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| Institution: University of Manchester |
| Unit of Assessment: 29 (English Language and Literature) |
| Title of case study: Impact on the Public's Understanding of Nineteenth-century Poetry and Politics |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study demonstrates how the research of Dr Michael Sanders on Chartist poetry has enhanced the public awareness of nineteenth-century working-class politics. Dr Sanders regularly communicates his research beyond academic audiences to reach a general public through his involvement in public lectures and musical, film, and heritage projects all aimed at expanding the understanding of poetry from the Chartist era. His work has had a direct impact on the presentation and preservation of the rare <i>National Chartist Hymn Book</i>, which was digitised as a result of his advisory role and made available to a whole new audience.</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The impact is based on continuing research that has been taking place at The University of Manchester from 2006 to the present day, with major publications in 2009 and 2013. The key researcher is Senior Lecturer Dr Michael Sanders (appointed as Lecturer in 2006; Senior Lecturer in 2009).</p> <p>The aim of the research was to extend understanding of early Victorian literature by recovering a significant body of currently neglected poetry that enjoyed a mass readership in the 1840s. Dr Sanders also wanted to demonstrate that the writing of poetry was a central rather than a marginal activity within Chartism, and that the poems can be treated as objects of aesthetic as well as socio-historical interest [3.1-3.4].</p> <p>The fundamental significance of this work is that it unearthed a substantial body of working-class literature that had previously been entirely neglected by both literary and historical scholars [3.1, 3.2]. The overwhelming bulk of this writing emanated from the workers themselves and whilst it has never enjoyed a popular status, it did secure a readership far in excess of even the best-loved novels of the period, such as those of Charles Dickens.</p> <p>The research led to the publication of a monograph, <i>The Poetry of Chartism</i>, which is based on the analysis of around 1,000 poems published in the leading Chartist newspaper, the <i>Northern Star</i>, between 1838 and 1852. After submission of his manuscript in 2008, Dr Sanders continued this work on Chartism and its literature, developing it further with an article for <i>Victorian Studies</i> [3.2] on the recently discovered <i>National Chartist Hymn Book</i> in Todmorden public library.</p> <p>Key findings:</p> <p><i>The Poetry of Chartism</i> [3.1]:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. demonstrates that poetry was an integral part of the Chartist movement; 2. shows that the extent of Chartist poetic production radically transforms our understanding of the wider literary landscape of the early Victorian period; 3. offers a new understanding of the relationship between aesthetics and politics. <p><i>The National Chartist Hymn Book</i> [3.2]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. is the only surviving example of a Chartist Hymn Book; 5. provides a new understanding of the role of religious belief within Chartism; 6. demonstrates the existence of a distinctive Chartist theology. |
| <p>3. References to the research (AOR- Available on request)</p> <p>The research has been published in top-ranked peer-reviewed journals, such as <i>Victorian Poetry</i>, <i>Victorian Periodicals Review</i> and the leading journal in this field, <i>Victorian Studies</i>. Dr Sanders' monograph, <i>The Poetry of Chartism</i>, appeared in the Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture series.</p> |

Key Publications

- 3.1 M. Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Politics, Aesthetics, History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Monograph. (AOR)
- 3.2 M. Sanders, “‘God is our Guide! Our Cause is Just!’: The *National Chartist Hymn Book* and Victorian Hymnody’, *Victorian Studies* 54.4 (2012), 679–705. Article. (AOR)
- 3.3 M. Sanders, ‘Constellating Chartist Poetry: Gerald Massey, Walter Benjamin and the Uses of Messianism’, *Victorian Poetry*, 45:4 (Winter 2007), 369-89. Article. *This article subsequently appeared as Chapter 7 of the monograph and translated into Chinese and published in *Research on Marxist Aesthetics* (Winter 2010). (AOR)
- 3.4 M. Sanders ‘Courtly Lays or Democratic Songs? The Politics of Poetic Citation in Chartist Literary Criticism’, in K. Blair and M.Gorji eds., *Class and the Canon: Constructing Labouring-Class Poetry and Poetics, 1750-1900*, Palgrave Macmillan, (2012), 156–173. (AOR)

Other Relevant Publications:

- 3.5 M. Sanders, “‘A Jackass load of Poetry’”: Re-constructing the *Northern Star’s* editorial policy 1838-1854’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 39:1 (Spring 2006), 46-66. Article. (AOR)
- 3.6 M. Sanders, “‘Tracing the ramifications of the Democratic Principle’”: Literary Criticism in the *Chartist Circular*’, *Key Words*, 8 (2010), 62–72. Article. (AOR)

4. Details of the impact

Context

Before Sanders’ research there was very little public awareness or understanding of either the extent of Chartist poetry or its importance within the movement. The research has radically changed this: it has had an impact on the public discourse around the relationship between poetry and politics in the mid nineteenth century; it has contributed to inspiring new forms of artistic expression in the North West; and it has helped the preservation of local heritage.

Pathways to Impact

Sanders’ research into the extent of Chartist poetic production formed the basis for articles in *The Guardian*, (‘Lost Voices of Victorian Working Class uncovered in political protest poems’, 15/3/2007)[5.1], and the Italian journal *Left*, (‘La fabbrica della poesia’, 30/3/2007). As a result of this coverage, Sanders was invited to act as an advisor to the South Bank Show for its ‘Literary Walks’ series (2008) and has been interviewed on two separate occasions by BBC Radio Manchester (March 2009, May 2010) as well as being featured in the *Manchester Evening News* (March 2009).

Following the discovery of the *National Chartist Hymn Book* in Todmorden Public Library, Sanders’ work was featured in the *Church Times* (December 2010), the *Times Literary Supplement* (December 2010) and the *Yorkshire Post* (21/12/2010) and *Lancashire Telegraph* (16/12/2010). Sanders’ research in this field was also used by Canon Garth Hewitt in a ‘Pause for Thought’ feature on Radio 2 (27/6/2012) [5.2].

Since his work on *The Northern Star*, Sanders was asked to act as an advisor to the Yorkshire Chartist Choir, a community arts project undertaken as part of ‘Celebrate Democracy – Halifax Chartist Festival’ (supported by the Local Heritage Initiative, a partnership between the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Countryside Agency and the Nationwide Building Society, 2006) [5.4]. The Yorkshire Chartist Choir performed one concert attended by 250 people, and recorded a CD. Sanders assisted the choir in finding Chartist songs and provided historical contextual information that was used to produce a booklet to accompany the performance. Also as part of this festival, Sanders gave a talk on the Chartist poet Ernest Jones to an audience of 60 people.

Reach and Significance of the Impact

Impact on creating and inspiring new forms of artistic expression

As a consequence of his research and previous involvement with the Yorkshire Chartist Choir, Dr Sanders started collaborating in 2009 with Corista, a choir based in the Calder Valley in West Yorkshire: in March 2009, Corista accompanied his talk on Chartist poetry at Manchester Central

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Library [5.7]; in 2010 he gave the Inaugural Frow Memorial Lecture (2010) organized by the Working-Class Movement Library, Salford, where he was accompanied both by Corista and the actress Maxine Peake, who is a Trustee of the Working Class Movement Library (200 participants) [5.6]; and in September 2011 gave a talk on the *National Chartist Hymn Book* at the People's History Museum in Manchester, attended by 80 people with musical accompaniment from Corista [5.7]. As members of the choir put it: 'his [Dr Sanders'] research led us to take up the words of the newly discovered Chartist Hymn book, add music of the era consistent with the songs, and perform these to many audiences great and small' [5.7].

Since 2011, Dr Sanders has been collaborating with Canon Garth Hewitt from the international charity the Amos Trust. They have been working with a group of folk musicians on original arrangements of hymns from the *National Chartist Hymn Book*, which led to the creation of a CD, recorded on July 15th 2013 and launched by Canon Hewitt and Dr Sanders just outside the review period on 25 August 2013 at the arts, faith and justice festival Greenbelt (23-26 August 2013), which attracted 600 people [5.9].

Dr Sanders provided Canon Hewitt with the lyrics of the hymns, which Hewitt also used in his BBC Radio 2's 'Pause for Thought' on 27 June 2012. Hewitt writes: 'I am particularly grateful to Dr Sanders for the help he has given me [...] to understand more about the Chartist Movement, [...] the culture, and the context in which the hymns were written. I am already including two of those hymns in my regular concerts [during 2012 and 2013] and telling a little bit of the story around them, but this will become a far higher profile in what I am doing as soon as the album is released. [...] I think that this exposure of the *National Chartist Hymnbook* will raise awareness of a distinctive Chartist theology and this will be an issue of particular interest to the church community, though possibly even wider' [5.2].

Impact on the presentation and conservation of cultural heritage

Invitations to speak at the Ledbury Poetry Festival (100), the Chartist Convention Newport (200), and the Frow Memorial Lecture (200) have contributed to the presentation of new information about working class cultural heritage. Sanders' research on the *National Chartist Hymn Book* has also had an impact on the preservation of such heritage. By 'confirming the origins of the find and identifying that it contained 16 hymns sung by the Victorian radicals who campaigned for democracy and workers' rights', Sander's research led Calderdale Library Services to produce a digitised version of this extremely rare 1845 item, which is now available online [5.3]. Importantly, as a consequence of an increased awareness of the importance of this find, the number of visitors to the small Todmorden library increased, and put the library in a position to preserve the pamphlet correctly by housing it in a small acid free box [5.3]. As the Team Leader for West Calderdale Libraries puts it, 'Thanks to Dr Sander's efforts the pamphlet is now catalogued and accessible for everyone to enjoy' [5.3].

Sanders' research on Chartism led to an invitation to sit on the management committee of Wild Rose Heritage and Arts, a community group whose aim is to 'bring heritage alive through local voices'. Based in Hebden Bridge, from which it takes its name, the group began as an oral history project and later expanded its activities and focus, working with a variety of age groups to understand the ways in which people both change, and are changed by, the places in which they live and work. As the manager of the WRH&A, writes: 'The oral histories we collect reflect individuals' endeavours and reactions to working conditions [...]. The Chartists' belief in equality, for which they fought, has carried on into issues that concern us today. And just as poetry and song express people's real interests today, so did the Chartist Movement's pioneer efforts. Dr Sanders' involvement in our organisation has given us new approaches to understand contemporary contexts [...] and helped inform us in our use of socio-historical material in a creative way, which increased the possibilities of transferring knowledge and understanding to others, [...] widening our audiences and appeal. [...] The history of radical workers' movements is prevalent in many of the stories we've collected and is the driver for the next major project we are undertaking [in June 2013]. Sanders' research has helped 're-assess how the context of our area of interest has been influenced by the Chartist movement and this insight is brought to bear on our meeting and funded projects' [5.5].

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Sanders' research and his associations with the Working Class Movement Library have also contributed to widening public access to and participation in the political process through his involvement in 2012 to the film *The Condition of the Working Class* by Inside Film [5.8]. Inspired by Engels' book of the same title, the film follows a group of working class people from Manchester and Salford who create a theatrical show based on their own experiences and Engels' book. It contextualises their struggle to get the show on stage against the daily struggles of ordinary people facing economic crisis and austerity politics. Drawing on Sanders' knowledge of the historical context of Chartism and Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class*, Deidre O'Neill and Michael Wayne interviewed Sanders as 'the only real "expert" testimony in [the] film', for which he 'provided a personal commentary and reading on Engels' text' [5.8]. Between April and August 2013 the film was screened in 32 different locations, ranging from the London Labour Festival to the Miners' Community Centre in Moston, from Calder's Bookshop in London to Brighthelm Church and Community Centre in Brighton. A DVD is available for sale on the website.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

All claims referenced in section 4.

5.1 David Ward, 'Lost Voices of Victorian working class uncovered in political protest poems', 15 March 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/mar/15/books.booksnews1>

5.2 Letter from Amos Trust

5.3 Letter from Calderdale Library Services

5.4 Celebrate Democracy: Halifax Chartist Festival:

<http://www.halifaxcourier.co.uk/news/calderdale/history-festival-judged-uk-s-best-1-1977629>

5.5 Letter from the Manager of Wild Rose Arts

5.6 Working Class Movement Library Inaugural Frow memorial lecture 2010 (available on request)

5.7 Letter from Corista (a group of six singers)

5.8 Email from 'Inside Film': <http://www.conditionoftheworkingclass.info/>

5.9 <http://www.garthewitt.org/>