'Politics, Performance and Popular Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain'

Locations	The Storey
Date(s)	Thursday 7th (00:00) - Saturday 9th July 2011 (00:00)
Contact	Peter Yeandle (**p.yeandle@lancaster.ac.uk (mailto:p.yeandle@lancaster.ac.uk)**)
Download	**Add to Calendar (/schools/edacs/departments/drama/news/2011/politics-performance-conference.aspx?ical=true)**

Politics, Performance and Popular Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain

Conference registration

- Register online **here (https://www.bhamonlineshop.co.uk/browse/extra_info.asp?compid=1&modid=2&prodid=321&deptid=17&catid=3)**
- **conference programme (/Documents/college-artslaw/drama/provisional-schedule-pantomime.doc)**

This is an advance notice of the second symposium organised as part of Professors Kate Newey (Birmingham) and Jeffrey Richards's (Lancaster) AHRC-funded project on the 'Cultural History of English Pantomime'. Our first conference was 'The Sister Arts in the Popular Theatre, c.1820-1910'. For our next, we wish to encourage discussion and debate on the connections and interrelationships between politics, performance and popular culture.

Pantomime serves as useful measure of popular perceptions of contemporary political issues. As is the case nowadays, nineteenth-century pantomime made jokes at the expense of politicians and 'celebrities', made comment on topical events of the day, and poked fun at local, national, and world events. Stage managers were reliant upon a well-attended and long-running pantomime in order to finance their theatre for the year: a vibrant, fun, and relevant production was thus crucial. David Mayer, in his seminal work on the topic, emphasises how pantomime offered 'immediate and specific comment' (*Harlequin in His Element*, 1969, p. 2). As such, the study of pantomime – and reviews of pantomime in contemporary newspapers and periodicals – provides 'the historian with an informal chronicle of the age' (Witchard, *Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie*, p. 24). In his introduction to a recent collection of critical essays, Jim Davis notes that pantomime was 'not only an all-pervasive form of popular entertainment, but also functioned as a way of seeing, even as a metaphor, in shaping perceptions of the contemporary world' (*Victorian* Pantomime, 2010, p. 2). Study of pantomime thus enables analysis both of public response to political satire and public understanding of contemporary politics; but also an opportunity to further delineate Victorian attitudes to sex, gender, class, race. The*Hornet* noted in 1874 that, for such reasons, 'the politics of the pantomime are the most important indications of the politics of the people'.

This conference seeks to address a number of methodological issues that arise out of such a context. On the one hand, we are interested in papers which explore how popular entertainments (not just pantomime, but ballet, music hall, burlesques, comic opera, circuses, etc) made allusions to, and critiqued, the politics of the day. On the other hand, we are keen to receive proposals for papers which address ways in which popular theatre *shaped* popular politics. Dickens and Ruskin both used pantomimic metaphor in their social commentaries, but how widespread was this? The popular press often used the immediately-identifiable visual components of pantomime as a frame for their social and political satire, of which the cartoon from *Punch* is a good example. But to what extent did popular entertainment shape popular responses to local and national politics? These questions are all the more important given how the pantomime performance seemingly destabilised cultural norms: for example, cross-dressing in pantomime challenged gender codes and riotous behaviour on stage flew in the face of idealised civil conduct (the policeman, after all, became a staple of comic iconography).

Moreover, in what ways might popular culture have defined politics? How might 'performance' be addressed as a concept by which better to understand crowd behaviour, whether for example at hustings or in protest? How did politicians and others conceptualise their audience? If, as Patrick Joyce argues, the late-Victorian audience in a context of political reform were 'rightful heirs to the democracy of pleasure' (*Visions of the People*, 1994, p. 309), how can we define the relationship between audience, politics and pleasure?

The following list of possible themes and topics for proposals is indicative only, and therefore serves merely as a guide:

- Politics as theatre/theatre as politics
- Conceptual approaches to notions of "performance" and "popular culture"
- Theatrical metaphor
- Topical allusion/topical referencing
- Gender, class and representation
- Style/Genre/Form
- The evolution of popular entertainment across the 19th century
- Popular politics and movements – eg., Chartism; New Women; Christian Socialism; Fabianism.
- Crowd, audience, presentation
- Children on stage/children in the audience
- Subversion/inversion
- Theatre reform/political reform
- Censorship, regulation, control
- Metropolis, periphery, region
- Historiography of leisure and pleasure.

To date, we have a number of confirmed speakers: Jim Davis (Warwick), Tracy Davis (Northwestern), Brian Maidment (Salford), David Mayer (Manchester), Rohan McWilliam (Anglia Ruskin), Kate Newey (Birmingham) and Mike Sanders (Manchester).

We welcome proposals for 30 minute papers, to be received by Peter Yeandle (**p.yeandle@lancaster.ac.uk (mailto:p.yeandle@lancaster.ac.uk)**) no later than 5pm, 1 April 2011. Proposals to be 250-300 words.

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