

High Culture and/versus Popular Culture

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ABSTRACTS

Vicky Angelaki (PhD Forum), Royal Holloway, University of London, Great Britain

"Breaking Down Barriers between High and Low: The Case of London's National Theatre"

Recently, one of the most popular television channels in the UK, Channel Four, broadcast a play entitled *The Play's the Thing*. The premise of the show was that aspiring playwrights, encouraged to submit their work, would enter a selection process, at the end of which one author's work would be chosen and consequently staged in London's West End, world-famous for its productions and a major tourist attraction. Such TV programmes simultaneously reinforce and contribute to the perception of the theatre as a popular and even populist medium, addressed to wide audiences and seeking to draw in masses of spectators, this time through television. Surely such processes convey that the theatre is being transformed into a cultural product, intended to appeal to as broad a number of consumers as possible. In my paper I will discuss the example of London's National Theatre, particularly focusing on key repertory choices made by different artistic directors in recent years. I am concerned with tracing and assessing what such choices of productions convey regarding the identity of the theatre in the UK today, arguing as to whether and to what extent distinctions between high and low culture are still valid or even purposeful. Through a consideration of National Theatre productions such as *Guys and Dolls* (1996), *The Villains' Opera* (2000), *Jerry Springer - The Opera* (2003) and *The History Boys* (2004-05), and of their position within the wider framework of the diverse NT repertory I will address this question further, also considering distinctions between popular and mass culture. In this way I will explore whether categorizations of artistic products as low culture are overly facile, taking into account the existence of nuances and the significance of factors such as commercial success. On theoretical grounds my paper will be informed by the writings of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, as well as related texts. This will allow me to reach the core of the question pertaining to the position of the UK theatre between high and low culture today.

Dietmar Böhnke, University of Leipzig, Germany

"Popularising the Victorians: 'High' Victorian Culture in Contemporary Films, Musicals and Comics"

In many ways the Victorians can be credited with having invented modern popular culture, from the cinema and the musical through mass circulation newspapers, mass spectator sports and package holidays, to shopping arcades and advertising. And yet the image of Victorian culture in our own day is frequently dominated by the stereotype of the serious, even stuffy period in which people were (sexually) repressed and generally puritanically minded, who argued about the (in)compatibility of religion and science or the social uses of art (cf. e.g.

Sweet 2001). In other words, we connect it with high rather than popular culture – formerly 'popular' artists such as Dickens, Wilde or even Gilbert and Sullivan have changed sides to become canonical and 'high-cultural' in our own day. However, there seems to be a recent parallel or opposed movement in which the Victorian period is appropriated by modern popular culture, especially films, musicals and comics.

In this paper, I propose to look at several recent products of these genres (e.g. the films *From Hell* [2001] and *Shanghai Knights* [2003]; the musicals *Heathcliff* [1997] and *Woman in White* [2004]; the comics *Melmoth* [1991], *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* [1999] and *From Hell* [1999]) in order to investigate their approach to the Victorian period. Are they perpetuating the received view of the Victorians as outlined above? Do they rediscover the period as the starting point of the modern (consumer) era? Are they 'dumbing down' history for the sake of the contemporary viewer/reader? How 'high-cultural' is the picture of the Victorian age in these products of contemporary popular culture? These will be among the questions addressed in this contribution, leading to a final consideration of the more general issues involved in the distinction between high and popular culture and their historical variations.

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Hilary Dannenberg, University of Bayreuth, Germany

"Where Histories and Cultures Meet: *Doctor Who* and British Culture"

The blending of high and low cultural formats is a key feature of postmodernism, and the long-running BBC television series *Doctor Who* (1963-1989, 2005-2007), which has a unique and iconic status in British culture, is a key text of postmodernist science fiction. The paper will examine how the programme has bridged multiple domains of British culture – in terms of its representation of history, of its characters (particularly the changing incarnations of the figure of the Doctor), and of invading aliens.

Doctor Who was a hybrid right from its inception - not least because it was aimed at, and immediately fascinated, both adult and child audiences. Many of the programme's 1960s stories had the character of educational historical drama: the time-travelling Doctor and his companions visited the Stone Age, Ancient Greece, met Marco Polo in China, and got caught up in the Crusades. Other 1960s *Doctor Who* stories had a more traditional science-fiction format, depicting struggles with evil creatures intent on taking over the world – notably the Daleks. These recurring figures, who also achieved iconic status in British culture, can be decoded not only on the level of science-fiction alterity, but also as reworkings of real world British history (Dalek creator Terry Nation subsequently admitted he had modelled them on the Nazis).

Just as the programme's cultural blends have gone through different phases in its historical evolution, so has its main character – the eponymous Doctor. The idea that a Time Lord's body is capable of regeneration allowed a range of actors to take on the role and ensured the programme's longevity. The various incarnations of the Doctor from the 1960s to the 2000s can be read as changing conceptualizations of British masculinity and cultural identity. The first incarnation of the doctor, played by William Hartnell, was not only an elderly and learned, but also an authoritarian and impatient, patrician. Subsequent incarnations of the Doctor changed his personality, but he was nevertheless always cast as belonging to Southern English middle-class or highbrow culture. The series relaunch in 2005 broke this British cultural barrier: the ninth doctor, played by Christopher Eccleston, had a Northern accent and a blunt verbal style to match, while the current and tenth Doctor, played by David Tennant, is an Estuary man.

In contrast to the historical scenarios of the 1960s stories, the current *Doctor Who* series uses the backwards time-travel format to focus on and celebrate a range of British cultures and histories. So far it has featured encounters with William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens, as well as some deeply nostalgic trips to London in the Blitz and the televised coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953. In addition, the new series has a clear multicultural agenda, with actors from Britain's ethnic minorities playing many roles, including that (in a parallel-world story) of President of Britain.

Sarah Fekadu (PhD Forum), Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, Germany

**"Refusing the Division between High and Low:
Virginia Woolf's Use of Music in *Between the Acts*"**

This paper is concerned with the relationship between popular music and classical music in the final novel of Virginia Woolf, thereby providing an individual case study of the relationship between high culture and popular culture in literature. The ways in which literature makes use of music, on a structural as well as on a thematic level, particularly invite such an examination since musical styles embody different forms of cultural capital and propagate very different world views. Regarding the interaction of high culture and popular culture in music, the epoch of literary modernism provides an interesting object of investigation since it was in this period that major changes in the distribution and consumption of music took place, e.g. the invention and spreading of the gramophone and the radio as well as the construction of large music halls. Briefly, the medial developments that Adorno later described as a fetishised, fully commercialised musical torrent that produces regressive listeners coincided with the emergence of literary modernism.

The characters in *Between the Acts* are strangely aware of and, at the same time, overwhelmed by these medial changes. For Isa, born in 1900, "the newspaper was a book" (p. 15), and, one could extend with regard to the treatment of music in the novel, "the radio was a songbook", since *Between the Acts* is interspersed with quotations, sounds, voices and noises from different musical genres and styles.

Regarding the relationship of popular and high culture, it is striking that *Between the Acts* does not make any efforts to keep these two spheres neatly apart from each other. This becomes particularly obvious in its use of music: the division of high and low examples is constantly refused and, at the end, amounts to "a cackle, a cacophony" (p. 109) of sounds. With the close examination of the numerous elements this cacophony is composed of, I aim not only at a deeper understanding of the novel on a structural and thematic level but also ask how Woolf, generally regarded as a high-brow modernist, positions her own art within cultural hierarchies. In my reading, her use of music in *Between the Acts* promotes a strong

sense of hybridity that also suggests that her art's interchanging with the emerging mass media world of her time is far more complex and ambiguous than often assumed.

Rita Gerlach, Großbritannien-Zentrum Berlin, Humboldt University, Germany

"Categories of Evaluating Quality in British and German Theatre"

Keywords: categorization, evaluation, aesthetic judgement; institutions; theatre; British-German comparison; case studies

My paper is based on my interdisciplinary PhD research project that compares the British and German theatre systems and enquires into whether the different degree of state involvement generates different outcomes in theatrical production. I have presented findings from its first part which compares (1) the number of theatres and their productivity, (2) the geographical distribution of theatres, (3) the diversity of theatre programmes, (4) theatre innovativity and (5) market success at conferences on cultural policy (iccpr2006 Vienna) and cultural sociology (ESA Arts 2007 Lüneburg). In this paper, I will draw from the second, qualitative part of my PhD research which addresses issues of artistic quality and aesthetic judgement.

I will focus on the following questions: Which criteria underlie evaluations of theatre performances as good or bad? Who categorizes theatrical productions as 'high' or 'popular', under what conditions and in which contexts? Are there differences between British and German categorizations or between the different media in which these categorizations are transmitted? Is the distinction between 'high' and 'popular' related to theatres' being subsidised or owned by the state, on the one hand, or their commercial status, on the other? Is it a useful distinction today for recommending 'valuable' theatre experiences?

My paper examines theatre awards and critics' reviews. In analysing a larger sample of award-winning theatres and productions, on the one hand, and focusing on selected reviews of productions by theatres representing the different funding types, the paper combines quantitative and qualitative research methods. At the same time, I keep in mind the mechanisms and contexts of theatre awards, how they are discussed in the cultural sphere and in the media, as well as the general discourse about the role of theatre in the two countries. Similarly, I have not only analysed and compared reviews of theatre performances with regard to the criteria of evaluating artistic quality, but I have also looked at interviews with and articles by theatre critics to find out how they arrive at their expert judgement.

Therefore, the paper also aims at illustrating how fruitful such a mixed research framework can be for the field of Cultural Studies.

Joe Gixti, Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand

**"Blockbuster Art and Elitist Pulp:
Textual Discrimination in the Age of Commercial Media"**

The paper revisits the argument that postmodern approaches to art and literature have blurred traditional distinctions between canonical and popular cultural products, and considers how the commercial demands of contemporary global media are influencing the patterns and practices of textual discrimination. I argue that although the now habitual interactions and mutual borrowings between 'high' and 'pop' have profoundly modified how the two are understood, performed and consumed, the boundaries between them remain as ideologically pronounced and ethically entrenched as they were at the height of the modernist movement in

the early 20th century. I start by considering the extent to which 'high culture' can nowadays be claimed to be primarily experienced as 'high pop' because of its increasing appropriation by popularly-oriented media – as reflected for instance in blockbuster biopics like *Shakespeare in Love*, *Amadeus* and *Becoming Jane* as well as in the increasingly trendy styles of film and television adaptations of classic literary texts. The paper identifies those qualities which make these and similar examples of 'high pop' popularly appealing and successful, and considers the extent to which these qualities can be said to have modified popular as well as educated understandings of the values and meanings traditionally associated with the canonical texts and writers themselves. I compare these examples with popular texts which, coming from the opposite direction, similarly appear to blur distinctions between 'pop' and 'high' by performing, packaging and encouraging the consumption of traditionally 'low-brow' material in styles and techniques more conventionally associated with 'high brow' and intellectually challenging artistic works (as in the films of Quentin Tarantino, the graphic novels of Frank Miller, or the cyberpunk fiction of William Gibson). I argue that although these texts suggest that there has indeed been a coming-together of high and pop through similarities in style, refined technique and clever referentiality, there are ongoing ideological and ethical differences underlying the production, performance and reception of canonical and popular texts in the variegated contexts of contemporary global media, and that these differences continue to influence their connotations, substance and meanings.

Susanne Gruss, University of Erlangen, Germany

**"'A Few Flowery Phrases and He Thinks I'm His' –
(Re)Appropriations of Wordsworth in Contemporary Literature and Film"**

Wordsworth, master-autobiographer and pre-eminent Romantic poet, is undoubtedly a rock-solid column of the British literary canon – or is he? The poet laureate's status naturally invites both critics and those who try to profit from his immense degree of popularity. In this paper, I would like to explore how contemporary literature and culture interacts with and uses both the works and the status of the canonised poet. I would like to suggest three different directions in the manifold appropriations of Wordsworth, the revision of his (auto)biography, the rewriting and the (often parodist) playful quotation. Wordsworth's biography has been revisited and revised numerous times. Kenneth R. Johnston's *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* (1998) explores Wordsworth's youth and young adulthood (e.g. his relationship with French mistress Annette Vallon) and depicts Wordsworth as a British spy in revolutionary France. The film *Pandaemonium* (Julien Temple, 2000) focuses on the friendship between Coleridge and Wordsworth and tries to transport the two revolutionary 'pop-star-poets' into the 21st century. In *Fair Exchange* (1999), Michèle Roberts focuses on Wordsworth's silenced lover Annette Vallon – in her feminist rewriting, the poet himself becomes a marginal presence. Roberts's novel not only gives a voice to Vallon, it also invents an encounter between Wordsworth and Wollstonecraft in revolutionary France and thus tries to reclaim a feminist past. While she thus tries to unsettle Wordsworth's iconic status, Roberts simultaneously uses him to inscribe herself (and her heroines) into the canon. Last but not least, Wordsworth's fame and the recognisability of clichéd romantic poems (it's all about daffodils...) has led to countless parodies and adaptations, which rely on the quotation of well-known verses and factoids. A relatively dull Wordsworth makes an appearance in Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair* (2001), where one of the characters is imprisoned in "I wandered lonely as a cloud", and the poet has only recently become the star of a crime novel by Val McDermid (*The Grave Tattoo*, 2007).

Sonia Amalia Haiduc (PhD Forum), University of Barcelona, Spain

**"R. L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* –
Masterpiece or Penny Dreadful"**

Referring to the success of his *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) with the general public, Robert Louis Stevenson writes in a letter to his friend Edmund Gosse: "There must be something wrong in me, or I would not be popular".

The result of educational reforms implemented throughout the nineteenth century was an unprecedented rise in literacy within the middle and working classes. These numerous new literates were perceived as source of great profit by publishers and writers alike. The production of easily readable paperbacks or serials was meant to satisfy this new mass readership's taste for sensational novels.

Torn between the ideals of high culture and the demands of the market, R.L. Stevenson had an ambivalent attitude towards his allegory of the duality – or multiplicity – of selves inside the human being. He considered his "Gothic gnome" a mere "shilling shocker" written under financial pressure. Divided by its theme, style and appeal for mass audience, critics have found it difficult to place Stevenson's novella within the hierarchies of high and popular literature. Therefore, this paper will first examine the reception of Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* - from acclaim to oblivion to final reinstatement as a literary classic –, as well as the mechanisms by which the novella has managed to anchor itself firmly into the cultural imaginary. A reflection of cultural anxieties about the human body, Stevenson's story has provided inspiration for over a hundred film productions, some by directors as illustrious as Jean Renoir or Victor Fleming. Especially in its first decades, cinema was trying to attain a higher status as an art form by adapting classical literary texts to the new medium. The paper will also analyze some of its more relevant film adaptations against the cultural background of the twentieth-century, focusing on the cinematic reflection of social and cultural fears, and on the changing perspectives on the human body.

Philipp Horst (PhD Forum), University of Bochum, Germany

**"High and Low Culture in Contemporary British Art –
A Media History of the Turner Prize"**

The *Turner Prize* is one of the most prestigious prizes on the contemporary art circuit. Even the shortlist – and thus participation in the accompanying exhibition in the Tate gallery – is a respectable entry into an artist's CV. Since the early establishment of art prizes, they have been considered as 'high' culture institutions contributing significantly to canon construction. However, it is not uncommon that the prize money is provided by private sponsors; their withdrawal can lead to cancellation. The cultural canon is thus largely determined by economic interests. The *Turner Prize* has a famous ancestor. The 19th century Paris *Salon* was the manifestation of dominant cultural hegemony in the arts – resulting in the formation of the *salon de refusées*, probably an early example of a subcultural utterance. In Paris, political rather than economic interests were important. It is interesting to study the contemporary prize with the help of the historical foil. As a result of the interconnection between art (institutions) and economy, today's *Turner Prize* is also a major annual media event. For some years in the early 1990s, its sponsor and media partner were one – *Channel 4*. Its protagonists are artists, curators, celebrities, media people and the audience alike. Its media presentation bears a strong resemblance to the *Academy Awards* in L.A., or sports events. The resulting

reception of art through a 'popular' medium is a significant contemporary manifestation of 'low' culture's tendency to metaphorically devour 'high' culture formative institutions.

The paper will try to throw some light upon the delicately connected web of the public, media, economy, politics, price / prize, and, yes: art! To achieve this, the artistic positions on display over the (recent) years are analysed with the help of the above mentioned criteria.

Christian Huck, London College of Fashion, Great Britain

"Edgar Wallace: From Novel to Translation to Film"

A contemporary bibliography lists 6493 British books published in Germany between 1895 and 1934, of which more than 70% only appeared in translation (Schlösser 1937). More than a third of those, and increasing in numbers, were detective and adventure novels. Edgar Wallace's books were the most successful among these: nearly two hundred editions of more than a hundred different books sold more than four million copies during this period, and they were top of the popularity list in public libraries as well.

The proposed paper sets out to analyse the consumption of popular British writing as a situated corporeal practice, analysing the framing as well as the process of reception on the one hand (cf. Kittler 1990), and the marketing and retailing of English books on the other (cf. Brown 2006). Methodologically, the study harks back to the neglected strand of *Rezeptionsforschung* within *Anglistik* and new research conducted following the insights of *Medienwissenschaft*. What I endeavour to show is that whether Wallace's work was seen as part of high or popular culture was determined by the ways in which people were understood to *experience* his works – where, when, and how they consumed his work.

As noted above, Anglo-American fiction in Germany became especially successful in the entertainment sector, and the analysis of the discussions surrounding the *Kolportageroman* (cf. Storim 1999) and its subsequent identification with foreign, especially Anglo-American writing will form an important part of my paper (cf. Fullerton 1979). Readers of Anglo-American writing, and especially of translations of these work, were seen to consume these works in a particular way (late at night in bed, for example), which did not square with the general concept of high art. The adaptations of Wallace's work for the cinema renewed these discussions, stating a specific way of experiencing peculiar to the cinema, and in turn devaluating Wallace's work by claiming it to be particularly suited for adaptation.

Throughout the proposed paper I will examine how different contextualisations – as detective novel, as translation, as film – determine how Wallace's work is seen to be experienced, and how these apparent manners of experiencing in turn determine the status of his work.

Hugo Keiper, Karl-Franzens-University of Graz, Austria

"'No Ordinary Love': 'Saxie Sade' and what they can teach us about pop lyrics as avantgarde poetry"

While it has been rightly considered an "historic gain of cultural theory [...] to establish that popular culture is also worth studying" (Terry Eagleton), pop/rock lyrics as such, even though they represent so powerful and pertinent an aspect of our globalized culture, have rarely been the subject of close, non-partisan scrutiny by literary (and cultural) critics, not least, one might surmise, because generally and with very few exceptions they are still looked down on as essentially worthless, pedestrian products of 'popular/mass culture'. Hence, and virtually by

default, such lyric texts are seen as in themselves largely insignificant, uninspired expressions of 'low' culture, as unsophisticated and trivial, the fabrication of hack-work rather than Literature, let alone Poetry, in any 'proper' understanding of those concepts. In my presentation, I propose to turn the tables on such supercilious convictions and their concomitant bolster of supporting arguments by taking a fresh, unprejudiced look at some fundamental aspects of how the lyrics of pop/rock songs actually work within their intermedial context(s), as well as at a few of the resulting complexities and ramifications, by exploring what I provisionally suggest to term the 'Sade-effect' – referring to the singer and her band. (The clever use of the saxophone in many of their songs, as e.g. "Is It a Crime", "Smooth Operator", or, indeed, "No Ordinary Love", is also what the punning title of my paper partly alludes to.)

Taking the telling example of Sade as a springboard for my argument, I intend to show how the interplay between their musical arrangements and the words in some of their songs can be seen as remarkably cunning artistic devices that function to charge and (re-)invest their lyrics (or certain key-words and hooks) with fresh significance, thus 'making strange' apparently worn-down words and notions that are mainly taken from the realm of everyday discourse, of apparently prosaic, banal experience as well as expression. Hence, they can be viewed as ultimately literary strategies of defamiliarising language in order to endow and 'supercharge' it with fresh associative meaning and resonance(s) – a phenomenon that is quite characteristic and can be detected in a host of other pop songs as well, by Hendrix, The Beatles, Dylan, Pink, and many others. This insight, I believe, should provide us not only with a clearer perception of the working and function of pop/rock lyrics as a genuinely intermedial phenomenon, but perhaps also with some fundamental aspects of an emerging intermedial aesthetic of pop lyrics (which I am working on at the moment and which, to my mind, is badly needed as a means towards a better, more balanced perception of such phenomena).

At the same time, it is hard to deny that what I have described here is precisely what formalist theorists such as Viktor Shklovsky have claimed (and is still believed by many) to be the very hallmark of advanced, even avantgarde art in literature, indeed of the very dynamics driving its historical development. And this in turn suggests the possibility of a thorough re-assessment of the complex relationships between 'high' and 'low' in our globalized world at the beginning of the 21st century – not in the sense of playing them off against each other, but rather in terms of acknowledging at last the (potential) artistic value of popular culture, and even of mass culture, in their very own specificity and aesthetic (functions) within shifting cultural contexts.

Anton Kirchhofer, University of Oldenburg, Germany

**"Are we all at a 'School for Scandal':?
The Role of the Scandal in High and Popular Culture"**

This paper undertakes to address the differentiation of culture into 'high' and 'popular' in terms of the peculiar relation which both bear to scandal and the scandalous. Both divisions (high culture vs. popular culture, the morally legitimate vs. the scandalous) have been employed as devices for structuring and differentiating the public sphere. Both can be used in order to regulate the claims that given materials may have to public attention and public debate.

It is not, of course, that the distinctions coincide. The popular is by no means always scandalous. Nor indeed is the scandalous always absent from 'high culture'. In fact, no doubt, the two distinctions could hardly perform in combination if they were simply tautological.

The historical interest, then, lies in tracing the emergence and the interaction of the two oppositions and in defining the characteristic constellation in which they exist at certain periods, or in certain sections of the public sphere.

Materials on which I will draw range from eighteenth-century Grub Street to twentieth-century tabloids (and broadsheets), and will include a number of – might we say? – 'high' and 'popular' literary scandals. What will emerge from such a perspective is not only a better perception of the interaction of 'high culture,' of the scandalous, and of the popular. This might offer, too, the makings of a new theory of the scandal – a perspective that recognises the constitutive role of the scandal(ous) in structuring the public spheres in Western societies since the seventeenth century, and that validates its role in the dynamic relationship between high and popular culture – a perspective, after all, that gives due recognition to the function and significance of scandal and the scandalous in the historical making of our cultural landscape.

Elisabeth Klaus, University of Salzburg, Austria

"From Documentary to Reality TV: The Downfall of Public Television?"

For a few years now the BBC has been confronted with a growing crisis in distrust by the public. Quite a few media critics see this as a result of the BBC's turn to more entertainment programming in general and to Reality TV in particular. The advent of Reality TV undoubtedly has led to a "restyling of factual TV" (Annette Hill) that includes a more pronounced blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction, information and entertainment. But Reality TV also exemplifies that audiences today are more competent viewers who want to be taken seriously by programme makers.

Undoubtedly there are many reasons for the difficult situation public broadcasting faces all across Europe. Reality TV as such is not one of them since it is a genre that has produced formats that are very trashy as well as ones that have won prizes for excellence. In order to produce quality formats, factual programming needs to entertain and, at the same time, inform its audiences. Above all it has to act as a mediator of cultural citizenship. To this purpose the BBC has adopted public value principles. But so far its public value management has been applied mainly to news programs and journalistic output. What is needed is a broadening of this focus towards Reality TV and entertainment. It is argued that this is exactly the area where public broadcasting can prove its worth.

Jürgen Kramer, University of Dortmund, Germany

"On the (Im)Possibility of Distinguishing between High and Popular Culture"

In my paper I want (i) to briefly rehearse the history of the debate on high versus low (popular) culture and (ii) to focus on the argument that the answer to the question of whether a particular object belongs to either high or low culture cannot be found in the object itself but in the reader's/viewer's/listener's relations to this particular object ("beauty is in the eye of the beholder"). This argument implies that (iii) certain objects can belong to either category, if only for different readers/viewers/listeners. Finally, reasons have to be given (iv) why this is so and (v) what consequences this has. I intend to draw on examples from music (Mozart, in Salzburg a must), literature (Stevenson, Hammett and Eco) and film (Tarantino).

Norbert Lennartz, University of Bonn, Germany

"Lord Byron's *Don Juan* – the Epic Poem as Pop Culture"

There is scarcely any Romantic work such as that as Byron's *Don Juan* that combines elements of popular culture and features of the erudite epic tradition in such a spectacular way. Himself embodying the bizarre mixture of the popular and the high-brow, Byron – the precursor of dandyism – enjoyed gross pastimes such as boxing and did not even shrink from catering to the popular taste of lurid Oriental tales, a mass genre of Regency Britain which made him rich and ensured his notoriety in the gazettes. It is debatable whether Camille Paglia's comparison of Byron with Elvis Presley is appropriate, but the fact that Byron epitomizes the late Romantics' cravings for a pop idol can hardly be denied.

To what extent Byron last poem *Don Juan* is moored in 19th-century popular culture is clear in the very first stanzas: justifying the choice of his hero, Byron not so much refers to Tirso de Molina's *burlador de Sevilla* or to Mozart's famous *Don Giovanni*, as to the pantomime which was based on a popular stage production of Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine*. The fact that the loquacious tone of the gazettes more often than not clashes with the sublime style of the epic tradition is encapsulated in the image of Pegasus which, in its desire to produce outstanding epic poetry, suddenly "sprains a wing" and comes crashing to the ground. Pegasus' Icarian fate of soaring too high and falling low – which aptly characterises Byron's mode of writing at the end of his career – is, notwithstanding its Neoclassicist heritage of the mock-heroic, predominantly a descent into popular culture.

This becomes particularly evident when Byron's narrator begins to describe the changing colours of the rainbow in a Romantic vein and then almost inadvertently turns into a popular-culture pugilist who cannot help comparing the sublime natural phenomenon to a boxer's black eye. While critics exclusively tend to connect Byron's poetological inconstancy with the trauma of his Calvinist education and the haunting idea of the loss of paradise, they fail to see that Byron was also an experimenter who enjoyed juxtaposing different modes of writing within a single work: traditional high culture with modern popular culture.

David Malcolm, University of Gdańsk, Poland

**""no more than pub anecdotes":
High Culture and Popular Culture in Julian Maclaren-Ross's Short Fiction"**

The interaction of high and popular cultural texts is an important concern of Formalist literary theory. Such interaction is seen as a vital feature of literary evolution. For example, Viktor Shklovsky understands literary change as a process whereby elements from "lower" genres are introduced into "higher" genres, and often replace them in the literary hierarchy. Boris Tomashevsky notes that "It is intriguing how constantly high genres are pushed out by low ones" and discusses the "canonization of lower genres" as a source of literary development. However, such a "down-up" direction of influence is not accepted by other theoreticians working within the Formalist tradition. The Polish scholar Ireneusz Opacki argues rather that within literary periods certain genres are accorded the status of "royal" genres, and that such a dominant genre will affect, in a wide range of ways, other genres that co-exist within the same period. This paper approaches the issue through a discussion of the short stories of the mid-twentieth-century British writer Julian Maclaren-Ross (1912-1964). Maclaren-Ross published four volumes containing short fiction – *The Stuff to Give the Troops* (1944), *Better Than a Kick in the Pants* (1945), *The Nine Men of Soho* (1946) and *The Funny Bone* (1956). The stories of army life in *The Stuff to Give the Troops* well illustrate Shklovsky's and

Tomashevsky's argument about the relationship of high to popular culture. These short stories, psychological and social in focus, draw on the language and conventions of working-class anecdote and humorous story. They also incorporate linguistic features of contemporary US popular fiction. A similar use of elements of popular culture can be seen in the stories "The Hell of a Time" and "A Bit of a Smash in Madras" from *Better Than a Kick in the Pants*. Indeed, Henry Reed criticized some of the texts in this volume as being "no more than pub anecdotes." Maclaren-Ross's fiction, however, does not only exemplify the "canonization of lower genres." "My Father was Born in Havana" (*The Nine Men of Soho*) is a comic short story (popular/low) that is a condensed family-saga/social-psychological novel (high), thus illustrating Opacki's argument. Equally interesting is Maclaren-Ross's late collection *The Funny Bone*, in which low and high, fictional and non-fictional, comic and serious genres jostle with each other to produce a fluid and complex text.

Joseph Eugene Mullin, University of Minho, Portugal

"Another Plot against America – Philip Roth and *The Great American Novel*"

In *The Plot Against America* (2004) Philip Roth imagined a right-wing conspiracy, involving an elected President Charles Lindbergh, which installed fascism and systematic anti-Semitism in the United States in the early 1940s. This political fantasy, in the form of realistic historical fiction, was not Roth's first foray into the realm of political conspiracy and paranoia. More than three decades earlier, coincident with the political upheavals of the late 1960s and earlier 1970s, Roth burst forth with a series of satirical texts: *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), *Our Gang* (1971), *The Breast* (1972), and *The Great American Novel* (1973). This last, his most complex comic invention and satiric design, depended fundamentally on political schemes and paranoia.

The Great American Novel is a mock history of a baseball league that never was. It proceeds anecdotally with sketches of how the worst team in the worst American professional league, the Ruppert Mundys baseball team and its wartime roster of has-beens, adolescents, cripples, midgets, dwarfs, and the near-blind, were manipulated by the International Communist Conspiracy to destroy "the national pastime." This conspiracy being exposed by the House of Un-American Activities Committee, the Patriot League submitted to a political witch-hunt, was disbanded, and its history, both vaunted and sordid, suppressed. Baseball was saved, but Truth was lost. One man though survived, Ishmael-like, to tell the tale.

Word Smith, a nonagenarian and former sportswriter, intends to expose this political suppression of the Ruppert Mundys and of the entire Patriot League. Further, he aspires to shape the tragic demise of America's forgotten "third" major league into that long-awaited literary apparition, the Great American Novel.

All satire, especially Menippean, in manipulating materials and tones, conflates high and low art. Bathos is of the very nature of a satiric form that plays off of literary parody. In *The Great American Novel* Roth mocks the fixation of the American intelligentsia with baseball, with exposé journalism, with political paranoia, and with extreme literary ambition in a playful and, yet, disturbingly serious work of satiric sanity.

Peter Osterried and Stefan Schlensag, University of Dortmund, Germany

"'A Dying Glory'– Venice as a Cultural Setting"

Lines of clear demarcation between high and popular culture are difficult to draw. The discourse in academe is blurring the difference between the high and the low, between the serious and the popular, between contemplation and sheer entertainment, and it is unlikely that clear definitions of those oppositions will ever emerge. Therefore a definition of culture is a floating thing (cf. Kramer 1997: 83).¹

Cultural settings are in this respect intriguing and alluring. Cultural settings do of course exist in their own right, but only as a construction of artists or critics over the course of time, as they become part of the discourse in other cultures, too. Such a cultural setting is Venice, the charming and morbid museum of a life in the past and the epitome of melancholy and love in the present for so many tourists and lovers. Not astonishingly, this cultural realm has influenced art in particular, both literature and the fine arts. In the context of the debate of high versus popular culture, a crucial aspect becomes obvious: the discourse enveloping a cultural setting may challenge our evaluation of what is considered to be serious or just a piece of popular culture. When we focus on the Venetian discourse of the 19th century, the category of high-culture seems self-evident. That this also applies to Thomas Mann and Luchino Visconti is self-explanatory. But as for other more contemporary works, it is not: German pop singer Sebastian Hämer works together with a dating agency in order to make publicity for his new album. A photo shows him in Venice, and he is holding a poster saying "lonely", thus advertising both the new album "Only with you" and the dating agency "neu.de". Don't we need to ask ourselves whether the shadows of rainy San Marco positively overshadow the superficial quality of the singer and the institution trying to earn money with man and woman's loneliness?

Joanna Rostek (PhD Forum), University of Passau, Germany

"Constructions of the Sea in Contemporary British Fiction"

The 2005 Booker Prize winner, John Banville's *The Sea*, is – not only by virtue of its title – a suitable example of what seems to be an interesting trend in contemporary English fiction: the deployment of the sea as an essential motif. One could, of course, argue that this phenomenon is only a continuation of a long-standing tradition: a great deal of British culture and, hence, literary works have always been concerned with the sea, due to the almost proverbial insular location of the country, its imperial history and its, by now faded, glory as a sea-faring nation. Yet, contemporary novels, while certainly drawing on sea fiction of the past also break with the very tradition they conjure up by constructing the sea differently from their predecessors. This becomes particularly visible in novels which can – to a greater or lesser extent – be subsumed under Linda Hutcheon's (not uncontroversial) term 'historiographic metafiction'. It is true that in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea* (1978), Julian Barnes' *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (1989) or Graham Swift's *Last Orders* (1996) the sea is not always situated at the very centre of the plot. Yet just like Britain can evoke its insular identity only through the waters surrounding its shores, so it seems that these novels' core concerns are emphasised through the sea at their periphery. This paper wants to take a closer look at how this process works. It will therefore examine the afore-mentioned novels with the aim of laying bare

¹ Kramer, Jürgen (1997), *British Cultural Studies*, München.

constructions of the sea contained in them and discovering whether there are connections between writing history, remembering the past and summoning the sea.

Christopher Smith, University of East Anglia, Norwich, Great Britain

**"We Could Sing Better Songs than These":
Cultural Assumptions Underlying Education and Society in Modern Britain"**

The quotation in the title of this paper comes from Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*. When premiered in 1980, this social comedy was a great success; in an excellent expanded film adaptation directed by Lewis Gilbert, it won over larger audiences with fine acting. For present purposes, however, dramatic acumen and humour in the depiction of the characters, will, like the *quasi-Pygmalion* love story, be taken as read. Attention will focus instead on the assumptions implicit not so much in the particular programme followed by Rita in her Open University course (though it will not be ignored) as on certain cultural hierarchies. Although they are only sketched out in the play, they have, in fact, been important elements in humanities education in Britain over the last century and a half. *Educating Rita* may be said to do no more than mention a canon of high culture, juxtaposing it only briefly with *Rubyfruit Jungle*. It will be useful to pursue the matter further, even if, as I suspect, that particular story never actually existed. The rationale of the choice of texts for Rita (and thousands of other students) needs to be questioned, not only in the perspective of literary pedagogy, but also because of the social values it and they promote. Rita's transformation is as much social as cultural, and despite lip-service to personal qualities reflecting the young woman's background the implication is that the cultural ladder is the way to social ascension. (Not for nothing was a major study on universal education in Britain in the nineteenth century called *The Silent Social Revolution*.) The paper will not dwell on Russell's portrayal of this process (and the dramatist's unreadiness to do more than note the phenomenon); instead it will take his unconcerned attitudes as constituting in themselves a starting point for further enquiries into aspects of class and culture that are disturbing. Throughout the paper the opportunity will be taken to widen the concept of high and low culture away from the somewhat limited literary sphere on which Russell focuses to take in other aspects of evolving contemporary culture, in newspapers, broadcasting in either medium, cinema, music and even holidays, as a major expression of leisure time preferences.

Jenny Skipp, University of Leeds, Great Britain

**"British Eighteenth-Century Erotic Literature
and Its Role in High and Popular Culture"**

This paper examines British eighteenth-century erotic culture and reveals to what degree erotic literature was aimed at high or popular audiences. Analysis of over two thirds of English-language erotic titles published in Britain between 1700 and 1799 highlights that there was a shared erotic culture amongst eighteenth-century audiences. Erotic literature intended for elite audiences such as erotic novels, lengthy prose and large miscellanies contained similar sexual content, messages, images and attitudes as those erotic titles intended for a popular audience, especially those in the form of riddles, jokes and short songs (ditties). In addition, this analysis shows that erotic texts which were relatively expensive contained the same or very similar stories to those publications which were cheap and priced at a level that a purchaser from the lower sections of society could potentially obtain.

Furthermore, there is evidence which suggests that erotic literature was read in popular environments of the tavern and alehouse as well as more formalised social spaces of the coffeehouse and freemason meetings. Many erotic texts required a performance of masculinity as men were required to respond to the images and messages contained within the pages of erotic literature in an appropriate way. Consequently, there was interaction between high and popular culture through the similar attitudes that were disseminated about sex and sexuality through erotic literature.

Lastly, this paper will assess whether discussions and debates about sex and sexuality which were heard in the convivial environments of the tavern and alehouse were reproduced in erotic texts which were then consumed by both high and popular audiences alike. It will therefore ask whether high erotic culture borrowed from popular erotic culture or whether erotic literature actually helped to erode this distinction entirely.

Joachim Schwend, University of Leipzig, Germany

**"The End of the Curious Old Shop:
Women in the Role of the Self-Confident Consumer"**

The paper tries a comparison between the image of the Victorian woman as the typical middle-class mother, keeper of the household, angel in the house, – as she is represented in high culture texts – and woman in her new role as consumer surviving in a growing consumer culture.

The beginnings of consumer culture are usually placed in the 18th century with industrialization, the end of family self sufficiency and early mass production with the rise of consumer culture. According to Adam Smith it is the consumer who decides about production and not the other way round. Women are suddenly given a new role in society, they are the ones who make choices and decisions for their families and for their personal lifestyles.

The nation of shopkeepers (a phrase used by Adam Smith) undergoes decisive changes in the course of developments from seventeenth century shopping galleries to nineteenth century department stores and contemporary shopping malls. Certain characteristics of the early galleries are preserved and still visible in contemporary malls, in other respects the architecture and above all the role of the consumers has changed significantly.

Women have acquired a new position in society thanks to consumption and the levelling of class barriers: they can go shopping on their own, they are in control – up to a certain degree – and they dominate the "adamless spheres" of the Victorian department stores. On the one hand, Victorian masculinity is turned upside down, men are just about tolerated in department stores, everything is geared towards the female consumer. On the other hand, the competitive atmosphere of a free market works in the world of shopping as it does in the male dominated world of business. Advertising uses the female consumer up to now and lifestyle shopping is the keyword.

Texts used will be among others Thomas Carlyle: *Sartor Resartus* (1836), John Stuart Mill: "The Subjection of Women" (1869), leading to Emile Zola: *Au bonheur des dames* (1883), to Steven Millhauser: *Martin Dressler. The Tale of an American Dreamer* (1996) and to Sophie Kinsella *The Secret Dreamworld of a Shopaholic* (2000).

John Storey, University of Sunderland, Great Britain

"Discourses of the Popular"

To study popular culture we must first confront the difficulty posed by the term itself. The conceptual landscape which it brings into play often consists of confused and contradictory definitions of the object of study. It is not just that there are various ways to define popular culture, rather that to a certain degree popular culture is in effect an empty conceptual category, one which can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways. Part of the difficulty stems from the implied otherness which is always absent/present when we use the term 'popular culture'. As I will try to explain, popular culture is always defined, implicitly or explicitly, in contrast to other conceptual categories: folk culture, mass culture, dominant culture, working-class culture, etc. Therefore, a full understanding must always take this otherness into account. Moreover, whichever conceptual category is deployed as popular culture's absent/present other, it will always powerfully affect the 'politics' brought into play when we use the term 'popular culture'. My paper will outline some of the general features of the definitional debate which the study of popular culture has generated.

Doris Teske, University of Potsdam, Germany

**"British Provincial Museums in the Early 19th Century –
Between Elite Dominance and Popular Interest"**

In the decades preceding the Great Exhibition, the expanding industrial towns of Northern England came to be defined not only by their social conflicts, but also by endeavours of some urban groups to create a new, shared local identity. This paper will discuss the development of provincial urban museums at Liverpool and Newcastle as part of this endeavour. Although the social aspirations of the middle-class elite groups responsible for these initiatives sometimes amounted to the exclusion of a wider audience, most of the museums were defined by the rhetorics of a common citizenship used in their presentation, by the draw of popular exhibition formats extending well beyond wealthy middle-class visitors, and by the social inclusion practised in the supporting/owning organisations of popular and applied science.

Heinrich Versteegen, University of Bochum, Germany

"TV Judges and the Law – Popular Culture vs. Legal Culture"

Whereas in Germany and the USA reality-based courtroom shows are a regular feature of afternoon TV entertainment, these shows seem to be virtually non-existent on British television. (Admittedly, American-produced "Judge Judy", aired on ITV 2, has been enjoying at least some popularity for a number of years, but several attempts by British TV channels to launch a British-based courtroom show flopped within weeks of going on air.) Considering that other forms of popular television (quiz shows, docu-soaps, docu-games, lifestyle shows etc.) are ubiquitous features in all Western TV cultures, the conspicuous absence of the "TV judge" from the British TV screen is remarkable indeed. I will try to offer an explanation for this by looking for possible connections between the popular cultures and the legal cultures in Britain, the USA and Germany.

In my paper I will argue that it is Britain's century-old legal tradition of defending the rights of the underling against the ruling elite that may be held accountable for the complete

lack of motivation to watch the law being dragged into the dirt of scandal-mongering infotainment. A second factor, though connected with the previous one, is the incentives to start litigation (cost, risks, potential gains) offered by the legal systems, which have transformed the USA and Germany into comparatively litigious societies, whereas Britain has remained rather the opposite. If it is true that the success of popular television is based on situations that the viewer is likely to identify with, then TV courtrooms do not seem to offer a lot of identification potential.

Ingrid von Rosenberg, University of Dresden, Germany.

**"Culinary into Literary Pleasures:
Varied Reflections of the Current Popular Food Craze in Selected Recent Novels"**

According to sociological research cinema going, dancing and sports, once favourite leisure time activities of the British, have been replaced for some time by eating in all kinds of forms: eating out and eating in, eating fast food American style and eating (and cooking) elaborate exotic meals. Cookery shows on TV are among the most popular, and the rising number of cookery books each year are considered sure sources of income by publishing houses. Like all obsessions the food craze has produced corresponding excesses and anxieties, obesity on the one hand and fear for the fashionable waistline leading to anorexia on the other. No wonder, that literature has reacted to these trends in manifold ways. In my paper – after a brief overview of the sociological facts - I would like to look at various literary reactions to the food craze from the realistic treatment of class specific tastes and behaviour in some working-class novels (e.g. Livi Michael, *All the Dark Air*, Laura Hird, *Born Free*) to *Bridget Jones's* obsession with dieting, the analysis of anorexia in Jenefer Shute's *Life-Size*, cooking and recipes used as structural elements of the narrative in John Lanchester's *The Debt to Pleasure*, and finally to the satirical and symbolical stories in Jim Crace's *The Devil's Larder*.