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Weaver, Words, and Dancing in The Judgment of Paris

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On 31 January 1733, the *Daily Post* let its readers know that 'The Judgment of Paris, which was intended to be perform'd this Night, is deferr'd for a few Days, upon Account of some Alterations in the Machinery'. John Weaver's new afterpiece, which was to be his last work for the London stage, received its first performance at Drury Lane on 6 February 1733.¹ Weaver had not created a serious dance work since his 'Dramatic Entertainments of Dancing' *The Loves of Mars and Venus* of 1717 and *Orpheus and Eurydice* of 1718. When the description for *The Judgment of Paris* was published to accompany performances, it announced a change from Weaver's earlier practice by referring to the work as a 'Dramatic Entertainment in Dancing and Singing'.² Why did Weaver resort to words? Did he feel that they were necessary to attract audiences and explain the story to them?

The Judgment of Paris was performed six times between 6 and 15 February 1733, and then dropped out of the repertoire. On 31 March The Harlot's Progress; or, The Ridotto Al'Fresco was given its first performance. This afterpiece by Theophilus Cibber, based on the very popular series of paintings and prints by William Hogarth, included a 'Grand Masque call'd, The Judgment of Paris'. Weaver's work was performed within Cibber's afterpiece until 25 May. Although The Harlot's Progress was revived in the 1733–1734 season, and performed throughout the 1730s and for much of the 1740s, The Judgment of Paris was not advertised as part of its performances after 1732–1733. Weaver's last serious afterpiece was initially quite popular, yet it did not survive its first season. What sort of work was The Judgment of Paris? Why did it disappear so quickly? Was Weaver behind the times by the 1730s, or was he still too far ahead of contemporary taste?

This paper will attempt to answer these questions by placing Weaver's *The Judgment of Paris* within its theatrical context, and analysing the afterpiece in detail. It will look at the changes affecting Drury Lane during the 1732–1733 season, and it will consider the influence on Weaver of the rival pantomimes created at Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields during the 1720s. Using the surviving sources, the paper will explore Weaver's use of dance, gesture, song, machines, scenes, and stage properties in *The Judgment of Paris*, to see how he adapted his practice of more than fifteen years earlier to changing times and a new and more demanding audience.

Theatrical context

When John Weaver returned to Drury Lane during the 1732–1733 season, after an absence of five years, he found significant changes within the company. The theatre had been run for more than twenty years by a triumvirate of actor-managers – Barton Booth, Colley Cibber, and Robert Wilks. These were the men for whom Weaver had worked in 1717 and 1718, when he created his first serious dance works, and in 1728, when he and Roger had created the pantomime *Perseus and Andromeda*. In July 1732, Barton Booth, who had been in poor health for several years, sold half of his share in the company to John Highmore, a gentleman with an amateur interest in the stage. On 27 September 1732, Robert Wilks died leaving his share to his widow, who appointed the painter John Ellys to act on her behalf. The dissolution of Drury Lane's long-standing management was completed shortly afterwards, when Colley Cibber rented his interest as manager to his son Theophilus in return for a handsome salary as an actor. During the 1732–1733 season Drury Lane had a new triumvi-

rate, but only Theophilus Cibber was an actor-manager with knowledge and experience of the stage, and he was notoriously arrogant and quarrelsome.

By the time Weaver arrived to mount *The Judgment of Paris*, probably in January 1733, there was already dissension at Drury Lane as Theophilus Cibber feuded with his fellow-managers. In March, Colley Cibber exacerbated the discord by selling his share in the company to John Highmore. Barton Booth died on 10 May, leaving his remaining share to his widow the company's leading dancer-actress Hester Booth. By then, Theophilus Cibber was promoting outright rebellion among the actors, and on 29 May Highmore and Ellys locked them out of the theatre. Before the 1733–1734 season began, Mrs Booth sold her share to the Goodman's Fields actor-manager Henry Giffard and retired from the stage. In 1733–1734, Theophilus Cibber and the rebel actors played at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, while John Highmore struggled at Drury Lane with a much depleted company. This was the background against which *The Judgment of Paris* was performed and disappeared from the repertoire at Drury Lane.³

Weaver's casting for *The Judgment of Paris* was not constrained by any lack of suitable dancers at Drury Lane. For the leading role of Paris, he had Denoyer, who had returned to London in 1731 after several years in Hanover as dancing-master to Frederick Prince of Wales. Denoyer was London's leading male dancer during the 1730s.⁴ Opposite Denoyer, as Helen of Troy, was Hester Booth (Hester Santlow before her marriage), who had been the leading female dancer in both of Weaver's earlier 'Dramatic Entertainments of Dancing' and was still the most popular and most admired dancer on the London stage. As Juno, Pallas, and Venus, the three goddesses between whom Paris must choose, Weaver cast Mrs Walter, Miss Mears, and Miss Robinson. All three had danced supporting roles in several of the Drury Lane pantomimes, as well as dancing regularly in the entr'actes, and all three were actresses as well as dancers, which was probably an added incentive for Weaver to work with them.

When it came to singers, the Drury Lane company could offer quality rather than quantity. The principal singing role in *The Judgment of Paris* is that of Mercury, who tells Paris of the choice he must make; Weaver cast Stoppelaer. Although Stoppelaer was mainly an actor, he also sang regularly; his singing roles included Cephalus in the overwhelmingly successful pantomime *Cephalus and Procris*, and Macheath in a revival of *The Beggar's Opera*, both at Drury Lane. He later transferred briefly to Covent Garden to work with Handel. The only female singing role in Weaver's afterpiece, that of the Grace Thalia attending on Venus, was performed by Miss Raftor. She was establishing a career at Drury Lane as a comic actress and a singer, and had sung opposite Stoppelaer as Procris in *Cephalus and Procris* and Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*. As Kitty Clive, she would enjoy an immensely successful career. If Weaver did not need to include singers in his new work, he certainly had good reasons for doing so.

There were compelling reasons for including singing in *The Judgment of Paris*. In 1723, Drury Lane had ignited a rage for pantomime afterpieces with *Harlequin Doctor Faustus*. Lincoln's Inn Fields had quickly responded with the even more successful *The Necromancer; or, Harlequin Doctor Faustus*, which began a fierce rivalry between the two theatres. Drury Lane's next success was John Thurmond Junior's pantomime *Apollo and Daphne; or, Harlequin Mercury* of 1725, answered in 1726 by the Lincoln's Inn Fields *Apollo and Daphne; or, the Burgomaster Trick'd*. When Lincoln's Inn Fields produced *The Rape of Proserpine; or, the Birth and Adventures of Harlequin* in 1727, Drury Lane was unable to respond.

However, in 1728 audiences flocked to Roger and Weaver's *Perseus and Andromeda: With the Rape of Colombine; or, the Flying Lovers.* Lincoln's Inn Fields waited until 1730 to reply with *Perseus and Andromeda; or, the Spaniard Outwitted*, which was far more popular than the rival production. Each time, at Lincoln's Inn Fields John Rich copied his Drury Lane rivals and managed to eclipse them. Apart from the *Faustus* pantomimes, all these afterpieces alternated a serious with a comic plot, but there was one significant difference between the two theatres: at Lincoln's Inn Fields the serious scenes were sung, copying Italian opera but with English texts; at Drury Lane they were danced, emulating Weaver's 'Dramatic Entertainments of Dancing'. In 1730, Roger changed course at Drury Lane. His *Cephalus and Procris* had a sung serious plot, and proved to be the most successful pantomime of all with an astonishing seventy-four performances in its first season. This was the example that Weaver would have to follow if he was to attract audiences.

Weaver's The Judgment of Paris

When he created his first 'Dramatic Entertainment of Dancing', *The Loves of Mars and Venus*, Weaver had turned to a masque by Peter Motteux as the basis for his action.⁵ He did the same for *The Judgment of Paris*, for which he used a masque by the dramatist William Congreve.⁶ Congreve's *The Judgment of Paris* had been the subject of a musical competition during the 1700–1701 season, with rival scores by John Eccles, Gottfried Finger, Daniel Purcell, and John Weldon. Weaver would have had several opportunities to see it while he was working in London as a dancer and a choreographer, because it was performed five times between 21 March and 3 June 1701; at the last performance all four versions were given, and Weldon was declared the winner. Weaver undoubtedly purchased a copy of the libretto.

Congreve's masque was sung throughout, and the libretto makes no mention of dancing. In his adaptation of *The Judgment of Paris*, Weaver kept much closer to his source than he had done for *The Loves of Mars and Venus*. He retained Congreve's structure but simplified it. Except for Mercury, he gave the principal roles to dancers instead of singers, but transferred some of the songs originally performed by Juno, Pallas, and Venus to their new attendants Power, Fame, and the Grace Thalia. Where he used Congreve's song texts, he shortened and slightly amended them. More significantly, Weaver created the new role of Helen of Troy (who had merely been mentioned by Congreve) to provide a completely new scene as well as a suitable danced climax to the action. Weaver's version told the story primarily through dances and gestures.

In his description, Weaver provided a synopsis of the story of *The Judgment of Paris*:

The Goddess of *Discord*, at the Marriage of *Peleus* and *Thetis*, conveys a Golden Apple among the Goddesses, with this Inscription on it, *To The Fairest: Juno, Pallas*, and *Venus* lay claim to it, and each demand it as their Due. *Jupiter* sends them, under the Conduct of *Mercury*, to *Paris*, a Shepherd on Mount *Ida*, to be Judge in this Contest: Each Goddess pleads her Right, but *Paris* decrees in favour of *Venus*, and gives her the Apple, who rewards *Paris* with the Possession of *Helen*, the fairest Woman in the World.⁸

Weaver's 'Dramatic Entertainment in Dancing and Singing' is essentially about the overwhelming power of Love. The music for Weaver's *The Judgment of Paris* was never published and does not survive. According to the titlepage of the description, the afterpiece was 'Set to Musick by Mr. Seedo'. German by birth, Seedo had begun his career in the Little Theatre in the Haymarket in the 1720s. During the early 1730s he worked at Drury Lane, where he provided the songs for a series of ballad operas. The most successful of these was the afterpiece *The Devil to Pay*, first performed in 1730–1731 with Stoppelaer and Miss Raftor in leading roles. His other works at Drury Lane during the 1732–1733 season included the masque *Venus, Cupid and Hymen*, first given on 21 May 1733. It seems not to have included dancing, since the popular entr'acte dance *Les Bergeries* was given at the end. Other than *The Judgment of Paris*, Seedo is not known as a composer of dance music. All of his music for the London stage has been lost.⁹

The Judgment of Paris is formal in structure. Although the description supplies no scene divisions, and the action was obviously meant to be continuous, Weaver's afterpiece can be readily divided into three parts. In the first part, Paris is commanded to judge between the goddesses. It begins with an overture, which finishes as the curtain rises to reveal Paris with 'his Crook' and other Shepherds, who dance. Mercury descends 'his Caduceus in one Hand, and an Apple of Gold in the other' and the frightened Shepherds run off. Paris asks Mercury what commands he brings from Jupiter, and Mercury answers with a song 'This radiant Fruit behold'. Juno, Pallas, and Venus descend and dance together. Mercury reassures Paris with another song, 'Fear not, Mortal, none shall harm thee'. Paris asks to see the goddesses one at a time, and Mercury conveys this to them. Pallas and Venus leave the stage. 10

In the second part, each goddess in turn appeals to Paris to give her the golden apple. Juno is introduced by a 'Symphony'. She gives her sceptre to Mercury while she dances. She then commands a scene change to show 'a Palace, a Throne, with Guards attending' and 'a Table ... on which are placed the Symbols of Royalty and supreme Authority'. She offers Paris 'absolute Empire' and her attendant Power sings 'Let Ambition fire thy Mind'. Juno retires, and Pallas advances 'to a Symphony of Trumpets and Hautboys, alternate'. She gives her spear to Mercury while she dances, after which 'the scene changes to a Discovery of Arms, Arts, and Sciences'. She offers these to Paris, and her attendant Fame sings 'Awake, awake, thy Spirits raise'. Pallas retires, and Venus appears 'to a Symphony of Flutes'. Her appeal begins as 'she beckons in Cupid from one Side, and the Graces from the other; they surround her, adjust, and set in order her Dress', then she dances. She commands a scene change 'to a beautiful Garden; Pillars of Clouds divide and form Arches of Columns twisted with Flowers'. The Grace Thalia sings 'Far from thee be anxious Care', then there is a dance by Shepherds and Shepherdesses. Thalia sings another song 'Nature fram'd thee, sure, for loving', after which 'Helen is discover'd by Cupids in a beautiful Grotto'. Helen dances, but before Paris can embrace her 'a Cloud arises and takes her from his Sight'. 11

In the third part, Paris makes his judgment and receives his reward. Juno and Pallas return, and all three goddesses renew their pleas for the golden apple. Power sings 'Shepherd, fix thy wond'ring Sight', Fame sings 'This way, Mortal, bend thy Eyes', and Thalia sings 'Hither turn thee, gentle Swain'. Venus shows Helen to Paris again, and he immediately runs to Venus with the prize. The three goddesses ascend. Paris and Helen dance together. Then Mercury 'flies up', and Thalia sings 'Hither ye Graces, and ye Loves'. A chorus joins in with 'Sing, and spread the joyful news around, / The Queen of Love is Queen of Beauty crown'd'. The entertainment concludes with a 'Grand Dance to the Chorus'. ¹²

Weaver's description suggests the different uses he made of singing, dancing, and scenic display in *The Judgment of Paris*. Paris, Juno, Pallas, and Venus are all identified by the properties they carry, and each character is represented in a dance. Mercury, who initiates but does not participate in the action, carries his caduceus but does not dance; his songs indicate that he is merely Jupiter's messenger. The gifts offered by Juno and Pallas are physically represented by scenes and stage properties; their abstract aspects – 'absolute Empire' and 'Arts and Conquest' – are made explicit in the songs performed by Power and Fame. The gift of Venus – 'Love' – is personified by Helen of Troy, who is identified by Thalia's song and represented through dancing alone. Weaver used song texts to add an intellectual dimension to his afterpiece, perhaps as a way of underlining the serious nature of his 'Dramatic Entertainment in Dancing and Singing'.

Weaver's description of *The Judgment of Paris* specifies eight dances, naming the characters who perform them but giving few other details. There is much work yet to be done on dance music and dance types performed in the London theatres, but it is possible to guess at some of the dances in Weaver's last afterpiece. The curtain rises to show 'Shepherds dancing to a Rural Air', who are joined by Paris. ¹⁴ Weaver's audience would have known that Paris is actually a Trojan prince, abandoned on Mount Ida by Priam and Hecuba because of a prophecy that he would cause Troy's ruin, and brought up by shepherds. Paris and the Shepherds could have performed a bourée, a dance which (according to Jacques Bonnet) mixed seriousness with gaiety and so would reflect Paris's true as well as his assumed identity. ¹⁵ The second dance is an 'Entry' performed by Juno, Pallas, and Venus together. ¹⁶ Weaver could have used a minuet, which was not only the most popular of the dances for the ball-room but also the basis for figured dances created by London's dancing masters to display the skills of their female pupils. ¹⁷

The third dance is Juno's 'Entry'. This may well have been relatively slow in tempo, with little in the way of showy or virtuosic steps, in keeping with the majesty of the wife of Jupiter and the Queen of heaven. Next, Pallas performs her 'Entry'. Weaver followed Congreve in emphasising her warlike aspect rather than presenting her as the goddess of wisdom, suggesting that her dance could have had something in common with the 'Pyrrhic' he gave Mars in *The Loves of Mars and Venus*. However, Miss Mears as Pallas was a young and relatively inexperienced dancer, who took supporting roles in the Drury Lane pantomimes and was rarely billed in entr'acte dances. There is no evidence that she was a strong performer or had a powerful dance technique. It seems more likely that Pallas was given a straightforward dance, perhaps to a March, characterised by Johann Mattheson as 'heroic and fearless'. ²⁰

The last contender to appear was Venus, the goddess of love and beauty. Her appeal to Paris included three dances, an 'Entry' by Venus herself, a dance by Shepherds and Shepherdesses, and another 'Entry' by Helen of Troy.²¹ The shepherds and shepherdesses could have performed a passepied, a pastoral dance described by Louis Bonin as having an amorous and charming character.²² For Venus Weaver looked back to *The Loves of Mars and Venus*, in which she had been discovered 'in her Dressing-Room at her Toilet' and had risen to dance a passacaille.²³ Although very young, Miss Robinson already had five years of stage experience and seems to have been an accomplished dancer. At Drury Lane on 23 September 1732, the entr'acte dances included '*Les Bergeries*, Composed in the Taste of Monsieur Dumoulin and Mademoiselle Camargo, of the Opera at Paris. By Essex, Miss Robinson, Houghton, being the first Time of their Dancing since their Arrival from Paris',

and on 17 January 1733, Miss Robinson danced Mrs Booth's role of Amphitrite in *Cephalus and Procris*. However, it is clear that in *The Judgment of Paris* love and beauty were personified not by Venus, but by Helen of Troy. If Weaver included a passacaille among the dances in his afterpiece, he is most likely to have given it to Helen, and the unrivalled talents and experience of Hester Booth. Venus may have danced a sarabande, a dance type often associated with sensuality and erotic passion.²⁴

The remaining two dances are near the end of *The Judgment of Paris*. After giving the golden apple to Venus, Paris is united with Helen and they dance a duet. This, the culminating dance of the afterpiece, could have been a musette, the pastoral dance associated in *Les Caractères de la Danse* with ideal love. Les Caracterès de la Danse had been introduced to the London stage by Marie Sallé at Lincoln's Inn Fields on 27 November 1725, and had been performed at Drury Lane as recently as 19 April 1731 by Miss Robinson. Weaver's 'Dramatic Entertainment in Dancing and Singing' concluded with a conventional 'Grand Dance to the Chorus', which brought together Paris, Helen, the Shepherds, and the Shepherdesses to celebrate the victory of Venus in the contest for the golden apple.

Weaver's description makes clear that there are a great many actions and gestures in *The Judgment of Paris*. Weaver used actions for narrative events which were easy to understand, as when Paris 'runs to *Venus*, delivers the Apple, and flies to embrace *Helen*'. Other parts of the narrative were more dependent on words, and these were much more difficult for the dancers to express, and the audience to interpret. When '*Paris* advances towards *Mercury*, and by Action desires to be inform'd of *Jupiter*'s Commands', Weaver resorts to words as Mercury prompts Paris's question in his recitative 'From high *Olympus*, and the Realms above' and then answers it with his song 'This radiant Fruit behold'. Juno's offer of 'absolute Empire' is made explicable by a symbolic display of 'Crowns, Scepters, &c.' which she shows Paris 'by Actions' as well as by Power's song 'Let Ambition fire thy Mind' which follows.²⁶

Weaver also used a variety of gestures expressing the passions, from the 'Surprise' and 'Fright' shown by the Shepherds when Mercury descends at the beginning of the afterpiece, to the 'Anger and Threats' and the 'Indignation, Scorn, and Contempt' shown by Juno and Pallas respectively as they ascend after losing the contest.²⁷ The goddesses undoubtedly performed gestures explained in Weaver's description of *The Loves of Mars and Venus* sixteen years earlier.²⁸ The only extended sequence of expressive actions and gestures in *The Judgment of Paris* comes when Paris encounters Helen for the first time:

Helen is discover'd by Cupids in a beautiful Grotto; Venus shews her to Paris, who seems astonish'd at her Charms; she advances down the Stage and dances her Entry; Paris, full of Admiration, &c. at the End of the Dance approaches Helen with all the Actions of Love, Respect, and Desire. Scene of Love, Courtship, &c. on the Part of Paris; and a respectful Coyness and unwilling Refusal of Helen; Paris persevering, and just ready to embrace her, a Cloud arises and takes her from his Sight; he returns in Despair down the Stage.²⁹

Weaver, and his dancers Denoyer and Mrs Booth, wove a complex web of dance and expressive gesture for this scene, similar to the meeting between Mars and Venus in *The Loves of Mars and Venus*.

Conclusion

So, why did Weaver resort to words in *The Judgment of Paris*? He was probably persuaded by the success of Drury Lane's *Cephalus and Procris*, with its sung serious plot, and the popularity of Stoppelaer and Miss Raftor who had taken the title roles in the pantomime. He must also have realised that songs made it easier to follow the plot of his afterpiece, as well as linking it (through the use of words by Congreve) to serious drama.

What sort of work was *The Judgment of Paris*? For Weaver, it was a serious entertainment which told a story from classical mythology in dancing and singing. He drew both on long-established conventions and the recent development of the pantomime in his use of machines, for the descent and ascent of deities, stage properties, as attributes identifying individual characters, and scene changes, which revealed the gifts offered by the three goddesses. For dance and gesture, Weaver looked back to his own earlier works, particularly *The Loves of Mars and Venus*, but he changed his approach. He used narrative actions alongside gestures expressive of the passions, and he incorporated songs to explain abstract ideas. There are hints, too, that Weaver intended his dances to be expressive of character and situation. *The Judgment of Paris* was not as ambitious as *The Loves of Mars and Venus* and *Orpheus and Eurydice* had been, but it was still a sophisticated experiment in expressive dance and gesture. Weaver was more sympathetic to the tastes of his audience than he had been in 1717 and 1718, but he was still ahead of his time.

Lastly, why did *The Judgment of Paris* disappear from the repertoire so quickly? There were two main reasons, neither to do with the work itself. One was the collapse of the management at Drury Lane and the split in the company, which divided Weaver's cast between the theatres and may have prevented his return to London in later seasons. The other was the retirement from the stage of Hester Booth, who had worked with Weaver to create all his 'Dramatic Entertainments of Dancing'. Weaver may have felt that she was essential for the role of Helen of Troy and that, without her, *The Judgment of Paris* could not be revived.

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