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## PERFORMING THE OTHER ON THE POPULAR LONDON STAGE: EXOTIC PEOPLE AND PLACES IN VICTORIAN PANTOMIME

### **Abstract:**

*Pantomime was one of the most enduring and popular forms of public entertainment in the nineteenth century. As a performance genre, it was both sensitive, and reactive, to political developments – indeed, much of its appeal owed to its topical commentary on current affairs and its staged negotiations of prevailing ideological attitudes. Topical allusions to empire increased exponentially after 1880 – the timing of such a rise is coterminous with the Scramble for Africa and deliberate attempts to sow imperial enthusiasm across society writ-large.*

*In this essay, I trace the ways in which dominant – and less dominant – ideologies of imperialism were played out in the pantomime. We know from several existing studies, for instance, that the pantomimes Aladdin and Robinson Crusoe evolved over the nineteenth century to reflect shifting attitudes to China, the Chinese, Africa and Africans. If it is a secure supposition that pantomime became increasingly exotic in its articulation of imperial topics, more might be said on how the pantomime implemented a visual display of colonial landscapes and the people that inhabited these spaces. This essay, then, investigates the interrelationship of exotic people and exotic places in the context of late-Victorian visual culture. In particular, I focus on pantomimic responses to the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and trace the evolution of the Jack and the Beanstalk story as it was presented in London's pantomimes. I am interested in how topical references to the empire were incorporated into performances, and pay particular attention to the role of the Giant, as villain, as allegory of imperial ideology.*

*These questions guide analysis of reviews published in the national press and trade periodicals. These sources reveal much about how performances were received by the audience; they also often provide detailed coverage of the technical production of pantomimes. They provide, therefore, a rich source for the study of the theatrical display of the exotic.*

### **Biography:**

Dr Peter Yeandle is Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Loughborough. In a previous post he was Research Associate on the AHRC-funded 'Cultural History of English Pantomime, 1837-1901' directed by Professor Katherine Newey and Professor Jeffrey Richards. His research interests include the interrelationships of popular imperialism and popular culture in particular and the cultural history of nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain in general. He is the author of several essays on the teaching of history and his monograph, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire: the politics of history teaching in England, c. 1870-1930*, was published by Manchester University Press in 2015. He is co-editor of a special issue of the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42/5 (2014) on the imperial hero in an age of decolonisation. His current project focuses on Victorian performance and exhibition culture, and includes the study of theatre, zoos, circuses and museums. Peter is also lead editor on *Politics, Performance and Popular Culture: Theatre and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, forthcoming with Manchester University Press.

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## Introduction: pantomime and popular imperialism

In 1879, Britain was gripped by debates about its empire. William Gladstone, ‘the Grand Old Man’ of British politics, provoked national discussion in a series of speeches about the ethics of foreign policy, particularly in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, British forces in Africa had suffered setbacks against the Zulus but, by the end of the year, had emerged victorious and the Zulu leader Cetewayo was captured. This is how events were raised in the *Era*’s review of the *Jack and the Giant Killer; or, Good King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* at the Crystal Palace’s children’s pantomime of Christmas 1879:

Children do not want to hear anything of Mr Gladstone’s speeches, neither do they understand much about Cetewayo and the conditions of Zululand. But they, one and all, are well up in the story of Jack, that delightful youth who made short work of the terrible Giant, and who was raised to the peerage of the period by his grateful monarch for the valuable services he rendered. We want a few such heroes at the present day, for there are plenty of giants to be slaughtered if we could only find Jacks equal to the task (28 December 1879).

This essay explores pantomime responses to key events in British imperial history with particular focus on the interrelationship of exotic bodies and exotic spaces in Victorian performance culture. Pantomime was the most popular and commercially profitable theatrical form of the nineteenth century, often financing theatres for the year.<sup>1</sup> It was a core ritual of Victorian Christmas.<sup>2</sup> As George Lancaster, a contemporary theatre critic, noted in 1883: ‘Boxing Day without pantomime would be as empty as Christmas Day without dinner’.<sup>3</sup> Another critic, for the *Daily Telegraph*, had also embraced the analogy of festive food: ‘an exceedingly large proportion of the community would as soon think of giving up their plum pudding on Christmas Day as abandoning their pantomime the night after’.<sup>4</sup> The pantomime was popular with people of all ages and from all social classes, from Queen Victoria herself to the poorest of her subjects.

Pantomime was popular because it was a spectacular, extravagant and anarchic theatrical form. Its popularity was also owed to its remarkable sensitivity to topical news: productions poked fun at local, national and imperial events, often sending up politicians and offering critique of current and foreign affairs. Pantomime was popular entertainment, but it was much more than *just* entertainment. As David Mayer argues for the early nineteenth century: ‘like the tabloid of today, the pantomime leaned towards the *immediate*, the *sensational*, the *most readily apparent* or *easily understood*’. It was ‘an unofficial and informal chronicle of the age’.<sup>5</sup> In her study of the politics of regional pantomime, Jill Sullivan demonstrates that pantomime encompassed ‘references to aspects of mid- to late-Victorian culture’ which mirrored the audiences’ ‘various experiences and understandings’

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent academic study, and most detailed to date, is Jeffrey Richards, *The Golden Age of Pantomime: Slapstick, Spectacle and Subversion in Victorian England* (London: IB Tauris, 2014); See also the essays in Jim Davis, ed., *Victorian Pantomime: a collection of critical essays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Mark Connelly, *Christmas: a History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 44-60. See also Jim Davis, ‘Boxing Day’, in Tracy C. Davis and Peter Holland, eds, *The Performing Century: nineteenth-century theatre’s history* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 13-31.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Notes on Pantomimes’, *The Theatre* (January, 1883), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Davis, ‘Boxing Day’, 14.

<sup>5</sup> David Mayer, *Harlequin in his Element: English Pantomime, 1806-36* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 6-7. My emphases.

the world.<sup>6</sup> Pantomime would continue to thrive because it was uniquely placed, amongst theatrical forms, to operate as a form for broadcasting and interpreting the news – pantomime was satirical, but it also reflected, and sought to direct, public opinion. Simply put, its success depended not only on its fantastic spectacle but on the accessibility and popularity of its topical commentary. It is precisely this contemporaneity of pantomime that makes it such a rich source for analysis of Victorian attitudes to race and empire.

When invited to contribute an essay on Victorian pantomime to this volume, I was initially hesitant. Given the surge of recent academic research into the history of the popular Victorian theatre – including pantomime – I was unsure what I could contribute that was interpretively new. Provoked by Bernard Porter’s misleading argument that the empire was almost entirely absent from Victorian performance culture,<sup>7</sup> a spate of recent studies has emerged confirming popular entertainments not only reflected imperial themes but consciously sought to inform and enthuse audiences about the empire.<sup>8</sup> Marty Gould, for instance, has located hundreds of nineteenth-century plays in which plot and characterisation dramatized imperial events and conveyed ideologies. Moreover, his case study of the *Robinson Crusoe* story, adapted into one of the most popular Victorian pantomime franchises, reveals changing attitudes to the empire – particularly Africa – over the course of the nineteenth century: the Crusoe character transitions from explorer to coloniser, and from colonial administrator to conquistador, functioning throughout as a ‘current and contemporary embodiment of British imperialism’.<sup>9</sup> Edward Ziter’s meticulous study of the *Orient on the Victorian Stage* illustrates how melodrama and pantomime responded to imperial wars in East Africa in the mid-1880s.<sup>10</sup> Anne Witchard’s reading of the evolution of the *Aladdin* and *Ali Baba* pantomime adaptations of the *Arabian Nights* stories demonstrates that the popular theatre directed as well as reflected public attitudes to China and the Chinese. Witchard’s study is particularly rich for its emphasis on the development of oriental pantomime characters in the context of Opium Wars and Yellow Peril.<sup>11</sup> Jim Davis and Jennifer Schacker have both used the relocation of Giant-land to South Africa in the 1899 Drury Lane production of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, in the context of the second Boer War, to investigate pantomime’s negotiation of ideologies of race and gender.<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey Richards’ powerfully argued essay shows how pantomime responded to the imperial wars of the late-Victorian pantomime; productions not only provided a digest of foreign affairs and topical comment on them but also, according to the evidence found in theatrical reviews, stoked the patriotism of the audience by presenting to them a series of imperial heroes and colonial

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<sup>6</sup> Jill A. Sullivan, *The Politics of the Pantomime: Regional Identity in Theatre, 1860-1900* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2011), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: What the British Really Thought About the Empire* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2004), 140.

<sup>8</sup> For work that pre-dated Porter, see for instance, Michael Booth on melodrama, ‘Soldiers of the Queen’ in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopolou, eds, *Melodrama: the cultural emergence of a genre* (New York: St Martins Press, 1996), 3–20; Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music, Britain 1876-1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001). For work that post-dates Porter, see below.

<sup>9</sup> Marty Gould, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and the Imperial Ideal* (London: Routledge, 2011), 72.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 164-95.

<sup>11</sup> Anne Witchard, *Thomas Burke’s Dark Chinoiserie: Limehouse Nights and the Queer Spell of Chinatown* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), especially 58-9, 68-77, 84-7.

<sup>12</sup> Jim Davis, ‘Imperial Transgressions: the Ideology of Drury Lane pantomime in the late nineteenth century’, *New Theatre Quarterly* 12 (1996), 147– 55; Jennifer Schacker, ‘Slaying Blunderboer: cross-dressed heroes, national identities and wartime pantomime’, *Marvels and Tales* 27/1 (2013), 52-64.

villains.<sup>13</sup> My initial hesitancy, then, is well founded: in the present state of research, the argument that pantomime operated as a cultural site for the dissemination of imperial ideology is seemingly irrefutable. That would suggest a privileged place for the performance of race, and exotic bodies, in Victorian theatres.

My aim is to problematize our understanding of the interrelationship of imperialism and performance culture by arguing the significance of those exotic bodies – so dramatically depicted in the rough and tumble of pantomime – is advanced by examining their relationship to theatrical depictions of place. Pantomime was popular because, as a humorous performance genre that staged and invoked intense emotional reactions, it exceeded Victorian parameters of theatrical authenticity. Pantomime created performative space for crudely drawn and vulgar topical commentaries on race and imperialism and the form thrived on its freedom to fashion fun through invocations of fairy tale traditions. Pantomime was, as Katherine Newey argues, ‘licensed mayhem’; the ‘enduring attraction of pantomime in the nineteenth century was precisely [its] mix of frivolity and topicality’.<sup>14</sup> Its pursuit of pleasure included social and artistic licence to trade in grotesque characters and exaggerated stereotypes; melodramatic modes of good versus bad were translated into fantastical forms of pantomime heroes and villains.<sup>15</sup>

However, the location of ‘exotic’ bodies in exoticised landscapes animated stage representations of race in ways that sharpened delineations of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Linda Colley defines the ‘other’ and ‘otherness’ as conceptual modes in which the cultural construction of ‘us’ as a national community was defined in opposition to constant iterations of what ‘we are [were] not’. If we take this definition, then the contrast of ‘home’ and ‘foreign’ bodies reveals Victorian pantomime’s contributions to collective identity formation.<sup>16</sup> This was particularly the case by the end of the nineteenth century as pantomime increasingly sought to sow imperial patriotism, holding up the image of the colonial body to public view in order to justify colonial wars and promote British solidarities around racial identity. To add to this, I follow Edward Ziter’s argument that the theatre ‘helped constitute the modern British colonial imaginary’.<sup>17</sup> Audiences were conditioned to locate bodies within particular geographical contexts; race and place were contingent factors in staging the exotic body in pantomime and this relationship became increasingly evident as the century progressed. I investigate these issues through two case studies: of pantomime’s responses to a key event in British imperial history (what Victorians called the Indian ‘Mutiny’, of 1857); and the imaginative use made of a famous pantomime location (Giant-Land, in *Jack and the Beanstalk* productions from the 1870s to the 1890s). But, first, a note on methodology, further elaboration of the significances of place and visual culture, and an explanation for why I have chosen these case studies.

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<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey Richards, ‘Drury Lane Imperialism’, in Peter Yeandle, Katherine Newey and Jeffrey Richards, eds., *Politics, Performance and Popular Culture: Theatre and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, chapter 9 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming)

<sup>14</sup> Katherine Newey, “‘Bubbles of the Day’: the pantomimic and the melodramatic”, in Yeandle, Newey and Richards, eds, *Politics, Performance and Popular Culture*, chapter 3 (forthcoming).

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most immediately obvious example of the pantomimic play on realism is the gender subversion in the roles of the pantomime dame and the principal boy. In both instances, it was clear to audiences that key roles were played by people of the opposite sex. See Jim Davis, “‘Slap On! Slap Ever!’ Victorian pantomime, gender variance, and cross dressing”, *New Theatre Quarterly* 30/3 (2014), 218-30.

<sup>16</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation* (London: Pimlico, 1994); ‘British and Otherness: an argument’, *Journal of British Studies* 31/4 (1992), 309-29.

<sup>17</sup> Ziter, *Orient on the Victorian Stage*, 6.

## Quantitative trends: the importance of place

This essay draws from research I conducted as a postdoctoral researcher on Professors Katherine Newey and Jeffrey Richards's AHRC-funded project 'The Cultural History of Victorian Pantomime'.<sup>18</sup> Part of my task was to build a database of pantomime performance in London, recording productions staged across London between 1820 and 1910. The initial purpose of the database was twofold: first, to document performance titles, playwrights, theatres and, where information was available, set painters, musical directors and choreographers; second, the database was to double up as an easy-reference catalogue of over a terabyte's worth of digitised newspaper and periodical reviews. However, the database also enables simple quantitative analysis of change over time.<sup>19</sup> In the mid-Victorian period pantomimes derived their titles from mixed traditions – the burlesque, the extravaganza, French, German and Scandinavian folk stories adapted to an English audience, and in some cases, traditional English and Celtic folk stories.<sup>20</sup> The chart below details titles, subtitles and the theatres in which pantomimes were produced for the Christmas season 1851-2.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Subtitle</b>	<b>Theatre</b>
<i>Harlequin Hogarth</i>	<i>Or the Two London Apprentices</i>	Drury Lane
<i>Princess Radiant</i>	<i>Or the Story of Mayflowers by the Brothers Brough</i>	Haymarket
<i>The Prince of Happy Land</i>	<i>Or the Fawn in the Forest</i>	Lyceum
<i>Harlequin Billy Taylor</i>	<i>Or The Flying Dutchman and the King of Raritongo</i>	Princess's
<i>The Mandarin's Daughter</i>	<i>Or the Story of the Willow Pattern Plate</i>	Punch's Playhouse
<i>Red Rufus</i>	<i>Or Harlequin Fact, Fiction and Fancy</i>	Olympic
<i>Harlequin and the Yellow Dwarf</i>	<i>Or the Enchanted Grove</i>	Sadler's Wells
<i>Mr and Mrs Briggs</i>	<i>Or Harlequin Punch's Festival</i>	Astleys
<i>Harlequin Bluecap and the King of the Golden Waters</i>	<i>Or the Three Kingdoms, Animal, Vegetable and Mineral</i>	Surrey
<i>The Lion and the Unicorn</i>	<i>Or Harlequin Britannia, True Blue and Merry England</i>	Victoria

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/News/Pages/Pantomimes-enduring-appeal-put-through-academic-scrutiny.aspx> [Accessed 9 May 2015].

<sup>19</sup> In order to draw up the database, I used advertisements and reviews in the national and theatrical press, including the *Era*, the *Stage* (for the years after 1880 in which it was launched), *The Times* and the *Daily News*. I also cross referenced against the Lord Chamberlain's collection of plays. Although lists are as comprehensive as possible, I cannot claim to have documented every pantomime that was staged in London. Not all were recorded in the press or submitted to the censor.

<sup>20</sup> For a brisk explanation and analysis of the development of the pantomime genre, see Jennifer Schacker, 'Unruly Tales: Ideology, Anxiety and the Regulation of Genre', *Journal of American Folklore* 120 (2007), 381-400.

<i>Sir John Barleycorn</i>	<i>Or Harlequin Champagne and the Fairies of Hop and Vince</i>	Marylebone
<i>Oliver Cromwell</i>	<i>Or Harlequin and Charlie over the Water</i>	City of London
<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>		Queens (Tottenham Court Rd) Standard
<i>Hoddy Toddy, All Head and no Body</i>	<i>Or Harlequin and the Fairy of the Magic Pippin</i>	
<i>Cowardy, Cowardy Custard, Ate His Father's Mustard</i>	<i>Or Harlequin the Demon Vice and the Fairy Queen of Virtue</i>	Pavilion
<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>		Adelphi
<i>Queen Mab</i>		Grecian Saloon

**Table.1 Pantomime produced in London, Christmas 1851.**

By the end of the century, recognisably modern and anglicised productions of *Aladdin*, *Cinderella*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Dick Whittington* dominated calendars. The chart below documents pantomimes in London in the season 1899-1900.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Theatre</b>
<i>Jack and the Beanstalk</i>	Drury Lane
<i>Cinderella and the Little Glass Slipper</i>	Standard
<i>The Forty Thieves</i>	Grand (Islington)
<i>Puss in Boots</i>	Garrick
<i>Goody Two Shoes</i>	Surrey
<i>Dick Whittington and His Cat</i>	Elephant and Castle
<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>	Shakespeare (Clapham)
<i>Dick Whittington.</i>	Kennington
<i>Cinderella.</i>	Grand (Fulham)
<i>Cinderella</i>	Crown (Peckham)
<i>Magic Moonstone</i>	Britannia
<i>Sinbad</i>	Lyric (Hammersmith)
<i>Babes in the Wood</i>	Coronet
<i>Dick Whittington and His Cat</i>	Pavilion
<i>Dick Whittington</i>	Borough (Stratford)
<i>Jack of Hearts</i>	West London

<i>Dick Whittington and His Cat</i>	Lyric (Ealing)
<i>Puss in Boots</i>	New Cross
<i>Sinbad</i>	Stoke Newington
<i>Aladdin</i>	Morton's (Greenwich)
<i>Dick Whittington</i>	Terriss Theatre (Rotherhithe)
<i>Dick Whittington</i>	Dalston
<i>Puss in Boots</i>	Richmond
<i>Babes in the Wood</i>	Kingston
<i>Aladdin and the Sleeping Beauty</i>	Royal Artillery (Woolwich)

**Table 2. Pantomime performed in London, Christmas season 1899-1900**

Two trends are immediately obvious: titles were shortened as harlequinades all but disappeared from productions and more suburban theatres produced pantomime. The third trend, and the trend of most relevance to this essay, is the vivid increase in productions set nominally in overseas contexts. In the 1890s, 54 out of the documented 120 pantomimes staged in London were set – according to the admittedly crude measurement of title – abroad: of which *Robinson Crusoe*, *Ali Baba*, *Sinbad*, and *Aladdin* predominated (these formed less than a tenth of productions in the 1850s). The two most popular pantomimes of the 1890s were *Cinderella* (31) and *Dick Whittington* (27), both of which increasingly incorporated comment on imperial events and, in the case of *Dick Whittington*, almost always involved foreign travel. In 1882, *Cinderella* at the Pavilion theatre introduced audiences to British and enemy protagonists of the Egyptian campaign (30 December 1882). The Adelphi's production of *Dick Whittington* in 1898 was staged in the aftermath of Britain's brutal victory at Omdurman in the Sudan. In a reflection of near-contemporary events, the hero was pitted in battle against Arabic slave traders in East Africa (*Era*, 31 December 1898). Titles alone, then, are not indicative of content and should not be presumed to be; however the mammoth increase in oriental pantomimes as the century progressed is clearly noteworthy. The huge rise in the number of performances staged overseas can be taken as a crude indicator of the persuasiveness of Gould's and Richards' arguments (outlined in the introduction) that pantomime became increasingly imperialistic towards the end of the century. This correlation confirms further analysis of place is an essential complement to the study of pantomime's exotic bodies.

In recent years, theatre historians have persuasively argued that scholars need to place more significance on the reciprocal relationship between Victorian theatrical and visual culture.<sup>21</sup> Vision, according to Lynda Nead, was the 'universal language' by which the Victorians would learn about their world.<sup>22</sup> Increasingly given to classification of the environment and its bodies, the Victorian period was an age – in Jonathan Smith's words – that was 'relentlessly, explosively visual'.<sup>23</sup> The reciprocity of visual and theatrical culture is

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Katherine Newey, 'Speaking Pictures: The Victorian Stage and Visual Culture', in Anselm Heinrich, Katherine Newey and Jeffrey Richards, eds, *Ruskin, the Theatre and Victorian Visual Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 1-18.

<sup>22</sup> Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, CO: Yale University Press, 2000), 59.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 30.

crucial to the study of popular imperialism. Visual culture increasingly illustrated foreign spaces and bodies: from extensive public fascination with Victorian explorers of the 1860s,<sup>24</sup> through to the dominance of exotic landscapes as scenic devices for picturing out crude racial stereotypes in late-century advertising.<sup>25</sup> By the end of the century, it is no surprise that reporting about the empire and foreign affairs was dominated by visual and theatrical culture – this included line drawing, coloured illustrations and war photography in the graphic press on the one hand, and historical and contemporary re-enactments, and topical dramatisations in and out of the theatre, on the other.<sup>26</sup> The interplay of the theatrical and the visual contributed to what Ziter calls the cultivation of a ‘pictorial vocabulary’ of ‘authentic’ imperial knowledge.<sup>27</sup> Ziter explains:

It was not simply that the theatre rallied support for Britain’s imperial wars or that in doing so it familiarised audiences with distant regions; the theatre adopted an emerging conception of geography that was informed by the growth and popularisation of the discipline at a time when new racial theories were coming to the fore.<sup>28</sup>

For an understanding of Victorian knowingness about the empire, stereotypes of place were as crucial as racial stereotypes of people.

The following two sections are driven by the project’s quantitative data. They investigate the interrelationship of people and places through detailed investigation of how pantomimes made topical allusion to an event (the Indian Rebellion) and a fantasy location (Giant-Land). There are two reasons to examine what the Victorians called the Indian ‘Mutiny’. First, barring one exception, no pantomime title in 1857 gives any indication whatsoever to the dramatic events that had occurred in India that year: titles alone are no signifier of content.<sup>29</sup> Second, the Mutiny was one of the most horrifying events in British colonial history. That a great number of London’s pantomimes were able to make the horror humorous through the representation of the dismembered Indian body illustrates the argument that pantomime both told the news but also adapted the news through exaggerated caricatures and by drawing contrasts between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Indian bodies were transported into the anarchic world of the mid-Victorian harlequinade. By the end of the century the harlequinade had all but disappeared from performance calendars; instead topical allusion to people and events was incorporated within the plotting and staging of the pantomime. That

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<sup>24</sup> See Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). On visual culture and imperialism more generally, see Ashley Jackson and David Tomkins, *Illustrating Empire: a Visual History of British imperialism* (Oxford: Bodleian, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Simon Pople, “‘Fresh from the Front’: Performance, war news and popular culture during the Boer War”, *Early Popular Visual Culture* 8/4 (2010), 401-418; Kenneth Morgan, ‘The Boer War and the Media’, *Twentieth Century British History* 13/1 (2002), 1-16; Jane Pritchard and Peter Yeandle, “‘Executed with remarkable care and artistic feeling’: popular imperialism and the music hall ballet”, in Yeandle, Newey and Richards, eds, *Politics, Performance and Popular Culture*, chapter 8 (forthcoming).

<sup>27</sup> Ziter, *Orient on the Victorian Stage*, 3. This may explain why D.W. Griffith, the only film director granted official access to the Western Front to film during the First World War, ‘was disappointed with the reality of the battlefield’. See Michael Hammond, “‘A Soul Stirring Appeal to Every Briton’: The Reception of *The Birth of a Nation* in Britain (1915-6)”, *Film History* 11/3 (1999), 353-70 (at 359).

<sup>28</sup> Ziter, *Orient on the Victorian Stage*, 165.

<sup>29</sup> One of the methodological weaknesses of Porter’s research is that, on a study of play titles alone, he claimed theatrical culture was not influenced by imperialism. Clearly it is problematic to rule out the potential of a text to reveal ideological discourses without due attention to its content. See Gould, *Nineteenth-Century and the Imperial Encounter*, 3-9.

required theatrical signification of place. My second case study, then, focuses on the *Jack and Beanstalk* story examining the opportunity for the presentation of foreignness and exoticism afforded by Giant-Land.<sup>30</sup>

As noted, Jim Davis and Jennifer Schacker have both drawn our attention to the theatrical use of Giant-Land space in the 1899 production of *Jack* at Drury Lane. In 1899, Britain was at war in South Africa against the Boer republics. Paul Kruger, the Boer President, was represented as the pantomime villain: the Giant Blunderbore of fairy-tale lore replaced, seamlessly, by the Blunderboer. When defeated, the Giant was draped in a Union Jack flag as hundreds of child actors, dressed in the various colours of British and colonial troops, emerged from his pocket leading a rousing singalong of ‘Rule Britannia’ and ‘God Save the Queen’ (British troops had been besieged in key garrison towns and Kruger claimed to have had the British army in his pocket). If 1899 enabled the imaginative staging of South Africa on the pantomime stage, and the imposition of imperial ideology onto the body of the colonial enemy in a militaristic crescendo, was this a novelty or an extension of a tradition? Analysis of how *Jack* pantomimes became increasingly bombastic in representations of imperialism, I demonstrate, underlines the significance of combined depictions of people and places.

### ACT I – India, 1857.

The majority of pantomimes staged in London in 1857 included topical reference to what Victorians called the Indian Mutiny. The ‘Mutiny’ became, for mid-Victorian Britons, an enthralling unfolding drama of treachery, total villainy and absolute heroism; it was, according to James Ryan, ‘the single most important influence in the making of British images of India in the nineteenth century’.<sup>31</sup> As various sieges were relieved, battles won, and reprisals meted out to mutinous sepoys, news was greeted in Britain with a mixture of relief and celebration. Tales of horror, shock and despair had been captured in various genres of popular print culture including hundreds of published sermons, pamphlets, novels, and stories and images in the graphic press.<sup>32</sup> Hero cults developed around key military leaders – especially Sir Henry Havelock.<sup>33</sup> Yet, as Marty Gould demonstrates, ‘the energies of this colonial crisis exceeded the narrow limits of pen and page’ as news of the uprising was ‘carefully choreographed and politically reinterpreted’ in dozens of plays staged in theatres across the country.<sup>34</sup>

Gould traces theatrical representations of the Mutiny in melodrama, including those which responded with incredible speed to events. Melodrama played on serious themes of inter-racial children (*Vermuh Kareeda*, performed at the Victoria in November 1857) and sought to explain the history and development of events (*The Storming and Capture of Delhi* at Astley’s in December 1857). Melodramas took on a pseudo-documentary function,

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<sup>30</sup> Allegorical use of *Jack* stories was an ever present in political discourse. See, for instance, Caroline Sumpter’s analysis of how socialists took up the story and used to frame critique of the Giants of capitalism. *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 118-30.

<sup>31</sup> James Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), 197.

<sup>32</sup> Gautam Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Neil Hultgren, *Melodramatic Imperial Writing: from the Sepoy Rebellion to Cecil Rhodes* (Athens, OH: University of Ohio Press, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), especially 79-116.

<sup>34</sup> Gould, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre*, 155-6.

situating audiences in India and bridging, in Gould's words, 'the worlds of journalism and entertainment' by inviting audiences 'to think of themselves not merely as playgoers but as eyewitnesses'.<sup>35</sup> London's pantomimes also responded to the profound sense of revulsion at atrocities committed by rebellious sepoys and, like melodramas, served as theatrical sites for the playing out of acts of ferocious retribution. Unlike melodrama, however, they merged celebration with sadistic humour. The violence of revenge scenes in pantomime was made possible by the incorporation of mutinous Indians into harlequinades.<sup>36</sup> At the City of London Theatre, the otherwise historical pantomime *William the Second and the Fayre Maid of Honour* contained a scene in its harlequinade in which sepoys were captured and Nana Sahib, villain-in-chief, was fired from a canon 'to the great satisfaction of the delighted audience' (*Times*, 28 December 1857). The Surrey pantomime *Queen Mab; or, Harlequin Romeo and Juliet* included a gruesome scene in which a sepoy was killed by the Clown, amusingly dressed in Grenadier's costume, 'rammed into a mortar, and fired at the butcher's shop, where his disjointed body suddenly replaces the mutton and beef on the hooks' (*Era*, 27 December 1857). 'The patriotism of the audience rose to a fever pitch' in response to this scene, reported the *Standard*, as the Clown 'besplattered the walls with his [Nana Sahib's] members' (28 December 1857). In a remarkably swift response to the headlines of the day that the siege of Lucknow had been lifted, British soldiers shelled sepoys in the Grecian Theatre's *Peter Wilkins and the Flying Indians* and Nana Sahib was labelled 'out of Lucknow'. The 'flying Indians' of the title, according to the *Era* (27 December) were not 'retreating Sepoys' yet the title must have appealed to the 'exigencies' of the moment.

Of the topical references to India in *Joe Miller; or, Harlequin Mirth, Jollity and Satire* at the Marylebone theatre, the *Standard* reported:

It may be worth mentioning, as showing the temper and tone of the public mind, that every reference in the course of the piece to the events now passing in India, and the heroes who are fighting our battles there, was eagerly caught up by the audience, in a manner which proves that the people at any rate are not disposed to distribute to our heroes any niggard measure of praise or award (28 December 1857).

Productions clearly aimed to generate patriotic reactions and on the evidence of reviews, they more than succeeded. The *Era* reviewer even noted that 'much dissatisfaction' was 'expressed' by the audience at the Princess's Theatre for the lack 'of political allusions' in its pantomime *The White Cat* (27 December 1857). However, the nature of the comedic dismemberment of the Indian body exceeded the usual bounds of patriotic emotions unleashed by military victory. This was a celebration of retribution and violence that both reported acts of vengeance actually carried out by British troops in India but also sanitised them by reducing the act to humour. The unprovoked murder of British women and children had demanded an equally violent response: this was not just the gratuitous and spectacular execution of foreign bodies but the symbolic execution of Britain's moral duty. The relocation of Indian bodies into butcher's shops was a particularly crude comment on one of the causes of the Mutiny: Muslim and Hindu soldiers had refused to bite open ammunition cartridges because they contained fat from cows and pigs. Although conflict in India would last long into the following year, these acts of revenge constituted a suitably dramatic finale for British audiences at home: the melodramatic narrative of the story had reached its conclusion as good had overcome evil and moral order was restored.

<sup>35</sup> Gould, *Nineteenth-Century Theatre*, 174.

<sup>36</sup> The following paragraph draws from but extends Jeffrey Richards' analysis. See his, *The Golden Age of Pantomime*, 25-6; and 'Drury Lane Imperialism' (forthcoming).

It is clear that in these pantomimes it is the body – or the enacted body – of the villainous Nana Sahib that serves as the site for physical comedy. Nana Sahib represents mutinous Indians writ-large and British generals embodied the entirety of the British army. At Sadler’s Wells, *Harlequin Beauty and the Beast* featured the embodied figure of ‘Justice’ in a sign– painter’s establishment awakening (from ignorance) to award a peerage and a pension to the Mutiny heroes General Havelock and Sir Colin Campbell. In *Queen Mab*, Harlequin and Pantaloon played cribbage with ‘immense conversation cards’: “‘General Havelock’ played over ‘Nana Sahib’ secured enthusiastic applause; so did ‘Wilson taking Delhi’” (*Era*, 27 December 1857). The physical comedy in these scenes was derived from the traditional rough and tumble anarchy of harlequinade scenes. Indian bodies became characters in a fantasy realm starring Clown, Pantaloon and Harlequin. In these, the melodramatic structure of ‘goodies’ versus ‘baddies’ takes on new meaning. The humour of these pieces was prefaced upon audience knowledge of, and shared emotional revulsion, at the horrors committed by the sepoy; laughter and patriotic cheering was both the expression of collective joy at the defeat of the sepoy and shared celebration in acts of retaliation. Indian bodies became expendable theatrical props both to ‘other’ the enemy as brutal and immoral but also to hold a mirror up to the British as heroic and honourable.

That comic retribution was enacted in harlequinades, however, is significant. As noted, quantitative analysis demonstrates that whereas harlequinades dominated in the 1850s they had almost all but disappeared by the end of the century. How did later-century pantomime incorporate its topical referencing not into harlequinades but pantomime plot and staging? The answer relates to the theatrical use of landscapes and bodies, especially in the form of the pantomime villain, and this is made manifest by a study of the evolution of the *Jack and the Beanstalk* pantomime from the 1870s to the Drury Lane spectacular of 1899.

## ACT II – Giant-Land, 1870-1899

The *Daily Mail*’s review of the 1899 Drury Lane production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* confirms that the production was an emphatic patriotic statement of intent. The review both captures the jingoism of the performance but also pantomime’s flexibility to respond to the news. After the defeat of Blunderboer, child actors emerged from the Giant’s pocket:

Soldiers in red, soldiers in khaki, soldiers in kilts, colonials on the tiniest little ponies, sailors with their Maxims [guns] - on, on they come, in a long stream, marching, drilling, manoeuvring. Such an animated scene as these scores of perfectly drilled children, so full of life and energy, has surely never been seen [...]. They begin to shout and cheer and scramble back again till they cover the Giant, and the Union Jack is waved, - the effect is indescribably exciting. It is an open secret that the original giant was to have represented Mr Kruger, and, of course, the meaning of the scene suffers through the alteration rendered necessary by our temporary check in South Africa. All the same, this scene is the triumph of triumphs of pantomime (27 December 1899).

Here, the Giant *is* Kruger even though the intended pantomime mask slips for the sake of expediency: it would not do to predict so definitive a victory over the Boers at a time in which Britain was suffering major reverses in the field. However, there was a clear depiction of a military victory: the pantomime ‘catches the martial mood’ reported the *Stage*, continuing that ‘the pitch of patriotism enthusiasm’ meant that ‘the audience find it a very

inspiring scene' (28 December 1899). The contrast of innocent and healthy children to the corpse of the despoiled immoral enemy served clear propagandistic purpose. Concerns about the health of soldiers had combined with trepidation about the decline of the 'race' to dominate contemporary domestic debates about imperialism.<sup>37</sup> This was especially so because, as was the case in Mutiny pantomimes, the othering of the enemy took place while combat was ongoing, providing comfort by merging humour and violence.

Jack had not always found the Giant's kingdom and castle atop the beanstalk. In some productions, Giant-Land was cast either as a fairy kingdom, 'cloud land', or as an historical utopia. *Jack and the Beanstalk* at the Adelphi (1872) invoked 'The Verdant Valley of the Variegated Beans' and in *Jack the Giant Killer* at the Surrey (1875) Jack emerged in Camelot. Even in these productions, however, the fusion of Christianity and imperialism was implied by Jack's recruitment of knights in his crusade against a barbaric and uncivilised enemy (*Era*, 28 December 1872; 26 December 1875). However, as the century progressed and in tandem with the increased influence exercised by imperial propagandists over popular performance culture, Jack more often than not found himself located in the giant's domain. As key scenes of castles that required annexation, treasures claiming, and face-to-face battles became commonplace, the *Jack* genre incorporated a greater frequency of topical references to the empire and foreign affairs. This development is neatly encapsulated by juxtaposition of the 1899 production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* at Drury Lane and the quotation, from the *Era*'s review of *Jack* at the Crystal Palace in 1879, given at the beginning of this essay. In 1899, the articulation of imperial ideology could not have been more explicit; it was central to the pantomime's action and given as the central explanation for the production's success. In 1879, however, it was the authorial voice of the reviewer that wished for more Jacks to combat allegorical giants. When empire was referenced in 1879 it was not by direct allusion to violent conquest but by celebration of the gorgeousness of Indian scenery; the transformation scene, 'The Shrine of Schiva', incorporated elephants, camels and 'groups of figures emblematic of the various races under our dominion in East'. In a clear nod to Victoria having recently been made Empress of India, the Queen dominated the 'centre of the scene' and sat regally on top of a giant silver globe (*Era*, 28 December 1879). In 1875, similarly at the Crystal Palace, *Jack in Wonderland* included both topical commentaries and exotic scenery. Set in a venue that also exhibited Egyptian and Byzantine decorations, the pantomime reprised the Prince of Wales' tour of India of that year. Nautch girls, dressed in 'handsome Indian robes of gold-spangled crimson or white' joined elephants, monkeys and camels in a parade in front of the 'sacred river' and a 'vast domed palace'; to their number was added 'natives, Indian soldiers, serpent charmers' and Britannia in a chariot. This was, according the reviewer in the *Morning Post* a 'laudable effort to make us at home realise to the full some of the scenes which the future Emperor of India has witnessed'. The scene painters and costume designers deserved 'all possible credit' (23 December 1875). For *The Sunday Times*, the pantomime had 'fully revealed' the gorgeous 'splendour of eastern magnificence' (26 December 1875). With the Indian Rebellion still fresh in the mind, the pantomime was a show of stability and beneficent colonisation. Indians soldiers had become subservient. Indian subjects held up a banner proclaiming 'tell Mama we are happy', a 'significant message for the Prince of Wales to carry home to the Queen' commented the *Era*, 'and one we trust would be echoed by the natives in reality' (26 December 1875). By the end of the 1890s, however, *Jack* pantomimes had evolved to display levels of brutality evident in the 1899 Drury Lane production. How?

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<sup>37</sup> See Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop Journal* 5 (1978), 9-65.

In 1878, various *Jack* pantomimes alluded to events in Bulgaria as Russia became Britain's main diplomatic adversary. Productions at both *Covent Garden* and the *Gaiety* included audience singalongs to G.W. Hunt's widely popular song, *By Jingo*, which had been popularised by the Great MacDermott (G.H. Farrell).<sup>38</sup> Topical allusions, according to *The Times* 'elicited roars of merriment' (27 December 1878). *Jack and the Giant Killer* at the Imperial Theatre (1882) included a procession of flags depicting the colonies; so, too, did *Jack and the Beanstalk* productions at the Grand in 1883 and the Surrey in 1886. In 1886 the Bulgarian question re-emerged as a significant dilemma for the British and the pantomime at Sadler's Wells addressed the issue: Jack's mother was called Dame Europa, the villain 'Blunderbore Russia', and all participants were transported to Buckingham Palace where Britannia delivered a lecture to them (and the audience) on the foreign policy issues of the day. The *Stage* commented that the pantomime concluded 'with an edifying picture' of 'virtue triumphant and vice defeated, ultimately resulting in peace and reconciliation all round' (31 December 1886). Clearly, the pantomime reflected Britain's contemporary understanding of itself as a moral arbiter. In 1887, the recent celebrations of the Queen's Golden jubilee spilled over into the pantomime at Covent Garden as children, dressed in the national costumes of 'England and her colonies', paraded in a spectacular display as cast and audience together sang 'Rule Britannia' and 'God Save the Queen' (*Daily News*, 27 December 1887). The transformation scene in *Jack* at the Grand, Islington, in 1893 was similarly given over to a display of Britain and colonies; on this occasion, however, it was not national dress worn but emblematic military uniforms (*Stage*, 28 December 1893). By 1897, the militarisation of *Jack and the Beanstalk* was complete. The production at the Pavilion included a 'grand bombardment of the Giant's castle' and audience participation in 'patriotic songs' (*Stage*, 30 December). The *Era* took delight in reporting that the audience knew the words to the popular song poem 'Soldiers of the Queen' (1 January 1898) and *The Times* commented that topical allusions to President Kruger, the Klondike Gold Rush and the Indian frontier were enthusiastically and 'quickly taken up by the audience' (28 December 1897). Pantomime clearly had its finger firmly on the pulse of imperial developments and reflected current affairs to audiences accordingly.

Authentic images of exotic colonial landscapes were thus increasingly incorporated into productions, setting scenic context for allusion to topical imperial affairs. Pantomime did not only trade in crude imagery, however, it also revealed tensions in imperial ideology and this is evident in various treatments of the exotic body of the Giant. The process by which Kruger's body was othered through its representation as Giant provides fascinating insights into pantomime's ability to construct binary opposites of heroes and villains; between 'us' and 'them'. Visual propaganda had successfully used demarcations of race to contrast the British and their black African foes, most recently and most explicitly in recent wars in Egypt and the Sudan.<sup>39</sup> Such techniques of picturing the colonised body as subhuman and barbaric helped to justify British military campaigns.<sup>40</sup> Visual othering, in the context of social Darwinism, also endorsed a racial hierarchy in which military conquest could be explained as the legitimate extension of British superiority. Depicting racial difference through visual and performance culture was not so straightforward for the second Boer War, however, given the Boers were – like the British – white, Christian, European colonists. The pantomime Giant

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<sup>38</sup> See Richards, *Imperialism and Music*, 325-6. See reviews in *The Times* (27 December 1878) and the *Era* (29 December 1878).

<sup>39</sup> Richard Fulton, 'The Sudan Sensation', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 42/1 (2009), 37-63.

<sup>40</sup> Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage*, 180-1. On racism, see Hazel Waters's study of the years 1830-60, *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

had emerged from across nineteenth-century adaptations of the *Jack* story as a thief, a murderer, a tyrant and a cannibal (he was even called Giant Gobble-All at the Surrey Theatre's production of 1886). The pantomime Giant in general, and Kruger specifically, was stripped of all the characteristics of a civilised European: as a cannibal, he was actively dehumanised. The key line of 'Fe-Fi-Fo-Fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman', had become a well-established pantomime trope by the end of the century; so too the pantomime scene set in the Giant's kitchen in which the bones of humans are crushed to create flour. The elision of Kruger and Giant served not only to animalise Kruger but to also attribute characteristics to him that had previously been used to describe black colonial adversaries: savage, cannibalistic, beyond the reach of civilisation. The villain contributed to the creation of its mirror image, the hero: Jack's transformation from lazy child to masculine warrior served a didactic function specially geared to children in the audience; salutary attributes of courage, civic duty and national pride were clearly established in an obvious metaphor of imperial manhood.

Imperial propaganda, however, traded not only in tales of ruthless military conquest but also the conversion and civilisation of the colonised. This perhaps explains why pantomimic depictions of Indians and India could be both heartlessly inhumane in response to the 'Mutiny' but sentimentally affectionate in later years. In his study of race relations, *Taming Cannibals* (2011), Patrick Brantlinger's observes this 'central contradiction in the racist and imperialistic ideology'.<sup>41</sup> Treatment of Kruger-as-Giant as a savage colonial tyrant to be defeated certainly reflected the brutality of turn-of-the-twentieth century militarism. In the majority of productions Jack killed the Giant. However a few pantomimes in the 1880s made reference not to the death of the Giant, but his conversion and resultant emergence as part of civilised society. In the Standard's *Fi Fo Fum; or Harlequin Jack and the Giant Killer* (1887) 'the wicked giant was not imbued with an excess of wickedness'; indeed he ultimately 'proved to be a very amiable monster' and partook in Jack's wedding celebrations suitably attired in 'evening dress' (*Era*, 31 December 1887). The *Stage* described the Giant as a 'converted ogre' (30 December 1887). In the same year, *Jack* was presented at the Covent Garden theatre and there, too, the Giant's life was spared; the Giant, in formal evening wear and now a member of the Salvation Army, returning to the stage to join the final (teetotal) celebration scene. (*Stage*, 30 December 1887). In 1889, the Giant in Drury Lane's *Jack and the Beanstalk* was a bookworm, and in particular a fan of Shakespeare. That love of learning and English classics may explain why the Giant did not want to devour the princess, whom he had taken prisoner, but marry her.<sup>42</sup> When defeated by Jack, not in a battle of weapons but wits, the Giant 'renounces his claim to the princess' and is invited to join the entirety of the cast at a lavish feast. What is noticeable, clearly, is that the incorporation of distinctively British symbols – Shakespeare, evening wear, Salvation Army – allowed both for the civilisation of the giant but also the assimilation of the 'other' into national culture. As the reintegration of the Giant into civil society demonstrates, the core component of the othering of the pantomime villain as an enemy was his location within exotic landscapes – place positioned the 'other' beyond civilisation itself. Such was the flexibility of pantomime that it was able to embody various ideological manifestations of empire and apply these to those foreign bodies onto which colonial ideologies were written.

## Conclusion

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<sup>41</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>42</sup> None of the reviews suggested the production was a mash up of *Jack* and *Beauty and the Beast* but the plot suggests certain similarities.

It has been my contention that topical references in pantomime reveal various ways in which imperialism permeated popular performance culture. Exotic bodies, in relation to visual signifiers of imperial places, served to enforce colonial ideologies and help generate support for British foreign policy. The pantomime was both illustrated imperialism in practice – the civilising mission of the empire project – and a performance technique that gave British audiences scope for a whole range of emotional responses from horror and revulsion, to sensations of comfort, assurance and superiority. Pantomime could both shock and thrill. But, ultimately, it was intended to make people laugh. Such an objective required a performance format that was flexible but could concomitantly blend the realistic and the hyper-real. Pantomime encapsulated what Lynn Voskuil labels the ‘enigmatic doubleness’ of Victorian sensation theatre, making possible a ‘dual emphasis on authenticity and heightened spectacle’.<sup>43</sup> Such doubleness was enhanced by a performance culture that emphasised the visual truthfulness of scenery within which exaggerated racial stereotypes could perform their roles. When applied to pantomimic depictions of race, and the location of race, this allowed for both the comedic and the serious, and the abstract and the corporeal.

In his study of the nineteenth-century evolution of *Jack and the Beanstalk* in children’s literature, Brian Szumsky argues that different versions ‘can be read as the history of literary responses to socio-political circumstances, in particular [...] colonial practice and ideology’.<sup>44</sup> The evidence of pantomime *Jacks* presented in this essay certainly support this view. Yet pantomime, watched by large audiences and demanding boos, hisses, applause, cheers, and singalongs, was able to reach further than the written word. Pantomime was able not only to adapt the story to incorporate plot and character variation but also to integrate surplus and seemingly unrelated scenes. Going to the pantomime was an immersive experience, to which the visual was vital. This is perhaps why pantomime was so suitably positioned to both report and revel in popular imperialism.

**End.**  
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<sup>43</sup> Lynn Voskuil, *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 76.

<sup>44</sup> Brian Szumsky, ‘The House that Jack Built: Empire and Ideology in British versions of “Jack and the Beanstalk”’, *Marvels and Tales* 13/1 (1999), 11-30 (at 12).

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