

Journée d'études

Jeudi 9 avril 2026

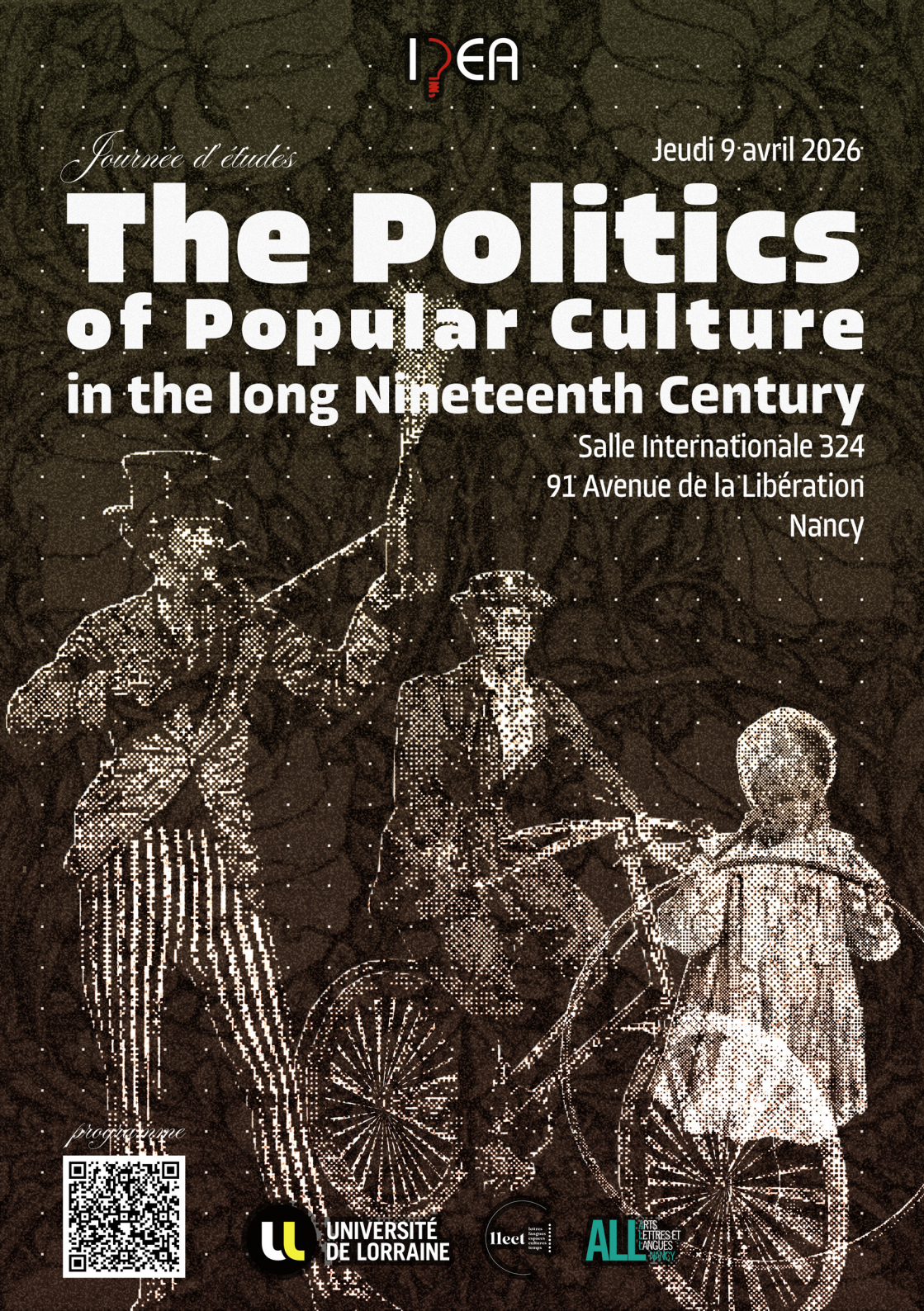
The Politics of Popular Culture in the long Nineteenth Century

Salle Internationale 324
91 Avenue de la Libération
Nancy

programme



UNIVERSITÉ
DE LORRAINE



Programme

9:00

Welcome & Coffee



9:15



Introduction and Opening Remarks

Nathalie Collé, Director of IDEA
Eleanor Parkin-Coates & Stéphane Guy

9:30

Panel 1 – Novels and Music: A Means to Gender and Class Empowerment

Moderation: Céline Sabiron



9:30



Mary Shelley's and Frances Trollope's observation of and engagement with the lower classes in Italy and Britain

Antonella Braidà Laplace (University of Lorraine)

In the travelogue *Rambles in Germany and in Italy, in 1840, 1842 and 1843* (1844) when narrating her visit to the island of Capri, Mary Shelley introduces a long section on the lower classes:

The wretched lot of these poor people is very sad. In England we see and read of the squalid condition of the poor; and when it is contrasted with the luxury of the rich, we feel deeply, 'That there is something rotten in the state.' But while we are aware that our climate fearfully increases the sufferings of the poor, we know that to keep out cold and hunger is costly, and the suffering does not appear so causeless and arbitrary as in this fairy island; here, where the sun in all his splendour kisses earth, which, well cultivated and fertile, yields plenty; and where, moreover, the sea is abundant in fish; the heart rebels yet more vehemently against the hungry poverty of the hard-working peasants. (*Rambles*, SW, 372-73)

In *History of a Six-Weeks' Tour* (1817) a collaborative short travelogue written with Percy Bysshe Shelley, she noted the dire consequences of the Napoleonic wars. Mary Shelley's first and last travelogue thus reveal her interest in the conditions of the lower classes, while introducing comparisons with Britain. Both travelogues thus reveal her engagement with the lower classes in Italy and in Britain before and after the Reform Acts of 1832. As for Italy, her observations reveal an almost scientific desire to describe and understand the situation of the lower classes as an ethnographer.

Another traveller contemporary to Mary Shelley, Frances Trollope (1779-1863), also visited the peninsula at about the same time and published *A Visit to Italy* (1842). She, too, noted the situation of the poor in Italy. As for Britain, in her novel *Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (1840), she denounced the plight of child labour and the condition of the lower classes. Inspired by political reports such as the *Sadler Report* (1832), and John Brown's autobiographical *Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, the novel is credited as having contributed to the reform of the Factory's Act of 1844. In the novel, Trollope adopts the original position of claiming that individual philanthropy cannot replace political action to reform factories.

This paper will analyze the two writers' production as examples of women entering the public sphere of politics despite contemporary assumptions that the subject should be confined to men. The two writers thus contributed in different ways to raise awareness and to empower the lower classes in a crucial decade leading to the important reforms of 1832. The question will be raised concerning the legacy of the second generations of blue-stockings, involved in philanthropy and charity.

Antonella Braidà is lecturer in English at the Université de Lorraine, Nancy (France), and a member of the research center IDEA. After completing her D.Phil at St Catherine's college, Oxford. She has edited volumes and authored articles on the reception of Dante, on Anglo-Italian relations in the Romantic period, and on women writers, with a special focus on Mary Shelley. On women writers she has published the edited volume *Mary Shelley and Europe* (Legenda, MHRA, 2020), *Female Voices* (with Éva Antal, PUFC, 2022) and an issue of *Études anglaises* 76/2 2025 on "British Radical and Revolutionary Women Writers (1770s-1830s)"



9:55



British Music Hall Song and Politics 1890-1914

John Mullen (University of Rouen Normandie)

Music hall, not folk song, was the centre of popular music in Britain in the last decades of the long nineteenth century. Far from being mere entertainment, music hall song served as a site where class grievances, colonial attitudes, and workers' aspirations were voiced, negotiated and sometimes suppressed.

Music hall has been on the one hand praised as a true "vox populi" of its overwhelmingly working-class audiences, and on the other hand has been considered a reactionary, jingoistic, moralistic commercial voice of High Empire, tightly controlled by music hall management obsessed by respectability and by nouveau riche owners. Archival work on large corpuses of song has, however, been extremely rare, and easy generalization has sometimes reigned unopposed.

To judge what popular voices could be heard in music hall song, it is essential to look first at the different pressures exerted on the making of the repertoire: industrial, legal, commercial, ideological, and artistic pressures among others. My contribution will attempt to characterize the contradictory voice of music hall, seeing this entertainment form as an aid to survival for audiences in a world far harsher than ours.

Aside from their songs and turns, the artistes also had political priorities in their working lives. A vibrant trade union tradition led to the great music hall strike in London in 1907, an event which can help us understand some of the complexities of the ideological positionings of music hall professionals.

John Mullen is Emeritus Professor at the University of Rouen-Normandy. Author of two books on popular song during the First World War, he has published widely on the music hall industry after 1880, and its processes and repertoires. His most recent article, "Structures, Song Traditions, Fears and Fantasies: British and French Love Songs in the First World War" (*Popular Music History* 17:2, 2026), compares and contrasts the very different love song repertoires in the two countries.



Discussion



10:45

Coffee Break

∞ **11:15** ∞

Keynote Speaker

Moderation: Pauline Collombier

The Making of Working-class Politics in Nineteenth-century Britain

Emma Griffin (Queen Mary, University of London)

The contours of the politicisation of the working class are well known. The first truly working-class political movement – the Radicals – emerged in the 1790s. The Radicals were repressed, but a new clamour for reform re-ignited in the 1810s and grew in time to become the Chartists. How did this happen? How did working men with no tradition of political activism organise themselves into such a large and powerful organisation? This paper uses working-class autobiography to shed light on the process, rather than content, of working-class politics. My aim is to switch attention away from *what* political views working people expressed to the question of *how* they learned to engage with politics at all.

Emma Griffin is a Professor of Modern British history. After an undergraduate degree in History at Queen Mary in the 1990s and a PhD and postdoctoral fellowship at Cambridge University, she spent eighteen years at UEA, before returning to QM in 2023 to take up her current position as Head of the School of History. She has written five books, most recently *Bread Winner: An Intimate History of the Victorian Economy* (Yale University Press, 2020) and is currently writing a global history of industrialisation for Penguin Press.

In addition to her work as a researcher and teacher, she is the current President of the Royal Historical Society, having previously been an active member of its Council in the 2010s in a variety of roles. She has spent many years engaged in editorial work and has served as editor for *History*; *Historical Journal*; *Cultural and Social History* and the *Camden Series*.



Discussion



12:30

Lunch

14:00

Panel 3 – Appropriation and Perceptions of Popular Culture

Moderation: Eleanor Parkin-Coates

∞ **14:00** ∞

Joseph Ritson: folklorist, radical and eccentric

Richard Somerset (University of Lorraine)

Joseph Ritson is usually described as an antiquarian and collector of folklore, and a significant figure in the ‘ballad-revival’ of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In this rather specialized and predominantly genteel world, he cut a notoriously eccentric figure. Equally capable of pronouncing himself Jacobite or Jacobin and atheist, Ritson mostly seemed determined to challenge establishment conventions. In his writings he often adopted a polemical style, apparently relishing any opportunity to ruffle staid literary feathers with abrasive public controversy. Most curious of all, to his contemporaries, was his adhesion to a vegetarian diet; but their ridicule only seemed to strengthen his resolve. As folklorist, Ritson first made his mark with a *Collection of English Songs* (1783), a title which set the collection apart from that of predecessors who had collected “old ballads” (Ambrose Philips, 1723) or “reliques of ancient English poetry” (Thomas Percy, 1765). Unlike these earlier collectors, Ritson sought to disentangle a popular oral tradition from productions sponsored by aristocratic patronage. To them, “English” meant only in the English *language*; to Ritson, it meant something more specifically ethnographical. This orientation found even stronger expression in his 1795 collection of Robin Hood tales, which can be understood as the main source for that figure’s representation as popular rebel, outlaw and hero.

This paper will attempt to situate Ritson in the complex of currents of thought that accompanied the emergence of ‘Englishness’ as a significant social, cultural and political consideration at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. It will seek to address each of these dimensions, and so to relate abstract disciplinary history – the emergence of an organic or ethnographic sense of culture – to concrete political and ideological issues of incarnation and representation.

Richard Somerset is a lecturer at the Université de Lorraine. He is primarily interested in the concept of historicity in the nineteenth century as manifested in the fields of natural science, historiography and literature. This interdisciplinary work naturally led to an interest in the history of disciplines and disciplinarity, and to the co-editing of two collections of essays: *Mapping Fields of Study: the Cultural and Institutional Space of English Studies* (Presses universitaires de Nancy, 2019) and *Ordering Knowledge: Disciplinarity and the Shaping of European Modernity* (Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2023). He has also published articles on evolutionary thought and evolutionary popularisation in France and in Britain, and on illustration and narrative form used as argumentative strategy in popular science and popular history writing; as well as pieces on specific 19th-century authors, both French and British.

∞ **14:25** ∞

The imaginary dangers of popular religious movements and contrived popular religious movements: perceptions of Methodism and Anglican Evangelicalism during the British Regency period.

Matthew Smith (University of Lorraine)

14:50

“Revised and Improved”: Pedagogical Politics in Mid-19th-century Editions of William Godwin’s Books for Children

John-Erik Hansson (University Paris Cité)

This paper proposes to examine the politics of educational books in the mid 19th century by looking at “revised and improved” editions of the cycle of works of history for children that philosopher and novelist William Godwin (1756-1836) had written in the early years of the 19th century. In the aftermath of the French Revolution and the conservative reaction in Britain, Godwin entered the world of children’s literature not only as an author, but also as a publisher and bookseller. He and his wife Mary Jane ran their Juvenile Library from 1805 until it eventually went out of business in 1825, publishing works by Godwin as well as others (most famously, Charles and Caroline Lamb). After the demise of the Juvenile Library, Godwin sold some of the copyrights to booksellers Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, who put out new editions. Godwin’s histories of England, Greece and Rome continued being published into the second half of the 19th century, showing an enduring popularity, in editions advertised as “revised and improved”.

By comparing Godwin’s early 19th-century editions to those published later in the century, this paper looks into how Victorian publishers and educationalists transformed works whose pedagogy was innovative, in line with an emancipatory political project, but whose claim to being part of a ‘popular culture’ is limited, into works that are more clearly part of a ‘popular culture’, but which embody a much more conventional approach to education. In this respect, the “revised and improved” editions that ensured that Godwin’s histories for children became part of Victorian popular culture also implied a more conservative pedagogical politics.

John-Erik Hansson is a lecturer in British history at Université Paris Cité, a member of ECHSELLES (UMR 8264), and reviews editor for *Anarchist Studies*. After writing his PhD thesis on William Godwin’s books for children, he has turned to the history of Godwin’s anarchist reception in the 20th century, and the social and intellectual history of British anarchism.



Discussion



15:45

Coffee Break

16:15

Keynote Speaker

Moderation: Stéphane Guy

Theatrical Celebrity and the Coming of the Picture Postcard, 1890-1914

Rohan McWilliam (Anglia Ruskin University)

The coming of the picture postcard in the 1890s amounted to a communications revolution. It changed what Rachel Teukolsky calls the ‘picture world’ of the period. Sending postcards became a popular mania. This paper is devoted to a sub-genre of the new form: the presentation of actors and actresses associated with the West End stage in drama, music hall and musical comedies. The postcard became vital to the development of popular theatre, creating a celebrity culture that was felt around the globe. More deeply it helped construct a new cultural force: glamour Postcards worked with conventions of performance and portraiture but also reflected developments in the fashion and beauty industries. Their subjects became objects of desire and longing. Soldiers, for example, pinned up postcard images of the actress Gladys Cooper in the trenches during the Great War. I am concerned here both with the image of the performer on the card but, equally, with the card as a material artefact and the people who consumed it. In the context of a conference devoted to ‘The Politics of Popular Culture in the Nineteenth Century’, these images appear to be at odds with conventional politics. I will argue, however, that they can be related to social and political change in the later nineteenth century. This paper is part of a wider history of the West End of London that I am writing where I am particularly concerned with its cultural politics.

Rohan McWilliam is Professor of Modern British History at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. He is a former President of the British Association for Victorian Studies (2012-15) and serves on the boards of the *Journal of Victorian Culture* and the *London Journal*. At Anglia Ruskin, he is co-director of the Labour History Research Unit. He writes about Victorian popular politics and popular culture whilst also commenting on current affairs. His publications include *The Tichborne Claimant: A Victorian Sensation* (2007) and *London’s West End: Creating the Pleasure District, 1800-1914* (2020). He is at work on a follow up volume to the latter which covers the West End from 1914 to the present whilst co-editing a book on Keir Starmer’s Labour government.



Discussion



17:30

Closing Remarks

19:15

Dinner in Town

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