

PROTAGONISTS IN PAPER: TOY THEATRES AND THE CULTIVATION OF CELEBRITY

JAMES ARMSTRONG

James Armstrong is a playwright and adjunct assistant professor of theatre at City College of the City University of New York. He is currently working on a book about the interplay between performers and playwrights in Regency-era Britain. This article was completed with funding through a research award from the STR that allowed him to travel to the British Museum, and with the assistance of the accommodating staffs at the British Museum, the New York Public Library, and the Harvard Theatre Collection.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, several London printers began publishing designs to be used in toy theatres. Much that has been written about these toy theatres has focused on their mechanics and how they replicated the stage effects and scenic designs of the contemporary stage. Since few actual scenic and costume designs have survived from the early nineteenth century, toy versions of productions sometimes grant us the closest approximation we have of what plays of the period actually looked like, offering a wealth of information about their costumes and scenery.¹ However, the few authors who have written about toy theatres often overlooked the fact that the miniature versions frequently depicted famous actors in specific roles, sometimes providing captions beneath characters stating not just the part being portrayed but also the star performer whose face and bodily manner were being copied. Toy theatres offer an exciting glimpse into the past, a time capsule capturing how theatre was performed in the nineteenth century, but they also performed a valuable service for actors and theatre managers during the time they were in general circulation. These miniature theatres reinforced an iconography of celebrity that linked star actors with the roles they played, generating excitement around individual performers. They helped to promote the star system that dominated British theatre through most of the nineteenth century, and by closely examining miniature theatre prints, we can see the ups and downs of this star system being played out before our very eyes.

The first writers to comment on toy theatres tend to be nostalgic in their descriptions of miniature theatricals. These male authors recalling their own boyhoods tend to emphasize the roles the theatres played in the lives of young boys. Edward Draper, writing in 1868, remembers how “nearly every boy had a toy theatre, with its pasteboard characters and scenes” (181). John Oxenford, writing three years later, enthuses about how these theatres were once “the most valued treasure that a boy in his early teens could possess” (67). While Oxenford notes that “young ladies of the family might assist with their scissors or their camel’s hair pencil” he remarks that “in a well-regulated household the manager and proprietor was always a boy” (67). This comment seems to imply,



Figure 1. Toy theatre with characters and scenes for *The Silver Palace*, Benjamin Pollock, wood, card, tinsel and metal, 63.5 x 68.5 x 61.0 cms. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

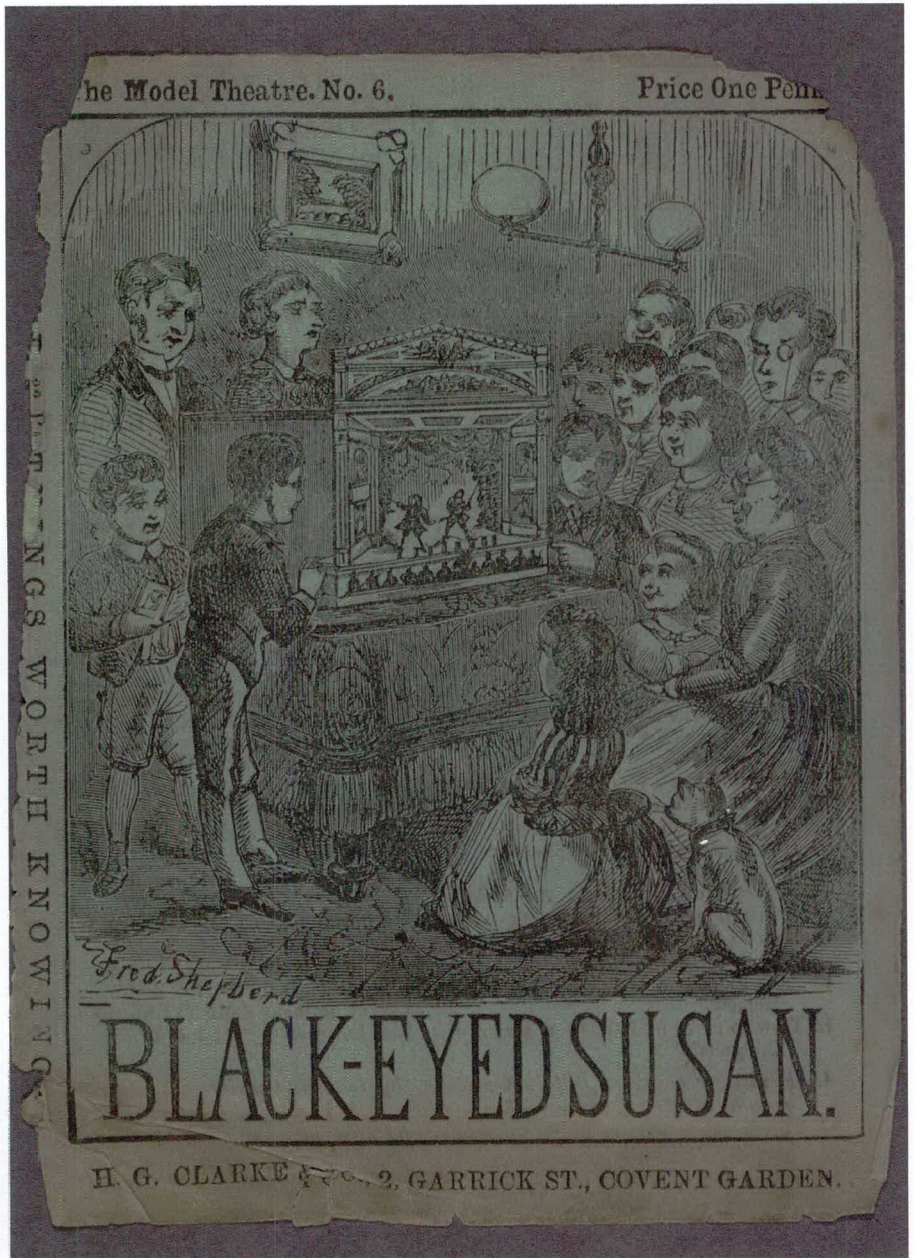


Figure 2. Cover for *Black-Eyed Susan*, The Model Theatre, No. 6., Fred Shepherd, print on coloured paper. © The New York Public Library.

however, the existence of less “well-regulated” homes where females had the audacity to engage in their own miniature theatricals. In fact, the actress Ellen Terry later wrote, “I remember the little stages well and there is nothing quite like them” remarking that she herself owned one when she “was a child” (3).

Chief among the backward-glancing aficionados of the toy theatre was the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson, who in 1884 published “A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured” in *The Magazine of Art*, later collecting it together with other essays in his book *Memoirs and Portraits* (213-27). The title for the essay comes from the fact that one sheet of prints typically sold for a penny when uncoloured and twice as much when pre-coloured by hand.² The purchaser would then cut out the images, glue them to a hard surface (generally pasteboard or thin cardboard) and assemble them into a miniature theatre that mimicked the professional productions on the London stage. Though these ephemeral items generally did not survive intact, the Victoria and Albert Museum possesses a few fully built specimens, including one assembled by the toy theatre publisher Benjamin Pollock [Figure 1]. Amateur thespians could perform an entire play on such stages, complete with scene changes, characters in different costumes, and spectacular stage effects. Stevenson remembers the shop where he bought toy-theatre prints as being “a loadstone rock for all that bore the name of boy” (216).

However, manufacturers of toy theatres marketed their wares to more than just boys. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, H.G. Clarke & Co. produced a number of abbreviated scripts intended for use with toy theatres. The covers of these scripts usually contained an illustration by Fred Shepherd depicting an imaginary performance [Figure 2]. On one of these covers, behind the miniature stage are an adult man and woman, who might be examining the paper scenery in preparation for a change in scene or might simply be supervising the proceedings. A boy at the side of the theatre manipulates a paper character on stage through means of a special instrument (known as a slide) that could be imbedded in the floor of the toy theatre or lie flat on top of it.³ Beside him is another boy, reading from a script for the performance. Most interesting, however, is the large crowd of assembled spectators, including a sharp-nosed woman wearing a monocle. The audience members who appear most engrossed in the performance are a young girl crouching on the ground, a matronly woman with spectacles, and a cat who watches the play as intently as the rest of the family. This picture is likely an idealized version of a toy-theatre performance. Still, the depiction of the entire family enjoying a performance suggests the prints were intended to be seen by a heterogeneous audience.⁴

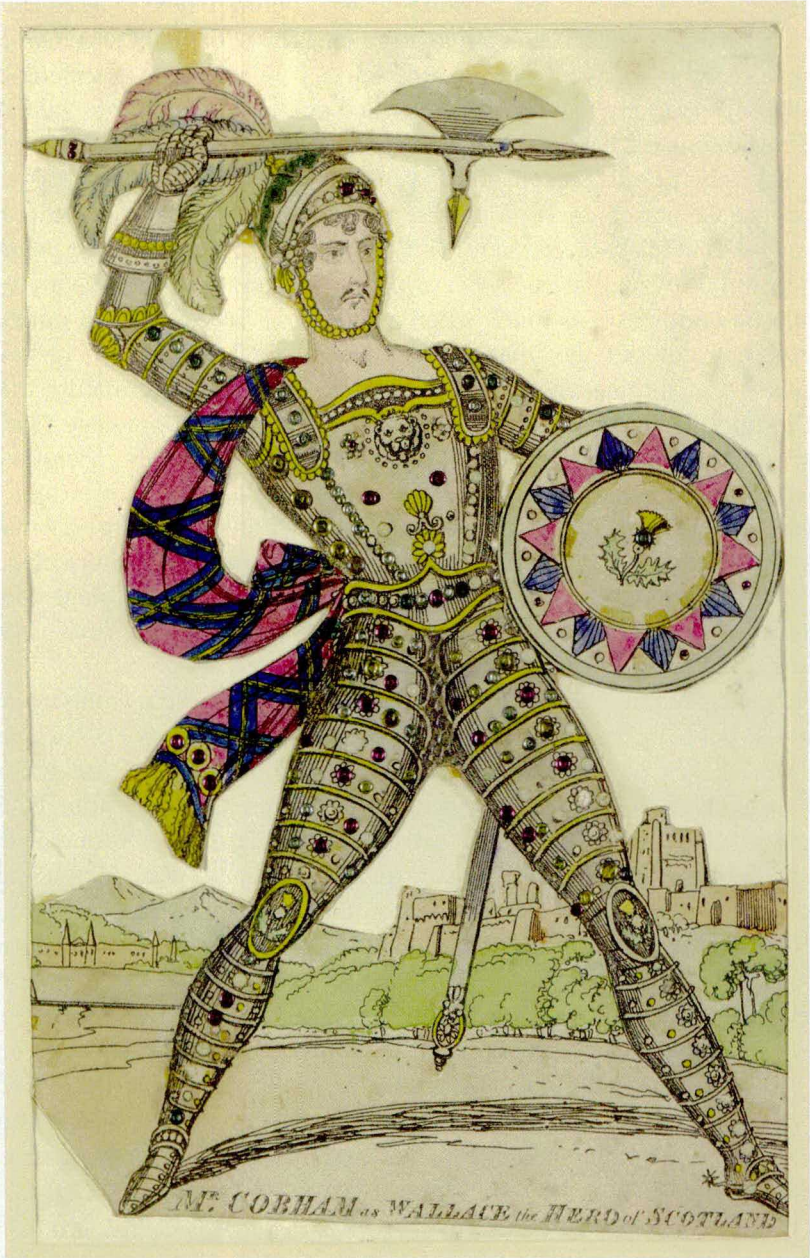


Figure 3. Mr. Cobham as Wallace the Hero of Scotland, hand-coloured etching, lightly tinselled, 20.3 x 15.0 cms. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The full catalogue of plays offered by publishers also shows a remarkable variety. A catalogue offered by the printmaker William West in 1811 lists (frequently anonymous) pantomimes such as *Mandarin or Harlequin in China*, *Harlequin & the Red Dwarf*, and *Harlequin & Asmodeus*, plays by William Shakespeare including *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Richard III*, and works of ambitious Romantic-era drama, including Matthew G. Lewis's *Timour the Tarter*, John Philip Kemble's *Lodoiska*, and August von Kotzebue's *The Virgin of the Sun*.⁵ The diversity of West's offerings suggests publishers aimed at multiple audiences. Today, these paper-and-pasteboard constructions are frequently referred to as "toy theatres" or "Juvenile Drama", but those who actually sold them sometimes used phrases such as "The British Theatre in Miniature" or "The British Stage in Miniature" (Speaight 79). Clarke's publications, for instance, describe the apparatus as a "Model Theatre". In 1811, publication of toy theatres was still in its infancy, but even from the beginning the industry marketed its wares to purchasers with a wide variety of theatrical interests.

Most telling about West's catalogue is the number of times it mentions star actors who might not have been known to a child just looking for an amusing toy. Listed alongside the plays and scenery available for toy theatres are actors appearing in famous roles, such as Nannette Johnston as Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Charles Young as Rolla in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro*, and Edmund Kean as the title character in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Not all of the offerings on West's list were intended for use in toy theatres, and these listings likely refer to full-sheet theatrical portraits. The same toy-theatre designs showing star actors as famous characters were frequently available in larger versions, and these larger prints could be coloured or have cloth and metal glued to them, becoming known as "tinsel prints" when they had metallic additions or were bejewelled with faux gemstones. One example, "Mr. Cobham as Wallace the Hero of Scotland", shows the actor Thomas Cobham in the title role of an equestrian spectacle that opened at the Royal Circus in 1815 [Figure 3]. Charles J. Tibbits wrote an early account of these prints in *The London Magazine* at the beginning of the twentieth century, claiming that tinsel prints had recently become "one of the fastest selling" items offered by curio dealers (604). According to Tibbits, one such dealer labelled the craze for tinsels "a fad" (607). Still, a good collection of the memorabilia could be valued in the hundreds of pounds in the early twentieth century (608). Though tinsels could represent famous monarchs or generals as well, Tibbits notes they usually depicted actors, which reflects their close link to toy theatres.

Printers frequently used the same iconic designs of actors both as full-sheet prints and as smaller toy-theatre figures that occupied only one position on a sheet of characters. For instance, West's Theatrical Portraits No. 78 from 1824 is a full-page image of the nineteenth-century actor Alexander Pope (not to be confused with the eighteenth-century poet of the same name) as St. Aldobrand in Charles Robert Maturin's verse tragedy *Bertram* [Figure 4]. The figure's face, pose, and clothing are identical to his depiction on the second plate of characters from *Bertram* that West published that same year in a size suitable to be used in a toy theatre [Figure 5].⁶ Although the larger image has considerably more detail, the smaller, toy-theatre version resembles it right down to the plumes on the helmet. The toy-theatre version omits the actor's name, but that is not always the case. The first plate of characters West published for *Bertram* listed the actors who originated the two leading roles, Margaret Somerville and Edmund Kean, identifying the images as "Miss Somerville, as Imogine" and "Mr. Kean, as Bertram" [Figure 6].

While most toy-theatre prints that have survived do not identify the actors represented, quite a few of them do. The practice spanned multiple publishers and multiple decades. Just a few examples of actors being identified in toy-theatre prints include the character plates for Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Remorse* ("Characters in the Popular Tragedy called REMORSE", Jameson, 1813), James Robinson Planché's *The Vampire* ("West's Characters in The Vampire", West, 1820), and Thomas Dibdin's *Valentine and Orson* ("Principal Characters in the Grand Melo Drama of Valentine and Orson," Love, 1823).⁷ In each of those three cases, not only are the star actors identified, but supporting cast members are as well. Though the names might have been cut away when the characters were assembled into toy theatres, the images of their faces and postures would remain.

Even when the printer did not provide the names of the actors, as was the case with Pope in West's toy-theatre version of *Bertram*, the actors could sometimes still be recognized. On some extant prints where the publisher has not provided the name of the actor, a collector has filled in this information by hand. For instance, the British Museum possesses a character plate West printed in 1821 showing the Royal Coburg Theatre's production of *Korastikan, Prince of Assassins* [Figure 7].⁸ Beneath each character is a handwritten note indicating the name of the actor being depicted, with only the anonymous dancer (misspelled "Daner") being left without a name.⁹ Also telling is that the print advertises itself as being published "with the Permission of J. Glossop Esq." who was the proprietor of the Royal Coburg at the time.¹⁰ For at least some toy-theatre designs, then, the images not only



Figure 4. West's Theatrical Portraits, No. 78: Mr. Pope as St. Aldobrand in *Bertram*, etching, 23.2 x 19.2 cms. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 5. Second plate of The Principal Characters in the New Tragedy *Bertram*, W. West, etching, 24.0 x 18.5 cms. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 6. First plate of The Principal Characters in the New Tragedy Bertram, W. West, hand-coloured etching, 24.0 x 18.5 cms. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 7. First plate of West's Characters in the New Grand Spectacle called Korastikan, W. West, etching with hand-written notes, 23.0 x 18.7 cms. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

provided recognizable portraits of actors, but did so with the specific permission of a theatre's management. In fact, the catalogue offered by West went as far as to boast that "The Whole of the Characters are Finely Engraved from Original Drawings, in their Exact Costumes . . . Published by Permission of the Proprietors, of the Different Theatres".

Writers at the end of the nineteenth century wrote patronizingly of theatre memorabilia, even as they were fascinated by it. Stevenson hyperbolically called the toy theatre a "national monument" and said it is possible "the Museum numbers a full set . . . or else her gracious Majesty . . . but to the plain private person they are become, like Raphaels, unattainable" (213). The comparison of toy theatres with the works of the Renaissance artist Raphael is meant to be ironic. Stevenson implies that no museum, and certainly not the famed British Museum, would ever want something as inconsequential as a collection of toy-theatre prints, any more than Queen Victoria might be expected to collect penny plates of characters at Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle. Yet the character plates for *Korastikan*, as well as numerous other designs for toy theatres, ended up at that very institution.¹¹ They are kept in large, leather-bound volumes in the museum's prints and drawings department, which interestingly enough also houses prints based on the work of Raphael.

The British Museum acquired its collection just two years after Stevenson first published his essay in 1884. Shortly afterward, no less a prominent theatre critic than William Archer, best known for his championing of the plays of Henrik Ibsen, congratulated the museum on the acquisition. Writing in *The Art Journal*, Archer claimed that the museum "has recently been fortunate enough to secure a very large collection of West's prints" which he called "not to be despised from the point of view of art" (105). Archer was aware of a claim made the previous year by Godfrey Turner that William Blake had designed some of the plates for West, though Archer said he himself was "disposed to doubt" (106). He did recognize, though, that both George and Robert Cruikshank had contributed to West's catalogue of prints. In addition to acknowledging the artistic value of the prints themselves, Archer also noted that through toy theatres West had preserved the memories "of the great theatrical figures of his time—the Kembles, Kean, and Miss O'Neill" (108).

Subsequent authors have been slow to pick up on Archer's suggestion that toy theatres played a role in promoting celebrity actors. The antiquarian John Ashton includes a chapter on toy theatres in his 1894 collection *Varia*. Like Stevenson, Ashton seems motivated primarily by nostalgia, describing the toy

theatre he had as a child as “the source of pure and unadulterated enjoyment” (1). He recounts the mechanics of the toy theatre, including the miniature oil lamps that lit the stage, the grooves through which an operator could drop scenery, and the trap doors which he recalls finding “difficult to work” (3). Ashton mentions the names of star actors when discussing tinsel prints published by West, but does not note that the smaller toy-theatre versions of these characters were still recognizable as star actors, or that their names were sometimes listed on character plates. He does note that Jameson (whose name Ashton misspells “Jamieson”) identified famous pantomime actors, including “Mr. Bologna, as Harlequin” (18). While this is true, Ashton leaves out that John Bologna (usually billed as “Mr. Bologna, Junr.”) was also depicted playing such roles as Orson in Dibdin’s adaptation of the medieval romance *Valentine and Orson*.¹² While pantomimes were certainly popular, the same actors who appeared in them also appeared in some very different roles, and the toy theatre helped to burnish their reputations in a variety of fields.

A few other authors contributed works on the toy theatre at the dawn of the twentieth century, but the successor to Archer, in more ways than one, was A.E. Wilson. In addition to taking over Archer’s job as drama critic for the *London Star*, Wilson wrote a book on toy theatres in 1932. The first full-length study of the British toy theatre, Wilson’s book is mostly concerned with detailing the history of toy-theatre producers, as well as indulging in Stevenson-esque flights of nostalgia regarding his own boyhood pastime. However, he acknowledges that “the little theatre may have come into existence at first not for the amusement of the children but to satisfy the interest of their elders who were keen lovers of the stage” (34).¹³ Wilson notes that early publishers “took particular care not only to render the little characters life-like and spirited in their drawing but to secure a perfect likeness to the actors and actresses who created the parts” (34).

This claim is supported by the numerous nineteenth-century writers who mention names of the actors who appeared in toy-theatre plates. Stevenson recalls how the miniature theatres were “smacking of O. Smith” and how their scenery “was betrotten by the light pump of T.P. Cooke” (222-23). O. Smith (whose given name was actually Richard) and Thomas Potter Cooke were figures most commonly associated with melodrama, and their images can frequently be found in miniature versions of plays such as Dibdin’s *Valentine and Orson* and Planché’s *The Vampire*. Similarly, Turner noted a couple years later in 1886 that when examining old toy-theatre prints he could “still recognise in many of the personages” faces of various actors, including William Oxberry, who appeared in Richard Brinsley Peake’s

melodrama *The Bottle Imp* (181). As late as 1891, Theo Arthur recalled seeing “faded examples of Mr. Osbaldiston as ‘Gilderoy’” and similar actors in other long gone roles (44). The actor David Webster Osbaldiston had been dead for more than 40 years at that point, and had not played the Scottish outlaw on stage in William Barrymore’s *Gilderoy, the Bonny Boy* for quite some time. Still, the actor’s fame was living on after him, and his name, face, and stage mannerisms were recorded and recollected even at the close of the century by someone who might never have even seen him in that role.

We cannot be sure how much of the cultivation of celebrity by toy theatres was accidental and how much was part of a planned strategy to advance the careers of certain actors. However, performers sometimes deliberately bought and distributed prints of themselves, as was the case with the actor and equestrian performer Andrew Ducrow. In an interview Henry Mayhew published in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1850, the toy-theatre publisher William West recalled how Ducrow had paid for a print to be made of himself so he could give away copies at a benefit performance (5). Even if not all performers were quite as savvy, they were still affected by the propagation of their images in certain roles. How actors and characters were displayed can also give us insight into how certain performances were received.

A useful case study of the interaction of performer celebrities and the toy theatre is Coleridge’s 1813 drama *Remorse*, which became the subject of a toy-theatre version the same year it premiered. The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane had burned down in 1809, and when the rebuilt theatre opened again in 1812, it was with a production of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The Drury Lane company continued to perform old favourites until 23 January 1813, when *Remorse* became the first major new work premiered at the theatre since it opened its doors again after the fire. The play went on to run for 20 performances, making it the most successful new verse tragedy on the London stage since Hannah More’s *Percy* in 1777. Key to the play’s success were two sensational scenes, which not coincidentally were reproduced on sheets published by Jameson.

Remorse, which was a revision of Coleridge’s unperformed 1797 drama *Osorio*, begins with the return to Grenada of the Spanish nobleman Don Alvar. In the opening scene, Don Alvar lays out a plan to inspire his murderous brother Don Ordonio with remorse for having ordered his assassination. Dressing in a Moorish costume, Don Alvar pretends to be a conjuror and eventually presents himself – unrecognized – to his brother. Robert William Elliston is dressed in this manner when he appears as Don Alvar in the upper-left corner of the first plate published by Jameson [Figure 8]. Opposite him is



Figure 8. First plate of Characters in the Popular Tragedy called *Remorse*, J. H. Jameson, etching, 23.0 x 18.5 cms. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Alexander Rae, dressed in the costume of Don Ordonio. Between them is the famous cavern scene at the beginning of Act IV, in which the villain murders his henchman Isidore, originally played by Vincent De Camp.

The cavern scene contains a stirring passage in which Don Ordonio relates a family legend that directly parallels the crime he himself is about to commit. He describes "One of our family" who "knew this place well" (4.1.98).¹⁴ According to Don Ordonio, this distant relative "was a man different from other men, / And he despis'd them, yet rever'd himself" (4.1.101-2). The description could just as easily apply to the man telling the tale as to the figure in the story. As Don Ordonio continues, the speaker seems to merge with the relative he is describing. When he gets to the part of the story where the bygone family member turned on his henchman, he himself draws his sword, and after a struggle, kills Isidore.

The first plate issued by Jameson prominently displays the show's starring actors along with this memorable scene in which Don Ordonio appears. It also shows in the lower right a woman who was a rising star in 1813, Sarah Smith, appearing as Donna Teresa. According to an anonymous critic in *The Theatrical Inquisitor*, by the time Smith appeared in *Remorse* she "had already obtained the applause of criticism" (128). Coleridge initially wanted Smith to play the role of the vengeful Alhadra, which he called "a part that would have suited her admirably" (*Letters* 426). Instead, however, she insisted on playing the innocent Donna Teresa, a choice she might later have regretted.

In *Remorse*, Don Ordonio wants to wed Donna Teresa, in spite of the fact she was once engaged to his brother, Don Alvar. He thus needs to convince the lady that her old lover is dead. Not realizing the conjuror is Don Alvar himself, Don Ordonio orders the magician to "make her certain of his death" (2.2.130). The conjuror is to perform a spectacular trick on an altar, and once "the smoke of the incense on the altar / Is pass'd" (2.2.144-45) he is to leave behind a portrait that Don Alvar used to hang around his neck, but that has been returned to Don Ordonio by Isidore. The disguised Don Alvar agrees, setting up the magnificent conjuring scene in Act III.¹⁵

The conjuring scene occurs in a Hall of Armory that is depicted on the second plate published by Jameson [Figure 9]. This scene was not only visually stunning for the audience, but aurally stunning as well. Michael Kelly composed a special piece of music to be played on a glass harmonica during the scene. The ethereal sound of the instrument impressed many reviewers, who found the conjuring scene one of the highlights of the drama. According to the review in *The Examiner*, the critic "never saw more interest



Figure 9. Second plate of Characters in the Popular Tragedy called *Remorse*, J. H. Jameson, etching, 23.0 x 18.5 cms. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

excited in a theatre than was expressed at the sorcery-scene in the third act" ("Theatrical Examiner" 74). The reviewer goes on to write: "The altar flaming in the distance, the solemn invocation, the pealing music of the mystic song, altogether produced a combination so awful, as nearly to overpower reality, and make one half believe the enchantment which delighted our senses".

The moment described by the reviewer is precisely the one depicted by Jameson on the second plate of characters. At the pivotal moment when the portrait is supposed to appear, Don Alvar (dressed in his Moorish conjuror costume depicted on the first plate) produces a painting showing his attempted assassination by Isidore. Both Don Ordonio and Lord Valdez (who is depicted on the first plate being played by Alexander Pope) look on as the painting appears, with fiery imagery just below it. According to the play's stage directions, this image is supposed to remain just "a few seconds" and it "is then hidden by ascending flames" (after 3.1.134). Though the scene only lasted seconds, it undoubtedly had an effect on the audience, as is evidenced not only by the reviews but by the detailed illustration on the plate of characters.

Missing from the scene is Donna Teresa, who exits shortly before the appearance of the painting. As noted on the first plate of characters, the role was originated by Smith, an actress many considered to be a suitable successor to Sarah Siddons. Though the convention for miniature theatres was to portray all adult actors as roughly the same size—as can be seen on other character plates—the image of Smith is downright diminutive. Not only is her character considerably smaller than all of the men, it is also smaller than the other woman in the series, Isidore's wife Alhadra (portrayed by Julia Glover). Keeping with convention, Alhadra is roughly the same size as the men, who themselves all appear as uniform in height regardless of what their actual statures might have been. While the Moorish character Zulimez is portrayed as shorter than the others, that appears to be in order to make room for his large hat. When one includes their hats, Zulimez and Lord Valdez come up to about the same height. What is more, Zulimez was a small part originated by a certain Mr. Crooke, an actor so minor that theatre historians aren't even sure of his first name. In spite of the fact that there is plenty of room on the sheet for Smith, a legitimate star in 1813, the artist keeps her image noticeably smaller than all the rest, with a fair amount of empty space above her head.

The reason for such a small image of Smith could lie in her disappointing performance of the role, which was remarked upon by reviewers. After the play opened, *The Morning Post* praised the depictions of several characters, but commented that Smith's role "does not rise to much above mediocrity" ("Drury-Lane" *Morning Post* 3). *The Times* generally praised the acting, but

attacked the epilogue of the play, which Coleridge wrote specifically for Smith. The reviewer claimed it seemed to be written for the purpose of determining "how far Miss Smith's popularity might be proof against her performance" and was "singularly lachrymose and lamentable" ("Drury-Lane" *Times* 3). The harshest criticism came from *The Examiner*, which commented: "Of Miss Smith we would rather say nothing" ("Theatrical Examiner" 74).

In contrast to the disappointment in Smith, reviewers were pleasantly surprised by the performance Glover gave as Alhadra. Though Glover began her career as a tragic actress, by 1813 she was known for her comedy, which might have made her an odd choice to play Alhadra. Coleridge had originally written the role for Siddons when he composed his first version of the play as *Osorio* in 1797.¹⁶ Though Glover was a very different sort of actress than audiences expected in the role, critics were enthusiastic about her performance. *The Times* claimed that Glover "exhibited some of the most subduing and striking powers of the art" ("Drury-Lane Theatre" *Times* 3). *The Examiner* went even further, expressing surprise that an actor "with a face comic in every feature, with a person which engages no interest, with a voice whose every tone is displeasing" should somehow "present to us one of the most impressive portraiture of strong passion that we ever recollect to have seen" ("Theatrical Examiner" 74).

The audience's reception of Glover's performance, as manifested by the critics, is reflected by her character's placement on the second character sheet printed by Jameson. Though Alhadra appears on the second sheet rather than the first, she is given pride of place there, located in the centre of the top row, directly above the illustration of the conjuring scene. Unlike the portrait of Smith, Glover's character is roughly the same height as that of all the men. Her stance is striking, and her arm is upraised as if she is reciting the speech Coleridge gives to her at the end of the play:

This arm should shake the Kingdoms of the World;
 The deep foundations of iniquity
 Should sink away, earth groaning from beneath them;
 The strong-holds of the cruel men should fall,
 Their Temples and their mountainous Towers should fall;
 Till Desolation seem'd a beautiful thing,
 And all that were and had the Spirit of Life,
 Sang a new song to her who had gone forth,
 Conquering and still to conquer!

(5.1.271-79)

The figure of Glover as Alhadra embodies the revolutionary “Spirit of Life” praised in Coleridge’s text. Furthermore, the attribution of the figure to that of “Mrs. Glover” reminded purchasers of the print of the specific performer who brought the role to life.

While Jameson’s sheets inherently provide a “miniature theatre” of sorts, some critics have argued that they were never intended to be used in a toy theatre. According to George Speaight, “The first sheets published by West, Jameson, and other early publishers were in no sense of the words toy theatre plays” because they were simply “sheets of the principal characters in very popular plays” (92). West’s catalogue for 1811 claims that the images were meant “purposely for Colouring” but does not mention cutting them out and using them for toy theatres. However, that same catalogue includes “Stage Fronts” of several theatres, “Scenes”, and “Setts of Wings” for a variety of plays. West’s listing of offerings for 1811 might have been more predictive than descriptive, since it also includes a “Stage Front of the New Theatre Royal Drury Lane” which did not open to the public until 1812. Still, by the end of 1811, publishers were at least stating their intention to provide all of the elements to build miniature theatricals, including not just characters, but scenery and printed proscenium arches as well.

But was this true of Jameson? Speaight claims that the majority of Jameson’s plays “consist of two or three sheets of principal characters, without any scenes, and it is obvious that they were designed as theatrical souvenirs” (40). Other researchers, including Gordon S. Armstrong, have pushed back against the “theatrical souvenirs” explanation for character plates. Also, while I have not been able to locate any extant scenery plates that Jameson printed for *Remorse*, the publisher did print a number of scenery plates the following year in 1814, including a generic “Wood Scene” complete with “Rock Wings” that could have been used for multiple plays, including *Remorse* [Figure 10]. This and other scenery plates issued by Jameson can be found in the Arthur Weyhe Toy Theatre Collection at the New York Public Library, so perhaps their remote location led the Britain-based Speaight to overlook them.¹⁷

Since we might never know for sure what the publisher of the figures from *Remorse* intended, a more relevant question might be whether the figures actually were cut out and used in miniature theatres, regardless of the publisher’s intention. There is evidence that characters from Jameson’s plates—and images of Glover in particular—were in fact cut out, likely in preparation for being used in a toy theatre. The British Museum contains an incomplete set of characters Jameson published from John Howard Payne’s

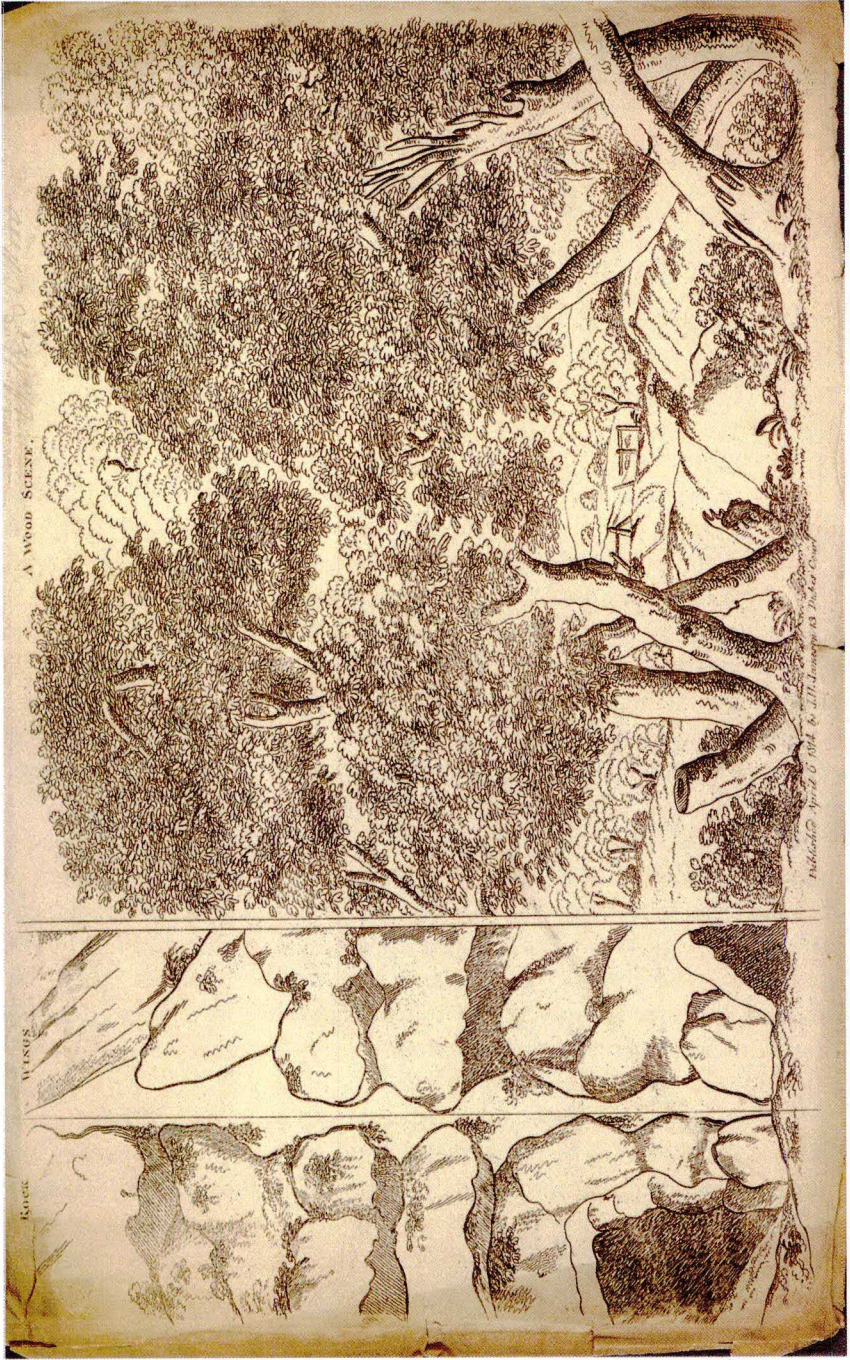


Figure 10. A Wood Scene, J. H. Jameson, print on paper. © The New York Public Library.

tragedy *Brutus, Or the Fall of Tarquin* [Figure 11]. The plate that depicts Glover in the role of Tullia is partially cut out, with the paper around the top of her head carefully cut away, as if the owner of the print started to cut out the character then stopped for some reason. No matter what Jameson's intent, it seems the publisher's prints were cut out at least some of the time, and little Julia Glovers graced miniature stages after the real actress took her bow at Drury Lane.

These miniature versions of actors like Glover, whether they were displayed on whole sheets or cut out, pasted to backings, and made to re-enact plays in toy theatres, served as a constant reminder of the performances that created a demand for miniature drama in the first place. As can be seen with the plates for *Remorse*, these plays in miniature reflected visually the performances as they were recorded in reviews of the period. When rising stars like Smith disappointed, their roles were downplayed by the publishers depicting them. When an unlikely heroine like Glover exceeded expectations, her image could be shown with the power and vigour that won her unexpected accolades. This reflection of the performance would then reinforce the memory of it in the purchaser of a theatrical print.

Through the toy theatre, the star power of actors extended beyond the original audience to new audiences of miniature theatricals who might never have seen the original performance. Speaight points out that authors including Robert Southey, Sir Walter Scott, Charles Lamb, and Charles Dickens all recorded seeing plays by Shakespeare and other serious dramatists at early ages, so children of the early nineteenth century might have been enacting plays they had actually seen (90). However, toy-theatre prints continued to be reissued, sometimes for decades after an original production. Glover, Smith, Elliston, Rae, and countless others continued to portray their roles both in paper prints and as miniature actors on the toy stage after they had ceased to tread the boards of the real one. Even when actors did not consciously use these images to their advantage, as Ducrow allegedly did, they still benefited from their use in toy theatres. Even now, at a distance of two hundred years, we can view these images and get a glimpse of the performances that moved audiences so long ago. While many authors link toy theatres with childhood nostalgia, their importance is far greater than just that. They reinforced celebrity through their iconography as actors' reputations rose and fell throughout the nineteenth century.

5



Figure 11. Characters from *Brutus, Or the Fall of Tarquin*, J. H. Jameson, etching. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Notes

¹ According to George Speaight, in the few cases where we have designs for sets of the period, the toy-theatre versions are “close, though not exact” in their resemblance to the original designs (57).

² Plain prints sometimes were priced for as little as a halfpenny, and coloured prints, while usually costing two pennies, could run as high as six for the largest scenes.

³ Oxenford recalls how in his childhood characters “were placed in slides, which were about four in number, and were slipped through grooves, cut into the stage” (68). Later, characters were placed in “tin stands to which long wires are attached” (68). Many of these instruments survive today, and some can be found in the theatre collection of Harvard University’s Houghton Library.

⁴ Speaight includes other nineteenth-century illustrations of toy-theatre performances, which similarly include mixed audiences of various ages and genders (99, 104).

⁵ This list, titled “West’s, Catalogue of Original Tragic, Fancy, & Comic Characters” can be found in the Prints and Drawings collection of the British Museum. The list is object reference number PPA 387217.

⁶ Though these two particular prints were published the same year, West and other toy-theatre publishers frequently reprinted nearly identical plates for years on end. The toy-theatre version refers to the play as “the new Tragedy of Bertram” in 1824, even though the play debuted at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1816. West printed a previous version in 1818 titled “Characters in Bertram” which showed the same figures but without any actor names and in a different order (British Museum object reference number PPA 386873).

⁷ While the practice of listing actors’ names was followed by several publishers and across a wide span of time, some of these publishers were simply reissuing earlier designs by other publishers. For instance, the character plates for *Valentine and Orson* that W. Love published in 1823 (New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Arthur Weyhe Toy Theatre Collection, box 8, folder 14) are nearly identical to plates West published in 1812 (British Museum object reference number PPA 382164), with the exception of the information identifying the publisher.

⁸ The author of *Korastikan* remains a mystery, but an anonymous review entitled “Royal Coburg Theatre” in *The Cornucopia; or, Literary & Dramatic Mirror* implies it was “by the author of Blackbeard”. John Cartwright Cross wrote a famous dramatization of the life of the pirate Blackbeard, but he appears to have died considerably earlier than the premiere of *Korastikan* in 1821.

⁹ In some cases, sheets with handwritten notes indicate proof sheets, where the publisher has written in new information to be added (or perhaps corrected, as in the case of the misspelled word “Dancer” here). However, other copies of this plate exist without the changes, indicating this might not be a proof sheet, but simply have had notes added to record the names of performers. The British Museum possesses

another set of plates, “Hodgson’s New Characters in Thalaba” (object reference number PPA 389921) depicting actors in Edward Fitzball’s adaptation of the Robert Southey poem *Thalaba the Destroyer*. This set includes not just hand-written notes listing the actors, but also more detailed descriptions of the characters, for instance noting that Abdalda is “a Dæmon, assuming various Characters” and Hasric is “a Persian chief”.

¹⁰ Joseph Glossop was the proprietor of the Royal Coburg Theatre—which is today known as the Old Vic—from its opening in 1818 until 1826, when it was leased to George Bothwell Davidge (Roberts 43).

¹¹ In 1886, toy-theatre enthusiast Ralph Thomas sold his extensive collection of prints to the British Museum, which has them to this day. Speaight writes that while Thomas reportedly asked for a hundred pounds for the collection, “he eventually accepted rather less” (165).

¹² When Dibdin’s melodrama was published in 1804, Bologna was listed as playing Agramant the Green Knight, but he is portrayed as Orson both in West’s 1812 print and in the nearly identical plate published by Love in 1823, both mentioned previously.

¹³ Wilson’s hypothesis that toy theatres might have come out of memorabilia intended for adults was rejected by Gordon S. Armstrong. After examining the Harvard Theatre Collection, Armstrong concluded that the British “toy theatre originated in an orderly, sequential, economic expansion of an existing market for children that predates the Regency Period by more than a decade” (121). Sheets of illustrations for children published in the eighteenth century resemble toy-theatre prints in certain ways, but after examining the Harvard Theatre Collection myself, as well as the toy-theatre collections at the British Museum, New York Public Library, and elsewhere, I question whether the evolution of the toy theatre was as orderly and sequential as Armstrong posits. Rather, I argue that the toy theatre developed through trial and error out of a variety of types of prints, including those meant for display and those meant for performance, as well as those intended for adults and those intended for children, with a large number of these prints perhaps inhabiting a grey area somewhere in the middle.

¹⁴ All act, scene, and line numbers for *Remorse* come from the printed version of the play rather than the promptbook copies or the manuscript submitted to the censor’s office, all of which have significant variations.

¹⁵ The conjuring scene is Act III, scene 1 in the printed text, but in performance it was preceded by a brief scene with the head of the Inquisition, making it Act III, scene 2 when the play was performed at Drury Lane. This is also how it is identified on the plate by Jameson.

¹⁶ Ve-Yin Tee discusses how Coleridge crafted the role expressly for Siddons (127).

¹⁷ Though the New York Public Library has an extensive collection of scenery published by Jameson, the British Museum possesses its own scenery plates issued by that publisher as well, including an 1815 print of a backdrop and wings for the last scene of *The Forest of Bondy*, William Barrymore’s adaptation of René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt’s melodrama *The Dog of Montargis*.

Works Cited

- Archer, William. "The Drama in Pasteboard." *The Art Journal* (1887): 105-08 and 141-44.
- Armstrong, Gordon S. "Art, Folly, and the Bright Eyes of Children: The Origins of Regency Toy Theatre Reevaluated." *Theatre Survey* 26.2 (Nov. 1985): 121-142.
- Arthur, Theo. "The Toy Theatre." *The Era Almanack and Annual* (1891): 43-46.
- Ashton, John. *Varia*. Ward & Downey, Ltd., 1894.
- "Brutus, Or the Fall of Tarquin." Print. J.H. Jameson, 1818. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 397938.
- "Characters in Bertram." Print. W. West, 1818. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 386873.
- "Characters in the Popular Tragedy called REMORSE In 2 Plates." Print. J.H. Jameson, 1813. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 398090.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 3. Edited by Earl Leslie Griggs. Clarendon Press, 1959.
- — —. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works III, Plays*. Edited by J.C.C. Mays. Princeton UP, 2001.
- Dibdin, Thomas. *Valentine and Orson*. Barker and Son, 1804.
- Draper, Edward. "Characters and Scenes." *The Savage-Club Papers for 1868*. Ed. Andrew Halliday. London: Tinsley Brothers, 1868. pp. 178-185.
- "Drury-Lane Theatre." *The Morning Post*. 25 January 1813. p. 3.
- "Drury-Lane Theatre." *The Times*. 25 January 1813. p. 3.
- "Hodgson's New Characters in Thalaba." Print. Hodgson & Co., n.d. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 389921.
- "Last Scene in the Forest of Bondy." Print. J.H. Jameson, 1815. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 398280.
- Mayhew, Henry (credited as "special correspondent"). "Labour and the Poor, Letter XXXVIII." *The Morning Chronicle*. 25 February 1850, pp. 5-6.
- "Mr. Cobham as Wallace the Hero of Scotland." Decorated print. n.d. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 398889.
- Oxenford, John. "The Toy Theatre." *The Era Almanack and Annual* (1871): 67-68.
- Pollock, Benjamin. Toy theatre with characters and scenes for *The Silver Palace*. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Museum number E.2449-1924.
- "Principal Characters in the Grand Melo Drama of Valentine and Orson as Performed at the Surry Theatre in Four Plates." Print. W. West, 1812. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 382164.
- "Principal Characters in the Grand Melo Drama of Valentine and Orson as Performed at the Surry Theatre in Four Plates." Print. Love, 1823. New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Arthur Weyhe Toy Theatre Collection, box 8, folder 14.
- "The principal Characters in the new Tragedy Bertram In 3 Plates." Print. W. West, 1824. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 381731.
- Roberts, Peter. *The Old Vic Story: A Nation's Theatre 1818-1976*. W.H. Allen, 1976.
- "Royal Coburg Theatre." *The Cornucopia; or, Literary & Dramatic Mirror* 1.10 (June 1821): 91.

- Shepherd, Fred. "*Black-Eyed Susan*. The Model Theatre, No. 6." H.G. Clarke & Co., n.d. New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Arthur Weyhe Toy Theatre Collection, box 10.
- Speaight, George. *The History of the English Toy Theatre*. Studio Vista, 1969.
- Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Memoirs and Portraits*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895.
- Tee, Ve-Yin. *Coleridge, Revision and Romanticism: After the Revolution, 1793-1818*. Continuum, 2009.
- Terry, Ellen. "Miss Ellen Terry and the Pollock Theatre." *The Mask* 5.1 (July 1912): 3.
- "Theatrical Examiner." *The Examiner*. 31 January 1813. pp. 73-74.
- The Theatrical Inquisitor, and Monthly Mirror*, vol. 2. William Molineux, 1813.
- Tibbits, Charles J. "What Are Tinsel Pictures?" *The London Magazine* 11.65 (Dec. 1903): 604-08.
- Turner, Godfrey. "A Penny Plain: Twopence Coloured." *The Theatre* 8 (Oct. 1886): 177-82.
- "West's, Catalogue of Original Tragic, Fancy, & Comic Characters." Print. W. West, 24 Nov., 1811. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 387217.
- "West's Characters in the New Grand Spectacle called Korastikan, Prince of Assassins! As performed with Unbounded Applause at the Royal Coburg Theatre, In 6 Plates." Print. West, 1821. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 382003.
- "West's Characters in The Vampire." Print. W. West, 1820. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 382166.
- "West's Theatrical Portraits, No. 78: Mr. Pope as St. Aldobrand in Bertram." Print. W. West, 1824. British Museum, Object reference number PPA 383299.
- Wilson, A. E. *Penny Plain, Two Pence Coloured: A History of the Juvenile Drama*. George G. Harrap & Co., 1932.
- "A Wood Scene." Print. J.H. Jameson, 6 April, 1814. New York Public Library, Billy Rose Theatre Division, Arthur Weyhe Toy Theatre Collection, box 8, folder 13.

Copyright of Theatre Notebook is the property of Society for Theatre Research and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.