

## 'Englishness' and 'Burlesque' on the London Stage

: The Case of *The Dragon of Wantley*

MATSUMOTO, Naomi

*The Dragon of Wantley* (1737) is an English opera written by John Frederick Lampe on a libretto by Henry Carey. Although its premiere was not favourably received, it eventually became one of the most successful works on the 18<sup>th</sup>-century London stage, and that makes its neglect by modern scholars surprising. This article explores the opera particularly in relation to its 'Englishness' and the notion of the 'Burlesque', placing these features in the context of cultural and social influences on the work.

The work's indebtedness to a broadside ballad, *A true relation of the dreadful combat between Moore of Moore-Hall and the Dragon of Wantley* (1685) will be demonstrated, as will the ways in which 18<sup>th</sup>-century English connoisseurs exploited balladry as a countervailing force against foreign influences. Under such circumstances, the opera was welcomed by the audience who found in the work something reflective of their national psyche. *The Dragon* was a deliberate combination of 'high' (serious music) and 'low' (vulgarised text), and its music will be analysed to reveal how the composer deliberately exploited musico-dramaturgical conventions derived from opera seria.

Finally it will be proposed that *The Dragon*, through its fusion of high and low styles helped to transform the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century vogue of the burlesque into a theatrical genre. This idea is suggested by contemporary sources which distinguish the burlesque genre from those of 'parody' and 'satire'. Through this exploration of *The Dragon*, this paper will position the vogue for the burlesque within the 18<sup>th</sup>-century theatre - which accommodated every social stratum - and show how it was able to challenge and undermine the supposed dichotomy of the 'high' and 'low' arts.