

LIBERAL LIVES AND ACTIVIST REPERTOIRES

This ambitious study traces the strategies of human rights activists to show how world-changing reform movements were shaped by women and men from modest backgrounds who were deeply attuned to the power of performance. Tracy C. Davis explores nineteenth-century reform campaigns through the pioneering work of a family of activists – prominent anti-slavery lecturer George Thompson, his daughter Amelia (the first female theatre and music critic for a British daily newspaper), and her husband, the political organiser Frederick Chesson. Engaging in some of the most important social struggles of the late Georgian and Victorian periods – including abolition, enfranchisement, and anti-genocide – this book reveals how two generations' insights into performance consolidated into activist tactics that persist today. Characterised by a skilful deployment of performance theory alongside deep and wide-ranging historical knowledge, this ground-breaking work demonstrates what 'dramaturgy' can teach us about 'history'.

TRACY C. DAVIS is Barber Professor of Performing Arts and Professor of Theatre and English at Northwestern University. She has published books on nineteenth-century theatre, the economics and business history of theatre, performance theory, and gender and theatre. Her latest book combines these interests in a study of two generations of Victorian activists.

LIBERAL LIVES AND
ACTIVIST REPERTOIRES
Political Performance and Victorian Social Reform

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*In ever-loving memory
of
Thora and Ernie Davis*

*Dedicated
to reconciliation,
the process and aspiration*

Some people have an idea that reforms consist of one great spasmodic effort; but, to succeed, we must be willing to work slowly, by patient and often unheralded endeavour. Read the history of the reforms of the world. What patient persistence! What endeavour to build better!

(Gough, Orations, 3)

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Max Shapely welcomed George, Fred, and Millie into our house for over a decade, but even when I took the trio abroad he kept the home fires burning. Thanks for everything. Now we give the eviction notice to our long-dead tenants.

Note on Names, Terms, and Abbreviations

Whenever possible, the first appearance of a name includes inclusive dates. This emphasizes how individuals align with George Thompson's (b. 1804) and Amelia and Frederick Chesson's (b. 1833) lives. Respectively, they were the last Georgian and first Victorian generations. Later critics, historians, and theorists are not accorded dates.

For readers unfamiliar with the terminology of British Protestant sects, designations can be confusing. In England, the state-supported Established Church was styled the Church of England, or the Episcopal Church (thus, the Anglican Church in British colonies). Anglicanism was the Established Church in Ireland, styled the Church of Ireland despite the Catholic majority. In Scotland, the Established Church was Presbyterian. Any Protestant outside these congregations was a Nonconformist; most prominently, during the nineteenth century, this designated Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, and Quakers. If, additionally, a Nonconformist also disagreed with the principle of national or state churches they could be styled a Dissenter.

The Reform Movement – a constellation of efforts to enfranchise Britons, revise parliamentary seat selection and district definition, and alter voting methods – is indicated through capitalization, true to its contemporaneous usage. Allied causes, such as disestablishment of the Churches of England and Ireland, Nonconformists' access to university education, universal primary education, abolition of slavery, and labour rights – all fuelled by liberal critiques – are reform causes (lower-case). Liberal Members of Parliament (MPs) adhered more or less to Reform and reform – sometimes as Radicals (a semi-organized faction) or radicals (believers in liberalism's more extreme ideas, atheism, and/or republicanism). Not strictly a party in the later sense, Liberals nevertheless rallied to vote pro-reform as liberals (lower-case). Chartism (active 1836–48) was a working-class movement that arose in reaction to the limitation of the 1832 Reform Act's granting of suffrage only to men of the property-owning

Note on Names, Terms, and Abbreviations

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middle classes. Named after the People's Charter, Chartists advocated for universal suffrage for men aged twenty-one and older, a secret ballot, no property qualifications for MPs, salaries for MPs, equally proportioned electoral districts, and annual parliamentary elections.

A few frequently occurring organisations are abbreviated:

ACLL	Anti-Corn Law League
APS	Aborigines' Protection Society
AASS	American Anti-Slavery Society
BFASS	British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society
The Company	British East India Company
HBC	Hudson's Bay Company
JRL	John Rylands Library
MP	Member of Parliament