



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S57. Riots in Literature

Wednesday 30 August: 2.30-4.30pm

Convenor: Gerald Porter (University of Vaasa)

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This seminar will address representations of crowd disorder as manifestations of popular politics, including colonial and postcolonial contexts. While crowd action is difficult to study, literary representation of it is plentiful, and deeply revelatory of political agendas, attitudes and anxieties. We are interested in the analysis of the interaction of official political culture and crowd politics as represented in literature and orature, and how such representations contribute to discourses of authority, resistance and subversion.

Collective Responsibility and Individual Culpability: Truth, Understanding and Reconciliation in Siniwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*

David Bell (Independent Scholar)

Siniwe Magona's novel *Mother to Mother* deals with the death on 25th August 1993 of the white American student Amy Biehl. It is written as an explanation by the mother of a boy that killed to the mother of the girl that died. The "riot" frames the novel, but is not its focus. Instead, Magona delves into the past of both mother and son to understand why this boy murdered and why Amy was killed. Like the TRC, it is concerned with truth, understanding and reconciliation. Collective and individual histories determine responsibility and culpability.

Shakespeare's Crowd Disorder: Jack Cade and Enclosure Riots in *2 Henry VI* (1590)

Pascale Drouet (University of Poitiers)

Rioting in *2 Henry VI* is linked to two topical issues: the enclosure of commons for the purpose of sheep-raising and the increase of masterless men. Evicted tenants were considered as potential mercenaries or "ready material for riot and insurrection." In *2 Henry VI*, the petitioners' discontent and Jack Cade's utopianism and hubris are taken over by seditious subterranean political forces epitomized by the Duke of York, even if Jack Cade clings to his anti-enclosure, communism-like ideal. Shakespeare's history play offers a qualified view of the topic, reflecting both sides of the contemporary enclosure debates and bringing it a step further with biblical references.

Mirrored Riots in *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh

Tuomas Huttunen (University of Turku)

This paper concentrates on crowd disorder in the context of the subcontinent of the 1960s, where riots ensuing from the aftereffects of the partition into the nation-states of India and Pakistan are still common. The issue is approached through the novel *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh (1988), which applies the motive of a combination of mirror and window to account for the two-fold nature of the communal and national divide and the riots that stem from this situation. The paper concentrates on the levels of communal and national discourses and the tension they create.

“Never again stop the way of a Welshman”: Rioting and Rebellion in Amy Dillwyn’s *The Rebecca Rioter*

Tomos Owen (Cardiff University)

The paper will discuss *The Rebecca Rioter*, Amy Dillwyn’s 1880 novel about the agricultural unrest of nineteenth-century Wales - known as the Rebecca Riots. The toll gate charges imposed on the rural population of West Wales are interpreted by the protesters as impositions by a colonising power. Opposition to what might be deemed a class injustice is consequently countered by a rallying cry for action on nationalist terms. Evan Williams – the Rebecca rioter of the title – narrates his tale from a jail cell in Australia; his narrative is edited by another Welsh persona, Morganwg, a doctor working for the Empire in the colonies. The paper will consider the colonial dimension of this conflict over definitive ownership of the narrative voice in the novel; it will be suggested that Dillwyn, by ventriloquising this conflict, is herself a rioter in the text.

“We showed them British play”: Mythologizing the Imperial Project in Popular Narratives on the Indian Uprising of 1857

Gerald Porter (University of Vaasa)

The numerous popular songs that were written on the Indian uprising of 1857 and published as street literature confirm the polarized nature of imperial ideology (as opposed to the relative flexibility of imperial praxis). This is in spite of the fact that some of the songwriters clearly had first-hand experience of the fighting. In a mythologizing of the Imperial project, the songs draw repeatedly on metaphors linked with animals, and also on images of violent entry and penetration. In a related metaphor, contemporary songs repeatedly describe the action of the army as “British play”, a phrase which may be a covert reference to physical humiliation of the rebels and in particular the use of the bayonet.

Riot Time is Real Time: Crowd Action and the Art of the Historical Vignette in Carlyle’s *The French Revolution*

Jukka Tiusanen (University of Vaasa)

The French Revolution is the most famous of Carlyle’s calls on the Victorian elite to active social leadership, and it may hold the world record for the continual use of the historical

present tense. The emphasis on the urgent moment is strengthened by its visually oriented representation of processions, musters and demonstrations. Its call for an active response is directed by the guide-like transtemporal presence of Carlyle-as-historian, showing the historical actors in brief vignettes and criticizing them for their inadequate comprehension of this moment of serious social unrest. Riot-time, the viewer learns, disallows an easy response.