

# Introduction to Cultural Studies SoSe 2017

## Guest Lecture: High and Popular Culture: Theatre in Britain

PD Dr. Angelika Zirker



## Today's Lecture

1. Culture: Popular vs. elite? High vs. low?
2. The theatre as 'great equalizer'? A historical view

### Interlude

3. Neither high nor low? Shakespeare as a cultural icon
4. Popular and high: Mike Bartlett, *Charles III* (2014/2017)
5. Conclusion



# 1. Culture: Popular vs. elite? High vs. low?



## “Culture”

Taking now the point of view of identification, the reader must remind himself [...] of how much is here embraced by the term culture. It includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people; Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, 19th century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar. [...] We must not think of our culture as completely unified. [...]. (297-98)

Eliot, T. S. *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. 1948, rev. ed. 1962. Quoted from: *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975).



## “Popular Culture”

1. Popular Culture as Culture Liked by Many People
2. Popular Culture as Culture that Originates from “the People”
3. Popular Culture as “Mass Culture”
4. Popular Culture as Social Construction

John Storey, “Discourses of the Popular,” *High Culture and/versus Popular Culture*, ed. Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Dorothea Flothow (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009), 1-16.



# 1. Popular Culture as Culture Liked by Many People

“Popular” is first used in England in the late fifteenth century as a legal term. An “action popular” is a legal action which can be undertaken by anyone. [...] By the early seventeenth century popular is being used to indicate something that is widespread or generally accepted [...]. From the beginning of the nineteenth century popular is used to designate forms of entertainment that are said to appeal to the tastes of ordinary people. [...] It is this use of popular which generates the definition of popular culture as culture that is liked by many people. This is a quantitative definition of popular culture: it depends on counting the sale of things [...]; looking at audience preferences. (3)

John Storey, “Discourses of the Popular,” *High Culture and/versus Popular Culture*, ed. Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Dorothea Flothow (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009), 1-16.



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## “Elite culture”

In an élite composed of individuals who find their way into it solely for their individual pre-eminence, the differences of background will be so great, that they will be united only by their common interests, and separated by everything else. An élite must therefore be attached to *some* class, whether higher or lower: but so long as there are classes at all it is likely to be the dominant class that attracts this élite to itself. (300)

Eliot, T. S. *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. 1948, rev. ed. 1962. Quoted from: *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975).





The culture of an artist or a philosopher is distinct from that of a mine worker or field labourer; the culture of a poet will be somewhat different from that of a politician; but in a healthy society these are all parts of the same culture; and the artist, the poet, the philosopher, the politician and the labourer will have a culture in common, which they do not share with other people of the same occupations in other countries. [...]

Now it is obvious that one unity of culture is that of the people who live together and speak the same language: because speaking the same language means thinking, and feeling, and having emotions, rather differently from people who use a different language. (303)

Eliot, T. S. *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. 1948, rev. ed. 1962. Quoted from: *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975).



## 2. The theatre as ‘great equalizer’? A historical view

- the theatre as a cultural phenomenon
- since antiquity
  
- English tradition: medieval pageants



## 2.1 Pageants and religious plays

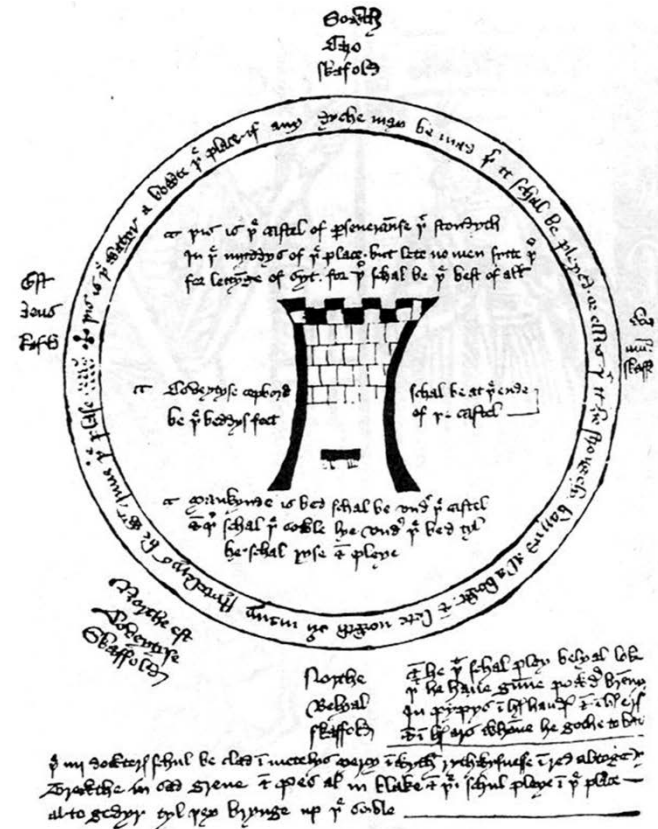


Middle English  
pageant wagon, c.  
1460; from Sharp,  
*Dissertation of the  
Pageants* (1865)



All men example here-at may take  
To mayntein be goode and mendyn here mys.  
Bus endyth oure gamys.  
To saue you fro synnyng  
Evyr at be begynnyng  
Thynke on youre last endyng!  
Te Deum laudamus! (3643-49)

[All men example hereat may take  
To maintain the good and mend their ways.  
So endeth our games.  
To save you from sinning,  
Ever at the beginning  
Think on your last ending!  
Te Deum laudamus!]



The Castle of Perseverance. The Macro Plays. Ed. Mark Eccles. London: OUP, 1969. 1-112.



## 2.2 Theatrum mundi

*Duke Senior.* Thou seest we are not all alone unhappy.  
This wide and universal theatre  
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene  
Wherein we play in.

*Jaques.* All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players.  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. [...]

*(As You Like It 2.7.137-44)*

Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, trans. and ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978).



## 2.3 The moral stance

In our assemblies at plays in London, you shall see such heaving and shoving, such itching and shouldering, to sit by women; such care for their garments that they be not trod on; [...] such tick[l]ing, such toying, such smiling, such winking and such manning them home when the sports are ended, that it is a right comedy to mark their behaviour, to watch their conceits, as the cat for the mouse, and as good as a course at the game itself, to dog them a little, or follow aloof by the print of their feet, and so discover by slot [track] where the deer taketh soil [refuge]. If this were as well noted as ill seen, or openly punished as secretly practised, I have no doubt but the cause would be feared to dry up the effect, and these pretty rabbits very cunningly ferreted from their burrows.



For they that lack customers all the week, either because their haunt is unknown, or the constables and officers of their parish watch them so narrowly that they dare not queatch [move], to celebrate the Sabbath, flock to theatres, and there keep a general market of bawdry. Not that any filthiness is committed within the compass of that ground, as was done in Rome, but that every wanton and his paramour, every man and his mistress, every John and his Joan, every knave and his quean, are there first acquainted, and cheapen the merchandise [bargain] in that place, which they pay for elsewhere as they can agree.

Stephen Gosson, *The School of Abuse* (1579)



## 2.4 The theatre and cultural imagination



David Scott, *Elizabeth I. at the Globe Theatre* (1840)





# INTERLUDE



## 3. Neither high nor low? Shakespeare as a cultural icon

[Shakespeare] has more allusions than other poets to the traditions and superstition of the vulgar; which must therefore be traced before he can be understood. [...] If Shakespeare has difficulties above other writers, it is to be imputed to the nature of his work, which required the use of the common colloquial language, and consequently admitted many phrases allusive, elliptical, and proverbial, such as we speak and hear every hour without observing them. (53)

Samuel Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Arthur Sherbo (New Haven: Yale UP, 1968), vol. 7.

Michael D. Bristol, "Theatre and Popular Culture," *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia P, 1997), 231-48.



### 3. Neither high nor low? Shakespeare as a cultural icon



Shakespeare is at the heart of our national identity and part of the world's cultural "glue."  
(Diana Owen, Director SBT)  
[www.shakespeare.org.uk/about-us/press-information/news/record-visitor-numbers.html](http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/about-us/press-information/news/record-visitor-numbers.html)



## Shakespeare sells



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## 4. Popular and high: Mike Bartlett, *Charles III* (2014/2017)

Mike Bartlett (\*1980)

first performed at Almeida Theatre, London, on April 10, 2014; moved to West End and Broadway

directed by Rupert Goold

Critics' Circle Award for Best Play of 2014

“future history play”

90-minutes-adaptation broadcast  
by BBC2 on May 10, 2017





## Characters in the Play

King Charles III

Camilla

William, Duke of Cambridge

Catherine (Kate), Duchess of Cambridge

Harry

James Reiss [Press Adviser for the Palace]

Mr Evans, *Prime Minister*

Spencer [one of Harry's friends]

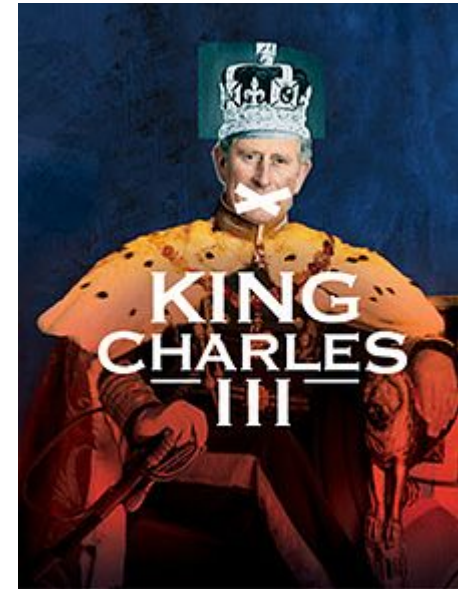
Cootsy [one of Harry's friends]

Jess [Harry's girl-friend]

Mr Stevens, *Leader of the Opposition*

Ghost

various servants, butlers, friends of Harry's, newspaper journalist, et al.





### 4.3 *Kensington.*

*Enter KATE, reading the Evening Standard.*

KATE.

And so despite emancipation we must look  
Towards the harder sex to find the power.  
But I know nothing, just a plastic doll  
Designed I'm told to stand embodying  
A male-created bland and standard wife,  
Whose only job is prettying the Prince, and then  
If possible, get pregnant with the royal  
And noble bump, to there produce some heirs.  
And in all this I'm told I don't have thought  
Or brains to comprehend my strange position.  
But being underestimated so  
Does give me what these men could never have  
Since no one asked me what I think, I can  
Observe and plan and learn to rule.  
For I will be a Queen unlike the ones before



### 4.3 *Kensington.*

*Enter KATE, reading the Evening Standard.*

KATE.

And so despite emancipation we must look  
**Towárd**s the **hárd**er **séx** to **fínd** the **pówer**.

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[...]

I have ambition for my husband yes  
And hope my son will grow the finest King  
But if I must put up with taunts, and make  
So public everything I am, then I  
Demand things for myself, I ask no less  
Than power to achieve my will in fair  
Exchange for total service to the State.  
Yes this is what, enthroned, that I will do.  
Not simply help my husband in his crown  
But wear one of my own.

(4.3, 97-98)





## Shakespearean allusion/quotation

CHARLES *puts the crown on WILLIAM's head.*

God save King William, unking'd Charley says,  
And send him many years of sunshine days!

CHARLES *slowly collapses and sits on the step.* WILLIAM *stands.*  
*A long pause.*

WILLIAM *looks to the ARCHBISHOP.*

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

God save the King!

ALL.

God save the King!

*End.* (5.2, 126-28)

KING RICHARD. [...]

God save King Henry, unkinged Richard says,  
And send him many years of sunshine days! (4.1.220-21)



Mike Bartlett has written a speculative play about the future of the monarchy. While based on a dodgy premise, it gains traction as it goes along and by the end has acquired a borrowed grandeur through its Shakespearean form and a tragic dimension through the performance of Tim Pigott-Smith.

Billington, Michael. "King Charles III – a flawed premise but royally entertaining." *The Guardian*. 11 April 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/apr/11/king-charles-3-flawed-premise-royally-entertaining>



## Controversy

“It is unfortunate the BBC would seek to promote this flight of fantasy, which many licence-fee payers will find distasteful and which I believe denigrates and undermines our royal family.” Andrew Bridgen, MP

*Davies, Caroline (2 May 2017). "Distasteful": BBC's King Charles III sparks anger even before it is aired". The Guardian. Retrieved 17 May 2017.*

“If the BBC has commissioned a production of a decent play how can one possibly object to that? [...] High-quality drama is at the heart of public service broadcasting...Some of my colleagues get hysterical about this kind of thing. I don't think the Queen is the least bit offended.”

John Whittingdale, former Culture Secretary

*Horton, Helena (11 May 2017). "This is just Royal bullying": Viewers attack BBC for showing ghost of Diana on new Charles III show". The Telegraph. Retrieved 17 May 2017.*



## Conclusion

“It is our ‘mission’ to bring audiences to the NT, regardless of specific educational, cultural or social backgrounds.”

Nicolas Hytner, Artistic director of the National Theatre (2003)



Vicky Angelaki, “Breaking Down Barriers High and Low: The Case of the UK’s National Theatre,” *High Culture and/versus Popular Culture*, ed. Sabine Coelsch-Foisner and Dorothea Flothow (Heidelberg: Winter, 2009), 85-93.