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

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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

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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

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

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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,

The London Stage in the Indian Ocean

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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 19th

‘One More Unfortunate’: Deathly Spectatorship and Suicide as Stage Sensation [1]

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

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

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

Disabled Bodies in the London Street and on the London Stage

Mary L. Shannon
University of Roehampton

In periodicals of the 1820s and 1830s, the ‘King of the Beggars’ was a disabled man: first William ‘Billy’ Waters, a Black disabled sailor with a wooden prosthetic leg; then Andrew Whiston or ‘Little Jemmy’, a white man born with physical disabilities.
This paper will take two recently-discovered images of Waters and Whiston - one a caricature of a London street performance, and other a magic lanthorn slide of a scene from a play set in London which featured them as characters – to consider how nineteenth-century visions of what Rosemary Garland-Thompson famously calls ‘Extraordinary Bodies’ were shaped by ideas about performance and theatricality both on and off the stage. In the process it will argue that visual images of performance have an important part to play both in the construction of disability representation in the nineteenth-century, and in our contemporary deconstruction of disability history.

Mary L. Shannon

Simultaneous Settings and Audience Affect

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

General Sir George White Goes to the Hippodrome: film, theatre, and the cultivation of a wartime public sphere in late-Victorian London

Peter Yeandle