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The Uncompromising Victorian

The Law and the Family in the Plays of Dion Boucicault

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Introduction: Boucicault and the Victorian audiences

If illegitimate, Dion may never have been baptized.
(Walsh 1915: 8)

Dion Boucicault was a man full of contradictions. He was a playwright who knew his literary worth but chose to write for profit, producing what the audience expected of him – or nearly so –, an actor who aimed to destroy the stereotyped stage Irishman, and turned it into another stereotype, as powerful as the one he had meant to destroy, a director who radically innovated the Victorian stage but always catered to the taste of the audience, a respectable member of the community who got married twice, possibly three times – once, at least, bigamously – a proud, rebellious Irishman who believed he was – or, at least, sometimes pretended to be – the scion of an aristocratic French house.

Controversy, or rather, a decided penchant for troublemaking, was a constant feature of Boucicault throughout his professional life. Well before he rose to national fame with *London Assurance*, when he was still working as a provincial actor under the pseudonym of Lee Moreton, he played the leading role in his own version of *Jack Sheppard* (1839), from William Harrison Ainsworth's novel (Walsh 1915: 20-1). At that time, many other adaptations of *Jack Sheppard* were being produced, among which perhaps the best was the one John Baldwin Buckstone wrote for the Adelphi theatre. Shortly afterwards, however, the Lord Chamberlain prohibited the production of all plays taken from Ainsworth's novel, because of the potentially explosive political undertones (*ibid.*: 21-2). Knowing what Boucicault wrote in later years, one may suppose that his own adaptation, which has not survived, was not one of the tamest.

Many passages from his plays contain barely disguised disturbing political undertones, or rather, a deeply felt awareness of disturbing social issues, which at that time might have been roughly termed 'radicalism'. As a show-businessman Boucicault was always very careful to tone down his utterances, and this has sometimes been mistaken for shallowness or opportunism, both by Victorian reviewers and modern critics¹. However, the points in which he dwells on the difficulties of Victorian society's marginal people – be they the poor, the

¹ For example, writing about *The Colleen Bawn*, Deirdre McFeely observes: "while he may have been something of an innovator, he was not a social critic or a rebel. He was not inviting people to imitate the irresponsible roguery of Myles; he simply wanted them to enjoy the rollicking spectacle" (2012: 20).

foreigners, or the Irish – are too many to be ignored. Even as a young man, in 1842, his powers of observation of the ills of his times were strong, as when he sketched the appalling conditions of the poor governesses, often orphaned or lacking the support of a family, always silently enduring the snubs of the household they worked in. In his comedy *The Irish Heiress* (1842) he had the villainess of the piece dismiss the heroine with these words: “I will undertake to break the matter to dear Norah. She can go as governess or companion. I know a family in Baker-street that give thirty pounds per annum, and find new mourning twice a year” (MRS COMFORT, in *The Irish Heiress*, 2.1).

The Irish Heiress was the first play that Boucicault signed with his own name. It was produced at Covent Garden Theatre in 1842, after which, besides countless adaptations, Boucicault wrote several other original plays, such as *Old Heads and Young Hearts*, *The School for Scheming*, *Love in a Maze*. Then, overworked and underpaid, he decided to forsake his literary ambitions and become a “successful showman” (Walsh 1915: 38). He kept his word, and indeed for most of his life he was one of the most successful show-businessmen of his times, even though, paradoxically, the best plays he wrote, those that even today are reprinted due to their undoubted literary merit, were almost invariably his greatest commercial successes.

Many of the controversial issues that can be detected in Boucicault’s works arise from a variety of influences. It should be noted, for instance, that as a young man he spent four years in Paris, from 1844 to 1848 (*ibid.*: 42-52). Paris in those years was the cradle of a variety of new ideas in the field of drama, but also the seat of widespread political unrest². On his return from the Continent, after the death of his first wife, the playwright began to work for Charles Kean, who had just opened the Princess’s Theatre. It was for Kean that Boucicault adapted several French plays, some of which were to become major successes for Kean himself and later for Henry Irving: *Pauline*, *The Corsican Brothers* – from Dumas – and *Louis XI*, from Casimir Delavigne. Years later, it was Boucicault that persuaded Irving to take up the role of Louis XI, in which the actor was vastly more successful than Kean, for whom the play had been originally adapted (*ibid.*: 43).

During his stay at the Princess’s Theatre, he wrote countless adaptations from the French for other theatres, and made his acting début under his real name, in the year 1852, also at the Princess’s Theatre, in his own play *The Vampire* (*ibid.*: 45-8). Immediately after the gothic play, he wrote a sentimental comedy, *The Prima Donna*, for his then mistress and future wife Agnes Robertson (1852).

² The connection between political unrest in Paris and French melodrama has been brilliantly discussed by Rahill (1967: xvi-xvii).

The break with Charles Kean came shortly after, and Boucicault left the Princess's Theatre with Agnes and went to America, where he wrote *The Poor of New York*, an enormously successful adaptation from the French. A partly original play, *Jessie Brown, or, the Relief of Lucknow*, followed. The playwright was no mean actor, even though the critics seldom agreed on the subject, and he was fearlessly versatile. For example, when *Jessie Brown* was produced, no member of the New York Wallack's Theatre company was willing to play the part of the villain of the piece, the wicked Sepoy, since the actor who played the role in a London production had been attacked by the mob, so it was Boucicault himself, not new to the roles of perfidious villains, that took it up (Walsh 1915: 54-5).

Ever attentive to the unspoken expectations of his audience, "relatively early in his career he gave signs of the emphasis he would place on spectacle and sensation" Booth 1965: 165), even inventing the term 'sensation drama', which he referred to his iconic success, *The Colleen Bawn* (*ibid.*). Actually, Boucicault was one of the very first directors in the history of theatre. He was sometimes the 'stage manager' in a production, but more often he was a kind of all-seeing, tyrannical author, who shaped all the aspects of the productions of his plays. He was so keen on creating a perfect show that he even planned to establish the perfect theatre. In the early 1860s he promoted a subscription, promising shares in a new venture: the ideal London theatre. Endowed with a very Victorian obsession for technical novelties, he tried to reshape Astley's Amphitheatre, that up to then had been devoted to equestrian shows, by turning it into a perfect venue, with winter gardens and all sorts of up-to-date facilities. On December 22, 1862, Astley's re-opened under the new name of Theatre Royal, Westminster. But the enterprise in the end proved an utter failure (Walsh 1915: 84-8).

In the Victorian theatre world, which was teeming with overbearing actor-managers and all-powerful theatre owners, managers and lessees, Boucicault, who never completely fitted into any of these categories, was considered one of the most tyrannical overseers of a play in production. Even the Bancrofts, writing their memoir when they were firmly part of the theatrical elite, still remembered his autocratic methods with some irritation, but also with boundless admiration for his ability to turn a piece into something new (Bancroft and Bancroft 1891: 73). Henry Irving himself, who is now considered one of the first directors in the modern sense of the word, learnt much from his collaboration with Boucicault³.

³ Gordon Craig wrote: "From Dion Boucicault I think he derived a good deal. I believe that one of the things taught by Boucicault was the importance of making a theatre pay. He was an experimenter – and so was Irving" (Gordon Craig, qtd in Irving 1989: 131).

One instance of his comprehensive idea of the production of a play can be found in a letter Boucicault stated he had written to American manager Laura Keene, giving her directions to get everything ready because he had found the subject for his next play, which was to be staged in her theatre – the play that was to become his greatest hit, *The Colleen Bawn*. The letter may well have been invented by Boucicault, who loved colouring anecdotes concerning the momentous events of his life, and as such has been given little credit by the critics. Its authenticity being very doubtful, as a document it is indeed irrelevant as far as the history of the composition of *The Colleen Bawn* is concerned, but it is revealing in one important point, which has been overlooked: as an example of how Boucicault, as an author, actor and director, planned a production in its entirety, disregarding the boundaries that in the nineteenth century were traditionally imposed on the author, the stage manager, the stage designer, and the actor. A passage from the letter is revealing of how he had the musical and visual dimensions of the production in his mind long before he thought of the words, and probably even the final shape the plot was to take. The visual and auditory effects were as important as the spoken word, even though the latter was far from unimportant, witness the continuous changes the scripts underwent in Boucicault's writing practice. The author, rather, seems to have conceived his works primarily as shows, keeping in mind the global effect of a production, from the start:

I have it! I send you seven steel engravings of scenes around Killarney. Get your scene-painter to work on them at once. I also send a book of Irish melodies, with those marked I desire scored for the orchestra. I will have the first act of a new play finished soon. We will rehearse it while I work on the second. We can get the play out in a fort-night (Dion Boucicault, qtd in Walsh 1915: 71).

Boucicault's radically experimental vein can be detected in many aspects of his work – as an actor, a director and a playwright – and the frequent clashes with the audiences and the critics are perhaps a symptom of his being before his time, even obscure in his obstinate efforts at renewal.

Perhaps it is for this reason that criticisms usually involved the productions of his plays considered as a whole. Writing in or about 1848, the author of the preface to the American Samuel French edition of Boucicault's comedy *Old Heads and Young Hearts* was surprisingly cutting in his remarks about Boucicault's comedies, but he considered them in production, not merely as the work of a playwright. Alluding to Boucicault's qualities as a director, the critic highlighted disparagingly what today is usually praised as one of his most innovative qualities, realism:

Boucicault [*sic*] may be considered to be the originator of what has been very aptly designated as the “*Upholstery school of COMEDY*”, in which the decorations and novel effects derivable from the appointments and accessories, which modern improvement has introduced on the stage, form the prominent features of the piece. That the comedies of this author owe much of their success to these novel introductions, cannot be denied [...] He has succeeded in producing two or three comedies, that never fail to amuse and attract audiences, aided as they are by the adornments of costly stage appointments (Anonymous, “Editorial Introduction”, in *Old Heads and Young Hearts*, iii).

Besides his projected building of the perfect theatre – a plan that ended up in complete wreck – he also tried, with equally disastrous results, to reintroduce in the British theatre a kind of pantomime that followed the old, traditional pattern, and was completely performed in dumb show (*Lady-bird*, 1862). For this experiment he chose the worst venue he could find, the London scene, that was by then accustomed to the scenic splendours of Covent Garden and Drury Lane (Walsh 1915: 89). Another disastrous failure, the notorious *Babil and Bijou*, was a *fantasie* that Boucicault and his patron, the Earl of Londesborough, meant to be the most grandiose show ever produced in a theatre. Nevertheless it was, financially speaking, a risk that the Earl had been happy to run, and perhaps the loss had been calculated from the start (*ibid.*: 119-21). Considerable success, meanwhile, was enjoyed by his rewriting of Otway’s *Venice Preserv’d*, to which the playwright added a scene taken from Lord Byron’s *Marino Faliero*, a move which now would probably be termed a Post-modern essay in the appropriation of the Western Canon, but which, to his contemporaries, looked like brazen nonchalance (*ibid.*: 123).

Despite the fact that he did write some of the Victorian age’s most successful box-office hits, his relationship with the critics – sometimes also with his audience – was uneasy throughout his professional life. This certainly derived from the fact that he was indeed an innovator, as Gordon Craig styled him, but also from his disregard, perhaps contempt, for the moral standards of the age he lived in. His attitude was particularly at odds with the time-honoured conventions of melodrama, the theatrical subgenre to which his own plays often belong, or, at least, with which they have many points in common. Victorian melodrama had a very fixed set of moral values, which lasted up to the end of the first world war, when “moral boundaries” became “vague” (Booth 1965: 181)⁴. Boucicault’s attitude, when detected by contemporary critics, was mistaken for heartless immorality and invariably led to the critical failure of a play. Actually, an analysis of Boucicault’s plays shows how the author, being an outsider – an Irishman, a bohemian, but also an illegitimate son – saw the strict

⁴ See also *ibid.*: 155.

moral code of Victorian England as a senseless restriction to individual freedom. Far from leading him to nihilism or immorality, the marginal position he found himself in made him a constant and vehement advocate for higher standards and a higher law, which may be said to correspond with the law of Nature or with the author's own idiosyncratic version of Christianity.

Boucicault's years of feverish activity made him rich on several occasions, but each time he would lose his fortune. In his long working life he wrote and produced hundreds of plays, both original works and adaptations from a French source or English novel. Many of these plays are now lost to time, and many survive only in manuscript form.

This study offers a re-evaluation of some of the playwright's works, especially those that have received little critical attention, some of which perhaps have been undeservedly forgotten and would still be enjoyable in performance today. It also aims to reconstruct their impact on Victorian audiences, which sometimes were unprepared for the destabilising, revolutionary quality of this rebellious Irishman.

Chronology¹

1822. December 27. Born at 47 Lower Gardiner Street (or at 28 Middle Gardiner Street), Dublin, the son of Samuel Smith Boursiquot and Anne Maria Darley, possibly the illegitimate son of Dr Dionysius Lardner by Anne Maria Darley.

1828. February. Anne joins Lardner in London, taking the children with her. Samuel Boursiquot lives with them for a year, then returns to Ireland alone. Boucicault attends Dr Hessey's school, Hampstead, Zion House School, Margate, Bruce Castle School, Tottenham.

1834. Attends University College School.

1835. Collegiate School, Brentford.

1836. Plays Rolla in a school production of Sheridan's *Pizarro*. Writes his first dramatic sketch, which years later will become *Napoleon's Old Guard*. Returns to Dublin, where he attends Dr Geoghegan's Academy, St Stephen's Green.

1837. Back in London, he is apprenticed to Dr Lardner as a civil engineer.

1838-39. Begins acting in the provinces under the stage name of Lee Moreton, mainly in minor and Irish roles. *A Lover by Proxy*, *A Legend of Devil's Dyke* are written, but not performed.

1839. February 18. *Lodgings to Let* opens at Bristol's Theatre Royal. It is his first play to be performed professionally. March 9, the play is transferred to the Haymarket Theatre, London, by Benjamin Webster. It runs for one night only. Writes *Jack Sheppard* (adapted from W.H. Ainsworth), playing the title role in Hull. Quarrels with the manager.

1840. Works as a clerk at the Guinness Brewery in Dublin, then moves to London, and enters the Dramatic Academy, Dean Street.

1841. Financial crisis, followed by his first success: *London Assurance* (March 4), written for Madame Vestris and Charles Mathews of the Covent Garden Theatre. He joins the London literary circles.

¹ See Walsh 1915 and Fawkes 2011.

1842. February 7. *The Irish Heiress*. After its failure, he joins Benjamin Webster at the Haymarket. Webster will finance his plays for the next eight years. *A Lover by Proxy* (April 21), *Alma Mater; or, A Cure for Coquettes* (September 19), *Curiosities of Literature* (September 24), *The Bastille* (December 19, written with Webster). Decides to begin adapting French plays for money – anonymously, at first.

1843. *Woman* (2 October, Covent Garden, under Henry Wallack), 9 October: *The Old Guard* (New Princess's Theatre, Oxford Street), 1 November: *Victor and Hortense* (Haymarket, adapted from the French), *Laying a Ghost* (Haymarket Theatre, adapted).

1844. March: *Used Up* (Haymarket, adapted from the French), *Lolab, or, The Wreck-light* (Haymarket, adapted), April: *Love in a Sack* (Haymarket, adapted), September: *Mother and Son* (Adelphi, adapted), *The Confederacy* (Haymarket, revised from an original play by Vanbrugh). 18 November: an original play, *Old Heads and Young Hearts* (Haymarket). Refuses to alter the script according to Charles Mathews's suggestions. Meets Douglas Jerrold and Bulwer-Lytton. December: he is sent to France by Webster. Meets Phineas T. Barnum.

1845. February 6: *A Soldier of Fortune* (adapted with Webster, Adelphi Theatre), 23 June: *Peg Woffington* (from a novel by Charles Reade, Adelphi), 9 July: marries Anne Guiot, a wealthy widow. 25 August: *Enquire Within* (Lyceum).

1846. February: *The Old School* (Haymarket). May: *Up the Flue* (written with Charles Lamb Kenney: Haymarket), *Mr Peter Piper* (Haymarket). July: *The Wonderful Water Cure* (operetta, written with Webster: Haymarket), *Shakespeare in Love* (Haymarket).

1847. *The School for Scheming* (Haymarket), *Love in a Maze* (Princess's Theatre). *La Salamandrine* (ballet: Covent Garden). June: flies on the Great Balloon of Nassau, from Cremorne Pleasure Gardens to Essex.

1848. Back in Paris in February. His wife dies some time during that year, perhaps at Aix-la-Chapelle in March, or perhaps falling from a height in Switzerland. Summer: back in London to manage Dumas's Théâtre Historique Company at the Drury Lane Theatre. November: bankruptcy. 22 November: *The Knight of Arva* (Haymarket). Begins campaigning for the rights of dramatic authors, but fails.

1849. November 26: *The Willow Copse* (written with Charles Lamb Kenney: Adelphi).

1850. *La Garde Nationale* (Queen's Theatre, January). September 12, *La Giralda* (adapted from Scribe: Haymarket).

1850-53. Works as literary advisor and house dramatist to Charles Kean at the Princess's Theatre, Oxford Street. For Kean he adapts from French originals: *Pauline* (1851), *The Corsican Brothers* (24 February 1852), *Faust and Marguerite* (1854), *Louis XI* (1855). He also writes original plays: *Love in a Maze* is produced in March

1851 at the Princess's theatre. He adapts French plays also for the Adelphi (*Belphegor*, with Webster), the Haymarket and the Olympic. Adapts *O'Flannigan and the Fairies* (from Tyrone Power, Adelphi), *Sixtus V* (with John Bridgeman, Olympic), *The Queen of Spades* (from Scribe, Drury Lane). Makes his first appearance on stage under his own name, in his own play *The Vampire* (1852), under Charles Kean.

1853. Following a fierce quarrel with Kean, sails for New York with Agnes Robertson, Charles Kean's former protégée and ward, whom he had met during the run of *The Vampire* and seduced shortly after. The enraged Kean is left with the still unproduced scripts of *Faust and Margaret* and *Louis XI*, a play that will become one of his (and later Irving's) greatest successes.

1853-56. Tours the United States with Agnes, whom he has probably married, and who has become an American star. Writes and adapts plays for her: *The Young Actress* (from Edward Lancaster), *To Parents and Guardians* (from Tom Taylor), *Love and Money* (from *The School for Scheming*, produced at Wallack's Theatre, New York), *The Fox Hunt*, *Andy Blake, or, The Irish Diamond* (from the French), *The Devil's in It*, *Janet Pride*. He begins acting again: *The Fairy Star*, *Apollo in New York*. In December 1853 he books Hope Chapel, New York, for a series of lectures.

1855. *Agnes Robertson at Home*. On 10 May his first son, Dion, is born in New Orleans. *Grimaldi, or, Scenes in the Life of an Actress* (from the French), *The Cat Changed into a Woman*, *Rachel is Coming*. On November 28 opens the Gaiety Theatre in New Orleans and begins directing his own plays. News of his death. *The Chameleon*. Engages the Keller Troupe for tableaux. *Azael, or, The Prodigal Son*, a biblical drama.

1856. *Una*, a biblical drama, *The Phantom* (adapted from his own play *The Vampire*), *Blue Belle*. The word 'Bourcicaulted', meaning 'plagiarised', is coined. He is instrumental in the Congress's approval of the amendment to the 1831 Copyright act, on behalf of dramatic authors and composers.

1857. General director of the promenade concerts at the Academy of Music, New York. First matinée performances in America. On October 10 Eve, the Boucicaults' second child, is born in New York. With the help of Charles Seymour, editor of *The Daily Times*, and other journalists, writes *The Poor of New York* for New York impresario Lester Wallack. Enormous success, especially of the sensation scene. *The Invisible Husband* (a rewriting of *Giralda*), *Wanted: a Widow* (written with Charles Seymour).

1858. Opens the Washington Theatre, a new theatre in Washington in partnership with William Stuart, but leaves after only four weeks due to a quarrel with his partner. Writes for Agnes *Pauvette* (adapted from the French) and *The Pope of Rome* (adapted from his play *Sixtus V*). Both are produced at Niblo's, New York. *Jessie Brown, or, The Relief of Lucknow* (Wallack's Theatre, New York). *Brigham Young, or, The Revolt of the Harem* (a play about the Mormons, written with the help of some journalists).

1859. Again, with William Stuart, opens a theatre in New York, formerly the Metropolitan theatre, renamed "The Winter Garden"; 23 May, his third child, Darley George (Dot), born in New York. Dot was to be the first English director. September: the Winter Garden opens with *Dot* (adapted from Dickens's *The Cricket on the Hearth*), 13 October, *Chamooni III, Smike* (from *Nicholas Nickleby*, where he plays Mantalini to his wife's Smike). Writes and produces *The Octoroon*, a melodrama on the issue of slavery (Winter Garden, 9 December), where he plays the Indian Wah-no-tee. In *The Octoroon* a camera is shown on a stage for the first time. The Boucicaults leave after the first week, but the play goes on without them. Quarrels with William Stuart and moves to Laura Keene's Theatre, New York (Keene was the first American female manager).

1860. After the complete failure of *Effie Deans* and *Vanity Fair* (despite the title, an adaptation from the French), he hurriedly writes (or finishes) *The Colleen Bawn* (from Gerald Griffin's novel *The Collegians*), which première at Laura Keene's Theatre on 29 March with Agnes in the leading role, Laura Keene as Anne Chute and Boucicault as Myles-na-Coppaleen. The phrase 'sensation drama' is coined. Huge success of *The Colleen Bawn*. Buys two houses in New York. 18 July: sails back to England. Signs a contract with Benjamin Webster: *The Colleen Bawn* opens at the Adelphi on 10 September 1860. First long run in theatre history (360 nights).

1861. 4 February: creates his first touring company. It is the first time a West End production goes on tour. Buys Hereford House, Brompton Road, Earl's Court. April 1: brings *The Colleen Bawn* to Dublin, starring himself and Agnes. Signs an agreement with Benjamin Webster to take up the artistic direction of the Adelphi; it is the first time an author is granted this. 18 November: *The Octoroon* proves a failure. He changes the last act, finishing the play with a happy ending. 18 June: after a legal battle, leaves Webster, transferring *The Colleen Bawn* to Drury Lane. 9 August: birth of his daughter Patrice.

1862. Takes a two-year lease on Astley's Amphitheatre, renames it the New Theatre Royal, Westminster. The theatre opens on 22 December (closing only a few months later), with Tom Taylor's *To Parents and Guardians* and *The Relief of Lucknow*. 26 December: *Lady Bird; or, Harlequin Lord Dundreary*, a pantomime in dumb-show. Appoints future matinée idol H.J. Montague secretary to the Westminster theatre, then engages him as an actor.

1863. 26 January: *The Trial of Effie Deans* (a new version of *Jeanie Deans*). Introduces afternoon performances. 3 July: is declared bankrupt. Begins a provincial tour. Nervous breakdown. December: *How She Loves Him!* In Liverpool, he turns *The Poor of New York* into *The Poor of Liverpool* (the play, first produced at the Liverpool Amphitheatre by William Robert Copeland, is changed again and again into *The Poor of Leeds*, *The Poor of Manchester*, *The Streets of Islington*, *The Streets of London*).

1864. The play, as *The Streets of London*, is transferred to the Princess's Theatre, London, whose manager George Vining pays Boucicault a share of the profits. It is the first time a playwright is not paid on a fixed basis. Buys a new house in London, 326 Regent

Street, where, in October, hosts the Davenport Brothers, a troupe of sham mediums, which were attacked by the majority of the press and which he defends. October 24, *Omo; or, The Sea of Ice* (from the French) opens at the Liverpool Amphitheatre. 25 October: sails for Dublin, where, at the Theatre Royal, *Arrah-na-Pogue* opens on 7 November. Writes anti-English lyrics to the ballad *The Wearing of the Green* (two years later, after the Fenian bombing of Clerkenwell Prison, he has to remove the song from the play).

1865. Rewrites *Arrah-na-Pogue* and transfers it to the Princess's Theatre, London. Writes *Rip Van Winkle* for American actor Joseph Jefferson. The play runs at the Adelphi for 170 nights.

1866. May: writes *The Parish Clerk* for Joseph Jefferson. The play opens at the Prince's Theatre, Manchester, on 30 April. On 30 July *The Two Lives of Mary Leigh* opens at the same theatre, starring his mistress Lydia Foote, Kate Terry and Henry Irving. 15 September: *The Long Strike* (from Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton*) opens at the Lyceum Theatre, London. On 6 October *The Flying Scud* opens at the Holborn Theatre. On 5 November *Hunted Down* (a new version of *The Two Lives of Mary Leigh*) opens at the St James's Theatre.

1867. *A Wild Goose Chase* (Haymarket). *How She Loves Him!* (Prince of Wales, starring Marie Wilton, her husband Squire Bancroft, and H.J. Montague). Presents a petition to Parliament asking for a copyright agreement between Britain and France, on behalf of the French Society of Authors. 27 February: birth of his fifth child, Nina.

1868. Serialisation of his novel *Foul Play*, written with Charles Reade, in *Once-a-Week*. The novel is turned into two different stage versions: *Foul Play*, by Boucicault, and *The Scuttled Ship*, by Reade. On 12 August, *After Dark*, from D'Ennery and Grangé (adapted with their permission), opens at the Princess's Theatre. Augustin Daly accuses him of borrowing the sensation scene (a last-minute rescue of the hero from an incoming train) from one his own plays and is granted a royalty for every American performance of Boucicault's play. While in Dublin for the opening of a new version of *Arrah-na-Pogue*, announces his – and his wife's – retirement from acting. Psychological breakdown, during which he writes *Presumptive Evidence*, adapted from *Le courrier de Lyon*, by Siraudin, Delacour and Moreau.

1869. *Formosa, or, The Railroad to Ruin* (Drury Lane, starring Henry Irving and Katherine Rodgers). Collaborates with Henry J. Byron in *Lost at Sea* (Adelphi). Birth of his sixth child, Aubrey. At the author's request, he revises Tom Robertson's *Dreams*. Writes the Irish play *The Rapparee, or, The Treaty of Limerick* (Princess's Theatre), *A Christmas Story* (Gaiety Theatre).

1870. *Paul Lafarge* and *A Dark Night's Work* (Princess's Theatre). *Jezabel, or, The Dead Reckoning* (Holborn).

1871. Writes for Lydia Foote *Elfie, or, The Cherry Tree Inn* (Theatre Royal, Glasgow, then Gaiety Theatre, London). Writes *Kerry, or, Night and Morning* (Gaiety Theatre). Returns to acting, and has an enormous success in the title role, which will also be the last role he will perform. Death of Tom Robertson. Decides to return to the US.

1872. August 29, *Babil and Bijou* opens at the Covent Garden Theatre, produced in partnership with the Earl of Londesborough, written with J.R. Planché (music by Hervé). It is conceived as the most spectacular show ever performed. The costs are enormous, and the losses considerable. Nervous breakdown: after the first night, he sails to America.

1873. He and Agnes receive American citizenship. Agnes returns to England alone. He sets up house in New York with Katherine Rodgers. *Daddy O'Dowd* (Booth's Theatre, New York). Writes *Mora*, then *Mimi*, for Katherine Rodgers (adapted from Murger), *Led Astray* (Union Square Theatre), *A Man of Honour* (Wallack's Theatre).

1874. Journey to the Far West. Writes the burlesque *Boucicault in California*. Engages David Belasco, then a young actor, as his secretary. *Belle Lamar* (Booth's Theatre). Revises Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*. November: the *Shaughbraun* premières at Wallack's Theatre, New York. Engages Ada Dyas, now of Daly's company, whom he had previously worked with in *Hunted Down* at the St. James's Theatre.

1876. Begins an affair with Clara Rousby in Boston. Back in Britain, writes to Benjamin Disraeli for the release of Irish political prisoners. On January 22, his son Willy dies in a railway accident. Tours the provinces holding special benefits for the families of Fenian prisoners. April: a French version of *Arrah-na-Pogue* opens at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, Paris. Rewrites *Louis XI* for Henry Irving. Back in New York with Katherine Rodgers, writes *Forbidden Fruit*.

1877. After an American tour, settles in New York with Katherine Rodgers, at 20 East 15th Street. *Marriage* opens at Wallack's Theatre, New York.

1878. *The Dead Secret* (from Wilkie Collins's novel) opens at the 5th Avenue Theatre, New York, starring Katherine Rodgers. *Clarissa Harlowe* opens at Wallack's, then his revised version of *The School for Scandal*.

1879. Rewrites *Pauline* as *Spell-Bound* (Wallack's Theatre). Takes a six-month lease of Booth's Theatre, New York. Writes a new play, *Rescued*, then *Contempt of Court* and *How She Loves Him!*. Another nervous breakdown. Is arrested by the sheriff's officers in New York, at Agnes's request, to hinder him from leaving the States and evade the divorce cause she has started. The suit will be dropped in 1883.

1880. In London, produces *A Bridal Tour* (rewriting of his own *Marriage*), then *Therese, or, The Maid of Croissy*. Acts in *The O'Dowd* (rewriting of *Daddy O'Dowd*).

1881. Tours the States and then England with his Irish plays. During the tour he sells copies of his pamphlet *A Fireside Story of Ireland*. Last visit to Dublin.

1882. In Boston, helps Oscar Wilde to cope with the difficulties of his lecture tour. Plans to write a play on Don Quixote for Henry Irving. Together they decide to found a school of dramatic art.

1883. Writes *The Amadan*, opening at the Boston Museum in February. *Vice Versa* opens at Springfield, Massachusetts in March. Writes a short autobiography under the name of his friend Charles Lamb Kenney. His new plays are not successful and he lives by acting alone.

1884. His new play, *Robert Emmet*, opens at McVicker's Theatre, Chicago.

1885. *The Jilt* (rewriting of *The Flying Scud*). Begins to tour Australia. In Sydney marries twenty-one-year-old actress Louise Thorndyke. Agnes declares the marriage bigamous, his children sever contacts with him. The couple return to the States. July, takes *The Jilt* to London. His last appearance in the city. Agnes files for divorce, Boucicault's marriage is declared bigamous, he marries Louise for the second time after his divorce from Agnes is granted.

1887. Writes *Ourselves*, a comedy, rewrites *Belle Lamar* as *Fin Mac Coul of Skibbereen*, writes *Phryne*. Tours the States.

1888. Adapts Walter Scott's novel *Guy Mannering* as *Cuishla-ma-Chree*. Decides to stop touring. Is asked by Albert Palmer of the Madison Square Theatre, New York, to direct his newly-founded drama school.

1890. Writes *A Tale of a Coat* for the young actor Sol Smith Russell. The play fails. Contracts pneumonia and dies in New York on 18 September.

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