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# ‘Kaleidoscopes of changing pictures’: Representing Nations in Toy Theatre

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**Abstract:**

Toy theatre was an adjunct trade to London theatreland in the nineteenth century. Publishers produced miniature versions of popular productions on stage in contemporary playhouses. Consequently, toy theatre has typically been studied as a unique visual record of theatrical scenery and costumes. This article aims to question these assumptions, and to argue that these toys should be critically examined as performances in their own right. In 1854 the Lord Chamberlain’s Office licensed the ‘Grand Military Spectacle’ of ‘The Battle of the Alma’ at Astley’s Amphitheatre. Both the spectacle and the humour of the drama drew on the interplay between domestic and foreign settings and stereotypes. Far from presenting simplified models of place, space, and identification, however, Astley’s used stock characters and generic tropes to play with and unsettle national identities, and to encourage the audience to question press coverage of the Crimean War. At least two toy theatre publishers adapted ‘The Battle of the Alma’ by the end of the year, but each revised the source drama differently. Although J. K. Green’s and W. Webb’s toy theatre scripts and sheets both drew on the stereotypical imaginaries of domestic and foreign cultural geographies used in Astley’s full-scale production, these publishers constructed diverse meanings from familiar tropes. Comparing alternative versions of ‘The Battle of the Alma’ thus identifies divergent ways in which these apparently analogous products adapted the source drama, engaged with discourses of national identity cued in the original production, and negotiated the relationships between theatrical representation and contemporary reportage of the battle. Instead of interpreting toy theatre as an archival record of lost scenery and costumes, this article argues that its scripts and sheets are material evidence of multiple processes of cultural production occurring simultaneously in superficially similar artefacts.

**KEYWORDS:** toy theatre, juvenile drama, cultural geographies, national identities, nationalism, adaptation, Astley’s Amphitheatre, military spectacle, Battle of Alma, Crimean War

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By the latter decades of the nineteenth century, toy theatres were no longer a popular children's entertainment. An article for the *Era Almanack* of 1891 laments that 'the present generation knows not that resource from which their parents derived great amusement and, probably, unconscious instruction'.[1] But for decades toy theatres had engaged generations of young people in multimedia play. Toy theatres are free-standing models, usually made of a proscenium arch and a frame, into which two-dimensional scenery sheets are slotted to create a miniature stage space.[2] Paper characters are then cut out and mounted on card, so that they can be moved around the stage. So, unlike the theatrical portraiture from which it evolved, the material properties of toy theatre could be mobilized for performance as juvenile drama, allowing opportunities for practitioners to introduce music, changes in lighting, and special effects, such as Red or Blue Fire, purchasable as optional extras.[3] The trade reached its zenith in the 1840s, but the market was competitive from 1811 (the date of the earliest preserved sheets) until the 1860s, and numerous publishers vied for consumers' attention.[4] As early as 1871, however, the playwright John Oxenford memorialized these toys as artefacts of a bygone youth culture, 'valued treasure' in which modern children had little interest.[5]

Connecting Oxenford's account with the article published in the *Era Almanack* two decades later is the representation of toy theatres as relics of national, as well as individual pasts. For both commentators, toy theatres nostalgically evoke an imagined community of middle-class Britishness. Both present preparing and performing juvenile dramas as part of a typical middle-class childhood experience earlier in the nineteenth century, linking disparate individuals through their similar engagement with popular and material culture. Moreover, they see the social experience of collaborative play within households as a model for adult social or familial networks, because the roles children adopt are supposed to be limited by gender expectations. 'The young ladies of the family might assist with their scissors or their camel's hair pencil, […] but in a well-regulated household the manager and proprietor was always a

[1] Theo Arthur, 'The Toy Theatre', *Era Almanack* (January, 1891), 43–46 (p. 46).
[2] The proscenium is usually decorated. Some models are based directly on London playhouses (Drury Lane or the Britannia, for example), while others employ generic images to evoke a night at the theatre: well-dressed people seated in boxes, an orchestra pit below the stage. Examples can be seen at Pollock's Toy Museum, London.
[3] George Speaight, *History of the English Toy Theatre* (London: Studio Vista Ltd., 1969), pp. 103–5. Speaight goes so far as to argue that 'the English toy theatre never began as a child's toy at all' (p. 14).
[4] Ibid. pp. 34–48.
[5] John Oxenford, 'The Toy Theatre', *Era Almanack* (January, 1871), 67–68 (p. 67).

boy, beginning to think himself a man.'[6] Both articles assume that these domestic social networks are replicated in many homes, and so conceive a wider national space through cosy, domestic imagery. Conversely, even while both articles represent these departed cultural and childhood events as unifying experiences, the wistful tone of their descriptions signals each writer's current alienation from a past which 'has to be classed, with the Dodo and Megatherium, as utterly and totally extinct.'[7] Indeed, they both present the passing of this aspect of children's culture as indicative of the broader disintegration of the nation as a knowable space. Oxenford reinforces his desire to recapture what he perceives as an intimate cultural space through a protectionist attitude to foreign imports. He repeatedly takes pains to emphasize the inferiority of 'those German ready-made theatres' to those produced by British publishers earlier in the century.[8] For Oxenford, toy theatre is one legacy of a national past and cultural geography, which is being eroded by international encounters.

Oxenford associates a distinctly British cultural geography with toy theatre because of the aesthetic qualities of the sheets, as well as the fact that London publishers dominated the domestic market for these objects earlier in the century. Toy theatre was an adjunct trade to London theatreland in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. Publishers produced miniature versions of the popular productions on stage in contemporary playhouses, so Oxenford sees the sheets as visual records which 'preserved' a specific theatrical heritage 'from oblivion.'[9] Certainly, there were close ties between full-scale and miniature productions. Artists apparently sketched the costumes and settings during a performance, before the completed design was etched onto metal plates for printing.[10] Previous studies of toy theatre history have typically

[6] Ibid. Oxenford is not alone in stating that toy theatre was chiefly enjoyed by boys. See also: Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured', *Magazine of Art*, 7 (January, 1884), 227–232, and Arthur, 'The Toy Theatre'. Moreover, later in the nineteenth century toy theatre sheets were given away with boys' magazines. (David Powell, *W. G. Webb and the Victorian Toy Theatre* [Webb Festival, 2005], p. 18.) These factors indicate the toy theatre publishers' target market.

[7] Arthur, 'The Toy Theatre' (p. 46).

[8] Oxenford, 'The Toy Theatre' (p. 68). The publishers who had dominated toy theatre production earlier in the century (such as J. K. Green, W. Webb, William West, and the Skelt family) were no longer trading. Instead, the market (though already diminished by the second half of the nineteenth century) was dominated by elaborate German imports. (Peter Baldwin, *Toy Theatres of the World* [London: Zwemmer, 1992], p. 77.)

[9] Oxenford, 'The Toy Theatre' (p. 68).

[10] David Powell explains that different publishers favoured different metals. J. K. Green used zinc plates from 1839 to his death in 1860, whereas W. Webb employed steel and copper plates variously. (David Powell, J. R. Piggott, and Horatio Blood, *Printing the Toy Theatre* [London: Pollock's Toy Museum Trust, 2009], pp. 22–3.) This is one reason for the stylistic differences between the sheets produced by separate publishers. However, their professional relationships with specific artists also contributed to making their sheets distinctive. Theo Arthur's article for the *Era Almanack* asserts: 'The idiosyncrasies of each firm were very marked and striking. […] Each firm had its particular artist. Ah! those unknown artists! who put their individuality as strongly into their work as ever did limner who is entitled to add RA. to his name. You could no more confuse a "Grindoff" after Skelt with a "Grindoff" after Webb than you would mistake a Millais for a Tadema.' ('The Toy Theatre' [p. 44].)

followed Oxenford's lead.[11] Its best-known historian, George Speaight, states that 'as records of the actual theatre […] these toy theatre sheets now qualify as documentation of the highest value.'[12] Peter Baldwin likewise reviews the extent to which scenery and character sheets can be treated as an archival record of theatre's lost artistry, and concludes that 'available evidence would suggest that the output of toy theatre publishers between 1820 and 1850 was based almost entirely on the live theatre.'[13] Both studies reach the conclusion that toy theatre has significant archival value for theatre historians because much of the publishers' output corresponds with successful productions running concurrently in London playhouses, and because toy theatre scenes sometimes correlate with other images that were supposedly copied from performances, such as watercolours of dramatic scenes.[14] Conversely, comparing various versions of the same drama reveals that publishers interpreted their sources differently. Even when separate publishers chose to adapt the same play at a contemporaneous moment, their versions were diverse. Contrary to Oxenford's assertion that toy theatre 'preserved' records of nineteenth-century productions, these sheets should not be taken at face value, but critically examined as performances in their own right.

Although, as we have seen, late-century commentators construed toy theatre as representing a middle-class British identity founded on shared childhood experiences now threatened with obsolescence, originally they were intended to engage with current performance cultures. In so doing, juvenile dramas picked up on generic theatrical conventions through which ideas about place and nation were staged in full-scale productions. Jacky Bratton, Michael Ragussis, and Edward Ziter, among others, have examined how theatre

[11] Previous studies and museum books include Speaight, *The History of the English Toy Theatre* (1969); Kenneth Fawdry, ed., *Toy Theatre* (London: Pollock's Toy Theatres Ltd., 1980); Peter Isaac, *A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured: The Juvenile Drama* (Wylam: Allenholme Press, 1990); Baldwin, *Toy Theatres of the World* (1992); Powell, *W. G. Webb and the Victorian Toy Theatre* (2005); Powell, Piggott and Blood, *Printing the Toy Theatre* (2009); Riva Arnold, 'Design of the Imagination: How Did Children in the Victorian Period Engage with the Orient?' (unpublished MA dissertation, Royal College of Art, 2010). There is also a brief discussion of toy theatre in Dan Fleming, *Powerplay: Toys as Popular Culture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 81–123.

[12] George Speaight, 'Toy Theatre', in *Toy Theatre*, ed. by Kenneth Fawdry, pp. 9–19 (p. 9). Evidence about theatrical scenery is particularly scarce for several reasons. First, there was the problem of storing huge stage equipment, especially as the trend for spectacular built-out scenery gathered pace around the mid-nineteenth century. Second, there was the inevitable wear and tear that sets would have sustained from multiple reuses, particularly if it were taken on tours of the provinces or overseas. Finally, there were casualties attributable to stage husbandry, as older scenery was thriftily painted over for new productions. Anne Witchard has revealed that interpreting toy theatre sheets as visual records of bygone productions is not new, its aesthetics were used to stage reconstructions of Victorian British theatre in modernist ballet. (Anne Witchard, 'Bedraggled Ballerinas on a Bus Back to Bow: The 'Fairy Business', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 13 [2011] <http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.618> [accessed 03/08/2017].)

[13] Baldwin, *Toy Theatres of the World*, pp. 11–12.

[14] Ibid. p. 12; Speaight, 'Toy Theatre' (p. 11).

played a role in both establishing and questioning representations of national or racial identities outside of the playhouse. As Ziter rightly states, theatres communicated a 'pictorial vocabulary' of Otherness to a mass public.[15] Nevertheless, such imagery was not passively accepted. Indeed, the very familiarity of dramatic tropes allowed theatre practitioners to subvert these models of identification for subversive or comic effect. Consequently, as Bratton has argued, the uses and meanings of stereotypes and stock characters were far from predictable, and could provoke audiences to reconsider how national identities were commonly conceived.[16] The word 'tropes' indicates this flexibility in how performers staged cultural geographies. For, while tropes are 'expressions that have a figurative meaning', they can affect a decisive journey away from their original context, and in so doing be used to generate differently nuanced cultural connotations.[17] In employing generic imagery of place and nation, theatres engaged in interlocking processes of de- and re-familiarization, as staging variations on recognizable themes and characters unsettled the very ideas that these conventions appeared to reinforce. Toy theatre drew on contemporary dramatic tropes, such as common costumes for stock characters, and mediated their relocation from stageland to domestic spaces. Yet, just as full-scale performances self-consciously evoked or revised the cultural meanings embedded in generic imagery and stereotypical characters, so toy theatre publishers mobilized dramatic tropes to construct national cultural geographies differently. This article examines two juvenile versions of the Crimean military spectacle 'The Battle of the Alma', produced at Astley's Amphitheatre in 1854, and asks how these toys engaged with, or discarded, the source drama's representation of British and foreign spaces and identities. Comparing different versions of 'The Battle of the Alma' identifies the nuanced ways in which these apparently similar products adapted the source drama; engaged with discourses of national identity cued in the original production; and negotiated the relationships between theatrical representation and contemporary reportage of the battle. For, at the same time that the conventional aesthetics of this medium communicate stereotypical imaginaries of domestic and foreign cultural geographies, the familiarity of these representational modes allows us to

[15] Edward Ziter, *The Orient on the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3.
[16] Jacky Bratton has noted, for example, that theatres mediated a public reassessment of European stereotypes during the Crimean War, when Britain's military alliance with France meant that the French were no longer conceived as enemies. Consequently, Bratton argues, the major difference in Crimean plays was 'the lesson that all victories are Allied victories, and that the French have a new national character, [they] are lively, bold and dashing, their officers romantic and kind to horses.' ('Theatre of war: the Crimea on the London stage 1854–5', in *Performance and politics in popular drama: Aspects of popular entertainment in theatre, film and television 1800—1976*, ed. by David Bradby, Louis James, and Bernard Sharratt [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], pp. 119–37 [p. 123].)
[17] Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. by Sara B. Young (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 96.

identify how publishers and practitioners created alternative impressions through subtle alterations. Analysing these sheets thus illustrates how supposedly straightforward tropes are continually revised in popular culture. Far from an archival record of lost scenery and costumes, toy theatre is material evidence of multiple processes of cultural production occurring simultaneously in superficially analogous artefacts.

Toy theatre sheets record that generic imaginaries of place and nation were not reproduced coherently, even in apparently similar products. The interpretations of the artists, and the materials used by the publishers all resulted in noticeable differences between separate versions of the same drama. Needless to say, juvenile dramatic play would produce further variations. Although sheets could be bought pre-coloured at an additional cost, as Oxenford attests many children favoured the cheaper plain sheets that they could decorate themselves.[18] 'Tinselling' was one popular decorative addition, which involved sticking coloured shiny metal foils onto standard images to give them a further layer of glitz and glamour.[19] In another late-nineteenth-century retrospective of juvenile drama, Robert Louis Stevenson recounts how he quickly discarded the abridged scripts written by the publishers, because these 'proved to be not worthy of the scenes and characters', and invented his own instead.[20] The implied re-presentation of specific theatrical events thus mingled with the imaginative reinterpretations of artists, publishers, and individuals. This is not to say that toy theatre permitted 'a sort of vacuous populism (in which cultural resources are just a big playground where everybody has the power to make whatever meanings they want)'.[21] Recognizable tropes – such as thatched roofs on rural cottages, or kilts on Scotsmen – still facilitated the communication of cultural geographies and forms of national identification. In other words, familiar or stereotyped images and characteristics were redeployed as signifiers of broader contexts, groups of people, and places.

Studying these objects draws attention to the role of media in communicating ideas about a nation's cultural geography. In their engagement with recognizable contemporary tropes, toy theatres are, what Robin Bernstein has called, 'scriptive things':

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[18] '… the preparation for the performance gave infinitely more pleasure than the performance itself, and the gift of a theatre, with a piece that could be acted at once, would have been regarded with the indifference with which an angler would contemplate a basket of killed fish offered as a substitute for his expected day's sport.' (Oxenford, 'The Toy Theatre' [p. 67].)

[19] Speaight, *The History of the English Toy Theatre*, pp. 129–35. Another reason why toy theatre sheets cannot be interpreted as records of performance is because opportunities for toy theatre sheets to be personalized through colouring or tinselling means that archives (such as the Brady Collection in Christ Church Library, Oxford, where I conducted the majority of my research) include various versions of the same sheet.

[20] Stevenson, 'A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured' (p. 228).

[21] Fleming, *Powerplay*, p. 5.

> A scriptive thing, like a playscript, broadly structures a performance while allowing for agency and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable. […] To describe elements of material culture as 'scripting' actions is not to suggest that things possess agency or that people lack it, but instead to propose that agency emerges through constant engagement with the stuff of our lives.[22]

Analyzing the raw materials of toy theatre does not mean that we can recapture the details of ephemeral juvenile performances. Yet despite variations between performances, the ways that toy theatre publishers utilized theatrical conventions in domestic entertainment reveal embedded cultural meanings, and show that toy theatre publishers engaged with contemporary theatrical and social contexts to revise how local and foreign spaces and identities were represented in their products.[23] As in Bernstein's analysis of how scriptive things cue social performances, the use of familiar theatrical tropes in juvenile drama enabled the representation and performance of various cultural geographies in ways that were at once known and unpredictable. Nevertheless, these tropes were not a stable symbolic vocabulary, and could communicate a variety of politically or socially inflected connotations. For instance, while both juvenile versions of 'The Battle of the Alma' signal the alliance of Britain and France by presenting the French marshal and British commander as mirror images of each other, only one adaptation features Queen Victoria in the final scene, suggesting a nationalistic vision in which Britain ultimately takes precedence.[24] Toy theatre publishers thereby cued differently inflected social performances despite utilizing similar tropes. Even though later retrospectives such as Oxenford's looked back on juvenile dramas as a means of consolidating and communicating images of a national past, and evoking an imagined community of play, the objects reveal an divergent cultural imaginary of nation and identity.

## I 'The Battle of the Alma' at Astley's Amphitheatre

Astley's 'The Battle of Alma' engaged directly with the representation of contemporary national identities, and British interactions with foreign spaces and nations. This new 'Grand

[22] Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011), p. 12.
[23] Ibid. p. 29.
[24] This is in the final plate of J. K. Green's adaptation of 'The Battle of the Alma'.

Military Spectacle' played its first night on 23rd October 1854,[25] at which time the real battle had been fought only a month before, on 20th September.[26] It was the first time that the allied forces of Britain, France, and Turkey had met the Russian troops in combat since the Crimean conflict began a year and a half earlier, and was a significant victory for the allies.[27] In the battle, the Russian forces occupied the ground atop the steep range of hills on the south bank of the river Alma, in an attempt to block the allies' progress towards the port of Sebastopol. Vulnerable and exposed, the allied forces were obliged to cross an open hillside to meet the Russian troops, but – in a risky manoeuvre – a battalion of French Zouaves marched a weakly manned alternative route, and met the Russians on the 'heights'. Contemporary reportage presents the battle as a victory won by the 'great strategic skill' of the allies against the odds.[28] William Howard Russell's account in *The Times*, for instance, celebrates 'the cool courage and bravery of the British soldier' in the face of the Russian troops' tactical advantages.[29] Astley's production followed this underdog narrative of events; for instance, by constructing spectacular scenery which emphasized the uneven battle terrain. Simultaneously, however, onstage interactions between stock theatrical types (signifying different nations) and a key journalist character pointedly unsettled patriotic sentiments embedded in the staging.

Like the military reviews from which they evolved, these visually impressive performances were popular in peacetime, as well as productions which could be deployed to rouse support for troops engaged in conflict.[30] 'The Battle of the Alma' is typical of the genre.

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[25] London, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Collection, Add MS 52950 H, fol. 1. [Joachim Hayward Stocqueler], 'The Battle of the Alma' (1854), hand-written play script. Astley's Amphitheatre was a permanent circus building, located on the Surrey bank of the Thames, near Westminster Bridge. Philip Astley, a former sergeant major with General Elliott's Light Dragoons, began exhibiting trick horsemanship on the site in 1768. (A.H. Saxon, *Enter Foot and Horse: A History of Hippodrama in England and France* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968], p. 10.) By the mid-nineteenth century, the amphitheatre which still carried his name was renowned for its spectacular hippodramas, and was an iconic, family-friendly London entertainment venue: Kit Nubbles escorts his future sweetheart and their two families to Astley's in Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841).

[26] The drama had an initial run of four months. It was updated in line with current events, and a further act was added in February 1855 to permit the inclusion of the battles of Balaclava and Inkermann. (See: London, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Collection, Add MS 52952 W. [Joachim Hayward Stocqueler], 'The Battle of the Alma (Additional Act)' (1855), hand-written play script.)

[27] For a detailed account of the battle see Winfried Baumgart, *The Crimean War 1853–1856* (London: Arnold, 1999), especially pp. 117–21.

[28] William Howard Russell, 'The Battle of the Alma [A portion of the following appeared in our edition yesterday: -] (From our Special Correspondent.)', *The Times*, 21868 (October 10, 1854), 7–7 (p. 7).

[29] Ibid.

[30] Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 141. For instance, Astley's wildly successful *The Battle of Waterloo* (1824) – which had an initial run of 144 consecutive performances – was restaged frequently until well into the second half of the nineteenth century, regardless of changing military contexts. (Saxon, *Enter Foot and Horse*, pp. 140–1.) 'The Battle of the Alma' was, therefore,

The plot is thin, chiefly serving to transport the audience between action sequences, or displays of trick horsemanship and martial skill.[31] The action begins with the departure of the British troops from Southampton and culminates with a spectacular battle sequence. Scenes are divided between the Russian and allied forces. Humorous exchanges and rousing speeches take place in the allied camp, emphasizing the affable relations between British, French, and Turkish representatives. On the other side, there are tensions between the Russian characters. The Russian nation is not demonized, but is instead presented as at the mercy of a misguided despot, Prince Menshikov.

Military spectacles were never purely or straightforwardly nationalistic entertainments. Even though, like other Crimean plays, Astley's production portrays the alliance between Britain, France, and Turkey positively, it simultaneously satirizes the generic tropes used to establish worthy national identities, such as the heroic characterization of British sailors. Astley's 'The Battle of the Alma' challenges generalized representations of the British forces in the press by staging encounters between a variety of national and regional types. Almost all the *dramatis personæ* are theatrical models of national stereotypes. The characters include 'Paddy O'Driscoll of the Guards', 'Sandy McGregor of the Highlanders', and 'Harry Hansen a British Sailor'.[32] Interactions between these stereotypes are a source of humour. Speaking in exaggerated regional idioms, the characters emphasize differences between Scotland, Ireland, and England by commenting on the contrasts between home comforts and their new surroundings, and particularly their dislike of each other's favourite foods. Unlike Russell's famous account of the battle, which praises the 'cool courage and bravery of the British soldier' in general terms, Astley's characterization draws attention to Britain's regional differences.[33] In so doing, the drama offers a representation of a nation internally divided by diverse cultural geographies, even as representatives of its different nations are unified by a single cause.

Astley's regionally differentiated portrayal of British identities and spaces is further reinforced by the fact that different English characters present a variety national types and their characteristics continue to collide and contradict each other. In addition to the Jolly Jack Tar sailor, there are gallant generals, a noble lady, and a comic working-class woman in search of

an opportunity for Astley's to trade on the popularity of a dramatic genre that had previously been successful at the amphitheatre, and so appeal to its audience by offering them a new variation on a familiar theme.

[31] Playbills confirm that spectacle was the drama's main appeal. The first playbill boasts that 'every attention has been paid to Costume, Scenery, Properties, Decorations, & Mechanical Effects'. (London, Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance Archive, Astley's Production File. *Battle of the Alma* (October 23, 1854), playbill.)

[32] BL, LCC, Add MS 52950 H, fol. 2.

[33] Russell, 'The Battle of the Alma' (p. 7).

her eighteenth husband. The play script cannot be interpreted as a full record of the performance because it does not capture the ways that actors interpreted characters, interacted with the set, or, perhaps, altered their performance on a nightly basis in response to the audience's reactions. Still, there is enough in the script to suggest that many of the national stereotypes presented were played with an ironical awareness of their constructed nature. For instance, the well-established stock figure of the British sailor characteristically employs an almost nonsensical abundance of nautical metaphors, which the audience would have expected from him: 'Shiver my top lights, but that is plain English!! Grog for ever!'[34] Following close on the heels of other comically exaggerated dialects, his over-the-top idiosyncrasies imply that the sailor (as well as the other characters) is presented both as representative of positive so-called British characteristics, and an easily caricatured theatrical and national type.

Astley's production engaged with generic theatrical and national tropes for comic effect, but also to jokily question nationalistic battle reportage through characters' interactions with a journalist. One of the major characters in 'The Battle of the Alma' is a war correspondent named Montague Quillet, 'the Crimea Correspondent of the Illustrated Blood and Murder Penny Herald'.[35] Quillet is probably a satirical portrait of Russell, who was the first reporter of his kind, and a celebrity in his own right.[36] Quillet prompts the audience to reflect on desires to read about or witness theatrical re-enactments of real battles, as well as the generic national and theatrical tropes presented in the drama and press reports. He offers a direct challenge to the versions of British military identity popularized in newspaper accounts and implied by the other *dramatis personæ*: he is characterized as self-interested and cowardly, plainly stating his intention to abandon the soldiers if his life is endangered. Instead he plans to 'get behind a tress [*sic*] & if I see the chance surrender myself a prisoner & then come out after the War a Twelve months among the Serfs of Siberia "all notes Topographical, Biographical & Physiological, 3 Vols Octavo". Hem.'[37] The character's difference from the version of British national identity presented in Russell's report is a metatheatrical joke for audience members familiar with his account. Even within the confines of the drama, however, Quillet undercuts the representation of British heroism embodied by other members of the cast. His dissimilarity to other stock British characters is emphasized, for example, by his emotional distance from the sentimental

[34] BL, LCC, Add MS 52950 H, fol. 13.
[35] Ibid. fol. 2.
[36] Russell's cultural significance is proven by the fact that there is a bust memorializing him in the crypt at St Paul's cathedral in London. The bust is located in the section dedicated to war correspondents, but Russell is the only reporter to be personally represented in this way.
[37] BL, LCC, Add MS 52950 H, fol. 6.

goodbye scenes between soldiers and their families, which he notes down and reports as entertainment for his readers, and to further his own ambitions. Quillet's interactions with the other British characters also test established stock types. Wordplay draws attention to Quillet's difference from the other characters by highlighting his 'silly Villain' dress, and urges the audience to judge the other characters by the ways that they interact with him.[38] One doubts the British commander's intelligence, for example, because of his immediate affability to Quillet ('Oh! A Gentleman of the press we accept your assistance'), even though the dialogue signals that from the start of the drama Quillet is played as obviously untrustworthy.[39] Quillet is redeemed later in the play, and the character adopts comic and heroic roles. Nevertheless, he remains a troubling figure: he is simultaneously one of the people and disconnected from them, both one of the heroes and morally questionable. Quillet's prominent role thus encourages the audience to reassess nationalistic stereotypes and reveals that 'antimilitary feelings […] persisted under the surface' of apparently patriotic dramas.[40]

Quillet further problematizes how British national identities and spaces are conceived by drawing the audience's attention to Britain's permeability to international influences. In a metatheatrical joke about hack playwrights, he boasts that 'my French is considered very good by the Manager of the Horsleydown Theatre – for whom I translated "The Ruffian of the Alps and the Skeleton of the Murdered Monkey"'.[41] The joke specifically identifies Quillet as an urban (and, particularly, a London) type, and differentiates his character further from stock national stereotypes because it implies variations between the characters found in metropolitan or provincial locations. Moreover, the joke signals that British popular culture was affected by international cultural exchange, even prior to Britain's alliance with France in the Crimean War. Astley's reinforced a transnational view of popular culture on their playbills which repeatedly named the playhouse 'Europe's National Amphitheatre'.[42] Further, the audience experienced the drama's ironic representation of national identities at the same time as the material space of the theatre itself, in which one would have encountered members of London's demographically diverse population and tourists. Even though the production encourages patriotic forms of audience participation – characters call on the audience to cheer the soldiers, and the drama culminates with 'God Save the Queen' – these

[38] Ibid. fol. 6.
[39] Ibid. fol. 5.
[40] Myerly, *British Military Spectacle*, p. 150.
[41] BL, LCC, Add MS 52950 H, fol. 13.
[42] V&A, *Battle of the Alma* (October 23, 1854), playbill. The V&A holds later playbills which show that this statement was repeated throughout the rest of 1854 (advertising performances on October 30, November 6, November 13, November 20, etc.).

nationalistic features are juxtaposed with layers of satirical metatheatrical humour. Astley's representation is ultimately cosmopolitan. Even though toy theatre publishers drew on the source production's use of generic identifying tropes, however, their adaptations do not reproduce Astley's complexly differentiated vision of Britain.

## II 'The Battle of the Alma' as Juvenile Drama

If Astley's 'The Battle of the Alma' had fun with national stereotypes, loyalties and rivalries onstage, these models of identification were revised again when the drama was adapted for toy theatre. On the surface, there are material similarities between J. K. Green's and W. Webb's adaptations of 'The Battle of the Alma'.[43] Each publisher produced the same play for the mid-nineteenth century toy theatre market, and their dramas were roughly equivalent in price and size.[44] Moreover, each was published in 1854, which – given that Astley's production was not staged until the end of October that year – indicates that the adaptations were rushed into shops swiftly to capitalize on the popularity of the original drama. Despite these parallels, variations between their play scripts, characters, and scenery sheets reveal that Green and Webb interpreted the source drama differently. Although both publishers' representations of national identities and spaces pick up on common theatrical tropes to delineate the cultural geographies represented in the play, these models are not re-presented coherently.

As in Astley's production, theatricalized stereotyping is one way in which toy theatre adaptations establish and differentiate the cultural geographies of the Russian and allied forces. Yet not only are stock figures characterized differently from the source drama, Green and Webb also revise the *dramatis personæ* in diverse ways to construct variously nuanced cultural meanings. Green makes a significant alteration to Astley's 'The Battle of the Alma' by almost entirely removing Quillet from the drama. The marginality of the war correspondent in Green's version limits the element of political critique available to junior practitioners, facilitating a more straightforwardly jingoistic performance. For example, the opening scene in Astley's drama contains several pointed comments from a serjeant and his family about the likelihood that the troops will be seriously wounded or die overseas. He refers to a longstanding point of

[43] According to Powell, 'Green […] was Webb's only active rival as a play publisher during the period 1847–57' (*Printing the Toy Theatre*, p. 14).
[44] Both Green's and Webb's scripts were sold at fourpence, and Green's play requires twenty-six sheets to be complete, whereas Webb's requires seventeen. Each drama was published in sheets of six by eight inches.

contention: the support offered to soldiers' families by the state if they are killed. Rousing patriotic statements from the British commander are thus juxtaposed with trepidation and uncertainty. Green's dialogue by contrast favours a simple patriotism, in which the war is represented as a heroic stand against an oppressive tyrant. The British sailor is unchallenged when he asserts: 'I feel proudly [*sic*] in being one of those selected to aid in striking down the power of that man who would crush nations, he has no right to rule.'[45] Emphasizing the sailor's desire to participate in the conflict, and implying that the British forces are specially 'selected', Green foregrounds the troops' heroism by writing less ambivalent dialogue and downplaying the significance of unsettling characters.

Green also alters the challenging relational dynamics between diverse regional *dramatis personæ* and Quillet by introducing other stock characters, and changing the significance of characters' roles. In so doing, he gives a more unified impression of national space, because the humour of the drama places less emphasis on encounters between diverse regional cultures. Indeed, his addition of two new comic characters enables Green's representation to focus more narrowly on England and English characters. The humorous courtship of the drummer Dickey Roll and his betrothed Betty largely replaces Astley's plot, and serves as a foil to pictorial scenes of travel and battle.[46] Dickey's and Betty's prominent roles mean that their dialogue sways the tone of the piece overall, and confirm its focus on England as a synecdoche for the entire nation:

> BET. May the Lion of England and Eagle of France,
> DIC. Catch the Bear by the paw, and teach him to dance [47]

Dickey and Betty reinforce the patriotic mood of Green's drama. Even though they are comic figures, they contribute to making Green's adaptation less ironic in tone than Astley's production. Their dialogue employs a gentler style of humour than the pointed satire evoked

[45] Oxford, Christ Church Library, Brady Collection. [J. K. Green], *Green's Juvenile Drama. The Battle of the Alma. A Pictorial Drama, in Three Acts. Written expressly for and adapted only to GREEN'S Characters and Scenes in the same.* (London: J. K. Green, 1854), printed play script, p. 6.
[46] The character sheets reflect Green's alterations to the script; there is only one depiction of Quillet, whereas there are two of Betty, and Dickey is drawn in four poses, more than any other character in the piece. Young drummers feature in other mid-century military dramas, showing that Dickey was another stock type. Edward Stirling's 'Sebastapol [*sic*] From our own Correspondent', staged at the Royal Marylebone Theatre around one month after Astley's opened 'The Battle of the Alma', included a drummer and a special correspondent among its *dramatis personæ*. (See, London, British Library, Add MS 52949 Y. Edward Stirling, 'Sebastapol [sic] From our own Correspondent. A Drama in Two Acts' (1854), hand written play script.)
[47] CCL, BC. [Green], *Green's Juvenile Drama. The Battle of the Alma*, p. 7.

by Astley's use of Quillet. Indeed, even when Dickey and Betty touch on the possibility of death and injury in battle, their statements do little to undermine the drama's nationalistic tenor overall, because these are included as part of the comic plot, rather than in a sentimental scene:

> BET. […] You'll be shot no doubt: But Dickey, when you lay on the battlefield gasping—in your last moments think Dickey of me, and be assured your Betty will pray for you.
> DIC. Betty!
> BET. But I do hope Dickey they will not leave you with out [*sic*] a grave, the screaming wild.birds [*sic*] devouring your remains:
> DIC. Betty if you kill me—don't pick my bones.[48]

Dickey's reasonable fears appear ludicrous in contrast to the stoicism of higher-ranking military characters. The tone is jaunty, and the gruesome humour probably targets the toy theatre's primary market: young boys.[49] Green's use of these different stock characters is thus one way in which his adaptation scripts a repertoire of embodied actions for juvenile practitioners, which differ from those implied by the source drama. Although Astley's and Green's dramas both draw on generic character types, these figures are differently manoeuvred and produce contrasting effects, which revise how Britishness is represented.

Webb's version follows Astley's production more closely in its plot, dialogue, and *dramatis personæ*; yet instead of offering, as the original had done, an ironic engagement with national stereotypes, Webb's script is frequently didactic. He reproduces patriotic statements made in the source drama but does not then question such assertions through challenging character interactions. For instance, although Quillet is an important personage in Webb's version, his moral ambiguity is softened. He writes for the respectably titled 'Illustrated Terrific Register of Events in the Crimea', and not the 'Illustrated Blood and Murder Penny Herald'.[50] Despite Webb's apparent fidelity to Astley's drama, therefore, his script evokes a different affect by tempering the original's satirical humour. Akin to Green's version, the tone of Webb's adaptation is jingoistic. Even though both publishers use stock characters to convey positive

[48] Ibid. pp. 6–7.
[49] Speaight, 'Toy Theatre' (p. 9).
[50] BL, LCC, Add MS 52950 H, fol. 2; Oxford, Christ Church Library, Brady Collection. [W. Webb], *Webb's Juvenile Drama. The Battle of Alma, A Grand Military Spectacle, in Two Acts. Written expressly for and adapted only to Webb's Characters & Scenes in the Same.* (London: W. Webb [1854 hand dated]), printed play script, p. 3.

ideas about British military and national identities, however, their alternative emphases reveal how these stereotypes do not communicate unified imagery. Webb's different adaptive process is evident in his decision to retain a mix of generic and original characters, and give more equal weight to characters from different regional backgrounds. In so doing, Webb pays tribute to Astley's engagement with diverse British regions and contemporary reportage of the Crimean war, by making the battle action central to both his play text and the picture sheets. In Green's script, by contrast, the battle is the background to the comic romance plot. Thus the cultural geographies indicated in Webb's representation are bound to specific socio-political contexts more explicitly.

Unlike other melodramas adapted for toy theatre, such as *Blackbeard the Pirate* or *The Miller and His Men*, Astley's 'The Battle of the Alma' communicates its representation of national and military identities through specific topographic features. The terrain was central to the battle narrative, because of the strategic advantage that occupying higher ground gave the Russian forces. The allies' victory in spite of their less favourable position was presented as evidence of the soldiers' bravery and skill in Russell's report, and in representations of the battle in other media.[51] Astley's stage managers went to great lengths to portray the Crimean terrain. The amphitheatre's two performance spaces (the stage, and the circus ring in front of it) were joined by a single inclined plane to signify the mountainous landscape. Similar to Russell's account, Astley's presented the Crimean terrain as a hostile foreign environment: 'there are difficulties to be overcome before we can approach Sebastopol – the Russians will dispute every inch of ground from the moment of our landing in the Crimea'.[52] The landscape thereby contributed to Astley's representation of the British soldiers' bravery in the face of adversity. Meanwhile, the Otherness of the setting thrown into relief by the recognizability of stock theatrical characters.

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[51] By the opening night many in the audience would have had preconceptions about what the scenery and action would represent. Although there were several false reports of the fall of Sebastopol published in the press in early October (for instance, the *Morning Post* [3rd October 1854]), these were quickly retracted. (See: Gavin Williams, 'Gunfire and London's Media Reality', in *Hearing Crimea: Sound and the Unmaking of Sense in Nineteenth-Century Wartime* [forthcoming], n.p. [fn. 3]. My thanks are due to Gavin Williams for allowing me to read a copy of his article prior to its publication.) However, representations of the terrain, artillery, and position of the separate allied forces in the battle were quickly aligned across visual and textual portraits of the battle. (See, for instance, Ulrich Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War* [Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 2001].) Images of the battle in multiple media reinforced each other, and, given that the dramatic technique of realizing familiar images in scenery and tableaux was common in nineteenth-century dramaturgy, Astley's likely staged recognizable pictures for dramatic effect. (For a detailed exploration of realization see: Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* [Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983].)

[52] BL, LCC, Add MS 52950 H, fol. 18.

The material dimensions of toy theatres prevented Green and Webb from recreating Astley's spectacular scenery, and so their sheets present versions of British and military identities through alternative visual tropes.[53] However, this resulted in asymmetric representations of national and international spaces: their adaptations varied from each other, but were also internally divergent. Green's scenery plates combine generic tropes and specific visual cues in their representations of Britain. The first four scenes are set in Britain. On the one hand, the scenes imply a modern, technologically-advanced culture. Scene four, for example, shows soldiers on board a ship with a funnel and wheels on its sides. These were up-to-the-minute military technologies, connoting Britain's naval power.[54] Moreover, the defensive coastal walls topped with cannon in scene two align national space with military might. On the other hand, the British scenes simultaneously evoke a cosy impression of national space, inappropriate to contemporary contexts of Empire. By setting the action by the sea and including ships in the background, each scene presents Britain as an island nation. Some of the ships are equipped with modern technology, but others resemble galleons, and so evoke the romanticized aesthetic of nautical melodramas. Green's toy theatre sheets for *The Flying Dutchman*, for instance, favour older styles of ship. In contrast to the military defences pictured in scene two, scene one depicts British space in a picturesque mode (see Figure 1). Even though the script details that the scene is set at 'PORTSMOUTH – THE SIGHN [SIC] OF THE QUEEN'S HEAD NEAR THE HARBOUR', its lattice windows, verdant plant life, and irregular roof conjure up a rural past, even while naming the pub 'Victoria' signifies the play's modern setting.[55] Picturesque tropes educe an intimate, backwards-facing cultural geography, at odds with the contemporary details in other sheets. The nation that the troops fight for is thus conceived in its contrast to military identities and contexts, so the drama's representation of Britain's cultural geography is internally divided between an imagined past and modern present.

[53] The fact that 'The Battle of the Alma' was set in a specific locale makes this drama an unusual choice for toy theatre publishers. As a military spectacle, however, it is not without precedent. Both Green and Webb had previously published versions of Astley's *The Battle of Waterloo*, which was repeatedly revived at Astley's long after the battle itself, and proved a best-seller for toy theatre publishers as well. Therefore, it is likely that Green and Webb decided to adapt 'The Battle of the Alma' because it followed a popular precedent. In 1850, for instance, Henry Mayhew published an interview with the famous toy theatre publisher William West, who is recorded saying that *The Battle of Waterloo* was one of his best sellers: 'of this nearly 10,000 had been printed'. (Henry Mayhew, 'Interview between Henry Mayhew and William West, Monday, February 25, 1850', *Hugo's Toy Theatre* <http://toytheatre.net/JKG-Frame.htm> [accessed 29/11/2016].))

[54] I am indebted to Oskar Cox Jensen for this observation.

[55] CCL, BC. [Green], *Green's Juvenile Drama. The Battle of the Alma*, p. 5.

**Figure 1:** Oxford, Christ Church Library, Brady Collection. [J. K. Green], *Green's Scene In {The Battle of the Alma, Sc. 1, No. 1* (London: J. K. Green [1854]), uncoloured toy theatre sheet. © Christ Church Library

David Lowenthal long-since argued that Victorians 'passionately embraced or yearned for' the past at the same time as they confidently endorsed new technologies, and so the co-existence of both in Green's scenery sheets is not surprising.[56] Nevertheless, his already divided representation of national space is further complicated by its similarity to the scenes set in Crimea, despite the apparent patriotism of Green's adaptation. Green's representation of Crimea is nonspecific, even though the publicly available battle narrative was predicated on the significance of a specific terrain. Green's script details that scenery sheet nine represents 'THE CRIMEA', but the scene bears little resemblance to the barren landscape, 'but little cultivated,' detailed in Russell's report and other visual representations of the battle (see Figure 2).[57] There are no geographic indications that this is foreign or dangerous terrain. Instead it deploys similar tropes to the picturesque opening scene showing the Victoria pub. We might be in England. There is a cottage with lattice windows and hollyhocks in its garden, the landscape is divided by hedgerows and roads. The scene is typical of a broader toy theatre aesthetic, in which clichéd settings are – in Robert Louis Stevenson's words – 'a sort of indigestion of England and drop-scenes', even when they are supposed to denote exotic locales.[58] One likely reason that Green's representation is nonspecific is to enable juvenile practitioners to reuse the scene in other dramas. For instance, even though Astley's production did not include any shipboard scenes, Green's scenery sheet for scene five shows the interior of a ship, and could be recycled for scenes in his adaptations of *Wapping Old Stairs*, *Black Eyed* [*sic*] *Susan*, and *Blackbeard the Pirate*.[59] There are no annotations to inform practitioners which dramas the Crimea scenery may be reused in, but the blank space above the label at the top of the sheet suggests that Green is keeping his options open. What this means in *The Battle of the Alma,* however, is that the play's visual and textual properties do not agree. The script avows British military heroism, but the danger faced by the troops appears less extreme when staged against recognizable tropes of domestic space.

[56] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 96.
[57] CCL, BC. [Green], *Green's Juvenile Drama. The Battle of the Alma,* p. 13; Russell, 'The Battle of the Alma' (p. 7).
[58] Stevenson, 'A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured' (p. 230).
[59] Oxford, Christ Church Library, Brady Collection. [J. K. Green], *Green's Scene In { Blackbeard the Pirate, Sc. 2 & 4, No. 2 | The Battle of the Alma, Sc. 5, No. 5 | Wapping Old Stairs, Sc. 10, No. 9 | Black Eyed Susan, Sc. 12, No. 11* (London: J. K. Green [1854]), uncoloured toy theatre sheet.

**Figure 2:** Oxford, Christ Church Library, Brady Collection. [J. K. Green], *Green's Scene In {The Battle of the Alma, Sc. 9, No. 9* (London: J. K. Green [1854]), uncoloured toy theatre sheet. © Christ Church Library.

Unlike Green's representation, which combines images signifying Britain's past and present, Webb's representation is embedded in contemporary contexts of Empire. Webb's Duke of Cambridge explains that 'the commerce of the world demands the freedom of the Black Sea, and the destruction of Sebastopol with its numerous fleet; […] remember you fight for an oppressed nation against the oppressor: 'tis a righteous cause.'[60] As well as depicting Britain's military identity as morally upright, then, Webb's dialogue explains how its martial aims intersect with economic profit. Conversations between peripheral characters support and extend Webb's introduction to the Crimean War by giving details of other battles, and recent military histories of the nations involved in the conflict.[61] The Countess Bombinski remarks, for instance, that 'being by birth a Polish woman, [she] can feel but little interest in the cause of Russia'.[62] Providing further contextual details reinforces Webb's patriotic tone because it appears to justify Britain's military position and the righteousness of the British Empire at the same time as it celebrates the benefits of imperial conquest for Britain. Unlike Green, Webb establishes a heroic national identity built on contemporary contexts of Empire. Nevertheless, his scenery deploys generic tropes to identify the Otherness of Crimea.

Webb's scenery sheets depicting Crimea follow reportage of the event, and what we know about the drama's staging at Astley's. Sheets four and five each represent a mountainous Crimean landscape, with barren plains and 'cliffs […] close to the sea', before the final scene shows the '*The Heights of the Alma.*'[63] Soldiers dressed in the specific regalia of the troops involved in the conflict are drawn into several of Webb's scenery sheets, evoking the spectacle of brightly coloured military uniforms seen *en masse*: a technique that playbills indicate was used in Astley's production.[64] The scenes appear to have been drawn specifically for this play, and there are no notes to suggest that the scenery could be recycled for different plays.[65]

[60] CCL, BC. [Webb], *Webb's Juvenile Drama. The Battle of Alma*, p. 9.
[61] Ibid. e.g. pp. 4–5.
[62] Ibid. p. 5.
[63] Russell, 'The Battle of the Alma' (p. 7); CCL, BC. [Webb], *Webb's Juvenile Drama. The Battle of Alma*, p. 17.
[64] This technique began in military reviews, and thus Webb's representation reflects a long-standing theatrical device not unique to Astley's production.
[65] For instance, even though Astley's production did not include any shipboard scenes, Green's scenery sheet for scene five shows the interior of a ship, and could be recycled for scenes in his adaptations of *Wapping Old*

However, Webb's apparently exact details are overlaid with generic Orientalist tropes. For example, scenery sheet three shows soldiers lining up in the foreground, and a walled city in the distance (see Figure 3). The line of soldiers recalls the stage directions for Astley's production, which detail that the actors should advance in a 'line' formation – the technique used by the British troops in the battle.[66] Still, the shapes of the city's roofs indicate that Webb was redeploying generic scenic tropes in his design: a dome topped with a crescent moon and minarets suggests Muslim worship. Like Green, Webb's representation combines specific with generic visual cues, but his engagement with theatrical conventions and contemporary contexts reimagines Crimea differently. In comparing how these publishers adapted generic theatrical tropes for domestic performance, then, we can see how toy theatre both communicates conventional ideas about domestic and foreign spaces, but also reveals the fragmentation and occasional confusedness of national imaginaries.

**Figure 3:** Oxford, Christ Church Library, Brady Collection. [W. Webb], *Webb's Scenes in The Battle of the Alma, Scene 3, No. 3* (London: W. Webb, [1854]), coloured toy theatre sheet. © Christ Church Library.

As in full-scale theatre, the familiarity of toy theatre imagery allows us to recognize how subtle revisions afford alternative or nuanced cultural meanings. The materiality of toy theatres also has an impact on its representations of national spaces and identities by focusing attention on the staginess of these generic tropes. The reduced visual scale, the domestic setting for the entertainment, and practitioners' tactile engagement with the material object, immediately alter the frame through which the local and the foreign may be conceived. Miniaturization allows practitioners to adopt an omnipotent perspective on the drama itself: aware of the front and backstage spaces of the toy theatre at once. To borrow a phrase coined by Susan Stewart in *On Longing*, miniaturization draws attention to the toy theatre as a 'total object'.[67] In contrast to the spectacular effects produced by lavish scenery and large casts of actors and supernumeraries in full-scale theatre, juvenile drama did not go beyond the comprehension of a single glance. As Stewart puts it: '[u]nlike the metonymic world of realism,

*Stairs, Black Eyed* [*sic*] *Susan*, and *Blackbeard the Pirate*. (Oxford, Christ Church Library, Brady Collection. [J. K. Green], *Green's Scene In { Blackbeard the Pirate, Sc. 2 & 4, No. 2 | The Battle of the Alma, Sc. 5, No. 5 | Wapping Old Stairs, Sc. 10, No. 9 | Black Eyed Susan, Sc. 12, No. 11* [London: J. K. Green (1854)], uncoloured toy theatre sheet.)

[66] BL, LCC, Add MS 52950 H, fol. 35.

[67] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 40.

which attempts to erase the break between the time of everyday life and the time of narrative by mapping one perfectly upon the other, the metaphoric world of the miniature makes everyday life absolutely anterior and exterior to itself.'[68] As total objects, therefore, but also because imaginative engagement had to be balanced with the practicalities of performance (multi-tasking between changing scenery, moving characters, speaking dialogue, etc.), juvenile drama in practice altered the practitioner's relationship to the temporal and spatial contexts it denoted.

Robert Louis Stevenson's 1884 article 'A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured' suggests that one of the major ways in which toy theatre play revised how publishers' evoked spaces and nations was in juvenile practitioners' simultaneous awareness of multiple spaces, temporalities, and contexts during a performance: intra- and extra-textual settings, relevant performance cultures, and so on. In mocking the clichéd settings that toy theatre publishers recycled in miniature representations of full-scale scenery, for instance, Stevenson remarks that this stock imagery denotes English, rather than British, cultural geographies.[69] 'Whether it set forth Poland as in "The Blind Boy," or Bohemia with "The Miller and his Men," or Italy with "The Old Oak Chest," still it was Transpontus.'[70] Here Stevenson's article evokes a specific theatrical culture: the minor 'Transpontine' theatres on the south bank of the Thames in London.[71] Surreyside theatres were renowned for staging popular, crowd-pleasing melodramas, burlettas, and pantomimes, which commonly recycled familiar tropes, plots, and material properties between productions. The representation of both English and alien spaces in these shows was thus achieved by deploying recognizable theatrical conventions; at the same time this familiar style signified a theatrical idiom that was identifiably English, and locatable in a specific zone of the metropolis. The style of the images signifying foreign and domestic spaces in toy theatre allows Stevenson's remembered boyhood self to self-reflexively conceive of differences between Scottish and English spaces and identities. He is conscious of a cultural

[68] Ibid., p. 65.
[69] Stevenson focuses particularly on the output of one successful publisher, Martin Skelt. For Stevenson, Skelt typifies the aesthetics of juvenile drama; however, publishers had different styles, as is revealed by comparing sheets held in the Brady Collection at Christ Church Library, Oxford. Stevenson's emphasis on Skelt perhaps reflects which sheets Stevenson had access to when growing up in Edinburgh. George Speaight has argued that Skelt did much to popularize toy theatres, and to extend their market. (*The History of the English Toy Theatre*, pp. 46–7.)
[70] Stevenson, 'A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured' (p. 230).
[71] Prior to the 1843 Theatre Act, the Surreyside theatres were classed as minor theatres, and so were forbidden to perform legitimate dramas (comedy and tragedy). Nonetheless, the popular genres that these theatres were originally obliged to stage became so popular that Surreyside theatres continued to stage 'illegitimate' theatre even after the 1843 Act removed prior restrictions. For detailed analysis of the impact that the divide between patent and minor houses had on nineteenth century theatre see: Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London,1770–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

and regional distance between the source dramas and his encounters with the objects. Identifying himself as a 'Scotsman' in this essay, Stevenson analyzes his childhood engagement with toy theatre's aesthetic qualities against a combination of local and personal memories, and broader national imagery. Indeed, he goes so far as to differentiate Scottish and English topography by identifying a version of Englishness mediated through common toy theatre tropes. He recounts that when he 'at last came to visit' England as an adult, he interpreted the landscape through familiar visual markers 'foreshadowed' in toy theatre: 'England […] was only [toy theatre] made evident'.[72] So, Stevenson uses toy theatre to define his representation of Britain as divided into recognizably different nations.

Stevenson's reflections on toy theatre's aesthetics show how national identities and borders can be differently imagined through a single creative artefact. Productions staged in London's theatres toured to Scotland, and Stevenson's own access to English toy theatre proves that there were further exchanges of popular and children's culture between Scotland and England in the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, for him toy theatre does not evoke a unified imagined community because it enables him to conceive cultural, aesthetic, and geographical differences between Scotland and England, theatrical cultures, and mediations of space.

Although it is hardly surprising that these artefacts of middle-class children's culture convey less subversive impressions of British national identities than Astley's full-scale production of 'The Battle of the Alma', they script imaginatively-generative ways for juvenile practitioners to engage with the cultural geographies cued by recognizable tropes. Of course, toy theatre play has a socializing dimension, as publishers' use of generic tropes links children's culture to adult cultural productions and imaginaries of nation. Conversely, as Stevenson indicates, and as Bernstein rightly cautions us '[c]hildren do not passively receive culture', but imaginatively embellished familiar conventions at the same time as they engaged with them. 'Every sheet we fingered was another lightening glance into obscure, delicious story'.[73] Therefore, while the cultural meanings conveyed by the sheets frame Stevenson's imaginative absorption in the toy, his childhood play revises and eclipses the adaptive processes of the publisher

[72] Stevenson, 'A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured' (p. 230).
[73] Ibid. (p. 228).

## Conclusion

Toy theatre is, to use Bratton's term, 'intertheatrical': a quality she sees as a defining characteristic of nineteenth-century full-scale theatre.[74] In other words, dramas communicate cultural meanings through both verbal and non-verbal cues, such as 'systems of the stage – scenery, costume, lighting and so forth – but also genres, conventions and, very importantly, memory.'[75] In their different ways, Green's and Webb's representations of national spaces and identities in their adaptations of 'The Battle of the Alma' are likewise intimately bound to contemporary cultural, political, and market conditions of the mid-1850s. One way in which Green ensured his success in a competitive, although shrinking toy theatre market was by producing sheets that were recyclable in multiple dramas. Webb competed by creating more detailed and high-quality images, and his specific engagement with contemporary military and Imperial contexts represents his precise style overall. Meanwhile their use of generic tropes and stock theatrical figures allowed each publisher to refine their adaptation to construct productions that were calculated to appeal to juvenile practitioners. However, while their different adaptive strategies reveal that toy theatres cannot be interpreted as archival records of lost theatrical scenery and costumes, the diverse ways in which these publishers deploy generic tropes is material evidence of multiple divergent processes of cultural production occurring simultaneously in superficially similar artefacts.

Oxenford's 1871 article nostalgically reimagines toy theatre so as to locate his construction of middle-class Britishness in a supposedly shared past, one that elides regional and class variations. As I have suggested, toy theatre is a powerful representational device for Oxenford, in that it grounds these abstract concepts in an object that can be seen and touched. The materiality of the toy makes his personal memories appear tangible, at the same time as it seems to record national and theatrical heritage. However, as my analysis of Green's and Webb's dramas indicates, the cultural meanings and imagined communities that Oxenford retroactively scripts onto toy theatres are at odds with the form's contemporary focus, and its dynamic representation of place and identity. Moreover, as Stevenson indicates in 'A Penny Plain', even though publishers deployed apparently nonspecific tropes, toy theatre aesthetics was specifically Transpontine: a theatrical culture that was conceived diversely, depending on a practitioner's cultural background. Though less inclusive than Oxenford imagines, toy theatre

[74] For Bratton's definition of 'intertheatricality' see *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 37–8.
[75] Ibid. p. 38.

nonetheless draws attention to the coexistence of different theatrical, class, and national cultures within Britain.

Juvenile drama mobilizes flat and static images to create an impression of visual depth and movement, an effect that Stevenson likened to 'kaleidoscopes'.[76] In this, its material properties correspond to how its publishers communicate domestic and foreign spaces, and dynamic national identities, through apparently predictable generic tropes. Toy theatre sheets constructed scenes in which relations between the generic and the specific, the alien and the familiar, were fluid and multiple. In play, sheets were further individualized by colouring, tinselling, or imaginative embellishments. The pictures may be two-dimensional, but they reveal rich and varied cultural imaginaries, inappropriate to the simplified, nostalgic, or protectionist national imagery that later nineteenth century commentators used these toys to construct.

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[76] Stevenson, 'A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured' (p. 227).