

Introduction

Within the last generation, scholars have begun to take graphic art more seriously than ever before. Building on a proud tradition of scholarship dating from the work of Ernst Gombrich, and utilising the vast corpus of material assembled in the British Museum's catalogue of personal and political satires, by Frederic Stephens and Dorothy George,¹ scholars such as Diana Donald, Ronald Patten, Eirwen Nicholson, Amelia Rauser, Mark Hallett and Todd Porterfield have begun to interrogate, more seriously, the visual language of this genre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.² Brian Maidment has extended this work, contributing important commentaries on reading comic images as well as popular prints, a contribution to scholarship which he continued most memorably in his plenary talk to the symposium that heralded this special issue of *Visual Culture in Britain*.³

However, in spite of this formidable array of scholarship, there is still a perception that graphic art is not taken as seriously as other visual art productions such as painting, drawing, film and sculpture. Why graphic art does not enjoy a more significant role in the academic canon is one motivation behind this special issue of *Visual Culture in Britain*. Another is the paucity of literature on transnational aspects of the British graphic tradition.

British graphic art did not exist in a vacuum – it was influenced by developments in, and practitioners from, a wide range of contexts. This collection of essays, which derives from the one-day symposium on graphic satire and the United Kingdom in the long nineteenth century, held at the University of Nottingham in September 2017, seeks to interrogate the nature of the United Kingdom's status as a global power in the long nineteenth century by considering the varied ways in which it was viewed, and represented, in graphic satire during the period.

The five essays that follow discuss how graphic satire illuminated the relationship between Britain and other imperial colonies such as Ireland and Australia but also powers such as the USA and Germany. A running connection between them is the sustained transnational influence of the British graphic satirical tradition throughout the nineteenth century. That influence is examined for good or ill in a number of case studies that consider such issues as the reception of imagery, the widening of the scale of graphic satire beyond the traditional print and the role of graphic satire in a range of crisis points - the Anglo-American War of 1812, Daniel O’Connell’s election to Westminster in 1829, and the independent Australian Briton movement of the late nineteenth century.

The essays raise issues concerned with Britain and its place in the world, both in the Empire and elsewhere. By moving from European concerns to North America and to Australian preoccupations, a global perspective on Britain is offered. What emerges is that the language of graphic satire, so keenly developed in Britain over the preceding two centuries, is continuously altered and fine-tuned by local situations whilst maintaining a visual and stylistic awareness of its origins.

Those transnational links with an originating British tradition include an abiding adherence to humour and social categorisation. The first maintains the interest of the observer whilst the second allows the viewer to identify and/or compare him/herself with others.⁴

The two main ingredients of graphic satire, laughter and implausibility, are evident in the work of Charles Jameson Grant, whose 1834 print, ‘The Trades Unions – a General Strike!’, provided a detail as the poster image for the 2017 symposium (Figure 1). The image of a group of agitating ‘Scavengers’ has them complaining that “Ve’ll have Ham & Beef or ve’ll Upset the Mud Cart.” The point of using this detail was to raise the issue of humour as a key

ingredient in nineteenth-century graphic print. Produced in the year of the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act, which seriously altered relief for the poor in the United Kingdom, Grant's graphic sheet is a comic compendium of complaining groups arranged in two tiers, five on the top and five below. There are tailors, dustmen, bricklayers, policemen (here 'raw lobsters'), dyers, cinder sifters and working clergy. Produced within a decade of the legalisation of trade unions, this motley group of unregulated urban types threaten 'A General Strike' and declare ridiculous resolutions. The pretensions of the men and women (the cinder sifters being the only collection of women workers in the ten vignettes) are gently satirised. One of the three 'Bricklayers Labourers' is an Irishman who, complaining about his employer, wonders, '...does he tink dat we can pay de Rint & get dacantly Drunk wid 18 shilling a wake - och Bathershin we'll have Five and Twinty.' The flood of Irish labourers in England in the 1830s is here instantly referenced in this display of grumbling workers, the ethnicity of the three Irishmen indicated by the phonetically written speech cloud, their uncouth appearance and the use of Irish-language terms such as 'och' and 'Bathershin'.⁵

There is more to Grant's work than mere entertainment. By including the Irish bricklayers, Grant's sheet shows us the ease with which a transnational dimension had entered the English scene by the 1830s, without any discernible differences in visual scale, stylistic alterations or overall tone. The Irish bricklayers are comparable in depiction, the use of humour, and their attitude to authority, with their fellow urban workers, the dustmen, the scavengers and the dyers. Graphic satires related to the United Kingdom during the nineteenth century cannot be explored and fully analysed without examining such transnational inclusions and that is what lies at the heart of this collection.

All of the essays published here in one way or another deal with the movement of images and/or individual artists to and from Britain. Such movement may have been with Ireland, Australia and Germany, or the fledgling USA. Ireland features in two of the essays,

those by Carly Hegenbarth and Emily Mark-FitzGerald. Hegenbarth's contribution explores the movement of prints across the two sides of the Irish Sea, from London to Dublin and vice versa. Through a close reading of three prints dating from the late 1820s, we are offered an insight into who looked at and purchased politically-charged graphic images relating to Daniel O'Connell and the imminent prospect of Catholic Emancipation. In Mark-FitzGerald's essay, the focus is on an individual artist, Harry Furniss, who had a fractious relationship with his native Ireland but in his early illustrated satirical work contributed to the reputation of a Dublin-based journal that became known as 'The Irish Punch'. While such nomenclature may, one might think, reek of colonial mimicry, it needs to be remembered that, in the early 1870s, when *Zozimus* was published, Dublin was an imperial city that had been part of the United Kingdom since 1801.

Such 'colonial mimicry' also features in the contribution from Richard Scully who takes us through the artists and administrative history of the Australian version of *Punch*, the one in Melbourne appearing from the mid nineteenth century until 1925. As Scully argues, the existence of such variations on the London *Punch*, go a long way to underlining the strength of an imperial 'shared humour' that, as these essays show, stretched from London to Dublin and on to the State of Victoria in Australia as well as the east coast of North America.

Whilst historians of colonialization and empire during this period typically characterise relations between London and other imperial centres as marked by the opposing forces of assimilation (to metropolitan norms) or antagonism (in reaction against them), all of the essays presented here suggest a more nuanced understanding of similarity and difference are required to explain the interchange in personnel, techniques and style, where graphic satire is concerned.

Matthew Potter's essay on the reception of eighteenth-century British satirical prints in late nineteenth-century Germany is a welcome historiographical reading of internationalism at work. Potter shows how British cartoons and graphic satires offered a potentially liberal viewpoint to the deeply conservative *Kaizerzeit* of the *fin-de-siècle*. Hegenbarth and Potter, in their different examples, discuss the international currency offered by the exchange and awareness of graphic satires. A shared audience is created and prints become part of what Hegenbarth calls 'the communication infrastructure' between different geographical areas.

Another product of transnationalism is how one nation sees itself against a larger entity, be that entity a former or even existing colonial power. Allison Stagg's essay shares a similar premise to that of Richard Scully in her interest in how a nation shows itself. William Charles' borrowings in the Philadelphia of 1813 of a James Gillray design for the representation of George III produced a decade earlier in London is a very clear example of transatlantic appropriation. As Stagg demonstrates in her essay, the American Hornet piercing the English Peacock as the 'mad monarch of the British Isles' looks on is as perfect an example of transnational caricature in operation as one could hope to see. In the long nineteenth century, graphic satire is one major component in that story.

Notes

1. Gombrich; *British Museum Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires*.
2. See Bibliography.

3. Maidment, 2013 and 2001. Maidment delivered the Cust Lecture 'The Comic Image 1820-1840 - The Death of Caricature?' at the University of Nottingham on the 5th September 2017 as part of a one-day symposium, 'Graphic Satire and the UK in the long 19th Century'. He subsequently delivered the talk in Paris to the Franco-British Seminar, The Sorbonne, Paris; for video recordings of all the talks from the Nottingham symposium see <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/conference/fac-arts/humanities/history/graphic-satire/videos/videos.aspx>.
4. One of most sustained accounts of a transnational examination in graphic satire is Curtis.
5. The first an expression of annoyance or sorrow, the second an amalgamation of the English 'bother' with the Irish 'sin' meaning 'that', altogether implying something resembling, 'regardless'. For more on Grant see, *C.J. Grant's Political Drama*. Our thanks to Brian Maidment on the possible dating of Grant's 'The Trades Unions – A General Strike'.

Disclosure statement

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Figure caption

Charles Jameson Grant, *The Trade Unions. - a General Strike!*, detail, hand-coloured lithograph, sheet: 19 x 26 cm, c. 1834, courtesy of Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham.