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ENTREPRENEURS, EMPIRES AND PANTOMIMES:

J. C. WILLIAMSON'S PANTOMIME PRODUCTIONS AS A SITE TO REVIEW THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF AN AUSTRALIAN THEATRE INDUSTRY, 1882 TO 1914

by Josephine Vita Fantasia

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of English University of Sydney

March, 1996

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J. V. F.
'ENTREPRENEURS, EMPIRES AND PANTOMIME'

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**Introduction**
INTRODUCTION

The great industrialists utilise all the existing parties turn by turn, but they do not have their own party. This does not mean that they are in any way 'agnostic' or 'apolitical'.

Antonio Gramsci (1971), Selections from Prison Notebooks, 155.

###

To be sure, we must always start from the satisfaction of wants, since they are the end of all production, and the given economic situation at any time must be understood from this aspect. Yet innovations in any economic system do not as a rule take place in such a way that first new wants arise spontaneously in consumers and then the productive apparatus swings round through their pressure. We do not deny the presence of this nexus. It is, however, the producer who as a rule initiates economic change, and consumers are educated by him[the entrepreneur] if necessary; they are, as it were, taught to want new things, or things which differ in some respect or other from those which they have been in the habit of using. Therefore, while it is permissible and even necessary to consider consumers' wants as an independent and indeed the fundamental force in a theory of the circular flow, we must take a different attitude as soon as we analyse change.

Sitting in the gallery of the Princess Theatre, Melbourne, watching The Phantom of the Opera in 1992, was a catalyst for my research on the importance of 'entrepreneurial' theatre in Australia. Undoubtedly, the fact that the theatre visit occurred while I was at a conference at the Performing Arts Museum on 'Preserving Our Performing Arts Heritage' in no small way contributed to my critique of Phantom that night. The evening seemed to demand that I see a cultural connection between Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical and the particular subject of my research, J. C. Williamson and his Firm. I was sitting in J. C. Williamson and George Musgrove's Princess Theatre, opened in 1886 with Gilbert and Sullivan's The Mikado, and which subsequently housed a spectacular array of imported English musical productions: I was watching, over a century later, another musical from London. At one stage, I even speculated on the possibility that, if Williamson's phantom was wandering about the theatre that night, he would be viewing something he would have loved to have imported.

Accompanying the production was a glossy 'souvenir' theatre programme making an adroitly selective use of 'history' for the purpose of marketing Phantom to modern audiences. The Complete Phantom of the Opera (Perry 1992) includes the histories of the Paris Opera House and the original 1911 novel by Gaston Leroux as preludes to the 'official' history of Webber's musical. It focuses on particular parts of the Opera House's history, later to feature in the contemporary production's set design. The underground lake, used to spectacular effect in the musical, was there because the planners built the Opera House on water-logged land and then had to devise an engineering feat to remove the water from the building's foundations, thus creating a subterranean lake.

The same use of history is evident in the programme's explanation of how Webber borrowed from Gaston Leroux for the Phantom's narrative. Leroux's 'detective' story of a deformed killer had 'romantic' possibilities and allowed Webber
to transform the 'phantom of the opera' into a tragic hero. Hence the justification for Webber's use of nineteenth-century theatrical forms in his 'true theatrical instinct' intuited that 'the day of the spiky, abrasive, loose-structured musical may well have passed, and that there is a public thirsting for extravagant romance, colourful spectacle, proscenium arches, orchestra pits, helpless heroines, rugged heroes, tragic villains and evocative melodies' (Perry 1992, 81). Though Webber is not the subject of my research, what struck me about his construction of The Phantom of the Opera on stage, and the reporting of its coming into being in the theatre programme, were the similarities between his apolitical views of musical theatre and Williamson's vision of a popular Australian theatre between 1882 and 1913.

J. C. Williamson: Life Story Told in his Own Words with Valedictory Messages (1913), published shortly after his death to commemorate his life's work in the Australian theatre, repeats the substance of a life-time of publicity created by or about him during those years. The biographical section of the publication was based on a series of interviews given to A. G. Stephens of the Bookfellow in 1907. Most significantly, it contains a tract, since quoted many times, describing Williamson's opinion of what constitutes a 'good play' and a 'popular' theatre.

People go to the theatre as a distraction, as an amusement, as a relaxation after the toil of the day, so that they can drop their burdens and forget their troubles for a little while. They do not go to be instructed, or to be puzzled, or to be bored, and being human beings, the same human qualities appeal to them generation after generation (28).

Life Story does not, however, even begin to interrogate the political nature of Williamson's popular theatre. Similarly, Complete Phantom does not in any way substantiate how Webber's 'extravagant romance' was politically different from 'the spiky, abrasive, loose-structured musical.' Does Webber mean musicals by Brecht and Kurt Weill or the likes of Peter Weiss's Marat/Sade or perhaps even Hair, Oh Calcutta, The Rocky Horror Show and Boys in the Band? What is most noticeable about Life Story and The Complete Phantom are their attempts to re-write 'history', and in particular theatre history, to legitimise both Williamson's and Webber's respective 'commercial' enterprises. The implications of this recall the concerns
Brecht (1964) raised in 'Gestic Music' as to the supposed apolitical spectacle of popular cultural forms.

The pomp of the Fascists, taken at its face value, has a hollow gest, the gest of mere pomp, a featureless phenomenon: men strutting instead of walking, a certain stiffness, a lot of colour, self-conscious sticking out of chests, etc. All this could be the gest of some popular festivity, quite harmless, purely factual and therefore to be accepted. Only when the strutting takes place over corpses do we get the social gest of Fascism. This means that the artist has to adopt a definite attitude towards the fact of pomp; he cannot let it just speak only for itself, simply expressing it as the fact dictates (105).

It is the entrepreneur's reluctance 'to adopt a definite attitude towards the fact of pomp' which lies behind my seeing a possible cultural connection between Webber's and Williamson's 'entrepreneurial' theatres. How, for instance, did Webber's 'true theatrical instinct' inform him that the public wanted 'helpless heroines' and 'rugged heroes' after all that has transpired within the Women's Movement from at least the 1890s? How was Williamson so certain that Australia wanted the productions from the Savoy, Drury Lane and Gaiety Theatres in London instead of 'Australian' drama? My night at Phantom of the Opera hence spectacularly focussed for me the motivating concern of my research. How do 'popular' theatrical forms come to dominate the social experience of theatre both materially and ideologically? And how do they give the illusion of novelty while being limited by the entrepreneur's fiercely conservative ideology? Furthermore, how is this related to the organisation of theatre industries?

'Entrepreneurs, Empires and Pantomimes' examines how Williamson influenced the form and content of one theatrical genre within his theatrical empire between 1882 and 1914. As the frontispiece signals in spectacular fashion, the pantomime was a vitally popular dramatic form. I believe that my findings have serious implications for the formation of an Australian theatre industry with regard to the 'development' of Australian drama. Ironically, as J. W. Gough points out in The Rise of the Entrepreneur (1969), the word 'entrepreneur' first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1897 as referring to 'The director or manager of a public musical institution: one who 'gets up' entertainments, especially musical performances.' Not until its Supplement appeared in 1933 did the Dictionary
recognise the word had a place in the business as well as the entertainment world, and
could mean 'one who undertakes an enterprise: especially a contractor...acting as
intermediary between capital and labour' (Gough 1969, 9). Though economists never
use theatrical allusions to describe entrepreneurship, many, like J. A. Schumpeter
(1934), believe that the entrepreneur possessed an 'artistic' flair which expressed 'the
joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply of exercising one's energy and
ingenuity.' (Schumpeter 1934, 133). As Mark Casson (1990) argues in
Entrepreneurship, it was Schumpeter who was also responsible for defining the
entrepreneur as an innovator and risk-taker, organiser and leader (p. xvi). However, it
is the artist who continues to be an important motif in explanations of the
entrepreneurial type.

The artist is an entrepreneur who derives satisfaction directly from the creative art,
that is, his own (organizational and programmatic) constructs. There are basically
two types of artist: the architect subtype is a builder, craftsman, or tinkerer who
likes to 'play' with organizational 'blocks.' He may view his organisation as a
workshop for building better structures, both physical and organizational...The
poetic subtype is less structured and less meticulous but a more cerebral
entrepreneur. He may view his agenda as a blank canvas to be filled with a painting
of his own conception (Young 1981, 422).

Gramsci's and Schumpeter's views on industrialists and entrepreneurs, as
highlighted in the epigraphs to this introduction, indicate the political divisiveness of
the terms from at least the 1930s, with the former epitomising the 'industrialist' as a
reactionary social force (this is particularly noticeable in the work of Georg Lukacs,
Antonio Gramsci and the critical thinkers of the Frankfurt School), while the latter
believed him to be the cornerstone of economic change. Neither free-marketeers nor
Marxists dispute, however, the entrepreneur's connection with mass production.

J. C. Williamson has been characterised in Australian theatre history as
c Creatively shaping the future of Australia drama.¹ He has also been depicted as a
worthy successor to the 'Father of Australian Theatre', George Coppin, and founder
of 'the Firm' through which other theatre entrepreneurs, in particular the Tait brothers,
were able to continue to mould the destiny of Australian theatre under the name J. C.

¹ A typical example of this is 'J. C. Williamson: Plans for the Future - Drama Here and Abroad' in
the Age, 5 March 1908.
Williamson Ltd up to the late 1970s.² Williamson is thus the historical linch-pin between the Australian theatre's 'colonial' past and its 'coming of age' in the twentieth century. As an American, he also embodies the triadic English/American/Australian cultural experience so visible throughout nineteenth- and twentieth-century Australian history. In this respect, Richard Waterhouse's (1990) conclusions in his history of Australian vaudeville also applies to Australian pantomime:

the fact remains that the emerging gap between high and popular culture never became as wide here as it did Europe and the United States. Australian cultural values and institutions were almost all imported from Europe and the United States but the Australian whole did not equal the sum of the European and American parts (142).

It is the 'sum of the parts' that I 'detotalise' from the outset. Following Foucauldian historiography, I want to present the archeological 'fragments' of the Firm's enterprise from the perspective of a 'general' history which resists constructing a 'totalised' account. This is not only because such an account is an impossibility (as any historical source points to a multitude of other facts which are beyond the reach of the historian) but because the most politically provocative aspect of the Firm's work is its paradoxically tenuous domination of the Australian theatre industry.

My reason for choosing to focus on Williamson's pantomime productions is twofold. Firstly, the massive output of productions (both nationally and also in New Zealand and South Africa) in the pre-1914 period necessitates that I limit my study in some way. I will thus be dealing with fifty-seven pantomimes staged by Williamson and some sixty-one productions staged by various other theatre managers between 1879 and 1914. My concentration on Sydney and Melbourne reflects the way in which the company initiated the vast majority of its productions from these two cities, despite its representation as 'Australian' theatre.

Williamson's company produced more pantomimes than any other company during this period. 1891, 1904 and 1905 were the only years the Firm did not put on a pantomime in either capital city. Conversely, in 1896, 1899, 1906, 1907, 1910, 1911 and 1913, it was the only company to stage one. No other manager came

² For example, Peter Newton's 'The Story of J. C. Williamson and His Firm' in Masque (1969) is based on the premise that Williamson took over from 'Coppin the Great.'
anywhere near fifty-seven productions, with Coppin producing only nine pantomimes in this time, William Anderson seven and George Rignold six. In fact, pantomime productions show the comings-and-goings of the Firm's various competitors: Frank Towers (1882), G. B. W. Lewis (1883, though Lewis produced others previously in the late 1870s), Alfred Dampier (1886 and 1891), Frank Smith (1892), Fred Gunther (1893), Alfred Woods (1895), J. & C. McMahon (1897), Miss Ada Juneen (1897), J. F. Sheridan (1902), Tom Perman (1903) and George Willoughby (1913 and 1914).

Other managers staged pantomimes for a period of only three to four consecutive years: F. E. Hiscock (1884 - 1887); George Rignold (1890 - 1894) and George Coppin (1891 - 1895).3 Williamson's ex-partner George Musgrove produced three independently: in 1890 in Sydney during his two year rift with Williamson in 1890/91 and two after his final split with him in 1899, at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne in 1900 and 1901. Harry Rickards staged five productions beginning in 1885, while William Anderson began staging pantomimes from 1904. Anderson had also previously produced a pantomime with Charles Holloway in 1897. The setting up of the Clarke, Meynell, Wrenn and Gunn company in 1908 saw it stage the pantomime Cinderella in Melbourne. Inexplicably, though the company was seriously challenging the supremacy of J. C. Williamson's at this time, it did not stage another pantomime until it amalgamated with the Firm in 1911.

Given the importance of 'localism' in pantomime productions, the theme of my explorations will be the notion of a 'local' pantomime. Australian theatre historians such as Elizabeth Webby, Margaret Williams and Veronica Kelly identify a local tradition of pantomime writing from the mid-1840s. In the light of this, I want to describe how the Firm's employment of arrangers, composers, scene painters and choreographers related to that local tradition. Remarkably, from 1881 onwards, the firm of Williamson, Musgrove and Garner predominantly used English arrangements.

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3 Eric Irvin (1985) notes that Coppin came out of retirement to stage pantomimes to pay his way out of the financial crisis in the 1890s. He had, of course, produced many pantomimes through his long career as a theatre manager in Sydney and Melbourne but his last pantomime production prior to 1891 had been in 1881 after which he handed over the lease of the Theatre Royal, Melbourne to J. C. Williamson (76).
This, however, requires further qualification because of the way the Firm inventively moved between English 'in-house' authors and the occasional employment of local writers such as Garnet Walch, Arthur Adams and Monty Grover. Furthermore, Williamson himself co-authored four productions, three with English actor, Bert Royle and one with Australian-born author, Bernard Espinassee.

My deliberations are based on pantomime scripts found in the public archives. These have been read as 'performance' rather than 'literary' texts, though I am only too aware of what they cannot record of the pantomime's protean form: the comedian's ad libbing, the changes in scenic effects, the back-stage drama between cast and management, the audiences' reception of the amalgam of effects, the managers' business meetings. All of these impacted on the productions and must be searched out from the fragmentary evidence of other contemporary records.

Despite these 'archeological' limitations, it is possible to see something of how the Firm 'unlocalised' the Australian pantomime and altered a local tradition, one most evident in the 1860s and 70s. The second part of Chapter One describes how the process of 'unlocalising' Australian pantomime was inextricably connected to the Firm's framing of 'England and its other' in pantomime scenarios. A term adapted from post-colonial theory, it foregrounds the essential cultural imperialism of the Firm's pantomimes, seen in the way they ontologically divided the 'West' from the 'East'. More importantly, such an 'othering' of the East highlights Australia's scenic absence from the pantomime stage, an indication that it was hardly ever depicted as England's 'other'. Instead, it was thought of as a terra nullius, remaining largely unrepresented in post 1880 pantomime productions.

In the third part of the chapter, I will consider how this impacted on the Firm's creation of an 'original' Australian pantomime in Williamson's arrangements of Djin Djin (1895), Matsa (1896) and Australis (1900). A comparison with Garnet Walch's original arrangements, mostly from the 1870s but also including those he wrote for the Firm in 1885 and for Dampier and Coppin in 1891 and 1893

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4 In particular, of course, Francis Barker's (1985) edition of Europe and its Other.
respectively, shows that Williamson significantly altered the Australian pantomime's 'post-colonial' re-invention of the form.

Chapter Two looks more specifically at the Firm's imperialist aspirations: firstly, in terms of the theatre manager as 'empire-builder' and secondly, in terms of the productions' representation of British militarism. In the first part of the chapter, therefore, I specifically consider Williamson's own domination of the Firm and how that has been reflected in the way imperialist historiography legitimized his domination of the pre-1914 Australian theatre industry. In this respect, he became the hallmark of the Firm's productions. Thus, I wish to move away from the 'biographical' approach which has so far dominated the analysis of Williamson's work, as in Paul Macguire's *The Story of the Australian Theatre* (1948), Hal Porter's *Stars of the Australian Stage and Screen* (1965), Viola Tait's *A Family of Brothers* (1971), Brian Carroll's *Australian Stage Album* (1976), John West's *Theatre in Australia* (1978) and, more recently, Ian Bevan's *The Story of the Theatre Royal* (1993). The most detailed example is Ian Dicker's thesis *An Historical-Critical Study of the Career of James Cassius Williamson and His Contribution to Theatre in Australia* (1970), subsequently published as *A Short Biography of J. C. Williamson* (1974).

Furthermore, I would argue that a Schumpeter-like definition of entrepreneurship has forged a positivist cause-and-effect relationship between Williamson's late nineteenth-century commercial theatre and the present-day Australian theatre industry. This is certainly evident in Ian Dicker's (1970) work which argues for Williamson an entrepreneurial greatness on a par with the English and American theatre managers Augustus Harris and Charles Frohman.

Few Australians or New Zealanders in the latter half of the twentieth century, however, would know very much, if anything at all, beyond the name of the man, J. C. Williamson— the man whose courage, foresight and knowledge bequeathed them so splendid a theatrical inheritance. During his lifetime James Cassius Williamson was honoured with a multiplicity of flattering titles, each more or less accurately descriptive of his position at the forefront of Australian professional theatre. He was referred to variously as 'the Theatrical King of Australia,' 'Theatre's Richest Man,' 'Australia's Augustus Harris,' and 'the Charles Frohman of the Southern Seas' (ix).

Apart from historians, the post-J. C. Williamson firm of J. C. Williamson Ltd has also been instrumental in sponsoring this view of its founder. Viola Tait's *A
Family of Brothers: The Taits and J. C. Williamson, a Theatrical History (1971) describes a continuity of Australian entrepreneurship as the Tait brothers succeed Williamson from the time of J. & N. Tait's amalgamation with J. C. Williamson Ltd in 1920.

Australia has been fortunate in having a succession of enterprising commercial theatrical entrepreneurs who, for over a hundred years, have played an important part in the cultural development of their country. Distance presented no barrier to them in promoting the Arts, despite Australia's isolation from the leading opera houses and theatres of the world, nor did the time and expense involved in transporting artists deter them (Introduction).

Williamson's quest to legitimise himself and his theatre enterprise signals how hegemony primarily dominates through consensual means rather than brute force. Hence, in the second part of the chapter, I seek to make a connection between the manager, the performer and the soldier in the British Imperialist enterprise. In this triadic relationship the Firm participated by reproducing Imperialist rhetoric in pantomime productions.

The free-market/Marxist debate over the value of entrepreneurs is also connected to the continuing debate over the entrepreneur's role in British Imperialist expansion as, for instance, P. L. Payne (1974) and D. H. Aldcroft (1964 in Casson 1990) indicate in their overviews of British entrepreneurship to 1914. There is no doubt that specific individuals (e.g. Cecil Rhodes) played a major political role but, as Raymond Betts points out, there also existed a differentiation between imperialists of the 'blood-red type' and those of the 'business proposition' as revealed in Lord Alfred Milner's 1909 article in the British Empire Review. It was only the 'blood-red type', Milner argued, who should be considered dedicated zealots, invested with historical purpose (Betts 1979, 24-25).

The theatre programme/scripts, theatre reviews and numerous photographs of the company's pantomime productions suggest that the Firm may have been a 'blood-red' business proposition type. To use Edward Said's (1993) term, the 'pleasure of imperialism' in the Firm's pantomimes supported British military campaigns in the Sudan and South Africa and imperial celebrations of Victoria's Jubilee and, of course, Australia's participation in World War I. The degree of consciousness this entailed is
dependent on whether one believes, as Penny Summerfield (1986) does of English Music Hall, that 'uncritical support for the monarch, the Empire and the government of the day was not considered 'political' (42) or whether one reads all moves in business as a deliberated strategy.

Notably, the transformation of real political events into fantastic spectacle further highlights the way that exotic and erotic images are inextricably intertwined in spectacular presentations of British and Australian militarism. So I move onto considering the pantomime as a 'spectacle of patriotic women' when I examine how the exotic spectacle of late nineteenth-century productions contributed to the effectiveness of the two 'war-time' pantomimes, at the outset of the Boer War in 1899 with Little Red Riding Hood, and the outset of the Great War with the 1914 production of Cinderella. Primarily, these demonstrate how the pantomime's use of women and children in spectacle seems to have given both campaigns 'wholesome' support.

It is important not to underestimate the pantomime as a carnivalesque form; after all, it was a vital part of the Christmas festive season. Though the Christmas festival and the pantomime began as separate events in English and Australian social history, their relationship shows the influence on the nineteenth-century theatre industry of the commercial practices of the 'new' Victorian Christmas. Therefore, I want to examine the subversive potential of late nineteenth-century pantomime, with its antecedents in the Italian Commedia dell'Arte, later adapted into the English 'harlequinade'. I will consider the chronology of its evolution as demonstrated by English theatre historians such as David Mayer (1969) through the evolution of its four seminal figures, Pantaloon, the Clown, Harlequin and Columbine.

The assumption that early nineteenth-century pantomime was more counter-hegemonic is mainly based on the anti-patriarchical character of its narrative, as Harlequin and Columbine attempt to escape Pantaloon's despotism. Later, when the Clown comes to match Harlequin's importance in the drama, he does so as a kind of 'Lord of Misrule'. Grimaldi's contribution to the creation of the role of 'Clown Joey'
continues to be featured in the much reduced 'harlequinade' of late nineteenth-century productions.

As Michael Holquist (1990) reminds us, the pivotal point of Bakhtin's theory of carnival is his interconnection between literary genre and a vision of the body. The pantomime's spectacularisation and the use of glamourised and reified bodies on stage in late nineteenth-century productions seem antithetical to Bakhtin's idea of a 'grotesque body' as 'never finished, never completed' (317). There is a noticeable difference, for instance, between what Bakhtin identifies as the eating, drinking, defecating, copulating body, and the 'clean' bodies of the Firm's pantomime. Coincidentally, the elongated fairytale arrangement of this time, influenced by mid nineteenth-century 'fairy extravaganza', seems less anti-patriarchical and anarchic than the early nineteenth-century pantomimes which Mayer describes in Harlequin in his Element (1969).

Instead, the fairy tales used in pantomimes lend their own educative 'mythic' process to creating a feudal and hierarchical world in which 'good' and 'evil' are locked in eternal combat. The festival set up through the staging of the 'traditional Christmas pantomime' might thus be likened to the taming of the Saturnalian spirits, a central feature of Christianity's transformation of pagan rituals. However, still contained within this highly fictional fairytale world is the anarchic clown, and around 1860 the other descendents of 'Clown Joey', the music-hall comedians, 'invaded' the pantomime. Thus we see how in late nineteenth-century arrangements fairytale narratives are continuously disrupted by comic routines and sight gags.

The pantomime is thus a 'grotesque' form which amalgamates any number of 'theatrical borrowings'. In the second part of the chapter, I thus consider the 'subject' of pantomime through the 'grotesque' bodies of its central roles: the pantomime boy and girl and the Dame and her love interest, usually the Pantaloon/father figure of the arrangements. I also consider the role of the Fairy Queen as intermediary. The cross-dressed pantomime boy and Dame signal the metatheatricality of the representation of all characters in the arrangements. They also highlight the 'space of possibility'

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which, as Garber (1992) argues, emerges because of the way transvestism is fundamental to culture (11). However, I want to argue that patriarchy limits such possibilities; thus the arrangements often 're-arrange' these carnivalesque characters for misogynist and masculinist purposes. The Dame's role in lampooning the New Woman is particularly noteworthy, as is the boy and girl relationship in setting up the ideal couple based on the male/female active/passive binary. The cross-dressed roles thus signal the way the Firm's adherence to a patriarchal ideology subverts subversion and thus turns the pantomime's festive form into what Bakhtin described as a 'limited' carnival.

This might also be explained through Frederic Jameson's (1990) notion that popular culture is based on a 'psychic compromise'. Thus, my consideration of the many re-arrangements of Cinderella and Sinbad, the stories most often staged between 1883 and 1914, shows how the subversive potential of cross-dressing is itself 'contained' within conventional gender terms even while tantalisingly offering the 'boy's' body and those of the ladies of the ballet to the voyeuristic gaze of the spectator. Similarly, the 'anarchic' humour of the Dame and her partner can be both misogynist and racist.

Nonetheless, the sheer size and number of 'festive' productions grow exponentially between 1882 and 1914 through the premiering during the traditional pantomime season of comic opera, operetta, opera bouffe and musical comedy. By the same token, the pantomime and other musical theatre productions are staged at other times throughout the year. The post-Federation period shows that the more the Firm imports these productions, the more 'imported' the local pantomime became. A study of post-1900 pantomime reveals how they were staged by the 'Great Empire of the South', a term used to describe the new nation in Williamson and Espinasse's Ausralis, but an equally apt term to describe the Firm at this time, as it became the biggest theatrical company of the Southern Hemisphere.

In attempting to continue 'detotalising' a history of such an enterprise, I will describe the post-Federation Firm through the perspective of the theatrical partnerships

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which seem to have been the foundation of its success. Given that Williamson single-handedly managed theatres in Australia for only four out of the thirty-four years between 1879 and 1913 (i.e. between 1900 and 1904), I am interested in how he has dominated later accounts, with the artistic and business contributions of Maggie Moore, George Musgrove and George Tallis particularly minimised. Moore's place in the setting up of the company also raises questions of how 'women's history' is recorded.

A 'patriarchization' of the theatre industry occurred after 1880 as the husband and wife acting teams, so prevalent earlier, gave way to the ascendancy of the 'actor-manager' and the 'speculative manager'. A comparison of Williamson's relationship with Maggie Moore and with his other business partners thus underlines the 'natural' move the actor made between acting and management, while the actress remained predominantly 'an actress', with all the incumbent sexism this entailed.

Furthermore, the theatre manager's straddling of industrial and artistic questions highlights the way in which, de facto, Williamson was 'manager of culture' who claimed the right to say what forms of drama were more acceptable. Critics of the Firm, such as the journalist/dramatists of the _Lone Hand_, Arthur Adams and Leon Brodsky, thought that such a claim had enormous impact on Australia's access to European 'new drama' and on the production of local works. While the Firm produced both types of theatre during this time, their sparseness highlights the manager's lack of 'artistic autonomy' in discriminating between forms.5 Williamson's experiment in writing the 'muscular' Christian drama _Parsifal_ and the comic opera _Tapu_, like his pantomimes, show his inability to define 'local' content or an 'original' form in anything but the polemic terms of the Scribean 'well-made formula'.

Nonetheless, the post-1900 pantomime productions, despite their 'imported' appearance, localised content in stridently racist and sexist ways. This can be demonstrated by examining the Firm's adaptations of one of its key sources for

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5 Zuidervaart (1991) outlines the 'aesthetic debate' between Adorno and Benjamin over the progressive and/or conservative tendency of popular culture. The Firm's presentation of popular drama raises the same issues with regard to the company's political intentions.
arrangements at this time, the 'modern' pantomimes of J. Hickory Wood. In particular, Wood's 1907 arrangement of *Sinbad* for the Theatre Royal, Manchester seems to have been the source of the Firm's 1911 production. The programme/script of the Mancunian production is topical and counter-hegemonic in ways which suggest that it was produced on the 'edge of Empire' (English regional differences in the pantomime form opens up another fascinating topic in the relationship between British imperialism and theatre), while the Australian production demonstrates a blatant Anglophilia.

Hence, what is contested most between 1900 and 1914, in both artistic and industrial terms, is the right to configure and access local theatrical spaces. This is highlighted, for instance, in a debate between Arthur Adams and Claude McKay in the *Theatre* in 1911, with Adams speaking for the local dramatist and McKay voicing the opinions of the Firm (despite the fact that he claims to be speaking for himself). The Australian actor and dramatist working on the edge of the 'Great Empire of the South' thus confronted the theatre entrepreneur's right to shape the Australian theatres under his control. As Claude McKay notes with reference to the way theatre managers influenced Australian drama, 'someone has to make the selection, and in this case, as in most others, it has always been the person who pays the piper' (1 May, 1911).

Renate Holub argues in *Antonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and Postmodernism* (1992) that the most significant analyses of culture coming from Gramsci, Brecht and the Frankfurt School were created in the face of the political successes of Fascism. Bearing this in mind, Holub's study of Gramsci explores how the specificity of any historical context might be related to 'contemporary' concerns. In a similar fashion, Tony Bennett (1990) rejects what he sees to be the over-determinism of Historical Materialism within Marxist literary/cultural theories and argues that 'left-wing' critics have no choice but to move 'beyond Marxism' in order to pose 'the question of criticism's contemporary political vocation'. Both Holub and
Bennett thus critique Marxist theories in the light of post-structuralism and
deconstruction to arrive at their 'post-Marxist' stances.\(^6\)

In contrast, I want to return to the 'idealistic' Marxist critiques of Gramsci
and the Frankfurt School to examine how Williamson's entrepreneurship subverted
potentially counter-hegemonic elements within English pantomime productions.
While I understand that, in a sense, all theories must produce something 'beyond'
their own selves, I do not believe that the concerns raised by Gramsci, Brecht and the
Frankfurt School have exhausted themselves either in theoretical or practical terms.
The conjunction of 'entrepreneurs, empires and pantomimes' thus raises the issue that

> While power is ubiquitous, as Foucault would have it, equally ubiquitous are
unequal relations of power. So the question for Gramsci is not so much, as it is for
Foucault, to show that and how power exists, though Gramsci shows that as well.
Equally important is why power exists (Holub 1992, 200).

My reading of the theatre entrepreneur's role in shaping popular culture
shares the Frankfurt School's 'hopeful' pessimism in believing that critical thinkers
'had not yet conceded defeat' (Holub 1992, 174). In particular, one should never
underestimate the entrepreneur's ability to educate audiences with regard to 'what they
really want'.

As Tony Bennett (1986) notes, Gramsci's importance to cultural theorists in
recent times is in providing a model for viewing popular culture 'as a force-field of
relations' which are shaped by 'contradictory pressures and tendencies' (Introduction,
x). Similarly, Foucault's concept of 'perpetual spirals of power and pleasure' has also
been useful in explaining the 'essential' oppositional nature of power relationships. In
the Foucaultian model of culture the double helix-like strands of pleasure and power
'do not cancel or turn back against one another, they seek out, overlap, and reinforce
one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of
excitation and incitement' (Foucault 1976, 48).

Given the oppositional nature of hegemony, then, it is not surprising that
Williamson occasionally staged 'new woman' dramas such as Diana of Dobson's and

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\(^6\) Bennett argued for such a position in *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (1986) where, together
with Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott, he explored a 'Foucaultian' Marxist reading of popular
culture different to that offered by the Frankfurt School.
Ibsen's and Shaw's work. However, it is also vital to see how contradictions or 'exception to the rule' were overruled by other happenings in the company. For instance, it is important to note the vital role Minnie Everett and Jennie Brenan played as choreographers and dance teachers from at least 1900, while at the same time the pantomime commodified women's bodies in its imperialist/nationalist processions, dances and tableaux. Likewise, it is important to note the trouble the company took dealing with members of the Australian Chinese community in order to get authentic costumes and 'Lion Dance' masks for various productions of *Aladdin*. Or how it had to work around the Immigration Restriction Act in order to bring acrobats from Java for its 1900 production of *Australis*. Indeed, there were no end of contradictions and oppositional forces within the company, not the least amongst its managers, as Williamson's and Musgrove's relationship reveals.

But, as Colin Mercer (1986) reminds us in his analysis of broadsheet newspapers in 'Complicit Pleasures', hegemonic structures are strengthened through structural contradictions, since hegemony gains its power 'silently from a field of meaning' (57). Hence, the presence of these spectacular diversions only re-inforced the ideological structuring of the imperialist-inspired narrative showing the protagonist's journey towards wealth and happiness. In other words, I am not arguing that the company was ever monolithic or non-dynamic. Quite the contrary, it was inspiring, attractive and convincingly successful in dealing with its competitors and any rival ideology which argued against its crusade to bring the 'best' of world entertainment to Australia. However, the Firm's pantomime productions show the extent to which its theatre managers worked to 'distract' audiences from imperialist and nationalist contestations being fought along race and gender lines in pre-1914 Australia, as outlined by such historians as Beverley Kingston (1988), Stuart Macintyre (1986), Luke Trainor (1994) and Susan Magarey (1993).

The period after 1906 saw the company evolving into the limited liability company of J. C. Williamson Ltd. Its corporate management structure traded on Williamson's name while, according to Nellie Stewart's autobiography (1921),

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Williamson himself largely stopped managing the Firm's day-to-day business due to his declining health (35). Nonetheless, he continued to shop abroad for the Firm's productions and in that way dictated what should be staged in Australia. His legacy is fittingly recorded in John Landes' panegyric to Williamson in 1933 when he equates the artist and the empire-builder as the hallmarks of the theatre entrepreneur.

Once there was a Man of Vision, with the soul of an artist and the courage of an explorer, who travelled from a far country across the widest ocean in the world to a great lonely land. In that land were gold-seekers with their eyes fixed always on the ground; owners of vast flocks who watched the wool growing into money on the sheep's backs and in the cities keen-eyed men of commerce immured in their counting-houses and immersed in their ledgers. Most of these were splendid men of the true pioneer type, but so intent on piling up gold to be spent on material luxuries, since there were few opportunities at that time for cultivating any of the arts, that they missed the best and most satisfying gifts that life has to offer to humanity. So the man of vision set himself to reveal to the people of the great lonely land some of the things that they had missed in the quest for happiness - the charm and beauty of Romance that flowers in every love-meeting of a man and a maid; the poignant thrill of tragedy, that purifier of the passions, the incisive humour of comedy that shows men and women all their own human faults and foibles depicted for them before their eyes by characters fashioned by the playwright and given the breath of life by skilful players. It is the power of mimetic art - including the art of the theatre - which touches the heart and uplifts the mind of the spectator beyond any other work contrived by the wit of man...The man of vision knew - because he had sensed it himself and had wielded it himself - this wizardry of a dramatic character, portrayed with just that touch of insight (shown in the convincing gesture, the revealing facial expressiveness and the eloquent inflection of the voice) that approaches interpretative genius. He resolved to portray raw human nature with its highest lights and its deepest shadows, with its heroism and its frailty, with its jests and its follies, its laughter and its sobs. And so he took a crude play that he had bought from an old Californian miner, and adapted it with a master hand, and wrote into it a part for the brilliant actress who was his newly-wedded wife, and he set out nearly sixty years ago to found a Temple of Drama in the Great Lonely Land, where civilisation itself was still in the making. The man of vision has passed onward, but the name of James Cassius Williamson abides. Here in this building with which he was associated from the first, all the Arts of the Theatre, Tragedy, Comedy, Drama, Music and the Dance, flowered at his bidding (Landes 1933, 3 - 4).