

<b>Institution: University of South Wales</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: D35</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> Grand-Guignol and Popular Horror Performance (Case study 1)
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>When Hand and Wilson commenced research into Grand-Guignol in the late 1990s, it was a neglected topic in academic studies and a largely forgotten or misunderstood form in both theatrical circles and the popular imagination. Hand and Wilson have unraveled the myths surrounding the Grand-Guignol to explain in unprecedented depth this unique phenomenon in popular theatre and horror culture. Hand and Wilson have had a major role in the renaissance of the form in academia and also in the professional theatre and media. Their research has enjoyed extensive media coverage and the plays the authors have published have been performed internationally.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The Théâtre du Grand-Guignol in Paris (1897-1962) achieved a legendary reputation as the ‘Theatre of Horror’, a venue displaying such explicit violence and blood-curdling terror that a resident doctor was employed to treat the numerous spectators who fainted each night. The Grand-Guignol specialised in one-act plays: every night at the Grand-Guignol featured a ‘hot and cold shower’ of carefully written terror plays interspersed with comedies performed by an ensemble of versatile performers and innovative special effects technicians. The result was an intense evening of theatre designed to terrify and titillate the spectator through a mixture of horror, laughter and the erotic. Such was its success that the term ‘Grand-Guignol’ was used to refer to the theatre itself and the genre of plays that were performed there. In addition, ‘grand-guignolesque’ has entered English and other languages to describe any heightened display of horror. The huge popular success of the Paris theatre led to offshoots around the world including, in London, the British Grand-Guignol experiment (1920-22) which attracted figures such as Sybil Thorndike to act in it and Noël Coward, Joseph Conrad and H. F. Maltby to write plays for it.</p> <p>Richard J. Hand (University of South Wales, formerly University of Glamorgan see REF5, 1997-present) and Michael Wilson (University of Glamorgan 1997-2010) began their research into the Grand-Guignol in 1998. Their research work (funded variously by the AHRC, British Academy and the Society for Theatre Research) is most profoundly embodied in their two co-written books published by the University of Exeter Press (UEP) as part of its “Studies in Performance” series. Their research has subjected the Grand-Guignol form, legend and subsequent influence to unparalleled scrutiny. This has been achieved through archival research (in France, the UK and the US); theoretical analysis and practical investigation in the drama studios at the University of South Wales and through touring productions. As well as offering substantial historical contextualization and critical analysis which has taken into detailed account issues of writing and performance, stagecraft and technology, audience and reception, legacy and influence, Hand and Wilson’s two books make available for the first time in English 10 translations of classic Grand-Guignol plays (in the 2002 book) and the publication of 10 British plays (in the 2007 volume), including works which had been banned by the theatre censor and/or never published. Independently, Hand has explored in depth Conrad’s association with the British Grand-Guignol, which has included Hand directing and touring in 2000 the world premiere of Conrad’s 1920 Grand-Guignol play <i>Laughing Anne</i> the script of which he will be publishing, with British Academy support, in the forthcoming Cambridge critical edition of Conrad’s plays. With AHRC support, Hand has also translated and published (2011) two full-length plays by Mirbeau, a French writer who wrote several plays for the Grand-Guignol and whose novel <i>Torture Garden</i> was adapted for the Grand-Guignol (and translated by Hand and Wilson in the 2002 volume).</p>

### 3. References to the research

1. Hand and Wilson, "The Grand-Guignol: Aspects of Theory and Practice" (with Michael Wilson), *Theatre Research International* 25:3 (2000), 266-75. (Refereed Article)
2. Hand and Wilson, *Grand-Guignol: the French Theatre of Horror*, University of Exeter Press, 2002 (AHRC-funded). The volume is now in its third edition and was supported by an AHRB Small Grant in the Performing Arts (£2375). Sales to date: over 2300 copies sold.
3. Hand and Wilson, *London's Grand-Guignol and the Theatre of Horror*, University of Exeter Press, 2007 (funded by British Academy (£1498) and Society for Theatre Research (maximum grant £500). Final Shortlist for Society for Theatre Book Prize 2007. Sales to date: over 700 copies sold.
4. Hand and Wilson, "Transatlantic Terror: French Horror Theatre and American Pre-Code Comics", *Journal of Popular Culture* 45:2 (2012), 301-19. (Refereed Article)
5. Hand, "Labyrinths of the Taboo: Theatrical Journeys of Eroticism and Death in Parisian Culture", in *Eroticism and Death in Theatre and Performance* (ed. Karoline Gritzner) University of Hertfordshire Press, 2010, 64-79 (Chapter in book)
6. Hand, *Octave Mirbeau: Plays*, Bristol: Intellect, 2011. AHRC-funded (£4988)

### 4. Details of the impact

The reach and significance of the research has benefited three groups outside the academic research community: organisations and individuals in the creative and performing arts; the media; and the wider public in general.

Hand and Wilson's books have brought twenty plays into the public domain. They translated/adapted ten into English as well as bringing others out of archives and into publication. Independent productions of these twenty plays have been regularly staged by professional theatre companies including: Wild Thyme Players (Knoxville, Tennessee, 2011); Le Nouveau Guignol (London, 2010-12); Theatre of the Damned (London, 2010-11); Danger House Theatre (San Diego, 2010); Yehuda Duenyas and The National Theater of the USA, (Saratoga Springs, New York, 2010); Molotov Theatre (Washington DC, 2008); Santa Fe Playhouse (Santa Fe, 2008); The Sticking Place (London, 2007); Phantasmagoria Horror Theater (Arizona, 2003); La Mama Theatre (Australia, 2003); Tragic Pleasure Theatre (London, 2002); and Instant Classics (London, 2001).

Hand and Wilson were commissioned to translate the Grand-Guignol play *The Beast* (publication forthcoming) by Thrillpeddlers (San Francisco), resident company of the world's only permanent horror theatre, the Hypnodrome. Hand has written original scripts: *Do It Yourself* for Tragic Pleasure and *The Belladonna Monologues* for the award-winning Molotov Theatre: 'an unprecedented coup for any group pursuing the authentic Grand-Guignol' (see 5.6).

Hand and Wilson located the script of Coward's *The Better Half* in the Lord Chamberlain archives. The play had been 'missed' by Methuen's 9-volume *Complete Plays of Noël Coward*, so with approval of the Coward Estate, Hand and Wilson published Coward's 'forgotten' play. The restitution of the play into the Coward canon resulted in Hand and Wilson being interviewed as part of a major feature on the play on BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* and they were also interviewed in the *Observer*, *Stage* and *Western Mail*. Wilson attended the UK revival of the play at the 2007 Terror Festival at the Union Theatre, London. In 2008, Hand was guest-of-honour at the US premiere of Coward's play, delivering a public lecture prior to the opening performance at the Hypnodrome, San Francisco. In the following days, Hand was interviewed on US radio (West Coast Live and KALW).

Hand and Wilson have established a clear pattern of impact through their Grand-Guignol research and have made numerous industry and media appearances drawing on their expertise in horror performance. They were commissioned by Hammer Films to give a lecture at the 2008 Cheltenham Screenwriters Festival, a major industry event. They are the primary interviewees on the "Grand-Guignol: A Theatrical Tradition" documentary on the DVD of Tim Burton's *Sweeney Todd* (2008) and have been interviewed on Bridge FM (UK). Other media presence has included

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interviews with Hand on BBC Radio 4's *Grand-Guignol: A Documentary* and BBC Wales (*Roy Noble*). Hand and Wilson have also delivered public lectures for the Society of Theatre Research (2008); the London Horror Festival (2012); the San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum (Wilson, 2007); and the Radyr and Morganstown History Society (Hand, 2009).

After their 1999 Edinburgh Fringe Grand-Guignol production, they have mounted touring productions commissioned by the Society for Theatre Research (London, 2008) and the Abertoir Horror Festival (Aberystwyth, 2009). Hand was also commissioned to direct the world premiere of *Laughing Anne* in 2000 with public performances in the UK (Birmingham) and US (Texas). Since 2011, Hand has mounted an annual public Halloween performance for Cardiff City Parks.

Hand and Wilson advised in the writing of Carl Grose's *Grand-Guignol* (Theatre Royal Plymouth, 2009) and were commissioned to write an essay for the programme. Julie Hoverson's *Puppets* (November 2011) for the award-winning Seattle-based podcast channel 19 Nocturne Boulevard is a dark comedy about the Grand-Guignol and features Hand and Wilson playing eponymous characters (accompanied by other characters synonymous with the Grand-Guignol such as "Thorndike", "Maltby" etc.) brutally tortured to death.

Firmly established as they are as consultants and experts in Grand-Guignol research, Hand and Wilson will continue to attract invitations for public lectures, consultancy roles and media appearances. Their Grand-Guignol books have been highly prominent for UEP: the 2002 volume is now in its third edition and is one of the most successful ever published by UEP, achieving a genuine public readership as well as an academic one; the 2007 volume was shortlisted for the 2007 Theatre Book Award and reached the final six, beaten to the top prize by Michael Billington's *The State of the Nation*. UEP has recently commissioned Hand and Wilson to write two more Grand-Guignol books which, with emphases on practicalities and Grand-Guignol 'now', will be of great interest to the creative arts industries.

#### 4. Sources to corroborate the impact

##### 1. Society for Theatre Research, 2008

<http://www.str.org.uk/events/lectures/archive/lecture0812.shtml> Contact details with STR are available

Details public lecture and touring performance and links to book judge Claire Allfree's official advocacy for the Theatre Book Prize: 'This delightful book, from Exeter University Press, unearths a little known but utterly thrilling niche of British theatrical history.'

##### 2. The Observer coverage of Coward play discovery (16 September 2007)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/sep/16/theatrenews.books> Features interview with Hand 'A biting satire of sexual morality written by Noel Coward but never published has been unearthed by two Welsh scholars...'

##### 3. US Premiere of Noel Coward Play

<http://www.eddiemuller.com/thrillpeddlers.html> Contact details with writer/director Muller and Thrillpeddlers are available

Details premiere and public lecture by Hand: 'In an amazing coup for Bay Area theatre, a "lost" one-act play by the legendary Noel Coward had its U.S. premiere in San Francisco [...] Richard Hand, who discovered the original manuscript... will be in attendance'

##### 4. San Francisco Weekly press review (April 23, 2008) of production (featuring the Coward play) and Hand and Wilson's book

<http://www.sfweekly.com/content/printVersion/995857/>

##### 5. Aberdare Online (October 28, 2009) Preview of Abertoir Horror Festival

<http://www.aberdareonline.co.uk/content/night-grand-guignol-0>

Details show and talk by Hand: 'Presided over by Grand Guignol expert Professor Richard Hand, "Horror and Laughter: A Night at the Grand-Guignol" will offer audiences a rare and exciting

opportunity to experience a recreation of this unique and influential theatre form.'

**6. Molotov Theatre (Washington DC) Press Release (November 20, 2007) on Hand's involvement[ ]as consultant and scriptwriter of the *Belladonna Monologues*:**

<http://tinyurl.com/bls4eyo> *Contact details with artistic director are available*

'In an unprecedented coup for any group pursuing the authentic Grand Guignol theatre form, Professor Hand also created the character of a narrator...'

**7. Cheltenham Screenwriters Festival, 2008**

<http://www.screenwritersfestival.com/speakersetoi.php>

Hand and Wilson have entries on permanent list of Guest Speakers

**8. Book reviews by Theatre of the Damned**

<http://www.theatreofthedamned.com/grand-guignol/resources/books/> *Contact details with artistic director are available*

'Hand and Wilson's groundbreaking guide to the Grand Guignol [...] is doubtlessly the finest English language introduction to the genre.'

**9. Forbidden Book Review**

<http://www.forbidden.org.uk/forbidden-books-2/>

'certainly the best English language book on the subject'

**10. "Grand-Guignol: A Theatrical Tradition" Documentary on DVD of Tim Burton's *Sweeney Todd* (2008)**

IMDB reference: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1374961/>

Richard J. Hand named as 'star'.