

ABSTRACT

The Power of Illusion

In this article, I examine how two English theatrical phenomena used stage technology to produce illusions for certain political ends. The two phenomena of interest are the court masque of the early 1600s and the illegitimate genres of the late Georgian London theatre. My focus will be on the latter, through an examination of the pantomime *The Picture of Paris* – opening at Covent Garden in 1790.

Whereas a political reading of the court masque is well established in theatre studies, the same cannot be said regarding a political understanding of the theatre culture of the late Georgian period. Furthermore, those who have focused on the political aspects of this theatre culture have not been interested in the role played by stage technology. This is where this article aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

Although the court masques and the illegitimate genres used much of the same stage technology, they differed in how they used it and to what political ends.

Whereas the masque could be understood as a conservative statement of royal powers, asserting their right to rule, the illegitimate genres approached the governing powers and policies in a more subversive manner.

Late Georgian cultural politics, censoring the spoken word on stage and patenting the performance of tragedy and comedy, gave rise to new theatrical genres where visual aspects – by legal necessity – took centre stage. The resulting spectacular theatre of action and visual image was exempt from government censorship, making possible a special kind of political freedom of expression in these genres. It was during performance, through their use of dumb shows, setting, stage machinery and special effects that government criticism could unfold within these genres.

Keywords: stage technology, court masque, late Georgian pantomime.

BIOGRAPHY

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The Power of Illusion

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In theatre history, the use of stage technology has frequently been associated with spectacle, which again has been connected with courtly indulgence and later on with cheap thrills.¹ However, stage technology has also been used to produce powerful illusions to political ends. In the following, I will delve into the power of illusion as seen in two instances of theatre history. The first phenomenon of interest is the court masques of James I and Charles I – the Jacobean and Caroline masques – a theatrical expression frequently associated with courtly indulgence. The second phenomenon of interest is the so-called illegitimate genres of the late Georgian London theatre, genres frequently associated with cheap thrills.² My focus will be on the latter.

In this article, I will examine how two theatrical phenomena used stage technology to produce illusions for political ends.³ The renaissance masque will be used as a baseline for how a theatrical phenomenon produced spectacular illusions to express royal power by the use of sophisticated stage technology. Inspired by this political reading of the masque, I will extrapolate a similar relationship between technology, stage illusion and political expressions in the illegitimate genres of the late Georgian theatre. These were genres that by legal necessity were restricted to other modes of expression than the spoken word. In order to investigate what kind of illusions that could be produced here, and to what political ends, I will examine the pantomime *The Picture of Paris* – opening at Covent Garden in 1790.

Whereas a political reading of the court masque is well established in theatre studies, the same cannot be said regarding a political understanding of the late Georgian theatre culture. In 2000, Jane Moody reinvestigated the emergence of this theatre culture in a study offering new understandings of the cultural politics of Georgian times as well as a critique of the position theatre has been given in studies of Romanticism.⁴ Furthermore, in the 1990s several historians and literary scholars interested in the long eighteenth century began exploring the radical political culture of Georgian England and its relationship with popular theatre. David Worrall, in two publications from 2006 and 2007, embeds this theatre culture within its political context of censorship.⁵ Both Moody and Worrall’s arguments and examples have contributed to my understanding of these genres as having a political content.

However, none of the scholars mentioned has focused on stage technology’s role in the production of stage illusions for political ends. This is where this article aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge. By focusing on stage technology and stage illusion, I approach theatre history as a history of a visual medium. With the aim of examining how illusions have been used for certain political ends, I approach theatre performances as being cultural expressions embedded in the social and political environment in which they occur.⁶

THE ILLUSIONS AND STAGE TECHNOLOGY OF JACOBAN AND CAROLINE COURT MASQUES

In *The illusion of power* (1975), Stephen Orgel analysed the English renaissance masque as political art and aestheticized politics and found that these court theatricals were perceived as statements of royal power.⁷ According to Orgel, the masques projected an image of how the monarch understood his own place and power in the world through their use of lighting equipment and stage machinery: "The marvels of stagecraft – the ability to overcome gravity, control the natural world, [...] are the supreme expression of Renaissance kingship."⁸

The staging of Jacobean and Caroline masques were influenced by contemporary, continental theatrical developments aimed at harnessing the rules of perspective – i.e. how to create an illusion of three-dimensional objects on a flat surface – to theatrical ends. Beginning in Italy in the fifteenth century, perspective settings were used to establish beautiful backgrounds to performances.⁹ By the mid-sixteenth century, scenic change had become the issue – by the use of diverse machinery operating clouds, trapdoors and waves.¹⁰ In addition the scenery itself became changeable.

The Jacobean and Caroline court masques were mainly performed at Whitehall Palace, in the hall of the Banqueting House. The hall had no permanent stage as it was a multi-purpose room and the staging of a masque happened only once a year during James I's reign – twice under his successor's. Prior to their reign, the masques had taken place on the floor of whichever room it was performed in – with the *décor* scattered around the room in mansion-like structures.¹¹ As Inigo Jones became the chief designer of English court masques from 1605 onwards this was to change. Jones was well informed regarding the various Italian solutions to produce the special effects and rapid changes of scene that was in demand. With Jones in charge, a stage was erected for the occasion at the very end of the hall and all the scenery was placed upon it – together with machinery for special effects.¹² The floor between the stage and the audience was now freed up for the all-important final dance, which involved players and audience members alike.

Orgel points out that when perspective settings

were introduced in England in 1605, they were used *only* at court or with a monarch present.¹³ Why were these settings considered so exclusively suitable at court? The perspective settings made the monarch the centre of the theatrical experience in a new way, as there was only one place in the auditorium from which the illusion achieved its full effect – and that was where the king sat.¹⁴ Thus the king was the only one seeing the whole picture from its proper perspective. Roy Strong finds it no coincidence that the introduction of perspective scenery at court happened as the theory of the Divine Right of Kings was introduced: "Perspective made the ruler the emblematic and ethical centre of every court production and emphasised the hierarchical gradations of court life."¹⁵

Orgel also points out that the new scenery and machinery were introduced in a form that at the time was not perceived as a kind of drama. The masque was rather perceived as a mode of expression essential to the court, as "their allegories gave a higher meaning to the realities of politics and power, their fictions created heroic roles for the leaders of society".¹⁶ A central notion in Renaissance ideas of kingship was the sovereign as a role model. The image of the monarch was crucial and the appearance of virtue was of the essence, whether the semblance coincided with the inner reality of the sovereign was of less importance.¹⁷ Thus the king would be allegorized as someone with control and power, and his allegorical embodiment on stage had to appear virtuous.

Still, the masques were not compliments offered to the monarch, but rather direct political assertions made by him.¹⁸ When the god Mercury restored nature by his powers in *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court* (1615) it was also a statement on James I's powers, as he perceived them. A vision of nature controlled by the human intellect was a central way of expressing the sovereign's place in the Renaissance universe.¹⁹ Thus the stage machinery producing special effects, such as thunder and lightning, would be put to good use so the allegorical royal powers could be displayed, for instance, in making a storm appear or disappear on command. The court festivals of James I, Charles I and other Renaissance rulers, in this way, became spectacles

of state and assertions of power, producing tableaux "in which the harmonious structure of the cosmos was conjured up as a mirror of the absolutist state and extended outwards to embrace its onlooking audience through dance".²⁰

THE ILLEGITIMATE GENRES OF THE LATE GEORGIAN LONDON THEATRE: SPECTACULAR AND POLITICAL

The court masques were dependant on sophisticated stage technology for creating their illusions of power, a dependency that frequently has been understood as courtly indulgence. As shown above, it would be a limiting perception of the Renaissance court masque if it were understood merely as such. The same, limited perception could be the result regarding the illegitimate genres of the late Georgian London theatre.²¹ The stage technology employed in these genres is often understood as merely producing cheap thrills for an illiterate audience – resulting in popular entertainment rather than high, theatrical art.²² However, in a period with strong censorship of dramatic texts, the subversive, political potential of these visually explicit genres has tended to be overlooked. In the following, I will attempt a more rounded investigation of these genres' use of stage technology, with a special interest in how it was used to create illusions for political ends. I will then focus on one pantomime production, in order to look more specifically at how illusions could be produced for political ends within an illegitimate genre. However, some historical context is needed in order to better understand what these genres were and how they came about.

The Licensing Act of 1737 regulated theatre activity in Britain by limiting theatre performances – understood as spoken drama – to the provincial Royal Theatres, and to two patented theatres in Westminster, London. In addition, it introduced a system for dramatic censorship that would last until 1968. According to Jane Moody, there were both moral and political reasons behind this ambition to control the theatre, as "Late Georgian culture was a period marked by profound anxieties about theatre as a potential site of political excitement and social disorder".²³ Limiting the number of theatres and the

number of performances through the Act, as well as controlling the content of the performances, legally addressed these anxieties and seemingly gave the government control over a volatile artistic medium.

As the Licensing Act was concerned with spoken drama, and primarily with Westminster, it contained loopholes. Outside Westminster, London theatres could, from 1752 onwards, operate on yearly licenses gained from local magistrates.²⁴ The performance of spoken drama was still limited to the patent houses by law. Consequently legitimate dramatic productions of tragedy and comedy were not an option for these non-patented theatres, which thus were restricted to other modes of expression. The burlesque and the pantomime quickly became the dominating genres here, and as with all illegitimate genres they were reliant on music, song and mime.²⁵

This speechless drama resulted in a spectacular theatre of action and visual image, much aided by stage technology. In addition to mime and music, poses and placards, the non-patented theatres availed themselves of the current stage technology in order to present their repertoire. To a certain extent, the stage technology of the Georgian theatre was a continuation of what was imported to the British Isles by Inigo Jones. The perspective settings, changeable scenery and machinery producing special effects: all the stage technology of court theatricals was by this time acquired by the public theatre. However, the stage technology employed in the illegitimate genres was not absolutely identical to, nor used in the same manner as it had been used in court masques.

The court masques and the illegitimate genres differed in how machinery and scenery was used in order to establish the setting of the play. A reason for this was that the aim of stage illusion began to change from around 1760 when "the passion for the real and the actual was taking the place of delight in the theatrically splendid".²⁶ Whereas the court masques largely revelled in mythical and allegorical *dramatis loci* the illegitimate genres would over time promote the use of familiar locations from near and far as an upsurge in tourism increased the public's awareness of the characteristics of different places.²⁷ The growing interest in tourism, as well as in landscape and archaeology, found an outlet in the the-

atre.²⁸ This meant that the choice of location, and the audiences' recognition of this location, could be employed to convey additional layers of meaning in performance. The stage setting was no longer to be considered a generic background to the plot; the stage picture might instead establish a "synergy between the scenic representation and the characters of the dramatic situation".²⁹

One way for this speechless theatre to communicate how a character was feeling on stage, other than by placards, poses or movement was by externalizing his or her sentiments. The interest in the relationship between human emotion and natural phenomena began a long tradition of what can be termed as *theatrical meteorology* – where staged thunderstorms, avalanches and erupting volcanoes equalled the mental state of the character in question.³⁰ This practice would survive far beyond Georgian times and illegitimate genres.

Theatrical meteorology had been employed differently in the court masques. Here, nature, in all its temperaments, was presented as an external force under royal control. In the illegitimate genres, nature was represented as an extension of the interior of the character in question. The stage technology, and more specifically the arsenal of special effects, is thus in Georgian times no longer a force wielded by the powers that be. So, who wielded these transformative powers in late Georgian pantomime?

THE POLITICAL FREEDOM OF PANTOMIME – THE PICTURE OF PARIS

The English pantomime was a genre older than the Licensing Act. When John Rich inherited the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields from his father in 1714, he immediately began developing a form of entertainment based on the *commedia dell'arte*.³¹ The resulting genre was later classified as an illegitimate one by the Licensing Act, much to the joy of the non-patented theatres as pantomime's mix of "scenic spectacle, mechanical trickery and acrobatic virtuosity invariable attracted large and profitable houses".³² It was, however, not a genre exclusively theirs as the profitable genre was performed in licensed theatres as well.

One of Rich's inventions was a particularly English Harlequin: "a silent figure of wit and magic who performed picturesque transformations in which palaces and temples turned into huts and cottages, men and women into wheel barrows".³³ The magical and transformative power of Harlequin was largely situated in his slapstick, i.e. a wooden bat, which was used to bring about alterations of the stage. These transformations, so essential to the English pantomime, relied on a technology and technique different to the one mentioned so far in this article. Harlequin would hit the scenery with his bat and change the scene by knocking down hinged flaps.³⁴ As these flaps fell down, the motif on the scenery where the flaps were placed would change and transform the whole stage picture with it. A woodland scene could instantly become the outside of an inn, for instance, due to ingenious paintwork on and under the flaps in question. In a German theatre encyclopaedia from 1841, a similar technique for changing scenery is referred to as *Klap-(en)-theater* – "flap-theatre". This is explained as consisting of a painted cloth stretched over a frame, with a crosswise seam on each motif. A string would pull down the uppermost half of this cloth, the flap, and a new motif would appear.³⁵ This is quite similar to how changes of scene were brought about in the English pantomime.

The Licensing Act attributed the authority of licensing and censoring all kinds of plays to the Office of the Lord Chamberlain by their Examiner of Plays, but how could censorship be enforced upon performances for which no text existed?³⁶ Government control came up short against the illegitimate genres. The speechless dramaturgy of these genres thus made possible a special kind of political freedom. As an example of what kind of political freedom that was open to these genres, I will look at the pantomime *The Picture of Paris*, opening at Covent Garden on 20 December 1790. Charles Bonnor and Robert Merry had written the piece, while William Shield provided the music.

On 11 December 1790 the Examiner of Plays, John Larpent, dated his copy of the script.³⁷ As only text was requisite for inspection, the pantomime action was omitted from his copy.³⁸ Thus dumb show,

settings and stage machinery could be used to express sentiments that would have been censored if put into words.

The play given the Examiner seems quite harmless. David Worrall sums up its plot: after the dissolution of religious houses in France, an English gentleman seeks his beloved who has been put out of his reach by her family making her join a nunnery. Now that the monasteries are dissolved, he is eager to find her and secure her.³⁹ What could possibly be politically charged about this story of two lovers?

There are huge differences between Larpent's copy and the play as it appears in print.⁴⁰ Worrall finds that the silent pantomime represented the aftermath of the French Revolution of 1789 in ways that Larpent could not have imagined based on the copy given to him.⁴¹ He concludes that Larpent only got the sub-plot and that under these conditions of censorship pantomime might be understood as "one of the most forward means of staging political commentary".⁴² What political commentary was staged in this pantomime? What was the main plot?

The full title of the play is *The Picture of Paris. Taken in July 1790*. On 14 July 1790, the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille was celebrated on Champ de Mars, outside Paris. The event, *Fête de la Fédération*, involved a meeting of the National Assembly at which the King swore allegiance to the Constitution. This celebration of the constitutional monarchy was witnessed by hordes of Parisians, by Church and military dignitaries as well as many foreign envoys. Now the production of a pantomime gave British audiences a chance to witness the event as well, as the bulk of the three printed versions of the play here discussed revolve around the preparations for and proceedings of this celebration.⁴³

The playbill printed in *The Times* at the day of the première, promised the audience an exact representation of the grand procession to the Champ de Mars.⁴⁴ The pantomime was to culminate with a faithful representation of the ceremony where the King swore loyalty to the new, short-lived constitution.⁴⁵ That the audience of the play perceived this ceremony as the core of the play and perceived it politically, even subversive, is reflected in newspapers of the day. King George III's visit to the performance was, for instance, chronicled in newspa-

pers such as *The Times*, and "[t]he representation of a monarch as merely the delegate of the National Assembly did not, according to 'The Times' at least, pass muster with George III's idea of his relationship to Parliament".⁴⁶

According to the stage directions, much of the play unfolds at Champ de Mars. This location is presented from different angles during the play. We are first given a partial view of this location.⁴⁷ Later, there is a scene showing a perspective view of the place – taken from the village opposite – and as the play approaches its conclusion, the stage picture displays the triumphal arch erected at the entrance to the Champ de Mars.⁴⁸ Through this arch, there then appears a procession and a re-enactment of the actual event ensues.⁴⁹

It is not only the scenes with views of Champ de Mars, which display specific locations in this play. Just within the first ten pages, the stage directions mention five Parisian locations. It seems to me that the success of the pantomime and its political message hinged on the audiences' ability to recognize the stage pictures displayed on stage as the real life locations they purported to be.

The question then arises as to how this play was staged, as it was quite common at the time to use stock scenery. If these were used in this production as well, it would work against any recognition of the stage pictures as Parisian locations.

The fourth edition of the printed play lists fourteen scenes painted specifically for the production.⁵⁰ The majority of these sets of scenery were also listed on the playbill – at least for the first nine performances.⁵¹ Among the custom made sets of scenery listed are the three scenes displaying Champ de Mars from different points of view. The accuracy regarding the settings was also advertised in advance of the première. *The Public Advisor* communicated on 16 December 1790, that Covent Garden on the following Monday would produce a new pantomime – *The Picture of Paris*, which had been long in preparation and whose scenery was made "from Drawings taken on the spot".⁵² A similar comment was made in a report from the première, published in the January edition of *The Gentleman's Magazine* 1791, which also found that the piece was "enriched with some of the most excellent scenery, that, per-

haps, ever adorned a stage".⁵³ The magazine then continued to comment on the accuracy of the scenery and singled out some of the scenes for particular commendation.⁵⁴

The plot presented to the Examiner of Plays revolved around a gentleman seeking his beloved ex-nun. In the three printed versions of the play that are available to me, this is barely mentioned.⁵⁵ If there is another plot besides the preparations for and arrangement of the *Fête de la Federation* in the printed plays, it is rather one concerning Harlequin and Columbine.

The printed plays all open in a Marquis's Hall where Harlequin – a Silversmith – and some workmen execute the decree regarding the disuse of nobility badges and armorial bearings. Here, he meets the Marquis' daughter, Columbine.⁵⁶ We meet the two of them again in the grand Municipality Chambers of the Hotel de Ville where Columbine successfully entreats Harlequin to use his transforming powers.

In two of the printed versions, we next meet Harlequin in a scene giving a view of a grand assembly with its members in debate and visitors in several galleries. The location is then transformed by Harlequin's powers.⁵⁷ In the third version of the script, we instead reconvene with Harlequin inside a Coffee Room as he rescues Columbine "by fixing the attention of her Pursuers to a change in the Fireplace, over which Harlequin leaps in order to avoid being himself taken".⁵⁸ In two of the three versions, we meet Harlequin one last time in Champ de Mars. Here he is reunited with the Marquis, who bestows Columbine to him.⁵⁹

Whereas previous scholarship, such as Jon Mee (2008) and David Worral (2007), has discussed the subversive potential of *The Picture of Paris* by way of its politically risqué pantomime re-enactment of the *Fête de la Federation*, other aspects of the pantomime have not been discussed in this light. I will in the following argue that a political reading may also apply to Harlequin's transformative powers.

During the first instance where Harlequin exerts his special powers, on Columbine's request, he transforms three magistrates "into emblematical Figures of Justice, Mercy and Truth".⁶⁰ Some ple-

beian women have just threatened the magistrates' lives because they did not pass the death sentence upon a person whom these women fiercely resented. It is not stated whom this is, but from what follows it seems most likely to have been Columbine and/or her father. Later in the play, Harlequin changes the grand assembly, where he all of a sudden is to be found, into "THE TEMPLE OF CONCORD".⁶¹ Here the first act comes to a conclusion with a song and dance, and the "Goddess seated on her Throne receives the offerings of her attendant Votaries".⁶²

Whereas the first transformation could be understood as a stage in Harlequin's courtship of Columbine, the second cannot. A political reading of the first transformation could be to the effect of showing that even after a revolution, truth, justice and mercy are still present and in force.⁶³ The second transformation could be understood as accentuating the current governance of France as a desirable form of governance, providing concord rather than strife. These positive renditions of current affairs in France were not necessarily in accord with the British official response to the Revolution. Jon Mee points out that the British government's alarm at the spread of French ideas meant that the play was unusual in representing French events so directly.⁶⁴

I find it interesting that it is Harlequin who is the one wielding these transformative powers. Traditionally in *commedia dell'arte*, Harlequin and Columbine are both servants. In the English pantomime, these two characters had become "the innocent lovers so strangely evolved from the Bergamask clown and the wanton Colombina".⁶⁵ In this transformation, Columbine became the master's daughter, here even a noblewoman. She is still pursued by Harlequin, here an artisan, whom she prefers to her socially more equal suitors. When the figure invested with the power to transform locations and command nature is of Harlequin's character, a common citizen mastering the universe, the resulting subversive potential of this character should be subjected to a more minute, political analysis of his transformative powers than has been the case so far.⁶⁶ In the court masque it was the king, or his allegorical embodiment on stage, who wielded these powers. In the English pantomime, it was Harlequin. The

fact that on-stage realities were commanded and changed by a citizen rather than a king, in a play celebrating the French Revolution, might have been a point not lost on the spectators of *The Picture of Paris*.

THE ILLUSION OF POWER – THE POWER OF ILLUSION

In this article, I have examined how two theatrical phenomena used stage technology to produce illusions to certain political ends, focusing on the late Georgian pantomime. Based on my argument, I claim that the illegitimate genres of the late Georgian London theatre, just as the Renaissance court masques, relied on the use of technology to project their worldview. It was in performance, through the use of, for instance, special effects, that the possibility for government criticism unfolded – and also as it was Harlequin, rather than a royal representative, that controlled the cosmos of the play.

The spectacular, illegitimate forms "invested that which is seen and made visible with a moral power which far outweighed that of words".⁶⁷ This power could be used to subversive political ends, just as the masques in their time had employed the same power for their purposes. The illusions produced by stage technology in these two instances of theatre history were thus used to opposite political ends.

The illegitimate genres of late Georgian London have been understood as less interesting objects for theatre historical study than the legitimate ones, allegedly due to the poor literary quality of the plays as well as due to their reliance on spectacle. The genre's reliance on spectacle has often been blamed on the illiterate urban working class, but "delight and concern for the spectacular and the pictorial have much deeper roots which cuts across the classes in which the theatre played its traditional leading and following role".⁶⁸ That the visual spectacle was of interest beyond the urban working class is demonstrated by the patent theatres' eagerness to purloin any technological developments from the illegitimate genres and produce spectacular entertainments for their own audiences. The resulting "appropriation of cultural objects by different social groups complicates and indeed undermines any dichotomy between

elite and popular cultures".⁶⁹

The Picture of Paris, for instance, seems to have been a popular addition to the repertoire of Covent Garden. *The Gentleman's Magazine* printed a theatrical register for performances given at the theatre in January 1791 and, according to this, the pantomime was on the playbill for 21 out of 26 performance nights that month.⁷⁰ The illegitimate genre was a great success with the audiences of the patented theatre.

A reassessment of the late Georgian theatre should address the issue of contemporary evaluation regarding the quality of the illegitimate genres as well. Much of the criticism launched at the illegitimate theatre culture within the Georgian era transposed the reviewers' ideological objections to the political and moral content of plays into aesthetic flaws.⁷¹ As Moody points out, the period was "marked by profound anxieties about theatre as a potential site of political excitement and social disorder".⁷² The newspapers consequently scrutinized the political loyalty and moral integrity of plays presented on stage. The reviewers, some of them in government pay, feared a complete disintegration of the status quo, as had happened in France, and were keen to disarm and marginalize views that they found troubling. Reviewers thus reframed works of art whose content disagreed with government policies as poor art, making a potentially political genre harmless and worthless.

Subsequent theatre criticism has built on the period's assessment of these genres, overlooking the reviewers' political motivations for their assessment. An approach to the illegitimate genres through a technological, visual, spectacular focus on theatre history and an understanding of theatre cultures as embedded in the social and political environment of which it occurs opens up for a re-reading of a theatrical era and a reassessment of the role played by stage technology in enabling theatres to produce illusions of power.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Christopher Baugh, *Theatre, Performance and Technology*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2005, p. 7. That Aristotle found spectacle – i.e. *opsis*, to be the least important factor in a tragedy has been a contributing factor to how spectacle has been discussed in theatre and literary studies (see Tor Trolie, “Scenografiens plass i forståelsen av det moderne teater: Opsis som analytisk begrep” in *Den teatrale illusion*, Kari Gaarder Losnedahl, ed., Bergen Museum, Bergen, p. 78).
- 2 I will explain the historical context of these genres later in the article.
- 3 By stage technology I will, in this article, refer to machinery and scenery used to establish and change the setting on stage as well as the use of machinery to produce special effects. The machinery and scenery are technologies in as much as they are results of the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, the knowledge being such as the harnessing of the rules of perspective to theatrical ends. The focus of the article is however not on the technical details of the technology in question, but rather on how the stage pictures and special effects produced by the current stage technology fabricated illusions for certain political ends. I am thus more interested in the output of stage technologies, the illusions, than in the technology itself.
- 4 Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000.
- 5 See David Worrall, *Theatrical Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006; David Worrall, *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality, 1787–1832*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2007.
- 6 For more on this approach to history, see William H. Sewell, “The concept(s) of culture” in *Beyond the cultural turn*, Victoria E. Bonnell, Lynn Hunt, eds., University of California Press, Berkeley 1999.
- 7 Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1975, p. 45.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- 9 As Sebastian Serlio would point out in *Architettura* (1545), the maximum effect of a perspective setting was achieved by using gradually diminishing sets towards the back of the stage – and the stage itself should be made with an increasingly sloping angle (Sebastian Serlio, “The Stage” in *The Renaissance Stage*, Barnhard Hewitt, ed., University of Miami Press, Coral Gables Florida 1958, p. 25).
- 10 Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre*, 5th ed., Harrap, London 1966, p. 84.
- 11 Oscar Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 6th ed., Allyn and Bacon, Boston 1991, p. 184.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 184–5.
- 13 Orgel, op. cit., p. 10.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 15 Roy Strong, *Art and Power*, The Boydell Press, Suffolk 1984, p. 156.
- 16 Orgel, op. cit., p. 38.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 20 Strong, op. cit., p. 43.
- 21 The illegitimate genres, found their shape due to legal necessity. They all had to avoid vocalization, as this was not permitted them. Worrall discusses all the resulting genres as burlettas, as musical dramas, and points out that any play staged outside the patent theatres had to be a burletta in order to legally be performed (see Worrall, op. cit., 2007, p. 20). Other genres that are discussed as illegitimate ones are pantomime, *opéra comique* vaudeville, the *feerie/extravaganza* and melodrama. Plays presented within these genres could also be presented at patented theaters, and were then free to use the spoken word. Whereas pantomime was founded on the *commedia dell'arte*, the other forms evolved from other influences. I will here focus on the pantomime.
- 22 See for instance George Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre, 1792–1914*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1967, p. 31.
- 23 Moody, op. cit., p. 244.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 17. This was due to the Disorderly Houses Act of 1752, which meant that places of entertainment in Westminster and within twenty miles of there were required to obtain a licence.
- 25 The illegitimate genres should thus not be understood as illegal ones, but rather as “natural children” – born as a result of the Georgian theatre legislation.
- 26 Nicoll, op. cit., 1966, p. 200.
- 27 Christopher Baugh, “Shakespeare and the Rhetoric of Scenography 1770–1825” in *Shakespeare in Stages*, Christine Dymkowski, ed., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 193.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 194.
- 30 Christopher Baugh, “Philippe James de Louthembourg and the early pictorial theatre: some aspects of its cultural context” in *Themes in Drama*, vol. 9: *The Theatrical Space*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987, p. 114.
- 31 Moody, op. cit., p. 210.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 211.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 210–1.
- 34 See <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/e/early-pantomime/>
- 35 H. Barthels and P. I. Düringer, *Theater-Lexikon*, Otto Wigand, Leipzig 1841, p. 292.
- 36 Moody, op. cit., p. 18.
- 37 *The Catalogue of John Larpent Plays*, MS886, at <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf1h4n985/dsc/?query=The%20Picture%20of%20Paris;dsc.position=1#hitNum1>. The Larpent Plays are in the keep of Huntington Library in California.
- 38 Worrall, op. cit., 2007, p. 53.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- 40 According to Worrall, Larpent’s script consists of the songs plus a scene summarized in two brief paragraphs (*ibid.*, p. 53). The three, printed versions of the play that I will discuss in this article are longer. They are not the only ones ever published, but they are the ones currently available to me via the Eighteenth Century Collections Online.
- 41 Worrall, op. cit., 2006, p. 27.
- 42 Worrall, op. cit., 2007, p. 53.
- 43 See Charles Bonnor and Robert Merry, T. Cadell, London 1790a, 1790b, 1790c. Two of the versions that I discuss are titled: *Airs, duets, and choruses, arrangement of scenery, and sketch of the pantomime, entitled The picture of Paris: Taken in the year 1790. As performed at the Theatre-Royal, Covent-Garden*. One of these I will refer to as 1790a, the other – marked as the fourth edition – I will refer to as 1790b. The third version, *The airs, duets, and choruses, arrangement of scenery, and sketch of the pantomime, entitled The picture of Paris: As performed at the Theatre-Royal, Covent-Garden*, will be referred to as 1790c. The lettering does not indicate the sequence of publishing; it is merely an attempt at precise citation. All these versions contain an outline of the pantomime that is lacking from Larpent’s copy of the play.
- 44 *The Times*, 20 December 1790, p. 1.
- 45 Jon Mee, “*The Magician No Conjuror*: Robert Merry and the Political Alchemy of the 1790s” in *Unrespectable Radicals?*, Michael T. Davis and Paul A. Pickering, eds., Ashgate, Aldershot 2008, p. 41.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 47 Bonnor and Merry, op. cit., 1790a, 1790b and 1790c, p. 14.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 1790a and 1790b, p. 16; 1790c, p. 21, and *ibid.*, 1790a and 1790c, p. 17.
- 49 For a contemporary illustration of the event, see I. S. Helman’s engraving *Fédération générale des Français au Champ de Mars, le 14 juillet 1790*, based on a drawing by C. Monnet at: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/pt-v1b6947601m/fl.item.hl.langFR>
- 50 *Ibid.*, 1790b, p. 4.
- 51 Playbills for the second through to the ninth performance of the play, V&A Theatre Collection: Production Records *Picture of Paris*, 1790.
- 52 *The Public Advisor*, 16 December 1790, p. 1.
- 53 *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 61 (first part), John Nichols, London 1791, p. 83.
- 54 *Ibid.*
- 55 This plot is actually mentioned only in one of the printed versions: Bonnor and Merry, op. cit., 1790c, p. 9 and p. 17.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 1790a, 1790b and 1790c, p. 5.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 1790a and 1790b, p. 12. This scene is also in 1790c, pp. 15–16.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 1790c, p. 12. This scene is also in the other two versions of the play, although here Harlequin distracts the pursuers by extinguishing and re-illuminating candles (*ibid.*, 1790a and 1790b, p. 15).
- 59 *Ibid.*, 1790a, p. 20 and 1790b, p. 21. Why Harlequin gets Columbine differs in the two versions. One version states it as being “in return for the protection his interference afforded against the savage Attacks of the Poissards” (*ibid.*, 1790a, p. 20). “Poissards” literally means fishwife, but at this point in time it was used to denote women of the working class. In the other version the Marquis “bestows his Daughter, as a reward for his [Harlequin] generously interfering to protect him from imminent personal danger” (*ibid.*, 1790b, p. 21).
- 60 *Ibid.*, 1790a, 1790b and 1790c, p. 7.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 1790a and 1790b, p. 12. This scene is also in 1790c, pp. 15–16.
- 62 *Ibid.*
- 63 The government friendly paper *The Times* commented upon this transformation in the following manner: “We should be glad to be informed what reference the statues of *Truth, Mercy, and Justice*, exhibited in the new Pantomime [...], has to the subject of it. – Surely the author of

this incoherent jumble of ideas does not mean to affirm that the Revolution in France is founded on any of these godlike virtues." (*The Times*, 30 December 1790 in Mee, op. cit., p. 42).

- 64 Ibid., p. 46. Mee's observation is probably correct regarding the patent theatres. However, at Sadler's Wells – a non-patented theatre – they had already in August 1790 presented a new performance in two parts called *The Champ de Mars; or, The Loyal Federation* (playbill 13 August 1790 in V&A Theatre Collection: Production Records Sadler's Wells 1773-1812). The playbill states that the scenery for the play was "correctly drawn from the actual observation of proper persons appointed to attend at Paris for the purpose" (ibid.). The Parisian event was thus already familiar to London theatregoers; although how directly the political event was presented in this production is unbeknown to me.
- 65 Thelma Niklaus, *Harlequin Phoenix or The rise and fall of a Bergamask Rogue*, The Bodley Head, London 1956, p. 136.
- 66 It could also be of political importance that the pantomimes are comedies. In traditional comedy the dominant social order is always challenged, although to what effect differs. The genre itself has thus a built in subversive potential, although many comedies end with the restoration of the same order that was in operation at the beginning of the play.
- 67 Moody, op. cit., p. 88.
- 68 Baugh, op. cit., 1987, p. 124.
- 69 Moody, op. cit., p. 5.
- 70 *The Gentleman's Magazine*, op. cit. p. 86. The similar register for February lists the pantomime as being performed six times that month (ibid., p. 287).
- 71 Moody, op. cit., pp. 49-50.
- 72 Moody, op. cit., p. 244.