

Institution: University of Manchester
Unit of Assessment: 35b (Drama)
Title of case study: British popular performance cultures of the 19th Century, for audiences of the 21st Century
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Anne Featherstone's ongoing, scholarly research into neglected popular performance practices of the 19th Century has had public impacts well beyond the borders of academia. Popular media interest in her initial, academic publications prompted Featherstone to explore the popular historical novel as an alternative form for the dissemination of her historical research. Her two fiction-based outputs to date have translated original, historical research into the transnational domain of murder mystery fiction, and have been published in French, Italian and (soon) Portuguese versions, as well as in English. Growing recognition of Featherstone's historical expertise has led to numerous public speaking appearances and to the development of ongoing relationships with broadcasters including BBC Radio and TV, who have utilised her research as a means of re-visualising the significance of popular performance cultures for the general public.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research took place in Manchester between 2005 and the present and is rooted in the long-term scholarly project of the key researcher Dr. Ann Featherstone (appointed part-time in 2005, and full-time since 2009). This has involved re-examining understandings of popular and working class performance cultures of the 19th Century, particularly by refocusing attention on the working experiences of professional and amateur performers in provincial as well as urban settings. Performance histories of the period have previously tended to focus on large theatres in urban centres, and on text-based theatrical forms such as melodrama, comedy, travesty, etc. Featherstone's work complements and extends these understandings by highlighting marginal forms (circus, fairground booth, music hall, etc.) and locations "off the beaten track", and by exploring the lives and routines of jobbing performers rather than the stories of playwrights, impresarios and "name" actors. This has been achieved through the analysis of primary sources including: theatre and performance archives; periodical and trade papers; letters and personal diaries of performers and audience members, many of which have been sourced from the descendants of their authors.</p> <p>The first major publications to come out of this research included <i>The Victorian Clown</i>, written with Jacky Bratton [3.1]), which drew on rare 19th C. clown's comedy notebooks, and <i>Journals of Sydney Race 1892-1900</i> [3.3], which used the spectatorial recollections of a Nottingham clerk as the focus for a series of essays on provincial circus, fairground and freak show performances. These publications extended existing understandings of the complexities of popular performance, and the findings of this scholarly, archival research also – somewhat unexpectedly – began to be disseminated widely in popular press and media contexts. <i>The Victorian Clown</i>, in particular, prompted extensive media interest, including appearances and interviews on <i>Richard and Judy</i> (Channel 4), BBC Radio 4's <i>Today</i> programme and <i>The World Tonight</i>, BBC News 24, BBC <i>Northwest Tonight</i>, BBC Radio Manchester and RTE. A re-construction of Victorian Clown material was commissioned for a performance at the Grand Theatre, Blackpool, in February 2007. Note: These 'impacts' are not detailed in the following sections of the case study, as they predate the current REF period. However, in highlighting the extent of public interest in 'forgotten' performance traditions, they also directly informed Featherstone's subsequent research and writing.</p> <p>While continuing to publish her findings in traditional academic contexts, Featherstone has also sought to make her scholarly understanding of the period and its performers accessible to popular audiences as historical fiction, in the form of her novels <i>Walking in Pimlico</i> (2009) and <i>The Newgate Jig</i> (2010). The former involves a Victorian clog-dancing comedian who becomes caught up in a murder mystery, and tracks his experiences "through shabby pump-room pavilions, fairgrounds and freak shows" (Amazon.com). In the latter, a fugitive finds sanctuary at the London Aquarium amongst performing dogs, a doll-lady, a giant, and an author of penny-dreadfuls. The depiction of these milieux and the dialogues between characters draw directly on continuing, primary research into performers' acts and working lives. Thus, what began as a scholarly</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

endeavour whose presumed audience also lay within the HE sector has been transformed, through adaptation and creative practice, into outputs more suited for dissemination to a wider public. Whilst the process of research has not altered, the means by which it has been shaped for broader consumption, and therefore its impact potential, have developed over the period. Just as the academic publications have contributed to the ‘social turn’ in British theatre history, through their examination of the interrelationships between urban and rural poverty and performance cultures, so the fictional outputs have used an imaginative framework to locate working-class performers in a new and re-envisioned version of nineteenth century popular cultural history. Whilst other writers of Victorian crime fiction have utilised academic research, Featherstone is the originator of the scholarly research material on which her novels are based, and this enables particularly accurate depictions of her chosen milieux. One reviewer of *The Newgate Jig* observed that: “by the end of the novel, readers will have gained a detailed impression of the lower forms of stagecraft in the 19th-century together with the hand to mouth existence of so many of the performers” [5.3].

The strategies developed through Featherstone’s research and writing have also informed a reflective, methodological essay on “Creative Archive Research”, co-authored with Maggie B. Gale. [3.7] The research itself is ongoing and future publications will focus on “Penny Gaffs” and the work of John Mathews, and on the theatrical entrepreneur George Belmont.

3. References to the research (AOR – Available on request)

- 3.1 Jacky Bratton and Ann Featherstone, *The Victorian Clown* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 288pp. (AOR)
- 3.2 Ann Featherstone, “A Suitable Piece of Ground: the Victorian Portable Theatre in the Age of the Built Environment”, in *Leeds Working Papers in Victorian Studies* (Leeds: Centre for Victorian Studies), Volume 8: 2006, pp.64-80. (AOR)
- 3.3 Ann Featherstone, *The Journals of Sydney Race 1892-1900: A Provincial View of Popular Entertainment* (Society for Theatre Research, 2007), 176pp. (AOR)
- 3.4 Ann Featherstone, *Walking in Pimlico* (London: John Murray, 2009), 308pp. (AOR)
- 3.5 Ann Featherstone, “‘Holding up the mirror’: Readership and Authorship in the Era’s Pantomime Reviews from the 1870s”, in *Victorian Pantomime: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Jim Davis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp.170-82. (AOR)
- 3.6 Ann Featherstone, *The Newgate Jig* (London: John Murray 2010), 288pp.(AOR)

Other relevant publication:

- 3.7 Ann Featherstone and Maggie B. Gale, “The Imperative of the Archive: Creative Archive Research”, in *Theatre and Performance Methodologies*, eds., Kershaw and Nicholson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 17-40. (AOR)

The quality of research can be evidenced by its placement in peer-reviewed publications, with key scholarly publishers, and with established independent publishers.

4. Details of the impact

Context: The research investigations both build on and challenge previous conceptions of popular performance cultures and, particularly through their dissemination into the commercial market place and popular media contexts, have begun to impact on public understandings of past performance cultures and their connection to contemporary ones. The types of impact involved here are: *economic, cultural life, public discourse*. Reach and significance of the impact has been summarised below under three main headings:

i. Reach and Recognition of Novels:

Walking in Pimlico and *The Newgate Jig* have both been enthusiastically reviewed in a range of contexts: “a wildly inventive romp through the lowlife of 19th Century England ... extremely hard to put down” (*The Times* on *Walking in Pimlico* [5.1]); “Drama both on and off stage that is blood red in tooth and claw.... a first rate crime novel that rises high above the normal standards of the genre” (*British Theatre Guide* on *The Newgate Jig* [5.3]); see also [5.2] and [5.4]. By October 2012

(most recent available figures), the novels had achieved combined English language print sales of 7,137, generating economic benefit for a small independent publisher. Following initial hardback publications in 2009 and 2010 respectively, both were released as paperbacks and in Amazon Kindle editions (2010 and 2011). *The Newgate Jig* has also been republished in a large-print edition (W.F. Howes, 2011) and as an audiobook (Oakhill Publishing, 2011).

Both Featherstone's novels have also achieved international reach in non-Anglophone contexts, having been published in Italian translations by mainstream publisher Newton Compton, and in French by Univers Poche, Paris. *Walking in Pimlico* became *Il Circo maledetto!* (2010: sales of 10,177 by October 2012) and *Que le spectacle commence* (2011: sales 4,044), while *The Newgate Jig* became *La giostra degli impiccati* (2011: sales 4,864) and *La Gigue du Pendu* (2012: sales figures pending). A Portuguese translation of *Walking in Pimlico* is forthcoming in 2014 from Brazilian publisher Editora Underworld. Marketing for the Italian translation has included commissioning of online video commercials [5.6].

Featherstone has been interviewed about her work in print contexts [5.5], and has been invited to give numerous public talks about her novels and the 19th C. popular entertainments informing them. These include talks for: Friends of the Pavilion, Matlock Bath (2013); Lowdham Book Festival's Victorian Day, Nottingham (2013); Camden Arts Centre, London: Café Curio series (2013) [5.7]; Eastwood Writers' Group (2012); Lincoln Book Festival: talk simultaneously broadcast by Siren 107.3 FM's 'Reading Room Live' (2011) [5.8]; Heanor Festival, Derbyshire (2011); Chorlton Book Festival, Manchester (2010); Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society (2010); Derbyshire Literature Festival, "Meet the Author" (2010); Ilkeston Library Readers' Group (2010). In 2010, Featherstone also participated in book signing events at Waterstones bookshops in Derby and Nottingham, and at Heffers bookshop in Cambridge. In 2011 *The Newgate Jig* was a finalist in the East Midlands Book Awards, and Featherstone was featured as "Writer of the Month" by Writing East Midlands in December that year.

ii. Adaptation:

Radio: Featherstone and Bratton's *The Victorian Clown* became the basis for a 3-part series broadcast in BBC Radio 4's "Afternoon Reading" strand (28-30 December 2010). Tony Lidington adapted and performed the book's examination of "The Circus Memories of James Frowde" (based on Frowde's memoirs).

Online: Featherstone's work on *The Journals of Sydney Race* gave rise to another form of adaptation when in 2012 she was commissioned by The Space, an Arts Council-supported online platform for free access to the arts, to contribute 4 short essays to James Walker's curated exhibit "Sillitoe's Nottingham: Then and Now" (N.B. Web pages for The Space were closed down 31 October 2013, when funding ended, so unfortunately this material is no longer available online). These explored aspects of the 19th C. Nottingham Goose Fair, as discussed in Race's diaries (including fairground food, freak shows, fisticuffs), and connected them with the 1950s experiences of Arthur Seaton, anti-hero of Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. The third web essay, "Fairs and fisticuffs", has been audio-recorded for the "Sillitoe Trail" iPhone App, allowing listeners to hear it while touring connected sites around Nottingham.

iii. Consultancy

Featherstone's recognised expertise on 19th C popular entertainments has led to her being consulted by a range of broadcasters during the current REF period, either during the research stage of programme-making and/or as a featured "expert". Examples include:

Television: In May 2012, BBC1's *The One Show* (average daily audience, 5 million) featured Featherstone in conversation with actor Larry Lamb (one of whose ancestors was a lion tamer), discussing the role of animal trainers in the Victorian menagerie. Featherstone has also contributed to several programmes for BBC4 (average daily reach, 2 million): *The World's Oldest Joke* (6 March 2013) featured Featherstone discussing the gag book of music hall performer Tom Lawrence with Sir Michael Grade (this exchange was featured as "Moment of the Week" in the *Radio Times* [5.9]); the *Timeshift* series (2011) drew on Featherstone's expertise on fairs and circuses for *All the fun of the fair* (5 August) and *When the circus comes to town* (11 August); the *Rude Britannia* series (2010) consulted her on "*Bawdy Songs and Lewd Photographs*" (15 June).

Impact case study (REF3b)

Radio: Numerous appearances on BBC Radio include: *Night Waves* (Radio 3's flagship arts programme, 5 October 2010), discussing 20th C music hall comedian Norman Wisdom; *In Search of the Wantley Dragon* (Radio 4, 5 September 2009); *The Verb* (Radio 3, 8 May 2009) on "rudeness" in music hall; *Woman's Hour* (Radio 4, 4 August 2008) on music hall performer Nellie Wallace [5.10]; *Making History* (Radio 4, 21 September 2009), on Victorian "pedestrienne" Madame Angelo (endurance walker/performer). A drama documentary on Victorian female sports entertainers is currently under consideration with BBC R4 Commissioning Editor.

Developmental: Featherstone's research and publishing has led to various invitations to participate in or run commissioned workshops for organisations including Derbyshire County Council Libraries (2013), Writing East Midlands (Arts Council funded), and the Theatre Writing Partnership (Nottingham Playhouse, 2009-10). These events have encouraged discussion of creative writing, and promoted understanding of how organisations can best work with authors. In 2010 Featherstone also acted as a consultant to Norfox Young People's Theatre (Capitol Theatre, Manchester) on their production of *The Magnificent Tale of Emily Law and Arturo the Waterboy*, which explored popular entertainments on "the dark side of Victorian Manchester".

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

All claims referenced in section 4.

Selected Reviews: *Walking in Pimlico* [see also review quotes on amazon.co.uk]

- 5.1. Review in *The Times*, by Kate Saunders, 24 October 2009 (pdf of clipping)
- 5.2. <http://historicalnovelsociety.org/reviews/walking-in-pimlico/>

Selected Reviews: *The Newgate Jig* [see also review quotes on amazon.co.uk]

- 5.3. <http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/articles/140910y.htm>
- 5.4. <http://www.historytoday.com/blog/books-blog/jerome-de-groot/historical-fiction-round-march-2011>

Interview with Featherstone about *The Newgate Jig*:

- 5.5. <http://www.leftlion.co.uk/articles.cfm/title/ann-featherstone/id/3737>

Related video resources:

- 5.6. 2011 promotional video for *La giostra degli impiccati* (*The Newgate Jig*), at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vC0J3oScZ2U>

Evidence of events connected with the novels:

- 5.7. Featherstone's featured talk on Penny Gaffs at Camden Arts Centre's Café Curio series (April 2013), at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQifhpb4PMc>
- 5.8. Featherstone's featured talk for "Reading Room Live" (Siren 107.3FM) from the Bishop Greaves Theatre, Lincoln, as part of the Lincoln Book Festival (May 2011), at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssQ3JxDC6Go>

Evidence of media consultancy/adaptation:

- 5.9. "Moment of the Week", *Radio Times*, 2 March 2013 (pdf of clipping)
- 5.10. BBC Radio 4, *Woman's Hour* (4 August 2008): http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/03/2008_32_mon.shtml