SKELT’S JUVENILE DRAMA

Reprint of a 19th Century Toy Theatre play
SKELT'S SIDE WINGS IN THE WATERMAN. Plate 1

George Skelt

Skelt "Maid and the Magpie" Wing 1 as used for the "Waterman"
SKELT'S JUVENILE DRAMA.

THE WATERMAN,
OR THE FIRST OF AUGUST,
IN TWO ACTS.

Written expressly for, and Adapted only to
SKELT's Characters & Scenes
In the same.

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Characters Represented.

MEN.
TOM TUG, a Waterman.
BUNDLE, a Market Gardener.
ROBIN, a Gardener,
Gardeners, Mob, &c.

WOMEN.
MRS. BUNDLE, Bundle's Wife.
MISS WILHELMINA, her daughter.
      Gardeners' Wives, &c.

The Reader is supposed to be on the Stage, facing the Audience.

N.B.—Care should be taken in cutting out the Characters, that Number of Plate, or Set Piece, &c., be marked on the back that they may correspond with the Book.

SKELT'S JUVENILE DRAMA.

THE WATERMAN.

ACT 1.

Two Gardeners discovered, C.pl. 1. They sing,
"Hail Smiling Morn." Then exit R. and L.H.
Replace with gardeners digging, PIs. 1 and 2 at back of stage. L.H. Then put on, C. Bundle and
Tom Tug seated at Table at Breakfast, Plate 2.

BUNDLE. This is my delight, to sit at breakfast while the men work. Come, honest Tom, let us make a finish before my wife gets up.

TOM. Why, Master Bundle, I have often thought how it was you two agreed so badly.

BUNDLE. Ah, Thomas, I cannot account for it.
      Enter Mrs. Bundle, right hand—Plate 1.

MRS. B. Mr. Bundle is it not a shame that I should be a slave to my family, while you and your companions are drinking and filling your time away. I, that am such a tame creature, that never scolds, and as patient as a lamb.

BUNDLE. You are a very good wife, to be sure only a little inclined to talking. But, don't you think the cart ought to be loaded against you go to London?
Mrs. B. I shall not go to London to night at all. Robin, Miss Wilhelmina, and myself are invited to go with a party to see the rowing match this afternoon; and afterwards, there is to be a dance at Mrs. Wicks, the Tallow Chandlers, where I shall settle about my daughter's wedding.

Tom. But Mrs. Bundle, are you not afraid you'll dance all the money out of your husband's pocket.

Mrs. B. I don't direct my discourse to you, sir; but 'tis my husband that encourages you to behave so, and has promised you that you shall have my daughter; you, indeed! a lazy idle fellow, dare to think of marrying Miss Wilhelmina Bundle?

Tom. I should not care much for marrying your daughter if she has not a better temper than yourself.

Mrs. B. Oh, the villain!

Bundle. My dear, how can you fly in such a passion?

Mrs. B. Mr. Bundle, nothing but your consent to Robin's marrying my daughter, shall ever make me look upon you again.

Exit Mrs. Bundle.

Tom. Well, what say you to that.

Bundle. Why, Thomas, for me to contradict would be much the same as you to row against wind and tide. But I will hear what my daughter says about it.

Tom. That will be best. But, here comes Miss Wilhelmina.

Take off Tom Tug and Bundle at Breakfast Table. Enter Tom Tug, left hand—Plate 1.

Enter Miss Wilhelmina, right hand—Plate 1.

Wil. Which shall I marry, Robin, or honest Tom?

Tom. Take my advice, Miss, and let it be honest Tom.

Wil. And do you think I should choose you before Robin—sweet Robin? He can spout Romeo, and that he's for ever talking similies to me.

Tom. I know he's forever talking nonsense to you.

Wil. Did you but hear him compare my cheeks to carnations, my hands to lilies, my lips to cherries, my teeth to snowdrops, what would you say then.

Tom. But you know, Miss, that's his nonsensical way of talking.

Wil. Then he writes verses.

Tom. What would you say, Miss, if I wrote something about falling in love with you.

Wil. I should begin to have some hopes of you.

Tom. Should you? Why, then, I have.

Wil. Oh, dear! let's see it?

Tom. It's a song, Miss, I'll sing it you, if you please.

Air.—Tom Tug.

THE JOLLY YOUNG WATERMAN.
And did you not hear of a jolly young waterman, Who at Blackfriars Bridge used to ply? jity
And he feathered his ears with such skill and dexter-Winning each heart and delighting each eye,
He looked so neat and rowed so steadily,
The maidens all flocked in his boat so readily, [air.
And he eyed the young rogues with so charming an
That this waterman ne'er was in want of a fare.
What sights of the fine folks he oft rowed in his
Wherry—
'Twas cleaned out so nice, and painted withal;
He was always first oars with the fine city ladies
In a party to Ranelagh went, or Vauxhall.
And oftentimes would they be giggling and leering—
But 'twas all one to Tom, their jabbing and jeering,
For loving or liking he little did care,
For this waterman ne'er was in want of a fare.
And yet but to see how strangely things happen,
As he rowed along thinking of nothing at all.
He was plied by a damsel so loving and charming,
That she smiled, and so straightforward in love he did fall.

And would this young damsel but banish his sorrow,
He'd wed her to-night—before to-morrow;
And how should this waterman ever know care,
When he's married, and never in want of a fare?

Tom. Well, Miss, how do you like it?
Wil. Why, it's the very moral of yourself?
Tom. Well, I hope you'll consent now.
Wil. Consent to what?
Tom. Why, to marry me. If you won't I will go on board a man of war; for I never could stay here if you were married to another.

Wil. Would you leave England, and all for the love of me.

Tom. That's what I would, Miss.

Wil. Well, that would be charming.

Air.—Tom Tug.

FAREWELL, MY TRIM-BUILT WHERRY.

Then, farewell, my trim-built wherry,
Oars, and Coat and Badge, farewell;
Never more at Chelsea Ferry,
Shall your Thomas take a spell.
But to hope and peace a stranger,
In the battle heat I'll go;

Where, exposed to every danger,
Some friendly ball shall lay me low.
Then, mayhap, when homeward steering,
With the news my messmates come;
Even you, the story hearing.
With a sigh may cry, poor Tom!

Exit Tom.

Wil. Well, 'tis a charming thing to plague these creatures. Die for me! If I had not given myself some airs to him, he never would of thought of such a thing. But here comes Robin.

Enter Robin, left hand—Plate 1.

Robin. Miss Wilhelmina, may I have the happiness of you granting me the favour of your hand this evening at the dance?

Wil. Why, Mr. Robin, what should you want to dance with me for?

Robin. Ask the plants why they love a shower?
Ask the sunflower why it loves the sun? 'tis because they can't help it; no more can I help my love for you.

Wil. Oh, Mr. Robin, how gallant you are!

Robin. Oh, my Wilhelmina, thou art sweeter than the sweetest flower! Thy breath is as sweet as honeysuckles.

Wil. You have said that so often, Mr. Robin.

Robin. Well, you never heard me say this before, you are to me, Miss, what the summer is to a garden, and if you don't revive me with the sunshine of your favours I shall be overrun with the weeds of disappointment, and choked up with the branches of despair.

Wil. Ah, Mr. Robin, you would soon forget me!
ROBIN. Forget! 'tis impossible! sooner shall asparagus forget to grow, seed forget to rise, leaves to fall, than I forget my Wilhelmina.

WIL. Do you really love me, then?
ROBIN. Love you! I do to distraction.

Exit Robin.

Enter Bundle, right hand—Plate 1.

WIL. Oh, Papa! are you there?
BUNDLE. Have you seen Thomas?
WIL. Yes; I have seen him, and I believe by this time he has entered himself on board a man-of-war.

BUNDLE. Why the girl's distracted.
WIL. You know mother desired me to marry Robin.

BUNDLE. You won't marry Thomas, then?
WIL. I can't indeed, I can't.
BUNDLE. Very well I'll settle the matter.

Enter Mrs. Bundle, right hand—Plate 1.

MRS. B. What is it Mr. Bundle?
BUNDLE. Nothing, my dear.

MRS. B. I hope you have not been plotting and undermining my daughter's inactions.

BUNDLE. Why, my dear, I did intend to say something to you on the subject.

MRS. B. Well, what is it?
WIL. (aside to Bundle). If you don't speak, papa, I shall be obliged to marry Robin.

BUNDLE. (aside to Wilhelmina). I can't help it.

Exit Bundle.

MRS. B. Well, my dear, I hope your father has said nothing to discourage you in your affections to Robin.

WIL. Indeed he has, and I can't think of being undutiful.

MRS. B. Undutiful, indeed!
WIL. But then, Thomas is such a sweet young man.

MRS. B. He! the vandal!
WIL. Such an affectionate creature.

MRS. B. Either comply, and marry Robin, or else I'll disinherit you.

Exit Mrs. Bundle.

WIL. Well, in all I have read, I never met with a girl of more spirit than myself. If I oblige one, I disoblige the other, I shall, therefore consult my own heart.

END OF FIRST ACT.
ACT II.

SCENE II. No. 2. Parlour at Bundle's House.
Sidewings, Pl. 2.

Enter Bundle, left hand—Plate 2.

Bundle. What shall I do with this perverse girl? I have little comfort for my friend Thomas.

Enter Mrs. Bundle, right hand—Plate 1.

Mrs. B. Mr. Bundle, I shall be very cool sir.

Bundle. I hope so, my dear.

Mrs. B. What is the reason that you have been making all this piece of work.

Bundle. My dear, you are wrong, I have given my consent for her to marry Thomas, but she refused me with her own lips.

Mrs. B. Why, the girl told me that she had promised you that she would marry Thomas.

Bundle. And she told me that she promised you to marry Robin.

Enter Wilhelmina, right hand—Plate 1.

Mrs. B. Here she comes herself, we shall now know the truth of all this. Wilhelmina, how is it you have promised your father one thing and me another?

Wilhelmina. Hear me, my dear papa, when first you proposed Thomas, and mamma, when you proposed Robin, I determined to have neither, till one or the other had given me some proof besides telling me so, that he would make me a faithful and affectionate husband; the first that does shall have me; on that alone shall depend my consent to be a wife.

Exit Wilhelmina.

Bundle. Well my dear, what do you say to all this?

Mrs. B. Say! why I am perfectly in a quandary, but I'll go after her and cure her of her ridiculous notions of love. In short I have determined what to do.

Exit Mrs. Bundle.

Enter Tom Tug, left hand—Plate 1.

Tom. Well, Master Bundle, how fares it? I wanted to speak to you.

Bundle. Well, Thomas, what is it you want me for.

Tom. But how comes it that she should be angry with Miss Wilhelmina? she has not refused to marry Robin, has she?

Bundle. But she has though, and refused to marry you too.

Tom. Aye, aye! why I never heard she had any other sweetheart.

Bundle. I don't know what the girl has got into her head, a parcel of absurd stuff. But there was something well enough in what she said, if she's sincere.

Tom. Why, what did she say?

Bundle. Why, that she does not know which she shall have yet; but that she'll marry the first that does anything to deserve her.

Tom. Does she? Why then, 'tis my opinion that she'll marry me.
BUNDLE. Why, what makes you think so?

Tom. I know why, well enough, but could not a body speak to her now?

BUNDLE. I am going in, and I'll send her to you.

Exit Bundle.

Tom. It's my opinion Miss Wilhelmina is trying which is the most loving of us two, and if so, I would not give my little Robin anything for his chance. Robin, a conceited fellow! I should like to know how he'd behave in all the horrors of a storm, as I was in the Bay of Biscay.

Song.

BAY OF BISCAY.
Loud roar'd the dreadful thunder,
        The rain a deluge show'ts,
The clouds were rent asunder
        By lightning's vivid powers.
The night both drear and dark,
        Our poor devoted bark,
Till next day, there she lay
        In the Bay of Biscay, O.
Now dashed upon the billows,
        Our op'ning timbers crak'd,
Each fears a watery pillow,
        None stop the dreadful leak.
To cling to slippery shrouds,
        Each breathless seamen crowds,
As she lay, till next day,
        In the Bay of Biscay, O.
At length the wished for morrow,
        Broke through the hazy sky,
Absorb'd in silent sorrow,
        Each heav'd a bitter sigh.

A dismal wreck to view,
Struck sorrow to the crew,
As she lay, on that day,
In the Bay of Biscay, O.
Her yielding timbers sever,
Her pitchy seams are rent,
When heaven, all bounteous ever,
It's boundless mercy sent—
A sail in sight appears,
We hail her with three cheers;
Now we sail with the gale,
From the Bay of Biscay, O.

Enter Wilhelmina, right hand—Plate 1.

Wil. Heyday! Why, I thought you was gone
          on board a man-of-war before now!

Tom. Why, no, Miss. I ain't gone yet—I am
          in hopes there will be no occasion. But I have a
          favour to beg of you please.

Wil. What is it pray?

Tom. Why, you know that the young Watermen
          are to row for a coat and badge this afternoon so I
          have hired a room at the "Swan" for you and your
          friends to go and see the sight.

Wil. That's very gallant, indeed, Mr. Thomas!

Tom. And do think now, if ever I was to do
          anything with an intent to please you, that you
          could look upon me with kindness?

Wil. Why, I don't know, but I might.

Tom. Why, then I assure you, if ever you
          should be agreeable to marry me, you should be as
          happy as ever love and an honest heart can make
          you.

Exit Tom.
Wil. There’s great honesty about poor Thomas. Here comes t’other. I see I must soon choose or there will be no peace for me.

Enter Robin, left hand—Plate 1.

Wil. Well, Mr. Robin, what news have you?

Robin. News, my angel! news that will make your heart dance with joy, and clear away the clouds and mists that hang upon thy beautiful face.

Wil. Indeed! I should be glad to hear it.

Robin. You can’t think how you will be overjoyed!

Wil. Shall I? Why don’t you tell me then?

Robin. Well then, Miss, I’ll no longer keep you in suspense; your mother is determined that you shall be married to-morrow morning.

Wil. What! whether I will or no?

Robin. How can you help it. Don’t I love you better than the Ivy loves oak, or better than birds loves cherries.

Wil. Hold, Mr. Robin, ’tis necessary in this case I should love you a little.

Robin. And don’t you? Hear this you blooming jonquils, and lose your sweetness! turn white, you roses, and you lilies, red! each flower loses its fragrance and its hue and nature changed! for Wilhelmina’s false, and a’nt no longer true.

Wil. Indeed Mr. Robin, that pretty speech has half persuaded me to consent.

Robin. Has it! Well, then, I’ll step to your mamma, and tell her what has passed, and then I’ll go to morrow and buy the ring and the license.

Exit Robin and Wilhelmina.

SCENE III. No. 3. A Room at the “Swan,” Battersea. Waterpieces to be placed at suitable distances to allow boats to pass in the race. The whole backed by Sky piece in Set I.

Enter Mrs. Bundle, left hand—Plate 2.

Enter Robin, left hand—Plate 1.

Enter Wilhelmina, left hand—Plate 2.

Mrs. Bundle. Come along, my dear, you’ll lose the sight; they tell me the rowers have set out sometime.

Wilhelmina. Oh, they are very near; for see what a number of boats have come in sight.

Mrs. B. I can see them very plain. How many is there?

Wil. I can count three or four.

The small boats in Plate 2 to pass the window.

Mrs. B. That smart young man will certainly win it; how clean and neat he looks.

Wil. Here he comes! his boat perfectly flies!

Mrs. B. Oh, he’ll win it!

Wil. He has won it already—he’s past the stairs!

Robin. See he’s coming this way.

Wil. So he is. Surely it’s not——

(Shouts outside)

Enter Mr. Bundle, left hand—Plate 2.

Bundle. Here’s your Thomas for you—he’s coming! I told you he’d be the first one that would do anything to deserve you—here he is.

Enter Tom Tug (with coat and badge), left hand—Plate 2. Enter Visitors, left hand—Plate 2.
Wit. And it was you that won the Coat and Badge? Then, Thomas, I will keep my word, and here is my hand. Tom. Why, what is the meaning of all this? Robin. Don't be in a passion: it is of no consequence—this is only the thirtieth time I've been crossed in love.

Exit Robin.

Wit. Is he not a sweet fellow! "How neat and clean he looks!" Mrs. B. Wilhelmina, you have deceived me—"you promised to marry Robin." Wit. In so serious a matter, I thought it better, to consider my own inclinations, and choose for myself. Bundle. Well, this is the happiest day I ever saw in my life; therefore, let it be the merriest.

FINALE—RULE BRITANNIA.

THE CURTAIN TO FALL.

THE END.

J. KEELER, Publisher. 24 Clearview St., St. Helier.
The Waterman

Although mainly remembered as being one of the shortest Toy Theatre plays this little piece is actually charming, easy to perform and very entertaining. Its origin goes back further than most Juvenile Drama, excepting Shakespeare, since the play was first performed at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket in 1774. It was written by Charles Dibdin and was one of his most successful having been revived in the 20th century.

Dibdin was a composer and prolific song writer who was rewarded by the Government for composing patriotic songs during the dark years of the Napoleonic invasion threat. It is a musical piece with songs at frequent intervals which meant that it did not infringe the rights of the Patent theatres (Covent Garden and Drury Lane) as the only ones that could perform drama at the time, although the Haymarket had a limited licence.

Early eighteenth century London had very few bridges across the Thames and the growing population made much use of the watermen’s services to ferry them across. The story of the “Waterman, or the First of August” is based around the annual race, which used to take place every August 1st, for Dogget’s coat and badge. The race has been run since 1715 and is undertaken by six apprentice watermen over a 4.5 mile course between London Bridge and Chelsea. Tom Tug the waterman is a friend of Bundle who owns the riverside market garden that is the setting of the first scene. Tom is wooing Wilhelmena, Bundle’s daughter but Mrs Bundle has different ideas and wants her to marry Robin, a sweet talking gardener. Wilhelmena decides that she will marry whoever first does something that show they deserve her. The final scene is a room at the Swan Inn in Battersea which Tom has hired so that the Bundles can get a grandstand view of the watermen’s race. They do not realise that Tom is taking part and when he wins it Wilhelmena instantly offers him her hand. Robin shrugs it off saying, “this is only the thirtieth time I’ve been crossed in love,” and the play ends with a stirring chorus of “Rule Britannia”!

The first Toy Theatre version was not produced until 1840 by J.K. Green in just six plates. The Skelts produced their very similar version at about the same time, it had been revived in 1838. John Redington issued a relatively crude copy of the Green play in the 1850s, before he had acquired the Green plates. He must have been dissatisfied with these because he produced a slightly improved version later, for which he also produced large scenes. It was the later Redington version, not the Green one (apart from scene 1 and some wings), that Pollock published later. In these early versions there were no cut scenes for the boats to race behind so the young producer had to use some ingenuity to make that scene work. This was also one of a few plays published by J.T. Wood around 1845, he was normally just an agent for Green and Webb.

A.H. Mathews published “Tom Tug” in 1893, this was a shortened version of the Skelt play reduced to just 5 plates! Finally around 1921 George Skelt adapted and partly redrew the Skelt play with a slightly enlarged scene size. This he published later and it is his version, with the cut scene for the race, that we have largely reproduced.

Our version of the play is in colour to make preparing for performance easier. If you do choose to perform it then your audience will enjoy the simple light-hearted dialogue, the songs and the special effect of the race. Its amazing how just a few sheets of paper can preserve so much tradition!

*Republished 2010 by Toy Theatre, 67 The Fleet, Belper, Derbyshire DE56 1NU*
Other versions of plate 1 of the play.

Images 1-3 reproduced here by kind permission of Hugo Brown

1. Green (1840)

2. Redington (first version)

3. Pollock (from Redington second version)

4. Mathews (1893)
A Toy Theatre is a miniature stage, built in card or wood and brightly coloured. Children perform plays on it using characters and scenes cut out from printed sheets and text written in a simple “playbook”. The audience would normally be family and friends and the auditorium the front room. Adults too are known to use them, especially the large elaborate versions published in Germany and Denmark.

As well as being a flexible means of expression, the sheets represent a vibrant folk art derived from the full size theatre. It is a unique record of real plays and stage presentations, particularly of the nineteenth century. Many enthusiasts collect and study old sheets for this reason.

Web pages that will tell you more:
www.pollocks-coventgarden.co.uk
http://www.pollocksmuseum.co.uk
www.toytheatre.net

SKELT’S JUVENILE DRAMA

This is one of a series of reprints of the plays produced for the Toy Theatre by the Skelt family who were perhaps the most famous and most prolific of the publishers. The currently available plays are:

Mary the Maid of the Inn
Wood Demon
Floating Beacon
Miller’s Maid
Robinson Crusoe
Waterman

Captain Ross
Prisoner of Rochelle
Lodoiska
Richard Turpin
George Barnwell
Der Freischutz

Reprints of stage fronts, orchestras, act drops, setpieces, tricks, portraits, combats etc. are also available.

For full details please contact the publisher:

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