

## **Abnormal Personages and Substantial Lumps: Theatre's Dialectic of Fairy Magic and Human Work**

By Martin Young

### **Abstract**

This article treats the nineteenth-century theatrical fairy as a paradigmatic figure for considering the relationship between work and magic. It explores what I am referring to as 'the dialectic of fairy magic and human work', which is constitutive of theatre in industrialised capitalism, in order to expose an ideological tension in bourgeois thought. In nineteenth century scholarship, we see that the institution of the theatre was regarded as inferior to private reading because dramatic poetry was marred by the practical limitations of live performance. This attitude, most clearly articulated in relation to Shakespeare's fairy play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, has been termed 'Romantic antitheatricalism' and can be understood as an iteration of the bourgeois privileging of idealism over materialism. I read Romantic antitheatricalism in the context of Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre's 'Romantic anticapitalism', and I treat the distaste for theatre's materiality as an anxious response to the emergence of industrialised capitalist society. This anxiety, however, is most fully expressed as contempt for workers' bodies: the corporeality of performers and the visibility of stagehands. I frame these concerns around the reviews of Samuel Phelps' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Sadler's Wells (1853).

...and please make  
my curtain half-height, don't block the stage off.

Leaning back, let the spectator  
notice the busy preparations being so  
ingeniously made for him

...  
don't show him too much  
but show something. And let him observe  
that this is not magic but  
work, my friends.

What underpins Brecht's lines is the understanding that theatre is a point at which magic may become confused with work. Or, more

accurately, a point at which work may be disguised as magic. This is the fundamental insight through which I am going to read a slightly bizarre theatre review, written by Douglas Jerrold, editor of *Lloyd's Weekly*, of a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Samuel Phelps at Sadler's Wells in October 1853. This review describes a quasi-transcendental reaction quite alien to my own experience of being in an audience, but which helps expose a familiar tension between idealism and materialism in relation to the theatre. This tension is internal to romanticism, a historically contingent ideological formation emerging from a specific moment of capitalist development, but the stakes of it are of enduring relevance to an understanding of theatre which continues to take place under industrialised capitalist conditions. It is this tension between the material and the ideal which theatre's cliché magic is able to illuminate.<sup>1</sup>

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was not a magic show as such, and nor did it specifically incorporate the tricks and gimmicks of stage illusion into its dramatic action, as other theatrical performances of the period sometimes did. Nonetheless, it seems evidently to be part of what Simon During has called the 'magic assemblage', the 'motley of shows in the public spaces where magic was performed: theaters, fairs, streets, taverns, and so on' (66). In During's argument, these performances of 'secular magic', (that is, magic 'which stakes no serious claim to contact with the supernatural'), as a form of commercial entertainment, 'helped provide the terms and content of modern culture's understanding and judgement of itself' (1). Here, I am concerned with how the evocation of magic in the theatre helps to delineate (often by obscuring) the nature of work. It is able to do this because work itself preserves magic as a constitutive yet denigrated facet of its ontology. In Alfred Gell's analysis, 'Magic haunts technical activity like a shadow; or, rather, magic is the negative contour of work' (181). Gell argues that even in societies which have undergone a process of modernising disenchantment and flatter themselves that they are guided by rational principles, ideologies

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1 My thanks to Faisal Hamadah for his insightful engagement with a draft of this article, and to Platform's editors and reviewers.

of work are still contingent on what he terms ‘the magic standard’, the imagined possibility of effortless production, and that this enduring conception is essential to how work is valued: ‘the relative efficacy of techniques is a function of the extent to which they converge towards the magic-standard of zero work for the same product’ (180). For Gell, the magical aura of art objects stems from how they mediate their own processes of production. ‘It is the way an art object is construed as having come into the world which is the source of the power such objects have over us - their becoming rather than their being’ (166). Developing this theory, however, I suggest that owing to its liveness, theatre cannot be alienated from its production in the same way as art objects; the theatrical event is the product of immediate work, and that work is rendered legible in ways that are unique among artforms. What Francesca Coppa writes of magicians’ assistants in this period is true also of theatrical spectacle: ‘the essence of magic is the effacement—or perhaps more accurately, the displacement—of labor’ (91). Theatre is consequently a key site at which to expose the obscure relationship between magic and work.

This article has, at its heart, an earnest consideration of the ideologies of labour in an industrialised capitalist society, a subject which I think is of urgent and enduring importance. Alongside this, it is largely about fairies, in all their sequined, gauzy glory, which I also think is a sorely neglected area of thought. At one pole, sweated, proletarianised manual labour figures as irreducibly real and inescapably politicised. Fairies, by contrast, are insubstantial, trite, and gaudy, not only in comparison to hard work but even by the standards of other objects of theatrical representation. That is perhaps why these two elements are important to each other in my approach. Indeed, During is adamant that ‘secular magic has been a powerful agent in the formation of modern culture precisely *because* it is trivial’ (2). Trivial though the magic is, its presence helps to render the labour relations legible. A taut hemp line runs through my thinking here. From one end is suspended a Fairy Queen; glittering wand in hand, diaphanous wings fluttering, drifting gracefully through the hazy air as though floating on a beam

of light. At the other, men sweat in the gloom below, bracing their stout bodies against the rigging mechanism and bearing the weight of the enchantment in their sinews. Underpinning this article, then, is a desire to resolve the dialectic of fairy magic and human work which, to me, is internal to theatre. I will return to this image in a less idealised form later in this article, amid the discussion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Jerrold's review. First though, there is another fairy I wish to consider.

In October 1863, the journal *All the Year Round* published 'A New Stage Stride', a report on the remodelling of the stage and backstage areas of the Lyceum theatre, which it championed as the unrivaled introduction of cutting edge technical innovation. At the heart of the unnamed journalist's conception of the new design is a curious image of fairy magic:

The Spirit of Progress, a fairy, doubtless, properly attired in muslin and spangles, has descended ... and with one wave of her glittering wand has inaugurated a new system whose laws are dictated by Reason and Common Sense. (230)

The writer frames this as a moment of historical advance, guided by the capitalist values of efficiency and rationalised industry, and yet the agent of that progress is something ancient and folkloric—or at least familiar from the staid traditions of pantomime. The quaint and conventional magic with which theatre amuses its patrons has returned to transform the theatre itself.

Among the new additions were various forms of technical apparatus for the manipulation of scenery from offstage. Until the second half of the nineteenth-century, scene changes were undertaken in plain sight of the audience, that is, with no curtain drops or blackouts to obscure them (Southern 20). Audiences were, therefore, habituated to the sight of workers crossing the stage between scenes, carrying things on and off. The Lyceum's new system of winches, counterweights, and metal rails was an attempt to do away with this, much to the delight of the *All the Year Round* journalist:

The banishing from the boards of that abnormal personage, the stage-footman, with his red breeches and white stockings, is an improvement on which we cannot but congratulate the manager of the Lyceum Theatre. It was not pleasant to sit and watch the proceedings of these gentry during a pause in the drama ... those footmen used to give one a shock, and bring one's imagination down to the realities of life whenever they appeared, and it is agreeable to think that in future their work will be accomplished by means of trap-doors and other simple contrivances. (233)

There is an evident disdain for the sight of workers here. Though it is by their labour that the theatrical image is put together, their presence in the theatrical frame registers as a shocking intrusion and the disconcerting reassertion of the realities of life: stagehands both produce and destroy theatre's magic. As Alice Rayner has commented far more recently, the work of stagehands contradicts theatre's ontological 'dubiousness' in that it is 'practical, necessary, and concrete' and 'has a kind of worldly reality' which is distinguished from 'the pretenses of bourgeois theatre's illusions' (536). This ontological problem of the theatre is to be remedied in the Lyceum by means of simple contrivances. However, while machinery might facilitate the elimination of signs of work from view, it is very clear that this is not technology which removes the need for labour; it merely conceals it more efficiently.

Though this technological innovation was reported as an epochal shift towards mechanisation, the changes were short lived and subsequent Lyceum managers, in harmony with the rest of the industry, returned their scene-shifting practice to, in the words of one nineteenth century chronicler, 'the rule of strong sinews'—the laborious effort of straining bodies, with people manually hauling scenery from place to place (Fitzgerald 28). This strikingly corporeal phrase repudiates the fantasy of effortless execution offered by the news report—a fantasy so divorced from the realities of life that even as it was being enthusiastically expressed it had to be ironised behind the image of the spangled, glittering fairy spirit.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

It was a widely repeated truism of nineteenth century criticism that an attempt to represent the fairy world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the theatre was, like the characters' own naive efforts to portray moonshine, doomed to failure. This owed much to an influential essay by William Hazlitt in 1817 which claimed that 'All that is finest in the play is lost in the representation. The spectacle was grand; but the spirit was evaporated' (133). Hazlitt, along with Charles Lamb and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, is one of the key articulators of what several critics have termed 'romantic antitheatricalism': a rejection of spectacle and sensation and a denial of theatre's capacity to do justice to dramatic writing (Barish, Carlson, Pechter). This at its most positive turns on a celebration of the superiority of the reader's imagination over the limited efficacy of theatrical representation. The reader is able to hold subtle ideas in mind, to engage in interpretation; they are an intellectually, aesthetically, and morally active participant in the dramatist's art. As an audience member, though, Hazlitt is simultaneously over- and underwhelmed. The theatre confronts him with an 'unmanageable reality'—what Julie Stone Peters interprets as a 'sensory overload' in which too many elements vie for attention and cannot be ignored (298). Yet by comparison to the marvels which dramatic poetry excites in his imagination, the crushing mundanity of live performance leaves him dismayed. 'Thus Bottom's head in the play is a fantastic illusion, produced by magic spells: on the stage, it is an ass's head, and nothing more' (133). Theatrical representation is both too much and too little, too real and too artificial.

This fixation on interiority is paired with an aesthetic distaste for the gaudy and cumbersome adornment towards which theatrical practice was seen to be moving. The flat scenic decoration of the eighteenth century, backdrops and screens delicately painted by master craftsmen, was being displaced by the crude literalism of 'built up' three dimensional sets. The practical compromises required to achieve the sensational designs and spectacular effects were regarded by many as the subordination of dramatic poetry to crass entertainment. Into this

can further be read a disdain for the unrefined tastes of an increasingly socio-economically diverse theatre audience; 'even as a taste for spectacle developed into the determining factor for theatrical production, so a distaste for spectacle became the driving force behind Romantic antitheatricalism' (Pechter 160). These new heights of scenic elaboration required more and more heavy lifting in their nightly live execution and so introduced more and more of those breaches into the performance through which the realities of life awkwardly imposed themselves on the theatrical illusion in the shape of labouring stagehands.

The absolute privileging of private reading is rooted in a profound individualism. 'Romanticism,' writes Jonas Barish in his long genealogy of antitheatrical prejudices, 'like Puritanism, leans toward inwardness, solitude, and spontaneity' (326). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given my materialist worldview, my professional life as a theatre technician, and my enthusiasm for fairies, I am presenting this antitheatricalism in a negative light, but there is a dimension to it that is worth pausing on. While it is undoubtedly a bourgeois perspective, it apparently owes some of its charge to unease around the development of capitalist society. This ambivalent and contradictory perspective has been theorised by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre as 'romantic anticapitalism'.<sup>2</sup> My thesis here is that romantic antitheatricalism is a form of romantic anticapitalism, although it is still a decidedly conservative and idealist strain of it. The aspects of theatre to which romantic critics most forcefully object are those aspects which most directly represent or evoke capitalist modernity. The rejection of theatre's crude materiality and vulgar excess, therefore, may be a rejection of theatre's spectacularisation of mechanised industry and participation in deindividuated mass culture. For Löwy and Sayre, 'Romanticism issues from a revolt against a concrete, historical present' (*Romantic Anticapitalism* 54)—it is specifically a reaction to the emergent capitalist economy, and is a worldview specifically held by capitalist subjects. The

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<sup>2</sup> In more recent publications, Löwy and Sayre have abandoned the phrase on the grounds that, for them, 'Romanticism is anticapitalist by its very nature' (*Romance Against the Tide of Modernity* 15). I am retaining it here for the purposes of clarity.

values of romanticism resented the spectre of homogeneity posed by the mass production of goods and the mass accumulation of people in the major cities, both of which were tangibly evoked by increasingly object-laden theatrical shows played before packed audiences. As Löwy and Sayre write, the individualism at romanticism's core is one that is ambivalently a product of capitalist development and simultaneously experiences itself as repressed by capitalist totality:

Capitalism calls forth the independent individual to fulfill certain socio-economic functions; but ... when it begins to want to freely exercise its powers of fantasy it comes up against the extreme mechanization and platitude of the world created by capitalist relations. Romanticism represents the revolt of the repressed, manipulated and deformed subjectivity, and of the "magic" of imagination banished from the capitalist world. (57)

The retreat to the vivid images mentally concocted by solitary reading rather than the clunking scrapes of bulky scenery at the theatre may signal a nostalgic desire to conserve a social experience that is innocent of industrial rationalisation. It is perhaps inevitable that this set of prejudices should form most concretely around Shakespeare, who is insistently constructed as a solitary poet, rather than a man engaged in collaborative theatrical production, and whose authorial genius is confirmed for romantic critics precisely in the fact that it is unrealisable in performance.<sup>3</sup>

As a play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was particularly suited to these purposes. Its setting looks back not only to English folklore

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<sup>3</sup> This is not necessarily a new phenomenon; Stephen Greenblatt relates Lamb and Coleridge's preference for solitary reading to a tradition stretching back to Ben Jonson (127-8). The romantic ideal of a solitary writer (or its more recent successor, as defined by Montuori and Purser, the 'lone genius myth') has disintegrated in current Shakespeare scholarship with the rise of attribution studies. For a full discussion of this changing conception of authorship, see the *Authorship Companion to the New Oxford Shakespeare* edited by Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan. See also Brian Vickers' *Shakespeare, Co-Author*. It is worth noting that the increased attention to collaborative authorship has coincided with increased scholarly concern for the practical and economic realities of producing for commercial theatre.

and forests unspoiled by industry but also to the precapitalist world of classical antiquity, which nineteenth century modernity encountered nostalgically as ‘a lost world, whose difference defined the present’ (Goldhill 161). This evoked for romantic critics a pastoral world which was irreconcilable with the industrial realm of theatre. Not only does the play feature a range of magic scenarios which are impossible to depict literally (invisibility, bodily transformation, the disproportionate physical size of the fairy and human characters), it also stages, through the clumsy amateurism of the ‘rude mechanicals’, an explicit meditation on theatre’s capacities for representation. The critic Henry Morley was therefore confident in opening his review of Samuel Phelps’ production at Sadler’s Wells with the declaration that ‘Every reader of Shakespeare is disposed to regard the ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’ as the most essentially unactable of all his plays’, the characters being ‘creatures of the poet’s fancy that no flesh and blood can properly present’ (66). Another reviewer surmised that the play had ‘generally been considered so infinite in the ideal, that to place it upon the stage would destroy it’ (B. W. W. 129). In spite of this consensus, the critics uniformly offer an enthusiastic view of the production, not because it challenged their antitheatrical romantic values but because, somewhat paradoxically, it affirmed them. Critics describe the action gliding from scene to scene without interruption for set changes and report that the appearance of the performers was softened by gaslight and gauze to create a visual dreaminess. I will return to these effects, but my interest here is not so much in the staging of the production itself (the precise details of which are, as a result of the vagueness of the reviews, difficult to determine) but rather in its appropriation by critics as a vehicle for their idealism.<sup>4</sup> In their description of an exceptional spectatorial experience which transcends the normal limitations of the form, they reify the general condemnation of theatre’s unbending materiality.

For Douglas Jerrold, reviewing for *Lloyd’s Weekly*, the idea that the play was ‘a fairy creation that could only be acted by fairies’ was

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<sup>4</sup> A good account of the available details of the staging is given in Gary Jay Williams’ *Our Moonlight Revels* (111-115).

‘a favourite dogma, which commentators have thumped down upon the Shakespearean page with the might of a paviour’s hammer’ (131). Though he attempted to distance himself from that antitheatricalist orthodoxy, he did not do so by embracing theatre’s materiality. Rather, he found in this theatrical production an ideal experience which transcended material limitation more effectively than private reading. For him, visiting Sadler’s Wells on a mid-October night, some kind of theatrical spell was cast, some intoxicating magic was worked. ‘Those critical opinions have all been blown away’, he wrote, before offering the crucial qualification: ‘And yet the beautiful dreaminess of the play is not in the least disturbed’ (131). He describes being plunged into a prolonged atemporal reverie, and speculates that ‘one-half the spectators are dreaming without knowing it, and that they only wake up when the curtain drops, and are surprised to find they have a play-bill in their hand’. Of his own experience, he reports

All motion, all action, seems to be involuntarily suspended. ... In this way, you dream quite unconsciously, lost one minute in a beautiful wood flooded with moonlight ... and the next minute laughing over the courtship of Pyramus and Thisbe ... (132)

Notably, this experience of spectatorship seems to obviate theatre’s inherent communality and instead reproduces the solitary individualism of private reading; rows of independent dreamers side by side in theatre stalls. At last, ‘the illusion is pulled, like a common cotton night-cap, from off your brow’ and ‘the ideal trance, in which you have been plunged for the last three hours’ is over (132). Jerrold’s response is exactly that scripted by Robin Goodfellow, Shakespeare’s mischievous metatheatrical fairy, in the epilogue to the play, in which he reminds the audience that they ‘have but slumbered here / while these visions did appear’, the whole drama being a ‘weak and idle theme / no more yielding but a dream’.

Here, I want to develop the account of romantic antitheatricalism as it has been theorised by the critics referenced above. Romantic

antitheatricalism has generally been assessed in more or less the terms set out by romantic writers themselves: individualism, aesthetic taste, and the primacy of the imagination, all of which amount to the privileging of idealism over materiality. What is absent from critiques which take romantic antitheatricalism on its own terms is an acknowledgement of one of the most significant material factors of industrial society—labour—which, though seldom mentioned, seems to subtextually animate much of the writing against theatre. The romantic antitheatricalists did not simply favour idealism over materialism in an abstract sense; indeed, to treat their view as such is itself an idealist approach. It was not a general, abstracted, or intellectual dissatisfaction with theatre's matter that they were motivated by; it was a disgust with the specific materiality with which theatre confronted them: human bodies at work.

Jerrold's spectatorial experience, in which familiar reality and the familiar passage of time are suspended and give way to something more effortlessly ideal, does not admit the labour on which it relies. So affected by the magic sensation of the show were all the reviewers that the practical means by which the effects were achieved can only be extrapolated from their dreamy descriptions. One of the fullest accounts of the staging comes from Henry Morley, who reports that for the entire duration of the forest scenes (the middle three acts of the play) 'a green gauze was placed between the actors and the audience', barely perceptible itself but allowing, through the precise use of gas lighting (newly installed at Sadler's Wells for this production), the visibility of the stage to be manipulated. The performers were denied the corporeality of their labouring bodies; the hazy gauze '[subdued] the flesh and blood of the actors into something more nearly resembling dream-figures' (67-68). Jerrold, too, was struck by fairies who danced and whirled across the stage with 'the appearance of flitting shadows more than of human beings' (132). At the same time, Charles Kean's rival production at the Princess's Theatre drew criticism for failing to disguise the fact that 'Titania's fairies were substantial lumps, not shadowless spirits' (B. W. W. 130).

The image with which I initially established the dialectical tension of this article, a Fairy Queen flying gracefully on a rope pulled by stocky stagehands, served not only to draw attention to the labour of theatre but to assert the mutually constitutive relationship between the illusions of bourgeois theatre and the work on which those illusions rely. Following Brecht, theatre's magic conceals theatre's work. However, if the two poles of my image have thus far been the ideal fairy and the material stagehands, the rope between them binds them far closer together, and brings them back down to the realities of life. The nameless journalist with whom I started reaches for a similar image in his praise for counterweight flying systems but adds that 'her majesty is less ethereal than the gauzy vapours that surround her' and that she is accompanied by 'a retinue of attendant sprites weighing their eight stone apiece into the bargain' (232)—the corporeal reality of the performer is held against the ideal image of the fairy.

The misogynist contours of antitheatrical writing are well established, building on the suspicion that theatre itself, as an insubstantial object of spectatorship, is somehow feminine or feminising.<sup>5</sup> Exceptional to this is the already counter-theatrical manual labour of the stagehands, which preserves its masculine coding precisely because it obstructs and resists the fairy magic of theatre. As Julie A. Carlson has demonstrated, in romantic criticism the perceptive imagination of the bourgeois subject in which the ideal was able to thrive was conceived as a masculine sphere from which women were largely excluded. In Carlson's account, romantic criticism 'treats actresses as bodies, not minds' (21), and the materiality of theatrical spectacle was understood as a feminine challenge to literary masculinity. The feminised ideal of the Fairy Queen, as she figured as a cultural trope, rhetorical device, newspaper illustration, or magical vision in a reader's imagination, was always reducible on the stage to the corporeal flesh of a human being, presented, draped in muslin and spangles, before the eyes of hundreds

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Carlson and Barish. The same antitheatrical suspicion applies to stage magicians, who 'may paradoxically be empowered by appearing to blur the distinction between masculine and feminine' (Schwartz 207).

of other human beings. On stage, where the ideal of the fairy appears in antagonism with the real woman who represents her, fairy magic asserts itself as a set of demands on the body of the performer. The fairy does not float on a beam of light, is not ethereal; if she moves gracefully it is only by straining her trained muscles against both gravity and exhaustion, a physical effort no less than that of the stagehands, though differently disguised from the view of the spectators who gaze up at her. The sight of stagehands is disruptive to theatre because they are so inescapably legible as labourers that they reveal theatre's industrial basis. The fairy performers, on the other hand, can function as the spectacularised objects of the audience's gaze only in as far as their activity is not legible as labour.

In Jerrold's reverent spectatorial fantasy, the fairy performer was reduced to an insubstantial illusion which 'puffed about [...] like a cloud of silver dust' (132), their physical exertion registering only as ethereal wonderment. The other executors of the spectacle, including 'that abnormal personage, the stage-footman' disdainfully described above, were, as far as the audience was concerned, completely dispensed with. As Morley wrote, 'There is no ordinary scene-shifting; but, as in dreams, one scene is made to glide insensibly into another' (67). Whatever subtle magic of gaslight and misdirection was undertaken behind the translucent green gauze, it did not announce itself to the audience. The antitheatrical unease with materiality encompasses both the sardonic, even purrulent attention to the corporeality of women's bodies and the desire that servile manual labourers should remain out of sight. A central tension of the bourgeois theatre is that as it subordinates the capabilities of industrial society to the production of spectacle and leisure for its privileged audiences, it inescapably confronts those audiences with the contradictions of that society. It is this which lurks behind much of the contempt for scenographic elaboration and dissatisfaction with the physical bodies of performers that is to be found in these writings, as Jerrold suggests:

Give it living embodiment, and the fairies become heavy, coarse realities ... The comedy was a poetical

dream, and if stage carpenters and painters laid their  
leaden fingers upon it they would only turn the dream  
into nothing better than a nightmare. (131)

The role of workers in mediating the dramatic text for performance is a contaminating intrusion, debasing something absolute by bringing it into contact with the mundane. It forces audiences to remember that what they have paid to see in the theatre is not magic, but work. If the romantic imaginary was a reaction against the disquieting traumas of a disenchanted capitalist world, the attempt to maintain its ideal visions as innocent of that world served only to reinscribe capital's own violent mystifications. For all their privileging of individual human subjectivity, the romantic anticapitalist was still susceptible to a bourgeois disdain for hired workers. More than simple hypocrisy, what is observable here is the idealist suspicion of the material culture of industrialised capitalist society manifesting as a resentment of the people who produce and work with capital's material content.

### **Epilogue**

In April 1856, Karl Marx gave a speech to the editors and writers of the Chartist *People's Paper*. In the disordered and unnatural world that capitalism had produced, he asserted, 'The newfangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, are turned into sources of want'. This contradictory sorcery subverts the incredible productive capacities of human labour into appalling conditions of exploitation, profit, and poverty. A Marxist materialism therefore represents the re-assertion of reality against illusion. This much is confirmed by Brecht's half-height curtain revealing the work taking place behind. However, in that same speech, there is one final instance of fairy magic with which I wish to close. This magic comes not from the theatre—in fact, that theatre might either foster or contain it is unlikely, though theatre has provided a useful model with which to introduce it. Unlike my image, this fairy does not descend from above but rather promises the revivification of a long dormant puckish spirit which will erupt from below. It resolves the petty dialectic of fairy magic and human work; labour is reunderstood

as the transformative force that, no longer concealed by the illusion of magic, lays claim to the power of magic.

In the signs that bewilder the middle class, the aristocracy and the poor prophets of regression, we do recognise our brave friend, Robin Goodfellow, the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer—the Revolution.

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