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THE PUNCH AND JUDY SHOW: ITS HISTORY AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

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In 2001 the Royal Mail, the UK's postal service, issued several sets of commemorative stamps depicting significant aspects of British life and culture. The subjects of these stamps included British fashion, double-decker buses, the Royal Navy, the weather (of course) and several characters from a centuries-old puppet show known as Punch and Judy. Five years later Punch and Judy featured in the top twelve of a list of cultural icons of Britishness in a project commissioned by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport [BBC website, 2006]. Although the puppet show may be significant to a notion of Britishness, it is arguably less well known internationally when compared to double-decker buses, English cups of tea or the Grenadier Guards, despite being older than the first two and of a similar vintage to the Guards.

The Punch and Judy show owes much of its status in British culture to being an historically established feature of the traditional British seaside holiday and children's parties. Certainly, for the first three quarters of the twentieth century, it is fair to suggest that the vast majority of children and adults in Britain would have had some kind of contact with a Punch and Judy show. In addition, the evolution of the tradition is very much linked to British social history, and, as such, the show can be seen as a barometer of certain areas of social thought and taste, as this work shall demonstrate.

Having been a part of British culture for over three centuries, it is perhaps understandable that the show's characters crop up in several corners of everyday British life and art. The images of Mr Punch and his wife Judy have been used for advertising, ornaments, kitchen-ware, sweet tins and numerous other everyday items (see: Fig. 1). Mr Punch's name was also used for the famous satirical magazine *Punch* (published between 1841 and 1992, and between 1996 and 2002). In the field of art, Punch and Judy has featured



Fig. 1. Punch and Judy metal doorstoppers. Photo by author

in literature (including Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*), television programmes (*Doctor Who*, *Midsomer Murders*), cinema (Tony Hancock's 1963 film *The Punch and Judy Man*, the Marx Brothers' 1931 film *Monkey Business*) and even a graphic novel (Neil Gaiman's *The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Mr. Punch*). As well as this, a number of scripts for the show have been recorded and published, meaning the show itself is not only an example of theatrical and oral folk tradition but also a literary one in its own right. There have been numerous melodies based on the show, including one by the English composer Sir Eugene Goossens, and even an opera, by Harrison Birtwhistle and Stephen Pruslin. The puppet show has also spawned a number of well-known idioms and sayings in British English such as "Punch and Judy politics" (meaning a very aggressive and attritional form of debate), "That's the Way to do it! (Punch's battle cry) as well as "to be pleased/proud as Punch" (meaning to be extremely pleased or proud, sometimes to the point of arrogance).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the familiarity of Punch and Judy to a British audience, it may pose a challenge to a reader with no awareness of the tradition, especially a non-British reader. Many artists and writers have used the imagery of Punch and Judy to create an effect or describe an action or attribute. An example may be seen in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, when a character comments, "I never heard such a voice out of a Punch and Judy show" [Conrad 2016, ch.6]. Conrad appears to assume the implied reader, being familiar with Punch and Judy, will know the voice is loud and shrill. Likewise, as Glyn Edwards points out, in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* the Red Knight and the White Knight "hold their clubs in their arms, as if they were Punch and Judy" [Edwards 201, 47]. This refers to the way

glove puppets of the period might hold a slapstick with their arms crossed over their bodies. To a Punch performer or regular viewer, this would be instantly understandable. However, unless a modern reader is aware of these characteristics of the puppet show the comment loses its effect. To further complicate the matter, the Punch and Judy show is a dynamic tradition and is constantly adapting. Therefore, the significance of some aspects of the show used in literature may be lost on a modern reader because the show has changed over its lifetime. For instance, certain Punch and Judy characters which appear in the writings of Dickens no longer appear in the majority of modern shows.

This paper aims to provide an historical overview and cultural insight into the Punch and Judy show for a reader who has little or no knowledge of the tradition. The paper explores the history of the show and some of the characters connected with it as well as certain cultural aspects of it. Due to the constraints of space, the article does not focus in detail upon the various published scripts of Punch and Judy, however, there are numerous references to texts which the interested reader may use to further their own research.

What is Punch and Judy? A Brief Description of the characters and the show

The Punch and Judy show is a glove puppet show, usually performed in a booth by a single puppeteer (Fig. 2). The performer is sometimes called a "Punchman," "Professor", or "Prof" (a self-awarded title of no legal standing). Throughout its history, the show has constantly developed, something which might prove problematic for those who seek to use a modern show to understand nineteenth-century references. While the basic form of the show would (arguably) still be recognisable to spectators of different periods, the style of performance and the range of characters has changed significantly over the years, with some characters remaining whilst others have been removed or supplanted. The following description of the show includes most of the well-known characters from different periods (a more detailed list can be found in *Successful Punch and Judy* by "Professor" Glyn Edwards [Edwards 1999]).

While the finer details may differ, the general outline of the story follows the (mis)adventures of Mr Punch, who is generally portrayed with a hunched back, a large, red nose, a shrill voice and a tall hat. Punch may be considered amoral in his dealings with others, generally doing what is best for himself, and is not adverse to dispatching his tormentors with a stick.

Punch's shrill voice is an important and well-known feature, as shown by Conrad's reference in *Lord Jim*. It is produced through the use of a swazzle, a small instrument held in the mouth. A nineteenth-century Punch player describes it thus:



Fig. 2. Punch and Judy characters. Photo by author

Our speaking instrument is an unknown secret, cos it's an "unknown tongue," that's known to none except those in our own purfession... We has two or three kinds, one for out-doors, one for in-doors, one for speaking, one for singing, and one that's good for nothing, except selling on the cheap. They ain't whistles, but 'calls', or 'unknown tongues'; and with them in the mouth we can pronounce each word as plain a parson, and with as much affluency [Mayhew 1968, 53].

As the Punchman says, details of the swazzle are traditionally secret amongst Punch performers. Even the noted performer Sydney de Hempsey had difficulty in finding himself a teacher [de Hempsey 2004, 19]. While the instrument can take some people a long time to master, it is widely held as a vital component of the show by serious profs.

Punch's wife, Judy, is commonly portrayed as a shrewish woman who is not slow to beat Punch. This leads to her downfall after Punch's mistreatment of The Baby (historically he kills it) after it annoys him. Judy's chastisement of Punch results in a major fight and Judy's death. This is the start of a chain of meetings with different characters who usually suffer a similar fate (although many modern profs may simply knock the character down, without saying they are dead).

Following the death of Judy, Punch is visited by an officer of the law, originally a Victorian Beadle (almost always called "Mr Bumble") but now



Fig. 3. Punch and Judy booth. Photo by author

more commonly, a policeman. The Policeman is usually dressed in the tall helmet of the Metropolitan Police which would have been a novel sight when the character was first introduced. Other characters include The Doctor, whose maltreatment of Punch earns him a beating, and Death or a Ghost, who is usually portrayed with skeletal features and comes to scare Punch. Some traditions hold it is the ghost of Judy.

A popular character in modern shows is The Crocodile, which first appeared in the late nineteenth century. It usually steals Punch's string of sausages, also an important item in the show (Fig. 4). Some shows have the crocodile eat Punch while in others the figure is part of a longer routine with The Clown. The Clown is generally referred to as "Joey", after the famous eighteenth century theatre clown Joseph Grimaldi (1778-1837). Tradition has it that he is the only character to escape Punch's stick.

After several "murders" the Hangman (commonly called Jack Ketch after a notoriously inefficient real-life seventeenth-century executioner) attempts to hang Punch but is tricked into putting his own head in the noose (Fig. 5). He was traditionally carried off in a coffin. The Hangman routine is often



Fig 4. Punch, the Crocodile and the Sausages; photo by author

omitted by modern profs, especially for children's shows. He is usually followed by The Devil, whom Punch also defeats (Fig. 6). This is usually the end of the show.

There are some theories that the Devil is connected to the medieval morality plays or a figure of a dragon. It is also believed that he may have been replaced by The Crocodile to avoid offending religiously-minded audiences. The Devil in the famous Codman's show in Llandudno (the oldest show in Britain) became a vampire at one point for similar reasons [personal communication, 26 VII 2018].



Fig. 5. The Hangman & Gallows.
Photo by author



Fig. 6. Punch & the Devil. Photo by author

Historically, the show has featured a Black Man. This character appeared as a servant in the earliest recorded show, later developing into a minstrel character due to the popularity of American blackface minstrels. In recent years the figure has become increasingly controversial due to changes in public attitudes towards the depiction of ethnic minorities. Some players, such as Glyn Edwards, continue to use a black figure but, for example, in a different role, such as a safety officer [personal communication, 26 VII 2018]. Older shows featured a character known as Shallahbalah (or The Grand Turk), a foreigner that could only say “Shallahbalah”.

A figure which was very popular in the nineteenth century, but is quite rare now, is Dog Toby. Toby was often played by a real dog until animal welfare laws restricted their use. He is more often played by a puppet nowadays (if at all). In Ursula Moray Williams’s children’s novel *Gobbolino the Witch’s Cat* [Williams, 1942], the eponymous feline spends a period performing as Toby in a Punch and Judy show (until he is “outed” as a witch’s cat).

Other possible characters include Scaramouche (whose head can be knocked clean off), the Blind Man (a beggar who coughs over Punch), Pretty Poll (Punch’s mistress, based on a character from John Gay’s 1728 work *The Beggar’s Opera*), a variety of novelty acts, such as plate-spinners or boxers and Nobody (whose neck just grows and grows). Many modern performers have introduced new, topical characters, such as Glyn Edwards’s Mr Jobsworth the Safety Officer and The Banker [Edwards 2011, 82]. In times of war, it was possible to see such real-life figures as Napoleon, Hitler or even Saddam Hussein feel Punch’s wrath.

Despite some of its more violent and gruesome scenes Punch and Judy is considered a comic show primarily for children. Marina Warner describes the show and its audiences’ reactions thus:

The traditional comic drama of Punch and Judy, still a staple of summer fairs and parks, is staged specifically for the amusement of very young children in the UK, who stay and watch and scream between fits of giggles at the mayhem. In the course of the play, Punch gleefully lays about him in a series of violent assaults... Punch and Judy is considered good family fun, though in recent performances, in deference to contemporary sensitivities, the baby is merely (!) shaken about by the exasperated Mr Punch, not killed. His abuse is the play’s only running gag, now and then punctuated by the puppeteer’s up-to-date jokes inspired by the week’s news and television. Children find it very funny [Warner 1998, 167].

To those who are not familiar with the show (and to some that are), a description without the experience of a live show may be somewhat puzzling: how is violence funny? Warner suggests a reason that the show appeals to children:

Children’s resilience springs from their laughter: Punch and Judy is often performed with a commentator on the side, who eggs on the audience to find Mr Punch’s antics ridiculous, and guides the children’s mockery. If they did not laugh at Mr Punch’s

antics, they would be very frightened. But they do not always need steering by an adult; in the right circumstances children can spontaneously make fun of intimidation and turn its threats hollow [Warner 1998, 168].

Punch and Judy's status as a family show is arguably one of the reasons it is embedded in notions of British culture; multitudes of children over several generations have seen the show during family holidays, birthday parties and communal events. It has been a feature of a concept of British childhood since before living memory; yet its role as children's entertainment is a late feature of its history. It was in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century that Punch and Judy became predominantly a children's show. However, prior to this it had long been a well-known feature of cultural life in Britain, especially England.

A Short History of Punch and Judy

The most significant histories and works about the Punch and Judy show are, perhaps understandably, written by authors who are also puppeteers. What follows is a brief history of the show based on the major histories of Punch, *Punch and Judy: Its Origin and Evolution* by Michael Byrom [Byrom, 1972], *The Punch and Judy Show: History, Tradition and Meaning* by Robert Leach [Leach, 1985] and George Speaight's *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* [Speaight, 1990]. While these authors disagree on certain points, it is not within the remit of this article to examine such debates in detail, but rather to give a basic overview for the interested reader.

It is generally agreed by historians of Punch that the character is descended from the figure of Pulcinella, a "zanni" (clown) role in the Italian Commedia dell'Arte, having come over to England in the first years of the Restoration period (1660-1688), when Britain attracted many Italian theatre performers. The character appeared in both actor-based shows as well as puppetry performances for decades afterwards, slowly becoming more anglicised.

On May 9th 1662, according to his diary, Samuel Pepys travelled to Covent Garden in London to see "an Italian puppet play, that is within the rails there, which is very pretty." The show was performed by an Italian puppet master known as Signor Bologna (Pietro Gimonde), who is known to have performed Pulcinella. Whilst the type of show would have been very different from those of today, not least in that the puppet figure would have been a marionette rather than the modern glove puppet, this date has become known as "Punch's birthday" by scholars, practitioners and fans of the show. It is commemorated by a plaque in Covent Garden (unveiled in 1962). There is a popular pub near the spot called "The Punch and Judy".

Over the next two hundred and fifty years, as Punch was performed throughout Britain and Ireland, as well as North America and the colonies,

the main method of performance changed from predominantly string-marionette, rod-puppet and actor-driven shows (requiring a stage and theatre) to glove puppetry shows in a small booth (the first recorded appearance being in 1785). This development not only made the show more portable and compact, as it only requires one puppeteer to perform with a range of figures, but also changed the style of the performance itself, as gloved figures can move faster and perform a number of tricks which a string puppet is unable to. It was partly due to this portability that Punch and Judy became strongly associated with street performance, indoor children's shows and later the British seaside holiday, an association which is still prevalent today.

A major event in the history of Punch came in 1827, when a journalist called John Payne Collier and the artist George Cruikshank recorded the show of an elderly Italian puppeteer called Giovanni Piccini (1745-1835), who had been performing in England for around half a century previously and is believed by a number of historians to have brought the street booth show to Britain [Speaight 216, Byrom 1972, 9-20]. Published in 1828 as *The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Punch and Judy*, this was the first time a Punch and Judy show had been recorded for publication and it became, essentially, a blue-print for future performers and audiences, not least because of Cruikshank's lively and detailed illustrations [Collier 1828].

While the Collier/Cruikshank recording of the show is the most famous, it is arguably the most controversial. As Robert Leach points out, J.P. Collier was something of a literary fraud, producing a number of dubious publications such as his own editions of Shakespeare. [Leach 1982, 14]. It has been suggested that he may have made similar "edits" to Piccini's show and, as Leach comments, a number of Punch performers have questioned whether the form of the show depicted in Collier's text can even be performed using such figures and using the special mouthpiece necessary for Punch's voice [Leach 1982, 15].

Despite the debates concerning its authenticity, Collier's version of Piccini's show is an important document for performers and academics alike. It features a number of characters well-known at the time, many of whom no longer feature in the majority of modern shows. Conversely, whilst lacking some of the more common characters known to modern audiences, such as the Crocodile, there are several routines and skits within the show which are still familiar today, such as the scene with the Baby or the Hangman. For a modern reader or researcher of nineteenth-century literature, the text and pictures may prove very instructive.

The importance of Piccini, and his apprentice Mr Pike, is made clear in a famous interview made by the social researcher and reformer Henry Mayhew in the 1840s. As part of his landmark work *London Labour and the London Poor* (published in three volumes in 1851) Mayhew interviewed a number of street performers and circus artistes (as well as other workers and

people of London). The interviews reveal much about the living and working conditions of the performers, as well as insights into the tastes and expectations of audiences, the best and worst places to play, and the sums of money collected. Mayhew's work was initially published in the magazine he founded, *Punch*, before being collected into three volumes. It contains a wealth of information for any student or researcher of nineteenth-century life and literature. The interview with a Punch and Judy player is the longest in the section about performers. The Punchman gives a highly amusing and in-depth interview which includes many references to Piccini and Pike, as well as anecdotes about life as a Punch player and the social conditions under which they worked [Mayhew 1968].

Mayhew's Punchman talks about his predecessors, Piccini (to whom he refers as 'Porsini') and Pike, stating that he considers Piccini to have been the original street performer. He also claims to have bought his puppets from 'Porsini' himself, "I bought the show off old Porsini, the man who first brought Punch into the streets of England... we consider Porsini as our real forefather" [Mayhew 1968, 44].

The Punchman makes it clear throughout his interview that his life is not the easiest and has little in the way of long term financial prospects:

I've heard tell that old Porsini used to take very often as much as ten pounds a-day, and he used to sit down to his fowls and wine, and the very best of everything. But he never took care of a halfpenny he got... At last, he reduced himself to want, and died in the St Giles's Workhouse. He was past performing when I bought my show of him and werry poor. I gave him thirty-five shillings for the stand, figures and all. I bought it cheap, you see, for it was thrown on one side and of no use but such as myself [Mayhew 1968, 44].

He goes on to suggest that his will be a similar fate, noting that the lot of a Punchman or street performer is definitely not a happy one and is reliant on the public's taste:

Then if, as you see, all our forefathers went into decay and died in the workhouse, what prospect have we to look forward to before us at the present time but to share the same fate, unless we meet with sufficient encouragement in this life? But hoping it will not be so, knowing that there is a new generation and a new exhibition, we hope that the public at large will help and assist us... [Mayhew 1968, 49].

As there is no record of his name or later history, this Punchman's fate remains unknown. What is apparent, however, is that the performers themselves were very close to their audience, physically and economically, and knew what kind of material would be appreciated.

As well as containing a description of several tricks of the trade and examples of showman's cant (apparently based on broken Italian) the interview also contains a script for the Punchman's show which has marked differences to Piccini's (it being at around fifteen years after the Collier version). This shows that the play was changing and evolving over time in keeping with the public

taste and topicality, something the Punchman touches on whilst explaining the different figures and performances (Mayhew 1968, 48-52). The inclusion of a clown puppet suggests that the show was becoming more influenced by English Pantomime as the clown is based on the character played by Joseph Grimaldi. Likewise, the Negro Servant in Piccini's script has become a blackface minstrel known as Jim Crow (after a song made famous by American singer Thomas Rice in the 1820s), showing the influence of the music hall on the puppet show [Mayhew 1968, 51]. The relationship between Punch and Judy and the British pantomime is still prevalent today in the verbal interactions between the puppet figures and the audiences (It should be noted that British pantomime is a very different art form to the silent 'pantomime' as it is more commonly understood in Continental European countries, involving comic action, songs, dances and verbal interaction between the performers and the audience; see: "*Oh, Yes It Is!*" by Gerald Frow [Frow 1985]).

Mayhew's interview gives a description of life as a Punchman which is consistent with many of the visual depictions found in artwork of the period. The picture accompanying the interview (Mayhew 1968, 46) shows the puppeteer setting up his booth, accompanied by a man playing panpipes and a large, military style drum (this man could act as a 'bottler', collecting money from the crowd, as well as a form of crowd control, making sure children did not get too close to the booth). Similar images can be found in the paintings *On the Road to Derby* by E.F. Brawnall [Hollis 1987, 12], an 1890 drawing by Emily Lees [Hollis 1987, 4], Isaac Cruikshank's 1795 picture *Punch's Puppet Show* F. Smith's 1874 work *Punch by Gaslight* [Leach 1982, 38 & 94], as well as many others (Robert Leach's book has a very good selection of pictures).

The pictures, as well as a number of other interviews, show that Punch was a very well-travelled show and the performers moved where the business was (as they still do). Mayhew's Punchman talks of travelling to a number of places which are some distance from London even with modern, quicker road systems, including Brighton (53 miles/ 76 km in 2018) and Warwick (83 miles/ 133km in 2018). He also mentions swapping instruments and puppets with fellow Punchmen he may meet abroad, as well as sharing performance spots and money [Mayhew 1968, 47].

Likewise, Michael Byrom quotes an 1887 interview with a London-based performer called Mr Mowbray, who states "Punch has taken me all over the country" [Byrom 1972, 41]. Both Mr Mowbray and Mayhew's Punchman put the number of Punch players in England at around fifteen or sixteen (although Mr Mowbray is less specific if this is a national number or a London number). Mayhew's Punchman says eight performers worked in London.

The widespread performance of the Punch and Judy show, as may be surmised by the above information, relied heavily on the movement of the performers to different towns and venues. While the coming of the railways increased the mobility of the working classes, especially with

regard to the seaside holiday, Punch and Judy shows often travelled by road and performed at different towns and villages en route. The above-mentioned paintings sometimes show travelling or itinerant performers carrying their solid framed theatre on their shoulders or on barrows (in comparison, a modern folding frame can be carried in a suitcase). This lifestyle is also described in *The Old Curiosity Shop* by Charles Dickens, where Nell Trent and her grandfather travel for some time with the Punch and Judy players Short and Codlin.

The coming of the railways and the rise in coastal holidaying proved a double-edged sword for performers and show-folk. Robert Leach cites a performer in 1860 lamenting the decline of the country fairs and shows in favour of excursions by steam-train. The showmen had little choice than to follow the crowds to the seaside [Leach 1982, 97]. While the trend declined in the late twentieth century, there are still a number of seasonal seaside shows, including one which became a family business and is still in operation after 150 years.

Codman's Punch and Judy, a family tradition

In some notable cases the tradition of playing Punch and Judy has been passed down through families [see Leach 1982, 111-125]. One of the most noted of these is that of the Codman family. In 1864 Richard Codman, a travelling showman of Romany descent, found himself stuck in the seaside resort of Llandudno, Wales, when his caravan burned down. He made a set of figures and began performing Punch and Judy on the seafront. It proved very popular. Members of the family became very active in the local entertainment industry and set up a show in the nearby resort of Colwyn Bay. The family still perform on the promenade today, doing the same show [Leach 1982, 117] with the original carved heads [personal communication, 26 VII 2018]. The current performer is Jason Codman-Millband, who has been performing since 2009 (Fig. 7).

In 1868 Richard Codman established a show in Liverpool outside the Lime Street railway station. This was also taken over by one of his sons in 1888 [Leach, 119] and the family tradition continued until around 2010 when the last performing family member died [personal communication, 26 VII 2018]. The importance of the show in Liverpool's social history may be seen by the monument of a Punch booth in the railway station and the nearby pub being called "The Punch and Judy". The long-term existence of two Punch and Judy shows in such busy venues as Liverpool and Llandudno may illustrate how popular and far reaching the show was in former days, and how it is still recognisable to many Britons as a cultural icon.



Fig. 7. Codman's show on the Promenade, Llandudno, Wales. Photo by author

Opposition and gentrification

Most of the accounts and illustrations of the Punch and Judy show so far have focused on open-air street performances. Mayhew's *Punchman*, however, brings up two points which were to influence the development of Punch and Judy, even down to today. Whilst explaining the nature of a performance, the *Punchman* says:

Some folks where I performs will have it [the show] most sentimental, in the original style. Them families is generally very sentimental themselves. To these sentimental folks I'm obliged to preform werry steady and werry slow; they won't have no ghost, no coffin, and no devil; and that's what I call spiling the performance entirely [Mayhew 1968, 54].

He goes on to comment that other audiences much prefer comedy and the more riotous scenes. This particularly concerns "street people" [Mayhew 1968, 54].

Two things which are apparent are that the showman was making a significant amount of money playing to a more genteel audience composed

of families and, presumably, house parties (something which became even more significant in the late-twentieth century). Secondly, there is both a split in public opinion about the show; an attempt at gentrification in some quarters and the identification of Punch and Judy as a show for children. This has echoes in modern Punch and Judy.

In recent times, there have been a stream of stories about the alleged banning of Punch and Judy by various English town councils under the guise of political correctness [McRobbie 2013, BBC website 2018]. A few weeks prior to this article being written, a performer was criticised on British television for his black puppet being representative of a blackface minstrel [O' Sullivan 2018]. However, while it may seem that Punch and Judy is under attack from the forces of modern political correctness, this in itself is nothing new. Mayhew's interview shows that Punch has split opinions for centuries. Even Charles Dickens, himself a huge fan, defended the show against people who wished to suppress it. In defence of Punch, Dickens wrote to Mary Tyler:

In my opinion the street Punch is one of those extravagant reliefs from the realities of life which would lose its hold upon the people if it were made moral and instructive. I regard it as quite harmless in its influence, and as an outrageous joke which no one in existence would think of regarding as an incentive to any kind of action or as a model for any kind of conduct. It is possible, I think, that one secret source of pleasure very generally derived from this performance... is the satisfaction the spectator feels in the circumstance that likenesses of men and women can be so knocked about, without any pain or suffering [Hollis 1987, 16].

The above quote is often used by Punch performers and organisations in defence of the show today, which may illustrate the show's longevity and popularity in many different levels of society.

Fluctuating Popularity in the Twentieth Century

The popularity of Punch and Judy increased throughout the early twentieth century and particularly through the interwar period. The webpage of the puppetry organisation UNIMA cites a 1939 survey by the journalist and puppeteer Gerald Morice which found forty-four Punchmen with seaside shows. The number of seaside shows fell after the war, presumably with the rise of foreign holidays, to around twelve [see UNIMA website]. However, it has been suggested in conversation between this author and some modern profs that there are possibly more Punch performers now than ever before [personal communication]. This seeming anomaly may be explained by more performers catering to parties and paid events (village fetes etc.) than relying on public generosity at the seaside. For this reason, whilst Punch and Judy is perhaps less visible than in the past, it is still thriving.

Changes in Performance

The end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century saw a huge shift in the style of performance. Michael Byrom's analysis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts demonstrates how the more heavily text-based shows began to give way to lighter scripts, more punning and a greater emphasis on audience participation and a breaking of the "fourth wall" [Byrom 1972, 30-68]. It is possible that the increase in audience participation was also influenced by the conventions of the British pantomime, which breaks the fourth wall and utilises call-and-response rapport with audiences (perhaps most famously, the exchange of "Oh yes it is!" and "Oh no it isn't!"). Eventually the show became more geared towards children's entertainment. George Speaight suggests that simple demographics may have played a part in this:

In the first prints of his [Punch's] appearance in the streets his audience is composed mainly of adults... But by the middle of the nineteenth century the children outnumbered the adults, and by the end of the century they practically composed the entire audience [Speaight 1990, 215].

One particular factor in this popularity may have also been the increase in such things as childrens' puppet show sets (so the children could perform their own shows) and "How to" books for children and adults which appeared in the twentieth century. Although leading Punch performers such as Percy Press also published such books, the most successful was *How to do Punch and Judy* by Sydney de Hempsey, first published in 1942. This book includes instructions about how to build a theatre and make puppets, as well as a script containing jokes, puns and routines still common today [de Hempsey 2004]. It has influenced numerous performers, particularly "Professor" Glyn Edwards, who wrote his own "How to" book [Edwards 2000] and runs classes on performing Punch and Judy.

Asked about possible stylistic developments in Punch and Judy performances, Edwards compared an older style of show with the post-war shows he grew up with:

I saw [a member] of the Codman family perform on a couple of occasions. He actively discouraged audience participation. I was brought up in the nineteen fifties on shows with audience participation and assumed it was the standard... I think that a popular form of theatre would be the loser if it didn't encourage a bantering rapport with its primary audience [personal communication, 25 VII 2018].

The change in performance style is, then, an important factor when comparing modern shows as a yardstick for shows depicted in nineteenth-century works, such as those of Charles Dickens. This was something which the author of this article did when presenting a modern-style show to a group of Dickensian scholars in 2016.

Conclusion

The Punch and Judy show is a dynamic tradition with a long and rich history that embraces various aspects of British culture, art and literature. A scholar of British literature, especially Victorian and early twentieth-century texts, may encounter a variety of depictions of the show. Some research into the history and tradition of this theatrical form can unearth a wealth of information which could enhance the reader's knowledge and understanding of the socio-historical context of the text, as well as various aesthetic descriptions utilised therein. As Mr Punch would say, "That's the way to do it!"

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Summary

Punch and Judy is a traditional form of puppet theatre widely known in the United Kingdom and certain other English-speaking countries. As part of the national culture for over 350 years it has featured in numerous works of art, particularly in literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Being generally less well-known beyond Britain, it may be problematic for readers encountering references to the show in English literature, such as the works of Dickens and Conrad. This paper provides an overview of the show, a short history and a description of certain aspects of historical and social change within the tradition.

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