

ESCAPIST CATHARSIS:
REPRESENTATION, OBJECTIFICATION, AND PARODY
ON THE PANTOMIME STAGE

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

British turn-of-the-century pantomime has a reputation as light, inconsequential entertainment, and so has received little attention from theatre scholars in the past. But as one of the most popular, lucrative theatrical forms of the period, pantomime is in an ideal position to reflect and comment upon its creating culture. This thesis undertakes a close analysis of a typical pantomime, J. Hickory Wood and Arthur Collins' *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*, performed from 1900-1901. The performance styles, plot structures, and scenic designs of this particular pantomime reveal and examine a society in transition, obsessed with objects and objectification, and increasingly reliant on image and representation rather than substance. The play provides a simultaneously cathartic and escapist outlet for ambivalence toward continuing cultural upheaval, playing a vital role in moderating the anxieties of turn-of-the-century Londoners.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Vita.....	iv
Chapters:	
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Pantomime in History.....	12
3. Pantomime, Story and Performance.....	30
4. Pantomime and Politics.....	44
5. Pantomime and the Physical World.....	61
Conclusion.....	74
Bibliography.....	77

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

British pantomime is a relatively dismissed and overlooked area of theatre history; only a modest selection of scholarly studies investigates this art form, and together they do not create a complete or coherent body of work. This inattention exists despite the fact that, throughout the nineteenth century in Britain, pantomime was one of the most popular theatrical forms, sometimes single-handedly keeping larger playhouses in business.

Pantomime merits the same attention as any other type of theatre simply because *it is* a type of theatre. The study of pantomime can lend much insight into how theatre relates to the society that produces it. It can also illuminate how comedy and parody work in theatre and performance. Pantomime, like most theatre, addresses and reflects its creating culture in its performance. It imitates reality, taking stances on social phenomena by presenting them on stage, acting as a critic of its own context. It does this especially by way of parody, coating incisive cultural observations with an easy humor that does not threaten the audience. This allows pantomime to serve dual cathartic and escapist functions, providing a release for everyday anxieties in the guise of light entertainment.

Pantomime as a subject for scholarly study does present its difficulties, mainly in what still exists to be studied. The best sources are original scripts, or librettos. Books of twenty to forty quarto pages listing songs and brief scene descriptions were sold during performances, sometimes with scenic dioramas added at the end. Manuscripts were also submitted regularly to the Examiner of Plays for approval; these exist in two archival collections. The first is the Larpent Collection of the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California; the other is the Lord Chamberlain's Collection in the British Museum. Both collections contain mostly scripts from Covent Garden and Drury Lane, as well as a few from the Lyceum, Adelphi, Olympic, and Surrey.

“That no pantomime script is ever a complete account of what occurred on stage is a truism [...]. Indeed, the problem of establishing an authoritative nineteenth-century pantomime text is a vexed one.”¹ Either several conflicting versions exist, in the case of *Harlequin in His Element*, five or more, or none at all, in the case of many others. In earlier scripts, the harlequinade is usually quite sketchy. Covent Garden scripts especially omit some scene descriptions, but detail encore material not found elsewhere. Drury Lane scripts are extremely complete, detailing comic business, scenic descriptions, and at times how the scenic tricks were carried out. These records have enabled scholarly analysis of pantomime content, but not necessarily of the performance event.

¹ Michael Booth, “Preface to *Harlequin in His Element* and *Harlequin Harper*,” *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 70-71.

Other helpful sources exist, but are difficult to come by. Magazines of the 1830s also at times featured narrative miniatures, or prose descriptions of the play material—these often varied quite a bit from existing libretti. Playbills provide names of scenic artists, as well as, at times, descriptions of scene progressions, which especially complement the barer Covent Garden scripts. Toy theatres, even more rare, replicate in varying degrees of accuracy the set and costumes of pantomimes—while extremely helpful for records of costumes, they provide only simplified scripts and scenic descriptions. They are perhaps more helpful as evidence of pantomime’s popularity than anything else.

A small selection of early and late illustrations, sometimes depicting full scenes, sometimes featuring single characters, have been published in the histories and encyclopedias described below. A few set and costume designs, as well as some records of the backstage process, illuminate the production elements of pantomime. Photographs from the late nineteenth century and on are also available, including character stills, cast photographs, and some pictures of scenery. Illustrations are problematic because they are not created in the moment, and, therefore, are of questionable accuracy; still photographs, almost entirely posed, similarly do not give us the actual performance event.

Each of these types of sources only hint at the movement of pantomime—the pacing of performance, the traffic of characters on stage, the flow of scene transformation—which is key to understanding pantomime. This information must be gleaned from first or secondhand accounts, found in theatre reviews, autobiographies, and similar contemporaneous materials.

Memoirs by prominent figures in pantomime, such as J.R. Planché and Thomas and Charles Dibdin, can also provide varying degrees of insight, Charles Dibdin's being the most detailed of the three. Unfortunately, these cover largely the beginning and middle of the nineteenth century—scholars have no memoir from later figures such as Augustus Harris to rely upon for turn-of-the-century pantomime.

Critical reviews are among the most commonly-used sources for pantomime information; A.E. Wilson, a critic himself, relies on them especially. The pitfall of relying on theatre reviews is, of course, any existing bias of the writer. Good reviews can romanticize the experience of watching an elaborate scenic transformation, and bad reviews can overlook the more affective aspects of a performance to focus on shoddy dialogue, weak acting, and clumsy stage effects. David Mayer regards the criticism of the London *Times* to be the most perceptive and detailed, but other pantomime historians have reached to every available source for opinions and descriptions of performances, without any assessment of the source itself. Far too often the assessment of especially later pantomime as dull, overwrought, and predictable is taken as truth, and as justification for lack of real analysis of pantomime.

Secondary sources on pantomime tend to be too general or too specified. This is true of histories and of the rarer, more analytical works. Most of the literature relies more on description than on analysis, which seems to support the idea that spectacular theatre has little to offer on a higher artistic or intellectual level. Histories of pantomime vary in purpose and reliability. Those written closest to the period in question are difficult to fully trust, often relating anecdotes of questionable accuracy rather than giving specific facts. They can certainly help, however, by giving general

information on how pantomime operated and how it was received. Most begin with the birth of pantomime in the eighteenth century, through its shape-shifting adulthood and into its decline and death at the end of the nineteenth century. The key idea underlying most of these histories is that pantomime saw its golden age sometime in the early or mid-nineteenth century, then degraded into cheap entertainment.

R.J. Broadbent's *A History of Pantomime*, published in 1901, begins with ancient societies and mythologies, eastern and western, in a search for early forms of mime. He progresses through Italian and English masques and the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, investigating their influence on pantomime. The rest of his history focuses on major figures such as John Rich and David Garrick, families such as the Grimaldis, Bolognas, Ridgways, and Paynes, and stories commonly used such as "Aladdin," "Sleeping Beauty," and "The Babes in the Wood." Overall, the text is valuable for its detail and its closeness to the period.

A. E. Wilson's *King Panto*, originally published in 1935, recounts a wide history of the art form, but is subject to the flaws of the time. Wilson was dramatic critic for the *London Star* and was presumably quite knowledgeable about both pantomime and its larger theatrical context; he quotes readily from a staggering range of theatre practitioners and fellow critics, as well as a plethora of pantomime librettos and scripts. These resources are only as useful, unfortunately, as they are reliable; Wilson often attributes a quote to "a critic" in such-and-such a year, neglecting both the name of the author and the source of the quote. He utilizes anecdotal evidence as well, citing practitioners' opinions of other practitioners as fact. Wilson's content gives little depth or introspection; in general celebratory, the text glances at the greatest names in

pantomime clowning and recounts the Drury Lane glory days. Perhaps most helpful are the numerous pictures, not just of portraits, but of scenes within specific pantomimes. Wilson's *The Story of Pantomime*, published in 1949, is much the same, but far less comprehensive.

The recollections of Augustus Harris's contemporaries such W. Macqueen-Pope, who looked more kindly, perhaps, on pantomime than did Bernard Shaw or William Archer, can be helpful; Macqueen-Pope's sentimental enthusiasm, of course, must be taken with a grain of salt. His recollections are effusive and seek mainly to glorify the popular theatre of the time, not to assess it in any great depth.

Contemporary sources must rely on the older histories to at least some degree; the modern scholarly text can with a footnote or citation tangle anecdote and hearsay with fact. A few sources contain a wealth of general information but remain frustratingly bare of annotations of any kind, so that the material presented cannot necessarily be traced to original or even secondary sources. This is especially trying when scholars have special access to archival materials and do not retrace their own research steps for their readers.

Gerald Frow's "*Oh, Yes It Is!*" is a perfect example. He writes the same sort of general history as Wilson's. He uses excellent resources, including hard-to-find texts such as John Weaver's 1728 *A History of Mimes and Pantomimes*, as well as materials from several special library collections; he also, however, uses no footnotes, endnotes, or in-text citations, to the point that his text is scattered with completely anonymous direct quotes. Short of a "Book List" and a list of picture acknowledgments, the reader has no clue where Frow has gotten his information. As a historian Frow does little to

expand on what Wilson has already written, and does even less to evaluate or assess his various sources—all information is good information in Frow's treatment.

David Pickering's *Encyclopaedia of Pantomime* has numerous helpful photographs and appendices, but is guilty of the same flaw. His information relies undiscerningly on a wealth of sources, but none of it is attributed; retracing his steps is nearly impossible. The illustrations and photographs he utilizes are helpful, but they are almost always merely presented, rarely analyzed or interpreted. Raymond Mander & Joe Mitchenson's *Pantomime: A Story in Pictures* presents a brief historical survey and an extensive collection of visual evidence, beginning in the early eighteenth century and ending in the mid-twentieth. Helpful details and quotes accompany most of the illustrations and photographs; however, the accompanying text is more descriptive than analytical.

A few more helpful scholarly histories do exist. John O'Brien's *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760* addresses the question of art versus entertainment, which he sees developing at this time as theatre moves from the courts into popular culture. People during this period began to see entertainment as "hijacking the cognitive apparatus and installing passion over reason as the dominant faculty in the spectator's minds" (xviii). His earlier essay, "Harlequin Britain: Eighteenth-Century Pantomime and the Cultural Location of Entertainment(s)," contains a wealth of detail on pantomime's early history. Perhaps most valuable are his insights into how pantomimes were perceived by theatregoers. He observes rather astutely that the formulaic stories freed the audiences' attention from the plot and engaged it elsewhere, specifically on the numerous topical references.

David Mayer's *Harlequin in His Element* does well with the challenge of reconstructing pantomime history in the early nineteenth century, from which comparatively little evidence survives. His work addresses satire, censorship, stage effects, etc., and contains an appendix on pantomime "trickwork" and music. According to Mayer the difference between normal comedies and these pantomimes was the plethora of subjects pantomime could target, while traditional comedy had to focus on one or two subjects. "Its structure enabled fleeting comedy or satire to be directed at many topics without requiring that they be shown in a logical or plausible sequence. It was more effectual by being random rather than precise."²

Michael Booth's scholarship is a wonderful support to the study of nineteenth-century pantomime—his collections of primary pantomime texts and production accounts are strengthened by attention to the artistic and cultural implications of spectacular theatre. He validates nineteenth-century popular theatre on the basis that the less-esteemed forms, like pantomime and extravaganza, were in fact the defining forms of the period. *Victorian Spectacular Theatre* looks at the phenomenon of spectacle across pantomime, melodrama, and other popular nineteenth-century theatrical forms. *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques* is the most valuable asset—Booth has culled from promptbooks, photographs, manuscripts, reviews, and published materials to create master scripts for many important productions.

Millie Taylor's recently published *British Pantomime Performance* has little to say about pantomime history, instead addressing contemporary aspects of pantomime

² David Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806-1836*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969, 6.

performance, such as financial realities and modern staging. Perhaps the first to really apply performance theory to the art form, she applies ritual theory to the dynamics between pantomime actors and the audience. She also investigates pantomime as it mixes topical references with traditional folk and fairy tales.

But Taylor's work has no sense of time—pantomime of today is conflated with pantomime of yesterday. Taylor's understanding of pantomime begins at the turn of the century, placing a strong emphasis on the art form's variety or music hall elements. Outside of brief paragraphs tracing a few historical phenomena like the Dame or the principal boy, pantomime is treated as largely consistent through a century of history. Taylor's insights into performance, though immensely valuable to the study of pantomime as a whole, cannot be extended to historical pantomime, simply because the cultural context is so wildly different.

Much legwork in the area of pantomime simply remains to be done. My own investigation seeks to expand on the ideas already touched on by historians and scholars. Yes, pantomime utilized comedy, but to what effect? Its comic material was gleaned largely from its surrounding culture, but quite a few critics and scholars, past and present, see this as a careless act, evidence that pantomime is little more than a haphazard, slapped-together entertainment. And few have pointed out the paradoxes inherent in later pantomime, whose subject matter was always fantastical but whose scenery and presentation were always elaborately literal.

My analysis of a particular pantomime performed at the turn of the century, *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*, seeks to address some of these neglected issues. This play addresses concerns with objectification, the Victorian tendency to endow objects

with incredible significance, to literalize metaphors and intangible concepts, to embody them in physical articles. It also reveals insecurity with new modes of representation, in the privileging of image over substance, and of the ultimate failure of image to fully replace or compensate for lack of substance.

Chapter Two begins with an overview of pantomime history, beginning with Italian *commedia dell'arte* and moving to England through the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It provides a familiarity with the context of pantomime, the traditions and variations within the form. A detailed synopsis of *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast* follows, because few are familiar with a wide range of pantomime scripts, and even fewer know this particular play.

Chapter Three explores the performative aspects of pantomime and its meta-theatrical qualities. It demonstrates how *Sleeping Beauty* uses self-referencing and allusions to other theatre, connecting itself to the pantomime tradition and to the theatrical world at large. It also investigates what pantomime says about performance in general, as it pokes fun at fakery and theatricality but provides entertainment in much the same way.

Chapter Four details the political references in *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*, connecting it to the climate of transition in turn-of-the-century Britain. The play focuses conflicting ideologies in its characters, pitting monarchy and imperialism against democracy, reflecting uncertainties about the democratization of Europe and the coming breakdown of Britain's empire. The play's plot reaffirms traditional government by first threatening and then reinstating it; it simultaneously undercuts this, however, with its portrayal of monarchs as ineffectual and vapid.

Chapter Five delves into how pantomime portrays the physical world. *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast* presents characters ill at ease with their environment and their own bodies. It juxtaposes scenes of the mundane with scenes of fantasy, elaborately realizing both in extreme detail, transforming fluidly from one to the next. It suggests the boundaries between reality and imagination are fluid.

Ultimately, *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast* mirrors Victorian uncertainty during a time of great transition; it reflects highly relevant problems such as the changing physical and political landscapes of Victorian life. Like other pantomimes of its time, it played a vital role by mirroring its society's insecurities, releasing and soothing them in a safe, controlled environment.

CHAPTER 2

PANTOMIME IN HISTORY

English pantomime had its beginnings in Italy in the sixteenth century, where the *commedia dell'arte* developed and flourished. Literally translated as “comedy of skill,” *commedia dell'arte* was an improvisational art form in which actors employed stock characters and situations to create comedies that changed from performance to performance. *Commedia* actors specialized in a particular type of role, often taking on a single character for the duration of their careers. Several of these characters (Harlequin and Columbine, the humorous servants, Scaramouche, Punch, and Pantalone, the idiotic father) and plotlines (estranged lovers, divided by their elders, come together in the end) were imported directly into early English pantomime.³

The influence of *commedia* on the English stage appears as early as the seventeenth century, through the plays of Aphra Behn and William Mountford. Behn used *commedia* material for her *The Emperor of the Moon* in 1687.⁴ Both Scaramouch

³ Margot Berthold, *The History of World Theatre: From the Beginnings to the Baroque*, Trans. Edith Simmons, New York: Continuum, 1999, 443-47.

⁴ John O'Brien, “Harlequin Britain: Eighteenth-Century Pantomime and the Cultural Location of Entertainment(s),” *Theatre Journal* 50.4 (1998) 489-510, 492.

and Harlequin have main roles, and the primary plot is that of young lovers divided.⁵ William Mountford created a farce in 1685 of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, importing Harlequin and Scaramouche and "uniting a popular fable with the stock masks of the *commedia dell'arte*."⁶

In the early eighteenth century, John Weaver, dancing master at Shrewsbury, staged pantomime ballets to accompany his plays at Drury Lane. He sought, perhaps increasing his work's credibility, to associate his dances with the Roman art of *pantomimus*; his 1717 *The Loves of Mars and Venus* was, according to the playbill, "a New Dramatick Entertainment of Dancing after the Manner of the Antient Pantomimes."⁷ The next year Weaver produced *The Cheats; or, the Tavern Bilkers* at Lincoln's Inn Field, in which Harlequin, Scaramouche, and Punch dash about contemporary London creating comic business. The production starred John Rich, who took over management of the pantomimes soon after. He paired a serious "overplot," taken from mythology or folklore, with an "underplot" filled with *commedia* characters, becoming an iconic Harlequin and creating the form of pantomime that would hold fast for the rest of the century. Harlequin and Columbine were conflated with the divided lovers of *commedia*; Pantaloon, Columbine's elder suitor, would pursue the two of them, but Harlequin would evade Pantaloon with the help of a magic bat, transforming

⁵ Aphra Behn, *The Rover; The Feigned Courtesans; The Lucky Chance; The Emperor of the Moon*, Jane Spencer, ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

⁶ David Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806-1836*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969, 4.

⁷ Emmet Avery, ed, *The London Stage, 1660-1800*, Pt. II: 1700-1729, Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960, 439.

various objects into obstacles.^{8 9} The plays were completely silent, perhaps due to criticism of Weaver as an illiterate actor with speech problems.¹⁰

As time went on, pantomime increased in popularity, in part because of the Licensing Act of 1737, which restricted spoken theater to the Patent Houses and fostered the growth of alternative forms of drama in smaller playhouses.¹¹ Writers began pulling not only from mythology and folklore for the opening, but popular stories of all sorts; they also stretched out the harlequinade from a few brief scenes to scene after scene of comic business. Thomas Dibdin's *Harlequin and Mother Goose; or, the Golden Egg*, which opened 29 December 1806, is a good example. The Mother Goose story itself provides a thin justification for introduction of the clowning action. The title character, a witch, provides a young man Colin with a goose who lays one golden egg per day, to assist him in his pursuit of Colinette. When Colinette's guardian demands the slaughter of the goose, Colin consents; Mother Goose appears in place of the animal and exacts her revenge. The transformation of the two lovers into Columbine and Harlequin is actually a punishment, instead of an enablement. Still, she gives Harlequin a sword, the "magic bat" of this particular play. She also transforms the pursuers into Pantaloon and Clown, who chase the other two through scenes of everyday London, such as inns, markets, and cottages. The harlequinade ends in a Mermaid's Cave, where

⁸ Mayer, 4-5.

⁹ According to A.E. Wilson, Rich's creations were "clumsily contrived" and lacking in any real unity. *King Panto: The Story of Pantomime*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1935, 29.

¹⁰ Mayer, 4-5.

¹¹ Mayer, 5.

Harlequin rescues a golden egg from the sea, after which Mother Goose transforms the entire cast back into their normal counterparts again.¹²

Joseph Grimaldi, better known as “Joe” or “Joey,” starred in *Mother Goose* as the Clown, and continued to play the same role in Covent Garden pantomime until 1823. After his retirement as an actor, he continued to be involved in pantomime stagings until his death in 1837.¹³ Like Rich, Grimaldi had lasting effects on the developing art of pantomime: it was he who extended the harlequinade at Covent Garden, while Drury Lane, lacking in consistently strong comic actors, focused more on the opening.¹⁴ As a performer Grimaldi helped shift pantomime’s focus from Harlequin and acrobatics, the foundation laid by Weaver, to Clown and satire.¹⁵

Though pantomime later became associated with both Christmastime and children’s theatre, in the Regency era pantomimes were still performed throughout the year, and their primary audience was adults. At Covent Garden and Sadler’s Wells, good comedians made humor the focus of a show, while at Drury Lane productions already tended toward scenic opulence, a trend that continued through the rest of the century.¹⁶

¹² Thomas Dibdin, *Harlequin and Mother Goose; Or, the Golden Egg*, London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, *English and American Drama of the Nineteenth Century*, Microfiche, New York : Readex Microprint, 1966.

¹³ Mayer, 7.

¹⁴ Michael Booth, “Preface to *Harlequin in His Element* and *Harlequin Harper*,” *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 69.

¹⁵ Mayer, 6.

¹⁶ Mayer, 10, 34.

By the middle of the century, however, pantomime's form shifted dramatically. Openings featured fuller plots in which transformation was simply an addition to the later story, rather than a necessity. Characters that had been silent began to speak extensively, in verse of rhymed couplets. Mayer marks the change by the repeal of the Licensing Act in 1843. Though pantomimes after Rich had used at least limited dialogue regardless of prohibition, Mayer explains, "managements seem to have compelled their pantomime arrangers and performers to take advantage of their new freedom."¹⁷ The art form expanded to imitate its main competitor, the fairy extravaganza (of which J.R. Planché was the foremost author), which Booth describes as "essentially a pantomime with the harlequinade removed and the comedy and magic tricks transferred to the opening."¹⁸ Pantomime most definitely mimicked its sister genre, tacking a brief harlequinade onto the end of every show as an afterthought, not even played by the same cast as the opening.¹⁹

Audience considerations also affected the tone of the pantomimes; more and more children attended the plays, and what had been morally ambiguous characters gradually took on more definite roles as "good" or "evil."²⁰ Pantomime "grew simpler,

¹⁷ Mayer, 309-11. Booth notes, though, that critics had already started to notice this trend in the 1830s. Michael Booth, "Introduction," *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 8.

¹⁸ Booth, "Introduction," 19.

¹⁹ Booth, "Introduction," 44. For a discussion of the distinction between pantomime and fairy extravaganza, art forms that are at times nearly identical, see Michael Booth's *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques*, 10-11, the only work so far to address the idea in any depth.

²⁰ Booth, "Introduction," 46.

less satiric, less cruel, more obvious comically and scenically, more ostentatiously moral and even instructional—in a word, less adult.”²¹ Henry James Byron’s *Robinson Crusoe, or Harlequin Friday and the King of the Caribbee Islands*, which opened 26 December 1860 at the Princess Theatre, clearly reflects these trends. It features two strongly delineated opposing forces, Tyranny and Liberty, who seek to interfere, for better or for worse, in the lives of the main characters. Sets and costumes reflect a more simplified moral realm: “The scene is heavy, dismal, and dark...Liberty rises in an illuminated bower; her dress is of shining silver, and stands out in marked contrast to the extreme darkness of the scene.”²²

The play also evidences a disintegrating harlequinade; the transformation of characters at the end is perfunctory, not integrated into the plot. Liberty herself admits the only reason to continue the harlequinade is merely to “keep alive the fun by killing care.”²³ In contrast to the fourteen comic scenes of Dibdin’s *Mother Goose*, *Crusoe* has only four. The storyline of the pursuit of the lovers disappears, as do the relationships between the characters—Pantaloone is no longer Columbine’s father or the Clown’s

²¹ Booth, “Introduction,” 43.

²² Henry James Byron, *Robinson Crusoe, or Harlequin Friday and the King of the Caribbee Islands, Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 259. The story of Robinson Crusoe was often used in Victorian pantomime (Byron himself collaborated on two others in 1867 and 1868).

²³ Byron, 279.

master, and Harlequin is all but completely disconnected from the action. A different cast of actors breaks any visual continuity between the opening and the closing.²⁴

Pantomime also began to reflect a widespread concern in Victorian theatre with literal physical representation of imagined settings. Like extravaganza, pantomime increasingly relied on elaborate visual effects to delight its audiences. Climactic scene changes labored on for minutes rather than seconds, extending into what was intended to be a scenic and emotional crescendo; Percy Fitzgerald perfectly describes the spectacle:

First the 'gauzes' lift slowly one behind the other - perhaps the most pleasing of all scenic effects - giving glimpses of 'the Realms of Bliss,' seen beyond in a tantalizing fashion. Then is revealed a kind of half-glorified country, clouds and banks, evidently concealing much. Always a sort of pathetic and at the same time exultant strain rises, and is repeated as the changes go on [...] While, finally, perhaps, at the back of all, the most glorious paradise of all will open, revealing the pure empyrean itself, and some fair spirit aloft in a cloud among the stars, the apex of all. Then all motion ceases; the work is complete; the fumes of crimson, green, and blue fire begin to rise at the wings; the music bursts into a crash of exultation."²⁵

Critics tended to view this new reliance on scenic spectacle negatively: William Bodham Donne, Examiner of Plays in 1857, complained in 1855 that the imagination of the audience had atrophied. "To touch our emotions, we need not the imaginatively true, but the physically real. The visions which our ancestors saw with the mind's eye,

²⁴ Byron, 247-8. *Aladdin, or Harlequin and the Wonderful Lamp*, E. L. Blanchard's Drury Lane pantomime of 1874, took this trend to its extreme and cut out the harlequinade entirely for nearly thirty of its ninety-some performances. Michael Booth, "Preface to *Aladdin*," *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 342.

²⁵ Percy Fitzgerald, *The World Behind the Scenes*, [1881], New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc, 1972, 89.

must be embodied for us in palpable forms.”²⁶ Booth points out the age-old artistic paradox embodied by Victorian Theatre:

Paradoxically, then, the nineteenth-century theatre moved steadily toward a simultaneous affirmation of realism and art; that is, while it was framing its stage as a painting would be framed, and bringing much stage art close to the art of painting, it was also insisting that the content of the frame should be as life-like as possible.²⁷

Drury Lane continued the stronghold for this visually literal type of pantomime, especially when Augustus Harris’ management began in 1879. His productions, melodramas in autumn and pantos at Christmas, were mammoth, spectacular affairs, sometimes boring and plagued with scenery glitches, but always visually impressive and incredibly lucrative.²⁸ Harris micromanaged every aspect of his productions;²⁹ at his high point, between Drury Lane and Covent Garden, he produced around thirty-five productions per year.³⁰ This certainly contributed to Harris’ death of a “wasting disease” in 1896 at the age of forty-five.³¹

Under Harris, Dan Leno and Herbert Campbell formed a comic partnership that changed the flavor of Drury Lane’s pantomimes for nearly two decades. Dan Leno

²⁶ Qtd. in *Essays on the Drama*, 1858. Michael Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, 2.

²⁷ Booth, 16.

²⁸ H. Barton Baker, *History of the London Stage and its Famous Players (1576-1903)*, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1904, 105.

²⁹ W.J. MacQueen Pope, *Theatre Royal Drury Lane*, London: W.H. Allen, 1945, 286.

³⁰ J.P. Wearing, *The London Stage 1890-1899: A Calendar of Plays and Players*, I, II, Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1976.

³¹ Baker, 6-7.

sang and danced on the music hall stage until moving to pantomime in 1886.³² Leno often played the “Dame,” the comic old lady who, for the first time in pantomime history, developed into more than just a stock character. Campbell, a jolly comedian, played the foil to Leno. According to Booth, “the little, wistful, tragicomic Leno and the big, hearty Campbell were ideally contrasted in comic style.”³³

After the end of Harris’ reign in 1896, Arthur Collins took over. Born in 1863, Collins had started as a scene-painter but quickly progressed to the level of Harris’ assistant. One of his productions’ most memorable scenes was from *Jack and the Beanstalk* of 1899, in which an army of children dressed as British soldiers climbed out of a dead giant’s pockets.³⁴ According to A.E. Wilson, this mirrored President Kruger’s assertion that he could put Britain’s army in his pockets.³⁵ Collins’ pantomimes were (if possible) even more elaborate than Harris’, but they did away with burdensome processions and, perhaps more importantly, they featured stage machinery that did not

³² Mayer, 322.

³³ Michael Booth, “Preface to *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*,” *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 383.

³⁴ David Pickering, *Encyclopaedia of Pantomime*, Andover: Gale Research, 1993, 467.

³⁵ A.E. Wilson, *King Panto*, 205-06.

constantly hitch on opening night.³⁶ Collins continued to import music-hall and operetta stars into his pantomimes and extravaganzas, especially after Leno's death.³⁷

Collins also hired J. Hickory Wood, whose pantomimes had previously appeared in provincial theaters and the Garrick Theatre. Little is known about Wood, an insurance-clerk-turned-author who came on board at the last minute to pen *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast* in 1900, and made his career at Drury Lane for the next twelve years.³⁸

The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast, written by Wood and produced by Collins, is an exemplary turn-of-the century pantomime. Opening at Drury Lane on 26 December 1900, it ran successfully for an impressive one hundred thirty-six performances³⁹; it eventually made its way overseas to the United States, where it similarly triumphed.⁴⁰ Leno played Queen Ravia, and Campbell King Screwdolph. Typically, women played not only the principal boy part (Elaine Ravensburg starred as

³⁶ Michael Booth, "Preface to *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*," *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 381.

³⁷ Pickering, 46-7.

³⁸ Pickering, 215.

³⁹ Michael Booth, "Preface to *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*," *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 383.

⁴⁰ R.J. Broadbent, *A History of Pantomime*, [1901], New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964, 216.

Prince Caramel) but also the roles of the prince's companions.⁴¹ The following is a detailed synopsis of *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*, drawn from the authoritative script in Booth's *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*.

Sleeping Beauty's plot is highly melodramatic, featuring a Good Fairy and a Witch who allow for no moral ambiguity. As the title implies, the pantomime blends two well-known fairy tales into one. In the first act, the fairy-born princess Beauty pricks her finger on a spinning wheel, falls asleep for a hundred years, and wakes up at the kiss of the Prince. In the second act, just before Beauty and the Prince wed, the Witch (creator of the spinning wheel) transforms the Prince into a Beast; only when Beauty voluntarily weds him, in spite of his ugliness, is the spell broken.

The play opens on The Fairies' Bower. The stage directions read as follows: "the scene represents a very pretty woodland glade with bright colouring and the landscape on a cloth. There is a practicable trick change at the back which at a given moment discloses among the foliage the little princess asleep in a cradle." Singing birds and an opening chorus induct the scene. We meet the Fairy Queen, who decides to cheer up a King and Queen by granting them a fairy child, revealed with a wave of the Fairy's wand. The Fairy Queen's attendants sing and "make an act of benediction" over the child's cradle, giving her gifts like beauty, wit, grace, health, and long life. A Witch appears, "a very ugly old lady, à la Hänsel and Gretel," to twist the fairy blessings into a curse. The Witch threatens to kill Beauty with a spinning wheel, but the Fairy Queen turning death to sleep, and sets the prince's kiss as the spell-breaker (I.i).

⁴¹ J Hickory Wood and Arthur Collins, *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*, *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 379-80.

The next scene carries the audience from fantasyland to London—it opens on a Hydropathic Establishment, where Bathmen, Bathmaids, Visitors, and Patients swim in the Sulphur Baths or drink Medicinal Water. The King and Queen enter, borne on “hooded” chairs, having just bathed. Comic banter follows, until someone from the palace phones the King and Queen, reminding them of their daughter’s sixteenth birthday. The two hail cabs and return to the castle (I.ii).

Scene three reveals the “Enchanted Wine Cellar in the Palace of Prapsburg,” the Witch’s lair, where she creates the fatal spinning wheel. The directions state “Specialty here, illusions, &c. ending in production of spinning wheel if this can be done.” (I.iii)

The Royal Aviary is the setting for the fourth scene. Beauty and her attendants entertain a set of suitors until the arrival of the Queen and King. The King puts on a math demonstration. Then, at five minutes to four, the prophesied hour of Beauty’s death, everyone goes crazy. The Queen demands the clocks be stopped and all spinning wheels be burned, though they were burned at the time of the prophecy, and asks all the doors be closed and locked, windows barred, drains stopped, and roofs padlocked. Beauty clearly has no idea what’s going on. Moments before the clock strikes four, suddenly and inexplicably, everyone deserts Beauty. The Witch and several spinning girls appear, singing a Spinning-Wheel chorus to Mendelssohn music. The Witch brings Beauty her cursed golden spinning wheel, and offers to teach Beauty how to use it. “Beauty sits and spins; while she spins she sings; the Witch sings also. Beauty pricks her hand, screams and falls to the ground. Four o’clock strikes.” The witch disappears. Then everyone rushes back in, sees Beauty, mourns her, then falls asleep with her. The lights are “gradually lowered to slumber” (I.iv).

The story moves one hundred years in the future, opening on a Tangled Forest. Here the audience first meets the prince, on a hunting trip. A bird is flown by on a wire; the prince shoots and, missing, dismisses his many attendants. He sits down and listlessly sings, wishing he was a true chivalrous hero. The Fairy Queen appears, tells him of a Beauty who needs rescuing, and sends him and his party off to the slumbering castle. The stage directions for the end of the scene read: “Plunges into tangled forest, followed by Crowd. Business of trees waving arms, barring the way, &c” (I.v).

Scene six brings the audience to the palace gates. “Everything in ruins. King and Queen are discovered sitting at gates. King’s beard has grown through horse-trough on rustic table, and Queen’s hair is all twisted among trees and shrubs. Guards also discovered asleep. Loud snoring heard.” The King and Queen converse as if awake, taking snuff and discussing the finer points of trances and somnambulism. They decide to sleepwalk for a little while. “They get up and come down stage. King brings horse-trough with him on his beard, and Queen drags trees and shrubs with her by her hair. Business. While they release themselves, bits of clothing drop off them.” They sing a bit, then exit with the guards. The prince enters with his party...he rings the bell, and the gates fall (I.vi).

The prince enters the deserted palace. “Exterior of House. Doors and windows overgrown with ivy and moss; on windows are notices which read ‘To Let for Ever’; underneath window blind man plays penny whistle, realising Eccentric Club picture ‘Love’s Labour Lost’. Man plays ‘I’ll be your sweetheart if you will be mine’.” The Prince dismisses his followers and sings another song. Some comic business from the King, Queen, and Forest Keeper closes the scene (I.vii).

The finale opens on the “Interior of the Palace of Sleep,” where the “Beauty’s Awakening” series of tableaux (described in full detail in chapter four) brings part one to a close. The Prince kisses Beauty, who wakes, and the two sing with the Fairy Queen as the curtain falls (I.viii).

Part two opens on “The Reception Hall of the President in the Capital City.” Courtiers chorus in praise of the president and his Great Republic. Jocelyn, a newly-awoken courtier of the King and Queen, announces their arrival; the Senators tell him he’s heard the “old legend, stupid and absurd,” and the President denies any knowledge of what he’s talking about. Jocelyn and the President (in a Frenchified accent) argue, resulting in Jocelyn’s rather arbitrary arrest. Beauty’s Nurse eventually suffers the same fate (II.ix).

Beauty enters, and the President fawns over her until the Prince (of Arcadia) appears to claim her. He announces the return of the King and Queen, who enter, “dressed in remains of faded pomp, but with great dignity. They are followed by a few of their courtiers, similarly attired. They walk down stage to c., bowing right and left to Senators, who make way for them but simply gaze in solid silence at them until they reach c., when everybody bursts out laughing. King and Queen stare at them in angry surprise” (II.ix).

The King, Queen, and President debate about his place as “boss of this country”; the President’s status as tax collector apparently trumps the other two’s arguments. The Prince assures the King and Queen he will provide for them, after he marries Beauty. The President celebrates by releasing those he recently arrested, and the wedding procession begins. Unable to let the plot resolve, the Witch appears. “Limes on Witch,

Beauty, and Prince, lights down. All scream.” The Witch changes the Prince to a Beast, and Beauty faints (II.ix).

Scene ten takes place outside the National Museum, where the crown jewels are held. “Enter King and Queen. They are disguised with burglar’s masks, &c. &c. King has enormous diamond on one of his fingers. In dress, King and Queen are attired like golfers, and Boy follows them carrying bag of crowbars and other implements as if he were a caddie carrying golf clubs.” They banter with the Keeper of the museum, expending quite a bit of comic business on breaking inside to steal the crown jewels. Then they attempt to escape in a motor-car, which breaks down. They try to fix it, eventually just hammering at it until it falls apart. Miraculously they find a sign to the “Twopenny Tube” on a tree; the tree opens, revealing a Conductor, who opens iron gates and announces the next station. Before the King and Queen can enter, the tree closes up and the “train” leaves. The same gag happens again, until finally the King and Queen hide, then “pounce” on the Conductor before he can announce the station. The gates and tree close behind all three and a whistle signals the train’s departure (II.x).

Meanwhile, in the Prince’s Orange Grove, the Nurse wanders around trying to get signatures on a petition to reinstate the King and Queen as rulers of Prapsburg—accidentally, she hands it to the President himself, and is once again arrested. The Prince still pursues Beauty, who refuses him, despite the fact that she recognizes his voice. She leaves, and the Prince returns to his human form, sings a bit, then leaves. The King and Queen wander into the same garden and thoughtlessly pluck a rose for Beauty (II.xi). Immediately the scene changes to the Enchanted Crystal Garden. The

Beast enters, accompanied by guards, and demands the King and Queen's daughter as payment. The scene finishes with this cryptic direction: "Exeunt King and Queen. Prince and Guards go up. Spectacle to end of scene" (II.xii).

Scene eight depicts the Palace of Justice. "Wall all round, large open ironwork gates, half view of prison van outside gates." Beauty visits her parents (whom the Beast has imprisoned) and agrees to do her "duty" to free them. Shortly thereafter, the citizens of Prapsburg riot against their President for imposing a tax on bicycles—they demand the King and Queen be reinstated, and the President abdicate (II.xiii).

The final scene opens on the Prince's Boudoir, where the Prince is in human form. As soon as Beauty appears, he changes back into the Beast. The Prince tells her that when all the rose's petals have been plucked, he will die, and he encourages her to finish the job. Instead she goes to him and kisses him. In a quick change, the Beast form falls from the Prince, and Beauty's clothes become silk. Everyone comes together and rejoices. The Grand Transformation, Beauty's Wedding Gifts, brings the play to a close (II.xiv).

For more detailed description of the pantomime's scenographic elements, Michael Booth once again provides the best material, having sorted through photographs, critiques, and promptbooks to expand on *Sleeping Beauty's* brief scenic descriptions. The witch's wine cellar featured "grinning faces of fire" that reflected off the walls. In the Royal Aviary scene, a gilded birdcage stretched across half the stage. The Presidential palace was filled with hundreds of courtiers, the women in 18th century white satin and powdered wigs. The Grigolati Troupe, featured in the Seasons

tableaux, reappeared in the Enchanted Palace scene, dressed as black and gold moths flying around a fountain. Fairies danced in and out of the palace.⁴²

The *Star* of 27 December 1900 reviewed *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*:

The Drury Lane pantomime, that national institution, is a symbol of our Empire. It is the biggest thing of the kind in the world, it is prodigal of money, of invention, of splendour, of men and women; but it is without the sense of beauty or the restraining influence of taste. It is impossible to sit in the theatre for five hours without being filled with weary admiration. Only a grand nation could have done such a thing; only an undisciplined nation would have done it. The monstrous, glittering thing of pomp and humour is without order or design. It is a hotch-potch of everything that has been seen on any stage; we have the Fairy Prince and the Sleeping Beauty and the quite different legend of Beauty and the Beast, we have President Kruger and the President of the French Republic hinted at in the same figure, we have Yvette Guilbert's gloves and Marianne's hair, we have the motor car, the twopenny tube, and the flying machine, we have a transformation and a harlequinade, we have a coon dance, music-hall songs, ballets, processions, sentimental songs, and occasionally even a good joke. And we have all this over and over again, for five hours, always with fresh foolery and fresh glitter, in a real crescendo of effects.⁴³

But in the midst of this comic and scenic chaos, the essential characteristics of late Victorian pantomime can readily be seen in *Sleeping Beauty*. Its harlequinade is virtually nonexistent, spanning merely two scenes; it receives no mention during the opening and no description in the final script. Yet transformation itself remains key to how the pantomime operates; scenically resplendent, featuring three massive scene changes in total, *Sleeping Beauty* carries on the questions of physicality and changeability that informed pantomime from Regency times. The parody inherent in all pantomime remains consistent as well; in content *Sleeping Beauty* begins with basic fairy tale settings and grafts on political and cultural commentary that is at moments

⁴² Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, 90.

⁴³ Booth, 89-90.

quite complex. The bewildering array of images and references, intentionally or not, all somehow deal with the changing realities of London.

CHAPTER 3

PANTOMIME, STORY, AND PERFORMANCE

There is a magnificent sameness about the whole thing—spectacle, story, audience, and all—that for the moment overwhelms and crushes. Who can say if the same pantomime were given year after year with only a change of name it would not, like some sermons, escape detection?⁴⁴

This frequent assessment of pantomime, written in this case by an unnamed theatre critic in 1885, lies at the root of the widespread scholarly disregard for the art form. Pantomime's largely formulaic structure and its heavy reliance on its own past and traditions have translated as thoughtlessness at best and meaninglessness at worst.

Pantomime's meaning derives much more from its performance style than from its recycled fairy tale trappings. The story serves as little more than a justification for performance; the audience does not approach the story for enlightenment, or even necessarily for suspense or surprise, and certainly not for tragedy. A fresh story is always appreciated (part of the popularity of *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*, certainly), but the story was certainly not the focus of the night. Of course, the plot structure and the dialogue of a pantomime can convey meaning, but further investigation of the performative elements is essential to understanding pantomime as a whole.

⁴⁴ Qtd. in A.E. Wilson, *King Panto*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 185-6.

Pantomime is highly theatrical, highly self-conscious. In performance it presents itself as a product of artistic creation. It is aware of its theatrical context, its own history as well as its situation in a wide range of contemporary genres. It is aware of its artificial nature, its status as a story subject to the whims of its author. It is aware of performance itself as something that passes beyond the boundaries of the theatrical stage. This awareness allows pantomime to poke fun at, and, at times, seriously investigate ideas of theatricality and performance, of the use of artifice to present mere entertainment or genuine truth and beauty.

Pantomime achieves a certain amount of subversive humor by continually undercutting its own story, calling attention to its artificiality—never, in other words, taking itself too seriously. Pantomime’s degradation of plot and breaking of the fourth wall offend traditional storytelling. It does this in part by frequent references to other plays and entertainments of the time, as the burlesques of the same period did. Pantomime’s referencing, however, is a bit more complex, because parody is not always its primary vehicle. *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast* invokes performances of all types, in a range of tones, to comment with great self-awareness.

A few of these are simple costume gestures. As the *Star* review points out (see pg 28), the costumes mimicked Mariamne’s hair and Madame Yvette Guilbert’s gloves. The latter of these was an image well-known to London—Guilbert was a sexually-charged musical performer famous for wearing long, iconic black gloves. The former refers to Maud Jeffries’ character in Stephen Phillips’ *Herod*, produced by Herbert

Beerbohm Tree at Her Majesty's from 1900-1901.⁴⁵ Jeffries' hair was thick, dark and nearly floor-length.⁴⁶ It would have made good hair for the witch, or for the awakening Queen when her hair tangles in tree branches—each possibility gives the gesture a completely different tone.

Other references take place through obvious caricatures of well-known performers. The math scene as a whole parodies Jacques Inaudi, a genius who grew up shepherding in Italy until he took his calculating talents on the road as a performer. As a small child he could multiply sets of five-digit numbers together, though he couldn't read or write until age twenty and otherwise had an atrocious memory.⁴⁷

Telling on what day of the week a given date falls is one of his favorite problems. The reduction of years, months, etc., to seconds he accomplishes almost instantly, knowing by heart the number of seconds in a year, month, week, or day. [...] As each number is announced he repeats it slowly to his assistant, who writes it on the blackboard and then reads it aloud, to make sure there is no mistake. Inaudi then repeats the number once more, after which he devotes himself to the solution of the problem, meanwhile making an occasional remark to keep the audience in good humor. Throughout the exhibition he faces the audience, never once looking at the blackboard. Actually he begins his calculation as soon as the numbers are given, and carries it on during the various repetitions of the numbers by himself and his assistant, so that by the time he seems to begin the solution he may be well advanced toward the answer. In this way he appears to work much more rapidly than he really does.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Stephen Phillips, *Herod: A Tragedy*, New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1922.

⁴⁶ *Maud Jeffries in Herod*, George Newnes, *Players of the Day*, London, 1902, Accessed 5 October 2007, <http://www.siue.edu/COSTUMES/actors/pics.html>.

⁴⁷ Frank D. Mitchell, "Mathematical Prodigies," *The American Journal of Psychology*, 18.1, (Jan 1907), 69.

⁴⁸ Mitchell, 70.

Campbell's performance replicates Inaudi's idiosyncrasies—he repeats numbers aloud, scrawls them on a chalkboard—but he also makes flagrant errors Inaudi wouldn't have. Some of Inaudi's calculations, such as parsing a four or five digit number into four perfect squares, were done partially by trial and error, leading to a few mistakes. Campbell's parody exaggerates this.⁴⁹ The parody calls attention to the theatricality of Inaudi's displays of skill by taking away Inaudi's genuine talent and leaving *only* the artifice. Being a parody, it portrays its subject in a slightly negative light, resulting in a slightly hypocritical critique of empty showmanship and fakery.

Most often, references to the theatrical world are explicit in the dialogue. In the first scene, as the fairies choose which gifts to bestow on Beauty, the Fairy Queen remarks that singing and dancing are “all the rage, / Both in Society and on the stage” (I.i) Within the first few minutes, the world of *Sleeping Beauty* becomes one that readily acknowledges, even draws attention to, the existence of theatre. Later, while drumming up support for the deposed King and Queen, the Nurse mentions a “petition against granting drink licenses to Music Halls” (II.xi); this references the Theatre Regulations Act of 1843, which allowed drinking in music halls, but forbade it in legitimate playhouses. The play's closing lines, “To give a cheer for England, Home, and-- / Beauty” (II.xiv), draw from John Braham's song ‘The Death of Nelson,’ from Samuel Arnold's *The American*, an 1811 comic opera.⁵⁰ Like the costume references, this points not just to the stage but to specific plays. Then, mid-play, when the Prince first

⁴⁹ Mitchell, 70.

⁵⁰ Booth, *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 462.

transforms into the Beast, causing Beauty to faint, this bit of dialogue follows: “King: Peace, my child, peace! / Queen: Yes, peace at any price!” (II.ix). This plays on the title of Drury Lane’s autumn 1900 production, Cecil Raleigh’s *The Price of Peace*;⁵¹ it brings the pantomime squarely into its actual time and space, a distance which, in fantasy, would ordinarily be much wider.

The play also parodies performances that are not explicitly theatrical. The wedding in scene nine is a gentle parody of actual weddings of the time, mimicking many of the traditional characteristics. The procession, sketched out by the stage directions, occurs as it would in a formal, public ceremony: “Wedding march. All form up before President. Enter Nurse, Jocelyn, Flossie, and range with the rest. Prince and Beauty join hands and stand before President” (II.ix). The succession of attendants preceding the bride, also common in weddings today, as well as the joining of the hands of the bride and groom, were typical of Victorian weddings of the time.⁵² An illustration of the scene’s climax, the transformation of the Prince into the Beast, further shows Beauty in a white bridal gown and long veil, as well as floral garlands draped along the top of the stage; two girls, possibly Flossie and an anonymous flower girl, cower in the foreground. A central gazebo forms the focal point for the intended joining of the two characters; in the picture, the Witch appears just behind the gazebo, visually dividing Beauty and the Beast.⁵³ The main joke of the scene rests in the timing

⁵¹ Booth, 462.

⁵² Satenig St. Marie and Carolyn Flaherty, *Romantic Victorian Weddings: Then & Now*, New York: Dutton Studio Books, 1991, 48-49.

⁵³ *The Prince changed to the Beast*, Plate 9, *English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, NP.

of the Witch's entrance, just as the President asks if anyone knows an impediment. It also relies on Beauty's over-dramatic refusal to marry. The moment plays out like an overdone version of the interrupted wedding in *Jane Eyre*.

That the President officiates the wedding underscores the contemporary tension between civil and religious marriage ceremonies. The Marriage Act of 1836 legalized civil unions, moving marriage to the provenance of the impersonal government.⁵⁴ The President declares:

I am ze President, as you all know;

I can divorce, and marry too, also.

And if you would be married, why then, please

Be married here, and I shall get my fees. (II.ix)

These lines hint at the political ambivalence of *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*, explored more fully in the next chapter. The President is a questionable authority figure at best, and the play seems to be attacking the government's usurpation of a religious ceremony. This does not seem to fit, however, with popular opinion; though civil marriage was originally associated with the lower classes, it soon became widely popular in Victorian England, offering an inexpensive ceremony that could be entirely free from the public eye. As the century neared its close, civil ceremonies especially

⁵⁴ Helena Michie, *Victorian Honeymoons: Journeys to the Conjugal*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 23.

became more and more frequent in London.⁵⁵ It is unlikely that the scene targets something so commonplace.

The real meaning becomes clearer in context of the last scene, which subtly echoes elements of the ruined wedding when Beauty finally surrenders herself to the Beast. The stage directions read: “Enter Beauty; walks between two lines which Attendants form themselves into. They gaze at her curiously and exeunt. Beauty is poorly attired. She approaches couch, holding rose in her hand, and nervously pulls a petal off now and then. Every time a petal falls, the Prince sighs” (II.xiv). Attendants do not precede her, but still form a path for her to approach the Beast. She carries, instead of a bouquet, a single rose; as wedding decorations, roses symbolized happy love.⁵⁶ She shreds the rose, and ostensibly the possibility of true happiness, until the Beast stops her. When Beauty accepts the Beast as he is, returning him to his princely form, all the absent characters return to the stage, and the Prince declares the wedding should be completed (II.xiv).

The key change is who presides over the ceremony. Instead of the President, it is the King and Queen who now bless the marriage and give their approval. The issue here is not one of religion’s triumph over government, but of true authority’s triumph over temporary authority. The scene’s connotations have wide implications for the meaning of ceremony in general. When the President oversees, the most proper ceremonies go horribly wrong; when the King and Queen are in charge, however, even

⁵⁵ Olive Anderson, “The Incidence of Civil Marriage in Victorian England and Wales,” *Past and Present*, 69 (Nov. 1975), 50-87, *JSTOR* <http://jstor.org/> Accessed 11 October 2007, 55, 65.

⁵⁶ St. Marie and Flaherty, 27.

a simple, quick ceremony stays right on track. According to *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*, performance of any kind, ritual or otherwise, is essentially meaningless without the appropriate and rightful authorities. This idea recurs in many elements of the play; the following chapter explores the highly political themes more fully.

Not all of the performance references in *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast* are necessarily parody. Booth comments that the “Beauty’s Awakening” tableaux, hardly a comic sequence, probably derived partially from *Beauty’s Awakening*, an Art Worker’s Guild project staged at Guildhall in June 1899. Several artists collaborated on this play’s design, including Walter Crane—it was intended as “an allegory of the Beautiful,” not a reflection of the actual fairy tale.⁵⁷ The play, fully titled *Beauty’s Awakening: A Masque of Winter and Spring*, is indeed highly allegorical. Crane and the others who worked on it believed the arts had been dead for years, and wanted to depict their revival in the play.⁵⁸ Fayremonde (the spirit of Beauty) slept on a couch, surrounded by seven slumbering maidens with seven unlit lamps. A curtain, painted to depict a forest, fell in front of the scene for a dance of forest leaves and the four winds. This dance featured a “procession of the months, and the struggle between March and December.”⁵⁹ Trueheart, the knight (who sounded a bugle like the Prince of Arcadia), fought through demons to reach Fayremonde and awaken her, relighting the lamps. The

⁵⁷ Qtd. in Michael Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, 179.

⁵⁸ Walter Crane, *An Artist’s Reminiscences*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907, 452.

⁵⁹ Crane, 454.

play concluded with dancers representing the regenerated five senses, who performed “a submasque to symbolize the awakening of Beauty and the new joy of life.”⁶⁰

That Wood and Collins borrowed from the play without intending the result to be comic, demonstrates an act of validation. They put pantomime on the same level as a production that saw itself as more artistic and meaningful than any other contemporary theatre, not just by having the nerve to borrow from it, but by creating a work just as full of allegorical meaning as the first. In doing so they connect their own art to the larger world of art around them.

Sleeping Beauty also utilizes the pantomime convention of meta-references; the play is highly aware of itself and its tradition, and says so clearly in the script. In the opening chorus, the fairies proclaim:

Here we plot for every mortal,
Gifts of happiness sublime,
Creeping with them through each portal,
Ev’ry year at Christmas time. (I.i)

The Fairy Queen then reminds her court that “The people on the earth whom we befriend / Await those Christmas presents that we send” (I.i). And, at the close of the first scene, the Fairy Queen and Witch give away the ending:

FAIRY QUEEN: You’ll lose at last.
WITCH: [*Shrugs shoulders.*] I shouldn’t be surprised.
 These yearly fights I never seem to gain,
 And Virtue’s very strong in Drury Lane.

⁶⁰ Crane, 453.

At any rate, I shall have done my duty.

FAIRY QUEEN: And I'll do mine, for Drury Lane, and Beauty. (I.i)

The play keeps the audience from immersing themselves too fully in the story, by consistently reminding them they are only at the theatre.

A number of pantomime conventions also accomplish this effect, somewhat more subtly. The cross-dressing of both the Dame and the Principal Boy is an excellent example. Young, attractive women were cast as principal boys for the titillation of the male audience members; the Dame, on the other hand, was always a comic actor, the character serving as an “extravagant parody of current fashion.”⁶¹ The changes were never supposed to be believable.

Also typical of pantomime is a nonexistent fourth wall, a distinct awareness of the audience throughout the performance. The framing of *Sleeping Beauty*, typical of pantomime, contributes to this theme. The immortals sit outside the story, controlling and commenting on it—without supernatural interference, Beauty would not have been given to the King and Queen, would not have been cursed by the Witch, and would not have married the Prince. This frame is revisited halfway through the play, during the dance of the seasons and the shift of the year back to Christmastime; the Fairy Queen tells the audience:

While Beauty's slept, the days have swiftly flown,

And each one has an int'rest of its own.

[...]

⁶¹ Dawn Lewcock, “Once upon a Time: The Story of the Pantomime Audience,” *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance*, ed. Susan Kattwinkel, 133-148, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003, 139.

To Beauty, in her dream, I wish to show,

How, year by year, the swift days come and go. (I.viii)

She speaks as a storyteller, summing up what the audience has not seen, and as a director, ostensibly choosing what the audience sees next. The frame highlights the artificial nature of the story, its status as a created product. It keeps the audience from being immersed in a depiction of something supposedly true or real.

Several instances of direct audience address heighten this distancing effect throughout the play. Each of the play's twenty songs is sung directly to the audience, keeping the performers closely connected with the audience. Occasional asides delivered by the Nurse and the Prince similarly break the fourth wall completely. The Inaudi parody takes the effect the furthest. The stage directions note: "This scene should be played very rapidly—King shouting real or imaginary numbers that audience give him, and Queen writing furiously on blackboard" (I.iv). The audience is not only being addressed, but is now explicitly contributing to the material of the show.

Dawn Lewcock asserts in a brief essay that during this scene, the audience would be even further engaged, and the traditional pantomime chorus of "Oh, yes he did!" and "Oh, no he didn't!" would be volleyed back and fourth by the performers and the audience. It is conjecture rather than argument, however, as her only noted source is the script in Booth's collection, which, as seen in the quote above, records no interchange of the kind.⁶² It is, however, generally true that pantomime scripts were not always entirely fixed, at least up until the first performance. J. Hickory Wood describes Dan Leno and Herbert Campbell's rehearsal process:

⁶² Lewcock, 142.

Instead of taking the ‘scrip’ home, studying it, and arriving at rehearsal letter perfect, with nothing but the ‘trimmings’ to add, they preferred to assimilate it by a process of constant repetition on the stage, during which they put on the ‘trimmings as they occurred to them, and as they went along.’⁶³

Though Wood implies a finished product by the time opening night comes around, this still allows for some variation in script and performance. It is quite possible the call and response would either have been assumed and not written in, or added after the script was released. Whether or not the chant takes place, Lewcock’s observation is correct that this scene does not serve to logically progress the story, but instead simply to knit a connection between performer and audience. This sort of audience response often nudges them into taking the side of the good or evil forces within the pantomime, engaging them even further.⁶⁴

Each of these characteristics has a function essential to pantomime’s operation and effectiveness, beyond the obvious easy joke of mocking a tragic character’s costume or punning on a line from a recent hit. The constant references to outside theatre firmly establish pantomime in relation to other dramatic genres; pantomime sets itself up as a commentator on any and all comedy, tragedy, melodrama, and music hall entertainment. In so doing, it also proclaims itself a peer to those genres. The references to pantomime as a whole, more specifically, give the genre a sense of nostalgia and history, certainly a large part of the appeal in returning every Christmas

⁶³ *The Pantomimes and All about Them*, (1882). Qtd. in *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 514.

⁶⁴ Dawn Lewcock, 142.

for a new play. They link each pantomime to a long line of earlier pantos, validating the genre's existence and, in a sense, justifying its continued performance.

The broken fourth wall serves to connect the audience to the performance, an essential task that the story itself probably does not accomplish on its own. Direct address, musical numbers and asides strengthen the audience-performer relationship, when otherwise the audience might not be strongly invested. It also makes the audience necessary for the performance to occur, by requiring a response from them before the show can continue; if carried out correctly, the audience members become involved in the action, taking sides between the good and bad characters. Strong audience response is indispensable in live comedy.

That the most popular theatrical form of the late Victorian period was the most artificial, the most theatrical, is quite fitting. The Victorians were obsessed with putting themselves on display, replicating their own lives and then observing them in the form of museums, exhibitions, panoramas, and dioramas, to name a few.⁶⁵ London's opulent architecture and city design, tending toward "luxury, ostentation, and outward show," became one large "self-important spectacle."⁶⁶ Pantomime became an extension of this tendency to perform; the Victorians put their own ostentation and artifice on stage and watched as actors prodded and poked at their behavior.

⁶⁵ Richard Daniel Altick, *The Shows of London*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978, *ACLS Humanities E-Book* (University of Michigan Library), <http://hdl.handle.net.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/2027/heb.00970.0001.001>, Accessed 24 September 07.

⁶⁶ Michael Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, 3-4.

Pantomime's meta-theatricality, its self-awareness, call attention to the play as a created artistic product. The genre is fundamentally driven by performance rather than by plot, its heavy interaction with the audience providing much of its appeal and carrying much of its meaning. *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast* highlights the concept of performance in general by referencing its own history repeatedly as well as its current theatrical context, sometimes humorously, sometimes seriously. It portrays performance that occurs both off the stage and on it, poking fun at figures who reveal themselves to be too fake. At times, it verges on the hypocritical, but at its best it questions how, if at all, theatre and performance can intersect with genuine behavior, and whether such an artificial medium can carry any insight or truth.

CHAPTER 4

PANTOMIME AND POLITICS

Theatre historians have by and large neglected the political aspects of pantomime, but just as the art form absorbed and transformed aspects of popular Victorian culture, so it addressed new and changing political ideas of the time. *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast* exemplifies this tendency, reflecting Victorian uneasiness during a time of political transition and ambivalence. It stages political ideologies, setting up direct conflicts between monarchy and imperialism and democracy, and often comes to resolutions that are either dissatisfying or nonexistent. The play also deals with politics as a type of performance, particularly in its treatment of Queen Victoria, whose reign is seen by many historians as one long political performance. Ultimately the play affirms monarchy over democracy, but also hints that the monarchy is a potentially unsubstantial institution.

Uneasiness about democracy and monarchy comes across largely in the characterization of the play's main politicians, the King, Queen and President, largely silly and inconsistent characters whose authority the play constantly undercuts. A certain amount of subversive humor is always a function of pantomime, because pantomime is largely parody; the key to unearthing the political meanings is the

reaffirmation of select characters in the end. Predictably, the characters built up again are the King and Queen, representatives of Britain and of traditional monarchy.

In poking fun at politicians, the play examines both their self-respect and their authenticity. The Queen especially is prominent, possibly because the reigning monarch at the time was a queen. Despite the at times absurd behavior of the monarchs, they concern themselves mightily with decorum, espousing declarations about appropriate royal behavior at every turn.

QUEEN: It's really most undignified

KING: For the King—

QUEEN: And the Queen—

BOTH: In publicity to pull an ugly face. (I.ii)

Later, the Queen queries the President:

QUEEN: You have cast off every shred of royal dignity?

PRESIDENT: We do not know royal dignity. (II.ix)

Part of the comedy inherent in the Queen's performance is that she makes the unspoken spoken. She announces aspects of royal rule that are usually kept quiet: "Of course, I make a point of being kind. I think monarchs *ought* to be kind, because it makes them popular" (I.ii). She calls attention to the aspects of the monarchy centered on performance and appearance. Speaking of her scepter, she reminisces: "I remember the first time I held it. I was sitting on a golden globe to represent that I ruled the earth. It was a bit slippery, but so *very* Imperial" (II.x). The play acknowledges and lightly parodies the artificial features of the Crown. But it somewhat hypocritically mocks the same aspects of democratic government, when the Queen observes, "So like a republic,

isn't it, to turn the real articles into cash and put imitations into the Museum?" (II.xi). A real concern for authenticity and appropriateness of government is apparent beneath the humor.

The play reinforces the connections between the monarchs and their people in humorous comments, such as the Queen's remark in the Hydropathy scene: "The constitution of a king or a queen is really the constitution of their country, and that is why, when I feel a little bit upset, I feel just as if there were a revolution inside me" (II.ii).

The President receives very little reaffirmation. He is very obviously based on the President of the French Republic, with his exaggerated French accent—"Zis country is ze greatest and most enlightened country on ze face of ze earth!"—and his entourage of senators. "If anybody laughs again, I will have zem imprisoned." "I have *all* ze authority! I am ze President—me!" (II.ix). The President's paranoia and trigger-happy arrests are most likely referring to the tumultuous ruling terms of French presidents in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Emile Loubet's tenure of 1899 took place amidst a coup in February, preceded by a week of riots over the Dreyfus case.⁶⁷ Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain of the French army, had been wrongfully convicted on little evidence of spying for the German army in 1894. The case was reopened in 1899, raising latent anti-Semitic tensions and dividing most of France.⁶⁸ Loubet stood

⁶⁷ Peter M. Rutkoff, "The Ligue des Patriotes: The Nature of the Radical Right and the Dreyfus Affair," *French Historical Studies*, 8.4, (Autumn 1974), 596.

⁶⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, New York: Vintage Books, 1987, 89.

strongly in favor of Dreyfus, pardoning him when he became president, and during the riots those who opposed Loubet were liberally arrested.⁶⁹

Presidency was a rather novel idea in 1900s London. Historian Eric Hobsbawm characterizes the late 1800s as the “Age of Empires,” and Britain was no exception. Leaders of England and Germany both adopted the term “emperor” in the 1870s.⁷⁰ As Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, Japan, Belgium and Spain divided up Africa, the Pacific, and Indochina, Britain’s own empire grew to a massive four million square miles.⁷¹ At the same time, democratization pushed still-existing European monarchies into obsolescence. By the 1870s France, Germany, Switzerland and Denmark had adopted electoral systems that, at least in theory, allowed a wide range of male citizens to vote. And in Britain, the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1883 increased the percentage of men who could vote in elections.⁷²

A continuing British monarchy was further in question at the time of the *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*—Queen Victoria suffered indigestion, insomnia, and fatigue in late 1900, and her mental capabilities began to slip in early 1901. She died on 22 January⁷³, interrupting the run of the play for four days.⁷⁴ Throughout her reign,

⁶⁹ Rutkoff, 597.

⁷⁰ Hobsbawm, 56.

⁷¹ Hobsbawm, 58-59.

⁷² Hobsbawm, 85.

⁷³ Helen Rappaport, ed., *Queen Victoria: A Biographical Companion*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2003, *OhioLINK Electronic Book Center*, Accessed 28 November 2007, 375-77.

⁷⁴ Michael Booth, “Preface to *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*,” 383.

Victoria had stood obstinately in favor of strong monarchy, despite the democratizing forces around her.⁷⁵ But according to Philip Magnus, Victoria's successor, Edward VII, "transformed the Crown politically into a rubber stamp," simultaneously increasing "to an incalculable degree the force of its moral and emotional appeal."⁷⁶ The monarchy retained power, but not at all the same power it had possessed in the previous century. Still potentially an object of the people's admiration, the office emptied of real political power and became a figurehead for an increasingly democratic government. The transition of monarchy into a politically ineffectual institution was an ever-present threat at the time of *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*.

The play gives voice to a level of anxiety about the preservation of the monarchy, but also to a certain sense of inevitability. The King and Queen awake to find their kingdom overtaken by the democratic French, who have relegated the crown jewels to museum status. But this is not by any trickery on the part of the French—the monarchy have indeed been asleep for one hundred years, leaving the kingdom without a government for those years, wide-open for invasion.⁷⁷ England was standoffish especially toward France's particular brand of democracy. According to William Kuhn, "the British monarchy represented a link to the past which the French had broken." As

⁷⁵ Rappaport, 366.

⁷⁶ Philip Magnus, *Gladstone*, London: Macmillan, 1995, 427.

⁷⁷ Perhaps also hidden here is a reference to Queen Victoria's widowhood, which she spent largely in recluse for around ten years, not returning to the public eye until the 1870s.

late as 1889, the British ambassador was not allowed to visit France for the centenary of the French revolution.⁷⁸

The French occupation of the King and Queen's soil plays out a very real fear during the Victorian era. In 1859-1860 volunteer troops formed to guard England's border from French soldiers and Napoleon III. In the 1870s, French invasion became a standard subject of popular novels of the day. By 1900, however, Britain feared German invasion more than French, as World War I neared and Germany became commercially competitive and began to send spies across the border.⁷⁹ The conflict enacted live had two functions. It served to diffuse a communal fear in a safe setting, in which the opponent is predictably defeated. By painting the President as irrational and laughable, it also signaled to the audience that France was no longer an entity to be feared.

The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast sets a president and a royal couple against each other; though the President is clearly meant to be an object of scorn, and the King and Queen do, in the end, emerge victorious, the conflict still does not send consistently clear evaluative messages about monarchy or democracy. The uncertain messages stem from the inconsistent characterization of the President and the King and Queen. On one level, each character seems to represent a major political concept, idealized or reviled, and begs to be interpreted according to a conservative, establishment, pro-monarchy agenda; on another level, however, the characters never act in alignment with their

⁷⁸ William M. Kuhn, *Democratic Royalism: The Transformation of the British Monarchy, 1861-1914*, New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996, 69.

⁷⁹ Hugh Cunningham, *The Challenge of Democracy: Britain 1832-1918*, New York: Longman, 2001, 65, 196.

supposed concepts. The President is not at all loyal to his supposed democratic ideals—he is instead painted as a tyrant. He brings about his own downfall with his power-hungry tax-grabbing tactics. He is perhaps the straw man of the pro-monarchy agenda. The King and Queen, on the other hand, are just plain empty-headed—unable to keep their own daughter safe, they are hardly effective rulers. Granted, most of their stupidity is for comic effect or plot convenience, but in a pantomime full of value judgments on the ruling elite, their general silliness can hardly be overlooked.

Still, the pantomime characterizes the President as a usurper of English soil, inappropriate because of his nationality and his tendency toward tyranny. He and his senators are simply secondary, coming into existence during an unnatural cessation of monarchical rule. In the end the King and Queen resume their rightful places as the heads of the government.

The reinstatement of ineffectual monarchs is hardly a resounding endorsement for monarchy in general. This is partially the pantomime genre itself, in which little can be taken seriously, but the play still presents a half-hearted endorsement. It reinstates the monarchy, but a monarchy of nearly obsolete, if affable, ruling figures whose only function seems to be those of public figureheads.

The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast also explores the idea of imperialism, partially in the figure of the Queen, but mainly in that of the President. Battered and chased by a mob demanding revolution, the President declares he will flee and join Paul Kruger, another ex-president. This is the second reference the President makes to Kruger, the leader of Transvaal during the Boer Wars.

“Boer” is a term for a farmer of Dutch descent living in the South African Republic, or Transvaal. In 1879 Britain annexed the country, doing nothing to improve the already dismal conditions for the Boers. Conflicts escalated as Boers refused to pay taxes and the British levied even higher taxes. When Britain resorted to military force, the army suffered a humiliating defeat at Majuba on 27 February 1881, bringing the first Boer War to a close and giving Transvaal temporary independence.⁸⁰

The conflict took on new dimensions when gold was discovered in Transvaal in 1886, spurring an influx of largely European miners and businessmen, *uitlanders*, seeking their fortunes in precious metals. These *uitlanders* were denied any political power for fourteen years, for a (very rational) fear they would overthrow the Boer government—but they still paid heavy taxes. Cecil Rhodes, British-born Premier of Cape Colony, and Alfred Beit made millions from their mining company Wernher-Beit. In 1895, to gain complete control of the precious resources, they plotted a raid of Johannesburg that ultimately failed, and in its wake all good faith with Britain was lost.⁸¹

After the Raid, President Kruger began using *uitlander* taxes to buy large quantities of weapons in case Britain (or the *uitlanders*) tried to overthrow the Boers again. Ironically, these purchases made greater enemies of powerful states with imperial interests in Transvaal, especially Britain. It wasn’t long before another war

⁸⁰ Martin Marix Evans, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Boer War: 1899-1902*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Inc., 2000, *OhioLINK Electronic Book Center*, Accessed 25 November 2007, 30, 37-38.

⁸¹ Evans, 100, 126-27.

broke out, and Britain's near monopoly on weapons supply lines cut Kruger off completely.⁸²

Promised help from Britain's competitors, Kruger left for Europe in September 1900 to negotiate, traveling first to Paris, then to Berlin. Paris received him politely but offered no assistance, and Berlin hardly received him at all. Unable to return to Transvaal, Kruger went to the Netherlands, then to Switzerland, where he died four years later. Britain annexed Transvaal on 25 October 1900.⁸³

The pantomime President's obsession with taxation is a clear reference to Kruger—and if the President stands for Kruger as well as Loubet, the play's question of democracy or monarchy shifts to a sister conflict between “native” rule and imperialism. David Cannadine points out how close those two concerns really are:

The dominions [...] developed political cultures that were democratic and liberal, out of which autonomous, post-imperial, multicultural nations would eventually evolve. But meanwhile they did so in the context of social and ceremonial cultures that were much more conservative and inegalitarian, and that thus fitted comfortably for the time being into the broader world of the British Empire.⁸⁴

The true concern, according to Cannadine, was not one of race, as has frequently been argued before. Without a doubt the British did see themselves as racially superior; “like all post-Enlightenment imperial powers, only more so, Britons saw themselves as the lords of all the world and thus of humankind.”⁸⁵ But primarily the English

⁸² Evans, 126, 260.

⁸³ Evans, 144, 254.

⁸⁴ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2001, 27.

⁸⁵ Cannadine, 5.

evaluated foreign people and colonists based on their social status. This partly explains the English custom of depositing a gentleman of high social standing in a distant territory as the head of the local government. It also explains the frustration the British would have felt with someone like Kruger. Cannadine claims:

Indirect rule of dark-skinned races was about admiration rather than condescension [...] [It was] much more ‘a recognition of indigenous genius’ on the part of native peoples than it was ‘a sentence of perpetual inferiority’ for them, a genuine wish to hold back the corrupting forces of capitalism and exploitation, so as to let tradition thrive and hierarchy flourish.⁸⁶

This idea of imperial rule as not only rightful but also protective is key to understanding why *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*, or any pantomime of the period, would lampoon Kruger. Rebellion in a territory or colony was the ultimate affront to a people who presumed themselves both fitting and rightful rulers of the rest of the world. Kruger stood for local rule, and was successful at it for quite a while. His very public demise was surely cause for glee among British imperialists, a restitution of their ego and a reaffirmation of their belief system. Ridiculing Kruger on stage was, in turn, a very public way of rubbing it in.

The pro-imperialist themes of *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast* should be seen as a model for British “wishful thinking” on the Boer wars. Though opposition to the Boer wars was substantial, most of the British public and popular presses supported the war.⁸⁷ The same is true of this pantomime. The King and Queen, the rightful rulers, by some fluke of fate are removed from authority for a period. Upon their return, an uprising of Prapsburg’s own people restores them to power. Of course, this is not what

⁸⁶ Cannadine, 67.

⁸⁷ Evans, 48-49.

really happened. Britain was not the original and rightful ruler of Transvaal in the first place. The residents of Johannesburg did not rebel against Kruger and chase him out—Kruger created his own stalemate and left when promised assistance that never came through. But turning Kruger into an object of ridicule on stage suggests, however subtly, that this version of events, the version that paints Britain in a more favorable light, is the correct version.

This plotline also serves to temper the play's more troubled assessment of monarchy, balancing its contradictions and unresolved tensions; in the face of unsettling content, it provides an easy assurance of a simplistically self-affirming worldview.

The political meanings of the pantomime also become clearer in subtle messages about performance and politics; during the period the two were distinctly intertwined. Victoria's reign developed this; though in the earlier half of the century public rituals of state were nothing to speak of, by the end of her rule, royal ceremonies were crowd-drawing spectacles described in all the papers and remembered for weeks after. Lord Robert Cecil wrote in *The Saturday Review*, after an opening of Parliament by Queen Victoria in 1861:

This aptitude [for ceremony] is generally confined to the people of a southern climate and of non-Teutonic parentage. In England the case is exactly the reverse. We can afford to be more splendid than most nations; but some malignant spell broods over all our most solemn ceremonials, and inserts into them some future which makes them all ridiculous...Something always breaks down, somebody contrives to escape doing his part, or some bye-motive is suffered to interfere and ruin it all.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ *The Saturday Review* 9 Feb 1861, 140-1. Qtd. in: David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977," *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 101-02.

According to David Cannadine, the Britain of the 1820s to the 1870s was one of "localized, provincial, pre-industrial society" and therefore of "ineptly managed ritual."⁸⁹ The kings preceding Queen Victoria had made monarchy unpopular, so "grand royal ceremonial" seemed impossible.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the crown was still quite powerful, and didn't need ceremonial displays to reinforce that power with the people—ceremonies that existed were largely private, a source not of entertainment for the masses, but of self-affirmation for the monarchy and aristocracy. The Queen's reclusive widowhood only exacerbated this tendency. The British people "prided themselves on the limited nature of their government, their lack of interest in formal empire, their hatred of show, extravagance, ceremonial and ostentation."⁹¹

The period from 1877, when Victoria was made Empress of India, to World War I, was on the other hand a "heyday of 'invented tradition', a time when old ceremonials were staged with an expertise and appeal which had been lacking before, and when new rituals were self-consciously invented to accentuate this development."⁹² Cannadine attributes this, in part, to the increase in both electorate power and good will toward the monarchy—Victoria, in effect, exchanged her own power for popularity. He also juxtaposes the technologically advancing society with the antiquated flavor of many of the ceremonies: "In such an age of change, crisis and dislocation, the 'preservation of

⁸⁹ "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition', c. 1820-1977," *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 108.

⁹⁰ Cannadine, 109.

⁹¹ Cannadine, 112.

⁹² Cannadine, 108.

anachronism', the deliberate, ceremonial presentation of an impotent but venerated monarch as a unifying symbol of permanence and national community became both possible and necessary."⁹³ In the age of the automobile, the old carriages the queen rode in during processions became romantic.

Cannadine's timelines for this conversion are perhaps a little too precise, but a definite shift did occur in the presentation of the Queen to the people in the 1870s; Margaret Homans argues forcefully the shift was a conscious one on the part of the Queen and those who managed her public image.⁹⁴ After Prince Albert died in 1861, Victoria entered a period of widowhood in which she disappeared almost completely from the public eye. For the next decade, her reign was a unique "historical moment in which the monarch's chief representational form [was] her invisibility"; the public, however, had a serious reaction against her extended mourning, and eventually Victoria was forced to resume her role as a public figure.⁹⁵

This return to the public eye did not coincide exactly with Victoria's assumption of power over India, but happened much more gradually. In April of 1868, still emerging from her reclusive period, Victoria inspected her troops at Aldershot; she arrived late, behind the spectators, in a tiny procession with two carriages that can only be described as anticlimactic. *The Times* of 16 April noted the elusiveness of the Queen

⁹³ Cannadine, 122.

⁹⁴ Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837-1876*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

⁹⁵ Hohmans, 59.

herself, the informal dress of the general, the few soldiers waiting "with apparently as much sense of expectation as some few groups of ordinary persons."⁹⁶

The Thanksgiving service held in February 1872 stands in stark contrast to the inspection. Both the Queen and her son, the Prince of Wales, had been ill the previous year, the Queen battling a throat infection and an abscess, and the Prince coming down with typhoid in November. When the Queen spent the remainder of the year nursing him back to health, politicians criticized her for neglecting her duties, but the general public rose to defend her, sending her a continual stream of letters and telegrams in support. In January, when the Prince began to recover, the Thanksgiving service was planned. The procession, featuring a full nine carriages, stretched from Buckingham Palace to St. Paul's Cathedral and back. The Queen herself, so resistant to putting herself on display in the past, suggested the last two carriages carrying the royal family be open, a detail that surprised and delighted the watching crowds. The public was just as thrilled to see the Queen as it was to see the recovered Prince.⁹⁷

Hohmans notes the *Times* review of 28 February reversed the roles of the Queen and her people. The article reads: "The real spectacle of the National Thanksgiving is the people, the never exhausted masses which covered all the pavements [...]. Her Majesty received the expression of their loyalty [...] with a feeling akin to delight."⁹⁸ It characterizes the Queen as a spectator, rather than the spectacle itself. Even an event clearly featuring the monarch shifts its focus, in retrospect, to the people.

⁹⁶ Qtd. in Hohmans, 153.

⁹⁷ Hohmans, 153-54.

⁹⁸ Hohmans, 154-56.

The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast plays this tendency out explicitly when the newly-awoken King and Queen attempt to present themselves to their court:

Trumpets sound. Guards heard harmonizing outside. They enter and walk down stage to C., singing. Prince and Beauty go up together.

GUARDS: Make way for the King and her Majesty the Queen!

Enter King and Queen, dressed in remains of faded pomp, but with great dignity. They are followed by a few of their Courtiers, similarly attired. They walk down stage to C., bowing right and left to Senators, who make way for them but simply gaze in stolid silence at them until they reach C., when everybody bursts out laughing. King and Queen stare about them in angry surprise.

QUEEN: Well, I don't call *this* a reception for monarchs who've been lost for a hundred years.

[...]

[*Dignified.*] Ahem! Beloved people! We are with you once more. [*Silent pause.*] Ahem! Beloved people! Your King and Queen are with you once again! [*Silent pause. Her dignity breaking down.*] Confound you, beloved people! Can't you see we're here? (*Silent pause.*)

(II.ix)

The pantomime continues to embarrass its monarchs as the objects of derision rather than adoration. The Queen's last lines especially oddly hint at the trend of disinterest in royal figures—though their entrance is in one sense clearly the focus of

the sequence, the Queen must beg for the attention and respect she believes she deserves.

The play presents these highly-charged political ideas in a safe environment, one that provides a tidier resolution than the current situation could. Before the play's close the monarchs are reinstated, and the Queen delivers a speech to the people which, despite its humorous overtones, still allows her to receive the adoration of her subjects once again.

QUEEN: [*Goes to gates. During speech Queen only says jerky and disconnected words and people cheer between each. While they cheer, Queen moves mouth as if still talking.*] Beloved people—
[*Cheers.*] a great crisis—[*Cheers.*] glorious country—[*Cheers.*] patriotism—[*Cheers.*] King and constitution—[*Cheers.*] all traitors—
[*Cheers.*] his Majesty the King—
[*Loud cheers; Queen bows and retires. Warder opens gates; people press in to kiss Queen's hand.*] (II.xiii)

But even this gesture to the Queen is ambiguous—the subtle implication is that the monarch's only real duty is to deliver speeches laden with magic words but bereft of any real content.

The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast acts as a release for audience dissatisfactions with the current state of the government, giving voice to very real worries fears in a controlled, and thus safe, environment. It presents a monarchy threatened by new and unconventional forms of government. It portrays rightful rulers as silly, rather insubstantial figureheads who exercise little control over their circumstances. The

parody coats every pointed observation with an easy humor that at once gives political ideas range on the stage and keeps them from spinning out of control. The plot threatens but then restores traditional rule. Monarchy and democracy are posed against each other, and monarchy prevails. Anti-imperialist figures are first lampooned and then thoroughly disposed of. The play upsets the balance of the political environment, aligning it with the realities of the British government. Then it solves the imbalance with a reaffirmation of pro-monarchy, pro-imperialist ideals; it does not settle the problems it brings up, but instead glosses over them with an easy plot fix.

CHAPTER 5

PANTOMIME AND THE PHYSICAL WORLD

Pantomime, a genre heavy with misbehaving objects and changing scenery, reveals much about the way the people of its period relate to the physical world. In pantomime, boundaries between the real and the imagined are fluid—scenery, props and characters metamorphose constantly, both in shape and nature. Transformations in pantomime are both ubiquitous—people, objects, and scenery regularly shift from the ordinary to the extraordinary—and ambivalent—these transformations reward or punish, and can help or hinder.

Through different periods of pantomime, transformations signify different ideas. A distinct shift occurred between the Regency and the turn of the century; pantomime from each period says something very specific about boundaries and physical reality. The meaning of transformations during the Regency can illuminate later transformations at the turn of the century. In Regency pantomime, the ordinary changes to the extraordinary and then back again. The lovers begin as everyday people, then turn to harlequinade characters, then finally back to people. Objects begin as docile, then they animate, then once again become inanimate.

Michael Booth characterizes these transformations as evidence of an uncertainty in the existing world—the Regency world was changing technologically, and pantomime reflected this:

In the Regency harlequinade man's plight is often created by the transformation, misbehaviour, and relentless hostility of objects and mechanical devices: things are not what they seem to be, or rather they are, but then they change frighteningly into something else. Nothing can be relied on; the very ground itself dissolves under the feet of the helpless characters.⁹⁹

Whatever the anxieties evidenced in Regency pantomime, the characters always return, in the end, to their mundane identities. The causes for unease, all magical or somehow supernatural, dissipate. In Dibdin's *Mother Goose*, Harlequin and Columbine, Pantaloon and Clown, return to their original selves.

In turn-of-the-century pantomime, the patterns by which things change are not simple or fixed. Objects do not transform as often—instead, many of them are either always ordinary or always supernatural, and do not change from one to the other. But character transformations fluctuate much more freely—the Prince transforms into the Beast and back again several times, though he does end in his ordinary form. The most important scene changes, finally, move from the ordinary to the extraordinary—the plays do not close in the everyday world, but look to the possibility of a supernatural one.

Taken together, these transformations seem to convey contradictory messages. Objects tend to remain in their original form, suggesting more definite boundaries

⁹⁹ Michael Booth, "Introduction," *Pantomimes, Extravaganzas and Burlesques, English Plays of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. 5, Ed. Michael Booth, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, 7-8.

between the commonplace and the magical. Characters' bodies, however, are more inconstant than ever, suggesting the boundaries are extremely permeable. Scenery makes an elaborate, but one-way, conversion to the fantastic, suggesting, finally, that the fantastic is the ideal and perhaps even more real world.

The easy answer to these apparent incongruities is that they represent a continuing ambivalence toward technological change, toward reality itself. Instead, I assert each of these contrasting threads contributes to a complex but unified statement that the imagined, the extraordinary, is at once beautiful and desirable as well as terrible and threatening. These differences also continue the Regency questioning of reality, but with more nuance and less constructed closure. The play does not end safely in a neatly-ordered world free of magical influence. The potential for metamorphosis still exists at the play's close.

The objects in turn-of-the-century pantomime are not as ambivalent as their Regency counterparts. They are quite hostile, and far less subject to human control. Instead of hindering the villains, the objects act out against the heroes. The heroes don't spend the play mastering physical objects to evade their pursuers—instead, they battle the objects themselves. It is important to note that these objects do not begin as ordinary or docile—they are always hostile. Technological novelties are prime offenders, malfunctioning at every turn. In *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*, the King and Queen's getaway car breaks down and they haven't a clue how to fix it. The train they try to board moves at impossible speeds, without regard for human limitations. Their bewilderment is, primarily, for comic effect, certainly, but it also acts out what many Londoners must have felt in an age of technological revolution.

Objects even gain jurisdiction over the characters' lives—a spinning wheel leads to Beauty's hundred-year slumber, almost death. The Witch creates not just an obstruction but a murder weapon, which nearly succeeds (I.iii). The Prince is then nearly dispatched by a single shredded rose (II.xiv). Beauty herself does this unwittingly—the mere plucking of a rose's petals can result in death. Of course, these plot points were imported from already-existing fairy tales, but two separate tales that mesh surprisingly well both with each other and with the general themes of pantomime.

That the objects never begin as innocuous is important. The ambivalence conveyed in Regency pantomime, where objects have the potential to be docile or harmful, is lost in *The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast*. The objects are always hostile; furthermore, they act either on their own or on the order of the Witch. There is no more magic bat, no more human control of the supernatural. The view presented here is one of an almost unfailingly misanthropic environment.

This mistrust of the physical works its way through in the settings as well. Scenery resists the heroes at every turn. The Prince must hack his way through holly and brush to reach the princess (I.vi). Part of the bravery the Fairy Queen demands of the Prince is the bravery to fight against, and overcome, the physical. Scenery also betrays; when the Queen and King pluck the rose to bring to Beauty, their world melts beneath them and a different one entirely rises up (II.xii). They cannot trust their own surroundings.

Character transformations make a move from ambivalent to mildly negative. Changes in identity and appearance assist Regency characters in obtaining their goals; by the turn of the century, these changes ultimately obstruct. The Prince's

transformation is brought about by the Witch, and makes him abhorrent to Beauty, keeping him from marrying her (and allowing the pantomime to span several more scenes). The shape provides no benefit to the Prince, allows him to escape no one.

Actually, from a certain perspective, the transformation benefits Beauty. The moral threads of the story lead Beauty to accept the Beast in lieu of the Prince. Beauty's character is somewhat flippant and immature until she agrees to marry the Beast, regardless of his physical form. She must embrace his transformation to resolve the story. Still, this does not erase the fact that the Prince's transformation is an unpleasant trial that must be overcome, regardless of the means (i.e. love, selflessness) used to overcome it.

Transformations of character in turn-of-the-century pantomime highlight a troubled relationship of the characters to their physicality. Much of the comic material of pantomime is a joking way of questioning human physicality, whether addressing the body itself or the numerous physical objects Victorians encountered in everyday life. The Hydropathic Establishment of scene two brings these issues to the forefront. Hydropathy was a health trend that swept Europe and eventually North America. Etiquette writer Baroness Staffe describes it:

Hydropathy is a system of treatment of maladies (especially chronic ones) by the exclusive use of cold water in various forms. Baths and douches of course form part of it; and besides these, the sick person is undressed, wrapped up in blankets on a couch, and made to drink innumerable glasses of cold water. Perspiration naturally follows, and he is then given either a cold bath or is enveloped in damp sheets.¹⁰⁰ [...] After a few baths, which are followed by vigorous rubbings, one feels a sensation of warmth and comfort, a sort of expansion of the body, wherein the vital principle seems to be born anew. [...] There is no denying that

¹⁰⁰ Baroness Staffe, *The Lady's Dressing Room*, trans. Lady Colin Campbell, 1983, 52, <http://victorianlondon.org>, Accessed 7 October 2007.

the science of medicine has found in hydropathy a puissant ally wherewith to vanquish chronic maladies, which before its discovery were often declared incurable.¹⁰¹

It is interesting to note that at the time of this play, the practice of hydropathy in Britain was well in decline. Treatment centers appeared across England in the early forties and went strong until the end of the seventies, when the movement lost much of its fervor.¹⁰² Perhaps this is why, in the play, the Doctor who runs the establishment is little more than a dandy who cultivates the respect of the community to make money and attract women (I.ii).

Bathhouses in general heightened tensions surrounding the body by providing opportunities for communal nudity and for heightened physical awareness. Katherine Kish Sklar notes a related contradiction—the hydropathy movement was built on ideas of self-denial, but in practice allowed a form of sensual self-indulgence.¹⁰³ J Jagger wrote of the nudity controversy in 1860:

Some object to the Bath, because of the time they are liable to be seen in a state of comparative nakedness. This seems to spring from the too common notion of no sin if the world does not see it. [...] the healthy, well-formed man, need not be ashamed to be seen by his neighbour.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Staffe, 53-54, 56.

¹⁰² Metcalfe, Richard, *The Rise and Progress of Hydropathy in England and Scotland*, London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Ltd., 1906, 43-57, 284-85.

¹⁰³ Wilkie, Jacqueline S, “Submerged Sensuality: Technology and Perceptions of Bathing,” *Journal of Social History*, 19.4 (Summer 1986), 658.

¹⁰⁴ *The Turkish Bath*, London: Barker [1860], <http://www.victorianturkishbath.org>, Accessed 7 October 2007.

That the King and Queen first appear on stage supposedly naked brings all of these charged contradictions onto the stage. A simple set of hooded chairs (possibly modeled after modesty tents used for Turkish bathhouses), along with a few lines of text, accomplishes the effect. The boundary between the body and the rest of the world is flimsy.

In the same scene, the Doctor's fat patients go to the Sulphur Baths and return minutes later, excess weight completely sloughed off (I.ii). The moment's humor derives from its impossibility, of course—but a costume change makes such a body change seem real. The stage often makes appearance and reality equivalent; the body appears to change, so in the world of the play, it *does* change.

The Prince's transformation develops this idea. While under the curse, the Prince's form is (presumably) completely inconstant—around others, he becomes the Beast, but when alone he resumes his natural shape. The Witch alternates between talk of physicality, of changed shapes and fantastic forms, and talk of appearance: “Thus in the eyes of all you shall appear, / Thus in the eyes of her you hold so dear” (II.ix). The audience is meant to assume the Prince actually changes to the Beast, but the Witch puts heavy emphasis on the sight of others, implying her curse may just be a trick of the eye. Does the transformation actually change the Prince's identity to that of the Beast? Or is it only an illusion? The distinction between physicality and the appearance of physicality is unclear here, if not nonexistent.

The process of hiding and revealing so often takes place in pantomime also explores these ideas of illusion and reality. Pantomime frequently presents a stage in which something—a character, a fantastic location—is concealed. As the scene

unfolds, opens up, changes, it uncovers what is hidden. The hiding and revealing both generate and satisfy various levels of suspense. But they also hint at the idea of a “true” stage picture—what is first seen is not always fully accurate, and is therefore at times more illusion than reality.

The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast opens on The Fairies’ Bower. The stage directions read as follows: “the scene represents a very pretty woodland glade with bright colouring and the landscape on a cloth. There is a practicable trick change at the back which at a given moment discloses among the foliage the little princess asleep in a cradle.” Singing birds and an opening chorus induct the scene (I.i). This is a simple moment that accustoms the audience to the experience of anticipation and expectation.

The supposed nudity in the hydropathy scene also toys with hiding and revealing, teasing the audience. But the King and Queen are never actually seen until fully clothed; the audience, of course, knows the two characters will not be shown naked. Though the moment is largely for comedic effect, it still continues the theme of discord between the seen and the actual.

The Enchanted Palace transformation carries these ideas even further. All of the scenic transformations reinforce the idea that fantasy and reality occupy the same space in the world of the pantomime, because everyday settings morph readily into otherworldly places. When the King and Queen pluck the rose, one simple physical gesture moves both the cast and the audience from London to an Enchanted Palace, as if the fantasy world lay just beyond the senses, waiting to be discovered. Both the fantastic and the everyday scenes are equally physically elaborate—is each meant to be

as “real” as the other? Is the eventually revealed world an illusion? Or is the illusion the world that hides it?

The answers to these questions are anything but simple. Of course from the perspective of the audience member the Enchanted Palace is the “false” world—it does not exist in the everyday world, and is the product of elaborate stage illusion. But the actual language of the scenery contradicts this. Each scene is presented with equal attention to detail and with unfailingly literal intention—each facet of the set, whether possible or impossible, is represented exactly as it would appear outside the theatre, or as close to it as the scenic effects can manage. The questions are further complicated by the fact that while scenic designers of pantomime strove to create convincing and “realistic” stage illusions, the meta-theatrical themes of pantomime undercut the illusions, as explored in chapter three.

The full transformation scenes concluding each act suggest, however, that the illusion is the reality. The first transformation scene, the dance of the seasons, unfolded slowly and purposefully. The scene displayed the passing of the seasons, but also continues the hiding and revealing theme by uncovering Sleeping Beauty at the end, echoing the opening of the play when the infant Beauty first appears. “As tableau succeeded tableau each backcloth was raised to allow a progressively augmented stage depth in which to accommodate the steady arrival of newcomers.” Groups of dancers, when finished, remained on stage, standing on the sides to make room for more people.¹⁰⁵ In the most complex spectacular scene in the pantomime, apparent space

¹⁰⁵ Michael Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, 91.

expanded—the stage aggregated people as the seasons progressed. The transformations continued, intensifying and proliferating in performers, colors, costumes, backdrops, until the climactic revelation of Beauty.

The tableau began with a pastoral landscape; Spring entered, accompanied by child Cupids with bows and arrows. The Cupids guarded the Valentines as they performed a Valentine ballet. Shamrocks then entered for St. Patrick's Day, followed by a dignified allegorical figure of Easter. Youths and maidens swarmed around carrying palms, some dressed as Easter eggs and birdnesters. April Fool's Day was marked by the entry of traditional fools and dancers dressed as primroses. May Day followed, with revelers and costumed daisies, laburnum, wisteria, and white and pink hawthorn dancing around a maypole. The May Queen then entered on litter, borne by apple and almond blossoms. The May Day backcloth depicts blossom trees and sheep.¹⁰⁶

The third tableau, Summer, displayed a backcloth of hayfields and a river. The costumes for the section were brighter and more colorful than the Spring costumes. Roses in pink, white, and red filled the stage. Autumn began the fourth tableau; dancers were dressed as gleaners and golden sickles, scarlet poppies and ripe corn, and performed a Harvest ballet. A Shooting ballet followed, danced by autumn leaves, featuring both a stag hunt and a fox hunt.¹⁰⁷

Winter opened on a snow-covered landscape. The *Sunday Times* of 30 December described 'a host of coryphees, dressed in lovely white draperies, sewn with

¹⁰⁶ Booth, 91.

¹⁰⁷ Booth, 91.

snowflakes of swansdown, touched with silver frost and finished with charming head-wreaths of holly, with its shining red berries, presently to be delicately illuminated with electric light.’ In addition, snow girls and red and green holly girls danced a Holly and Mistletoe ballet. The Grigolati Troupe flew above as swallows or magpies (reviews couldn’t identify which), dressed in black and white feather waistcoats, carrying large white muffs.¹⁰⁸

Finally, a few cloths move to reveal the Sleeping Beauty on a high platform. The Prince, carrying mistletoe, breaks through a thicket of holly for his kiss. A ballet of rejoicing greets Beauty’s Awakening, mixing all four seasons and dancing to music from *The Nutcracker*. The Prince, Beauty, and the Fairy Queen all sing to conclude the first part.¹⁰⁹

The scene completes the circle of the first act, bringing the play back to the fairyland of the opening scene. It also returns the play to Christmastime, coinciding with the actual time of performance. The scene is certainly a celebration of the Victorian taste for elaborate spectacle. It is also, as explored in chapter three, a confirmation of the capabilities of pantomime as an art form, not merely an entertainment. But primarily it functions to transport the audience to a world of dancing flowers, embodied holidays, and performing animals...a world of fantasy that avoids any reference to everyday London.

The final transformation scene developed as each of Beauty’s wedding gifts, made of pearl and diamonds, was added to the collection, increasing in size as the scene

¹⁰⁸ Booth, 91.

¹⁰⁹ Booth, 92.

progressed. A critic described it as a “monstrous ripening of the gold and silver vegetables, which come to life with a slow, sprawling expansion of themselves, like the vegetation of an opium dream.”¹¹⁰

The scene fittingly concludes the play with a simple celebration of things and of spectacle. Victorians loved exhibitions, galleries, dioramas, panoramas, museums, jubilees, and processions. They replicated their own cultures for observation, unearthed their histories for display, then poached the objects of other cultures to look at. Weddings were no exception.

According to Cassell’s *Household Guide*, marriage gifts were displayed during the wedding breakfast, the Victorian equivalent of a modern reception. This practice seems to have been a trend that came and went in cycles through the years, and which not everyone approved of:

This fashion is of questionable taste but, being in vogue, the practice cannot be dismissed without a word of comment. Some people carry the display to the extent of announcing the names of the donors of the respective gifts by having written cards affixed [...]. Some little time is usually passed by the guests in inspecting the presents and bestowing their congratulations on the bride and bridegroom.¹¹¹

John Cordy Jeaffreson explains, in his 1872 manual *Brides and Bridals*, the happy couple received gifts from both close friends and distant acquaintances, even household servants. Gifts were often lavish—even middle class couples received grand pianos, carriages, silver and porcelain. The gifts were seen by all both as tokens of

¹¹⁰ Booth, 90.

¹¹¹ [1880] 138, <http://victorianlondon.org>, Accessed 12 December 2007.

affection and as a measure of the couple's popularity.¹¹² The number of pearl and diamond gifts in Beauty's collection confirms that she and the Prince are beloved.

The final focus of the play rests not on the characters, but on possessions, things. The objects are grotesquely beautiful, completely out of proportion with actual size. They grow larger than life, visually dominating the characters just as the spinning wheel, the rose, and the malfunctioning technology held sway over people throughout the play. The play ends with this celebration of ostentatious objects, the perfect end to a very Victorian pantomime.

¹¹² Vol. 1, London: Hurst and Blackett, 1872, *History of Women*, Microfilm, 2776, New Haven: Research Publications, Inc., 1975, 210-12.

CONCLUSION

Pantomime's rich and varied history has received far less scholarly attention than it deserves, in spite of its status as one of the most popular theatrical forms of nineteenth-century Britain. This is partially due to a limited availability of scripts, photographs, and firsthand accounts of performance. Few reliable histories exist to supplement the primary resources; those closest to the nineteenth century are relatively inaccurate, relying on anecdotal evidence and critical opinion without much discernment. The still-existing scripts are hardly ever analyzed in any great depth for meaning.

Studies of pantomime in any depth tend to agree that pantomime utilized parody and scenic spectacle, but the observation tends to stop short there. Yes, pantomime relied on humor and visual appeal, but how and why? Both of these elements derive from and thus reflect pantomime's surrounding culture, but many dismiss this as thoughtless. The tantalizing paradoxes of pantomime, fantasy literally realized in elaborate scenery, performance and fakery lampooned amidst much performance and fakery, have remained inexplicably untouched.

The reliable histories are even prone to a bias (Booth being the exception), painting the earlier, Grimaldi-driven period as superior, and the later, more spectacular productions as somehow degraded or corrupted. Late Victorian pantomime is usually

passed over as little more than visually overdone, formulaic entertainment with minor substance and significance.

On the contrary, pantomime was actually a complex art form that adapted to suit changing times and audiences. In each period it reflects essential aspects of its creating society, how its people view and interact with the world. At the time of *Sleeping Beauty* in particular, pantomime reveals uncertainties about a time of great change and transition, as the British people turned away from one century and faced another.

Much of the meaning of pantomime is carried in its actual performance, rather than in its reused stories and plotlines. The meta-theatrical qualities of pantomime, its self-awareness as well as its direct relationship with the audience, enable its analysis of performance both in and outside of a theatrical context. It questions, sometimes hypocritically, the substance of any performance, often exposing ceremonies and routines as fake or subtly undercutting them in parody.

Pantomime also engages openly with the politics of the day, giving voice, albeit humorously, to contrasting ideologies of the day. *Sleeping Beauty* safely releases tension surrounding the opposing ideals of monarchy, democracy, and imperialism, representing them with comic characters who are, by and large, harmless. Most importantly, it privileges the ideologies of monarchy and imperialism, allowing their representatives to triumph in the plot. It simplifies overly complicated political issues for a neat and comforting, though improbable, conclusion.

In its staging, pantomime reveals ambivalent attitudes toward physicality. Supposedly useful objects and technological advancements turn against the characters, frustrating them at best and threatening their lives at worst. The characters' own bodies

can metamorphose, changing their identities. The ordinary and fantastical worlds bump up against one another, readily shifting from one to the other. The effusive spectacle of the transformation scenes ensures that objects and environment, all elaborately detailed, are the focus.

The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast probes into the mindset of a people in the midst of transition. The world at the turn of the century was changing, political landscapes reforming, technology advancing at an ever more rapid pace. The play itself operates on transitions, disorienting its own characters and replicating the unsettling lack of control the Victorians had over their environment. It juxtaposes two contrasting but equally accessible worlds, and in so doing it questions what is reliable, what is genuine and substantial, what is real. It creates images that fail over and over again to replace what they represent. Because it does all this primarily in the comfortable context of parody, it provides the audience with both cathartic and escapist experiences, remaining a palatable entertainment that serves vital social functions.

Ultimately, though, pantomime should be studied simply because it is a valid form of theatre. Like all theatre, it draws from its own context to converse with the audience, in varying degrees of subtlety, about the surrounding culture. Further study of pantomime in any period can illuminate all the potential ways theatre as an art form can relate to its creating culture.

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