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## MR AND MRS PUNCH IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *This article examines the changes and continuities in the depiction of the violent relationship between the popular glove-puppets, Punch and Judy, over the course of the nineteenth century. While the puppet show emerged as a low-brow street entertainment during the first decades of the nineteenth century, by 1850 it had been hijacked by the middle and upper classes, and began to appear with increasing frequency in fashionable drawing rooms. At the same time, the relationship between the two central characters, Punch and Judy, was substantially modified. On the streets, during the first half of the century, the Punches' marriage had both reflected the continuing popularity of the early modern theme of the 'struggle for the breeches' and encapsulated familial tensions that resulted from the pressures of industrialization and urbanization. However, from 1850 the middle classes attempted to reshape the relationship into a moral tale in order to teach their children valuable lessons about marital behaviour. Yet, at the same time, the maintenance of violence in the portrayal of the Punches' conjugal life exposed crucial patterns of continuity in attitudes towards marriage, masculinity, and femininity in Victorian England.*

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On accepting Mr McLean's offer of marriage, Miss Ailie, the well-loved school teacher of the village, invited her class of young pupils to the wedding reception and, as a farewell treat before handing them over to the new teachers, Mr McLean organized a Punch and Judy show for their entertainment. However, given the nature of the occasion, Miss Ailie thought that this entertainment might be inappropriate. She consulted many respectable people in the village, but none could see a way out of the difficulty. Then Tommy, her favourite pupil, found a solution.

The performance took place, and none of the fun was omitted, yet neither Miss Ailie nor Mr Dishart could disapprove. Punch did chuck his baby out of the window (roars of laughter) in his jovial, time-honoured way, *but* immediately thereafter up popped the showman to say, 'Ah, my dear boys and girls, let this be a lesson to you never to destroy your offspring. Oh, shame on Punch, for to do the wicked deed; he will be caught [sic] in the end, and serve him right.' Then, when Mr Punch had walloped

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his wife with the stick, amid thunders of applause, up again popped the showman: 'Ah, my dear boys and girls, what a lesson is this we sees, what goings on is this? He have bashed the head of her who should ha' been the apple of his eye, and he does not care a – he does not care; but mark my word, his home will now be desolate, no more shall she meet him at his door with kindly smile, he have done for her quite, and now he is a haunted man. Oh, be warned by his sad igsample [sic], and do not bash the head of your loving wife.'<sup>1</sup>

This fictional account of a late nineteenth-century Punch and Judy show contained in J. M. Barrie's *Sentimental Tommy* (1896) is perhaps slightly exaggerated, but its satirical value is important. The glove-puppet show first appeared on London's streets at the turn of the nineteenth century, its violent portrayal of wife murder proving popular with audiences. At the beginning of the Victorian age, Punch and Judy were invited into the middle-class home, their troubles transformed by respectable adults into a didactic nursery tale. However, as Barrie's narrative demonstrates, the process of change was never fully completed. Instead, the juxtaposition of violence and morality ultimately came to reflect the confusion and contradictions inherent in contemporary assumptions about marriage and conflict.

Recent scholarship has displayed a growing interest in the issue of conflict and violence within the home. Focusing predominantly on cases of actual violence between co-habiting men and women, historians have exposed the prevalence of conflict, especially in working-class households, despite the emergence of companionate ideals of marriage. While historians on the one hand emphasize the worsening position of women, particularly victims of domestic violence, historians on the other hand demonstrate ways in which women were able to manipulate new gender definitions in order to seek redress for the behaviour of their husbands.<sup>2</sup> In an effort to review these conclusions, Martin Wiener has examined narratives of violence in the cultural imagination. By comparing famous intimate murders from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, Wiener concludes that, with the rise of sensibility and the redefinition of roles of men and women, the prevailing 'public nightmare' changed. While women were increasingly

<sup>1</sup> J. M. Barrie, *Sentimental Tommy: the story of his boyhood* (London, 1896), p. 397.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and companionship: conflict in nineteenth-century married life* (London, 1995); Nancy Tomes, 'A "torrent of abuse": crimes of violence between working-class men and women in London, 1840–1875', *Journal of Social History*, 11 (1977), pp. 328–45; Anna Clark, *The struggle for the breeches: gender and the making of the British working class* (Berkeley, 1995); Anna Clark, 'Domesticity and the problem of wife-beating in nineteenth-century Britain: working-class culture, law and politics', in Shani D'Cruze, ed., *Everyday violence in Britain, 1850–1950: gender and class* (Harlow, 2000), pp. 27–37; Ellen Ross, '“Fierce questions and taunts”: married life in working-class London, 1870–1914', *Feminist Studies*, 8 (1982), pp. 575–602; Judith Walkowitz, 'Jack the Ripper and the myth of male violence', *Feminist Studies*, 8 (1982), pp. 543–74; Shani D'Cruze, *Crimes of outrage: sex, violence and Victorian working women* (De Kalb, 1998); Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, marriage and the law in Victorian England, 1850–1895* (Princeton, 1989); Maeve Doggett, *Marriage, wife-beating and the law in Victorian England* (Columbia, 1993).

represented as less dangerous and more in need of protection, men became perceived as more dangerous and more in need of control.<sup>3</sup>

However, this cultural imagination, especially in the nineteenth century, was far more complicated and ambiguous than Wiener suggests. Ideals and expectations of marriage that achieved such crucial status during the Victorian period were not so clear-cut. Instead, the persistence of older stereotypes and paradigms, as well as the harsh realities of conjugal life, meant that confusion and contradiction became entrenched in nineteenth-century discourses on marital conflict. Unease with behaviour that did not conform to respectable norms and disappointment with the limited achievements of companionate marriage helped to muddy the waters and allowed for a large measure of continuity in addition to the change that Wiener highlights.

With its comical representation of domestic violence and its great popularity, the Punch and Judy show formed an important component of the cultural imagination. From its emergence at the turn of the nineteenth century, this glove-puppet show followed a basic episodic structure in which Punch dealt with different antagonists, finishing scenes by either murdering or otherwise disposing of his opponents. The show was very socially sensitive and the cast of characters featured in its episodes frequently changed, reflecting wider contemporary developments. However, throughout the century, one episode consistently featured as part of the performance: Punch's turbulent and violent relationship with his wife, Judy. The regularity with which this scene was played and its great popularity (to the extent that the colloquial name of the show became 'Punch and Judy') meant that Punch and Judy became icons of marital conflict. These characters and their problems were regularly extracted from the show by contemporaries as their violent relationship offered an opportunity for private matters to be discussed in the public sphere.

## I

Past historians of Punch and Judy have long debated the roots of the glove-puppet show, drawing attention to both domestic and foreign influences as well as Punch's former glory as a marionette.<sup>4</sup> However, the emergence of Punch in glove-puppet form at the opening of the nineteenth century marked a significant turning point for both the entertainment and his characterization. In contrast to the popular eighteenth-century marionette shows, this new glove-puppet performance was extremely violent as Punch wielded his deadly stick against

<sup>3</sup> Martin J. Wiener, 'Alice Arden to Bill Sikes: changing nightmares of intimate violence in England, 1558–1869', *Journal of British Studies*, 40 (2001), pp. 184–212; and Martin J. Wiener, *Men of blood: violence, manliness and criminal justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge, 2004), especially pp. 123–68.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Leach, *The Punch and Judy show: history, tradition and meaning* (Athens, GA, 1985); George Speaight, *Punch and Judy: a history* (London, 1979); Scott Cutler Shershow, *Puppets and 'popular' culture* (Ithaca, 1995); Peter Fraser, *Punch and Judy* (London, 1970); Michael Byrom, *Punch and Judy: its origin and evolution* (Aberdeen, 1972).

any who crossed his path. The puppet's new brutality significantly modified the portrayal of his marriage, as the hen-pecked buffoon of the eighteenth century was transformed into a murderous wife-beater. George Speaight attributes this violence to the mechanics of glove puppetry as, given the limited actions of glove-puppets and the difficulties of dialogue within the showman's box, violent fights provided the lively action necessary to attract an audience.<sup>5</sup> But whatever the reason for high levels of violence, the new Punch and Judy show rapidly proved to be a success. Audiences enjoyed Punch's violent conquests. Although the increasingly common name given to the thuggish puppet was clearly an abbreviation of his eighteenth-century appellation, 'Punchinello', 'Punch', in the context of his new role, was also certainly suggestive.

With the development of the glove-puppet show, a cast of characters was introduced to share the stage with Punch. While there was some variation between showmen, a number of these characters were common to all shows, including Punch's wife Judy, a foreigner, blind man, publican, constable, hangman, and the Devil. As the showman attempted to attract a casual audience, Punch's encounters with each adversary were performed as self-contained episodes, so that passers-by could join or leave at any time. Punch's violent dealings with these characters have prompted attempts by historians to decipher the meaning of the Punch and Judy show. George Speaight, for example, argues that to try to extract a meaning from Punch's progress is to seek the impossible, yet Robert Leach asserts that Punch, rebelling against the constraints of various social controls, was a working-class hero and in his triumph Leach discovers a subversive and dangerous message.<sup>6</sup> However, this violent entertainment needs to be placed more firmly within the context of early nineteenth-century society and theatrical culture for its purpose, and the symbolic use of its characters, to be understood.

While the Punch and Judy show was not entirely devoid of meaning, it was also not as contrived as Leach believes. Instead, its wide appeal to such a diverse audience and its emergence in a gregarious and masculine Regency culture hints at both subversive *and* conservative undertones.<sup>7</sup> As Punch murders the various characters who cross his path, the show presents a kind of mini-revolution, yet at the same time mocks this very idea in its exaggerated and outrageous violence. Punch's progress thus becomes a satire. Moreover, the puppet show presents an interesting and important contrast with the theatrical genre of melodrama. Its popularity challenges the presumed ascendancy of melodrama in popular culture during the first half of the century. In his study of the melodramatic genre, Peter Brooks identifies the operation of a 'moral occult': by presenting the highly dramatic conflict between good and evil, melodramatic plays sought

<sup>5</sup> Speaight, *Punch and Judy*, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78–9, 84; Leach, *The Punch and Judy show*, pp. 35, 54–5.

<sup>7</sup> J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue, *The civilisation of the crowd: popular culture in England, 1750–1900* (London, 1984), p. 65.

to demonstrate the existence of a moral universe. The apparent triumph of villainy in a frightening new world devoid of moral order presented at the beginning of a melodrama is thus shattered with the eventual victory of virtue.<sup>8</sup> With its banal violence and the ultimate triumph of the immoral murderer, Punch, early nineteenth-century Punch and Judy shows present a stark opposite to melodrama, particularly with their debunking of sentimentality. In this context, Punch and Judy's relationship is also suggestive. Historians have used melodrama and its presentation of seducer-betrayal narratives to highlight the place of the 'delicate damsel' in the cultural imagination, demonstrating the increasing acceptance of changing definitions of femininity.<sup>9</sup> The characterization of Mr and Mrs Punch, however, presents an important contrast.

The turbulent but not especially violent relationship shared by the hen-pecked Punch and his eighteenth-century wife Joan emerged from a tradition in early modern plebeian culture that, in seeking to enforce marital ideals and expectations, regularly depicted marital conflict as arising from female challenges to the 'natural' patriarchal order. Street ballads and broadsides from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries presented humorous images of disorderly women or shrews and weak, unmanly husbands in order to ridicule alternatives to patriarchal marriage.<sup>10</sup> For example, one broadside, *The married man's complaint who took a shrow [sic] instead of a saint*, described the fate of an ineffectual 'Hen-peckt Husband' under the authority of his 'Head-Strong wife', with an accompanying illustration of the couple's tug-of-war with the symbolic breeches.<sup>11</sup> While the portrayal of Punch and Judy's conjugal life during the nineteenth century continued this tradition, the puppets' relationship also became infused with a new brutality as Punch now used his deadly stick to reassert his masculinity. This crucial development largely reflected the substantial impact of tremendous social upheaval on cultural perceptions of marriage and gender.

As a result of shifts in definitions of masculinity and femininity as well as social and economic upheaval during the early industrial period, the traditional theme of the 'struggle for the breeches' was dramatically reshaped. A misogynist streak

<sup>8</sup> Peter Brooks, *The melodramatic imagination: Balzac, Henry James, melodrama and the mode of excess* (New Haven, 1976), pp. 13–17, 20–2.

<sup>9</sup> Wiener, 'Alice Arden to Bill Sikes', pp. 184–212. See also Judith Walkowitz, *City of dreadful delight: narratives of sexual danger in late Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 85–102; Anna Clark, 'Rape or seduction? A controversy over sexual violence in the nineteenth century', in London Feminist History Group, ed., *Men's power, women's resistance: the sexual dynamics of history* (London, 1983), pp. 13–27; Anna Clark, 'The politics of seduction in English popular culture, 1748–1848', in Jean Radford, ed., *The progress of romance: the politics of popular fiction* (London, 1986), pp. 47–72; Martha Vicinus, 'Helpless and unfriended: nineteenth-century domestic melodrama', *New Literary History*, 13 (1981), pp. 127–43.

<sup>10</sup> Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly women and female power in the street literature of early modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville, 1992), p. 7, 9, 28; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and culture in early modern France* (Stanford, 1975), pp. 124–51, especially pp. 142–3.

<sup>11</sup> *The married man's complaint who took a shrow instead of a saint*, Oxford, Bodleian Library (Bod.), Francis Douce Collection, vol. II. See also *Advice to bachelors, or, a caution to be careful in their choice*, Bod., Francis Douce Collection, vol. I.

emerged in popular culture. Women, rather than men, became primary targets for mockery and images of violence began to feature in representations of marriage.<sup>12</sup> Anna Clark relates the appearance of such songs and caricatures, as well as the increase of domestic violence, to new sources of tension that arose during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Libertine pleasures of metropolitan life and the increasing flexibility of plebeian morals could spark flares of jealousy and fanned fears of abandonment. More significantly, traditional bachelor journeyman culture clashed with new realities of married life. Mechanization, the growth of large-scale production, and the decreasing reliance on skilled labour had severely disrupted traditional patterns of artisan life. Although many journeymen were now unable to proceed to the status of master, they still chose to marry or cohabit, but at the same time refused to transfer loyalty from their workmates to their wives. Furthermore, journeymen's limited incomes meant that they were dependent on their wives' earnings to support the family economy. Conflict erupted when women's independence gained from wage earning clashed with their husbands' desire to dominate. The misogyny and violence inherent in artisan fraternities also emerged in mainstream culture. Clark describes at some length the role of the wife-beating cobbler, the subject of many ballads and jokes.<sup>13</sup> Just as prominent was the brutal puppet Punch, who beat his wife into submission almost daily before large audiences.

Although Punch and Judy made regular appearances on London's streets during the first half of the century, John Payne Collier's transcription of Giovanni Piccini's Punch and Judy show, published in 1828, is the only surviving script of a performance. In the autumn of 1827, Piccini performed an exclusive show in the parlour of the King's Arms, Drury Lane, for Collier and George Cruikshank, who had been commissioned by a publisher to transcribe and illustrate a Punch and Judy show. Collier's *Punch and Judy*, complete with script and note on the history of the show, was a great success and many subsequent editions were released to meet popular demand.<sup>14</sup>

As evidence of an actual street performance, Collier's script contains inherent problems. First, this is a transcript of a private show for two gentlemen. Moreover, Piccini constantly paused the performance to allow Collier to transcribe and Cruikshank to sketch, thus some of the impact of the live performance may have been lost. Finally, Collier's addition of mock scholarly notes on the history of the show immediately raises some questions about the seriousness of his intentions and suggests that he may have even added some literary flair to the script itself.<sup>15</sup> Despite these reservations, when added to other descriptions of contemporary Punch and Judy shows, Collier's script seems to be quite accurate

<sup>12</sup> V. A. C. Gatrell, 'Sex, men and caricature in London, 1770–1820' (unpublished paper presented at the Modern Cultural History Seminar, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, 23 Feb. 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Clark, *The struggle for the breeches*, pp. 5–7, 31–4, 64, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Paul McPharlin, 'The Collier–Cruikshank Punch and Judy', *Colophon*, 1 (1936), pp. 371–87.

<sup>15</sup> Speaight, *Punch and Judy*, p. 81.

and, for the most part, the performance seen would have been the performance that was transcribed. The episode between Punch and his wife certainly follows a firmly established pattern, as does the rest of the show, and it is doubtful that the book would have achieved such popularity if the script was too remote from the performance. Furthermore, the fact that this script forms an account of how Collier (and Cruikshank) saw and absorbed the show, makes it even more useful for understanding how the Punches' relationship was perceived and interpreted, informing contemporary views on conjugal life.

The marital relationship between Punch and Judy forms a substantial part of the first act of Piccini's show and the nature of conflict between the couple unfolds through song, dialogue, and combat. Throughout the scene important lessons on shrew-taming are invoked as the power relationship between the spouses is clearly established. Although the audience does not meet Judy immediately in this text, her voice is heard from below the stage, refusing to comply with Punch's requests to appear with him. When she finally does emerge, the first few seconds of the scene establish the nature of their life together. Punch attempts to be affectionate with his 'pretty' wife, but instead receives a slap across the face and Judy's shrewishness or 'disorderliness' is confirmed. Judy then fetches their baby and places it in Punch's care. Punch plays with the child in an inappropriate manner, singing homespun nursery ditties which emphasize the unbearable state of his marriage. For example,

Oh rest thee, my darling,  
Thy mother will come,  
With a voice like a starling;-  
I wish she was dumb!

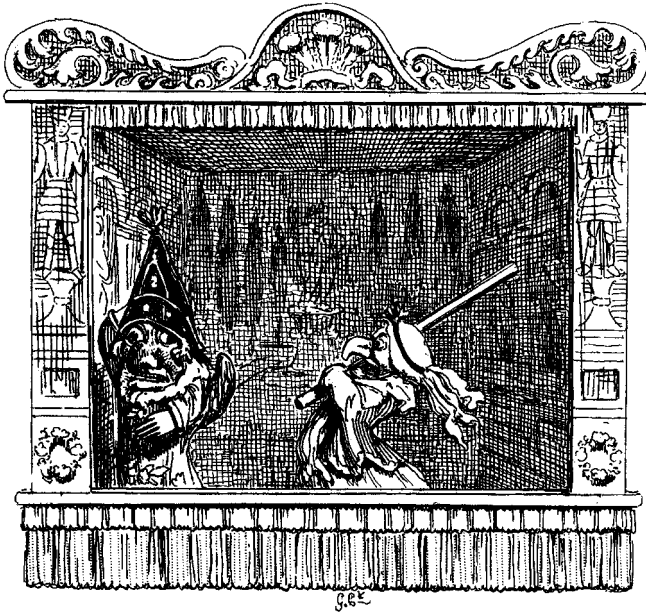
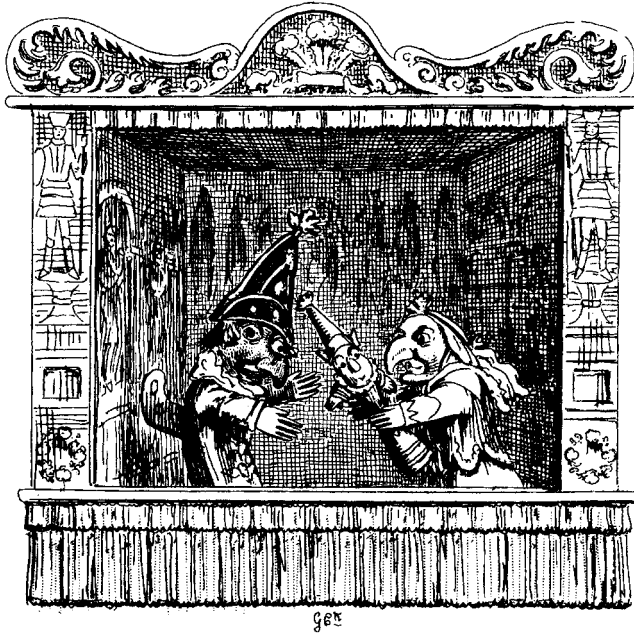
The baby soon wakes and, unable to stop it from wailing and screaming, Punch becomes impatient and throws it out the window.

Judy soon returns and is devastated to learn of the fate of her child. She rushes to fetch a stick and begins a savage assault on her husband. Violence is initiated by Judy as she strikes the first blow, and it is only after pleading with his wife to cease her attack against him that Punch snatches the stick. He begins a murderous assault, attempting to 'tame' his unruly wife, crying 'How you like my teaching Judy, my pretty dear ... Yes, one littel [sic] more lesson.' Judy soon falls to the floor and becomes silent. Punch, at first, believes she is play acting: 'There, get up Judy, my dear; I won't hit you anymore ... This is only your fun.' When he finally realizes that he has murdered her, Punch shrugs his shoulders, tosses her body from the stage and celebrates her death in song:

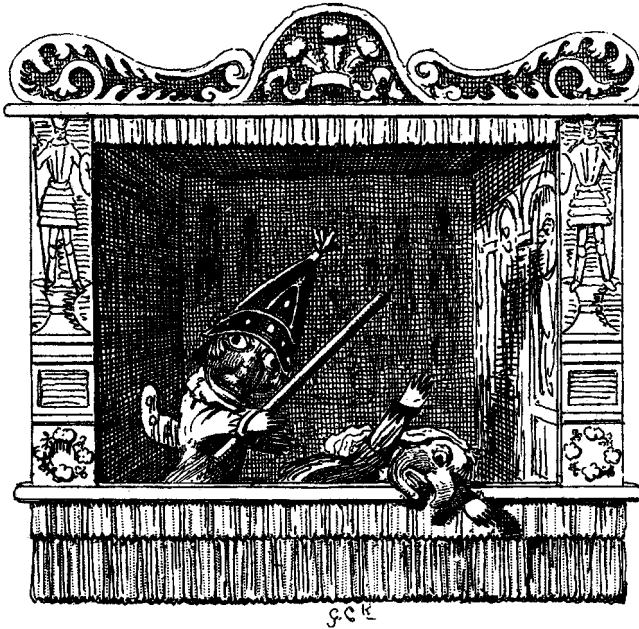
Who'd be plagued with a wife  
That could set himself free  
With a rope or a knife,  
Or a good stick, like me.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> John Payne Collier, *Punch and Judy* (London, 1828), pp. 69–76.





Figs. 1, 2, and 3. For legend see opposite page.



Figs. 1, 2, and 3. George Cruikshank's illustrations for John Payne Collier's *Punch and Judy*, 1828. Author's private collection.

The grossly exaggerated violence and Punch's nonchalant attitude about his wife's death make the scene rather humorous and ridiculous. Moreover, Punch's disposal of his wife's body objectifies her. Thus, with his re-establishment of mastery in his household, Punch becomes a hero, while little sympathy is left for his painful and ugly wife.

Extreme violence also characterizes Punch's encounters with other puppets in Piccini's show, including the doctor, servant, and blind man. When Punch is finally sent to the gallows, he succeeds in tricking the hangman into placing his own neck in the noose and the show closes with Punch's terrific defeat of the Devil. These final conquests create a sense of closure. However, while John Payne Collier transcribed an entire *Punch and Judy* show, in reality performances could have been concluded at any point.

Accompanying Collier's transcription of the show are George Cruikshank's illustrations of the puppets in action. Judy is presented as the instigator of the violence. After Punch's careless disposal of his child, Judy charges with stick in hand towards her husband who cowers in a corner. Punch only reacts to this assault and in the next illustration we see Punch clutching the stick while Judy's limp body hangs over the edge of the stage (see Figs. 1, 2, and 3). The physical appearance of the puppets themselves is also significant. Captured in these



*Doings of Punch and Judy.*

Fig. 4. Robert Cruikshank's 'Doings of Punch and Judy', featured in George Smeeton, *Doings in London*, 1828. By permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.



**PUNCH'S PUPPET SNEW.**

*Now's the Time for Mirth & Mice. Sing & Laugh & Dance with me.*  
*Published & Sold by LARSEN & WHITTYER, at Four Trees, London.*

Fig. 5. Isaac Cruikshank, 'Punch's puppet shew', 1795. By permission of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford; John Johnson Collection, Miniature Theatre 3.

sketches are the well-known figures of Punch and Judy; these portraits closely resemble illustrations of the show by contemporary artists such as Robert and Isaac Cruikshank (see Figs. 4 and 5). Judy is shabbily dressed with an eighteenth-century mop cap, has a long crooked, warty nose and is generally quite unattractive. She represents the stereotypical shrew. Although Punch has some

similar features (the long nose and red face), he resembles a more comical character, especially with his jester's hat. George Cruikshank also assumes some artistic licence in his interpretation of Piccini's show: his puppets change expressions – Punch shows fear, while Judy scowls. In performance, the comical and exaggerated features of Punch and Judy, as well as the inability of their wooden faces to express emotion or pain, are crucial as the audience is distanced from the violence and the characters themselves become difficult to identify with. When respectable Victorians later used the puppets for different purposes they would attempt to exploit this feature.

The layout and appeal of Collier's *Punch and Judy* also provides some clues about the audience present at Punch's performances. Given the tone of the literary analysis and script itself, those who purchased this book would have been adult and educated. In Regency London, Punch enjoyed fame in all classes as his audiences were so diverse. The location of the show on the street meant that the performance became popular with those who regularly used this public space, from working people and their families to men of the higher classes. Sketches of Punch and Judy shows from this period illustrate this heterogeneity: working men and women, pausing between errands, congregate at the front of Punch's stage, while higher elements gather around the edges. Adults also far outnumber children.<sup>17</sup>

Literary men regularly wrote about the Punch and Judy shows they saw, describing this audience and celebrating Punch as their hero. In their accounts, they describe with particular pleasure the Punches' marital conflict. They isolate these characters and, while not identifying with the puppets themselves, use Punch and Judy to symbolize the inevitable clash between the sexes. A correspondent to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1839 pondered,

if I were a woman of the lower grade, in which alone men are privileged to beat their wives, I would raise a female mob, and draw the merry ruffian [Punch] from the streets [as there must have been many a husband present who] would see, in the general applause, an excuse for beating his wife.<sup>18</sup>

But this correspondent fundamentally misunderstood the puppet show. Despite the enjoyment of violence, the Punch and Judy show did not expressly condone wife-beating, or indeed, wife-murder, for those in the audience. Humour and satire trivialized the beatings administered by Punch to his wife, ridiculing Judy's plight. The 'utility' of violence in marriage was, in part, recognized. After all, in this case violence did achieve a solution to Punch's domestic problems.

<sup>17</sup> See for example audience descriptions in John Eagles, 'Reflections on Punch: morals and manners', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 45 (1839), pp. 190–200; Anon., 'The puppet show', *Literary Speculum*, 1 (1821), p. 155; and J. T. Smith, *Nollekens and his times* (London, 1828), p. 114.

<sup>18</sup> Eagles, 'Reflections on Punch', p. 190. The German Prince Puckler-Muskau similarly questioned what effect the Punch and Judy show had on the morality of the lower classes. See Prince Hermann von Puckler-Muskau [E. M. Butler, ed.], *A Regency visitor: the English tour of Prince Puckler-Muskau*, trans. Sarah Austin (London, 1957), p. 87.



Fig. 6. Robert Cruikshank's 'The great actor, or Mr Punch in all his glory', featured in Charles Molly Westmacott, *The English spy*, 1826. By permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

However, its extreme presentation overrode any explicit sanctioning of violence in the domestic sphere. The irony inherent in Punch and Judy is all-important, as the following author recognized.

Charles Molly Westmacott's *The English spy* (1826) is a satirical portrayal of the life of the fictitious Bernard Blackmantle. In seeking to make a profitable marriage, Blackmantle is forced by his father to visit the Alderman, Mr Marigold, and his daughter, Miss Biddy. During his visit, a Punch and Judy show begins beneath the window. Westmacott provides an animated description of the audience that gathers at the sound of Punch's trumpet, including the butcher's boy, lamplighter, cook, and servant girl, all pausing to enjoy the violent conquests of the heroic puppet. This rather diverse audience is reflected in Robert Cruikshank's accompanying aquatint (see Fig. 6). Wealthy Londoners, for example, the Alderman's family, watch from their windows and balconies. In the top right-hand corner, one such affluent lady, captivated by Punch's fear of Judy's ghost, absent-mindedly drops her baby from the window, reflecting Punch's careless disposal of his own child. This image establishes a contrast with the thoughts of the Alderman. As he and Blackmantle delight in Punch's reassertion of authority over his shrewish wife, the Alderman cries 'what a true picture of the storms of life! – how admirable an essay on matrimonial felicity!'. Thus the Alderman ponders, as did other literary gentlemen, about the hen-pecked men in the audience who may follow Punch's example. At the same time, Cruikshank

suggests that this domestic scene, and the attitudes reflected within it, were not so isolated from their own lives.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Punch, in spite of his unlawful behaviour and murderous deeds, was welcomed in literature as a hero. As a correspondent to the *Literary Speculum* (1821) exclaimed, 'Oh! Punch! with all thy faults I love thee still!'<sup>20</sup> In contrast, these literary gentlemen have little sympathy for Judy, the termagant, who is often held accountable for the Punches' marital problems. Her unwomanly behaviour and 'provocations' are used to excuse Punch's violence. Furthermore, comments made in higher-class journals demonstrate how Judy, as an icon, continued to evolve outside the actual performance. She is frequently portrayed as an unfaithful wife, even though accounts of performances suggest no such conclusion.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the character of Judy is invoked to describe other disorderly women. In an article in *Fraser's Magazine* (1831), the author wrote of an encounter experienced by his travelling companion at a dinner party. The young gentleman was imposed upon by his host's cousin, Miss Snooks, whose outspoken nature and physical appearance reminded him precisely of Mrs Punch from the pages of Collier's *Punch and Judy*: 'Yes, Miss Snooks, the old maid, was the wife of Mr Punch ... The same weasel eyes, the same sharp voice and hooked chin, and the same nose.'<sup>22</sup>

## II

Despite the great popularity of the Punch and Judy puppet shows with all classes during the first half of the nineteenth century, when Henry Mayhew met with a showman during the early 1850s a grave sense of pessimism pervaded the interview. It was immediately apparent that business was not as lucrative as it had been in previous decades. The showman explained that twenty years ago he collected five pounds a week on average, earning seven or eight shillings from each street performance. However, 'a good day for us now seldom gets beyond five shillings ... Often we are out all day, and get a mere nuffing [sic]'. In the open street, Punch showmen now only gathered around threepence per show.<sup>23</sup> Punch's increasing bad luck on the streets was reflective of a decline in the fortunes of street amusements more generally. In his interviews with other street entertainers, Mayhew found that their earnings had substantially diminished and that the number of showmen had decreased. A peep-show exhibitor claimed that he could make three or four shillings a day before the theatres lowered their

<sup>19</sup> Charles Molly Westmacott, *The English spy* (London, 1826), pp. 59–62. See also 'Stanzas to PUNCHINELLO', *New Monthly Magazine*, 10 (1824), pp. 441–2. <sup>20</sup> Anon, 'The puppet show', p. 156.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see: *Pug's visit; or, the disasters of Mr Punch* (London, 1806) – a chapbook which presents the tale of Judy's elopement with a monkey and thus her unfaithfulness to her husband Punch. See also Muskau, *Regency visitor*, pp. 86–7.

<sup>22</sup> Anon, 'Punch and Judy', *Fraser's Magazine*, 3 (Apr. 1831), pp. 350–4.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Mayhew, *London labour and the London poor* (4 vols., London, 1861–2), III, pp. 45–6.

ticket prices, while another performer explained that street reciters had become a rare class – only five could now be found in London.<sup>24</sup>

The decline of Punch and Judy street shows can, in part, be attributed to the extension of authority and the increasing regulation of street life during the nineteenth century. The relatively wide powers granted to police by the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act have traditionally been held accountable for the transformation of London's streets, including the removal of many street entertainments, from the opening of the Victorian period onwards. Robert Storch argued that the new police officers were 'domestic missionaries', successfully used by the respectable classes to maintain 'order and decorum in all public spaces' and to impose 'new standards of urban discipline'.<sup>25</sup> Recently, Storch's conclusions have been challenged by historians who have produced evidence demonstrating the resilience of street life and the survival of various amusements conducted in this space. Stephen Inwood, for example, has pointed out that street culture proved relatively resistant to police control, and that police recognized that noise and indecency were a natural part of everyday life, deeply embedded in working-class culture. Thus, the police force established a practical compromise between middle-class ideals and working-class realities, learning 'to live with the popular culture which some of its advocates had expected [it] to destroy'.<sup>26</sup>

In this case, both change and continuity can be overemphasized. Perhaps it is more useful to consider the differences between so-called 'rough' and 'respectable' neighbourhoods in nineteenth-century London. Street culture did persist throughout the century; however, it became increasingly confined to single-class districts, for example, the East End. And this street culture became largely composed of amusements that did not require financial outlay, such as games and sports. Street performers needed higher-class patronage in order to survive. Henry Mayhew's interview with the Punch showman demonstrates just how crucial it was to attract middle- and upper-class audiences. He explained that, while showmen had largely deserted east London, the West End had become 'the great resort for all; for it is there the money lays [sic]'. Punch showmen began an annual pilgrimage to the more fashionable seaside resorts during the summer months and, for the rest of the year, continued to erect booths on street corners in the hope of encouraging paying gentlemen to their windows.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88–9 and 151–4.

<sup>25</sup> Robert D. Storch, 'The policeman as domestic missionary: urban discipline and popular culture in northern England, 1850–1880', *Journal of Social History*, 9 (1975–6), pp. 481–509; Robert D. Storch, 'Introduction', in Robert D. Storch, ed., *Popular culture and custom in nineteenth-century England* (London, 1982), pp. 1–14; and Robert D. Storch, 'Police control of street prostitution in Victorian London: a study in the contexts of police action', in D. H. Bayley, ed., *Police and society* (London, 1977), pp. 49–72.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Inwood, 'Policing London's morals: the Metropolitan Police and popular culture, 1829–1850', *London Journal*, 15 (1990), pp. 129–46. See also James Winter, *London's teeming streets, 1830–1914* (London, 1993), pp. 66–8. <sup>27</sup> Mayhew, *London labour and the London poor*, III, pp. 46–7.

However, during the second half of the century this practice became substantially curtailed as ideas about the appropriate use of public space were dramatically transformed. Urbanization and population growth challenged the utility of London's streets as entertainment venues. In commercial and business districts the sheer volume of people squeezed into the narrow streets and the overwhelming increase in traffic both restricted space formerly available for entertainers and generated large amounts of noise which performers were forced to compete with. Moreover, in quieter, middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods, notions of respectability shaped new regulations on the use of public space. Punch and Judy shows were excluded from Hyde Park.<sup>28</sup> In addition, during the 1860s, a campaign was launched against street musicians, particularly organ grinders, by a number of middle-class men who wished to exclude the unrespectable vagabonds from their streets. New legislation resulting from the campaign gave householders powers to regulate the space outside their front doors.<sup>29</sup> While Mayhew's showman claimed Punch was exempt from powers outlined in the Police Act, when asked about interference from the constables, he replied, 'some's very good men, and some on'em are tyrants'.<sup>30</sup> Law and authority thus did have some impact on the fortunes of Punch and Judy. However, equally significant was the rate at which more affluent audiences were abandoning Punch and Judy street shows, despite the tremendous enjoyment these men claimed to experience from watching them.

The beginning of the Victorian period witnessed the emergence of a more domestic culture that was orientated around the family and home.<sup>31</sup> Its location indoors meant that previous outdoor amusements that had benefited from higher-class patronage, such as the Punch and Judy shows, began to suffer. Moreover, pausing to watch a Punch and Judy show had become a dangerous activity: while one's attention was occupied with the pleasures of Punch, one could easily find oneself a victim of crime. Petty street crime was common during the first half of the century. Isaac Cruikshank's watercolour, *Punch's puppet show*, illustrates this hazard, as the partner of the Punch showman, while collecting money from the audience, picks the pocket of a distracted gentleman (see Fig. 5 above). But pickpockets and other criminals were seen as an inevitable part of metropolitan life. They were certainly an inconvenience, but also contributed to the atmosphere of danger and illicit pleasure that informed Regency culture. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, greater concerns were being expressed about crime and deviancy. The consequences of watching Punch and Judy shows were frequently catalogued in the police-court reports contained in

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, editorial in the *Times*, 6 Oct. 1862, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Brenda Assael, 'Music in the air: noise, performance and the contest over the streets of the mid-nineteenth century metropolis', in Tim Hitchcock and Heather Shore, eds., *The streets of London: from the Great Fire to the Great Slink* (London, 2003), pp. 183–97.

<sup>30</sup> Mayhew, *London labour and the London poor*, III, pp. 46–7.

<sup>31</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, *The rise of respectable society: a social history of Victorian Britain* (London, 1988), pp. 254, 256–7; and James Walvin, *Leisure and society, 1830–1950* (London, 1978), pp. 9–16.



the daily newspaper: respectable men found their valuables stolen and others, their attention distracted, were easily duped by sharpers.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, the respectable values of the more affluent section of the audience meant that objections began to be raised about the actual content of the Punch and Judy shows. Despite Regency ease with the graphic portrayal of wife-murder in the show, early Victorians began to express some discomfort with the Punches' violent relationship and especially audiences' enjoyment of the scene. Punch still featured regularly in literature, but his conquests were now approached with a sense of embarrassment, especially as the show represented the disruption of public and moral order, threatening the centrality of the institution of marriage and family to society. Clear attempts were made to emphasize the working-class character of both the audience and even the puppets as respectable writers sought to distance themselves from the themes presented. In *Picturesque sketches of London* (1852), Thomas Miller described the crowd which derived much pleasure from a Punch show, including a 'ragged woman holding up her dirty child. The little rogue claps his tiny hands, and crows again at every blow Judy receives; [and the poor mother is] delighted with the pleasurable expression of her dirty darling's countenance'. However, Miller also draws attention to the respectable gentleman watching the performance from the edge of the crowd, 'half ashamed of being seen in such a motley assembly'.<sup>33</sup>

Although the respectable attempted to disown him, Punch continued to be quietly celebrated in these circles and it was around the time of Henry Mayhew's interview with the Punch showman that Punch was actually invited into the very institution he threatened to destroy: the respectable middle-class family. And, at the same time, the show was repositioned as an entertainment to pacify children. In 1850, John Leech sketched the puppet show in the new surroundings of a middle-class drawing room and, by 1895, one showman claimed that he regularly performed for the children of the royal household.<sup>34</sup> Punch and Judy street shows declined in favour of the steadier income provided by privately commissioned shows in middle-class homes. Mayhew's Punch showman explained that the greater part of his income was now derived from commissioned shows performed indoors. Midsummer and Christmas were known as 'Punch's season. We do most at hevening [sic] parties in the holiday time, and if there's a pin to choose between them, I should say Christmas holidays was best. For attending hevening parties now we generally get one pound and our refreshments.'<sup>35</sup> But why were the

<sup>32</sup> See for example, *Times*, 10 June 1858, p. 11, 18 Oct. 1859, p. 9, 31 Jan. 1860, p. 11, 4 Dec. 1861, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Miller, *Picturesque sketches of London* (London, 1852), p. 256. See also Archibald Granger Bowie, 'The story of Punch and Judy', *The Theatre: A Monthly Review*, n.s. 3 (1 Jan. 1884), p. 18; and Charles Dickens, *The old curiosity shop* (London, 1841), ch. 26: Dickens parodies this duality of embarrassment and enjoyment.

<sup>34</sup> Alfred T. Story, 'Punch and Judy', *Strand Magazine* (Oct. 1895), p. 463.

<sup>35</sup> Mayhew, *London labour and the London poor*, III, pp. 45–7, 50.

uncouth showmen with their rather un-domestic portrayal of family life welcomed into these respectable homes?

Robert Leach and Scott Cutler Shershow have both attempted to explain this process of cultural appropriation. While Leach argues that Punch and Judy were adopted by the middle class as part of a culture of conciliation, Shershow views appropriation as a 'natural' development in the evolution of the show, questioning original lower-class patronage by noting the ease with which Punch's so-called 'rebellion' moves from street to nursery.<sup>36</sup> Yet the adoption of Punch and Judy was much more conscious than either allows. The process of domestication began with the decision of a group of literary men to name their new satirical journal, first published in July 1841 for the bourgeois intelligentsia, *Punch*. Their first issue strongly aligned itself with the 'morals' of Punch's puppet show.<sup>37</sup> It was a sense of nostalgia that prompted early Victorian middle- and upper-class men to invite Punch into their homes. They had found immense joy in the show during their youth as young 'men about town', seeing in the puppet a reflection of the pleasurable elements of Regency culture, including hedonism and misogyny. The process of street clearing and the increasing regulation of public space in respectable neighbourhoods helped to fan this sentimentality, as respectable men feared that Punch and Judy shows were fast becoming a relic of the past. Punch's performances in the drawing room were but a short step from shows set up on street corners by 'gentlemen's orders' during the Regency period.<sup>38</sup> However, in order to be accepted into this new environment, substantial modifications were necessary.

Henry Mayhew's showman may have been pessimistic about the future of his Punch and Judy show, but he was also a shrewd operator. He was fully aware of the changes necessary to make his show appealing to higher-class and more respectable audiences. For drawing-room audiences, the Punch showman stated that he adapted his performance according to their tastes. He explained to Mayhew that 'some families where I performs [sic] will have it most sentimental ... They won't have no ghost, no coffin, and no devil; and that's what I call spilling [sic] the performance entirely.'<sup>39</sup> Despite the showman's apparent distaste with this sanitization, throughout the interview he repeatedly emphasized the moral value of Punch and Judy to his gentleman interviewer. For example, when describing the Punches' marriage, he hoped that the representation would 'be a good example to both men and wives, always to be kind and obleging [sic] to each other ... (that's moral)'.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the transcript of his show, when compared to John Payne Collier's script of 1828, reveals some significant changes: puppets receive beatings from Punch but leave the stage alive and

<sup>36</sup> Leach, *The Punch and Judy show*, pp. 76–7, 80, 85, 91; Shershow, *Puppets and 'popular' culture*, pp. 162–70, 173–4; Scott Cutler Shershow, 'Punch and Judy and cultural appropriation', *Cultural Studies*, 8 (1994), pp. 541–6.

<sup>37</sup> 'The moral of Punch', *Punch*, 1 (1841), p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> For example, that witnessed by Bernard Blackmantle and the Alderman, described above, in Westmacott's *English spy*.

<sup>39</sup> Mayhew, *London labour and the London poor*, III, p. 43.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Punch's triumph over the Devil is repositioned as the defeat of evil (some times, the showman substituted the Devil with a topical Russian Bear), rather than the downfall of Christian morality.<sup>41</sup> Thus, like other exhibitors of Punch in London, this showman recognized the financial necessity of injecting some respectability and morality into his performances.

During the middle of the nineteenth century respectability became an important marketing device for all itinerant showmen. For instance, despite the active suppression of London's rowdy pleasure fairs during the first half of the nineteenth century, after 1850 fairgrounds located on the outskirts of London experienced a substantial revival. As Hugh Cunningham demonstrates, new powers granted to law enforcement agencies, including the police, cannot explain the new, increasing tolerance of the authorities. Instead, the values of the showmen changed. From the middle of the century, they became 'respectable and wealthy entrepreneurs of leisure, patronised by royalty'. As the norms of the showmen and authorities converged, fairs became tolerated, safe, and eventually a subject for nostalgia and revival. Thus, late nineteenth-century observers 'saw the fair as a routine and legitimate occasion for leisure rather than as one of those "violent delights" of Londoners'.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, after 1850, Punch showmen gradually came to be regarded as more respectable and appeared with greater frequency in the drawing room. And they gained this respectability through the changes they made to the performance of the puppet show, or, in other words, through its bowdlerization. As Mayhew's showman explained above, new characters were introduced that replaced some of the former controversial puppets. In 1895, one writer declared that 'we are ... softening down even this specimen of "good old" aboriginal humour, and now it more frequently closes with a "nigger" song, or something of that nature, than, as formerly, with the death of the Father of Evil'.<sup>43</sup> Men of the middle and upper classes, familiar with Punch from their youth, noticed considerable change when they stopped to watch performances in the street. Thomas Miller claimed that 'Punch was a different performance in our youthful days: then he went out, got drunk, came home and quarrelled with his wife; ... and sorry we are to say the drunken rascal swore dreadfully.'<sup>44</sup> In 1872, the editor of *Punch* recalled the invitation issued to a showman by the gentlemen of the Fielding Club to perform for them. Although 'the room was crowded with a great company of men who knew how to laugh, ... [the show] was a dead failure: the very dreariest night I can remember. We couldn't – and we tried hard – get up the smallest laugh.'<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53–60, especially p. 59.

<sup>42</sup> Hugh Cunningham, 'Metropolitan fairs', in A. P. Donajgradski, ed., *Social control in nineteenth-century Britain* (London, 1977), pp. 163–4, 170, 180.

<sup>43</sup> Story, 'Punch and Judy', p. 463. See also Max Beerbohm's comments in Russell Thorndike and Richard Arkell, *The tragedy of Mr Punch: a fantastic play and prologue in one act, with an introductory essay by Max Beerbohm* (London, 1923), p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Miller, *Picturesque Sketches of London*, p. 255.

<sup>45</sup> Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré, *London: a pilgrimage* (London, 1872), p. 177. See also 'A Modern Frankenstein', *All the Year Round*, n.s. 1 (1868–9), p. 202.

Furthermore, commercialization accelerated the process of bowdlerization as well as breathing new life into the puppet show. The development of the Punch and Judy show after 1850 was fuelled by a new middle-class concern with children's entertainment. J. H. Plumb and James Walvin identify a changing attitude towards children from the eighteenth century onwards with the emergence of the concept of 'childhood'. During the Victorian period, rising wages and the pressures of commercialization meant that the English toy manufacturing industry expanded rapidly to meet consumer demand. These manufacturers capitalized on the popularity of the show: Punch dolls appeared in toy shops, and, with the publication of children's scripts, large stores such as Hamley's sold the cast of puppets, priced from fifteen shillings to five guineas a set, giving children the ability to stage their own performances.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, entrepreneurs in the leisure industry began to view children as a specific target audience whose successful amusement could provide substantial profits. During the 1860s, Punch and Judy shows became just one genre of amusement offered by large businesses that specialized in the provision of children's entertainment and which regularly advertised in that respectable organ of news, *The Times*. For example, Addro's Magical Repository in Regent Street issued this notice in January 1866:

Evening Parties. – Mr Henry Novra continues to provide (in town or country) all the newest Entertainments in Conjuring, Juggling, Ventriloquism, Marionettes, Punch and Judy, Dissolving Views, etc. Terms moderate. *Respectable* artists guaranteed.<sup>47</sup>

Commercial entrepreneurs also began to take advantage of crucial technological advances and increasing literacy rates. Improvements in printing and illustration led to an upsurge in colourful picture books.<sup>48</sup> In this industry, too, the popular characters of Punch and Judy were rapidly exploited. The Punches soon appeared as popular characters in picture books and, in this nursery literature, Punch and Judy's marital relationship was altered almost beyond recognition. In examining the emotional standards for boys and girls during the nineteenth century, Peter Stearns identifies, particularly in boys' literature, a concern with outbursts of anger and the control of temper.<sup>49</sup> The violence of Punch's puppet show presented an ideal opportunity to teach children these

<sup>46</sup> Speaight, *Punch and Judy*, p. 119.

<sup>47</sup> *Times*, 13 Jan. 1866, p. 1, my emphasis. See also: 14 Dec. 1864, p. 1, 30 Dec. 1864, p. 1, 28 Jan. 1865, p. 1, 13 Jan. 1866, p. 1, 24 Jan. 1866, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> J. H. Plumb, 'The new world of children', in J. H. Plumb, et al., *The birth of a consumer society: the commercialization of eighteenth-century England* (London, 1982), pp. 305–11; James Walvin, *A child's world: a social history of English childhood, 1800–1914* (Harmondsworth, 1984), pp. 98–9.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Stearns, 'Men, boys and anger in American society, 1860–1940', in J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and morality: middle-class masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940* (Manchester, 1987), pp. 77–82; and Peter Stearns, 'Girls, boys and emotions: redefinitions and historical change', *Journal of American History*, 80 (1993), pp. 36–74. See also Elizabeth Foyster, 'Boys will be boys? Manhood and aggression, 1660–1800', in Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen, eds., *English masculinities, 1660–1800* (London, 1999), pp. 151–66.



Fig. 7. The Punch family portrait used for the frontispiece of F. E. Weatherly, *Punch and Judy and some of their friends*, 1885. By permission of the British Library (12811.f.2).

valuable lessons and such themes are, to some extent, reflected in nursery tales about the adventures of Punch.<sup>50</sup> However, the over-riding theme is that of domesticity. Nursery literature demonstrates authors' desire to portray the family life of the central characters, Punch and Judy. Happy family portraits feature as colourful covers or as frontispieces and writers describe, at great length, the life of the Punches outside the show (see Fig. 7). As the characters of Punch and Judy were extracted from their original context and placed within the nursery, their conjugal life became a moral tale, designed to promote the ideals of companionate marriage and prepare boys and girls for their future roles as men and women.

Although the ideology of companionate marriage and its accompanying definitions of femininity and masculinity were not entirely 'new' to the nineteenth century, during the Victorian period these concepts achieved special importance and interest. As domesticity became integral to respectability, concern about

<sup>50</sup> See for example, *The Punch and Judy alphabet* (London, 1880); and *Punch and Judy and their little dog Toby* (London, 1861).

marital behaviour, especially conflict, became widespread. Furthermore, central to companionate ideology during the nineteenth century was the notion of separate spheres: in order to secure matrimonial harmony, men and women were afforded distinct, but complementary, roles. While the husband made his way in the harsh world of work, his wife was confined to the domestic and private home. These ideals offered a division of tasks and a rhetoric of compassion within the home which would ease tension and prevent conflict. Constructions of femininity and masculinity also acquired greater significance and became more inflexible as specific patterns of conjugal behaviour were expected. A woman's abilities as a homemaker and moral guide became fundamental to her role as a passive wife. Moreover, more benevolent and peaceable standards of marital conduct became increasingly central to definitions of manliness.<sup>51</sup> Despite this, husbands and wives were never intended to be equal companions and wives were instructed to submit to their husbands' natural authority.<sup>52</sup> The ideology of companionate marriage thus became enshrined in different genres of literature as writers advised men and women, as well as children, on the prevention of marital conflict through the adoption of these important qualities.

F. E. Weatherly's *Punch and Judy and some of their friends* (1887) demonstrates how authors of nursery literature remoulded the Punches' marriage to reflect these ideals and expectations. It opens with a seemingly incongruous statement: 'In spite of what some people say, and in spite of what many more believe, Punch and Judy lived a very happy and peaceable life.'<sup>53</sup> As violence persisted in performances of the puppet show, Weatherly swiftly sought to marginalize this aspect of the relationship:

Sometimes, it must be admitted, in circumstances over which he had no control, Mr Punch had flung [the baby] out of the window; had knocked Judy on the head when she remonstrated; and had killed the Doctor when he had called to see what he could do for mother and child ... However, these exciting scenes did not last very long, and, as nobody bore any malice, they did not much matter. (p. 6)

<sup>51</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family fortunes: men and women of the English middle class* (rev. edn, London, 2002), especially ch. 3; Susan Moller Okin, 'Women and the making of the sentimental family', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 11 (1982), pp. 65–88; A. James Hammerton, 'Victorian marriage and the law of matrimonial cruelty', *Victorian Studies*, 32 (1990), pp. 281 and 291–2; Amanda Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 383–414. See the following marital advice literature published during the nineteenth century: Mrs Sarah Ellis, *The women of England, their social duties and domestic habits* (6th edn, London, 1839); Mrs Sarah Ellis, *The wives of England, their relative duties, domestic influence and social obligations* (London, 1843); Timothy Titcomb, *Letters to young people, single and married* (London, 1870?); Anon., *Woman: as she is, and as she should be* (2 vols., London, 1835); William Cobbett, *Advice to young men, and (incidentally) to young women, in the middle and higher ranks of life* (London, 1830); Anon., *The etiquette of love, courtship and marriage* (London, 1847); Margaret Brewster, *Sunbeams in cottages, or, what women may do. A narrative chiefly addressed to the working classes* (London, 1856); Anon., *Marriage and Home* (London, 1870).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31; Cobbett, *Advice to young men*, p. 178; Anon., *Etiquette of Love*, p. 87; Anon., *Woman: as she is and as she should be*, 1, p. 262.

<sup>53</sup> F. E. Weatherly, *Punch and Judy and some of their friends* (London, 1887), p. 5.

Instead, the cast of puppets lived happily together in a semi-detached box, rented out by the showman, with the Punch family in one and the Constable, Doctor, and Mr Ketch in the second (p. 7).

On the particular day described in the story, the showman gave his puppets 'notice to move', and they all set out to perform in the neighbouring village. The performance was a great success and the showman collected a tidy sum of money. During the show, however, an incident occurred of which the puppets were not aware. Nelly, a young girl in the audience, greatly disapproved of Punch's treatment of his family (in Weatherly's words, 'it made her blood run cold', p. 15). When Punch threw his baby from the stage it landed in Nelly's basket and, believing that it was not wanted by its cruel father, Nelly took the baby home. When Punch and Judy later discovered the loss of their child, they were greatly distressed and climbed out of their box to return to town to find the baby (p. 19). Eventually, they find the baby in Nelly's home and, when Nelly sees how much Punch loves his child, she happily returns it to him. Weatherly's story is cleverly constructed. He takes care to depict the beatings inflicted by Punch on his family as humorous. His use of the character Nelly is vital to this, as Nelly represents strong, respectable Victorian morals. When the baby is found, Punch sings his 'Roo-ti-too' song, which is ironic and clever: this is usually sung by the puppet when he murders his antagonists in the show. The violence is thus displaced.

Nursery books used Punch and Judy to promote new features in definitions of masculinity and femininity. Explaining how these characters managed their disagreements (even violent ones), writers sought to demonstrate how these qualities could ensure a successful, companionate marriage. First, Punch's manhood is called into question. In *Advice to young men* (1830), William Cobbett declares that 'Being fond of little children argues no effeminacy in a man, but, as far as my observation has gone, the contrary.'<sup>54</sup> Punch becomes the caring father and committed husband. In *Mr Punch and his tricks* (1893), the author states that 'Mr Punch is a good father, and plays "peep-bo" with his baby.'<sup>55</sup> Similar themes are evident in Weatherly's book: 'Mr Punch worshipped the Baby, for he declared that in its little face he could plainly trace the features of his darling Judy.' When the child goes missing, Punch expresses great sorrow, and when it is found, his joy is almost inexhaustible. We are told that, when hearing the baby was safe, 'Punch was moved, and his voice quavered as he began to sing again, for he was an affectionate father, in spite of his odd ways.'<sup>56</sup>

Judy's behaviour also comes under scrutiny. While violence may remain under the bright lights of the stage, at home with Punch Judy is transformed into a loving wife who easily manages his temper. The author of *Punch and Judy and their little dog Toby* (1861) describes Judy as a good, faithful wife at the opening of the

<sup>54</sup> Cobbett, *Advice to young men*, p. 175.

<sup>55</sup> *Mr Punch and his tricks* (1893), quoted in Leach, *The Punch and Judy show*, p. 87.

<sup>56</sup> Weatherly, *Punch and Judy and some of their friends*, pp. 5, 41. See also *Punch and Judy. In eight acts* (London, 1886), and *The Punch and Judy picture book* (London, 1873).

book, adding the hope that Punch ‘will well behave himself today’. However, when the couple appears on the stage, their ‘fondness’ soon changes to ‘wrath’. Illustrated by moveable figures which both dance and fight on the reader’s command, the stage relationship is cleverly described as knock-about fun on the part of Punch:

Look here – a quarrel has begun:  
See how they wield their sticks,  
And cruel Punch kills Judy dead,  
Ah, Punch! what naughty tricks!<sup>57</sup>

In *The marriage offering* (1847), one Victorian author advised wives to ‘leniently regard all [your husband’s] imperfections; and this will produce in him a corresponding disposition to overlook your failings ... this reciprocity of charitable consideration is essential to the continuance of wedded happiness’.<sup>58</sup> Off the stage, Judy seems to follow this advice, dealing with her husband’s temper and ‘naughtiness’ with understanding and patience. Weatherly’s Judy, for example, becomes a tamed shrew, especially as Weatherly attempts to play down the marital violence. In their semi-detached house (a *sine qua non* of Victorian respectability), she does not berate her husband for his behaviour, but overlooks his failings in order to promote marital harmony. After the show they perform together, Judy ‘found herself once more in the box with her husband. She did not bear any malice for the blows. In fact, she had not felt them, and that is a great matter when you have to be beaten continually.’<sup>59</sup>

The bowdlerization of the Panches’ relationship in these texts, and even to some extent in performances of the show, is important. In addition, this process reflects what we know about the Victorians from other sources, for example, that they regularly sanitized older dramas for sentimental and moral purposes. However, more significant were the continuities that persisted in the show, not least the maintenance of violence. As one showman explained ‘the dolls, you see, get so much knocking about that they only last about six months’.<sup>60</sup> These respectable Victorians adopted a violent entertainment for their children’s enjoyment and moral instruction, but when they set about to transform the show, they retained much of the violence, especially in the depiction of marital relations between the two central characters, Punch and Judy. Even though this violence had been slightly subdued for juvenile audiences, beatings administered by Punch to his wife continued to form the purpose and humour of this scene. Furthermore, these beatings were surrounded by yet more violent encounters in the show, as Punch continued to oppose vehemently those who came to share his stage.

<sup>57</sup> *Punch and Judy and their little dog Toby* (London, 1861).

<sup>58</sup> *The marriage offering; or, a series of letters addressed to a young married lady; embodying hints on the performance of household duties, and on the management of children, by a widow* (Rotherham, 1847), p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Weatherly, *Punch and Judy and some of their friends*, p. 18. See also Lothar Meggendorfer, *The great punch theatre. An amusing picture book of six plays acted by Mr Punch* (London, 1897), Act 5, and *Punch and Judy in eight acts*, particularly Acts 1, 6, and 7.

<sup>60</sup> Story, ‘Punch and Judy’, p. 463.



And, from the comments of some contemporaries, this presentation of violence was to have a lasting impact on childhood memories.<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, given these two, seemingly contradictory, processes, in the commissioning of private drawing-room performances during the second half of the century, Punch and Judy shows became quite sophisticated in terms of financial agency and the commercial processes involved. On one level, shows were put on for the purpose of amusing children: thus, the children had to be entertained. And young audiences found the slapstick and knock-about violence appealing. As one journalist pondered in 1872, 'Why children *should* be fond of such an *undomestic* drama as portrayed in the representation of Mr Punch's adventures can only be accounted for by that love of the horrible so innate even in infantile nature.'<sup>62</sup> Perhaps 'even' should be replaced with 'especially'. Studies in psychoanalysis and child psychology have revealed the particularly violent, anxious, destructive, and even sadistic character of a child's imagination. Their irrationality and the frequency with which dark and murderous thoughts pervade their minds do go some way towards explaining children's fascination with gruesome and graphically violent tales.<sup>63</sup>

On another level, however, were the adults who provided payment for the performance. And here we see the almost paradoxical operation of commercialization. First, parents exerted some influence over the style of the performance and, as noted above, showmen seeking private commissions were required to make some modifications in the interests of respectability. But, at the same time, these paying adults also wanted to be amused. Punch and Judy shows were, therefore, family entertainment, designed to appeal to both children *and* adults. In this way, commercialization also assisted in the maintenance of violence: this process ensured the continued portrayal of graphic violence in the Punches' turbulent relationship and even allowed its encasement in the language of respectability.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the characters of Punch and Judy came to embody the contradictions and confusion at the heart of marital ideals and expectations. As Jim Hammerton has demonstrated, patriarchal and companionate models of marriage 'were never stark opposites'. Instead, 'theoretical questions of husbands' authority and wives' challenges to it, continued to operate within a framework that re-emphasized the value of patriarchal structures'. While the old paradigm of religiously sanctioned patriarchy was weakening, elements of this old paradigm persisted in the 'newer ideal of egalitarian and companionate partnership'.<sup>64</sup> Companionate marriage with its accompanying ideology of separate spheres was intended to provide a solution to marital conflict. However, crucial flaws and inherent inequality contained in

<sup>61</sup> Edmund Gosse, *Father and son: a study of two temperaments* (London, 1907), pp. 59–60.

<sup>62</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, 6 Jan. 1872, p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The uses of enchantment: the meaning and importance of fairy tales* (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp. 120–2.

<sup>64</sup> Hammerton, *Cruelty and companionship*, pp. 2, 7, and 33.

the ideal meant that it often caused disputes. This problem was further exacerbated in lower-class marriages, as men and women struggled to come to terms with an ideal that was, in reality, too difficult to achieve.<sup>65</sup> This significant uncertainty and ambivalence meant that the violent and potentially dangerous female was never erased from the cultural imagination. And, in spite of the growing power of behavioural expectations, the male who triumphed over this character continued to be celebrated.

When Henry Mayhew located a Punch showman for his volume on London street entertainments, he transcribed a performance that was very much in a transitional period. Although elements of backsliding are apparent in this show, also evident are emergent patterns that would shape Punch and Judy shows for the remainder of the century. The showman toned down the violence of the Panches' relationship for respectable audiences (for example, in this script Punch does not actually kill his spouse). However, the continued depiction of rough beatings inflicted on Judy both demonstrates how violence became intertwined with the show's new didactic function and the extent to which the puppets reflected contemporary anxieties about marriage. In the script, Judy neglects and mocks her wifely duties in her rejection of Punch's affectionate gestures. Judy also remains the instigator of conflict and at the centre of the violent struggles.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, while the showman, in his accompanying commentary, superficially condemns Punch's treatment of his wife, responsibility for the violence is redistributed when he describes the characters individually. Punch did not intend to beat his wife; instead, Judy 'irritated' him so much that he was driven to it. And finally, the showman adds, 'Judy, you see, is very ugly ... a head like that there wouldn't please most people.'<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, in the transcriptions of the interview and show, Mayhew used the cockney dialect of the showman to highlight the working-class origins of Punch and Judy, a practice that was also adopted in later scripts and descriptions. For respectable observers, Punch and Judy offered a convenient opportunity to displace violence on to lower-class culture.

In 1854, Robert Brough published the first script for children who wished to perform their own show, entitled *The wonderful drama of Punch and Judy*. In his bold preface, Brough assured purchasers that, through a careful study of the dialogue and instructions, young gentlemen would 'acquire such a proficiency in the art of performing Punch, as to render an apprenticeship to a regular professor (to which parents, on its proposal, would be found to object) wholly unnecessary'.<sup>68</sup> The script proved so popular with children that it was later reprinted in various children's books, including *Every boy's book*, *Every little boy's book*, and *Boy's treasury*.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Clark, *The struggle for the breeches*, pp. 87, 248, 260–3.

<sup>66</sup> Mayhew, *London labour and the London poor*, III, pp. 54–5.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 48 and 50–1.

<sup>68</sup> Papernose Woodensconce Esq. [i.e. Robert Brough], *The wonderful drama of Punch and Judy with illustrations by 'The Owl'* (London, 1854), preface.

<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, one script that appeared in the 1860s combined the structure and dialogue of Collier's transcript and Woodensconce's version. The crude illustrations surrounding the text,

Throughout, the morality of the violence is repeatedly emphasized and cockney slang is again used to highlight the working-class character of the show and puppets. Brough's script was clearly modified for juvenile audiences – the Devil, for example, has been replaced by the Bogeyman – yet Punch's encounters with his adversaries are still quite brutal. The dialogue itself, however, is childish and at times nonsensical and, using this to frame the violence, Punch's actions become naughty rather than evil.

The scene between Punch and his wife opens the performance. Their relationship swings from one extreme to another, as the puppets are affectionate then violent towards each other. Punch strikes the first blow in their argument and is promptly challenged by the showman, to whom Punch replies, 'Haven't I a right to do what I like with my own?' Any sympathy for Judy rapidly evaporates as she begins to beat Punch savagely. After Punch 'innocently' throws his baby out the window, another fight begins during which Punch kills Judy at one blow.<sup>70</sup> The violence in this performance is so grossly exaggerated that the scene becomes almost too brutal and, when surrounded by the childish dialogue, the audience becomes easily detached from the action. Punch and Judy seem rather ridiculous, and humour allows for the subtle enforcement of stereotypes. At the scene's conclusion the showman declares, 'Mr Punch you 'ave committed a barbarous and cruel murder, and you must hanswer [sic] for it to the laws of your country.'<sup>71</sup> However, we do not want to see Punch punished for his playful and entertaining naughtiness and it is easy to feel relieved when Punch knocks the arresting constable dead. Moreover, Punch's final triumph over the Bogeyman (in which the Bogeyman is tricked rather than violently expelled) not only demonstrates the extent of Victorian bowdlerization (the removal of religious suggestions), but, more crucially, suggests the level of delight children would have felt. Punch's heroism is sealed as he conquers the shadow that clouds children's nightmares.<sup>72</sup>

Two further scripts were published before the close of the century, both of which demonstrate further modifications but also the centrality of violence in the Panches' marriage. Professor Hoffman's script in his *Drawing room amusements and evening party entertainments* (1883) emphasizes the role of Punch and Judy as family entertainment. While Hoffman suggests a number of changes for a comfortable shift from street corner to drawing room, he reassures readers that the 'hunch-backed hero still flings his offspring out of the window; still playfully murders his spouse' and thus will not 'be found a whit less popular' with admiring audiences.<sup>73</sup> In Mr Mowbray's script, published a short time later in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1887), violence between Punch and Judy is again exaggerated, as are other

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especially with their lack of colour, hint that this publication may have been aimed at adults rather than children. See *Punch and Judy. A serio-comical tragedy in three acts* (London, 1863).

<sup>70</sup> Brough, *The wonderful drama of Punch and Judy*, scenes 2, 3, and 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, scenes 4 and 5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, scene 23.

<sup>73</sup> Professor Hoffman, *Drawing room amusements and evening party entertainments* (London, 1883), pp. 190–210, especially pp. 190–1 and 198–201.

features of the scene, such as the over-use of sentimental language, including ‘kissy, kissy, kissy’, and ‘walky, walky, walky’. Judy’s shrewish character is established by her treatment of her child. During her battle with Punch, Judy uses her baby as a weapon against her husband before finally carelessly discarding it.<sup>74</sup>

While their children were being subtly instructed in their future roles as men and women, the characterization of Punch and Judy struck a wider resonance for the chuckling adults at the back of the room. First, the very use of the name Judy for Punch’s wife holds particular significance for Victorian culture. That the name of Punch’s wife was changed from her eighteenth-century appellation, Joan, to Judy during the opening decades of the nineteenth century is symbolic. At the same time, the name Judy came to hold negative connotations, used mainly by the lower classes as a label to describe ‘tarts’, unruly females, and unmarried women cohabiting with men.<sup>75</sup> During the Victorian period, the term Judy became even more culturally loaded. First, its biblical roots came under close scrutiny. During the siege of Bethulia described in the Old Testament, the heroine Judith saved the Jewish people from the armies of Nebuchadnezzar by slaying his commander-in-chief, Holofernes. This tale clashed with passive ideals of femininity.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, the colloquialism ‘Judy’ gradually began to be used in literature, extending its application and understanding through the respectable classes. Various plays of the period used phrases such as ‘to make a Judy of yourself’ and the label ‘Judy’ when referring to women who behaved in a disorderly manner. The term also featured in famous novels, such as *Scenes from clerical life* (1858) and *The mill on the floss* (1860) by George Eliot.<sup>77</sup> In these cultural surroundings the name given to Punch’s wife was particularly pertinent. The puppet became a crucial visual reference for the colloquialism and, even more than this, Judy Punch and the term ‘Judy’ became mutually constitutive.

Moreover, the PUNCHES were not isolated figures in the Victorian cultural imagination. Douglas Jerrold’s ‘Mrs Caudle’s curtain lectures’, published in *Punch* during the 1840s, continued the humorous tradition of depicting nagging wives, Mr and Mrs Caudle’s home forming a comic opposite of domestic

<sup>74</sup> ‘The Punch and Judy men of England’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 45 (15 June 1887), pp. 1–2.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*; Speaight, *Punch and Judy*, p. 85. See also report from police courts in the *Times*, 14 Nov. 1850, p. 7: ‘Southwark. – Peter Bent, alias Lewis, a well-dressed man, and Emma Barber, nicknamed “Judy”, a woman of the town with who he cohabits, were placed at the bar before Mr A’Beckett, charged with stealing a hat, pocketbook, knife and snuff-box, from William Arnold, in the Equestrian Coffee-house, near the Surrey Theatre. Both prisoners were committed’. During the eighteenth century, Punch’s wife had been known as Joan. Antiquarians place the change of name to Judy for the glove-puppet around 1820, once the show became more violent and Judy’s character further developed. See Speaight, *Punch and Judy*, p. 85.

<sup>76</sup> Margarita Stocker, *Judith, sexual warrior: women and power in western culture* (New Haven, 1998), pp. 1–2, 135, 137–42.

<sup>77</sup> George Eliot, *Scenes from clerical life* (London, 1858), ch. 1; George Eliot, *The mill on the floss* (London, 1860), ch. 6; George Colman, *The review; or, the wags of Windsor* (London, 1801), Act 1, scene 2; Joseph P. Pirsson, *The discarded daughter; a comedy in five acts* (New York, 1832), Act 1, scene 4.

bliss. The series was immensely popular and reprinted in various collections throughout the Victorian period. Like Judy, Mrs Caudle was an unbearable battle-axe, delivering nightly lectures to her husband on a range of trivial topics that challenged his authority.<sup>78</sup> The character of Mr Caudle, however, forms an important contrast to Mr Punch. As the hen-pecked husband, Mr Caudle enlists our sympathy. He is also 'manly' in the sense that he does not attempt to sternly discipline his wife. Yet his inaction leads readers to ridicule and even despise him for his failure to control his wife. Caudle's masculinity is thus called into question. Punch, on the other hand, is remembered as a wife-beater. Like Caudle, the construction of his masculinity is comic. Punch's manliness is mocked repeatedly, not least by his squeaky, falsetto voice. However, the puppet becomes a hero as he manages to overcome challenges to his masculinity, foremost those posed by his shrewish wife.

Despite this, Punch's violent taming of his wife did not necessarily condone wife-beating. Instead, the meaning of violence in the show was much more complex. The promise of wedded happiness enshrined in the ideal of companionate marriage was, in reality, so difficult to realize, especially as this ideal was fraught with contradictions. Punch and Judy, with their violent domestic quarrels, were used by respectable audiences to confront the realities of marital breakdown. They became important icons in a society in which marriage could, for many, degenerate into a farce or tragedy, as marital partnerships were so hard, legally and socially, to dissolve. Furthermore, Punch and Judy's relationship cannot be taken so literally. As violence in performance was so extreme, the characters so distorted, and strong elements of satire and humour remained predominant, this relationship was certainly difficult to identify with. For adults especially, Punch and Judy fulfilled important psychological functions. First, notions of politeness and civility adhered to by the respectable middle class not only led to the displacement of violence on to the working class, but, more significantly, determined how violence was viewed within their own class.<sup>79</sup> Elements of satire and humour in the Punches' marriage were used to accommodate issues of domestic violence which respectable Victorians found uncomfortable, but were forced to confront. Finally, we can only imagine the level of satisfaction some middle-class families would have experienced from this portrayal of violence. After all, this was, in a sense, behaviour in which the respectable were no longer allowed to participate.

<sup>78</sup> Douglas Jerrold, 'Mrs Caudle's curtain lectures', *Punch*, 8 and 9 (1845); Richard Kelly, 'Mrs Caudle, a Victorian curtain lecturer', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 38 (1969), pp. 296–309.

<sup>79</sup> For example, see Elizabeth Foyster, 'Creating a veil of silence? Politeness and marital violence in the English household', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), pp. 395–415; Margaret Hunt, 'Wife-beating, domesticity and women's independence in eighteenth-century London', *Gender and History*, 4 (1992), pp. 10–33.