six times during the summer of 1832, sometimes sharing the bill with revivals of earlier Peake plays, such as the farce The Haunted Inn and the melodrama The Evil Eye. In the original cast were some English Opera House performers who had already earned public recognition in plays by Peake: William Bennett, cast as the treacherous old servant, Jacob Buzzard; John Reeve, playing the role of Jack Rag, the clownish chimney-sweep; and George Bartley, portraying the central character of the drama, the distinguished Mr. Strawberry. The character of Mr. Strawberry, according to a letter written by Peake in the 1834 published acting edition of The Climbing Boy, is based in part on "those traits of humanity" that the playwright had seen in Lyceum manager Samuel James Arnold "during a confidential friendship for a period of twenty years..." 4 Strawberry is perhaps the first

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4 Richard Brinsley Peake, letter to Samuel James Arnold, in The Climbing Boy (London: John Miller, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, 1834. Ohio State University McDowell Film Archives: Promptbook #1127).
well-rounded character to appear in a Richard Brinsley Peake play; his personality blends compassion and joviality, allowing for earnest expressions of sentiment and ludicrous behavior without artificial transitions between the two. The lovable Strawberry is a country gentleman who is unwillingly elected to Parliament. In London, he encounters a mistreated climbing boy (assistant chimney sweep), whom he kindly adopts into his household. The complications center around the efforts of the major domo, Jacob Buzzard, to interfere with the well-being of the climbing boy and several other sympathetic characters over whom he has power. However, it is not just an individual villain that Peake desired his audience to resent, but social injustice. Strawberry, berating the insensitivity of Buzzard, strenuously lashes out against the virtual enslavement of children by proprietors of London business establishments: "Mark me, Jacob, I never will be accessory to the infliction of this horrible cruelty, oppression, and disease to poor helpless children."  

Another character, a poacher named Dan Slinker, expresses the view of Peake toward restrictive game laws. "There be no use in starving while one can poach a little," philosophizes Slinker,"--better risk being shut in jail, where we be sure o' board and lodging, and to be well taken care of, than die by inches of hunger." Somewhat later in the play, that same character describes to a blackmailing Jacob Buzzard the honest alternatives to game poaching: receiving petty wages as a laborer and begging in the

5Peake, The Climbing Boy, p. 25.
6Ibid., p. 13.
street. Despite these pointed social criticisms, *The Climbing Boy* is predominantly humorous, with the lion's share of physical comicality and word-play given to the street urchin's friend and mentor, the chimney-sweep Jack Rag. The play, which Peake derived in part from a popular story by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, also features several light-hearted songs by a Mr. Hawes\(^7\) and a love story as an additional sub-plot.

The comedy was well-received by the public. Reviewers reported enthusiastic audiences, particularly noting the rapport between the play's viewers and John Reeve. Apparently Reeve engendered as much warmth for his clumsiness as an actor as he did for his clumsy stage characters. On the opening night of *The Climbing Boy*, Reeve delighted the audience by forgetting a large number of song lyrics and hastily improvising substitutes; a stuffy *Times* critic wrote that this unintentional humor was not the first of its kind with Reeve.\(^8\) The play was assailed by the *Times* critic as a conglomeration of dramatic and musical elements without much formal organization or significance. "To speak of it as it deserves might seem unkind, and is besides hardly worth the while; to analyze it would be too much for the reader's patience."\(^9\) The reviewer from the *Literary Gazette* took an opposite stance on the quality of the script, praising Peake's skill in holding an audience's amused attention and punctuating that attention with sudden comic retorts and witticisms.\(^10\) But neither critic acknowledged the social

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\(^7\) In a production of this comedy at the Theatre Royal of Birmingham, prompted by M. H. Simpson, the songs were liberally edited. See the promptbook referred to in the previous footnotes.

\(^8\) *The London Times*, 14 July 1832, p. 4.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) *The London Literary Gazette* #809, 21 July 1832, p. 459.
commentary in the play, and neither reported any audience reaction suggestive of agreement or dispute with the forceful remarks on social injustices uttered by the characters. It may be supposed that the overwhelmingly working class audience of the Olympic approved of Peake's criticisms of abuses in the country's economic system. However, the greatest asset of *The Climbing Boy* was not its unique political diversion; rather, it was its combination of lively humor and sentimentality in a formula known to the theatre-going public. Peake, always primarily concerned with entertaining his audience, delivered in *The Climbing Boy* what the public had come to expect of him. There is no justification for an assumption that the frequent repetition of this play during the summer of 1832 was due to earnest political controversy. Nevertheless, *The Climbing Boy* incorporates a direct social function into a framework of entertainment. The play reflects not only Peake's development as a thoughtful writer, but also the interest and ability of dramatic authors of the early nineteenth century to support public indignation over unfair economic conditions and social abuses through the medium of the stage.

*The Title Deeds (1847)*

The final years of the life of Richard Brinsley Peake saw the production of his two most ambitious comedies. In the winter of 1845, the Haymarket Theatre produced *The Sheriff of the County*, a three-act piece exhibiting Peake's long-developed talent for creating bizarre dramatic characters and situations with the extra benefit of a sense of moderation acquired over three decades of writing. In *The Sheriff of the County*, there are buffoonish servants and off-hand jokes in the
tradition of Peake's farce, but there is also a general plausibility governing both its comic and its serious action. Two years later, Peake wrote the comedy that was to be his last play, *The Title Deeds*; it was produced at the Adelphi Theatre during the summer prior to Peake's death. Like *The Sheriff of the County*, *The Title Deeds* is characterized by a more mature treatment of character and sense of dramatic structure than that evident in the farces and melodramas of Peake. By no means are the final two comedies polished dramatic works, and in spite of Peake's own insistence on calling them comedies, the two defy simple classification into genre. But *The Sheriff of the County* and *The Title Deeds* are among the last achievements of Peake, reflecting both the writer's own experience and the gradual changes overtaking the drama in the mid-nineteenth century. These plays were written after the passage of the Theatre Regulation Act (1843), during the few years Peake had as a fully legitimate dramatist. Years of playwriting were coupled with a new opportunity for unhindered dramatic craftsmanship; the aging dramatist took advantage of both his old skill and his new liberty. The two comedies are also significant as gauges for the patterns of taste coming to dominance in the Victorian period. Both plays are appreciably more staid than works by Peake from earlier years. By no means did the burgeoning Victorian taste demand austerity; a farce by J. S. Coyne titled *How to Settle Accounts With Your Laundress*, which was a companion piece for *The Title Deeds* on several evenings in 1847, is as energetic and intentionally ridiculous as the best farces of
Peake. But audiences in Queen Victoria’s time gradually demanded more sentimentality, more domesticity, and, particularly, more moralization in their humorous plays. Notwithstanding the importance of Peake’s own maturity and the freedom afforded by the recent legislation in the creation of _The Sheriff of the County_ and _The Title Deeds_, the two plays are the products of a popular dramatist who was by necessity sensitive to both general and local trends of taste. There is even a perceptible difference between these two comedies: _The Sheriff of the County_, written for the fastidious audience of the Haymarket, shows more restraint than _The Title Deeds_, which was written by Peake for the less reserved audience of the Adelphi.

_The Title Deeds_ warrants particular attention, as it is Peake’s final play, and, perhaps because the playwright knew it would be such, his most eclectic and introspective play. Described as a comedy by Peake himself and by the play’s producers, it is actually a drama of mixed tones and several interrelated plots. (The reviewer from the _Literary Gazette_ appropriately described the play as a “three-act novelty.”) The action of the play is divided between two sets of characters, one upper class and one lower class; and, significantly, the affairs of the latter are considered as important as the problems of the former. The pivotal character of the play, the cabdriver Humphrey Haywhisp, is the most dimensional servant-class character in

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the drama of Peake; while he carries on the tradition of coarse humor and buffoonery of Peake rascals such as Brutus Hairbrain and Grady O'Shocknessy, he is also a compassionate family man with economic problems quite familiar to the original Adelphi audience. The action of *The Title Deeds* hinges on Humphrey's discovery of an iron chest left by a wealthy gentleman in his cab. The cabman and his wife, Sally, consider the money contained within the chest to be a gift of divine providence, as they and their family are on the verge of both starvation and eviction. But the chest also contains the title deeds to an enormous estate in the West Indies, and the absence of those deeds results in chaos for the genteel characters. An easy resolution is avoided when the Haywhisps, deciding to return the chest and its valuable documents, find out that Sally's mother, Mrs. Owlet, has suffered a mental collapse and has hidden the chest somewhere in the outskirts of the city. The serious and comic problems resulting from the misplacement of the chest are eventually resolved happily; Humphrey and Sally are rewarded for their honesty, and two young ladies are saved the social embarrassment of having to marry the mulatto sons of a Jamaican landowner.

The play has some measure of social commentary, most of which is delivered in a particularly impassioned exchange between old Mrs. Owlet and the play's most obvious villain, landlord Mr. Hardware:

_Script:

Hardware: Now what's your sorrow to do with my not receiving my money? If it isn't settled tomorrow I'll seize, and out you all go.

Mrs. Owlet: My blood biles? Do you call yourself a gentleman, Mr. Hardware?

Sally: Mother, don't—you will only make matters worse.

Mrs. Owlet: I am a woman of years and I have a right to speak, and, more than that, I will speak, if there were

ibid., p. 19.
accepted a translation from the French instead, for which they promised the author three and six-pence! I shall make up my mind to give up original dramatic writing.\footnote{Ibid., p. 18.}

It is quite likely that Peake wrote this speech with the intention of rebuffing the critics who for years complained about the playwright's excessive reliance upon French sources. Peake's career as a commercial writer demanded an understanding of the wants and prejudices of both audiences and producers; pride in original craftsmanship was necessarily second in importance to financial success. Peter Hush may even express Peake's regrets about the career he had chosen. Referring to the infrequency of his successes in the theatre, Peter tells Humphrey, "I wish . . . I had never turned author."\footnote{Ibid., p. 19.} While these bittersweet reflections by Peter are only periodic, they are unmistakably suggestive of the feelings of the playwright Peake. Having struggled to earn a living for himself and for his family over many years of playwriting in the unpredictable London theatre, Peake was on the verge of both poverty and death. Yet, as every personal account and obituary indicates, he maintained a sense of humor and a personal warmth that concealed any melancholic moods he may have felt. Like Peter Hush, Peake was the steadfast friend and the persevering artist, sensitive to his own failings, but never despondent.

The role of Peter Hush was played in the original production by a popular Adelphi comedian named Wright; critics described his performance
as lively, but sometimes too exaggerated. 16 The Haywhisps were played with great success by O. Smith and a Miss Woolgar. Reviewers from the London journals bestowed praise upon Peake, the performers, and the Adelphi manager, Madame Celeste, for delivering an evening of delightful diversion; audiences were unanimously in favor of the play. The Title Deeds ran fairly regularly from its opening on 21 June to its final performance on 7 August, after which another O. Smith vehicle, Rory O'More, dominated the Adelphi stage. The success of the play was a final reward for Peake, as he concluded three decades of dramatic writing. Perhaps nothing could more directly indicate to Peake the fruitfulness of his career than the response of the opening night audience to the mention of his name at the play's conclusion; as one critic noted, it 'was received with a burst of pleasant recognition.' 17

16 See The Examiner #2052, 26 June 1847, p. 405, and The Theatrical Journal #394, 3 July 1847, pp. 210-211.

CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSIONS

The Importance of Peake

Before any evaluation can be offered for the plays of Richard Brinsley Peake, there must be an understanding of Peake's purpose and function as a popular dramatist, and of the society for which he wrote. From the perspective of dramatic criticism in general, the plays of Peake may warrant only a cursory inspection, and then only in the context of a cursory inspection of most of the drama of his time. There is little in Peake's work to suggest extraordinary dramatic craftsmanship, brilliant wit, or insight into the depth and range of the human personality, all of which are qualities that earn plays the distinction of being called literature and the assurance of frequent revivals. The plays of Richard Brinsley Peake are primarily products conceived for the London populace of the 1820's, 1830's, and 1840's. They are obviously means of entertainment, and they are means by which social mores and social conventions (though not all social institutions) of Peake's time were reinforced. For Peake, a failure to entertain an audience, or a disregard of either its liberal or its conservative proclivities, would be tantamount to condemning his family to privations worse than those they already suffered.

The importance of Peake's work lies not so much in its unique values as in the relationship it bears to the popular theatre of London.
in the early nineteenth century. From the standpoint of theatre history, the corpus of Peake's work is valuable as a system of gauges indicating the tastes of audiences within particular localities and time periods. Peake's plays are also significant to the study of popular actors and actresses of the first half of the century, as an integral part of their theatricality was the deftness with which roles were designed for particular players. In addition to reflecting audience and critical tastes and providing appreciation for the talents of individual actors, the plays of Peake, and particularly his melodramas, supply the historian with some information relevant to the technical capacities of various London theatres. By no means is it possible to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of any of these features of the London theatre merely by an examination of the plays themselves; it is necessary to study the reactions, comments, and descriptions pertaining to each production, wherever they are extant. In general, this was the approach applied in the preceding chapters.

Richard Brinsley Peake was principally a dramatist of the minor theatres, and much of his career was intertwined with the development of the Lyceum, or the English Opera House, under the management of his good friend, Samuel James Arnold. Even the most ambitious dramatic works of Peake introduced at the Lyceum were restricted by the dictates of the theatrical monopoly to the burletta form. However, more important than this question of legitimacy in the manner of playwriting was the taste of the increasingly lower middle class audience of the Lyceum; the less affluent audiences desired a form of entertainment that presented human affairs in comprehensible ways. The humor of
language and character that had brought success to Richard Brinsley Sheridan was no longer an attraction; the larger London theatre audience in the time of Richard Brinsley Peake wanted diversions directly reflective of the social milieu with which they were faced. The entertainment provided by Peake should not be seen merely as an escape for the working people for the growing London community. While it is clear that audiences displayed much ebullience at productions of Peake's plays, it would be an error for a critic or historian to regard the productions as non-contributive to either social or personal growth.

In his valuable study of the popular drama, J. S. R. Goodlad writes:

> When people watch drama, it is unlikely that they are indulging in the same sort of escape as they do when they sleep, take drugs, or drink alcohol. The likelihood is that they are not escaping from their social obligations, but escaping into an understanding of society, which is necessary to them for their participation in society.¹

Even the most riotous farces of Peake, with Bob Keeley or John Reeve characters creating wholesale confusion, manage to reaffirm normative social conduct in their conclusions. And a play as exotic as the Adelphi melodrama The Evil Eye includes an evil of a domestic nature, understood by all of the struggling wage-earners in the audience: a landlord in pursuit of overdue rent. Peake was clearly sensitive to the variations of taste among individual theatres, and his consequent adjustments in his plays indicate both the gradations of sophistication among certain theatre audiences and the common interests that united all of them. The general success of Peake's forays into the Drury Lane and the Covent Garden reflects Peake's versatility in producing

plays for audiences with somewhat different standards; it also suggests
that the patent houses served a public that was not entirely upper class
or entirely elitist in its views of the theatre. A farce by Peake,
The Hundred-Pound Note, illustrates both of these facts. The play is
more restrained than Peake's Lyceum farces, but on the whole it is
lively and devoid of profundity, real or affected. Yet The Hundred-
Pound Note was a great success when produced at the Covent Garden. The
growing popular theatre served by Peake was by no means confined to the
illegitimate houses.

The insights offered by a study of Peake's plays for an under-
standing of popular drama in general are multiplied by the scope of
Peake's career and the versatility of his playwriting. In the course
of Peake's thirty years as a dramatist, England passed from the reck-
lessness of the Regency period to the austerity of the reign of Queen
Victoria. Consequently, the plays of Richard Brinsley Peake differ in
their modesty and manner of performance according to the year as well
as the theatre of their first introduction. This distinction is most
obvious in the contrast between Peake's raucous early farces and the
more thoughtful comedies of his later years. Two vehicles for O.
Smith, written twenty-three years apart, particularly illustrate this
contrast. In Americans Abroad (1824), much humor is derived from
derogatory national and racial caricatures, intimations of cannibalism,
and roguish behavior. In The Title Deeds (1847), the principal source
of amusement is the complicated predicament in which the likeable
characters find themselves. The contrast between these two plays also
indicates the freedom with which Peake was able to write in various
genre; like J. B. Buckstone and W. B. Bernard, Peake sought success as a writer of several forms of drama. Thus the output of Richard Brinsley Peake's three decades of commercial playwriting includes examples of nearly every type of play that was popular in the London theatre during the first half of the nineteenth century.

However, the focus of this study would be too narrow if its only conclusion was that Peake was a representative dramatist of his place and period. In the course of his career, Peake developed a personal style that was highly eclectic and defiant of critical standards. As successful as Peake was with the London audiences, many critics bewailed what seemed to them a tendency of self-sabotage in Peake's plays. Peake displayed a flair for ridiculous situations, hilarious word-play, sentimental heroics, and characters especially designed for individual players, but this asset was marred by incongruities of tone and a simplicity that many theatre goers did not require. Peake matured as a writer with his years of experience, eventually receiving little criticism as a popular dramatist, if no reputation as a major literary figure. Nevertheless, even in Peake's final play, The Title Deeds, the writer retained a personal approach that was dominated by a sense of the ludicrous. As a popular dramatist, Peake was bound to the conscience and consciousness of his time, but he was not afraid of controversy. Presumption! caused a furor among a vocal minority of Londoners, and statements in The Climbing Boy were antagonistic toward Conservative political powers. While these instances of conflict hardly earn Peake a description as a challenging social dramatist, they do represent cases in which the playwright used his own judgment as his
criterion in forming the moral premise of a play. Peake's individuality is also evident in the satirical qualities of his extravaganza The Meltonians, produced at the Drury Lane in 1838. This "Perfectly Illegitimate Drama" presented outrageous parodies of several well-known songs of the London stage as part of a ridiculous depiction of English sporting clubs. However typical Peake may have been in the general purpose and condition of early nineteenth century playwriting, he wrote with a personal enthusiasm, sense of humor, and insight that satisfied London audiences.

In terms of Peake's actual impact on the course of the London theatre, this playwright was not a major figure. But there is much evidence to indicate that Peake's talent for creating specific roles for particular actors provided immediate boosts to several careers, particularly those of the Keeleys, O. Smith, and John Reeve. In addition to this service to some of England's most promising and energetic performers, Peake contributed to the development of the early Victorian farce, particularly by way of his liberal use of the conundrum and puns in his successful The Hundred Pound Note. And in a small way at least, through his Gothic melodramas in the 1820's, Peake encouraged an imaginative use of the technology available to the theatre of the nineteenth century.

2Richard Brinsley Peake, The Meltonians (London: Webster's Acting National Drama #44. Ohio State University McDowell Film Archives: Film #810).
Suggestions For Further Studies

One purpose of this thesis has been to contribute to the opening up of a much-neglected period of English theatre history. In examining the career of Richard Brinsley Peake, several avenues for additional research of an enormous scope become evident. One such avenue is the sociological and theatrical history of London's minor playhouses. While there has been a large amount of material written on the Lyceum, the Haymarket, and the Sadler's Wells Theatres, other minor houses, such as the Coburg and the Royalty, are seemingly as disregarded by historians today as they were by the London critics of their time. If there is a scarcity of reviews or other published accounts of these playhouses, a beneficial study could still be made based on the extant texts of plays first produced on their stages.

Another avenue of research that would contribute to a greater understanding of the popular London theatre is the exploration of the works of other successful playwrights of the first half of the nineteenth century. While Douglas Jerrold, J. B. Buckstone, and W. B. Bernard have been examined by several historians in the context of dramatic literature of their time, much more can be written about individual works and their production histories. And by no means does this thesis fully cover the works of Peake himself; production histories of individual works, comparative studies between Peake and his contemporaries, and inclusion of Peake's plays in generic studies would all be valid contributions to an understanding of the theatre for which Peake wrote. In addition to these areas of research and criticism, there remain numerous playwrights of the popular London stage
whose work remains unexamined; among these writers are H. M. Milner and Lyceum manager Samuel James Arnold.

A third avenue of research that will produce many valuable insights is the study of the careers of the actors of London's popular theatre. The research leading to this thesis revealed the great attention paid by London critics to individual performers; criticism of plays in production is often accompanied by descriptions and evaluations of actresses and actors. Many of the actors mentioned in the preceding chapters have been given only occasional attention by historians of the period. More can be written about individual successes and failures among the performances of Robert Keeley, Mary Ann Goward Keeley, and John Liston, and much research can be done on several performers who were very popular with the London audience but who have been frequently overlooked by historians: Richard John O. Smith, James Wallack, John Reeve, William Blanchard, and William Bennett.
APPENDIX A

Some Popular Actors and Their Roles
in the Plays of Peake

Robert Keeley

Billy Black
Fritz
Brutus Hairbrain
John
Natty Larkspur
Dr. Manante
Geoffry Muffincap

Poltrop le Pop
Mr. Rumfit
Paul Shack
Willibald

Mary Ann Goward Keeley

Betty Nangle
Penelope
Vergellina

Richard John O. Smith

Bombardier Babillard
Barozzi
The Bottle Imp
Dr. Flamingo
Humphrey Haywhisp
Jemmy Larkspur
The Monster

The Hundred-Pound Note
Presumption!
The Middle Temple
Before Breakfast
Americans Abroad
The Spring Lock
Amateurs and Actors
The Smuggler Boy
The Duel
Master's Rival
The Bottle Imp

H.B.
The Middle Temple
The Spring Lock
Comfortable Lodgings
The Evil Eye
The Bottle Imp
The Spring Lock
The Title Deeds
Americans Abroad
Presumption!

Covent Garden, 1827
Lyceum, 1823
Lyceum, 1829
Lyceum, 1827
Lyceum, 1824
Lyceum, 1829
Lyceum and Covent Garden, 1827 (revival)

Covent Garden, 1833
Covent Garden, 1828
Covent Garden, 1829
Lyceum, 1828
Adelphi, 1839
Lyceum, 1829
Lyceum, 1829

Drury Lane, 1827
Adelphi, 1831
Lyceum, 1828
Lyceum, 1829
Adelphi, 1847
Lyceum, 1824
Lyceum, 1827 (revival)

128
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Bennett</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldgate</td>
<td>Master's Rival</td>
<td>Drury Lane, 1829</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethune</td>
<td>Blanche of Jersey</td>
<td>Lyceum, 1837</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Bonassus</td>
<td>Comfortable Lodgings</td>
<td>Drury Lane, 1827</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Buzzard</td>
<td>The Climbing Boy</td>
<td>Olympic, 1832</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankenstein</td>
<td>Presumption!</td>
<td>Lyceum, 1827</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Havannah</td>
<td></td>
<td>(revival)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Ledger</td>
<td>Before Breakfast</td>
<td>Lyceum, 1827</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Americans Abroad</td>
<td>Lyceum, 1824</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Mustyroll</td>
<td>The Smuggler Boy</td>
<td>Covent Garden, 1833</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Prettyman</td>
<td>A Quarter to Nine</td>
<td>Lyceum, 1837</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Tomkyn Probe</td>
<td>The Middle Temple</td>
<td>Lyceum, 1829</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Threadneedle</td>
<td>The Haunted Inn</td>
<td>Drury Lane, 1829</td>
<td>(revival?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tisserand</td>
<td>The Meltonians</td>
<td>Lyceum, 1838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Yarn</td>
<td>Gemini</td>
<td>Lyceum, 1838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lying in Ordinary</td>
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APPENDIX B

A Chronological List of Peake's Writings

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>Amateurs and Actors (Farce)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td>Walk for a Wager (Farce)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>Presumption! (Melodrama)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>Americans Abroad (Farce; later revived as Jonathan in England)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>Before Breakfast (One-act Farce); Comfortable Lodgings (Farce); The Hundred-Pound Note (Farce)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828</td>
<td>The Bottle Imp (Melodrama); The Duel (Farce)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>The Haunted Inn² (Farce); Master's Rival (Farce); The Middle Temple (Farce); The Skeleton Lover (Melodrama); The Spring Lock (Melodrama)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>The Chancery Suit (Comedy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>The Evil Eye (Melodrama)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>The Climbing Boy (Comedy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>The Smuggler Boy (Melodrama)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>The Chain of Gold (Melodrama); In the Wrong Box (Farce)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>The Devil on Two Sticks (Melodrama/Ballet); House Room (One-act Farce)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>Blanche of Jersey (Melodrama); A Quarter to Nine (One-act Farce)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Gemini (One-act Farce); Lying in Ordinary (One-act Farce); The Meltonians (Extravaganza)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>H.B. (One-act Farce); &quot;Toledo Rapier&quot; (Short story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>&quot;The Cobbler Physician&quot; (Short story); The Devil in London (Satire); &quot;Transylvannian Anatomie&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>The Bequeathed Heart (Melodrama)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>&quot;The Haunted Mine&quot; (Short story); Memoirs of the Colman Family (Two-Volume Biography); &quot;Pope Joan&quot; (Short story); Uncle Rip (Farce)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Cartouche (Novel); &quot;Post Bag&quot; (Article)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Between 1819 and 1823, Peake contributed to the dramatic sketches performed by Charles Mathews at the Lyceum; these pieces were collectively called At Home.

² Possibly a revival.
1845  "Ancedotal Gatherings" (Article); The Sheriff of the County (Comedy)

1846  The Devil of Marseilles (Melodrama)

1847  The Title Deeds (Comedy)

Plays by Peake of uncertain date:

Colomba, the Corsican Sister
Court and City (Comedy)
The Dead Guest
False Mr. Pope
The Little Laundress
Miser's Well
The Smuggler Count
Ten Thousand a Year (Adaptation of a novel by Samuel Warren)
The Three Wives of Madrid (Comedy)
Wanted: A Governess
APPENDIX C
Peake's Plays Arranged by Theatre of First Performance

Lyceum (English Opera House)

Amateurs and Actors; Americans Abroad; Before Breakfast; Blanche of Jersey; The Bottle Imp; Gemini; The Haunted Inn; House Room; Jonathan in England; Lying in Ordinary; The Middle Temple; Presumption!; A Quarter to Nine; The Spring Lock; The Three Wives of Madrid; Walk a Wager.

Covent Garden

The Chancery Suit; Court and City; The Duel; The Hundred-Pound Note; The Smuggler Boy.

Drury Lane

Comfortable Lodgings; The Devil on Two Sticks; Master's Rival; The Meltonians.

Adelphi

The Chain of Gold; The Devil in London; The Devil of Marseilles; The Evil Eye; H.B.; The Skeleton Lover; The Title Deeds.

Olympic

The Climbing Boy; In the Wrong Box.

Victoria (Coburg)

The Bequeathed Heart.

Haymarket

The Sheriff of the County.
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In the Wrong Box. London: Dick's Standard Plays #737. The Lilly Library.

Lying in Ordinary. London: Webster's Acting National Drama #49. McDowell Film Archives: F. 815.


The Meltonians. London: Webster's Acting National Drama #44. McDowell Film Archives: F. 810.

The Middle Temple; or, Which is My Son? London: Webster's Acting National Drama #11. McDowell Film Archives: F. 595.

Presumption!; or, The Fate of Frankenstein. London: Dick's Standard Plays #431. (Cover title: Frankenstein.) McDowell Film Archives: P. 1470.


The Three Wives of Madrid; or, The Diamond Ring. London Barth's Universal Stage #75. The Lilly Library.


Walk for a Wager; or, Bailiff's Bet. London: W. Fearman, The Lilly Library.

Novels
