The Miniature Stage
19th century English toy theatre
To showcase aspects of the unique F.B. Brady collection of theatrical ephemera, Christ Church Library has scheduled an exhibition, *The Miniature Stage – 19th Century English Toy Theatre*, to run from 14 September to 7 October 2016.

This exhibition charts the spectacular rise and fall of the English toy theatre, from its origins in the theatrical souvenir prints of the early 1800’s, its development into a working replica miniature theatre for the home and its struggle to compete with the explosion of popular print at the end of the century. The major sideline of the toy theatre business, the theatrical portraits, will also be explored showing how the cultivation of verisimilitude contributed to the growth of celebrity culture.

In a special workshop organized in the Upper Library at Christ Church on 7 October, we aim to illustrate how toy theatres were built by demonstrating the assembly and decoration, and handing out kits for you to build at home.

The exhibition is curated by Lauran Richards and Cristina Neagu.

Visiting hours:

Monday - Friday: 10.00 am - 1.00 pm; 2:00 pm - 4.30 pm
(provided there is a member of staff available in the Upper Library).
The origins of the toy theatre emerged in an interview by Henry Mayhew for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1850 when he visited ‘the celebrated publisher of penny theatrical characters’. The publisher was William West who in 1811 was running a haberdashery which sold toys including ‘children’s halfpenny lottery prints’. Lottery prints were illustrated alphabet prints featuring boxed single characters with a rhyming caption that children could use for a game of lotto.

Their transformation from lottery into theatrical prints was due to West’s familial connections to the nearby Covent Garden Theatre where his father was under property-man, his sister a dancer and another sister a fruit seller so ‘the idea struck me that something theatrical would sell’. West produced a sheet of characters in the lottery style from the pantomime *Mother Goose* which opened at the Covent Garden theatre in 1806. As the play which had established the fame of the clown Joseph Grimaldi, West found ‘it went like wildfire among the young folks’ and he acquired three presses to keep up with demand forming the beginning of the theatrical print trade.

1. *West – Harlequin and Mother Goose; or, The Golden Egg* (1811)
   This is a later reprint of West’s original 1811 print in the lottery style with his own rhyming captions. The images show from top left to bottom right: Mr Simmons as Mother Goose, Joseph Grimaldi in the ‘Bang-up’ song, Harlequin John Bologna in the same part, Punch with a salt box, Punch, Judy, John Bologna disguised as a fruit girl, and Joseph Grimaldi. Below it is a lottery style print on a generalised theatrical theme, here Shakespearean characters, but these were not topical images from current stage productions.

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1 All excerpts from this interview taken from: *The Unknown Mayhew: selections from the Morning Chronicle 1849-50*
2. West – Ferdinand of Spain (1813)
Throughout 1811 West began to move away from the lottery box characters towards an open layout with characters placed parallel to the short side of the sheet so they could be drawn larger and with greater detail. This format generally included the title of the play, place first performed, the names of characters and sometimes also the names of the actors in the part, and the price – West always sold plain prints at 1d and coloured sheets at 2d. These prints were intended as theatrical souvenirs for contemporary performances and West would emphasise these links, for example his print of Ferdinand states it is ‘Now performing with Unbounded applause at Astley’s’. Prints would be produced as soon as possible if a play proved popular, The Miller and his Men was being printed by Mrs Jameson within a month after opening.

3. West – The Lady of the Lake (1811)
West was determined to produce prints that were high quality and accurate representations of the contemporary productions: ‘I considers it as a matter of history like’. To protect his prints he would include a phrase like ‘as the Act directs’. This refers to the 1735 Engraving Copyright Act which secured the copyright of a print for 28 years. West frequently re-dated his prints either to extend their copyright or to advertise when he changed premises. He was always on the look-out for talented artists who he would send to the theatre to capture a performance, one of the first of which was William Heath: ‘Mr Hashley, of the Hamphitheater sent, young ----- [Heath?] with a drawing to show me. It was uncommon well done; oh such a beautiful picture! he got on to be one of the first-rate artists afterwards. [...] There’s the first plate ----[Heath] did for me. It’s the principal characters in The Lady of the Lake, as produced at the Surrey, and a great advance it is on the others’.

4. The Dramatized Works of Walter Scott: The Lady on the Lake play-text (1810)
Scott’s poem was dramatized by T.J. Dibdin for the Surrey Theatre in 1810. The theatrical publishers would send their artist to the theatre with a rough sketch of characters (and later scenery) which he would then dress by copying costumes from the stage. This could turn into two way process as West describes: ‘The wardrobe people at the minor theatres and masquerade people used to buy a great many to make their dresses from’. This play-text shows the original cast and a description of their costume so it is possible to compare the accuracy of West’s prints, see for example Fitzjames, Brien and Ellen.

5. Hodgson’s characters in The Infernal Secret (1822) and Romeo and Juliet (1823)
Hodgson also made use of William Heath’s services – in Romeo and Juliet (above) Heath has included his signature. The Infernal Secret (below) was drawn by William’s brother Henry Heath and the difference in quality between the artists is pronounced.

6. West – The Broken Sword (1816)
These prints also hint at how costumes developed over time; this play-text was published in 1825 and slight changes like the addition of hats for several characters don’t appear in the earlier print. Occasionally, West’s signature or those of his artists appear on the prints, here the WB was once thought to be William Blake but is now regarded as William Henry Brooke whose name appears on similar prints. Other artists and etchers connected to West and Hodgson at this time include Robert and George Cruikshank, Denis Dighton, Charles Tomkins a scene painter at the Coburg, Surrey and Adelphi Theatres and R. Scruton another scene painter from the Coburg.

7. Hodgson and Co’s Life in London and Gilderoy (c.1822)
Theatrical prints still only consisted of characters usually in two or three plates although the arrival of Hodgson and Co. in 1821 was soon to change this. They began to incorporate scenery between or behind the characters, eventually printing it separately. Unusually, small vignettes of action with hints of scenery were produced for Life in London the first play to exceed a run of 100 performances.
8. A. Park sketches for Hamlet? (1819)
It is not clear who created these pencil sketches of Park’s version of Hamlet nevertheless they give an indication of how characters and scenes were conceptualised and prepared for engraving.

9. Copper plate and print of Skelt’s Master Burke in six favourite characters No.2 (c.1830)
From the initial sketches the engraver (not necessarily the original artist) would place the sketch onto a prepared plate and run it through a press to create an impression and reverse the image. A needle was used to cut the design and add shading. The plate is then immersed in acid which ‘bites’ a line wherever the needle has touched a process that is actually etching but is referred to as engraving in relation to theatrical prints. The plate can then be dried and inked ready for printing. Copper plates were most commonly used although later in the century some publishers also used steel plates and lithography for portraits. The finished print now the right way round and coloured can be seen on the right.

10. O. Hodgson’s characters in The Forty Thieves (c.1830)
Two plates could also be engraved on a double-sized piece of copper to be cut apart later or sold as a pair. This double plate is likely to be the work of Robert Cruikshank who produced most of Orlando Hodgson’s theatrical prints and portraits.
11. Hodgson’s Juvenile Drama: The Blind Boy (1822)
When the Hodgson family entered the theatrical print trade they furthered the development of the theatrical prints into theatrical plays by issuing the first full sets of characters with scenery with an abridged play book which they issued under the title of Hodgson’s Juvenile Drama - the original authors of the plays were not considered important and were never credited. The Hodgson’s continued to reproduce contemporary plays specifically targeting a young, male audience and favoured melodramas, spectacles and combats.

12. West - scene from Casco Bay (1828)
Competition from the Hodgson’s forced West in turn to produce fuller sets of plays including scenery. He engaged scenic illustrators from the theatres for his designs and employed colourists like John Varley, Alfred Cocking and William Heath for the 2d prints and the quality of the results is evident. Later toy theatre publishers relied on family and child labour for mass production; they could colour a figure every eight seconds.

13. West’s Stage Wings
West attributes the creation of the toy theatre itself to his customers: ‘we was asked by the customers for theayter s to put the characters in’ so began to produce miniature stages. These necessitated the addition of various stage parts including wings, top drops, drop scenes and the orchestral strip and larger theatres could cost up to £20.

14. M. Skelt - George Barnwell (c.1835)
The halfpenny prints were published at a reduced size, becoming 9 by 7 inches in contrast to the 10 by 8 inch penny plates. To fit in more characters they were aligned parallel to the long side of the sheet like West’s first prints. The title of the play, names of characters and number of plates were retained but references to the original theatrical production and to the actors were gradually removed. This format became the template used by all toy theatre publishers for the rest of the century.

George Barnwell was first performed in Drury Lane at 1731 and is a romantic melodrama the genre which came to dominate the nineteenth century stage. These plays primarily featured pastoral romances, the exotic orient, nautical, gothic and historical battle settings but adaptations of the novels of Walter Scott and the plays of Shakespeare were also produced as well as operas and pantomimes.

15. J. Redington - Paul Clifford (c.1835)
This print exemplifies the typical style of colouration of the halfpenny prints. Instead of delicate hand colouration by artists these prints are often filled by blocks of primary colours applied in sweeping movements at high speed. This was also due to the changing nature of the prints, they no longer needed to be accurate theatrical souvenirs but cheap collectible plays and most boys would buy plain sheets to colour at home as a hobby: ‘joy attended the illumination; nor can I quite forget that child who, wilfully foregoing pleasure, stoops to “twopence coloured”’.

Here the publishers began to differentiate their toy theatre sheets from the theatrical portraits where their skill and artistry would be displayed instead.

16. Stokes’ Olympic Revels (1832) & O. Hodgson’s The Siege of Troy (1833)
These are some of the last plays published by the ‘Regency’ publishers West and Hodgson. Although they altered their sheets to match the new format they did not default on the quality or prices of their work and so could not compete with the cut-throat halfpenny publishers as West stated: ‘they used to copy my penny ones and sell ‘em at

*From Robert Louis Stevenson’s essay ‘A penny plain and twopence coloured’
half-price, so I thought it high time to give over [...] I wasn’t going to reduce to halfpenny – not I’. West reissued a few prints under the name of his housekeeper Sarah Stokes but on the verge of bankruptcy he left the theatrical print trade followed by Hodgson in 1834.

17. Hodgson and Green – scene from Aladdin (1832 & 1841)
The collapse of the penny publishers was capitalised on by the halfpenny publishers who saw an opportunity to acquire plays for their own stock. Here Green has copied Hodgson’s version of Aladdin then reversed the print and reduced its size to sell at a halfpenny giving evidence for West’s claim of the plagiarism of penny prints.

18. Skelt late Lloyd’s scene in the Maid of Genoa (c.1837-40)
Martin Skelt bought up the majority of R. Lloyd’s plates and prints which meant rather than copying he could reissue them with his own name inserted. He maintained the 1d price for Lloyd’s plates. Reissuing old plays also meant that fewer copies of contemporary plays were produced in this period although the halfpenny publishers did produce some original works.

19. Green – scene for multiple plays (1841)
The generic nature of melodrama meant that many plays contained similar elements for example palace or cottage interiors, castle or forest scenes, a naval battle etc. so stock scenery could be produced to fit multiple plays which reduced costs both for the publisher and customer. This scene fits 3 plays but it is common for titles to run across the top and even down the right hand side of the prints.
20. Green - Jack Sheppard (1839)
Jack Sheppard was the longest toy theatre play requiring 64 sheets of characters and scenes. To cut the expense of printing the play Green switched from copper to zinc plates and he continued to publish using zinc from this point onwards. Unlike the copper plates the zinc plates have deteriorated greatly with age.

21. Green - The Life of a Soldier (1854)
Another change made by Green in his publishing process after 1850 was the replacement of the technique of stipple (small dots placed close together) with cross hatching to shade in his characters giving them distinctive wide eyes and a woodcut style.

22. Skelt’s new and improved stage front (c.1840-50)
Stages consisted of a wooden frame surrounding a platform (which could be raised to accommodate a trapdoor in pantomimes) with a proscenium backed onto cardboard and attached to the front of the frame. Grooves in the boards across the top of the stage held scenes, wings and a drop curtain. Wooden and later tin slides with long wire handles were used to mount the characters and move them about the stage. Tin footlights contained oil to burn wicks providing illumination and chemical coloured fires effects for climatic conflagrations at the end of the play. The London stages were also changing in response to the highly visual and sensational melodramas. The Elizabethan forestage which allowed the audience to surround the stage retreated behind the proscenium and the auditorium was darkened to enhance the sense of a picture box. Where theatre had been an interactive experience the audience were now expected to be quiet watchers gazing at the cinematic-like spectacles.

23. Webb’s top drops
Along with generic scenery the publishers produced runs of interchangeable top drops and wings ‘to suit all pieces’. These would be publisher rather than play specific for example Skelt’s castle wings or Park’s water pieces.

24. Skelt’s new stage orchestra (c.1835-7)
Stages could be decorated further with an orchestral strip attached to the base of the stage. For a toy theatre performance music could be provided by a music box and some contemporary images of family performances show musicians accompanying the performance.

25. Directions for performing the Juvenile Drama
These instructions by Skelt reveal important information about how stages would be managed during a performance. Toy theatres were not designed for children at this time but were principally meant as a tool for young men to learn stagecraft although female relatives were allowed to help with the cutting out and colouring of the pieces. The assimilation of toy theatres into the home was now widespread, Robert Louis Stevenson, Aubrey Beardsley, Charles Dickens, John Everett Millais, Ellen Terry and Jack B. Yeats were all juvenile theatrical producers. R. L. Stevenson wrote that toy theatres plays ‘were like wallowing in the raw stuff of story books’ and may have been an inspiration to many young adults.

26. Park’s scenes in The Red Rover (c.1830)
Dioramas and panoramas were a public craze from the 1790s to the 1830s both as a visual and educational experience, revealing to images of major cities landscapes and historical events faithfully and accurately reproduced. In the 1820s theatres adapted moving panoramas for the stage, where a single painted canvas would be unwound from one side of the stage to the other. They were particularly effective for melodramatic spectacle this panorama is for an adaptation of James Fenimore Cooper’s ‘sea novel’ The Red Rover.

27. Skelt’s drop scene of The Death of Nelson
Many publishers capitalised on historical events, Skelt may have taken this scene from Hodgson who published The Death of Nelson based on Cumberland’s 1805 production of The Victory and Death of Lord Nelson at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. It was later coloured by H.J. Webb.
28. Skelt’s characters and scenes in Jonathon Bradford (c.1835-7)
This scene in The George Inn appears to show split level staging was a possibility; here four interior rooms are shown with miniature characters to match.

29. Skelt’s Harlequin Little King Pippin (c.1834) and Pantomime tricks (c.1840s)
West confined his pantomimes to the Christmas season at the patent theatres but as plays lengthened he ceased production of these in the 1820s and it was the Skelt’s who revived toy theatre pantomimes in the 1830s with Harlequin Little King Pippin. Pantomimes required tricks which would make use of trapdoors and pop-ups. The characters were folded along the dotted lines then with a pull on strings they would ‘pop out’ from the objects concealing them at a whack from Harlequin’s magic sword or bat.

30. Theatrical Tokens
In the early 19th century brass or copper theatrical tokens instead of paper tickets would be issued for regular performances. The first two coins from the left relate to the Old Price riots when prices were raised to cover construction costs of the newly rebuilt Covent Garden theatre in 1809. The larger silver coin shows Charles Kemble on a donkey - as manager of the theatre Kemble was forced to publically apologise after three months of rioting. The next two coins are for entry into the theatre, one for the upper gallery of Covent Garden theatre and the small yellow coin is inscribed: ‘Just dropt in hope I don’t intrude’. The small coin with the elephant advertises Pidock’s Grand Menagerie. The large silver coin pictures famous child actor William Henry West Betty who debuted at 12 and was known as The Young Roscius.

‘It’s a matter of history, like’: 1850-1900

By 1850 the toy theatre had become firmly disassociated from its Regency origins; West was interviewed by Mayhew and had made his will, the Skelt’s were barely producing any more plays and W. G. Webb completed his apprenticeship with A. Park ready to usher in the Victorian wave of toy theatre publishing but the print landscape was rapidly about to change.

31. Penny Theatre Royal - The Miller & his Men
The abolition of the newspaper tax in 1855 coupled with the development of mechanised paper mills caused an explosion in popular cheap prints. Penny packets ruthlessly condensed toy theatre plays to fit a single sheet, miniaturising the stage to 11cm and with the play text printed along the bottom of the sheet or in a separate booklet. The Penny Theatre Royal published at least 12 plays, nine of which were taken from the toy theatre publishers. Isaac Pocock’s The Miller and his Men was the most successful toy theatre play, every publisher produced at least one version, and it was revived regularly on the London stages from 1813-1861.

32. March’s Monster Penny Plays – William Tell
Juvenile magazines like Boys of England appeared in the 1860s and to encourage sales they serialised copies of toy theatre plays and gave away prints free with each issue. March’s penny packets were also aimed at young male consumers and unfold to reveal the entire set of pieces for a play. Eventually, these were superseded by the even cheaper halfpenny packets.

33. Figuren für Kindertheater
Adding to the flood of juvenile theatrical material were imports of German toy theatres. Toy theatre publishing in Germany began seriously in 1830 with publishers using lithographic rather than copperplate printing. They were much larger and better quality than their English counterparts at this time and their plays were versions of classics like Faust, The Magic Flute and The Mikado rather than contemporary popular plays.
34. Redington’s new and improved stage front (c.1857)
The English toy theatres responded to the competition from German imports and penny packets in different ways. Redington and Park produced enlarged versions of their plays and increased the size of the toy theatre stages to match the German stages. Redington’s small prosceniums were based on the Britannia theatre which was on the same street as his shop however the large proscenium bears more resemblance to the interior of the Haymarket Theatre.

35. Park’s original and new characters for The Miller and his Men
When penny packets began to produce or give away copies of The Miller and his Men the toy theatre publishers were quick to retaliate with new versions. Park produced a large and detailed 4d set which is obviously superior in quality to the original halfpenny version.

36. Webb – The Miller and his Men (1862)
W. G. Webb was the only formal toy theatre apprentice and he studied the techniques of drawing, colouring, engraving, etching, lithography, and publishing under Archibald Park. Like West he had the skills to make prints himself and he was also committed to accuracy - his version of this play is updated, based on its final revival at the Haymarket Theatre. Webb competed with other sources by using his skills to produce better quality prints than his rivals, he was most active during the 1860s until the increasing pressures in the toy theatre trade caused a period of stagnation which lasted from 1862-76 affecting Park, Redington and Webb who all virtually ceased production.
37. Pollock – The Miller and his Men (c.1880s)
The toy theatre industry appeared to be on the verge of collapse until 1877 when Benjamin Pollock married the daughter of Redington (who had died a year previously) and set out to revive Redington’s toy theatre business. Having acquired plates from Redington and Park he built up his stock and republished out of print titles, issuing only one original play. Pollock also simplified the style of his prints, paring them down to the essentials making a marked contrast to Webb's highly detailed and decorative prints as can be seen in their two versions of 'The Miller and his Men. Competition from Pollock revived the efforts of Webb and their rivalry produced the final surge in toy theatre publishing.

38. Webb and Pollock’s playbooks for The Miller and his Men
The different approach to the toy theatre by Webb and Pollock is also evident from the playbooks they produced, when comparing the first page of each. While both are adapted versions of the original text Webb (above) retains the theatrical language and a large amount of stage directions, even those that would be impossible to reproduce with fixed paper figures: ‘GRINDOFF coming forward seems surprised at seeing LOTHAIR’, making his plays very complex and lengthy recitals.

In contrast Pollock (below) has simplified his stage directions, modernised the language used and reduced the text as much as possible making his play easily comprehensible to children. This was the key difference between the publishers, Webb’s plays though more artistic were not as practical as Pollock’s who understood that toy theatre plays which had once been a leisure pursuit for young men were now primarily a child’s toy and only needed a minimalist design and basic instructions.

39. Webb – The Battle of Alma (c.1855)
While Pollock was content to reprint old material Webb actively updated his stock to create plays of topical interest. He published ‘The Battle of Alma and The Battles of Balaklava and Inkermann in response to the Crimean War. This meant he did not often follow the practices of earlier publishers and reuse stock scenery because these historical plays required unique landscapes and new settings.

40. Webb – Harlequin Dame Crump (c.1857/8)
Publishers would even promote their wares within their own plays; Webb has reproduced the exterior of his theatrical print shop in this scene of his first pantomime. In the window can be seen examples of his theatrical portraits, scenes from plays, favourite characters and combats and pantomime figures.

In 1880 Robert Louis Stevenson visited Webb’s shop to research an article he was composing on Skelt’s toy theatre plays which he had collected in his youth. After a row with Webb, Stevenson advertised Pollock as the last surviving toy theatre publisher: ‘If you love art, folly, or the bright eyes of children, speed to Pollock’s’, which has been attributed to the decline of Webb’s business and the survival of Pollock’s.

41. Mathews’ playbook for Jack O’Newbury
At the end of his playbook Mathews’ has included a puff piece deriding the ‘trashy’ penny packets and reminding his customers ‘there are no other names connected with the Juvenile Drama but Skelt, Webb, Redington and Mathews’ of which the latter only is living’, interestingly he in turn does not mention Pollock possibly because Pollock would be his only surviving competitor. Webb’s business was taken over by his son H. J. Webb after his death in 1890 but only Pollock’s shop remains today.

Ultimately, the decline of the toy theatre business was due to the change of drama on the London stages, the toy theatre was a perfect picture-box for visual melodramas and could not be adapted for the genre of realism which pervaded the theatres at the end of the century, replacing sensationalism with psychological drama and witty dialogue. Unable to draw on the London stage for plays and with an overabundance of cheap old stock available the toy theatre industry was relegated to history but in itself preserves a historical record, each play crystallises its real life counterpart and provides a window onto the Regency and early Victorian stage.
Alongside toy theatre plays the theatrical publishers produced a variety of ‘juvenile sundries’ to capitalise on all aspects of the theatrical trade. The most important of these were the collectable groups of characters and scenes and the theatrical portraits of contemporary actors and actresses in their most famous roles, consolidating the growing celebrity culture.

42. Webb’s miniatures No.4
In 1814 West began to create miniature characters an invention which has been attributed to George Cruikshank as he attempted to produce the smallest amount of work for West’s flat rate fee of a pound a plate. West would publish a miniature version of a full sized play sometimes with all the characters in a single sheet. Later, publishers used miniatures to mean a collectible set of characters from all their different plays.

43. Redington’s favourite fours
Alongside miniatures the publishers produced sheets of their ‘favourite’ characters or a specific actor in various roles in different sizes, the largest were the fours but these were then followed by sixes, nines and sixteen’s. Some of the individual characters were also enlarged into full sized theatrical portraits.

44. Park’s Shakespearean twelfth-night characters
Packets of twelfth night characters enclosed in a wrapper were produced for the festivities of the twelve days following Christmas. They could be on a specific theme or they reflected an event from the previous year. Inside the wrapper is a sheet of Shakespearean characters in boxes much like the lottery style characters with a riddle.
under each character rather than a rhyme. These riddles are equivalent to the jokes in Christmas crackers. The characters would be cut up and sent out as party invitations and the guest would arrive dressed as the character on their card.

45. Park’s scraps No. 8
Scraps were miscellaneous ephemera produced by the toy theatre publishers in the same style as the toy theatre sheets but were intended as decoration and did not have to be on theatrical topics.

46. Skelt’s new pantomime characters - Clowns
Runs of types of characters were also published and could be used to widen the range of costumes or poses available for a character.

47. Hodgson & Co. untitled equestrian combat (1822)
Equestrian scenes were immensely popular particularly for portraying heroes on their chargers, mounted soldiers and battlefield and circus imagery. This print may be based on the Royal Coburg Theatre’s 1820 production of The Crusaders, or, Jerusalem Delivered or alternatively The Crusades and the Seven Champions of Christendom at Astley’s Circus however there is no equivalent toy theatre play. The shape of the red cross worn by the knight on the right indicates he was a member of The Grand Priory of Knights Templar in Scotland, better known as the Knight Templars, and could therefore show their defeat by Saladin’s Muslim armies at the Battle of Hattin in 1187.
48. M & M Skelt – Mr Ducrow in the Vicissitude of a Tar (c.1840)
In 1824 Andrew Ducrow became the new manager of Astley's amphitheatre which specialised in equine spectacles like Blue Beard and The Forty Thieves. Ducrow's father was an acrobat and strongman who trained his son in circus skills like trick riding and he became the chief performer at Astley's. He staged many military campaigns like 'The Battle of Waterloo' and 'The Battle of Alma' with 'Mazeppa and the Wild Horse' becoming one of the most successful equine dramas. This hand coloured etching was drawn by W. Cocking and etched by R.Lloyd.

49. Langham – Grand Combat in Marmion
Langham was primarily an agent for Hodgson & Co. although he published some combat scenes and portraits independently. This combat is taken from the epic poem 'Marmion; A tale of Flodden Field' by Walter Scott which recounts the story of Lord Marmion of Fontenaye who is killed in the Battle of Flodden.

50. O. Hodgson – Mr Charles Kemble as Faulconbridge (1831)
On the left is a preliminary pen and ink sketch for one of Hodgson’s new series of theatrical portraits. It is almost identical to the final engraving which only adds minor embellishments such as jewels to the bronze armour. Charles Kemble played the character of Faulconbridge in his older brother John Phillip Kemble’s production of Shakespeare’s ‘King John’ in the 1803-4 season at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden which had just come under John Kemble's management.

51. Jameson – Theatrical characters No. 20 (1817)
Favourite actors or characters could be presented in ‘pairs’, here Sarah Siddons and her brother John Phillip Kemble are obviously drawn in a way to emphasise their family resemblance. Sarah Siddons had already achieved fame—her most celebrated role was to become Lady Macbeth—and was able to facilitate the careers of her brothers. The eldest siblings were often paired in leading roles such as King John and Constance or Othello and Desdemona with Charles Kemble in supporting roles.

52. Fairburn – Mr Macready as Rob Roy MacGregor (1823)
Publishers like Fairburn, Jameson and West aimed at creating an identifiable ‘likeness’ between the actor and their theatrical portrait so in these earlier portraits the faces are distinct and a clear resemblance can be seen when compared against the picture of William Macready. It was the role of Rob Roy in 1818 that Macready cemented his reputation as a romantic actor.

53. M. Skelt – Mr Dibdin Pitt as Count Friberg (c.1830s)
Not only did the publishers recreate the faces and costumes of the actors they also reproduced their poses which are deliberate theatrical gestures taken directly from the stage. After the destruction of the Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres by fire in 1808 and 1809 they were rebuilt on a vast scale to seat 3000 but the distance from the stage meant most of the audience could not hear the performance. Manuals of gesture and action were created for actors to be able to convey the action on stage with their bodies with each position becoming a symbol the audience could ‘read’. Here Count Friberg, under imminent attack from banditti, exemplifies the gesture of ‘terror’: ‘in the first moment of fear we stagger backward [...] we know not how to act, whether to fly or to defend ourselves [...] anger makes us impetuously present our hand, as it were to meet th[...].’

54. West – Mr Kean as Richard III (1824)
Edmund Kean made his debut on the London stage in the role of Shylock at Drury Lane in 1814 followed by the role of Richard III which became his iconic character. More versions of Kean as Richard III published than of any other actor in any other role due to his rising celebrity as a tragic actor and despite Sarah Siddons comment that he ‘played very, very well’ but ‘there was too little of him to make a great actor’. This is an allusion to Kean’s distinctive shortness – West with his penchant for accuracy is one of the few publishers to present Kean in this way whilst in other theatrical portraits he appears tall and gangly rather than compact.

*Description taken from Engel and Siddons’ Practical illustrations of rhetorical gesture and action. 2nd ed, 1822.
55. O. Hodgson – Mrs Faucet as Delha in Koulikhan (c.1830s)
The verse satire Kouli Khan, or, The progress of error was produced in reaction to King George IV’s attempt to
gain an annulment of his marriage to Queen Caroline from parliament in 1820 which was strongly opposed by the
public who viewed her as a ‘wronged woman’. Becoming a famous actress allowed women to overcome the
boundaries class and female etiquette to become financially independent or the head of their household. Actresses
like Mrs Egerton, Ellen Terry and Lillie Langtry were quick to see theatrical portraiture as a means of image
management to achieve celebrity and they also utilised memoirs, interviews and photographs. Actresses also
promoted their own style of fashion on stage and acted as advisors to noblewomen, Siddons described how ‘lady B
borrowed her lady Macbeth banquet dress for a masquerade’. This portrait is an example of the intricacy and
detail of female costumes in theatrical portraits.

56. Fairburn – Mr Osbaldiston as Bluebeard (c.1830s)
The Fairburn’s specialised in theatrical portraiture and produced some of the best examples of this art. In 1789
George Coleman the younger wrote an operatic oriental version of the fairytale Bluebeard which with its equestrian
battles and procession over the mountains became one of the most popular toy theatre plays after the Miller and
his Men.

57. Marks – Mr Dale as the Raja de Jalma (c.1840s)
Woodcutting was not used by the majority of the toy theatre publishers unless for cheap miscellanea like the
Twelfth Night characters although it was frequently used by the penny packet publishers. Marks was the only one
to use woodcut for his series of theatrical portraits perhaps because by the 1840s interest in capturing an accurate
likeness of the subject had diminished particularly with the growth of tinselling.

58. West – The Champion (1821)
West published a pair of ‘Champion’ portraits in 1821 as souvenirs of the coronation of King George IV and show
the Champion, Mr Dymoke, with a cup or a glove. The champion threw down his gauntlet three times issuing a
challenge to anyone who denied the sovereignity of George IV. George IV then drank to his champion and passed
him the goblet as depicted here by West. This portrait has also been adorned with tinsel, a craze which peaked in
the 1830s. After cutting out and colouring a portrait tinsel foil, as well as pieces of silk, lace or feather could be
pasted onto the figure as additional decoration. At first, people would purchase metal foil from jewellers and cut it
to fit their portrait but soon the theatrical publishers were creating packets of tinsel customised for a particular
portrait or item like a sword or a shield. Tinselled portrait were revived in 1926 by William Webb’s son for an
exhibition of the Webb toy theatre collection - some of his portraits for the exhibition are on the table.
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