



Instructor: Lawrence Switzky

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Course Number: ENG473H5S

Course Title: Victorian Theatre and Drama

Course description: Despite their reputation for personal restraint and rigid etiquette, Victorian audiences were mesmerized by the exuberance and spectacle of the theatre. This course will survey the stage genres that emerged and gained traction during the nineteenth century, including melodrama (Gothic, domestic, nautical, spectacular), pantomime, comic opera, “society” drama, and farce, as well as the dramatic monologues by Browning and Tennyson that became a major poetic form in the middle of the century.

In addition to reading plays, we will also consider influential theories of acting and the experiments in optical illusion (magic lanterns, stage ghosts) that were a precursor of early cinema. Charles Dickens, an amateur actor, life-long theatrical obsessive, and frequent commentator on the relationship between stage acting and everyday life, will serve as an informal guide to the century’s theatrical scene. We will read a short novel by Dickens, some of his essays on the theatre as a moral and political institution, and accounts of Dickens as a performer who became so invested in his roles that he died after one of his staged readings.

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First Three Texts/Authors to be Studied: J. R. Planché, *The Vampire, Beauty and the Beast*; Douglas Jerrold, *Black-Eyed Susan*; Dion Boucicault, *London Assurance*

Method of Instruction: Informal lectures, open discussions, student presentations

Method of Evaluation: Attendance and participation (15%); In-class presentation (15%); In-class exam (20%); Annotated bibliography for final essay (15%); Final essay (35%)