

**The London Stage and the Nineteenth-Century World V**  
**New College, Oxford, 10-11 April 2025**

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**From Folklore to Historical Subject: Adapting Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* for the London Stage**

**Francis Bertschinger**  
**Magdalen College, Oxford**

Even within the increasingly internationalising operatic environment of the early nineteenth century, Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* is notable for its transnational nature. Written by an Italian composer for the Paris Opéra in 1829, and based on a Swiss subject mediated through the work of Friedrich Schiller, the opera was adapted further upon its premiere in England. When brought to the London stage for the 1829/1830 season at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, Rossini's opera was adapted primarily through the substitution of the story of William Tell for that of the revolutionary Andreas Hofer, who had led the Tyrolean Rebellion in 1809. This paper explores this adaptation and its reception, focussing on the dramatic implications of the substitution of fifteenth-century folklore for a nineteenth-century historical narrative. In particular, I explore the extent to which the revolutionary nature of the two subjects may have led to their coalescing within the English public consciousness,

**The Failure of the ‘Opera Bill’; The Crisis in London Opera in 1853**

**Michael Burden, New College, University of Oxford**

The Opera House in the Haymarket, London’s exclusive home for all-sung foreign opera and elite dance was, in 1853, engulfed by a financial disaster. The manager, Benjamin Lumley, had a swashbuckling approach to running a theatrical enterprise that caused the resignation in 1846 of the opera’s conductor Michael Costa. As the situation deteriorated, Lumley decided to turn to the Crown and to Parliament to attempt a rescue package. Lumley’s stratagem was to promote a private parliamentary bill, the ‘Her Majesty’s Theatre Association Bill’ (colloquially called the Opera Bill) the object of which ‘was to vest in a large number of noblemen and gentlemen, who took

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**“In order categorical”: Genre, Classification Theory and the Works of  
Gilbert and Sullivan**

**Deborah Lee**  
**University College London**

The collaborative works of Gilbert and Sullivan present some interesting generic issues, within the already complex world of musical-theatrical genres. On one level, there is a rich question around how Gilbert and Sullivan’s collaborative works interplay with other musical-theatrical genres of the time, as seen, for example, in the multiple generic titles assigned to them such as Savoy opera, light opera and operetta to name but a few; at a narrower level, there is also scholarly, performer and enthusiast interest in categorisation *within* the works of Gilbert and Sullivan, such as main versus periphery works, the boundaries of the Gilbert and Sullivan “canon”, and how performer classification can influence the categorisation of individual works. This paper explores and analyses these genre classification questions from the perspective of knowledge organisation, which is a sub-discipline of information studies. First, the paper considers the category of Gilbert and Sullivan’s works from a classification theory perspective, with a dissection of their position in hierarchies of operatic/theatrical genres and a classificatory analysis of arguments that they are a separate subgenre. This section utilises knowledge organisation ideas such as grouping, labelling of categories, and hierarchies. Second, the paper contemplates the organisation and categorisation *within* Gilbert and Sullivan’s collaborative oeuvre,

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**The London Stage in the Indian Ocean**

**Sarah Meer**  
**University of Cambridge**

I would like to present some very early-stage research about the dissemination of London's popular plays through imperial networks, particularly in India and South Africa. I shall focus on the plays of Dion Boucicault (c. 1820-1890). Boucicault's career exemplified the transnationality of the nineteenth-century theatre. Consider his infamous facility for adapting French dramas; his success in multiple cities across the Atlantic world; his tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1885. But I shall sketch out some ways in which Boucicault's plays travelled even further. During the 1860s and 70s, Boucicault dramas were staged across the Indian Ocean, throughout South Asia and the Cape. The paper will suggest some of the different ways in which these plays travelled. Many featured in the repertoires of travelling theatre companies which originated in London. They were also taken up by Australian companies, which

**Melodrama and Immersion on the 19<sup>th</sup>**

**‘One More Unfortunate’: Deathly Spectatorship and Suicide as Stage Sensation<sup>1</sup>**

**Janice Norwood, University of Hertfordshire**  
**Hayley Bradley, University of Manchester**

At the 2022 The London Stage and the Nineteenth Century World IV conference we introduced research from our collaborative project on deathly spectatorship in which we analyse the presentation and remediation of nineteenth-century visual, literary, theatrical and filmic representations of death. On that occasion our focus was the death bed. For the 2025 meeting we present the most recent material from our project, continuing our examination of the spectacle of the dead or dying body, this time in relation to self-destruction. The many artistic, journalistic and dramatic depictions of suicide attest to the nineteenth-century fascination with acts of self-slaughter. In this joint paper, we map stage performances of suicide in relation to changing social attitudes: from being regarded early in the nineteenth century as a criminal action that was also against religious belief (*felo de se*), to an increasingly compassionate understanding of self-murder that recognised it as a response to mental health crises or social factors, as exemplified by Emile Durkheim’s *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (1897).

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industries with particular focus on stage machinery, technology, collaboration, adaptation and film. Hayley has published work on Ouida (Marie Louise de la Ramée) and *Moths*, theatrical artisan Henry Hamilton, autumn dramas at Theatre Royal Drury Lane, Edwardian fashions, and 'Stagecraft, Spectacle and Sensation' in Carolyn Williams (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama*, (2018). Forthcoming publications include: 'Historicising the Nineteenth Century Entrepreneurial Theatrical Artisan,' *Journal of Victorian Culture* (2024/2025) and 'Dangerous Performance and Injury to the Illusion: Spectacle, Risk and Legislation,' in Kate Newey, Jim Davis, Patricia Smyth, and Kate Holmes (eds), *Theatre and Visual Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century: A Collection of Essays* (Boydell & Brewer, 2025).



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**The Mysterious Marriage of Nancy and Sikes**

**Laurence Senelick**  
**Tufts University**

Of all the fallen women on the Victorian stage, Nancy in adaptations of Dickens' *Oliver Twist*





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**Simultaneous Settings and Audience Affect**

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**Is Parody a Thing of the Pastiche?**

**Martyn Strachan**  
**Independent Scholar**

Throughout the history of literature the use of parody has been widespread at almost all times and in most cultures. It can serve a number of functions and these have tended to change with the times. More modern usage has tended to equate parody

**Richard D'Oyly Carte and the Challenges (and Consequences) of Casting**

**James Brooks Kuykendall**  
**University of Mary Washington**

The impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte was a pioneer in the long-running show—seeking to produce works that could run nightly for a year or more. This he managed

