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Introduction

- 1 When they first presented *Utopia Limited* on October 7, 1893, before their now regular wealthy middle-class audience at the Savoy Theatre in London, librettist William Schwenck Gilbert and composer Arthur Sullivan must have known that, only three years later, they would be forced to put an end to their fruitful yet tumultuous twenty-two year-long collaboration – thus ending a unique, and uniquely successful cycle in the history of British music, counting no less than 25 comic operas. The big popular enduring successes – genuine musical hits at the time – of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, or *The Lass That Loved a Sailor* (May 28, 1878), *Patience*, or *Bunthorne's Bride* (April 23, 1881) and above all *The Mikado*, or *The Town of Titipu* (March 14, 1885) had been produced amongst and followed by far less acclaimed works; the financial difficulties caused by the costly running of the Savoy started to endanger the very survival of their musical/commercial enterprise, and, above all, one may here contend, “*the job was done*”. Royalty, the judiciary, the navy, the taste for exoticism and the Decadent movement – one by one, the political, ideological and aesthetic pillars of what was regarded as essentially British had been staged, lampooned, satirized and turned into ludicrous topsy-turvy librettos and catchy tunes. Little more could be added to the now famous gallery of mock generals, clergymen, judges and sovereigns in disguise. Likewise, resorting to some form of geographical and cultural uprooting could no longer produce the fresh sense of satirical detachment which had proved so successful with *The Mikado* and its staged Japanese setting, stock characters and vaguely Asiatic chords. As accordingly noted in the first-night review of the *Times* (on

Monday October 9, 1893), “*The introduction of English manners and customs into remote or imaginary countries has furnished forth many a piece of satire, whether on the stage or off*”.¹

- 2 Of course, the scope of such imaginary settings on which to transpose British idiosyncrasies was boundless. Having previously staged a mock Cornish Penzance with high-pitched pirates and maids, and an even more imaginary town of Titipu, complete with a Mikado, a Lord High Executioner and a Lord High Everything Else, Gilbert resorted this time to an even more distant fairy land – some vaguely idyllic South Pacific tropical island aptly called Utopia, and clearly a mock reference to Bacon’s Bensalem – on which to project an even stranger topic for a comic opera, that of the legal, corporate concept of limited liability. Gilbert’s short-lived, extremely unsuccessful career at the bar may account for his persistent interest in legal issues and recurring satire on corporations,² from the very first opera *Thespis* of 1871 down to *Iolanthe* (1881) and *The Gondoliers* (1889) – all of them staging adventurous business promoters, dubious syndicates and incompetent boards of directors. Having worked as a barrister between 1857 and 1866 – for a final total income of £100! – Gilbert had experienced (if not maybe fully understood) the gradual loosening of company law, following the 1825 repeal of the Bubble Act of 1720 and the expanding availability of corporate business forms. Consolidated by the 1862 Companies Act, the 1856 Joint Stock Companies Act was (and is still) regarded as the hallmark of the modern corporation – a legal form of business enterprise which the Victorians proudly regarded as quintessentially British. Not exactly, *per se*, the most obvious topic for a professedly comic opera. Unless transposed to the far-away kingdom of King Paramount, whose eldest daughter, Princess Zara, is staged as she finally returns from a five-year stay in England, the latter proudly described by the Utopian vice chamberlain himself as “*the greatest, the most powerful, the wisest country in the world*” – of course a telling instance of mock encomium. Although fictionally and geographically remote, the British Isles are immediately made to sound very close to the audience. Echoing the most recent political debates of the time- debates clearly centered on the issue of citizenship, the mention of “*that glorious country called Great Britain, to which some add – but others not – Ireland*” is a clear reference to the then ongoing debate on the Second Home Rule Bill, which had just been defeated by the Lords only a month before *Utopia limited* had its first performance. Therefore visually absent from the stage, Britain is yet immediately to be heard, even before the curtain rises, under the form of a loud, bombastic overture mostly for brass instruments – an “*Imperial March*” which is a resounding reminder of Handel’s court music and English oratorios, and not exactly the kind of tune evocative of tropical islands.

Utopia Limited, Overture

- 3 Back from some mock reversed Grand Tour, Princess Zara has not only completed her academic education with a “*high degree at Girton*”, in Cambridge. Her return opens the thrilling prospect of having the Utopian island being “*completely Anglicized*” and, to quote one the most fervent Utopian maids, to gain “*English institutions, English tastes and oh, English fashions!*” Even before the princess sails back from “*that glorious country called England*”, as praised by the King himself, the latter “*has ordered that the Utopian language shall be banished from his court, and that all communications shall henceforward be made in the English tongue*” – a convenient decree for the Savoy’s London audience, linguistically immune to the kind of vaguely Oceanic gibberish uttered by the Utopian Lord Exploder, “*Lalabalele tatala! Callabale lalabalica falahle!*”

- 4 With verbal Anglicization on its way, Utopia's citizens – or rather subjects – are about to be given a fully new identity once "*finished*" by Princess Zara and the so-called "*Flowers of Progress*" she has brought back from the British isles. In the meantime, before the introduction of the British form of "*government by party*", Utopians, having tried "*many unhappy experiments in the direction of an ideal Republic*", presently enjoy their own political version of a constitutional monarchy, a form of "*despotism tempered by dynamite*" in which the king of Utopia is constantly followed by Tarara, the Lord Exploder, whose sole responsibility is "*to blow up His Majesty with dynamite, on his very first lapse from political or social propriety*". A ludicrous, theatrical situation of course, the occasion for noisy crackers to be pulled on stage, but also one which may have been suggested to Gilbert, given his legal background, by the still active *Lord Campbell's Libel Act* of 1843, which toughened the penalties in such cases. Except that this *Libel Act*, often regarded as one of the landmarks of the puritan Victorian age, did not envisage the quite unlikely case of "*self libel*" yet practiced by King Paramount, who has found here a convenient legal loophole. Mocking the then very popular column in the *Times*, the King keeps sending numerous "*biting, trenchant, sub-acid*" letters to the *Palace Peeper*, under the epistolary guises of *Junius Junior*, *Senex Senior* and *Mephistopheles Minor*, exposing his own "*royal goings-on*" and "*abominable immoralities*" with headlines such as "*Another Royal Scandal*" and "*Ribald Royalty*". Easily maneuvered by the two Judges of the Supreme Court, the King has even written a comic opera called *King Tuppence, or A Good Deal Less than Half a Sovereign*.
- 5 With the added effect for the audience of a form of dramatic *mise en abyme*, *King Tuppence* promises to be a burlesque of the king's appearance and peculiarities, sung by "*the celebrated English tenor, Mr. Wilkinson*". Although the very Englishness of the singer is itself revealed to be a cheap trick deliberately played on the audience – "*they wouldn't listen to any tenor who didn't call himself English*" –, the more serious function of this opera within the opera remains political, as it enables King Paramount to be equally feared and mocked by his subjects. As Supreme Court Judge Scaphio notes:

During the day thousands tremble at your frown, during the night (from 8 to 11) thousands roar at it. During the day your most arbitrary pronouncements are received by your subjects with abject submission – during the night, they shout with joy at your most terrible decrees. It's not every monarch who enjoys the privilege of undoing by night all the despotic absurdities he's committed during the day.
- 6 This interesting case of despotic schizophrenia launches King Paramount on a surprisingly gay song, reflecting on life as a farce. Pondering on the infant's confusing early years, he himself sums up the whole absurdity of it by blurring linguistic barriers and stating that "*every symptom tends to show you're decidedly de trop*." If French is clearly here "*de trop*", and Utopia threatens to turn into a modern Babel, to top it all, even the king's terrible punishments are not truly of his own invention, as he admits to be "*in constant communication with the Mikado of Japan, who is the leading authority on such points*" – an instance of Gilbert's witty play on self-references creating for the Savoy's audience an unexpected community of fake operatic tyrants.
- 7 With Utopian identity thus questioned, and the subjects ruled by a sovereign whose use of language betrays both a split political personality and a tendency towards bilingualism, the king's younger daughters, who have stayed on the island, embody a first promising step towards the full Anglicization expected with the return home of their older sister. Princesses Nekaya and Kalyba have indeed been "*finished by an English Lady*", who goes by the name of Lady Sophy, "*of mature years and extreme gravity of demeanour and dress*." As

trophies of “*maidenly perfection [...] from the English standpoint*”, they are to be daily exhibited in public. The stage directions specify that they show themselves as “*very modest and demure in their appearance, dress and manner, with their hands folded and their eyes cast down.*” The rather plain chorus “*How fair! how modest! how discreet!*”, sung in unison, is nonetheless preceded by an orchestral prelude full of intricate melodic variations and appoggiaturas which betray the fake simplicity and deceitful naturalness forced upon the twin princesses in the name of Britishness.

How fair! how modest! how discreet!
 How bashfully demure!
 See how they blush, as they've been taught,
 At this publicity unsought!
 How English and how pure!
 How English and how pure!

- 8 Turned into mere “*clockwork toys*”, as they proudly yet oddly admit, and exhibited “*to loud applause from ten to four without a pause*”, the two princesses have become no more than parrot-like puppets and rigid imitations of a supposedly quintessential English modesty – “*demurely coy – divinely cold.*” Having thus being molded into a fake foreign national identity, they stand as Utopian versions of E.T. Hoffman’s Olympia. The deathly process of reification is staged by the twins themselves whose mechanical gestures can be arrested at any time and – a miracle of modernity – turned into frozen snapshots, as they state in a duet, directly alluding to George Eastman’s first Kodak camera of 1888 and its then famous motto “*You press the button, we do the rest*”:

Kalyba:
 Our celebrated “Sir!!”
 Then all the crowd take down our looks
 In pocket memorandum books.
 To diagnose
 Our modest pose
 The Kodaks do their best:

Nekaya:
 If evidence you would possess
 Of what is maiden bashfulness,
 You only need a button press –

Kalyba: And we do all the rest!

- 9 The following practical “course of maiden courtship, from the start to the triumphant matrimonial finish” is sung by Lady Sophy, complete with frozen tableaux and illustrative gestures by the two princesses where rigid etiquette and artful poses are in accordance with the chorus’s statement: “*English girls of well-bred notions, / Shun all unrehearsed emotions, / English girls of highest class / Practice them before the glass.*” And the same chorus to conclude, on the happy prospect of a gradual Anglicization of all Utopian maidens: “*Bashful girls will soon be plenty!*”
- 10 Yet the true root of the matter remains elsewhere. The king’s plan may have been circumscribed to the family circle only, but his elder daughter has a bigger picture in mind. In fact, she wants to fully eradicate the military, political, legal and economic shortcomings of her native “*semi barbarous society*” which she fears may be shocking to the “*puritanical British sensitiveness*” of the imported “*flowers of progress*” she brought back from Great Britain. Having no word too harsh for her own subjects – “*South Pacific island viviparians, little better than clothed Barbarians*” – she has resolved to turn those Utopian savages into true-blood English citizens, and has therefore landed with “*six Representatives*

of the principal causes that have tended to make England the powerful, happy and blameless country which the consensus of European civilization has declared it to be” – officers of the army and navy, a lord chamberlain, a queen’s counsel and MP, a spokesman for the newly introduced county council system (following the 1888 Local Government Act), and an aptly named Mr Goldbury, a company promoter and the advocate of a radical change in the Utopian monarchy, the latter to be registered as a corporation under the already-mentioned Companies Act of 1862.

- 11 Yet, before any tangible progress can be achieved under the invigorating influence of those imported “flowers”, Princess Zara’s return triggers an unexpected love quarrel between the two Utopian Supreme Court Judges, both “madly, passionately” in love with the king’s elder daughter. Captain Fitzbattleaxe, of the British First Life Guards, shipped to Utopia to reform the national army, immediately proves the effective superiority of the so-called “English fashion” when it comes to solving delicate amorous affairs – and subsequently ridiculing the Parliament’s much-criticized readiness to enact legislation on any trivial matter.

Scaphio and Phantis: The English fashion? What is that?

Fitzbattleaxe: It’s very simple. In England, when two gentlemen are in love with the same lady, and until it is settled which gentleman is to blow out the brains of the other, it is provided, by the Rival Admirers’ Clauses Consolidation Act, that the lady shall be entrusted to an officer of Household Cavalry as stakeholder, who is bound to hand her over to the survivor (on the Tontine principle) in a good condition of substantial and decorative repair.

Scaphio: Reasonable wear and tear and damage by fire excepted?

Fitzbattleaxe: Exactly.

Phantis: Well, that seems very reasonable.

- 12 This of course is made to sound anything but reasonable, which does not prevent the chorus of the Utopian populace from loudly welcoming the Flowers of British Progress: “All hail, ye types of England’s power / Ye heaven-enlightened band! / We bless the day and bless the hour / That brought you to our land.” The long-expected parade starts with the Queen’s counsel and MP, whose very name, Sir Bailey Bare, is unmistakably an echo of the Old Bailey in London. Introduced as no less than “a great arithmetician who can demonstrate with ease that two and two are three”, “an eminent logician” and “a marvelous philologist who’ll undertake to show that ‘yes’ is but another and neater form of ‘no’”, Sir Bailey prides in stating that “whether you’re an honest man or whether you’re a thief depends on whose solicitor has given me my brief.” The very definition of citizenship being grounded in law, and Sir Bailey Bare having being imported precisely to reform the Utopian legal system, his more than relative view on judicial matters casts a serious doubt on the benefits derived by king Paramount’s kingdom from his expertise.
- 13 The whole comprehensive reformation of Utopia’s “social and political arrears” also relies on the adoption of “England’s physical and moral cleanliness” by the natives. Lord Dramaleigh, a British Lord Chamberlain, and Mr. Blushington, of the County Council, are both embarked on this cleansing mission, the former to “purify the stage” and the latter to “sanitize dwelling houses”. Once improved along British lines, Utopian towns and the whole island must then be protected by a regenerated navy, under the muscular guidance of Captain Corcoran, who has conveniently left his former ship – and opera! (*HMS Pinafore*, produced in 1878), to propound his subtle vision of naval domination: “I’ll teach you how to rule the sea, / And terrify the simple Gauls.” But the greatest – if not at first clearest – achievement of all is the one heralded by the company promoter Mr Goldbury, whose

very name speaks of hidden wealth and concealed fortunes to come. Having himself “*freely speculated in ginger-pops and peppermint drops*” and “*largely advocated stupendous loans to foreign thrones*”, he proudly presents a scheme which alters the very foundation of arithmetic, and relies on the fairy-tale like magical figure of seven: “*Time was when two were company – but now it must be seven.*” Puzzled by the prospect of “*companification*”, Utopians are then presented with the whole legal process, from the initial declaration of the company limited by “*some seven men, if possible all Peers and Baronets*”, to the first business tradings “*with all who’ll trust’em / Quite irrespective of their capital*”, and finally the liquidation of the bankrupt venture, which is apparently not the worst part of it, as Goldbury states: “*You merely fill a Winding-up Petition, / And start another company at once!*”, the whole thing being frankly stated as “*shady, but sanctified by custom*”... As often, Sullivan chose to compose a tune the rhythm of which is either unexpected or even at odds with the words of the libretto – a classic case of comic juxtaposition where the two media convey jarring messages and impressions: here, Goldbury’s apparently serious eulogy of what he himself calls a “*money-spinner*” is sung to a fast, lively *molto vivace* tempo, thus audibly debunking any pretence at some form of sound legal and commercial advice:

Mr. Golbury:
 Some seven men form an Association
 (If possible, all Peers and Baronets),
 The start off with a public declaration
 To what extent they mean to pay their debts.
 That's called their Capital; if they are wary
 They will not quote it at a sum immense.
 The figure's immaterial--it may vary
 From eighteen million down to eighteenpence.
 I should put it rather low;
 The good sense of doing so
 Will be evident at once to any debtor.
 When it's left to you to say
 What amount you mean to pay,
 Why, the lower you can put it at, the better.

- 14 One may think that Golbury’s careless hints at recent commercial disasters should warn the Utopian King – in particular when the promoter lists the kind of tradings – “*none too tremendous*” – that one may embark upon with such limited companies : “*Bank, Railway, Loan, or Panama Canal*”. With the much-debated failure of the City of Glasgow Bank in 1878 and the even more recent and resounding business scandal associated to Ferdinand de Lesseps and his *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique*, Gilbert had a vast number of telling cases of fraud, bribery and false balance sheets to add a humorous touch of verisimilitude to his words. And in an unfortunately fleeting flash of lucidity, King Paramount seems to have an inkling of the possible illegality of this type of trading. Yet, as these Flowers, by virtue of their very name, can only bring progress to his kingdom, the scheme must be regarded as valid: “*If it’s good enough for virtuous England – / The first commercial country in the world – / It’s good enough for us*”. Even more ridiculous yet compelling is the competition thus triggered between England and Utopia, the latter being about to rank ahead of the former, to King Paramount’s boundless satisfaction:

King: (enthusiastically):
 We will be before you!
 We'll go down in posterity renowned
 As the First Sovereign in Christendom

Who registered his Crown and Country under
The Joint Stock Company's Act of Sixty-Two.

- 15 In a grandiose mock national anthem concluding act one, individual characters and voices join the full chorus and praise at unison the new deity to be hailed – resoundingly echoing the mid-eighteenth-century Westminster Abbey or mid-nineteenth-century Crystal Palace nationalistic musical celebrations:

Let's seal this mercantile pact--
The step we ne'er shall rue--
It gives whatever we lacked--
The statement's strictly true.
All hail, astonishing Fact!
All hail, Invention new--
The Joint Stock Company's Act--
The Act of Sixty-Two!

- 16 The libretto of act two and the quite chaotic unfolding of the many plots and sub-plots may deservedly be viewed in the light of the harsh criticism published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* two days after the premiere. The anonymous journalist states that “*The quips, whims, jests, the theory of the topsy-turvy, the principle of paradox, the law of the unlikely, seem to have grown old in a single night.*”³ Yet, very simply, between curtain fall and curtain rise, time has passed, and the full beneficial effects of Anglicization are then to be felt in Utopia: “*She is England – with improvements.*” Indeed, these extensive reforms have unexpectedly been so successful that Utopia’s army and navy are feared worldwide, making war depressingly impossible, and Utopians have become law-abiding, healthy, prosperous citizens – thus causing the starvation of doctors and lawyers alike. Society has been purged of its “*wicked courses*”, slummeries are gone, “*indelicate suggestions*” are no longer to be represented on stage, and plays “*not in blank verse and three hundred years old*” are no longer licensed... Thus reformed and forcibly sanitized, Utopia’s citizens have been Anglicized beyond the reasonable – and their island “*swamped by dull prosperity*” therefore turned into a depressing dystopia.
- 17 Yet the most striking feature of this eventually nightmarish quest for a new fake identity lies in the legal atomization of society – the very negation of a common sense of citizenship. Goldbury having “*companified*” Utopia, the following step has been to turn “*every man, woman, and child*” into “*a company limited with liability restricted to the amount of his declared capital.*” Princess Zara marvels at this final, ultimate reform – “*there is not a christened baby in Utopia who has not already issued his little prospectus!*” and Captain Fitzbattleaxe does not grasp the full extent of his own Wildian aphorism: “*Marvelous is the power of a Civilization which can transmute, by a word, a Limited Income into an Income Limited.*” More seriously, the princess clearly fails to realize that the Utopians’ sense of civic responsibility, a necessary legal and even moral cement which bonds individuals into a shared sense of belonging, has now become extremely limited, as each citizen is now free to fill a winding-up petition and thus becomes impervious to any legal attack. Thirdly, and most importantly, the Utopian citizens are not turned into any entity – their promised monad-like existence is essentially commercial, as they are meant to become independent hence competitive business ventures. Their new identity is now grounded in capital, thus surprisingly echoing, more than a hundred years in advance, our contemporary debates on “*corporate citizenship*”, “*privatized citizenship*”, and more largely modern citizenship wrongfully equated with money and consumerism.

- 18 But Gilbert's conclusive *tour de force* is yet to come. As reform, "*like some remorseless ogress*" has brought Utopia to a fatal standstill, one may expect that the chorus's outcry "*Down with the Flowers of Progress*" be followed by a national return to some lost status quo ante and affairs be restored "*to their original complexion.*" In fact, this would go without counting on Princess Zara's final remembrance of her stay in Queen Victoria's kingdom and of "*the most essential element of all – government by party!*" By reuniting citizens under rival banners and therefore reintroducing factions and divisions, this "*bulwark and foundation of England's greatness*" promises to reinstate a necessary fruitful political chaos:

Princess Zara:

Government by Party! Introduce that great and glorious element – at once the bulwark and foundation of England's greatness – and all will be well! No political measures will endure, because one Party will assuredly undo all that the other Party has done; and while grouse is to be shot, and foxes worried to death, the legislative action of the country will be at a standstill. Then there will be sickness in plenty, endless lawsuits, crowded jails, interminable confusion in the Army and Navy, and, in short, general and unexampled prosperity.

- 19 This unexpectedly happy prospect is logically hailed by the Utopian chorus in its recovered native language "*Ulahlica! Ulahlica!*" Linguistic unity having returned, the dreaded syndrome of a dislocating individual companification at the very top – and the ensuing danger of a "*Monarchy limited*" – is therefore replaced by a system "*a great deal better, a limited Monarchy!*"

Conclusion

- 20 Satire, in *Utopia Limited*, is clearly of the Horatian type – witty, wise and self-effacing. Gilbert and Sullivan did not aim at reforming their late Victorian world. Rather, they held up a gentle mirror at the peculiarities – political, social, aesthetic – of the British society which they chose to gently mock and lampoon, thus comfortably questioning notions like nationalism, identity and citizenship with tongue-in-the-cheek humour. Or maybe not? The question remains open, in the view of the concluding song and chorus, with their lyrical/military accents and Verdian ring – a loud final praise of "*a little group of isles beyond the wave*" which may – or may not – be taken at face value.

Zara:

There's a little group of isles beyond the wave –
So tiny, you might almost wonder where it is –
That nation is the bravest of the brave,
And cowards are the rarest of all rarities.
The proudest nations kneel at her command;
She terrifies all foreign-born rascallions;
And holds the peace of Europe in her hand
With half a score invincible battalions!
Such, at least, is the tale
Which is born on the gale,
From the island which dwells in the sea.
Let us hope, for her sake
That she makes no mistake –
That she's all she professes to be!

King:

Oh, may we copy all her maxims wise,
And imitate her virtues and her charities;
And may we, by degrees, acclimatize

Her Parliamentary peculiarities!
 By doing so, we shall in course of time,
 Regenerate completely our entire land--
 Great Britain is the monarchy sublime,
 To which some add (others do not) Ireland.
 Such at least is the tale, etc.

- 21 The fairy-tale quality of this number is only implicit in Princess Zara's opening lines. It becomes explicit with the chorus and its potentially radical questioning of the credibility of it all – "*Such, at least, is the tale...*". Yet Gilbert's own political satire eventually becomes, thanks to or maybe because of Sullivan's score, an *allegro maestoso*, *fortissimo* finale, resounding like a classical eulogy of Britain's manifest destiny. Indeed, these concluding bombastic chords leave little room for the already subdued and hardly critical pinpointing of her "*parliamentary peculiarities*". This "*monarchy sublime*", aptly praised with Burkian, sublime loudness, finally promises to completely regenerate Utopians who should simply copy Britain's "*maxims wise*" and imitate her "*virtues and charities*" to become prosperous, brave and above all respected citizens. In 1883, in the midst of Gladstone's second administration, Gilbert's own fear of liberal reforms and Sullivan's enduring taste for a bombastic *dénouement* finally produced once more what, in *In Churchill's Shadow*, (2004), David Cannadine calls, quite rightly I think, "*a paean of praise to national pride and the established order.*"⁴
- 22 **La spécialité de recherche de Joël Richard est l'étude des rapports entre les formes musicales et les contextes culturels, sociaux, politiques, religieux et économiques qui les font émerger, prospérer et parfois disparaître. A ce titre, après une thèse sur les oratorios bibliques de Haendel, interrogeant la question de « the Englishness of English music », il a travaillé sur les opéras de Purcell, les *comic operas* de Gilbert and Sullivan, mais aussi les rapports entre musique, frontière et traumatisme de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, en étudiant certaines pièces du compositeur américain contemporain Steve Reich, en particulier *Different Trains*.**

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NOTES

1. <http://diamond.boisestate.edu/gas/utopia/reviews/times93.html> (retrieved on 31/05/16)
2. See Albert Borowitz, "Gilbert and Sullivan on Corporation Law: *Utopia Limited* and the Panama Canal Frauds" (*Legal Studies Forum*, Vol. 29 Issue 2, 2005), p. 941.
3. <http://diamond.boisestate.edu/gas/utopia/reviews/pmg.html> (retrieved on 31/05/16)
4. David Cannadine, *In Churchill's Shadow: Confronting the Past in Modern Britain* (Oxford, OUP, 2004), p.112.

ABSTRACTS

This paper aims at studying how national identity was put into words and music by Gilbert in Sullivan in *Utopia Limited* (1893). Whereas the libretto reads like a mild Horatian satire of British institutions – in particular the system of corporate law, music sounds like the classical sublime eulogy of a conquering nation – commercially, politically and militarily. Under the guise of a witty criticism relying on absurd, topsy-turvy situations and characters, Utopia Limited partakes of a vast national enterprise, building up and asserting the national identity of an imperialist kingdom.

Cet article étudie la mise en mots et en musique de la notion d'identité dans l'opéra *Utopia Limited* de Gilbert et Sullivan (1893). Tandis que le livret semble se livrer à une satire horacienne des institutions britanniques, et en particulier de son système juridique en matière de droit des affaires, la musique laisse entendre les accents sublimes d'un éloge sonore, celui d'une nation commercialement, politiquement et militairement conquérante. Sous couvert d'une critique qui cultive les effets d'absurde et de renversement, Utopia Limited participerait d'une plus vaste entreprise de construction et d'affirmation de l'identité d'une nation impérialiste.

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Mots-clés: Haendel, oratorio, satire, identité nationale

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