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From Analogues to Digital: New Resources in Nineteenth-Century Theatre

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Abstract

This article outlines the scope, editorial choices, structure and research potential behind two major AHRC-funded projects which came to fruition at the end of 2008 offering a major contribution to the emerging field of Victorian theatre studies. The 'Buried Treasures' Project at Royal Holloway, University of London, and the British Library, provides a catalogue of all the plays that passed through the Lord Chamberlain's Office from 1852 to 1863, revealing a unique picture of interconnections between themes, theatres and playwrights as well as key information on authors, commissioning managers, dates and the licensing process. The Victorian Plays Project, based at Worcester University, allows free, public access to over 360 printed Acting Editions published by T.H. Lacy from 1847 to 1875, providing searchable materials to encourage research and future performances. Whilst the Lord Chamberlain's Plays form a unique, near complete collection of manuscripts for the professional theatre, the material for the Victorian Plays Project illustrates the resulting industry in publishing playscripts for practical use by provincial and amateur companies. Tracing the differences and areas of convergence, the two projects form an impression of a neglected cultural milieu, articulating the challenge of cataloguing and digitising the performative text. They also demonstrate the extent and flexibility of their output in terms of genre, revealing important links between in-house authors, theatres and publishing houses. What becomes clear through the 'unearthing', collation and identification of these materials is that it is only as they become more accessible that we can begin to challenge the long-held assumptions about Victorian drama and explore the complex interconnections between remediated cultural forms and frames of reference.

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