

The late 18th century Harlequinade: a migration from stage to book
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In late 18th century England attending theatre was a common cultural experience for people of different ages, genders and classes. Although the Licensing Act of 1737 had restricted spoken drama to two official London theatres: Covent Gardens and Drury Lane, (Mayer 5, Frow 18) people not only attended official theatres to see spoken drama but flocked to other venues to see different types of performances and spectacles ranging from the equestrian acts, to water spectacles, to puppet shows and to different types of combination of musical, spoken and danced entertainments such as the opera, burletta, entr'act entertainments, and pantomime. Attending a theatrical performance was a participatory event since the audience socialized with one another and commented loudly and on occasion violently to the choice of actors, and the effects of the performance (Brewer Ch.8).

Most popular theatrical performances did not have published scripts, nor were they conventionally authored. Mounting a pantomime was a collaborative effort for the designers' names were usually included on the theatre bills and programs along with those of the actors while the playwright's name was usually omitted.

(http://www.peopleplayuk.org/collections/object.php?ter=true&ter_id=88&object_id=807&back=%2Fcollections%2Fdefault.php%3Fter_id%3D88)

Very popular productions had spin-off texts such as fans, playing cards, or even house screens (Brewer 440-42) (note 1). One cross-over text from stage to book is an anonymous flap book that became known as the harlequinade due the dominance of these sections of the pantomime in the subject matter.

I consider the harlequinade to be an instance of migration of characters, conventional plot form and design features from popular drama to the moveable book. In this paper I first briefly describe the harlequinade on stage and in the moveable book. Then I analyze these books in terms of a largely visual storytelling based on the flap design, the gestures of the main characters, and the depiction of motion in relation to the implied reader/viewer. Finally I consider some implications of the depiction of motion in terms of interactive storytelling.

Harlequinades on stage and in text: from theatrical performance to flap book

The term harlequinade refers to the portion of a pantomime where harlequin and clown play the principal parts. Perhaps the first English pantomime is *The Tavern Bilkers* composed by dancing-master John Weaver and performed in 1702 at Drury Lane. It was a "comical entertainment" featuring the *Commedia d'ell arte* characters of Harlequin, Scaramouch, and Punchanello so it was a masked comic dance and dumb show (Taylor 200; Scouten Season 1701-02 p. 6)

http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:IUm-WqYFhuMJ:www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/h/b/hb1/London%2520Stage%25202001/lon_d1701.pdf+%22John+Weaver%22+%22history+of+mimes+and+pantomimes%22&hl=en

The term pantomime was initially used by Weaver to refer to type of dance theatre based on the Roman pantomime such as his *The Loves of Mars and Venus* staged

at Drury Lane in March 1717 which included both traditional dance and pantomime gestures (Taylor 210). In subsequent years the English pantomime lost most of its classical influence, although an opening sequence continued to be based on classical mythology until around 1780 (Taylor 207). Throughout much of the 18th century due to the inventiveness of actor manager and famous harlequin John Rich (called Lun) the comic sections, the harlequinade, were interspersed with the classical story (Frow 39). Rich established the convention for the silent harlequin which remained the norm although the actor/playwright Richard Garrick staged a successful talking harlequin and established the link with pantomime and the Christmas season with his *Harlequin's Invasion* 1759 (O'Brien 225-26). The shift in structure of the harlequinade occurred in January 1781 when Sheridan wrote his only pantomime *Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday*. Instead of the serious and comic scenes being interwoven they were presented in two distinct parts, with the principal characters being transformed into those of the harlequinade. This pattern was to remain for the next century or more with the only alternation being in the relative length of the parts (Frow 57-58).

Flap books featuring Harlequin's adventures first began to appear around 1770 and ceased around 1816 (Speaight, 1991,70). They are narrow octavo books consisting of a single engraved sheet of paper, folded perpendicularly into four sections. A second sheet is cut in half and hinged at the top and bottom edges of the first so that each flap could be lifted separately. The sheets are folded into four, like an accordion, and then roughly stitched with a paper cover (Shefrin,1980). A verse on each section of the flap tells a simple story usually concluding with instructions to turn a flap to continue. When the flap is turned either up or down the viewer sees that half of the new picture fits onto the half of the un-raised flap, so the act of lifting one flap after another creates a "surprise" unfolding of the story. Although a simple design feature, the flap can be quite an elastic format depending on the skill of the illustrator and the placement of the folds. As commodities they were relatively inexpensive with two prices: "6d plain and 1s coloured" (McGrath 9) so they would be accessible to a fairly wide population—indeed similar to the wide range that attended the theatre.

For this analysis I am focusing on two examples based on popular pantomimes: *Mother Shipton* published by Tringham et al 1771 and *Harlequin Skeleton* published by Sayer 1772 (note 2). To begin discussing the migration of the harlequinade from stage to book it is important to remember their respective structure: In the 1770's the stage harlequinade consisted of episodes occurring across the duration of the pantomime. Since the flap books isolated the harlequinade sections and placing them together, the harlequinade achieved a unity in print form before it occurred in performance.

Harlequinades on a textual stage: visual storytelling, the illusion of motion and the construction of the implied viewer.

Because the plot of a harlequinade is conventional both theatre audience and book reader know the outcome. Accordingly, in each mode of storytelling the focus is not on the "what" of the narrative but on the "how" and this is where the designers put their imaginative efforts. In pantomime, the action moves largely by spectacular changes called transformation scenes which are represented in the books by the changing images (Speaight 1991, 70-71). A doggerel rhyme is placed above and/ or below the images and

the combined words and images can be read only when the reader/viewer manipulates the flaps in a certain order.

The reader is often addressed by the narrator: instructions to turn the flaps might be included in the plot, or the reader may be invited to aid Harlequin in his exploits. In the second sequence of *Mother Shipton* lifting the flaps transforms the background of her shop into an inn. <SHOW sequence 2nd page 1. upper Flap up, 2. lower flap down>.

The verse states,

Here take this sword my Son she cries,
It will delude the Sharpest Eyes,
'twill Sink a House, raise a Storm,
Any kind of thing transform;
Your sword in danger ne'er neglect,
Turn down ,& View the Quick effect

The verse stresses the power and speed of the transformations harlequin will be able to perform and the rate of turning the flaps. By a quick turn, the reader participates in the storytelling and in achieving the effect of the performance.

In their appearance the harlequinade suggests an adaptation of stage design and theatrical methods to the print medium. Since the book depicts a miniature representation of a stage with stage action, the vantage point of the reader/viewer is comparable to that of a theatre spectator. Although the mechanics of change are different the flaps seem to correspond to the painted drops used in scene changes. In most of the Tringham books the human figures are restricted to the bottom flap while the scene rises beyond the figures and occupies the top flap. On occasion, the illustrations may include stage machinery. In the beginning of the final transformation in *Mother Shipton* the verse states, <Show last page: flaps down, >

A Coalpit's Mouth you here behold,
Which Harlequin went down I'm told
His Mother, and fair Columbine,
You See to follow him incline;
They'll quickly vanish form the Sight;
Turn down, and See if they go right.

In the illustrations the top flap shows a pit or well with a rope on big spit and in the bottom half Mother Shipton and Columbine stand part way down in rectangular holes. Despite the scenery suggesting out of doors, it is obviously a theatrical trap door, floor traps (grave traps) being one of the popular mechanisms for moving people through different levels (Frow 147 ff) (note 3). Because the narrator invites the reader/viewer to discover if the traps or tricks are working correctly, this reinforces the sense of being a knowing onlooker and a participant in a theatrical experience.

In comparison to the small, simple drawings in the Tringham harlequinades, the etchings in the Sayer harlequinades are larger and more detailed (note 4). With exceptions for specific effect the bodies of the main characters tend to be placed directly over the line produced by the closed flaps so they occupy both halves of the page. Due to the size the reader/viewer has a closer vantage point and can see details of facial gestures, bodily attitudes and the positions of the feet and arms.

<show three images of Harlequin Skeleton from second sequence>

In *Harlequin Skeleton* the second sequence begins with clown alone in the old anatomist's study with stuffed animals and skeletons including a human one in the closet. When the upper flap is raised the skeleton seems to take a step out of the closet. Without reading the doggerel verse a viewer can follow the simple story and appreciate the gag (note 5) for the humor lies mainly in observing the effect on clown.

The bodily placement of clown and skeleton accord with a traditional language of imitative gesture employed by actors in the “dumb show” of this period and it was assumed that the theatre audience knew how to interpret their facial expressions, bodily gestures and physical movements. The French philosopher Descartes had proposed that there were six universal passions—horror, fear, sorrow, astonishment, ravishment and awe. 18th century actors were expected to be able to evoke these passions by their gestures and attitudes. In his *Conference of Monsieur Le Brun* (1701; trans. 1731) the French painter Charles Le Brun drew the facial expressions and the attitudes of the head for the six passions. These were widely available setting common standards for the actors to imitate, for painters to use, and for the audience to judge from (Roach 62-66, O'Brien 79-80, 244 note 30; McPherson 401-430).

This theory that informed facial expression extended to the body as a whole and included different types of theatrical dance. Dancing master John Weaver defined grotesque dancing as the “just” and “lively” portrayal of comic characters although he objected to the popular commedia form because it was “so intermix'd with Trick and Tumbling, that the design is lost in ridiculous Grimace, and odd and unnatural Actions” (Taylor 196, 197 note 47). Accordingly in 1717 he tried to establish a full scale “mute rhetoric” (O'Brien 80) for pantomime based on a neoclassical model of pantomime where he outlined 21 emotions or emotional actions and their representative movements ranging from admiration, astonishment, anger, indignation and so on. He included hand actions, arm movements, leg positions, and movement of the trunk (Taylor 202). Weaver distributed his ideas to the public in an audience program for he was also trying to construct a knowledgeable spectator that cut across class lines. His was a comparative method that would enable any member of the audience to “judge the Design of the performer.” “Any spectator, no matter his or her class, could become a critic, for what could be easier to judge whether a mimed action communicates the story printed in a program?” (Taylor 198 note 53, 54).

In 1753 William Hogarth interpolated both systems of facial expressions and bodily gestures into his *Analysis of Beauty* where he classified the actions of grotesque or comic characters from those who are noble or gentlefolk based on the absence or presence of the serpentine line:

When the form of the body is divested of its serpentine lines it becomes ridiculous as a human figure, so likewise when all movements in such lines are excluded in a dance, it becomes low, grotesque, and comical; but however, ... <when> composed of variety, made consistent with some character, and executed with agility, it nevertheless is very entertaining.” (158).

Hogarth described the actions of the main commedia' characters: for example for Clown: “Pierrott's movements and attitudes, are chiefly in perpendiculars and parallels, so is his

figure and dress,” while for harlequin “the attitudes of the harlequin are ingeniously composed of certain little, quick movements of the head, hands and feet, some of which shoot out as it were from the body in straight lines, or are twirled about in little circles.” (159; 158).

Like Weaver Hogarth believed in the universal nature of this language of action for he proposed that a “foreigner” who is a “master of all the effects of action” could attend a play without knowing English and not only follow the narrative but judge the actors’ abilities: He could “distinguish by the lines of the movements belonging to each character.” “...<He> would judge ; the actions of an old man, if proper, or not, ... and he would judge of low and odd characters, by the inelegant lines” so he would “form his judgment of the graceful acting of a fine gentleman or hero, by the elegance of their movements” (161).

<Show Le Brun horror and three images of Clown in Sayer again>

In light of these ideas it is possible to interpret the visual language of clown and harlequin. Clown’s expression of horror is comparable to that delineated by Le Brun. Due to the open attitude of his upper body, when the first flap is lifted his torso swivels around, his arms move around the body to effectively signal his reaction to the skeleton, and then when the other flap is lifted he takes flight. At the same time, Harlequin skeleton is shown performing his simple sequence: standing and then walking forward into fourth position (note 6).

Harlequinades, the depiction of movement and interactive texts

As seen, the flaps can be a space for suggesting motion. One technique is by the careful overlaying of images in relation to the break created by the flap. Here the focus on the reaction of Clown is broken down into stages and each lift of the flap gives the viewer more visual information. When the flaps are lifted his body becomes animated. Because the figure of Harlequin is restricted to the upper flap his animation seems to be achieved by placing slightly different poses one over the other, so when the reader lifts the flap up the skeleton apparently pops out of the closet. This trick is repeated at the end in a more aggressive way when he emerges in full dress with his bat lifted and moves forward to confront the old anatomist waiting for him (note 7). Since both characters appear to move down stage towards the reader/viewer an uninitiated reader may be surprised by the effect of their sudden movements.

The depiction of movement seems similar to that in a comic strip narrative or in two flicks of pages in a flick book. I consider this visual representation of action to be an instance of early animation or pre-cinema effect. Dance historian Joseph Roach remarks that in the 18th century aesthetic theorists of dance had sought for a pre-cinematic graphic medium to depict movement and produced “ingenious” if “largely impractical” suggestions (74). He notes that Hogarth went on to propose a linear schematization of stage movement based on his undulating curved line (74). The Sayer harlequinade may be another more successful “ingenious” mechanism. The effectiveness lies in the complex technique of representation --word, image and motion through turning the flap. Considering this as pre cinema effect with an illusion of forward motion, a couple of comments by Walter Benjamin on early film may be instructive. In *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction* (1936) Benjamin compares Dadaist art to early film:

It hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality. It promoted a demand for the film, the distracting element of which is also primarily tactile, being based on changes of place and focus which periodically assail the spectator. Let us compare the screen on which a film unfolds with the canvas of a painting. The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested. . . . The spectator's process of association in view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film. . . .(XIV; 238).

In the pantomime, the transformation scenes and the mixture of different modes of dance, music, drama, speech, and mime created an ever changing spectacle for the audience. In the harlequinade books this large scale, multimodal, participatory event is transposed to a small paper platform partly achieved by the emphasis on speed by the narrator and the tactile pleasure of turning the flaps to discover what lies underneath. Similar to attending a pantomime the reader/viewer is invited to give critical comments on the textual performance of the characters. Yet the act of turning the flaps also places the reader/viewer in the position of enabler of the plot, similar to a stagehand. The unusual level of engagement with the flap book suggests the role of collaborator – analogous to the many who mounted the pantomime.

Harlequinades were produced by a few printmakers at a time of creative experimentation in the late 18th century. Robert Sayer, who produced the first flap book in 1766, experimented with different types of visual images alone and in combinations with words such as perspective prints, transformation prints, and dissected maps (note 8). By issuing the harlequinades in two forms and prices –uncoloured and coloured –Sayer who also produced painting books (Speaight 1969,87) was with the Tringhams tapping into the burgeoning children's market of the period. Indeed the Tringham harlequinades were sold in toy shops. They are one of the earliest texts commercially produced for children that were for amusement (McGrath 9).

As a type of moveable book the harlequinade is categorized as a hybrid form between book and toy and predates the toy theatre also based on the popular drama (c. 1811). The harlequinade should be studied within a history of mediated forms of interactivity on paper and digital platforms. It possesses some of the key characteristics of transitional media that David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins outline: it is a hybrid in format and audience, it is self-consciously a material object, the dramatic mode is comic and the tone often skeptical. The harlequinade is also an interactive text in view of criteria proposed by Luis O. Arata in that it “points to active interrelations between players and mediums,” “shift<s> the focus away from the object and tilts it more toward the subject that perceives” and “celebrates the creative value of play.” Moreover, the harlequinade has an episodic form based in participatory drama that Arata considers crucial to link performance and audience together (218-219). The harlequinade is a precursor of interactive storytelling today on multimodal digital platforms that depend on the user initiating and maintaining the action. Since the narratives tend to be generic in form with an episodic plot structure, and draw the user in as a participant they similarly create a

sense of performance. Here is Digital Storytelling example at the media lab at MIT called “The story in the kid’s room.”.

<show homepage>

<http://vismod.media.mit.edu/vismod/demos/kidsroom/story.html>

The creators’ describe how “The KidsRoom guides children through an interactive, imaginative adventure. Our goal was to design a story that takes place in a real physical space that is "transformed" into an imagination playspace. During the story, children interact with objects in the room, with one another, and with virtual creatures projected onto the walls. The story, inspired by *Peter Pan*, *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*, and *Where the Wild Things Are*, begins in a child's bedroom. Once the children have discovered the magic word by "asking" the furniture, they are told to go to bed. When they scream the magic word, the room transforms into a mystical forest world...Finally, the kids are once again told to go to bed, and the adventure ends as the room transforms back to a bedroom again.

There are four links denoting four different scenes: bedroom, forestworld, riverworld, and Monsterland.. As you click on different links “digital flaps” invisibly open to reveal surprising images and sounds that provide clues to the characters and to the reader/viewer. These need to be followed in order to propel the plot forward. Each scene transforms one from the other as in a pantomime. The images (enhanced by sound) unfurl sometimes in startling ways, on occasion, even appear to move towards you. Since your engagement is crucial for the adventure to unfold your role is both that of spectator and enabler of the action.

Notes

1. John Brewer notes this merchandizing was with respect to John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) and staged by John Rich, the famous harlequin who was also manager of Lincoln’s Inn Fields Theatre (Frow 50).
2. I studied these texts at the Cotsen Children’s Library, Princeton University where I was a Cotsen fellow in 2004.
3. In “Harlequin Turn-Ups” *Theatre Notebook* 1991 p. 76 George Speaight states that since this harlequinade shows the reader/viewer the actual stage device in operation the text was based on an actual performance. .
4. Although this technique seems to be most commonly used by Sayer this is not unique to his products. In “Punch and Joan” *Theatre Notebook* 2002.56 (78-84) Speaight has reproduced images of Sayer and Tringham harlequinades about Punch and Joan where both publishers use the body over the flap to achieve comical transformations. I believe the effect of the Sayer text is more sophisticated.
5. According to the OED the phrase b. *a skeleton in the closet, cupboard*, etc.: A secret source of shame or pain to a family or person. Brought into literary use by Thackeray, but known to have been current at an earlier date.
- 6 More obvious in terms of grace is when harlequin is courting Columbine or even bowing to his *Mother Shipton*.
- 7 In some other Sayer harlequinades such as *Harlequin’s Invasion* (1770) or *Dr. Last or the Devil with two sticks* (1771 this idea of forward movement is combined with

aggression. In the first Harlequin shown landing in England by transforming from a mast pole on a ship and stepping off board while in the second Dr. Last appears to spring out from under a bottle at the young lovers on whom he has been spying.

8. Perspective prints called “view d’optique” created a three dimensional effect when viewed by special optical devices like the zograscope (see chapter by Erin Blake in *New Media, 1740-1915* edited by Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree. Transformation prints appeared to change depending on whether they were front lit or backlit so different versions of the scene would be revealed. In *Peepshows A Visual History* by Richard Balzer (New York: Henry Abrams, 1998) he notes that between 1740-1790; a small group of London firms such as Robert Sayer, H. Overton, Laurie & Whittle, and Bowles produced high quality prints; These were copper plate engravings in a standard format 18” by 12” (45.7 x 30.5) and in different materials and forms. Some had holes, cut outs, or perforations in them. When seen from the front they appeared to be typical prints but they could be transformed by backlighting. This was achieved by using coloured paper, coloured paints or varnishes to cover the gaps or holes on the back. When the image in the viewing box was backlit it created a spectacular effect. Balzer states “The notion of transformation was utilised more and more to create greater illusions.” (32). As a mapmaker Sayer was involved in early puzzle making which entailed turning etched maps into games called dissected maps with ingenious breaks (Shefrin 1999 10).

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