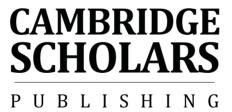# Adaptations, Versions and Perversions in Modern British Drama

Adaptations, Versions and Perversions in Modern British Drama

Edited by

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION:
REHABILITATING ADAPTATION

IGNACIO RAMOS GAY

The word 'adaptation' comes to us from the Latin 'adaptare' meaning 'adjust' –a combination of the prefix 'ad-' (to) and 'aptus' (fitted)–. Chambers's *Etymological Dictionary of the English Usage* (1867) defines it as 'the act of making suitable' as well as 'the state of being suitable' (5). Dr Johnson's definition identifies it with the process of "proportioning" (7). The word implies thereby a teleological rearrangement as much as a prior appropriation, or what Linda Hutcheon termed, when approaching the substance of the mechanism of parody, a "repetition with difference" (1985: 32). This book aims at exploring *what* plays were deemed 'suitable' to be reworked for foreign or local stages; *what* transformations – linguistic, semiotic, theatrical– were undertaken so as to accommodate international audiences; *how* national literary traditions are forged, altered, and diluted by means of transnational adapting techniques; and, finally, to what extent the categorical boundaries between original plays and adaptations may be *blurred* on the account of such adjusting textual strategies, or what historian Adrian Johns terms "how could the need to create new knowledge be reconciled with the need to appropriate old?" (179).

In his *Devil's Dictionary* (1911), American journalist and satirist Ambrose Bierce cynically defined the word 'dramatist' as "one who adapts plays from the French" (59). Bierce's definition inevitably takes after the late nineteenth-century zeitgeist, deeming theatre adaptation of foreign plays as an indeed economically profitable activity for the author, yet one that debased the dramatic art. Bierce's Victorian contemporaries glossed the theatre performed in London as a succession of low, despicable genres such as vaudevilles, farces, melodramas, *opérettes*, *burlettas* or *extravaganzas* whose influence upon native product had led to a theatrical decline. English actors complained in 1853 throughout a series of anonymous articles published in the *Bentley's Monthly Review* about the national theatrical poverty, crying out for "a new drama" that could

prevent them from "fainting", and proclaimed "a thousand noes" to a theatre peppered by "farces barely translated from the French" (3). On a similar note, drama critic Edward Fitzball, commenting in 1859 upon the so-called degeneration of drama, described the theatre as a "childish affair" due to its being "almost all composed of translations" (I: 1). A few years later, dramatist and adaptor Dion Boucicault pointed at the "deluge of French plays that set in with 1842" and that took place right at the end of the patent theatre's monopoly as the main factor that "swamped the English drama of that period" (242). Such literary colonisation was more epically described in 1887 by Edward Morton in an article whose suggestive title possessed evident warfare connotations, and conspicuously reminded the reader of bygone days: "The French Invasion". In line with previous criticism, Morton deplored that "at half-a-dozen theatres English translations, versions, or perversions of French plays are now being performed, to say nothing of the French comedians in possession of the Adelphi and Lyric" (*The Theatre*, 1 July, 1887). Blaming their fellow-countrymen for not being able to create 'original' plays 'in the manner' of Parisian dramatists, adapting and translating pieces from alien sources was considered a mere subterfuge to avoid original creation capable of determining a national literary tradition. As critic William Archer stated in 1899, "they [the French] have five or six men who can do tolerable dramatic work […] for every one of ours; and their good men are not tempted to waste their time and talent on adaptations from the English" (37). Unlike its current use as *evolution* –a result of the present-day absorption and assimilation of nineteenth-century Darwinist theories– adaptation at the time chimed more closely with the notion of *blockage* and creative obstruction.

   This hyperactively industrial adapting activity characterised English theatre since the liberalisation of the theatres brought about by the passing of the Theatre Act in 1843. In her essay on adaptation theory (2006), Linda Hutcheon states that "the Victorians had a habit of adapting just about everything –and in just about every possible direction; the stories of poems, novels, plays, operas, paintings, songs and dances, *tableaux vivants* were constantly being adapted from one medium to another and then back again" (xi)–. On this note, it comes off as no surprise that Allardyce Nicoll was able to compile eighty-seven different terms used to describe the wide variety of subgenres performed on the Victorian stage, as a result in many cases of adapting operations from alien and foreign works (V: 230). Similarly, Julie Sanders reproduces Adrian Poole's extensive list of terms accounting for the Victorian's fascination with the rewriting of previous or contemporary artistic forms: "borrowing, stealing,

appropriating, inheriting, assimilating […] being influenced, inspired, dependent, indebted, haunted, possessed […] homage, mimicry, travesty, echo, allusion, and intertextuality" (Poole, 2. qtd. by Sanders, 3). However, far from complying with the "constant critical denigration of the general phenomenon of adaptation" that receives and regards the resulting product as "minor and subsidiary and certainly never as good as the 'original'" (Hutcheon, 2006: xii), Hutcheon, in an attempt of de-hierarchizing the authoritative forms of creation, envisions adaptation as an instance of quintessential creativity; one by which "multiple versions exist laterally, not vertically" (2006: xiii).

This volume builds on Hutcheon's understanding of original creation as a horizontal –rather than vertical– process by bringing together a number of articles that scrutinise the linguistic, social, political and theatrical complexities inherent in the intercultural transference of plays, as well as the manoeuvres of semiotic recombination. The essays collected are partly a selection of the papers presented at a conference held at the University of Valencia, in Spain, in December 2011, titled "Adaptations, Versions and Perversions: French Theatre and English Playwrights", and co-organised by the English and French departments. Although originally focused upon nineteenth- and twentieth- century theatrical rewritings of French plays, the conference soon expanded to include further theatrical trafficking so as to illuminate the flexibility of transnational practices and the nomadic essence of theatre adaptation. In a way that could be equated to the rapid circulation of images and peoples nowadays, the play itself becomes a "gateway to cultural dialogue" (Shaked, 1989) holding multiple passports and tempering political frontiers. At a time when national identities and sovereignties are constantly reassessed due to the perennial "flux in cultural reproduction and identity formation" (Ong, 10), the approaches presented by the different contributors investigate the modern British theatre as an instance of diachronic and synchronic transnational adaptations based upon a myriad of influences originating in, and projected upon, other national dramatic traditions. These traditions, rooted in relatively distant geographies and epochs, are traced so as to illustrate the split between the state-imposed identity and personal, subjective identity caused by cultural negotiations of the self in an age of globalism. International frontiers are thus pointed at in order to claim the need to be transcended in the process of cultural re-appropriation associated with theatre performance for international audiences. As Ong contends, the prefix "trans" denotes both "moving through space" as well as the "changing nature of something: it alludes to the transversal, the transactional, the translational and the transgressive aspects of

contemporary behaviour and imagination" (4). Transnational adapting is to be construed as a diacritic of linguistic displacement, a textual diaspora detaching and reattaching dramatic fragments as a sort of protean self that paradoxically remains as the only possibility to approach an unmovable essence.

The following ten essays interact with each other by means of encompassing theoretical and practical issues that cast light on the transnational and trans-epochal transfers of plays. The notions of adaptation, version and *perversion* are inevitably studied in compliance with a flexible understanding of national credentials. These are not mere translations conveying accurate linguistic and gestural equivalents from one culture and language to another. Instead, they are examined as extensive, original rewritings that seduce audiences into national mobility. In this sense, I contend that British plays performed on foreign stages, or absorbing alien heritages, portray contemporary theatre as a source of cultural nomadism and the agent of a new mode of *subjectification*.

Despite its modern derogative use, in many ways, the adaptations dealt with in the next chapters could be deemed transnational *copies* of original plays, and they very proudly should be considered so. As Marcus Boon points out (2010), the word 'copia' is connected via its Latin root to the word 'copula' (a tie, a band, a fetter) but also to the verb 'to copulate' (83). By relating 'copying' with 'copulation', rewriting with *generation*, Boon reinstates what Robert Weimann termed the "reproductive dimension of appropriation" (14), that is, the engendering capacity of adaptation to create new life. More than a barrier to the constant flow of structures across cultures, the copy is the catalyser of creation, a celebration of renewal and a confirmation of the liquid texture of literature. In opposition with Victorian forerunning criticism, contributors to the volume show how textual annexation stands for a flowing, literary 'rescription': a writing back to past and present, foreign and local authors, forcing readers "to reconsider literary categories and loyalties" (Kellman, x).

The book is divided in two parts. Part One focuses upon the (trans)cultural dialogues established between British playwrights and foreign authors from the Victorian period until the twenty-first century. This diachronic dimension shows how texts encompass and respond to other texts through time and how the audiences' response varies accordingly. In this part, not only specific, porous texts, but also themes and leitmotifs are explored. A chronological progression has been followed so as to discern the interplay between time and space when adapting for the stage, the steady erosion of geographical boundaries made

by time, as well as the elasticity of chronological order as a result of transnational literary transit.

This is why the book opens with an article framing the widest chronological division between the text adapted and the play performed. Laura Monrós's study of the Victorians parodying classic mythology for the stage unveils burlesque rewritings of the myth of Helen as a subterfuge mirroring mid-nineteenth-century gender struggles. The controversial reception of plays like Robert Brough's *The Siege of Troy* (1859) or F. C. Burnand's *Helen, or Taken from the Greek* (1866) bridges the gulf between more than twenty centuries of social history and unearths the theatrical mechanisms employed by Victorian playwrights to update the classics and accommodate modern issues within a popular form.

The following essay maps out Oscar Wilde's transnational and translingual literary imagination. Ignacio Ramos-Gay argues that Wilde's life and writings can be interpreted in the light of a French cultural identity that transcends the classic Victorian binary of Irishness *vs* Englishness. In applying aesthetic formulae to the creation of his 'French self' and modelling himself, both physically and linguistically, upon his admired French classics, Wilde ignited a new mode of constructing identity that went hand in hand with his process of playwriting. Literary identity was consequently the result of a flexible cultural negotiation more related to art than to geography, which was arbitrarily used by Wilde as an instrument to convey his swinging sympathies towards France, Ireland or England. Finally, the author shows how Wilde used blatant transnational adaptations in his own works as a revolutionary practice to debunk the institutionalisation of intellectual property and as a tool of insurrection to British dominance.

Beyond the cultural transfer of plays, the third paper in the volume faces the challenging topic of the literary transposition of similar themes and leitmotivs in two different countries from the late nineteenth-century to the 1950s. Caroline Bertonèche's article tracks down and compares a number of theatrical representations of medical dysfunctions and scientific perversions permeating English and French contemporary drama. Taking as a starting point of such viral transmission Lord Byron's effeminate dandyism, the author scrutinises the poet's self-fashioning as an alternative and defying masculinity that was considered to be of one piece with the so-called homosexual malady fleshed out by Oscar Wilde. Her study then proceeds to explore two authors pivotal to the analysis of female pathology on the stage in the nineteenth century. The novels by Alexandre Dumas *fils*'s, *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), and Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) were successfully adapted for the stage, as the visual

medium intensified the theatricality inherent in the malfunctioning psyche and could be easily rallied with Charcot's display of hysterical muses at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris. Bertonèche concludes her journey into the spectacle of psychic anomaly with Beckett's dissection of linguistic neurosis. In his plays, aphasias and the plaguing loss of the ability to speak and understand language unveil a myriad of injuries of the brain so that, as Bertonèche contends, in line with Alfred Jarry's 'Ubuesque' saga, Beckett's 'anti-human' characters disarticulate the language as they dismember and mutilate their own selves.

Ana Fernández-Caparrós analyses an English adaptation of an Austrian classic. By examining the notoriously polemical reception in England of *The Blue Room* –David Hare's adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's play *La Ronde*– as well as the reasons underpinning its success, Fernández-Caparrós contends that the source text was exponentially updated by Sam Mendes's fêted *mise en scène*. Although limited to two actors fleshing out the whole original cast, Mendes's version of Schnitzler's text preserved the play's provocative carnality through an intensified sexual innuendo that staged well-known actresses such as Nicole Kidman performing naked. More than simply a scoptophilic stimulus for the audience, Mendes's voyeuristic adaptation enabled the audience to feel the perverse sexual arousal that the early twentieth-century public experienced in Berlin and Vienna when Schnitzler's play unleashed a tsunami of critical reactions.

If the opening article to Part One focused upon adaptations of Greek mythological plays in nineteenth-century England so as to annihilate any chronological division when rewriting plays for the stage, the paper that closes this section explores contemporary English theatre as a global and globalised genre transcending traditional national demarcations in the late twentieth century. Mireia Aragay thoroughly traces the alteration of the way space is experienced, and its subsequent progressive theatrical and psychological dissolution, in Harold Pinter's *Party Time*, Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and Martin Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies*. Following suit French political philosopher Étienne Balibar's theories on the "topography of cruelty" (2001), Aragay yields an insight into how the 'state-of-the-nation' play (Rebellato, 2007) steadily gives way to a competing non-naturalistic representation of spatial interconnectedness. Just as much as Monrós's paper showed how the Classics represent the first stage of globalised, 'achronological' literary appropriation, Aragay's revealing approach to contemporary drama looks ahead to twenty-first-century drama as a transnational, de-territorialised stage mostly defined by new instable alignments, global processes and mobility across space.

Part Two of the book focuses closely on the process of translating and adapting plays for foreign audiences. Chapters are again arranged chronologically: from Beckett's translingual self-translations in the 1950s to recent versions in Basque and Catalan of Brian Friel's play *Translations*; and from Ted Hughes's, Timberlake Wertenbaker's and Joanna Laurens's revisions of Ovid's tale of Philomela, to the American reception of British playwright Martin McDonagh. The five articles encompass the notion of itinerant transnationality and the possible fidelities towards, and reinventions of, the source work.

Marianne Drugeon begins with an essay on how Beckett's 'ambilingualism' –his ability to express himself in two different verbal systems and to translate his own works into French– transgresses any construction of a national identity associated with the use of a single, exclusive language. In line with a number of litterateurs –Wilde, Santayana, Nabokov, Cioran– who rejected the institutional constraints of 'monolingualism' expressed in their primary language by producing major work in a different one, Drugeon explores the lyrical strategies employed by the dramatist when translating his plays for a French audience, and most importantly, when performed in front of a Francophone public. The author deciphers the connection between two semiotic codes –the literary text and its theatrical representation– and observes in Beckett a system of 'double adaptation/translation' by which the text performed by the actors reaches a yonder degree of translingualism that obliterates the lexical meaning of words in favour of the audience's audio-sensitive experience.

The stage adaptation carried out by Christopher Hampton, and performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1985, of Choderlos de Laclos's eighteenth-century novel *Les liaisons dangereuses* articulates the second chapter of this section. Lydia Vázquez scrutinises the dramatic mechanisms of intergeneric adaptation from the novel to the play. The author specifically focuses on the myriad of ways French *esprit* in Laclos's text is replaced in Hampton's version by instances of English wit, and how these two notions coexist and interfere with alternative forms of conversational bantering such as *persiflage* and *raillerie*. Rallying nationality and humour codification, the author concludes by stating that Laclos's juxtaposition of morbid and farcical elements instilling a disturbing effect on the French reader is dulcified by means of English wordplay, leaving British audiences completely unaware of the novel's darkest tones.

Whereas Vázquez's article revolves around the interaction between cross-linguistic and cross-generic theatre adaptation, María Gaviña's chapter sheds light on the connection between linguistic reshaping and

cultural arrangement by comparing the Basque and Catalan versions of
Brian Friel's play *Translations*. First performed in Derry in 1980, and
dealing with the cultural and linguistic clash derived from colonisation in
nineteenth-century Ireland, the play acts as a reflecting and refracting
mirror of the Basque and Catalan mindset in the late eighties. Translated
first into Catalan in 1984 yet never published, and then four years later
into Basque under the title *Agur, Eire... Agur*, its immediate success in
Northern Spain brought to the fore a myriad of parallelisms between both
countries at a time of massive political instability. As Gaviña states, both
in Ireland and in Spain, linguistic variation epitomised an 'otherising'
representation of the coloniser and the colonised population, as well as the
silencing and the entombment of a specific culture.

Transcultural adaptation is also pivotal in the following essay. Miguel
Teruel analyses three contemporary stage plays depicting three new
versions of the myth of Philomela by Timberlake Wertenbaker, Ted
Hughes, and Joanna Laurens. Timberlake Wertenbaker's play, *The Love of
the Nightingale*, was presented in 1988 by the Royal Shakespeare
Company at The Other Place in Stratford. Her rendition of the tale of
Philomela enhances the dramatic potential of the story in significant ways:
Philomela's tapestry becomes a play-within-the-play, and her Itys voices a
new, positive message for our future. Ted Hughes published his *Tales
from Ovid* in 1997, a verse translation of twenty-four of the stories in the
Metamorphoses. A selection of these poems (daring English versions of
the Latin originals, faithful and modern at the same time) was transposed
to an acting version produced by Tim Supple and Simon Reade for the
RSC at The Swan Theatre in Stratford in 1999. Joanna Lauren's debut
play, *The Three Birds*, opened at the Gate Theatre in London in 2000, and
was favourably received by audiences and critics. Laurens rewrites the
myth with powerful poetical language, and threads the story with non-
Ovidian detail and terrifying actuality. All three update the protean
possibilities of the stories around the myth in two main directions: as
translations of the motifs and characters of the tales into the present, and as
new forms –'mutatas formas'– in a process of textual metamorphosis
which is essentially dramatic in its literary nature.

In the last chapter, Claudia Alonso approaches Martin McDonagh's
critically-acclaimed play, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (premiered by the
Royal Shakespeare Company at the Other Place in 2001) from the double
standpoint of international audience response and animal ethics.
Specifically, Alonso recapitulates on the criticism surrounding the play to
consider the implications of animal violence and cruelty within post 9/11
America. Irish terrorism acquires a new significance within this context,

but then so does the connection between animal rights extremists and terrorism, particularly due to America's preoccupation with national security, as manifested in the *Patriot Act*. It is the adaptation of McDonagh's play for American audiences, Alonso argues, which invokes new issues pertaining both to current conceptions of terrorism and of animal activism, enabling a piercing critique against not only the characters in the play, but also against the audience itself.

According to Darwinism, adaptation is a synonym of survival. The theory of evolution has it that adaptability to a new milieu is required for species to remain in being, and 'the survival of the fittest' within a process of natural selection provides for and guarantees the endurance of the species. The essays collected in this volume bring to light ten instances of how the thematic, linguistic, social, cultural and political phenotypes of a number of plays have mutated and adapted within a new environmental – and transnational– setting. In many a case, this new climate has undeniably transformed –if not distorted– the primary shape of the source play. Yet in no case has this operation of genetic recombination and migration of literary variants not granted the passing from one generation to the next of the textual species, thereby flaunting their freedom from their spatial and chronological constraints. Adaptation stands therefore as the single organising principle of the creative practice and the artistic mind.

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PART I

CULTURAL DIALOGUES IN THE BRITISH THEATRE: FROM THE VICTORIANS TO THE PRESENT DAY

CHAPTER ONE

"THE FAIREST ONE WITH GOLDEN LOCKS": PARODYING HELEN ON THE MODERN STAGE*

LAURA MONRÓS GASPAR

Women and Victorian Classical Burlesque

Lotman contends that a semiotic triangle between real human behaviour, theatre and the visual arts should be considered in an analysis of the aesthetic objects in nineteenth-century Russian theatre (54). As I have argued elsewhere (Monrós-Gaspar, 2011), the same principles should underlie an in-depth analysis of Victorian classical burlesque. Nineteenth-century burlesque was a source and mirror of the cultural images which shaped Victorian Britain and countless examples of recurring props, costumes and settings accounted for the fertile imagery which moulded contemporary representations of women. The refiguration of Greek tragedy in classical burlesque introduced a group of heroines who questioned authoritarian values under the guise of humour. Medea, Alcestis and Antigone, for example, were refigured as round characters with complex dramatic histories that surpassed the frivolous loveplay of the burlesque nymphs and the pomposity of battle-scenes. The topicality of Victorian popular theatre offered these petrified voices the ground on which to debate contemporary gender issues. As an example, Edward Lemman Blanchard's *Antigone Travestie* (1845) epitomizes the double standards that mould, measure and value the role of women in Victorian arts and culture.

The lack of significant English models during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the impeccable performance of Antigone by Charlotte Vandenhoff and later Helen Faucit were crucial for the success of Mendelssohn's *Antigone* in Victorian England. Hall and Macintosh's analysis of the repercussions both of the Covent Garden and the Dublin performances of the tragedy in 1845 identifies how Sophocles' *Antigone* suffused the intellectual, aesthetic and theatrical production of the

subsequent decades (316). Responses to Mendelssohn's *Antigone* ranged from Thomas De Quincey (1863) to John Gibson (1866) and George Eliot (1856). The questions raised by the tragedy pertained to the idealized statuesque beauty, the conflict between man-made laws and divine universals as well as Antigone's impersonation of Victorian virtue. Margaret Sandbach's poem 'Antigone' published in 1850, for example, exemplified the nineteenth-century construction of the heroine's uprightness which was also evoked by De Quincey (204-5).[1] Nineteenth-century American refigurations of the myth also gave prominence to the sacrificial Antigone and perpetuated the role of the "dutiful sister who defied the state to attend to her family and religious conscience" (Winterer, 81-4). The pre-eminence of the virtuous Antigone, however, did not completely upstage the political potential of the myth, as George Eliot contended in her essay "The Antigone and Its Moral" published in *The Leader* in 1856. Eliot's reading of the tragedy was in tune with her personal defiance of the institution of marriage as she underscored the struggles between the individual and society embodied in Antigone. Forty years later, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' short story *The Sacrifice of Antigone* (1891) deployed realism to denounce how inadequate education and moral obligations to family determined the development of women (Winterer, 81-4). The coexistence of the sacrificial with the rebellious Antigone in relation to the woman question is also stressed by Julia Ward Howe's lecture at The Congress of Women held in Chicago in 1893 and published in 1895 (Eagle, 102-3). Prior to Phelps' reinvention of the Faucit-like Antigone who was seen in America and England from the 1840s, and to Howe's restoration of the subversive voice of the heroine, E.L. Blanchard staged *Antigone Travestie* in 1845. Unlike Francis Talfourd's *Alcestis; the original Strong-minded Woman* (1850) and Robert Reece's *Agamemnon and Cassandra; or, the Prophet and Loss of Troy* (1868), Blanchard's *Antigone* depended on the staging of a Greek tragedy, whose spirit was recaptured by the playwright and transposed to the aesthetics of Victorian popular entertainment (Hall & Macintosh, 332-41).

 Antigone Travestie preserved the laudatory virtues of the heroine and stressed the entombment of her truth. Blanchard's Antigone embodied both the sacrificial and dutiful sister who chimed in with the Victorian family values and the strong-minded woman involved in 'male'-made politics. The syncretism with the tragic plot and images surrounding the petrifaction of women's discourse abounded. Creon's condemnation of Antigone, for example, syncretized with the systematic reification and concealment of women in caves in Victorian popular entertainment.

Furthermore, the heroine's perseverance in relating her truth paralleled the nineteenth-century political New Woman who scrutinized the legitimacy of ethical and political institutions.

The struggle between the 'natural' order of things and law was at the centre of the intellectual coteries of the 1840s. Charles Dickens' portrait of social inequalities in *A Christmas Carol* (1843), for example, was followed in time by Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) while Europe witnessed how a young Friedrich Engels was shaking the old order to pieces with *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England,* published in Leipzig in 1845. The clash between free-thinking and reliance on authority was an acute dilemma in Victorian England (Houghton, 99-109): James Martineau, for example, maintained in 1840 that there was "a simultaneous increase, in the very same class of minds, of theological doubt and of devotional affection" (qtd. in Houghton, 108). The dialogue between Hermon and Antigone on the relation between kings and subjects draws attention to issues of the sources of power and authority and reflects the socio-ideological crisis of the contemporary individual. Therefore, Blanchard's Antigone can be said to reflect the entombed voice of the political New Woman. Even though it might be argued that George Wild's cross-dressed interpretation might dissipate any possible gender criticism, it should be noted that Robert Brough's subversive Medea in *Medea; or, the Best of Mothers with a Brute of a Husband* (1856) and Robert Reece's Cassandra in *Agamemnon and Cassandra; or, the Prophet and Loss of Troy* were also impersonated by male actors. Transvestism was one of the staples of Victorian burlesque and on some occasions the characters less in tune with the Victorian ideals of femininity were precisely the ones performed by mature, well-known actresses and men. An added point to this issue is the function of humour as catalyst for debating social issues.

Complex heroines such as Blanchard's *Antigone* coexisted on the Victorian popular stage with flat burlesque characters such as those in Charles Selby's *The Judgement of Paris or the Pas de Pippins* (1846), and the anonymous *Cupid and Psyche* (1848). Notwithstanding the general perfunctory tone of burlesque, the topicality of the themes displayed questioned social issues that inevitably dealt with the woman question. A common topic was the reification of women through sculptured bodies and voices. As Marshall (1998) contends, the Galatea aesthetic was based on a sculptural representation of women moulded by a voyeuristic male gaze that silenced female bodies and voices. Examples of the Victorian statuesque aesthetic abound in the press of the time. In 1865, for example, the Dublin exhibition was echoed in the press primarily focusing on the

display and impact of the sculptures shown to the public. The *ILN* devoted several of its pages to the unpacking of the sculptures and the description of some of the most prominent marble groups such as Harriet Hosmer's *Sleeping Faun Satyr*.[2] Furthermore, following a common Victorian practice, the same newspaper reproduced sketches of the sculptures exhibited at leading art galleries and museums of the time. In the same year, the *ILN* echoed the exhibition of antiquities held at Kensington Museum in an article which, under the epigraph 'The Art Loan Collection in the South', included illustrations of the most sophisticated pieces.[3]

The daily life of the Victorians also abounded in references to the statuesque ideal of beauty, in particular, to women entombed in marbled bodies. With the development of the printed press, advertising became an important channel for creating attitudes towards women and beauty. Five actresses were depicted as sculptures in an advertisement of the 1887 Pear's Soap campaign (Loeb, 95-6). The actresses were Miss Fortescue, Adelina Patti, Mary Anderson, Marie Roze and Mrs. Langtry. Curiously two of them –Langtry and Fortescue– had performed Galatea in two different productions of Gilbert's *Pygmalion and Galatea* (Loeb, 96; Marshall, 11-12; 56-7). As a form of mass communication, newspapers perpetuated a statuesque aesthetic which even reached Queen Victoria, who was portrayed for example in *Punch* as the petrified figure of Shakespeare's Hermione. The caption of the caricature appealed to the reawakening of the Queen after her reclusive widowhood by Britannia, another sculptural embodiment of femininity.[4] Echoes of the beauty of marble sculpture in art can be traced well into the late years of the Victorian era, when portraits of languid waxed women by Alma-Tadema were described by Tennie Claflin in 1871 as perpetuating the "marble contour" of the sculptures from previous decades (Dijkstra, 123).

Furthermore, as we shall see, most important for this chapter are the exhibitions of *tableaux vivants* that reproduced the style of Greek art with regard to postures and costumes. Burlesque mirrored the lives of the Victorians, so whilst John Gibson's infatuation with his sculpture *The Tinted Venus* developed (Smith, 200), female statues moulded by the gaze of male voyeurs invaded the nineteenth-century popular stage. *Pygmalionism*, as defined by Havelock Ellis (188), was a generalized malady in European drama. The French stage, which nurtured its Anglophone neighbour, was rife with Galateas madly worshipped by pathological Pygmalions. In 1847, Cesare Pugni's ballet *Pygmalion* (choreographed by Arthur de Saint-Léon, which was a pseudonym for Charles-Victor-Arthur Michel) was first staged at the Théâtre de l'Opéra de Paris. In November the same year, Félix Anvers parodied the piece in

La femme de marbre and four years later, in March 1851, Levassor staged a satire of Pugni's ballet in the ballet-pantomime *La fille de marbre* at the Palais Royal. The Paris Vaudeville witnessed in 1853 the first performance of Théodore Barrière and Lambert Thiboust's *Les filles de marbre*, which was subsequently parodied in Marceline's vaudeville *Les filles…de marbre* (1853) and in *Les filles d'argile* (1855) by Hyacinthe Dubaq and Édouard Jaloux (Travers, 85; 17). In 1854, Barrière and Thiboust's play was first put on in London. Numerous adaptations of *Les filles de marbre* were staged in London between 1854 and 1883. The topic was widely reworked by all genres: ballet, extravaganza, burlesque, and magic drama.[5] The general plot reproduced Ovid's original story with variations founded on the petrifaction of the heroines and their responsive voices after reawakening to life (Frenzel, 152-4).

The symbiosis between women and sculptures reveals the semiotic construct that explains the cultural codes that perpetuated the social and individual subjection of women in Victorian England. Idealizing beauty and concealing wisdom were two regularized tools that enabled the gendered slavery of women denounced by Mill to continue. Patriarchal gazes, hands and institutions moulded ventriloquized bodies that remained concealed –and controlled– inside statues, caves and grotesque representations of women. On the other hand, classical burlesque heroines offered their voices to the social debates on the woman question encouraged by the mid-nineteenth-century strong-minded women who anticipated the New Woman of the fin de siècle (Macintosh, 2000).

Helen on the Victorian Popular Stage

A frequent referent in Victorian burlesque was Lemprière's Dictionary, which was the standard work of this kind in mid-nineteenth-century England (Clarke, 172).[6] F. C. Burnand's *Paris or Vive Lemprière. A New Classical Extravaganza* licensed to be performed at the Royal Strand Theatre in 1866, for example, and Henry James Byron's *Weak Woman*, a comedy first performed in 1875 at the Strand, use Lemprière as an authoritative text. Burlesque audiences covered the entire social spectrum, but only on very few rare occasions was it necessary to relate the classical plot. The spectators' acquaintance with the mythological figures evidences the increasing access of the middle and lower classes to antiquity, which was gained either with education, or with new cultural commodities, or with the numerous entertainments with Greco-Roman themes available at the time.[7] In the 1822 American edition of Lemprière, Helen is "the most beautiful woman of her age" (181). The dictionary records how she was

carried away and ravished by Theseus and that such a violence increased her fame among the young princes of Greece who aspired to her hand in marriage. Lemprière also accounts for the long list of her suitors, her marriage to Menelaus, her departure to Troy and her fate in the hands of the furies.

Helen was a model of beauty in Victorian England and so it was recorded, for example, in the paintings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (*Helen,* 1863), Anthony Frederick Augustus Sandys (*Helen of Troy,* 1867), and Evelyn De Morgan (*Helen of Troy*, 1898).[8] Between 1833 and 1867 as many as six burlesques on the siege of Troy were first staged in London and in the provinces. The episode of the judgement of Paris as triggering the Trojan War was also evoked in Victorian classical burlesques. With regard to Helen, many a burlesque which alluded to her beauty and her affair in Troy was written until the last decades of the century. In 1866, for example, Francis C. Burnand put on *Helen; or Taken from the Greek* at the Adelphi and *Paris; or Vive Lemprière* at the Royal Strand Theatre, and as late as 1884 Robert Reece's *Our Helen* was staged at the Gaiety. Moreover, as we shall see, the success of Jacques Offenbach's operetta *La Belle Hélène* at the Théâtre des Variétés in Paris in 1864 fostered a number of English versions that contributed to the vogue for the genre in England.[9] In such burlesques, Helen was a bastion of beauty and epitomized the paradigm of idle, shallow, vain young girls who put the institution of marriage at risk (Neff, 86-243).[10]

The daughters of Leda were recurrent characters in the English burlesque of the nineteenth century due to the social debates which sparked from the discussions on the Divorce and Marriage bills of the 1850s. The two women epitomized the stereotypes of vengeful, adulterous wives and young, fair concubines who filled the society news of the age.[11] Whereas the display of stunning stage effects in the performances of the siege of Ilium manifested the allure sophisticated mechanical inventions held for Victorians, the refigurations of Helen and Clytemnestra reflected topical debates on divorce and the emancipation of women. The issue of the position of women within the institution of marriage accompanied more profound questions on gender regarding the nature of women and their economic position in society. As I shall contend, John Robert O'Neil's *The Siege of Troy* (1854) and Robert Brough's homonym play in 1859 portray the traditional, frivolous and fickle Helen depicted in popular refigurations of the age.[12] F. C. Burnand's *Helen, or Taken from the Greek* (1866)*,* however, introduces topical debates which link Helen with other contemporary burlesque heroines at the forefront of the woman question.

John Robert O'Neil, known as Hugo Vamp, staged *The Siege of Troy; or the Misjudgement of Paris* at Astley's Amphitheatre on Monday August 28th 1854. O'Neil's taste for shows with elaborate stagecraft is revealed in *The Siege of Troy, or, the Misjudgement of Paris,* where tableaux with opening mountains and sea serpents appear. *The Siege of Troy, or, the Misjudgement of Paris* was announced in the title page of the 1854 manuscript at the Lord Chamberlain's Plays collection as a "Grand Classical Equestrian Burlesque in Two Acts" continuing with the tradition initiated by Charles Selby. *The Siege of Troy* follows the pattern of the comic theatre of the age: topical allusions, spectacular stage effects, women in Greek attire, etc. Reference to famous Shakespearean scenes from *Hamlet* also abound: the cockcrow, the sentinels, the fencing scene 'à la Hamlet & Laertes' were all familiar to an audience which had already been exposed to a large number of travesties of the tragedy (Young, 2002; Moody, 2000; Schoch, 2002; Wells 1978).

The Siege of Troy is a burlesque about men watching women, flirting with them, and speaking about war. Women's sexual and physical attributes, then, prevail over other matters. The socio-cultural context in which the play was first put on favoured the caricature of intellectual women and the eulogy of 'female statues' that complied with the demands of the voyeuristic male audiences. Accordingly, while the beauty of Juno's, Venus' and Minerva's nudity is applauded by both Paris and the audience, Cassandra's 'knowledge' is pitied and deprecated. With regard to Helen, she perpetuates the stereotypes of beauty and shallowness associated with modern refigurations of the myth. Lingering on Victorian double standards Helen plays the good wife at the same time as she is the capricious lover of Paris. The Chorus sings:

> For she's the ladiest Belle oh
> For any reflecting swell oh
> And when address'd by a fellow
> Through coyness she wont deny (O'Neil, f.22b)

Following in the line of O'Neil, Robert Barnabas Brough put on *The Siege of Troy* in 1859. William (1826-1870) and Robert Barnabas Brough (1828-1860) were born in London, sons of Barnabas Brough, a brewer and wine merchant, and the poet Frances Whiteside. They were both educated at a private school in Newport; Robert started his working career in Manchester as a clerk and William as a printer's apprentice in Brecon.[13] Robert's literary career included translations, prose and a complete dedication to journalism, where he displayed his talent for satire even more than on stage. Robert Brough's *The Siege of Troy,* which draws on

Homer's *Iliad* and William Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, had its opening night at the Lyceum in 1859 with Mrs Keeley in the role of Hector (Blanchard, 1891: 212). The news and illustrations on the siege of Delhi in 1858 published at *ILN* ensured the immediate success of the play which bore witness to the Victorian taste for historically inspired settings.[14]

Brough's Helen is described in the *dramatis personae* of the play as "the original *casus belli,* and a very fair excuse too" (2). The action is set in Troy, after her elopement with Paris and with the Greeks threatening the city. Helen is a minor character who serves to reinforce Paris' effeminacy. The contrast between Helen and Paris parallels the burlesque couples in Francis Talfourd's *Alcestis; or the original strong-minded woman* (1850) and Robert Reece's *Agamemnon and Cassandra; or the Prophet and Loss of Troy* (1868), where Admetus and Aegisthus are the coward and downtrodden counterparts of the strong-minded Alcestis and Clytemnestra. Yet the sound determination of Talfourd's Alcestis and Reece's Clytemnestra is still beyond the reach of Brough's Helen, and she is scorned by the *decent* Trojan women concealed at the Temple of Vesta for the downfall of Troy.

In contrast with John Robert O'Neil and Robert Brough, F. C. Burnand puts on an independent and wise Helen who intertwines traditional refigurations of the myth with contemporary debates on the situation of women. F.C. Burnand wrote as many as four classical burlesques connected to the motif of Troy: first *The Siege of Troy* at the Lyceum in 1858 (Adams, 67); then, *Dido* which opened at the St. James's Theatre in 1860; *Paris, or Vive Lemprière* at the Strand in 1866; and, finally *Helen, or Taken from the Greek* in 1866. As noted above, Jacques Offenbach's operetta *La Belle Hélène* at the Thèâtre des Varietés in Paris in 1864 was the object of countless parodies in England. Hollingshead's chronicles, for example record numerous productions at the Gaiety both in French and English between 1868 and 1871 (Hollingshead, 202; 243). The sensation caused by these stagings is well documented in the press of the time and by the sales of famous scores from the plays.[15] Based on Offenbach's operetta, *Helen; or, Taken from the Greek* was first staged in 1866 in London's Adelphi theatre (Nicoll, 289). Teresa Furtado, "one of the beauties of the sixties" (Scott, 231), played the role of Helena surpassing in fame Hortense Scheider, Helen in the French original which was put on the same year in London.[16]

Genette contends that Offenbach's hypotext is more imprecise than Scarronian travesty because it deals with the rape of Helen, not treated by Homer and only transmitted in highly hypertextual later versions. Genette

continues his argument by the statement that *La Belle Hélène* is but a modernization by means of anachronisms (66-7), like Burnand's *Helen.* Burnand adopts Offenbach's love triangle between Paris, Helen and Menelaus and domesticates the plot to the taste of the British audiences. Such domestication also affects the setting. The focus on the Temple of Jupiter, for example, allows for the introduction of sculptures and actresses in *poses plastiques* which helenize the play and attract the male audience.

Numerous examples from the arts and the press of the time manifest how the nineteenth-century Helen was, as a bastion of beauty, a paradigm for the vain and idle young women who threatened the institution of marriage within the Victorian social mores (Maguire, 2009; Reid, 1993). Burnand's Helen is "the fairest one with the golden locks,"[17] yet she also participates in the vindication of the female sages of her time.[18] Helen is the only main female character in the play. Nonetheless, she is more complex than her male counterparts, who are a mere parody of the epic hero. Burnand downplays their heroism which becomes the whims of the idle high-class young man in London. Furthermore, Helen provides the moral standpoint of the play manifesting the Victorian double standards. She represents both *the angel in the house*, who plays with coquettishness and virtue, and the seducer *femme fatale*, who scorns the rules of marriage. Burnand's burlesque lacks a clear political stance. Nonetheless, the intellectual superiority of Helen and her questioning of the bonds of marriage link her discourse with the classical burlesque heroines who denounced the entrapment of the numerous Caroline Norton in unwanted and unsuccessful arranged marriages.

The three burlesque refigurations of the myth of Helen discussed in this chapter raise questions on the issue of humour as catalyst for debating social issues. Although it is true that burlesque contributed little to the intellectual development of theatre, the analysis of the works en masse allows us to unravel the interplay between the social codes and cultural commodities in Victorian burlesque. Hugo Vamp's and Robert Brough's homonym plays *The Siege of Troy* reflect the reification of women in Victorian aesthetics. Burnand's *Helen; or Taken from the Greek* is chronicler of the two worlds opened for women in nineteenth-century England. On the one hand, Menelaus perpetuates pervading patriarchal ideologies. On the other, Paris and Helen give voice to the free will and licentiousness proclaimed by the end of the century and materialized, for example, in the drawings by Aubrey Beardsley. The evolution of the depiction of Helen on the Victorian stage manifests the mixed responses to the gradual integration of women into the cultural structures of modern societies. The myth of Helen, as an embodiment of women's beauty,

participates in the gender struggles that permeate an age rife with socio-cultural changes. The convergence of literary and iconic refigurations of the myth underscores the relevance of nineteenth-century burlesque as a mirror of the contemporary mindset.

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The Graphic
The North British Review
The Times

Notes

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[1] Sandbach's poem (1850) was based on *Antigone discovered over the dead body of her brother* by John Gibson (1866), which perpetuated the images of melodramatic heroines of the eighteenth century.

[2] See *ILN* 46, no.1315 (13 May 1865), 448; *ILN* 47, no.1329-1330 (19 August 1865), 165.

[3] The pieces were *Gilt salt cellar, lent by the Queen*, *Bronze group of Apollo and Daphne* and *Bronze Vase, lent by the Queen*. See *ILN* 46, no.1312-1313 (29 April 1865), 399.

[4] *Punch* (23 September 1865). For the depiction of Britannia as Great Britain see also *Britannia and the Admiralty*, *Punch* (14 December 1849), R. B. Peake's *Europe, Asia, Africa and America or Harlequin Mercury* (*Harlequin Traveller or the World inside out*) British Library Add MS 42919, 730-737b and the anonymous *A Masque*, British Library Add MS 42954.

[5] E.g: *The Marble Heart* by Charles Selby (1850); *The Elves or the Statue Bride* by Charles Selby (1856) (BL Add Ms 52962 Y); *The Marble Bride or the Nymphs of the Forest* (1857) by C. H. Hazlewood (BL Add MS 52964 V); *The Marble Maiden* by Suter (1866) (BL Add MS 53054 G); *The Animated Statue. A Modern Play in Five Acts* (1868) (BL Add MS 5370 F); *Pygmalion or the Statue Fair* by W. Brough (1867) (BL Add. Ms 53058 M). For the impact of the refiguration of the Galatea myth on the British stage see for example *Times* (24 May 1854) and *ILN* 8, no.201 (7 March 1846), 163.

[6] The 35th English edition of Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* appeared in 1824. The dictionary was compiled while Lemprière was still an undergraduate at Oxford (1788) and Lord Byron accused Keats of "versifying Tooke's *Pantheon* and Lempriere's *Dictionary*" (Clarke, 172).

[7] See *Penny Magazine*, 25 May 1839, for an account of Aeschylus' tragedies; see Kendrew (1826: 13, 19) for the Penny fables "The Waggoner and Hercules" and "Mercury and the Tortoise".

[8] See also *The Graphic* (20 January 1877) for an illustration of Mrs. Schliemann as Helen. See also *The Graphic* (8 May 1880) for the expectations for the performance of Christine Nilsson as Helen of Troy.

[9] Eg: Kenney (1866). See Hollingshead (201-202, 209, 243) for performances of *La Belle Hélène* at the Gaiety both in French and in English. See Mackinlay (215-225) for an analysis of the development of French operetta in England.

[10] Note the success of *Masks and Faces* by Charles Reade and Tom Taylor, which was first produced at the Haymarket Theatre in 1852. Reade and Taylor based their comedy on the misunderstandings caused by Mr. Ernest Vane's infatuation with Peg Woffington and the unexpected visit from his wife.

[11] See for example *The North British Review* 27, no.53 (Aug-Nov.), 162-194, for the engagement of the press with the debates. See *Punch,* 5 September 1857, for a