

The Past Jumps Up: British Radicals and the  
Remaking of Literary History, 1790-1870

by

Casie Renee LeGette

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Adela N. Pinch, Chair  
Professor Marjorie Levinson  
Emeritus Professor Martha J. Vicinus  
Associate Professor Daniel S. Hack  
Associate Professor Kali A. K. Israel

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## Abstract

This dissertation argues that radical editors and publishers transformed nineteenth-century literary history, hauling the texts of the recent past directly into the present and undoing literary chronology in the service of political change. The radical, political periodical press of the nineteenth century was filled with excerpts of literary texts from the recent past. We might call this publication practice nostalgic, except for the fact that these editors and publishers, not content with idealizing the radical past, pulled these texts directly into the present, excerpting them, reprinting them, and making them do new political work. By re-circulating the texts of the 1790s, radicals wrote a powerful alternative history of the nineteenth century. Robert Southey and William Wordsworth might have been considered conservatives by the 1810s, but not on the pages of the radical press, where they emerge as lifelong radical poets. The first two chapters of this dissertation trace the afterlives of works by William Godwin, Robert Southey, and William Wordsworth, including *Caleb Williams*, *Wat Tyler*, and Wordsworth's *Liberty Sonnets*. These chapters examine how these texts appeared in important periodicals, including Thomas Wooler's *The Black Dwarf* and William Thomson's *Chartist Circular*. The third chapter hones in on radical print culture by turning to a central site for practices of reading, writing, and publishing: the prison. This chapter analyzes a series of letters and poems written from prison, including the extended prison correspondence between Henry Vincent, a Chartist, and Francis Place. This chapter's treatment of poems, written

from prison and published in the radical press, has significant implications for our conception of the “solitary” lyric speaker of early nineteenth-century poetry. The dissertation’s final chapter turns to the second half of the nineteenth century, to examine George Jacob Holyoake’s repeated deployment of excerpts of texts by George Eliot, including *Felix Holt: The Radical*. By carefully excerpting and reprinting Eliot’s novels, poems, and plays, Holyoake turned her into a dedicated supporter of his various political initiatives. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates that the re-circulation of literary texts can be a surprisingly effective means of rewriting history and of advancing political movements.

## Introduction

My story of nineteenth-century literary history is a story of gaps in time, of belatedness, of reprinting, of remembering, and of forgetting. Despite recent attention to questions of reprinting and reception, historicizing literary texts too often means historicizing the moment of production. This over-privileging of the time of production can elide the fact that texts rarely moved from author to reader with any kind of immediacy, or the fact that—as we all know—texts are rarely fixed to their moment of publication. The question of whether or not texts are bound to a single historical moment proved to be a topic of some debate in the nineteenth century. For example, conservative commentators assured their readers throughout the century that both William Godwin and his novel *Caleb Williams* had lived only a very short public life, finding “universal success for the day, [but then] being flung into contemptuous and returnless oblivion.”<sup>1</sup> Although the Tory magazine *Blackwood's* could thus argue for Godwin's total disappearance from public attention in 1839, his novel *Caleb Williams* was in print continuously from 1793 to 1915, a fact that supports the ardent cry of a poet writing in the Chartist *National Vindicator* in 1841: “Dead! is he dead? stern advocate of truth, / Godwin the just, the generous, the good? / No! Godwin lives.”<sup>2</sup> Radical political commentators, like this poet, one Francis Baunock, often turned to the texts of the recent past. We might term this practice of looking back to the radical 1790s a kind of

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<sup>1</sup> George Croly, “Bannister the Comedian.” *Blackwood's* Vol 45 (March 1839) 403.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Baunock, “To the Memory of Godwin.” *The National Vindicator* 4 (December 1841).

nostalgia, except for the fact that radical editors and publishers, not content with idealizing the radical past, hauled these texts directly into the present, excerpting them, reprinting them, and making them do new political work.

Attending to the literary practices of radical editors and publishers upends our sense of literary history, particularly since literary history has been so much more likely to follow the dictates of the conservative *Blackwood's*, busy sounding Godwin's death knell, than the Chartist *National Vindicator*. By the mid-nineteenth century, radical editors and publishers could still insist, not only that Godwin was alive and well, but that Robert Southey and William Wordsworth were radical poets. By the 1820s, Southey and Wordsworth were public conservatives, apostates known for abandoning their early enthusiasm for the French Revolution. But the radical journals of the 30s and 40s blithely ignored the contemporary politics of Wordsworth and Southey, reprinting only their more radical early work and treating them both as lifelong radical poets. In an act of sheer political will—and in the face of much evidence to the contrary—nineteenth-century radicals created their own versions of Wordsworth and Southey, and actively co-opted their poetry for their own political ends. My project demonstrates that the re-circulation of literary texts can be a surprisingly effective means of rewriting history and of advancing political movements. By reprinting the literature of the recent past, the radical editors of the nineteenth century transformed lost causes into utopian politics.

The writers, editors, and publishers of the radical and Chartist presses regularly recycled the political texts of the recent past, excerpting classic radical texts like *Caleb Williams* (1793) and *Wat Tyler* (comp. 1794, pub. 1817) well into the 1840s and 50s. Radical publishers reprinted texts at much lower prices, and the radical press made such

texts—albeit in their excerpted forms—available to a significantly wider audience. In fact, “the radical press was the pacesetter in terms of newspaper circulation throughout much of the period 1815-55.”<sup>3</sup> As Kevin Gilmartin, among others, has demonstrated, the radical press was the main organ for the expression and organization of the various radical movements of the early nineteenth-century.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Laqueur calls the printing press the “most prevalent icon of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century radicalism.”<sup>5</sup> Radical journals published articles on the political events of the day, up-to-date information on the trials and imprisonment of radical figures, and detailed accounts of the many political meetings convened throughout the country. The vast majority of articles published in the radical press were thus of the moment—a fact which throws into relief the intriguing belatedness of the literary excerpts. The many distinct incarnations of the radical press each had their own particular aims, but the target of the radical press was undeniably the improvement of present and future conditions. When radical publishers and editors included the literature of the recent past, then, they were putting those texts to use for their own contemporary political purposes.

In part, this practice—making use of texts from the recent past—was determined by simple economics: texts from the recent past, particularly those which had lost their copyright status, were much more accessible and affordable for the often working-class agents of the radical press. The larger effect of this practice was that the revolutionary energy of the 1790s was funneled through the radical movements of the early Victorian

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<sup>3</sup> James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997), 13

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> “Toward a Cultural Ecology of Literacy in England, 1600-1850,” *Literacy in Historical Perspective* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1983), 44

period, via the textual practices of excerpting and reprinting. Cultural historians of nineteenth-century radical politics have debated at length the extent to which there was a sense of continuity between different radical movements—between the 1790s revolutionary movement and the political agitation of the 1810s, between the 1810s and the parliamentary reform calls of the 1820s and 30s, and between those reform movements and Chartism.<sup>6</sup> I offer a new perspective on this debate by arguing that one of the central methods by which nineteenth-century radicals maintained a sense of connection with earlier radical movements was through the literary texts of the recent past. By constructing a radical canon, radical publishers through the 1840s were able to draw upon the energy and optimism of the early 1790s, by regularly reprinting texts from that period. Although an earlier generation of both historians and literary historians argued that the radical momentum of the 1790s was defeated by both Pitt’s repressive legislation and spiraling conditions in France, I join more recent scholars, such as Ian McCalman, in arguing that the excitement of the 1790s lived on, thanks largely, I argue, to the radical publishers of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, although the widespread Victorian practice of turning to the recent past is often understood as an act of conservative nostalgia, for the writers, editors, and publishers of the nineteenth-century radical press, the recent past served as a source of radical, revolutionary potential.

My dissertation participates in Romanticism’s recently renewed interest in the fields of print culture and book history. The most important book in this burgeoning field

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<sup>6</sup> See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1964); James Epstein, *Radical Expression* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994); Gareth Stedman Jones, “Rethinking Chartism,” *Languages of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983); Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991); Richard Price, “Historiography, Narrative, and the Nineteenth Century,” (*Journal of British Studies* 35 [1996] 220-256).

<sup>7</sup> Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld : Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988)

is William St. Clair's groundbreaking *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (2004). St. Clair insists that in order to study practices of reading in this period, we must take careful account of which readers had access to which books, and when. St. Clair's economic analysis of the book industry during the Romantic period reveals how crucial to readerly access were both the rules of the market and intellectual copyright laws. He demonstrates convincingly the extent to which working-class readers were largely limited to obsolescent texts, because those were the cheapest to produce. Although St. Clair explores in detail the cheap piracies and cheap publications that *were* available for working class readers, he ultimately concludes that access to print was severely limited by economic status, arguing that the "reading nation came to be divided into overlapping layers of readers, differentiated not only by income, by socio-economic class, and by educational attainment, but by the degree of obsolescence of the print to which each layer had access."<sup>8</sup> In his own important study of nineteenth-century book history, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, Jonathon Rose also underscores the historical delays that characterize the experience of working-class readers. Like St. Clair, Rose argues that traditional literary history overlooks this crucial question of accessibility, ignoring the fact that most readers would not have read works until long after they were published. The delays and difficulties of publication would have interrupted transmission to even the wealthiest of readers, and for those readers for whom new books would have been prohibitively expensive, the time it took for books to

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<sup>8</sup> St. Clair, William. *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 437.

become “cheap enough [] for the streets,” as a nineteenth-century bookstall-owner told Henry Mayhew, could be many decades.<sup>9</sup>

My project is deeply informed by these critics’ emphasis on structures of delay and belatedness. But whereas St. Clair points to the profound disadvantages to which working-class readers were vulnerable, my project explores the possibility that such delays might not necessarily work to disadvantage readers. Instead, publishers, writers, editors, and readers throughout the nineteenth century transformed delays in reception into opportunities, using texts for various new political purposes long after their original publication. And they did this, largely, by means of the radical press. St. Clair’s emphasis on book history means, understandably, that he devotes very little space to the periodical press of the period. As I demonstrate here, the radical press in particular provided a crucial means by which literary texts—excerpted and reprinted—were made available to very large numbers of readers. I add to St. Clair’s study a consideration of the ways in which literature was made available in forms other than that of the book.

In turning our attention to the question of readers and readerships, St. Clair and Rose join other scholars, including Jon Klancher, John Plotz, and Andrew Franta, who have recently emphasized the importance for literary studies of the quickly expanding readerships of the early nineteenth-century.<sup>10</sup> Klancher emphasizes the flexibility of this “inchoate cultural moment,” a moment of indeterminacy which was met with vigor by authors and journalists who “carved out new readerships and transformed old ones.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Qtd. in Jonathon Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001) 120.

<sup>10</sup> See Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1987); Andrew Franta, *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007); and John Plotz, *The Crowd : British Literature and Public Politics* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Klancher, 3

For Klancher, “the British periodical [is] a paradigm of audience-making,” working “to divide audiences and guide them to compete for position in social and cultural space.”<sup>12</sup>

Although Klancher’s perspective on the ways in which readerships were shaped is distinct from St. Clair’s economically-based argument that “overlapping layers of readers” were distinguished by the level of access which they had to texts, both critics describe the divisions between groups of readers in the early nineteenth century.

St. Clair characterizes these divisions as debilitating, and indeed it is no stretch to imagine such divisions as a bad thing for readers, cordoned off from one another by class or politics. But just as radical periodicals made the most of their belated access to texts, they also made the most of their audience’s separation from middle- and upper-class readers. When radical editors quoted poetry by Wordsworth and Southey and turned it to their own political ends, they were remaking these poets for a separate and distinct audience, capitalizing on that audience’s political and social distance from someone like Robert Southey. Over the course of the century, however, these clear divisions begin to break down. When, in the second half of the century, George Jacob Holyoake repeatedly quoted George Eliot, he was writing for both a working-class audience and for readers like Eliot herself. Holyoake, as we shall see, could employ strategies of quotation in the service of a kind of coalition politics. By looking at changing strategies of quotation, my project charts the ways in which divisions between readers shifted over the course of the nineteenth century.

My research is informed, not only by broader studies of print culture in the Romantic period, but also by scholarship that has taken the nineteenth-century radical press as its primary object of study. Most important has been Kevin Gilmartin’s *Print*

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<sup>12</sup> Klancher, 4.

*Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England*, which provides a thorough rhetorical analysis of the political strategies of the radical press of the period. Gilmartin argues that radical periodicals of the 18teens like Thomas Wooler's *The Black Dwarf* (a journal to which I turn repeatedly in the chapters that follow) defined themselves entirely in their opposition to a corrupt government. This oppositional framework is less entirely characteristic of later radical movements—the fight for the free press in the 1830s, or Chartism, for example. Nonetheless, Gilmartin's insights into the radical press in the early nineteenth-century have proved valuable for my analysis of later radical moments, particularly his focus on the radical press's connections to a public, oral culture. Iain McCalman's *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries, and Pornographers in London, 1790-1840* also describes the radical culture from which the radical press emerged (and which it helped create). McCalman's study has been perhaps most useful to my work in its assertion that the various radical movements of the early nineteenth century were indeed connected to one another. McCalman examines a variety of "loosely-linked" groups, in order to demonstrate that by viewing them all as part of his "radical underworld" one can see the way they function as a "small but *continuous* revolutionary-republican 'underground'."<sup>13</sup>

My project makes a connected argument, but takes a different tact. I argue that one of the means by which various radical movements remained connected to one another was by reprinting a particular group of literary texts from the recent past. I build here upon work by McCalman and St. Clair, both of whom have collected the publishing lists of various radical (and otherwise illegal) publishers, and have thus begun to compile a radical "canon" of the literary texts in the nineteenth century. Also important in this

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<sup>13</sup> McCalman, 2.

vein is Paul Murphy's *Towards a Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals, 1816-1858*.<sup>14</sup> I argue that the reprinting of such texts not only created a sense of historical continuity, but also helped construct a sense of shared purpose among a diverse assortment of radical groups. In the pages that follow, I discuss the radical agitation that sprung up in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, the 1830s fight for the free press, the Co-operative movement, and Chartism. My decision to refer to these many distinct groups, and their publications, under the umbrella term "the radical press" may raise objections, in that the phrase seems to denote a stable and internally consistent object. These groups had significant historical and political differences, although a commitment to constitutional reform and the free press threads its way through them all. Crucially for my purposes, however, this diverse group of periodicals also shares a penchant for the radical texts of the 1790s. By quoting the same texts, over and over, these radical journals construct a potent sense of continuity, across time and across political divides.

My project takes as its subject the ways in which radical periodicals put literary texts to use. I thus put the periodical front and center, as an object of study. Recently, scholars of Victorian poetry, including Natalie Houston and Linda Hughes, have insisted that we take into account the fact that nineteenth-century poetry appeared most often in newspapers and other periodical forms.<sup>15</sup> This fact is even more true of radical political poetry, a genre whose favored home was undoubtedly the radical weekly, rather than the volume. In his recent *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History*, Mike

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Murphy, *Toward a Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals, 1816-1858*. (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> See Natalie M. Houston, "Newspaper Poems: Material Texts in the Public Sphere." *Victorian Studies* 50.2 (Winter 2008): 233-242; and Linda Hughes, "What the *Wellesley Index* Left Out: Why Poetry Matters to Periodical Studies." *Victorian Periodicals Review* 40.2 (Summer 2007) 353-84.

Sanders analyzes Chartist poetry as it appeared in the movement's most widely read paper, *The Northern Star*. Sanders takes seriously the political weight which poetry held in the period, arguing that “for the Chartist movement, the political and the aesthetic are not just closely related concepts but are thoroughly imbricated practices.”<sup>16</sup> It is impossible to understand the function of poetry—and excerpts of poetry—in these radical papers unless we fully accept the political power which poetry could wield. One of Sanders's most important interventions, I think, is his decision to shift our attention from the poet to the periodical; Sanders studies Chartist poetry by studying *The Northern Star*.

*The Northern Star* was the most important, and most widely read, of the Chartist papers, but the Chartist movement, like the other radical movements which predated it, boasted many smaller, regional papers. The many lesser-known journals of the radical press are a particularly valuable resource for the recovery of radical and working-class print culture, signs of which can be sparse. I have found this material in British archives dedicated to radical politics, including London's Bishopsgate Institute, the Francis Place Collection at the British Library, Manchester's Labour History Archive, and Manchester's National Co-operative Archive. In addition to their collections of radical weeklies, these archives have also provided me with access to important unpublished correspondence among radical publishers, editors, readers, and prisoners. Both the Chartist Henry Vincent and the Co-operativist George Jacob Holyoake were prisoners and publishers alike, and their correspondence on both fronts has shaped my sense of the functions of radical political quotation.

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<sup>16</sup> Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) 3.

Nineteenth-century periodicals open up a particularly interesting window onto how texts were reshaped for particular purposes, but they also deserve further study if only for their overwhelming presence in the nineteenth century. Nineteenth-century reading was dominated by periodicals, up and down the social scale. When the periodical takes center stage as an object of study—in my case in the form of the radical political paper—it immediately challenges us to think differently about literary genre. Periodicals are a mash of genres—mottos, epigraphs, bits of poetry, all co-existing with political tirades, news reports, book reviews, and letters to the editor, often in the space of a single page. Periodicals remind us that readers have never been limited by genre, and have never consumed genres in isolation from one another. Thus the generic mix of my dissertation, which treats novels and poetry, as well as nonfiction prose articles and reviews.

In addition to offering a different perspective on literary genre, my focus on radical periodicals also unsettles assumptions about the figure of the author. Meredith McGill has complained that current work in book history tends to cluster “around the poles of production and reception (which in many cases turns out to be nothing more or different than the author/reader dyad writ large).”<sup>17</sup> I offer the periodical as a particularly useful space between these two poles. My project examines the work of the editors and publishers of the radical press, figures who reshaped literary texts with both readers and politics in mind. My primary object of study is thus neither authors nor readers, but the space between the two. The Romantic period is particularly in need of such a challenge to the central status of the author. Though scholars have long challenged the myth of the

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<sup>17</sup> “West of Poetry: Poetic Form and the Transmission of Culture in Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes in 1843*.” Unpub manuscript. Presented at University of Michigan Nineteenth-Century Forum. November, 2009. 1.

Romantic author as an original, creative genius—hero of his own story—that myth is an enduring one. Recently, Tilar Mazzeo and Margaret Russett have used the period’s obsession with plagiarism (Mazzeo) and impersonation (Russett) to disrupt our assumptions about originality and identity in the early nineteenth century, demonstrating the extent to which those very assumptions about originality were constructed in relation to ideas about “fakes.”<sup>18</sup> My project decenters the figure of the author, not by rewriting ideas of originality, but by tracking these texts beyond the bounds of their authors’ control. The type of reprinting and excerpting I examine here is by no means the same as plagiarism, but both offer us a text—or rather, a piece of a text—divorced from its author and put to a new purpose.

Hand in hand with the Romantic myth of the original genius, goes the myth of the isolated genius, expressing himself in solitude. But when we realize that most nineteenth-century poetry appeared primarily in periodical form, it becomes harder to imagine the Romantic period as dominated by the idea of a solitary, isolated lyric speaker. The poetry which I analyze in this project was reprinted in the radical press as part of a clearly communitarian project, as these editors worked to convince readers to engage with political movements. Indeed, when traditional ideas about Romanticism butt up against the practices of radical and working-class politics, Romantic poetry can start to look quite different. Important in this vein is Anne Janowitz’s *Lyric and Labour in the*

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<sup>18</sup> See Tilar J. Mazzeo, *Plagiarism and Literary Property in the Romantic Period* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007) and Margaret Russett, *Fictions and Fakes: Forging Romantic Authenticity, 1760-1845* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006). Russett argues that the Romantics worked to authenticate their productions as fictions in the face of the widespread and popular fakes of the period, and in so doing acknowledged that subjectivity was itself a fiction. Mazzeo, likewise, looks at the interdependent, interpenetrating relationship between originality and plagiarism, demonstrating that the lines between the two were by no means clearly marked in the early nineteenth century.

*Romantic Tradition*.<sup>19</sup> Although Janowitz's book does not treat the press specifically, her goal is to recover the communitarian, social history of the Romantic lyric. Janowitz traces the work of working-class, radical, and Chartist poets throughout the nineteenth century, and argues that those poets draw on the social embeddedness of Romantic poetry, and continue Romanticism's own tradition of communitarian lyric. For Janowitz, Romanticism incorporates two opposing forces—the communitarian impulse and individualism—and she argues that nineteenth-century working-class poets needed to claim both sides of this divide. In my project, I build on Janowitz's insight, and analyze how these opposing pulls shaped the ways in which poetry was put to use for political purposes. I hone in on this topic most specifically in a chapter which treats the role of the prison in the circulation and production of poetry in radical political papers. There, we can see how political prisoners used poetry to overcome the isolating effects of imprisonment.

Thinking about how literary texts appeared in the radical press requires not only a consideration of what it means, broadly, for poetry to appear in a political paper, but also a consideration of what it means for these poems (and sometimes novels) to appear *in pieces*, which is by and large the case for the literature I treat in this project. My project is in many ways a study of excerpting and reprinting—a study of the ways in which texts can be transformed by a new and different context. My work is thus in dialogue with recent scholarship, most notably that of Leah Price, which thinks through the formal implications of practices of excerpting for literary production.<sup>20</sup> Price charts the shifts, from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, in how novels were excerpted for

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<sup>19</sup> Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

anthologies. She argues that the changing assumptions about what parts of a novel *should* be excerpted were fully connected with changing assumptions about what novels themselves should be. Price thus underscores the importance of practices of excerpting for literary studies. Rather than treat the excerpt as an after-the-fact event in the life of a text, we must consider the ways in which quotation and re-contextualization can redefine the meaning, usefulness, and form of the “original” literary text.

Whereas Price turns her attention to the rise of the novel, and to the ways in which processes of quotation shaped the novel’s form, I examine the political stakes of quotation. Radical publishers and editors carefully excerpted texts from the recent past, excavating useful radical claims from the midst of less amenable texts. I suggest that the practices of extraction I analyze reflect a particularly aggressive reading practice characteristic of nineteenth-century radical autodidacticism. While the Chartist Henry Vincent was in prison, he undertook a reading course with Francis Place, the famous radical. When it came time to read Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Place instructed Vincent on the importance of methodically extracting each of Godwin’s ideas, and judging them accordingly, rather than simply accepting them as truths.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, in the 1870s, the radical political figure—and subject of my fourth chapter—George Jacob Holyoake instructed the audience of his lecture, “Self-culture: Uses of Books,” to “bring the author to the bar of your judgment.” He goes on to emphasize the importance of “incorporating the thoughts of others with the ideas which appear to be the spontaneous produce of [your] own mind.”<sup>22</sup> Both Place and Holyoake instruct their

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<sup>21</sup> Francis Place, Letter to Henry Vincent. 9 September 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection, British Library.

<sup>22</sup> Holyoake, “Self-culture: Uses of Books.” Unpublished Manuscript. Holyoake Collection 6/8. Bishopsgate Institute, London.

readers to cull through a text, judging it bit by bit, and select those ideas which seem most productive. Radical reading practices tended to highlight the value of both extraction and adaptation—of putting texts to use.

As per Leah Price's insight in relation to the novel, the *ways* in which texts were excerpted can tell us a great deal about the formal attributes of those texts. When Robert Southey's radical play, *Wat Tyler*, was excerpted in the radical press, it always appeared as a single speech by a single speaker: the play is thus re-imagined as politicized lyric poetry. Although the titular character of William Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams* spends the novel continuously escaping his captors only to be captured again, his brief moments of freedom stand alone as excerpts in *The Chartist Circular*—these embedded moments of repetition are thus transformed into a final, singular moment of triumph. When plays, novels, and poems were excerpted in the radical press, they often shifted their generic status. I examine the ways in which literary texts cross generic boundaries when they are excerpted, and, most importantly, how those shifts in genre make those texts more usable for radical political purposes.

Crucially, though, even as radical editors and publishers carefully excerpted texts to serve their own ends, certain formal features of these literary texts adhere despite the ways in which the texts are pulled apart. It can often seem that the formal qualities of literary texts work to distance and remove the literary from the political arena. I demonstrate that, in fact, the very literariness of texts by Godwin, Southey, Wordsworth, and George Eliot is what makes them so usable. For example, the open, continuous lyric present of Wordsworth's *Liberty Sonnets* might seem to dissociate the poems from political history, but that very lyric present meant that political radicals could apply the

sonnets directly to a host of specific political moments. I show that the formal, literary qualities of these texts could actually make them more—rather than less—amenable for political work.

A final note on the authors treated by this study. I consider the excerpting and reprinting of works by Godwin, Wordsworth, Southey, and Eliot, as well as several lesser-known political poets who wrote from prison. These authors are by no means the only literary figures to appear in radical papers. As those familiar with radical culture in the nineteenth century are well aware, two of the most oft-quoted Romantic poets are in fact Byron and Percy Shelley. I do not treat those poets in detail here, in part because their importance to radical culture is already well known. More importantly, my project is a study of the ways in which less-than-amenable literary authors and their texts were transformed into the tools of political radicalism. This kind of transformation is all the more visible—and all the more fascinating—when performed upon a figure like Robert Southey, known both for his arch conservatism and his earlier radicalism. Byron and Shelley's radicalism could be celebrated unequivocally, thanks in part, perhaps, to their early deaths. But Wordsworth, Southey, and Godwin all lived very long lives, lives which left them time to shift their political identities. Wordsworth, like Southey, is known as an apostate, and Godwin too has been critiqued by contemporary critics for falling into conservatism in the nineteenth century. George Eliot, in her own distinct way, is difficult to pin down politically. All of these figures are politically liminal, shifting in different ways across the border between liberal and conservative. It is no easy feat to turn George Eliot into a secular Co-operativist, or Southey into a Chartist. And it is those feats which I chart in the pages that follow.

The first two chapters of my dissertation offer close analyses of the long radical afterlives of William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, William Wordsworth's Liberty Sonnets, and Robert Southey's *Wat Tyler*, demonstrating the ways in which these texts were modified, reorganized, and excavated for political purposes throughout the nineteenth century. In my first chapter, on the reception of *Caleb Williams*, I examine the surprisingly long life of *Caleb Williams* in the nineteenth-century: the novel was put to use by reformers as varied as Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Thomson, editor of the *Chartist Circular*. I argue that using and misusing *Caleb Williams* allowed reformers throughout the century to find utopian potential in the radical past of the 1790s, and to use that potential in their very contemporary—and forward-looking—attempts at reform. Next, I turn to the poetry of Robert Southey and William Wordsworth, two of the poster-children for Romantic political apostasy. On the pages of the radical press, Southey emerges as a bona fide radical poet; the editors, publishers, and readers of these papers resolutely refused to accept Southey's (very public) apostasy, instead identifying the poet entirely with his early works. And though by the 1820s William Wordsworth was widely considered a conservative, religious poet, that same decade saw the publication of several of his "Liberty Sonnets" in the radical journal *The Black Dwarf*, in a context which transforms them from patriotic poems in defense of England into poems in support of radical political transformation. Both radical publishers in the eighteen-teens and the Chartists in the late thirties and early forties were publishing a distinctly "radical" Wordsworth, creating their own version of the poet and his poetry (one significantly at odds with the legacy Wordsworth was working to construct at the same time).

In the second half of my dissertation, I examine the implications of this radical reception history for literary production and literary genre. In my third chapter, I turn to a central site for radical print culture: the prison. Radical journals are filled, not only with commentaries *on* prison, but with commentaries *from* prison. Imprisoned radical writers and publishers were astonishingly adept at keeping their weeklies in action, and keeping their voices present on the pages of those radical weeklies. I analyze a series of letters and poems written from prison, and published in the radical press. My analysis of these poems, with their complex negotiations of community and isolation, has significant implications for our conception of the “solitary” lyric speaker of early nineteenth-century poetry. Here, I show that in addition to challenging the chronology of literary history, the practices of radical print culture similarly challenge the literary tropes of that history. The familiar tropes of Romantic poetry are turned on their head in this poetry, when the lyric speaker finds himself well and truly in gaol.

In my final chapter, I extend my project into the high Victorian period, with an analysis of George Jacob Holyoake’s penchant for quoting George Eliot. Holyoake—Chartist, atheist, Co-operativist, and secularist—quotes Eliot’s novels, her poems, her plays, and her nonfiction, and in so doing, transforms her into a dedicated supporter of his various political initiatives. I pair Holyoake’s strategies of quotation with an analysis of Eliot’s own *Felix Holt: The Radical*. This novel, set in its own recent radical past of the 1830s, is obsessed with politics as a practice of extraction, reprinting, and repetition. I argue that Eliot’s mode of engaging with the recent past in *Felix Holt* is both informed by—and comments upon—the techniques of radical print culture. In this final chapter, I examine the shifts in radical strategies of quotation over the course of the nineteenth

century, and demonstrate the ways in which these strategies reflect the changing stakes of radical politics. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates that the re-circulation of literary texts can be a surprisingly effective means of rewriting history and of advancing political movements.

## Chapter 1

Of Waste Paper, Prisons, and Incest: *Caleb Williams* in the Nineteenth Century

The late 1860s saw a storm of publications on the so-called “Byron Controversy,” a transatlantic-wide debate on Lord Byron and his sexual relations. Central to this debate was Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose book-length *Lady Byron Vindicated* (1870) accused Byron of having incestuous relations with his half-sister.<sup>1</sup> Stowe’s wholehearted engagement in this sordid debate comes as somewhat of a surprise. It was certainly not good for business, or for her reputation.<sup>2</sup> What may come as even more of a surprise, however, is the text Stowe relied upon heavily in her defense of Lady Byron: William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794).<sup>3</sup> Godwin’s novel plays such an important role for Stowe that she insisted it be published alongside her *Lady Byron Vindicated*. As she explained in a letter to her publisher: “you had better publish in clear type with paper covers an edition of *Caleb Williams* at once for there will certainly be a call for it after

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<sup>1</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe. *Lady Byron Vindicated: A History of the Byron Controversy*. (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co. 1870). Stowe’s accusation first appeared in 1869 as the article-length “The True Story of Lady Byron’s Life,” published in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

<sup>2</sup> Stowe lost the battle for public opinion, and recent critics have seen Stowe’s Byron-related publications as responsible for the declining fortunes of *The Atlantic Monthly* and as an important marker, if not the cause, of her own declining reputation. See Joan Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) 369-370 and M. A. De Wolfe Howe, *The “Atlantic Monthly” and its Makers*. 1919 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1972) 49-50.

<sup>3</sup> The novel was originally entitled *Things as They Are, or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. In 1831, *Things as They Are* was dropped, and for the rest of the nineteenth century, the novel was variously entitled *Caleb Williams* and *The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. I will use *Caleb Williams* as a shorthand. For a discussion of the implications of the shifts in title, see below.

reading my book—don't forget this.”<sup>4</sup> Stowe's adamant “don't forget this” further cements the importance Godwin's novel played for her—so important, in fact, that she took responsibility for making it available to her readers, in an affordable, but readable, paper-back edition. Stowe got her way. The title page of *Lady Byron Vindicated* directly faces an advertisement for the newly republished *The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. The advertisement itself mimics the format of a title page, so that Stowe's text is prefaced by not one but two title pages, almost as though—impossibly—*The Adventures of Caleb Williams* could itself serve as the title to her disquisition on Romantic-era incest (See Figure 1).

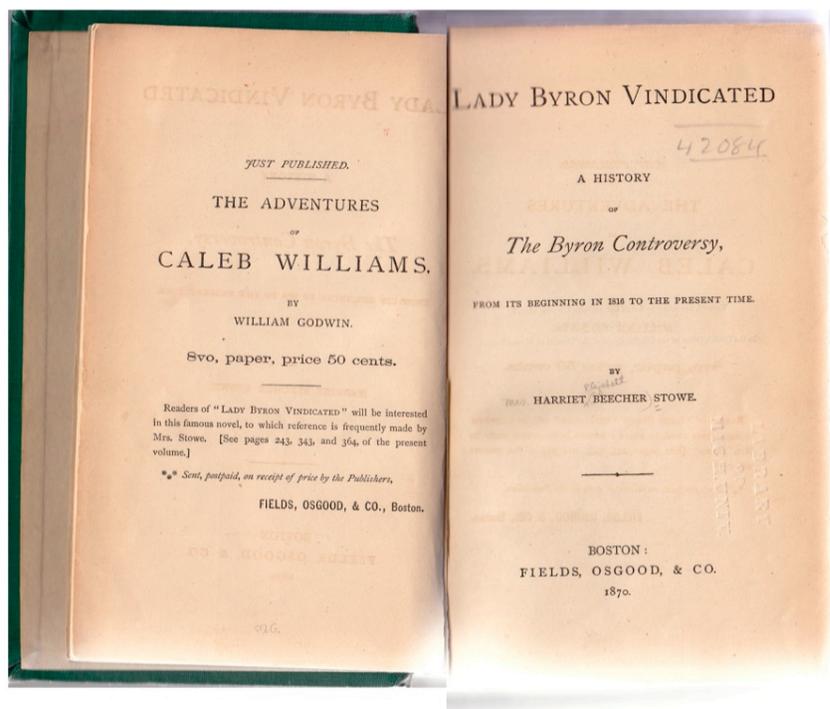


Figure 1: Advertisement for *Caleb Williams*, facing title page of *Lady Byron Vindicated*

<sup>4</sup> qtd. in Edward Wagenknecht. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Known and the Unknown*. (NY: Oxford UP, 1965) 170.

In *Lady Byron Vindicated*, Stowe argues that the “feeling of Falkland to Caleb Williams, as portrayed in Godwin’s masterly sketch [...] is exactly illustrative of what Byron felt for his wife.”<sup>5</sup> Whereas Lady Byron held the secret of Byron’s incest, Caleb Williams, a servant, discovers proof that his master, Lord Falkland, is a murderer. Falkland then attempt to save his own name by destroying Caleb’s; he spends the length of the novel framing Caleb for crimes of which he is innocent, and tracking him throughout England. Stowe’s representation of Byron throughout *Lady Byron Vindicated* relies heavily on a conception of the poet as a “real-life” version of Falkland: her descriptions of Byron’s actions and motivations are clearly informed by the ideas and even phrases of Godwin’s novel. Here, real life drama takes its cue from fiction.

Stowe thus puts *Caleb Williams* to use, adapting and reshaping the novel according to her own idiosyncratic purposes. In *Lady Byron Vindicated*, Byron becomes a version of Falkland, but Falkland simultaneously becomes a version of Byron, as Stowe transforms Godwin’s novel into a perfect map of the Byrons’ marriage. Stowe’s strange defense of Lady Byron, with its even stranger reliance on *Caleb Williams*, raises a host of questions about the ways in which writers and readers in the nineteenth century made use of their recent past—and, more particularly, the ways in which they made use of *texts* from that recent past. Stowe employs both a novel from the 1790s and a sex scandal from the 1810s, as she works to enact moral, marital reform in the 1870s.<sup>6</sup> And Stowe

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<sup>5</sup> Stowe, 342-43. Byron himself deserves the credit for first forging a connection. As Stowe tells it, when Lady Byron threatened to expose Byron, “[H]e became furious. *She* should never be the means of his detection, he said [...] In the sneering tone which was common with him, he said, ‘The world will believe me, and it will *not* believe you [...] I shall make it my life’s object to discredit you; I shall use all my powers. Read ‘Caleb Williams,’ and you will see that I shall do by you just as Falkland did by Caleb” (Stowe, 243).

<sup>6</sup> Some critics have highlighted the modernity of Stowe’s defense of Lady Byron, calling it her most proto-feminist work, a defense of a married woman’s right to leave her husband and a serious critique of the idea that women should continue to publicly support their husbands, regardless of their behavior. But *Lady*

was not alone in excerpting and manipulating scenes from Godwin's novels for her own ends. Indeed, I have introduced this odd publishing episode because in all its inimitable complexity it is, paradoxically, indicative of some issues I mean to track in this chapter. Stowe's aggressive reshaping of *Caleb Williams*—as she turns the novel into a treatise on a historical marital scandal—participates in a century-long pattern, in which nineteenth-century reformers put Godwin's novel to work. But whereas Stowe plays upon the psychological, sexualized dynamics of Falkland's hunt for Caleb, radical political publishers in Britain would spend the nineteenth century raiding the novel for its particular brand of 1790s politics.

*Caleb Williams*, as it appears in *Lady Byron Vindicated*, is much more about sex, and much less about politics. Not that the two are unrelated—were this a chapter on Byron, we might pause to consider the ways in which Byron's scandalous sexuality can sometimes operate as a cover—or replacement—for his scandalous radical politics. But instead, this chapter will investigate the powerful political afterlife of *Caleb Williams*. For most of its history *Caleb Williams* was notorious not for its associations with Byron's sexual escapades, but for its involvement in an entirely different controversy: the British debate over the French Revolution. As a novel written by one of the most famous Jacobin philosophers of the 1790s, *Caleb Williams* was linked, throughout much of the century, with William Godwin's radical politics. Stowe herself was no stranger to the political resonance of Godwin's novel. In an article for the series "Sketches of Modern

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*Byron Vindicated* as a whole is still overwhelmingly determined by the past, as though, for Stowe, reforming the past might somehow be the best way to reform the present. For more on the possible proto-feminism of *Lady Byron Vindicated*, see Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's response to Stowe, "The Moral of the Byron Case," published in *The Independent* (September 1869). Rpt. *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Ed. Elizabeth Ammons (Boston : G. K. Hall, 1980) 174-76.

Reforms and Reformers in Great Britain and Ireland,” Stowe described a series of novelists who have “contributed not a little to the cause of political reform.”<sup>7</sup> Stowe’s article begins with praise of *Caleb Williams*, an “extraordinary tale,” which, she explains “was intended to give wider currency to the author’s views of social and political reform, by clothing them in the attractive colors of romance.” Stowe gives Godwin, along with two other novelists, the credit for introducing “a new era in novel writing, by making fiction the medium of communicating radical opinions.” These statements, published just a few years before *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), provide the tantalizing suggestion that *Caleb Williams* may have provided not only a model for the Byrons’ marriage, but also a model for Stowe’s own famously political novel.

Godwin himself made the link between his politics and his novel explicit, presenting *Caleb Williams* in 1794 as a narrativized version of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), his treatise on political philosophy.<sup>8</sup> According to his original preface to the novel, Godwin’s goal was “to have taught a valuable lesson” about the findings of political philosophy to those readers “whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach.”<sup>9</sup> The novel employs an insistently didactic form in which Caleb, the first-person narrator, often interrupts the narrative to lecture his reader on the problematic state of “Things as They Are” (the first half of the novel’s original title). Thanks to their radical, political credentials, Godwin’s *Political Justice*, and, to a lesser

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<sup>7</sup> “Sketches of Modern Reforms and Reformers, in Great Britain and Ireland.” *The National Era* (September 6, 1849). My thanks to Daniel Hack for pointing me to this piece.

<sup>8</sup> Godwin’s particular brand of radical politics, with its emphasis on individual, private judgment, differs significantly from the populist politics of someone like Thomas Paine. For further details on Godwin’s politics, see below.

<sup>9</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*. Ed. David McCracken (London: Norton, 1977) 1.

extent, *Caleb Williams*, became standards of the nineteenth-century radical canon,<sup>10</sup> available in more and more affordable editions as the century progressed.

Although in 1870 Stowe was single-handedly working to have *Caleb Williams* republished, across the Atlantic, in the British context, there would have been no need for such an effort. The novel was in print continuously, from its original publication in 1794 until 1915, when the printing plates were melted for scrap metal to support the war effort.<sup>11</sup> How should we understand the relationship between this intriguing aspect of publication history and the ways in which *Caleb Williams* was put to use? How did the specific conditions of nineteenth-century publication interact with the ways the novel was quoted, edited, and deployed? *Caleb Williams* differs from most other novels from the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century in its continuous availability. It thus offers a particularly productive site for examining the uses to which Romantic-era texts were put throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

As the nineteenth century progressed, *Caleb Williams* became more and more affordable, and more and more widely available. Surprisingly, however, this pattern of expansion in terms of publication is matched by an opposing narrative which claimed that Godwin and his texts had been forgotten, completely removed from the public memory. While political radicals worked to keep *Caleb Williams* alive, political conservatives insisted that the novel was long dead. In this chapter, I argue that remembering—and forgetting—Godwin and his most famous novel was often deeply politically motivated. *Caleb Williams* and William Godwin both came to serve as stand-ins for the radical

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<sup>10</sup> St. Clair, 337.

<sup>11</sup> St. Clair, 431, 601.

<sup>12</sup> My history of *Caleb Williams* in the nineteenth century owes much to Burton Pollin's impressively thorough *Godwin Criticism: a Synoptic Bibliography* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1967) which compiles references to Godwin from the late-eighteenth century through the 1960s.

politics of the 1790s. Thus, the fight I will trace here, over whether or not Godwin and his novel were still “alive,” was in fact a fight over whether or not the radical energy of the 1790s was still alive and kicking in the nineteenth century. As we shall see, however, for mid-nineteenth century radicals *Caleb Williams* as-is was not enough: when the Chartist William Thomson excerpted the novel, he also transformed it, turning Godwin’s individualist politics into the tools of a mass movement. In the pages that follow, I explore several distinct moments in the history of *Caleb Williams*, demonstrating the ways in which readers on both sides of the political spectrum put the novel to use. As I move among these diverse materials, I will also be moving back and forth in time, investigating distinct moments throughout the nineteenth-century, often in non-chronological order. This method reflects the practices of the readers, writers, and editors who people these pages, many of whom shift with ease from one historical moment to another, incorporating seemingly alien texts from the past into their very contemporary efforts at reform.

I will begin, paradoxically, with forgetting.

## **I. Forgetting Godwin**

Mid- and late-nineteenth-century responses to William Godwin (and to many of the other important figures from his period) are often filtered through the most famous literary historian of the Romantic period: William Hazlitt. In his survey of famous figures in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825)—Hazlitt’s textual attempt to make sense of the tail-end of the eighteenth century—Hazlitt devotes a full chapter to Godwin. Hazlitt’s in-depth analysis of Godwin, his works, and his position in the 1790s radical milieu

ultimately grants Godwin the status of representative of his age. Strangely, though, Godwin is most representative of his age because he has been largely forgotten:

The Spirit of the Age was never more fully shewn than in its treatment of this writer—its love of paradox and change, its dastard submission to prejudice and to the fashion of the day. Five-and-twenty years ago he was in the very zenith of a sultry and unwholesome popularity; he blazed as a sun in the firmament of reputation; no one was more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after [...] now he has sunk below the horizon, and enjoys the serene twilight of a doubtful immortality.<sup>13</sup>

“The Spirit of the Age” is demonstrated, then, not in the fact that it produced Godwin, but by the conditions of its treatment of him. Hazlitt here, like many writers who follow him, treats the public’s forgetting of Godwin as an active, political decision: “the world makes it a point...of taking no more notice of him than if such an individual had never existed” (32). The world forgets Godwin *on purpose*. Forgetting, which might more usually be conceived as a loss or absence, is here presented as a decisive, purposeful act—an act so powerful, that it almost seems to erase Godwin altogether, to kill him off, in fact. Although Godwin lived until 1836, Hazlitt grants him a “posthumous fame” in 1825, arguing that “he is to all ordinary intents and purposes dead and buried” (32).

Hazlitt goes on, however, to differentiate between Godwin’s presence—or absence—as a person and his presence as an author. He resurrects Godwin by focusing on the life of his writings, rather than his personal fame. He may seem “dead and buried,” but “the author of *Political Justice* and of *Caleb Williams* can never die” (32). Such a strategy for guaranteeing posthumous fame is not unfamiliar; the strange aspect of Hazlitt’s particular efforts at resurrection lies in the fact that Godwin the person had not yet actually died. Godwin may well have been forgotten by 1825, but in his deployment of metaphors of death, it is Hazlitt who transforms that forgetting into a burial. Godwin

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<sup>13</sup> William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*. 1825 (Oxford: Woodstock Bks, 1989. Rpt. of original ed.) 31.

must, it seems, be killed off in order to be brought back. Recuperating and reviving Godwin's works is a crucial project for Hazlitt in *The Spirit of the Age*, as he attempts to recapture the revolutionary excitement of the 1790s, an excitement stamped out by the conservative backlash that followed the escalating violence in France. By defending the value and usefulness of *Political Justice*, and the quality and excitement of *Caleb Williams*, Hazlitt attempts to return to an earlier moment, when Godwin's works were more highly valued, before the "[f]atal reverse" which saw "this sun of intellect blotted from the sky" (33, 35). Hazlitt suggests, in fact, that the public is incapable of forgetting Godwin's texts, arguing of *Caleb Williams* that "no one that ever read it could possibly forget it" (49-50). Hazlitt points here to a paradoxical aspect of the history of Godwin and his novel in the nineteenth century: the coexistence of a "forgotten" author and an unforgettable, constantly-republished text.

When it came time for various reviewers to respond to Godwin's new novel, *Cloudesley*, in 1830, they all had trouble forgetting *Caleb Williams*. The novel's many reviews are characterized by their tendency to discuss not the novel being reviewed—*Cloudesley*—but to discuss *Caleb Williams* instead. The novel was advertised as "Cloudesley, by the Author of 'Caleb Williams,'" a phrase which the reviewer for the *Westminster Review* called a "combination of syllables well adapted to excite expectation."<sup>14</sup> The fame of the author's early novel was not sufficient, however, to save *Cloudesley*: "the reputation of Mr. Godwin's first able performance has thrown a light upon its successors, which though it has relieved them from utter darkness has not done much more" (491). Hazlitt, who reviewed *Cloudesley* himself, also begins his review with a (negative) comparison to *Caleb Williams*: "We find little of the author of Caleb

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<sup>14</sup> "Cloudesley. A Tale. By the Author of 'Caleb Williams.'" *The Westminster Review* 15 (1830): 491.

Williams in the present work, except the name in the title-page.”<sup>15</sup> Hazlitt here evacuates Godwin as author out of the current text, suggesting that “[e]ither we are changed, or Mr Godwin is changed, since he wrote that masterly performance” (144). Both Godwin and “we” (Hazlitt himself, but the “we” might also be expanded to include the reading public) are vulnerable to change, but as Hazlitt had previously suggested in *The Spirit of the Age*, the novel *Caleb Williams* seems to serve as a source of constancy—an unforgettable standard against which Godwin’s later attempts can be measured.

Although Thomas De Quincey differs from Hazlitt in his assessment of the literary quality of *Caleb Williams*, claiming that he “can see in it no merit of any kind,” he nonetheless follows Hazlitt’s lead in the complicated project of repositioning Godwin in the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> In a response to his friend Gilfillan’s “Gallery of Literary Portraits,” De Quincey takes issue with Gilfillan’s claim that a respectable person could now ask “Who’s Godwin?” De Quincey admits that such a question might apply in the case of Godwin’s politics: “That is, we must presume, *not* who is Godwin the novelist? but who is Godwin the political philosopher? In that character he is now forgotten” (262). In order to correctly represent Godwin’s position in 1845, De Quincey, like Hazlitt, is forced to split Godwin in two. Whereas Hazlitt split Godwin’s person from his texts, here De Quincey splits Godwin the political philosopher from Godwin the novelist—a now forgotten “character.”

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<sup>15</sup> Hazlitt, “Review of ‘Cloudesley.’” *Edinburgh Review* (April 1830): 144.

<sup>16</sup> De Quincey, “Notes on Gilfillan’s *Gallery of Literary Portraits*.” 1845. *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*. 21 vols. Ed. Frederick Burwick (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003) Vol. 15: 263. De Quincey’s “Notes on Gilfillan’s *Gallery of Literary Portraits*” was published in four installments in *Tait’s*, beginning in November 1845.

Whereas Hazlitt had blamed the public for Godwin's death-like erasure from discussion, De Quincey blames Godwin himself for his disappearance, claiming it was a result of his renegeing on his political principles:

In the [original] edition of his 'Political Justice,' Mr. Godwin advanced against thrones and dominations, powers and principalities, with the air of some Titan slinger or monomachist from Thebes and Troy...but, in the second, or octavo edition,--and under what motive has never been explained,--he recoiled, absolutely, from the sound himself had made [...] The second edition, as regards principles, is not a recast, but absolutely a travesty of the first [...] In this collapse of a tense excitement, I myself find the true reason for the utter extinction of the 'Political Justice,' and of its author considered as a philosopher. (262)

De Quincey's narrative of a fall from "Titan slinger" to "extinct" philosopher echoes—and intensifies—Hazlitt's rendition of Godwin's fall from "blaz[ing] as a sun in the firmament of reputation" to "sink[ing] below the horizon."<sup>17</sup> Given De Quincey's own conservative political leanings, he presumably—unlike Hazlitt—does not regret such a fall. De Quincey grants Godwin's historical presence the powerful imagery of classical Greek mythology, but thus exaggerates the distance, difference, and inaccessibility of the radical 1790s.

For various conservative writers throughout the nineteenth century, the project of making the radical 1790s—and the authors and texts linked to that decade—inaccessible was an important political strategy. Whereas both Hazlitt and De Quincey manage the strange contradiction of a famous author who is also a public absence by splitting Godwin into various smaller divisions, the conservative reviewers of *Blackwood's*, in the late 1830s, worked to erase both Godwin and his texts by combining them together. In 1839, George Croly of *Blackwood's* paused in his review of the life and work of "Bannister the comedian" to take a stab at William Godwin and *Caleb Williams*. While

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<sup>17</sup> Hazlitt, *Spirit*, 31.

noting Bannister's performance in *The Iron Chest*, the most famous of many stage adaptations of *Caleb Williams*, Croly takes the opportunity to discuss not the play, but the novel and its author: "The novel, wholly improbable in its story, and unnatural in its characters, was hurried into popularity by the passions of the time. Caleb was, like his author, a Jacobin, and he had a Jacobin's fate, universal success for the day, finishing by being flung into contemptuous and returnless oblivion."<sup>18</sup> Croly here conflates Godwin and his character—both Jacobins—both flung into oblivion.

As Hazlitt had done twenty years before, Croly here attributes Godwin's (and, inaccurately, Caleb's) disappearance from the public scene to a political act on the part of the public—forgetting imagined as an act of violence. I would characterize Croly's assertions here as closer to desire than fact: desire that *Caleb Williams* might be as easily forgotten as Godwin, and desire that they both really had been flung into that "returnless oblivion." Croly's anxiety about the possible presence of Godwin and his radical politics in 1839 was perhaps informed by the fear they might prove useful to one group in particular: the newly emergent Chartists.<sup>19</sup> One year later, in 1840, *Blackwood's* was continuing its project of reminding its readers to forget Godwin. In his review of Toqueville's *Democracy in America*, Arnout O'Donnell explains that had Godwin been born in France, his works "would no doubt had [sic] a high celebrity and an enduring popularity; whilst with us, after having excited surprise and a general contemptuous indignation for a season, they have sunk into oblivion, and are now regarded as little

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<sup>18</sup> George Croly [as attributed by Pollin in *William Godwin: A Synoptic Bibliography*], "Bannister the Comedian." *Blackwood's* Vol 45 (March 1839) 403.

<sup>19</sup> The *People's Charter* was published in May of 1838, but Dorothy Thompson, among others, points to the founding of *The Northern Star* in November of 1837 as the starting point of the Chartist movement. By 1839, a Convention had been called, which began meeting in London in February, and then moved to Birmingham in May. The rest of 1839 saw an increase in activity, with a three-day strike in August and the Newport Rising in November. See Thompson's *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution*. (London: Temple Smith, 1984).

better than waste paper.”<sup>20</sup> O’Donnell’s anxious desire to distance Godwin and the radical politics he stands for takes the form of a geographical displacement: Godwin really *ought* to have been French. As it is, though, being English, Godwin occupies the same “oblivion” that Croly had marked out for him, with his texts turned to “waste.” Like Croly, O’Donnell here attributes Godwin’s disappearance to the discerning taste of the British (as opposed to the French) public, who have made the active decision of regarding Godwin’s works as “waste paper.” Much to the dismay of this reviewer, one imagines, *Caleb Williams* would soon be published in the highly affordable *Novel Newspaper*.<sup>21</sup> The transformation of *Caleb Williams* into “waste paper” marked not its disappearance but its ever increasing availability.

By 1870, when Stowe “recuperated” *Caleb Williams* for her own unexpected purposes, we might assume that the novel, and its author, had run their course. Nonetheless, the pattern of active, anxious—even murderous—forgetting that characterizes the responses to Godwin and his texts in the first half of the nineteenth century continued into the 1870s and 80s. In 1876, the leftist publisher C. Kegan Paul published a biography of Godwin which was widely reviewed in England and America, including a review in *The Atlantic Monthly*, which had published Stowe’s original defense of Lady Byron. These reviews seem to agree, as a group, that Godwin has been entirely—and properly—forgotten in the present age, in both Britain and America. Although the review in *The Atlantic Monthly* argues for a peculiarly American interest in the period of time related to the French Revolution, bound as it is, ideologically, to the American Revolution, Godwin still seems undeserving of public attention in the 1870s.

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<sup>20</sup> Arnout O’Donnel, “Review of *Democracy in America*.” *Blackwood’s* Vol 48 (October 1840): 468.

<sup>21</sup> For details on this edition, see below.

Despite his “singular reputation” in his own time, “it has been difficult to account for his great reputation.”<sup>22</sup> This reviewer seems to be suggesting that the public remembers Godwin in fact *too* well, that he has a reputation that cannot be accounted for. The best way to remember Godwin, according to this reviewer at least, seems to be to forget him. Although the reviewer grants that, in his time “the prominence of Godwin lent its force to his novels and other writings,” their “reputation...has scarcely proved enduring.” The reviewer suggests here that Godwin’s somewhat public reputation can *only* be explained by looking to the strangeness of his own historical period. He works to locate Godwin squarely in his own historical period, arguing that both Godwin and his works are incapable of transcending that historical moment. As the reviewer concludes, “it is useless to count upon his retaining in public estimation anything like the relative importance which he held during his lifetime” (115). The writer’s choice of the word “useless” here suggests, on the contrary, that someone *is* interested in Godwin retaining that “public estimation.” In context, it seems that that someone is none other than Kegan Paul, who, with his biography, hopes to return Godwin to the spotlight. I would suggest that the hint of aggression that appears in the word “useless” hints at the possibility that Kegan Paul’s biography might prove more *useful* in maintaining Godwin’s reputation than this reviewer would like.

Leslie Stephen’s review of Kegan Paul’s biography in *The Fortnightly Review* agrees with the *Atlantic Monthly* reviewer that Godwin and his texts are entirely incapable of existing outside of their historical moment. Stephen grants that Kegan Paul has done his best; it is Godwin himself who is to blame: “If the figures in the background persist in being more distinct than the principal character, the fault is not with Mr. Paul.

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<sup>22</sup> “Recent Literature.” *Atlantic Monthly* (1876) 115.

He has done what can be done to bring his principal figure into relief: but Godwin, though we gradually gain some acquaintance with him, was wanting in the force and richness of character which keeps the dead alive.”<sup>23</sup> Godwin cannot “live,” then, because of the failure of his own personality. Apparently this fault of personality was one which Godwin shared with his own characters. In his discussion of *Caleb Williams*, Stephen argues that “In the hands of a more powerful writer, Falkland and his victim [Caleb] might have been more alive” (459). Stephen’s turn to a fictional character here highlights the way in which his earlier description of Godwin’s lack of “force and richness” itself reads like a description of a fictional, literary character. The point seems to be that Godwin is dead to history because he can neither create nor *be* an interesting literary character. Stephen’s attempts here, to confirm the “deadness” of both Godwin and his characters—even though neither could really be called “alive”—bear some affinity to Hazlitt’s earlier description of Godwin as “to all intents dead and buried,” even while he was living.<sup>24</sup> Even in the 1870s, the project of killing Godwin, by forgetting him, still proved relevant.

The conservative London magazine *The Spectator* published its own extended, three-part review of Paul’s biography in 1876. Like the reviews above, this author agrees that “The name of Godwin is one certainly not familiar to the present generation. The reputation which at the time of publication accrued to the author of *Political Justice* and of *Caleb Williams* is faded from the memory of the public.”<sup>25</sup> Like the *Atlantic Monthly* reviewer, this author’s emphasis is on the public’s version of Godwin. One of the notable

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<sup>23</sup> Leslie Stephen, “William Godwin.” *The Fortnightly Review* 26 (Oct 1876) 445.

<sup>24</sup> Hazlitt, *Spirit*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> “Review of C. Kegan Paul’s *William Godwin*.” *The Spectator: A Weekly Review of Politics, Literature, Theology, and Art* Vol 49 (April 1876): 501.

patterns in these responses to Godwin is an overriding, often politically-motivated concern with the status of these long-dead figures in the “memory of the public.” The author of *The Spectator* review seems to share in the larger project of keeping Godwin *out* of public memory by killing him and his writings off. As the reviewer explains, “The recollection that survives of Godwin’s writings and intellectual influence is of the very faintest complexion;” here, the recollection itself has become a pale corpse.

This reviewer concludes: “*Caleb Williams*, now forgotten, [was] at the time a success” (502). The advertisements that appear in the final pages of this edition of *The Spectator* (and of the following edition, which continues this review) tell a different story, however. There, an advertisement appears for a new, related, text: “Just published, in emblematic cloth...*Lord Byron Vindicated; or, Rome and her Pilgrim*. by “Manfred.” Poem in the Stanza of Childe Harold, replying to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s ‘Lady Byron Vindicated’.”<sup>26</sup> *Caleb Williams* does live on in the pages of *The Spectator* of 1876.

The coexistence in *The Spectator*, of a claim that *Caleb Williams* has been forgotten and a reference to a text, *Lady Byron Vindicated*, that remembers it, demonstrates the combinations of forgetting and remembering that characterize the nineteenth-century history of Godwin and his most famous novel. When writers throughout the nineteenth century claimed Godwin had been forgotten, they were of course simultaneously remembering him. And they were also trying to convince their readers to forget him for very particular reasons. Forgetting Godwin was intimately related to forgetting the radicalism of the 1790s. The intensity and violence of the thrusting of Godwin into oblivion evidenced in these reviews—particularly those from

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<sup>26</sup> *The Spectator* Vol 49 (April 1876): 512.

the 1830s and 40s—suggests that these reviewers were themselves responding to the possibility that Godwin, and the radical politics he had come to represent, might be less forgotten than they would like. One solution was to insist, over and over again, that Godwin and his texts were dead, trapped in the past, and thus unavailable for use in the present moment. As we will see, William Thomson, the editor of the *Chartist Circular*, among others, challenged the nineteenth-century consensus that Godwin and his politics were a thing of the past. Instead, by using Godwin's texts in particular ways, he, like Stowe, resurrected the supposedly dead Godwinian text, quoting, excerpting, and recombining its various parts to bring it back to life.

### **Remembering *Caleb Williams***

Thinking about the ways in which *Caleb Williams* was remembered and used in the nineteenth century requires careful attention to when and how the novel was available. Traditional reception history does not offer a clear window onto the way the novel functioned throughout the century, as powerful literary and political voices worked to make *Caleb Williams* and its author seem unavailable. The nineteenth-century narrative of forgetting attempted, I argue, to make Godwin and his texts unavailable to radical readers. However, as *Caleb Williams* became more and more affordable, it became more rather than less available. In addition to thinking about the plain fact of the novel's publication presence, my analysis will also consider *how* the novel was available at different points throughout the century. One of the truisms of twentieth-century criticism of *Caleb Williams* is that the novel was depoliticized by the 1830s. Close

attention to publication history suggests a different narrative, however, in which *Caleb Williams* carried its radical political valence deep into the nineteenth century.

By 1831, *Caleb Williams*, originally published in 1794, had already gone through five editions.<sup>27</sup> In that year, it was published as one of the *Bentley Standard Novels*, at a price of 6 shillings.<sup>28</sup> At first glance, this edition seems to downplay the political content (and context) of *Caleb Williams*. Although in 1794 Godwin's novel was titled *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, the Bentley edition is simply entitled *Caleb Williams*.<sup>29</sup> The removal of "things as they are"—an assertion of the novel's relevance to its contemporary social situation—unmoors the novel from its original moment of publication, as well as from its original *claim* of relevance to that historical moment. The new title would seem to almost change the genre of the novel, from political commentary to character-based fiction.<sup>30</sup>

Critics who point to the de-politicization of *Caleb Williams* over the course of the early nineteenth century attribute that shift to two things: the novel's change in title and Godwin's 1832 account of the composition of the novel.<sup>31</sup> Although the 1831 Bentley edition may seem to perform this shift, with its change in title and Bentley's later 1832 publication of Godwin's account of the novel's composition, this edition also performs

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<sup>27</sup> Most notable are the editions of 1796 and '97, which incorporated significant narrative changes, including a shift in the placement of the Emily Melville plot and the addition of the entire section in Wales, with Laura.

<sup>28</sup> William Godwin, *Caleb Williams* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831).

<sup>29</sup> Although the title *Adventures of Caleb Williams* is used on the first page of the novel, the simpler *Caleb Williams* is used twice in the opening front matter.

<sup>30</sup> Gary Kelly argues that the change in title signals the novel's "changed status from tract for the times to prototype of the English novel's renewed interest in individual psychology." *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 180.

<sup>31</sup> Several critics point to Godwin's very early (pre-publication) revisions as also participating in this pattern of de-politicization. Gilbert Dumas, in "Things as They Were," *SEL* 6 (1966), argues that Godwin's revision of the novel's ending (from Caleb's failure and breakdown to his successful courtroom speech) "directly and adversely affects both the logical dramatic development and the propagandistic intention of the narrative... undercutting the severity of Godwin's view of 'Things as they Are'" (582)

framing work to situate *Caleb Williams* in relation to its historical context. The novel is preceded by a memoir of Godwin, written by Mary Shelley, which insistently reminds the novel's readers of Godwin's political past. Also preceding the novel are Godwin's two original prefaces. The first, which had been removed from the original 1794 edition asserts the novel's goal to "have taught a valuable lesson" about "THINGS AS THEY ARE" (xix-xx). It is followed by Godwin's additional preface, explaining the removal of the original preface as motivated by the conditions of the 1790s, when "Terror was the order of the day; and it was feared that even the humble novelist might be shown to be constructively a traitor" (xx). These various prefatory materials are dated, so that before the novel begins, the reader of the 1831 edition has maneuvered through various memoirs and prefaces, from Shelley's memoir written for the 1831 edition, to a critical essay on "The Novels of Godwin," dated 1816, to Godwin's two prefaces, dated 1794 and 1795. This weighty chain of dates might function to distance the novel from its 1831 readership, but the historicizing material might also have worked to remind some readers of the conditions of their first reading experience of the novel, as well as providing an invaluable political context for a new generation of readers. By carefully reconstructing the historical context of Godwin's novel from the 1790s, complete with his didactic, political prefaces, the Bentley edition raises the possibility that readers in the 1830s may still have something to learn from Godwin's political project, which was still very much alive in the Bentley edition.

The most oft-cited evidence for *Caleb Williams* de-politicization in the 1830s is Godwin's explanatory narrative of the novel's composition, in which he emphasizes the novel's engagement with psychology at the cost of its politics. Godwin's 1832

description frames the text as “a book of fictitious adventure.”<sup>32</sup> As Godwin explains, he “bent [himself] to the conception of a series of adventures of flight and pursuit; the fugitive in perpetual apprehension of being overwhelmed with the worst calamities, and the pursuer...keeping his victim in a state of the most fearful alarm” (8). Here, the flight itself is presented as a technical strategy which allows the author to carefully probe the emotional, psychological state of his characters while thus engaged. Godwin’s description of his narrative technique as the “analysis of the private and internal operations of the mind, employing my metaphysical dissecting knife in tracing and laying bare the involutions of motive” (10) further emphasizes this new psychological focus and framing. Whereas Godwin’s original prefaces to *Caleb Williams* explained the author’s goal as to have “taught a valuable lesson,” this description from 1832 presents the novel as an exercise in the psychological representation of individuals. Pamela Clemit, among others, argues that Godwin’s framing of *Caleb Williams* around the question of individual psychology reflects a move away from political concerns.<sup>33</sup> Importantly, both Clemit and Kristen Leaver argue that this turn inward reflects a larger turn in literary history, a turn towards the psychological “inner world,” which they associate with Romanticism.<sup>34</sup> The twentieth-century critical narrative of the history of Godwin’s texts in the nineteenth century often turns on this shift from public and political to private and psychological.

Importantly, however, this prefatory narrative was *not* actually published with *Caleb Williams* in the 1830s, but was, rather, appended to the Bentley edition of

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<sup>32</sup> William Godwin. “Preface.” *Fleetwood. Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*. Vol 5. (William Pickering: London, 1992) 8.

<sup>33</sup> Pamela Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Kristen Leaver. "Pursuing Conversations: Caleb Williams and the Romantic Construction of the Reader." *Studies in Romanticism* 33.4 (1994): 589-610.

Godwin's novel *Fleetwood*. So although this preface has been crucial to twentieth-century readings of the novel, it is less clear that it had such a determining effect on nineteenth-century reading practices. In 1838, for example, *The Penny Cyclopaedia of The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* was still interpreting *Caleb Williams* according to very political standards. The entry for "Godwin" notes that *Caleb Williams*, published only one year after *Political Justice*, had "the ultimate object of [being] an illustration of some of the views contained in the 'Political Justice,' and a realization in the person of Caleb of many complaints contained in the 'Political Justice' of the prevailing state of society, designed to work upon minds for which the disquisitional character of the latter treatise was unsuited."<sup>35</sup> Such a version of *Caleb Williams* depends on Godwin's highly politicized original preface to the novel, in which he hopes to "communicate" the findings of political philosophy to "persons whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach."<sup>36</sup> The political implications of *Caleb Williams*, still central for the *Penny Cyclopaedia*, were also central, of course, to the way the *Blackwood's* reviewer—who marked the novel as a Jacobin text in 1839—understood *Caleb Williams*. In the 1830s and 40s, then, as *Caleb Williams* was becoming more affordable and more available, it was *not* simultaneously losing its radical credentials. It may be true that Godwin himself, as Butler notes, "ceased to emphasize...the dangerous topicality of his book,"<sup>37</sup> but his decision did not necessarily determine how the novel itself existed for nineteenth-century readers and reviewers.

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<sup>35</sup> "Godwin," *The Penny Cyclopaedia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*. Vol. 11. (London: Charles Knight and Co., 22, Ludgate St.) 290.

<sup>36</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*. Ed. David McCracken, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Marilyn Butler. "Godwin, Burke, and Caleb Williams" *Essays in Criticism* 32.3 (1982): 239.

This critical narrative, which argues that *Caleb Williams* lost its politics in the 1830s, elides the ways in which the novel was used politically throughout the century. A different, newly-emergent critical narrative of Godwin argues, not that the Godwinian text lost its politics, but that Godwin's texts were oriented around a concern with the private individual from the time of their original publication. These critics argue that Godwin's politics themselves are the politics of the private individual—a politics which would seem to make a novel like *Caleb Williams* of little use to a mass movement like Chartism. These critics tend to emphasize the contiguity between *Caleb Williams* and *Political Justice*, and highlight the ways in which Godwin's political philosophy, as represented in *Political Justice*, privileges individual, private judgment.<sup>38</sup> For Godwin, social reform will grow out of improvements in such individual judgment. All government systems are thus deeply flawed in that they attempt to decide *for* the individual, and prevent the exercise of private judgment. Godwin's idealizing of private judgment in *Political Justice* coincides with his severe distrust of cooperative, mass action. Cooperative action, like government, is dangerous in that it interferes with individual judgment. As he writes, "everything that is usually understood by the term co-operation is, in some degree, an evil."<sup>39</sup>

Garrett Sullivan and Andrew McCann argue that Godwin's distrust of mass cooperation is reflected in his distrust of mass reading practices.<sup>40</sup> Sullivan sees this

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<sup>38</sup> On private judgment in *Caleb Williams* and *Political Justice*, see Leaver; Andrew McCann, *Cultural Politics in the 1790s*. (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1999); and Andrew Franta, "Godwin's Handshake." *PMLA* 122 (May 2007): 696-710. On private judgment in *Political Justice*, see David Collings, "The Romance of the Impossible: William Godwin in the Empty Place of Reason." *ELH* 70 (2003): 847-74.

<sup>39</sup> Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, with Selections from Godwin's other Writings*. [based on 1<sup>st</sup> Ed] Ed. K. Codell Carter. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1971) 301.

<sup>40</sup> Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. "'A Story to be Hastily Gobbled Up': Caleb Williams and Print Culture." *Studies in Romanticism* 32.3 (1993): 323-37; McCann, *Cultural Politics*.

distrust as enacted in the fact that Falkland's pursuit and harassment of Caleb is abetted by the willingness of readers to believe the Newgate-style tales Falkland publishes about him. McCann agrees that *Caleb Williams* demonstrates Godwin's fear that any attempt to create a rational, private discussion (the kind idealized in *Political Justice*) is always necessarily destroyed by its engagement with public discourse. Leaver argues that Godwin's solution to the dangers of mass reading and mass cooperation is a turn to the individual reader, an attempt to avoid the "mass form" and present "*Caleb Williams* as a private conversation between an individual reader and the text."<sup>41</sup> Such a reading relies, again, on *Political Justice*, wherein Godwin claims that "[w]e can seldom make much progress in the business of disentangling error and delusion but in sequestered privacy, or in the tranquil interchange of sentiments that take place between two persons."<sup>42</sup> Tillotama Rajan agrees that in *Caleb Williams* Godwin locates the potential for reform in the mind of an ideal future reader, pointing to the fact that Caleb himself calls out for a future reader of his memoir.<sup>43</sup> Many recent critics, then, have located the politics of *Caleb Williams* in this attempt to construct a private conversation with an ideal, individualized, future reader.<sup>44</sup> This, these critics suggest, is the reader Godwin wants, *not* the dangerous mass of readers he presents in *Caleb Williams*, readers who might

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<sup>41</sup> Leaver, 591. For Leaver, the utopian moment of *Caleb Williams* is that in which Caleb, during his final public speech, regrets his failure to communicate privately. If only "I had told [Falkland] privately the tale that I have now been telling" (323), Caleb suggests, then the problems that have fueled the novel could have been solved.

<sup>42</sup> Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. [Based on 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.] Ed. F. E. L. Priestley. Vol 1 (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1946) 290.

<sup>43</sup> Tillotama Rajan, "Wollstonecraft and Godwin: Reading the Secrets of the Political Novel" *Studies in Romanticism* 27 (1988): 221-251.

<sup>44</sup> Other critics use this idea of a turn to the individual reader in order to explain the ambiguity of the novel's conclusion, arguing that, by ending his novel without a clear moral, Godwin is choosing to "present the reader with a choice," a strategy which reflects Godwin's "belief in the gradual reform of social institutions through individual renovation" (Clemit 68).

represent the kind of mass, cooperative presence Godwin found the most dangerous to individual, private judgment.

The critical narrative I have been presenting, which focuses on Godwin's attention to individual, private reform, seems to have little in common with the nineteenth-century attempt to erase Godwin completely. But both narratives construct versions of Godwin and *Caleb Williams* which make both author and text unavailable to a mass, working-class audience. As I argued above, the nineteenth-century project of forgetting Godwin may have been motivated by an anxiety that the philosopher and the Jacobin politics he had come to represent might in fact prove useful and available for mass radical movements. The twentieth-century critical tradition which highlights Godwin's desire to address an ideal, individual reader—as well as his abiding fear of mass readerships—would seem to alleviate the fears of the *Blackwood's* reviewers, in that it certainly constructs Godwin and his politics as less than useful for a mass, working-class movements such as Chartism. In fact, Leaver specifically links Godwin's privileging of the individual with a specifically middle-class audience, arguing that by deploying “a model of psychological growth” in *Caleb Williams*, Godwin “effectively tapped into the immense energy of the emerging middle classes” (597).

I largely agree with these critics in their depiction of Godwin's politics, and of his ideal reader. I suggest, however, that this critical focus on Godwin's ideal readers should be informed by an analysis of some less-than-ideal readers. Just because Godwin himself distrusted mass political movements did not mean that he could not still prove useful for such movements, although the critical privileging of Godwin's own political goals may have made such uses more difficult to see. And although, as Sullivan points out, Godwin

was deeply ambivalent about mass readerships, the publication histories of both *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* tell a different story, as both were published at more and more affordable prices throughout the century. Both the nineteenth-century narrative of Godwin's disappearance, and the twentieth-century narrative of his turn inward, to private, individual conversation, read differently when put in dialogue with the facts of publication history.

Although the Bentley edition did advertise itself as affordable, at a price of six shillings, it was still “not cheap by absolute terms. In the 1830s a single *Bentley Standard Novel* cost about half the weekly wage of a clerk or skilled manual worker.”<sup>45</sup> Over the course of the 1830s, *Caleb Williams* dropped in price to 1/6 shillings (for the Allman and Daly edition of 1839)—cheaper, but still not widely affordable. In 1841, however, *Caleb Williams* was published as part of *The Novel Newspaper* series.<sup>46</sup> *The Novel Newspaper*, which successfully published over eighty novels—many of them from the eighteenth-century—between 1838 and 1846, “concentrated on giving as much reading matter as possible in thirty-two pages of double-columned small print.”<sup>47</sup> This edition of *Caleb Williams* sold for only a few pence. It was probably also available in parts, and thus for even cheaper. With this drop in price, the novel was suddenly available to an entirely new readership. St. Clair estimates that *The Novel Newspaper* edition of *Caleb Williams* probably sold in the tens or even hundreds of thousands of

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<sup>45</sup> St. Clair, 362.

<sup>46</sup> Godwin, “Caleb Williams.” *The Novel Newspaper* Vol 11. London: J. Cunningham, 1841. British Library.

<sup>47</sup> Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850: a Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in early Victorian Urban England*. (London: Oxford UP, 1963) 25.

copies.<sup>48</sup> With this edition, which also included Godwin's original, politicized prefaces, the novel itself entered mass circulation.

It is of course difficult, if not impossible, to draw conclusions about *how* this particular edition of *Caleb Williams* was read. As a flight-and-pursuit narrative with definite links to the recycled "Newgate Tales" from the eighteenth century which were also widely available at this time, it might not have necessarily been read in the context of political radicalism. We should not assume, however, that simply because the novel entered the domain of mass readership, it lost its political implications.

### **Chartist Caleb**

Although Godwin's distrust of mass movements might seem to make his politics untenable to Chartism, William Thomson, editor of the *Chartist Circular*, carefully excerpted *Caleb Williams* to meet the challenge of integrating Godwin's individualist politics into the Chartist program.<sup>49</sup> In the *Chartist Circular*'s "Preface," Thomson explains its specifically political goals: "It would be a convenient and regular vehicle for the diffusion of the very best political information of the day. Articles extracted from the first periodicals, and from the works of the best authors of the age, besides popular original essays—all bearing directly on the moving principles of the present agitation—could be communicated weekly to the country" (iv-v). Such a description highlights the

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<sup>48</sup> St. Clair, 601.

<sup>49</sup> *Chartist Circular*. Ed. William Thomson. Collected Vols. Glasgow: W&W Miller, 1841. For details on the *Circular*, see W. Hamish Fraser, "The Chartist Press in Scotland." *Papers for the People: a Study of the Chartist Press*. Eds. Joan Allen and Owen Ashton. (London : Merlin Press, 2005). The *Chartist Circular* began circulation in September of 1839. Thomson, the editor, was a "former handloom weaver and co-operator" (Fraser 89). As Fraser explains, "The *Circular* was not a newspaper, but an educational journal intended to bring a greater understanding of the aims of Chartism...At a price of one halfpenny it was aiming at a sale of 10,000 per week and twice that was claimed for the first week's sales. It was intended also to be kept as a source of reference" (91).

contemporaneity for which the *Chartist Circular* strived. As I discuss in my Introduction, St. Clair describes a pattern in which working-class readers throughout the nineteenth century consistently had delayed access to texts, as they fell out of copyright and became cheaper and thus more accessible to the mass public. St. Clair emphasizes, correctly, the immense disadvantages of such a system, but here I would like to point to the coexistence of opportunities for taking advantage of such delays. In the case of Godwin and *Caleb Williams*, for example, just as various commentators were agreeing that Godwin and his texts had no place in the current context of the late 1830s and early 1840s, Thomson mined and re-framed Godwin's texts for his own very contemporary purposes.<sup>50</sup>

Godwin, in his position as radical philosopher, makes many appearances in the *Chartist Circular*'s "Thoughts for the Thoughtful" section, a regularly occurring feature of the journal which included various excerpts from political thinkers. Most of the works quoted in this section are nonfiction or essayistic in nature, and most excerpts from Godwin are drawn from *Political Justice*. In the October 24, 1840 edition of "Thoughts for the Thoughtful," however, *Caleb Williams* makes a significant appearance. The section begins with the following quotation from the novel:

Strange that men, from age to age, should consent to hold their lives at the breath of another, merely that each in his turn may have the power of acting the tyrant according to law! Oh God! give me poverty! shower upon me all the imaginary hardships of human life! I will receive them all with thankfulness. Turn me a prey to the wild beasts of the desert, so I be never again the victim of man dressed in the gore-dripping robes of authority. Suffer me at least to call life, and the pursuits of life, my own! Let me hold it at the mercy of elements, of the hunger of beasts, or the

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<sup>50</sup> Although Thomson's detailed use of *Caleb Williams* in his *Chartist Circular* is somewhat idiosyncratic, Godwin was also referenced by the much more widely influential *Northern Star*, the most important Chartist periodical. In an article on "The War Against Unjust Taxation and General Poverty," the author (possibly editor Feargus O'Connor) quotes Godwin's "admirable" *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* at length, on the problem of well-to-do-people, who "inveigh bitterly against all projects of reform," and argue that "We find things very well as they are." *Caleb Williams* is not referenced, but the near-quotation of its original title "Things as They Are," is suggestive. *The Northern Star*. (October 13, 1849)

revenge of barbarians, but not of the cold-blooded prudence of monopolists and kings. (232)

This lengthy quotation is marked as being excerpted from *Godwin's Caleb Williams*. It is thus marked as fiction, but its status as fiction is complicated by the fact that the excerpt is in a single voice—a direct address from Caleb to his reader. The format of the excerpt then, as wisdom dispensed from a single speaker, is not significantly different from its surrounding nonfiction counterparts: the editor of the *Chartist Circular* is excerpting Godwin's fictional text for political insight just as he uses Godwin's (and other political theorists') nonfiction writing.

Of course, the tone of this passage, with its exclamatory punctuation and melodramatic imagery differs significantly from the tone of something like *Political Justice*, or the quotations from Bentham and Locke which also share this edition of “Thoughts for the Thoughtful.” In fact, the content of this passage would, in some ways, seem to be an argument *for* over-the-top, fictional eloquence, in its desire for the extremity of “all the *imaginary* hardships of human life” over “cold-blooded prudence” (my italics). *Caleb Williams*, as a novel, might seem to offer a form of political commentary that is, in part, freed from the requirements of logic and rationality that might be said to govern most nonfiction political writing. In the 1790s, however, nonfiction political writing was itself suffused with the emotional language of melodrama. Several critics, including Marilyn Butler, have argued that Godwin's characterization of Falkland's obsessive chivalry is an implicit critique of Edmund Burke, the political thinker most associated with melodramatic rhetoric after his controversial *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).<sup>51</sup> Burke, however, was not the only

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<sup>51</sup> See “Godwin, Burke, and Caleb Williams.”

political writer depending on emotive rhetoric in the 1790s. So were his opponents, most notably—for the purposes of *Caleb Williams*—Thomas Paine.

Andrew Franta argues that “*Caleb Williams*’s political argument...takes the form of a double reversal that pits Burke and Paine against each other.”<sup>52</sup> Franta argues that Godwin uses the different handshakes of *Caleb Williams* to critique both Burke and Paine, emphasizing, as have other critics, Godwin’s distrust of Paine’s narrative of “natural rights.” Those “rights” themselves appear in another excerpt from *Caleb Williams*, which is included in the “Thoughts for the Thoughtful” section of the same issue of the *Chartist Circular*:

Never did man feel more vividly than I felt at that moment the sweets of liberty. Never did man more strenuously prefer poverty with independence, to the artificial allurements of a life of slavery. I stretched forth my arms with rapture, I clapped my hands one upon the other, and exclaimed, ‘Ah! this is indeed to be a man. These wrists were lately galled with fetters; all my motions whether I rose up or sat down, were echoed to with the clanking of chains; I was tied down like a wild beast, and could not move but in a circle of a few feet in circumference. Now I can run fleet as a greyhound, and leap like a young roe upon the mountains. O God!<sup>53</sup> thou only canst tell with what delight a prisoner, who has just broke forth from his dungeon, hugs the blessings of new found liberty. Sacred and indescribable moment, when man regains his rights! (232)

Part of the usefulness of both these excerpts for the *Chartist Circular* stems from the fact that the specifics of Caleb’s particular situation—the novelistic context for the scene—is largely irrelevant in these moments of exhortation. In the quote above, for example, Caleb’s speech moves quickly from the particularities of his own wrists “lately galled with fetters,” to the simile that he was “tied down like a wild beast” and then out to the

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<sup>52</sup> “Godwin’s Handshake,” 697.

<sup>53</sup> Thomson here removes the following parenthetical: “(if God there be, that condescends to record the lonely beatings of an ancient heart),” thus removing the religious doubt that characterized Godwin’s version.

metaphors of the greyhound and roe. From there, in the following sentence, Caleb's particular "I" disappears completely, as he becomes the third person "prisoner, who has just broke forth from his dungeon." In the final sentence of this passage, even the links between Caleb's experience as prisoner and his exclamation disappear, as he makes a final general statement about man "regain[ing] his rights."

More specifically, though, Caleb's reference to "rights" here should alert us, according to Pamela Clemit, "to Godwin's criticism of the notion of natural rights upheld by Paine and his followers" (62-3). Clemit identifies this moment in *Caleb Williams* as, specifically, an imitation of and critique of Paine: "Caleb's denunciations of tyranny and celebrations of independence are not set pieces of doctrine...but words of a fallible character in an autobiographical memoir we cannot fully trust" (46). For Clemit, then, when Caleb has these moments of rhetorical, emotional excess he is not an ideal figure for Godwin, but rather an image of failure, specifically the failure Godwin saw in those who pursued revolutionary action in a "frenzy of enthusiasm."<sup>54</sup>

Taken out of context, however, as these passages are in the *Chartist Circular*, such an implied critique disappears. Caleb's statements are here "Thoughts by the Thoughtful"—adamantly *not* the "words of a fallible character...we cannot fully trust" (Clemit 46). In this context, these moments, in which Caleb interrupts the flow of his narrative with his excited rhetoric, stand alone as straightforward "denunciations of tyranny and celebrations of independence," to quote Clemit. In quoting Caleb then, the *Chartist Circular* is quoting, not so much Godwin, as Godwin imitating Paine. Such a selection is profoundly appropriate, in that Paine's populist, revolutionary rhetoric of equality and liberty has much more in common with the Chartist program than does

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<sup>54</sup> *Political Justice* iii.281 (qtd. in Clemit 46)

Godwin's individualist philosophy. While other sections of *Caleb Williams* may support Leaver's claim that Godwin was working to construct an individual conversation with his reader, these moments of rhetorical excess feel much more public in address. Their exclamatory tone (the first passage alone boasts four exclamation points) links them to just the type of radical rhetorical performance of which Godwin was most suspicious. In *Political Justice*, Godwin argues that

Harangues and declamation, lead to passion, and not to knowledge. The memory of the hearer is crowded with pompous nothings, with images and not arguments...It would be inconsistent with the art of eloquence, to strip the subject of every meretricious ornament...Where hope and fear, triumph and resentment, are perpetually afloat, the severer faculties of investigation are compelled to quit the field.<sup>55</sup>

The real danger of such emotional, persuasive speeches is their power to convert their listeners without giving them the opportunity to exercise their own private judgment.

Clemit picks up on the dangerously persuasive power of Caleb's rhetoric in these moments, arguing that when Caleb is at his most revolutionary, he is also at his most tyrannous (62), since tyranny, for Godwin, is any attempt to prevent an individual from exercising his or her own private judgment.

Both passages cited above belong to the same scene in Godwin's novel, when Caleb manages his first successful escape from prison. As he wanders about an abandoned natural scene, attempting to stay hidden from his trackers, he speaks to the scene, "stretching forth [his] arms with rapture" and "exclaim[ing]" aloud. In the context of the novel, of course, Caleb is speaking to no one, but his open address to his surroundings, God, and the reader shares much more in common with a public speech than with an individual address. In speaking to no one, Caleb's rhetoric sounds,

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<sup>55</sup> Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. [Based on 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.] Ed. F. E. L. Priestley. Vol 1. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1946), 290.

strangely, much more like he's speaking to everyone, and almost like he's speaking to a radical, revolutionary audience. The *Chartist Circular*'s selection of these passages exacerbates the "public" quality of these moments, by placing them, out of context, in a widely circulated journal designed, specifically, as a "regular vehicle for the diffusion" of a particular political ideology, in an attempt to construct a mass movement.

Clemit and Franta's claims, that in these moments Godwin intended us to hear Thomas Paine in Caleb's speech, suggest that the public quality of Caleb's rhetoric in these moments predated this particular use by the Chartists. William Thomson found the Paine he wanted in the context of a perhaps less useful Godwinian philosophy. The *Circular*'s final quotation from *Caleb Williams*, which appears nearly a year later, further solidifies Thomson's careful excavation of Paine in the midst of Godwin's novel:

God, we are told, judges of men by what they are at the period of judgment; and whatever be their crimes, if they have seen and abjured the folly of those crimes, receives them to favour. But the institutions of countries that profess to worship this God admit of no such distinctions. They leave no room for amendment, and seem to have a brutal delight in confounding the demerits of offenders. It signifies not what is the character of the individual at the hour of trial. How changed, how spotless, and how useful, avails him nothing. If they discover, at the distance of fourteen, or of forty years, an action for which the law ordains that his life shall be the forfeit, though the interval should be spent with the purity of a saint and the devotedness of a patriot, they disdain to inquire into it.<sup>56</sup>

Like the excerpts cited above, this too is labeled as coming from *Godwin's Caleb Williams*. There is no label, however, to point the reader to *who* is speaking, and thus, the reader must attribute this "thoughtful" statement to either Godwin or to Caleb Williams. Unlike Caleb's calls for liberty, this particular critique of the English trial system might be easily attributed to Godwin. But the speaker being quoted here is neither Godwin nor

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<sup>56</sup> "Thoughts for the Thoughtful," *Chartist Circular* 104 (Sept 18, 1841): 436.

Caleb, but Raymond, the leader of the group of thieves Caleb falls in with immediately after his escape from prison. Godwin clearly supports Raymond's statements here—they are seconded by a series of footnotes on histories of cases in which the criminal's good lives after the crime made no difference. Raymond, however, does not usually provide such a clear window into Godwin's didactic intentions. Instead, as Franta argues, he and his team of thieves serve as another figure for the dangers of radical, Jacobin cooperation. Franta argues specifically that the gang of thieves represent the threat of cooperation, and their attempt to incorporate Caleb into their group seriously threatens his autonomy as an individual. Raymond calls for violence in response to class oppression: "Who that saw the situation in its true light would wait till their oppressors thought fit to decree their destruction, and not take arms in their defence while it was yet in their power?" (220).<sup>57</sup> Caleb ultimately chooses to leave this gang of thieves: he is unable to share their violent response to class oppression, and the novel thus refuses to endorse their version of radical, cooperative politics.

But by excerpting Raymond in the *Chartist Circular*, William Thomson endorses the rebellious thief as one of the "Thoughtful," where he holds his own with nonfictional political thinkers. In each of the three excerpts from *Caleb Williams* that appear in the *Chartist Circular*, then, Thomson manages to quote perspectives, from Caleb and from Raymond, that do not seem representative of Godwin's didactic project, but are, instead representative of political perspectives Godwin wished to critique. Specifically, Thomson presents a version of Godwin and *Caleb Williams* that endorses just the kind of mass movement which Godwin most feared. Thomson's extraction of select passages from the novel, and his re-incorporation of those passages in a very different context,

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<sup>57</sup> Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. McCracken, 220.

constructs a politically-motivated misreading of *Caleb Williams*, one which turns the novel into a supportive text for the Chartist movement.

Thus far I have been emphasizing the ways in which Thomson's version of *Caleb Williams*, with its support of mass movements, differs significantly from what we might imagine to be William Godwin's original didactic intentions. Those intentions, then, might seem largely irrelevant to the uses to which the *Chartist Circular* put his novel. I would like to suggest, however, that Godwin's didacticism might account for his usefulness for Thomson, even though the purpose behind that didacticism is refused. *Caleb Williams* is often interrupted by moments such as those excerpted above, where Caleb pauses in his narrative to comment directly on the ways in which the corrupt social system of England has contributed to his predicament. As we have seen above, these moments do not necessarily represent Godwin's politics—they often represent a version of politics which Godwin seems to be critiquing. However, the very structure of this kind of interruption marks these moments *as* didactic—as moments in which Caleb is providing an interpretation of his experiences, and instructing the reader according to that interpretation. This interruptive didactic mode marks such moments as those which *could* be excerpted from the novel as a whole. The fact that the excerpts included in *The Chartist Circular* are ultimately somewhat alien to *Caleb Williams*, in that they represent a different kind of radical politics, might make them even more prone to extraction.

Such moments also prove useful for Thomson in their didactic generality, in that Caleb's rhetorical eloquence can be applied to a historically distinct political project. Godwin's early readers seemed to recognize the ways in which these more generalized, didactic passages felt separate from the body of the novel. Elizabeth Inchbald admitted,

in a letter to Godwin, that “there are lines I wish erased.” Inchbald’s anxiety on this front was that Godwin’s politics, as they appear in “a few sentences, (and those particularly marked for the reader’s attention by the purport of your preface)” would cause “a certain set of people [to] hastily condemn the whole work as of immoral tendency.”<sup>58</sup> An early reviewer recommended a similar method of excision, although for perhaps different reasons: “The political reflections . . . might in general have been spared; and in a future edition . . . we would recommend to the author to expunge a considerable part of them at least.”<sup>59</sup> Both Inchbald and the reviewer imagine Godwin’s propaganda as being easily removed (“erased” or “expunged”), without doing damage to the text’s remainder. The Chartists and these early reviewers agree then, on the portability of these kinds of didactic moments, although their responses to that portability are opposite: the moments that these early reviewers recommend being expunged are just the kind of moments which the *Chartist* editor selected for republication. Godwin’s formal techniques in *Caleb Williams*, particularly his use of seemingly excerptable didactic interruptions, may have contributed to the formal excising which the novel underwent over the course of the nineteenth century.

As Godwin writes him, even Caleb seems to have recognized the awkwardness of his moments of didactic interruption. After a passage wherein Caleb has been ranting about the terrible state of Britain’s prison system, Caleb asks his reader’s pardon: “The reader will forgive this digression from the immediate subject of my story. If it should be said, these are general remarks; let it be remembered that they are the dear bought result of experience. It is from the fullness of a bursting heart that reproach thus flows to my

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<sup>58</sup> Letter from Inchbald to Godwin. Qtd. in C. Kegan Paul. *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*. (London, H. S. King & Co., 1876) 139.

<sup>59</sup> “Review of *Caleb Williams*.” *Critical Review* xi (July 1794): 290.

pen . . . I have felt the iron of slavery grating upon my soul” (182). This moment both opens up and attempts to cover over the presence in *Caleb Williams* of two voices. The formality of the first sentence suggests the presence of a readerly, knowledgeable narrator, apologizing to a “modern” 1790s reader, not the reader of a manuscript by the famous criminal Caleb Williams, but the reader of the novel *Caleb Williams*, written by Godwin. Godwin’s anxiety, perhaps, that these moments of didactic interruption do not belong directly to the character Caleb Williams explains the defense of the following line, that “these remarks . . . are the dear bought result of experience;” Godwin here works to re-locate the “general remarks” in Caleb’s own experience.

Despite the admittance here that this moment of interruption has been a “digression,” Caleb’s explanation and justification characterizes the digression not as a pause, but as a direct and continuous flow: “It is from the fullness of a bursting heart that reproach thus flows to my pen.” Although the quotation above begins with the premise that the narrative has been stopped for the digression, it ends with the suggestion that it is the digression itself, rather than the narrative, that cannot be stopped. Godwin’s insistence here, that Caleb’s political commentary is in direct relation to his experience of imprisonment (“I have felt the iron of slavery grating upon my soul”) might be read as simply an attempt to justify his own sense that the moments of “propaganda” do not actually belong to the narrative. I would like to raise the possibility, however, that the particular functions of these interruptive moments, especially as we have seen them employed by William Thomson, depend upon their embeddedness—or even their imprisonment—in a fictional narrative. The free-wheeling literary metaphors and exclamatory tone of the quotations in the *Chartist Circular* draw their power in part from

the melodramatic excitement of the narrative which they seem to interrupt, a narrative that depends upon a series of repeated escapes and repeated imprisonments. In the quotation above, it is Caleb's experience of imprisonment that grants him rhetorical power, allowing for the "flow" of his pen. Here, the space of the prison somehow allows for the fluidity and potential of Caleb's narrative—a paradox which informs both the narrative of *Caleb Williams*, and the ways in which the novel was put to use throughout the nineteenth century.

### **Caleb and *Caleb*: In and Out of Prison**

*Caleb Williams* tracks its title character's repeated movement in and out of prison, as he continually escapes prison—or eludes his trackers—only to be recaptured several pages later. Each time Caleb escapes, the excitement of his narrative is palpable. Thomson, editor of the *Chartist Circular*, recognized the excitement and optimism of these passages, and freed them from their position in the original narrative, only to capture them elsewhere, in the pages of the *Circular*. The afterlife of *Caleb Williams* in the nineteenth century mimics Caleb's own progress through his narrative, as parts of the text continually "escape," only to reappear again, in a different context.

Caleb's hope and excitement at his first major escape—the scene which Thomson quotes at length—is repeated throughout the novel. Each escape inspires Caleb; he seems to genuinely believe in his potential to finally live a life free of Falkland's oppression. He is of course continually recaptured, but the repetitive pattern of the novel suggests that each capture might really be conceived as one more opportunity for escape. Nonetheless, despite the narrative excitement of these escape-scenes, the reader cannot share Caleb's

hope for the future, thanks to the overriding despair of the “other” Caleb—the one telling his first-person narrative from a position of despair. The novel itself begins with this narrator’s assertion that escape is impossible: “I have been a mark for the vigilance of tyranny, and I could not escape . . . there is now little hope that I shall escape from the toils that universally best me” (3). From the very beginning of the novel, then, Caleb is trapped in his own narrative, unable to escape, despite his repeated—and successful—attempts.

Caleb cannot escape the prison of his novel, but he does manage to turn his jail cell inside out, transforming it into its own site of potential. Although Caleb spends the novel attempting, over and over again, to escape from prison, many of his most important moments of intellectual insight happen there. While imprisoned, Caleb discovers “the secret of employing my own mind” (185). Caleb has no actual books to read, but he manages to turn his own mind *into* books. As he explains, “I tasked the stores of my memory and my powers of invention. I amused myself with recollecting the history of my life,” complete with all the details. *Caleb Williams*, the novel, consists, of course, of Caleb’s recollections of his life. While in prison, then, Caleb “reads” *Caleb Williams*. He is not limited to that text, however:

By degrees I quitted my own story, and employed myself with imaginary adventures. . . . At length I proceeded to as regular a disposition of my time as the man in his sturdy who passes from mathematics to poetry, and from poetry to the law of nations in the different parts of each single day. . . . I went over, by the assistance of memory only, a considerable part of Euclid during my confinement, and revived day after day the series of facts and incidents in some of the most celebrated historians. (185-6)

Caleb creates a library out of his own mind, and spends his days in prison studying that library. By transforming prison into an opportunity for self-improvement and spiritual

enlightenment, Caleb participates in a Romantic trope, one dubbed the “Happy Prison,” by Victor Brombert. Byron’s “The Prisoner of Chillon” and “Sonnet on Chillon” offer one of the more recognizable literary versions of this trope, as does the actual experience of Leigh Hunt, who physically turned his prison cell into a library.<sup>60</sup> A closer look at imprisonment in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries reveals the fact that Leigh Hunt was by no means alone in constructing a prison library. As I discuss in detail in my third chapter, imprisonment was a shared experience for many nineteenth-century radicals. Also shared was the project of converting imprisonment into an opportunity for education.

Caleb Williams’s turn to scholarly pursuits, while imprisoned, may have offered one more way in which the novel reverberated with the Chartists, forty years after its publication. *Caleb Williams* provides, simultaneously, a critique of the British prison system and a demonstration of the individual prisoner’s ability to co-opt the conditions of imprisonment. Henry Vincent, whose experience of prison I examine fully in Chapter 3, was an important leader of the Chartist movement in Somerset and Wiltshire, arrested in 1839. While in prison, Vincent, like Caleb, carefully allotted his time: “My time is fully occupied—about 5 hours daily being taken up in reading, writing, and picking up bits of the French lingo.”<sup>61</sup> Vincent would proceed to undertake what we might call a “correspondence course” with Francis Place, during which time he studied history, geography, and economics, and—most relevant for our purposes here—read Godwin’s

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<sup>60</sup> See Victor Brombert, “The Happy Prison: A Recurring Romantic Metaphor.” *Romanticism: Vistas, Instances, Continuities*. Eds. David Thorburn and Geoffrey Hartman. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1973. On Leigh Hunt’s experience in prison, see Greg Kucich, “‘the Wit in the Dungeon’: Leigh Hunt and the Insolent Politics of Cockney Coteries,” *Romanticism on the Net*. vol. 14 (1999); and Jacqueline George, “Bibliomania and Beyond: Book Relationships in Hazlitt and Hunt,” *Romantic Scenes of Reading*. Diss. U of Michigan, 2007.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Vincent, Letter to John Minniken. 22 September 1840. Vincent Collection 1/1/35. Labour History Archive, Manchester.

*Political Justice*.<sup>62</sup> By adapting his prison sentence into an opportunity for study, Vincent literalized the Romantic trope of prison as a potential space of enlightenment. Such an experience seems to have been crucial for Vincent, who wrote to the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison in 1877, “I constantly console myself with my old motto ‘The road to Liberty lies through the jail.’”<sup>63</sup> Vincent’s assertion here, that prison is a necessary prerequisite for freedom, shares something in common with the repetitive structure of *Caleb Williams*, in which each imprisonment is also one more opportunity for escape.

While Vincent was reading Godwin’s political philosophy in prison, William Thomson, editor of the *Chartist Circular* was focusing his attention on getting Caleb out of prison. Two of the three excerpts from the novel which appear in the *Circular* come directly after Caleb’s successful escape from prison, and the third discusses the prison system itself. Thomson’s gravitation towards these quotations owes much to their popular radicalism, but it also owes something to this context of imprisonment, and to the surprisingly utopian potential of prison. The quotations which Thomson excerpted—particularly those that reference Caleb’s escape—might serve as the *ending* of a radical, utopian novel, a genre which is notoriously difficult to conclude. In her discussion of the Chartist novels *DeBrassier: A Democratic Romance* (by Ernest Jones) and *Sunshine and Shadow* (by Thomas Martin Wheeler), Martha Vicinus argues that “Wheeler and Jones believed in the eventual triumph of revolutionary forces, but since change had not yet come and did not appear imminent, they left their novels open-ended. The only possible

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<sup>62</sup> Vincent, Letter to Francis Place. 25 September 1840. Francis Place Collection. British Library.

<sup>63</sup> qtd. in Brian Harrison’s “Henry Vincent.” *Dictionary of Labour Biography*. Vol 1. Eds. Joyce Bellamy and John Saville (London: Macmillan, 1972): 333.

ending was revolution.”<sup>64</sup> The fate of the hero of *DeBrassier* remains “enveloped in darkness,” while the heroes of *Sunshine and Shadow* end the novel in prison.<sup>65</sup> Such endings offer a conclusion which is *not* a conclusion, but rather one that looks forward, beyond the parameters of the novel, to the utopian potential for reform, once the release from prison occurs. *Caleb Williams*, of course, does not end with a moment of release. Instead, Godwin’s novel ends with the confrontation between Caleb and Falkland, and their individual reconciliation. That moment of conclusion was of no interest for Thomson, however, as it highlights Godwin’s political program of reform through improvements in individual, private reason and conversation. That is the moment, according to Leaver, which offers the novel’s utopian potential, in the suggestion that had Caleb only talked privately to Falkland, the problems of the novel could have been prevented. Such a model of individual reconciliation shares little with the Chartist cause. And so Thomson ignores the novel’s conclusion, instead excerpting passages which fall in the center of the novel. He thus turns *Caleb Williams* inside out, turning its “middle” into the ending of a radical, utopian novel.

In 1832, seven years before Thomson’s excerpting of *Caleb Williams* in the *Chartist Circular*, William Godwin was also imagining utopia, by putting *Caleb Williams*—the novel—in prison. As we have seen, one of the means by which Godwin himself transforms the prison into a space of potential is to have Caleb tell himself his own narrative, to tell himself *Caleb Williams*. When, in the 1830s, Godwin was remembering his composition of the novel, he literalized this pattern, by squarely locating the novel *Caleb Williams* in prison—specifically in prison with one of the most famous

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<sup>64</sup> Martha Vicinus. “Chartist Fiction and the Development of a Class-based Literature.” *The Socialist Novel in Britain*. Ed. H. Gustav Klaus. (New York: St. Martin’s P, 1982) 21.

<sup>65</sup> Qtd. in Vicinus, 21.

radicals of the 1790s, Joseph Gerrald. *Caleb Williams* was written during the early stages of Pitt's persecution of radicals, in 1793, but Godwin's 1832 account of the novel's composition, published as the "Preface" to the Bentley edition of *Fleetwood*, ignores this context, focusing instead on the novel as a flight-and-pursuit narrative. Near the end of this Preface, Godwin complains, somewhat counterintuitively, that readers who read according to the excitement of that narrative are "bad" readers of the novel: "And, when I had done all, what had I done? Written a book to amuse boys and girls in their vacant hours, a story to be hastily gobbled up by them, swallowed in a pusillanimous and unanimated mood, without chewing and digestion" (12). Despite his rendition of the novel, in this Preface, as a "series of adventures of flight and pursuit" (8), Godwin here revives the goal of his original Preface: "to have taught a valuable lesson."

In the next sentence, however, Godwin complicates his criticism of "speed readers" with a reference to a very particular reader, Joseph Gerrald:

I was in this respect greatly impressed with the confession of one of the most accomplished readers and excellent critics that any author could have fallen in with (the unfortunate Joseph Gerald [sic]). He told me that he had received my book late one evening, and had read through the three volumes before he closed his eyes. Thus, what had cost me twelve months' labour, ceaseless heart-aches and industry... he went over in a few hours, shut the book, laid himself on his pillow, slept and was refreshed, and cried, "To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new." (12)

Joseph Gerrald, outspoken radical and member of the London Corresponding Society, was charged with sedition for his attendance at the Edinburgh Convention and sentenced to fourteen years transportation in March of 1794. Many of Gerrald's friends had encouraged him to leave the country without standing trial, as they feared his poor health would make transportation a death sentence. They were correct, and Gerrald died in

Australia in 1796, less than a year after being transported, a martyr to the cause of radical reform.<sup>66</sup>

Gerrald spent the year awaiting his transportation in Newgate and other London jails.<sup>67</sup> Godwin visited Gerrald at Newgate earlier, as he was awaiting trial, and later wrote him, advising him on his defence.<sup>68</sup> For Godwin, as for those readers who had even the most superficial memories of the radical agitation of the 1790s, this reference to “the unfortunate Joseph Gerald” would have immediately called up *Caleb Williams*’ radical context, and the extent to which the novel’s author was intimately involved in that context. But although Godwin praises Gerrald in this passage, as “one of the most accomplished readers and excellent critics,” he also places Gerrald in the category of the boys and girls reading *Caleb Williams* without “chewing or digestion.” And even more strangely, Godwin asserts that Gerrald read his novel, slept, “was refreshed,” and set his sights on “fresh woods and pastures new.” *Caleb Williams* was not published until the summer of 1794, by which time Gerrald had already received what most agreed to be his death sentence. He thus read *Caleb Williams* while imprisoned in London, awaiting transportation. Godwin’s claims of “refreshment” thus seem unlikely, while his assertions of “pastures new” are simply wrong—unless Godwin is referencing the “new pastures” of Australia, which seems quite unlikely, given Gerrald’s death. And Gerrald can hardly be blamed for reading the novel at a single sitting, since it seems likely that he had little to distract him.

In this odd moment, Godwin imagines Joseph Gerrald’s prison cell as a space of potential—one that opens onto the “fresh woods and pastures new” of Milton’s

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<sup>66</sup> E.P. Thompson, 121-130

<sup>67</sup> E.P. Thompson 128 (fn)

<sup>68</sup> Clemit 37, Kelly 196-198.

“Lycidas.” Godwin does his own excerpting in order to turn the space of the prison inside out, replacing it with Milton’s natural scene, which opens both spatially and temporally, as Godwin looks to the past in order to imagine Gerrald looking to the future. Godwin manages this transformation by means of *Caleb Williams*: it is Gerrald’s imprisoned reading of this novel—a novel *on* imprisonment—that allows for his (imagined) hopeful turn to “pastures new.” Thomson finds his moment of utopian potential in Caleb’s radically inflected escape from prison. And with his reference to Gerrald, Godwin makes a similar move, finding potential, possibility, and “new pastures” in his friend’s imprisoned reading, from forty years before. Both Thomson, in 1840, and Godwin, in 1832, look to the future by returning to the radical 1790s, and they manage that return by looking through *Caleb Williams*.

*Caleb Williams*’ thematic focus on the problems of the British criminal system naturally made it a particularly useful text for radical figures in both the late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries—people who shared an overwhelmingly common experience of imprisonment. Also relevant was the novel’s formal processing of imprisonment: the text’s repetitive structure, in which the narrator and title character moves continually in and out of prison, and its frame, in which Caleb’s continuous escapes are always contained within a larger narrative of inescapable failure. But despite that frame, despite the novel’s opening claim that Caleb is doomed—imprisoned by his own text—he is still always getting out. Caleb Williams is constantly trapped, and constantly escaping, and the novel’s insistent linking of the seemingly opposed ideas of imprisonment and freedom speaks powerfully to the practices of imprisoned readers, who found potential and possibility in prison, of all places.

*Caleb Williams*, as we have seen, participated in a series of battles over the course of the century: the struggle over radical reform in the 1790s, the conservative effort to erase the 1790s, the Chartists' fight for universal suffrage, and—in a decidedly different vein—Harriet Beecher Stowe's heated transatlantic debate over Byron's sexual escapades. It is perhaps only fitting that the novel ended up in World War I. *Caleb Williams*' 120-year print run finally came to an end when the stereotyped printing plates were melted during the 1915 armament drive.<sup>69</sup> But by then, Godwin's most famous novel had lived quite a life. Reformers throughout the nineteenth century were able to adapt the novel and its author to serve their own purposes, reshaping the novel—or its absence—into an ideal aid in the battle of their choice. These textual negotiations—excerpting, reprinting, and even a certain kind of literary forgetting—enabled reformers to put *Caleb Williams* to use in their own time, transforming a novel from the 1790s into a relevant commentary on contemporary events in the 1830s, 40s, or even in America in the 1870s.

In these negotiations, however, *Caleb Williams*'s original historical context was not entirely lost. William Thomson of the *Chartist Circular* may have purposefully misread Godwin's intentions, finding Thomas Paine in *Caleb Williams*, but his interest in the novel still stems from its participation in the radical agitation of the 1790s, a radicalism that Thomson worked to reinvigorate for his own cause in the 1830s and 40s. *Caleb Williams* became a particularly important site for remembering the radical legacy

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<sup>69</sup> Most plates that were melted in the first year of the war were less valuable and/or popular texts, but as the war progressed “the government refused to release the metal needed for new printing except in exchange for a compensating amount of scrap, and the numbers of plates sent for destruction rose inexorably” (St. Clair 431).

of the 1790s, as radicals in and out of prison looked to the novel throughout the century. When readers, reviewers, and editors engaged formally with the text of *Caleb Williams*, they were also using the novel to process the past, put that past to use in the present, and look toward the future. Like Godwin, idealizing his friend Joseph Gerrald's reading in prison, using and misusing *Caleb Williams* allowed reformers throughout the century to find utopian potential in the past, and to use that potential in their very contemporary—and forward-looking—attempts at reform.

## Chapter 2

### The Past Jumps Up: Wordsworth and Southey in the Radical Press

In February of 1817, Robert Southey, Poet Laureate, was less than pleased to discover that his own play, *Wat Tyler*, had just been published without his knowledge. Southey's unabashedly radical play, about a fourteenth-century peasant revolt, was written in 1794 and given to a sympathetic publisher, James Ridgeway. Ridgeway, like many oppositional publishers in the 1790s, was sent to Newgate, and Southey's play was never published.<sup>1</sup> In the 1790s, Southey, friend to Coleridge and Wordsworth, had been known for his radical poetry, his Jacobin colleagues, and his plans to form an idealist "pantisocracy" compound in North America. But by 1817, Southey (like many of the young intellectuals disappointed by the failures of the French Revolution) had changed his political allegiances, and become Poet Laureate and writer for the Tory *Quarterly Review*. That year, immediately after Southey denounced the radical press in an article for the *Quarterly*, the booksellers Sherwood, Neely and Jones found the manuscript of *Wat Tyler* and printed it gleefully.<sup>2</sup> Southey's play, criticizing unjust taxation and recommending outright rebellion against a corrupt king, was just the sort of "venomous"

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Cuthbert Southey, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, 6 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849-50) 4: 236, 239.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Mahoney, *Romantics and Renegades: The Poetics of Political Reaction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 123. For more details on the story of *Wat Tyler*'s publication, see Mahoney as well as David Craig's *Robert Southey and Romantic Apostasy: Political Argument in Britain, 1780-1840* (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2007).

text he had just condemned in the *Quarterly Review*.<sup>3</sup> Both Whigs and radicals were delighted—*Wat Tyler* was read aloud in the House of Commons, and in 1817 alone it sold 60,000 copies. These unheard-of sales numbers (*Wat Tyler* doubled the sales of even the most popular of Walter Scott’s novels) were thanks, quite literally, to the play’s scandalous content. Southey applied for an injunction against the pirate publishers—since he had given no permission to publish—but the play was declared injurious to the public, and was thus given no copyright protection. Paradoxically, this declaration made the text widely available, since it could be printed by anyone and everyone, for very cheap prices.<sup>4</sup>

And everyone read it. The widespread influence of this widely available text was such that St. Clair calls *Wat Tyler*’s publication “[t]he most decisive single event in shaping the reading of the romantic period.”<sup>5</sup> The responses to *Wat Tyler*’s publication, from Southey and Coleridge on the one hand, and from Hazlitt, Hunt, and other members of the radical press on the other, were many, thanks to the proliferation of weekly periodicals—radical and otherwise—in the early nineteenth century. The *Wat Tyler* publication scandal soon became a fierce debate on Southey’s apostasy.<sup>6</sup> The play’s publication demonstrated unequivocally that the conservative Poet Laureate who was berating the radical press in 1816 had just twenty years before recommended revolution. The years that spanned the divide between 1794 and 1817 marked a period of tremendous

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Southey, “Article XI,” *Quarterly Review* 16.31 (Oct 1816): 227.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Southey includes Lord Eldon’s judgment on the case, including his statement that “a person cannot recover in damages for a work which is in its nature calculated to do an injury to the public.” Charles Cuthbert Southey, ed., *Life and Correspondence*, 4: 251. See also St. Clair, 317.

<sup>5</sup> St. Clair, 316.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the debate on Southey’s politics, see Mahoney and Craig. William Hazlitt’s condemnation of Southey is perhaps the most famous. His criticisms are not exclusive to the publication of *Wat Tyler*, but on that topic, see his many essays for *The Examiner* in March and May of 1817, reprinted in *Political Essays with Sketches of Public Characters* (1819; reprint, Oxford: Woodstock Bks, 1990).

political upheaval in Britain, as the fallout from French Revolution led to a decades-long war with France. *Wat Tyler*'s publication in 1817 had embedded within it all of the dramatic about-face of those years. Southey was not alone; the charge of apostasy was leveled against Coleridge and Wordsworth as well. Critics disagree, of course, as to the extent to which Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge should be blamed for their fall into conservative politics, with E.P. Thompson serving as perhaps their most famous, if unexpected, defender, maintaining in "Disenchantment or Default: A Lay Sermon" that it was nearly impossible to stay a Jacobin in the repressive conditions of the 1790s.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, apostasy has become one of the defining narratives of the romantic period, as the trajectory of all three of these writers' careers is often written as a fall from the radical poetry of their youth into the conservative work of their later years.

However, while this narrative of apostasy may be convincing as applied to the careers and shifting political investments of William Wordsworth and Robert Southey, it does not accurately describe the ways in which their works were read and received in the nineteenth century, particularly by political radicals. Although we often assume that by the 18teens both Wordsworth and Southey were widely considered conservatives, I demonstrate that for many, many readers, Wordsworth and Southey remained radical poets through the 1840s. In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the poetry of Robert Southey and William Wordsworth was deployed to further political ends throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. *Wat Tyler* was no flash in the pan. It became one of the most important texts of the radical canon, where it remained into the 1850s. Radical weekly papers from the 1820s, 30s, and 40s are peppered with excerpts

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<sup>7</sup> E.P. Thompson, "Disenchantment or Default? A Lay Sermon," in *The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Merlin P, 1997) 33-74.

from the play, as well as by other poems by Southey from his radical period. This chapter will look closely at the long life of *Wat Tyler*, and will pair the fortune's of Southey's work with that of his friend Wordsworth. Wordsworth's Liberty Sonnets found their own place in the radical canon. Both radical publishers in the eighteenth-twenties and the Chartists in the late thirties and early forties were publishing a distinctly "radical" Wordsworth, creating their own version of the poet and his poetry, one significantly at odds with the legacy Wordsworth was working to construct at the same time.

The radical journals I discuss here ignored the contemporary politics of Wordsworth and Southey, reprinting only their early work and treating them both as lifelong radical poets. This refusal to acknowledge the poets' turn to conservatism is also a refusal to acknowledge the historical event which caused that turn: the failure of the French Revolution. A close look at the radical press's practices of reprinting reveals an unfamiliar version of early nineteenth-century history, one in which the French Revolution did not fail, and in which Robert Southey, one of the most famous conservatives of the early nineteenth century, could become a champion for radical politics.

By reprinting Wordsworth and Southey's early work, radical editors worked to pull the 1790s directly into the nineteenth century. Excerpts from *Wat Tyler* were applied directly to the various issues of the day, in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s. When radical editors transformed *Wat Tyler* into contemporary social commentary, they harnessed the play's 1790s radicalism, arguing as they did so, that the 1790s could provide a relevant framework for political debates taking place several decades later. This move may seem

unsurprising, until we take into account the fact that contemporary commentators on the early nineteenth century often characterized the revolutionary moment of the 1790s as powerfully divided from the early nineteenth-century. That sense of division explains, in part, the intense response which *Wat Tyler* received when it appeared in 1817, twenty years after its composition. Trying to make sense of the difference between the 1790s and 18teens in relation to the status of William Godwin's works, William Hazlitt would wonder: "Is truth then so variable? Is it one thing at twenty, and another at forty? Is it at a burning heat in 1793, and below *zero* in 1814?"<sup>8</sup> The difference in political climate between these two moments, which we might call those of early and late Romanticism, was powerful. But political allegiances were not all that had changed. When, in 1816, Jane Austen was preparing to publish her own text from the 1790s, *Northanger Abbey*, she hoped the public would "bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes."<sup>9</sup>

Austen's warning here, that her text from the 1790s would feel oddly out of place in the 18teens, might serve as an example for one of James Chandler's historical arguments about this period, that, as romantic-era thinkers began to define their own age, and compare it to other ages, the period saw "the emergence of a new conception of anachronism, now understood as a measurable form of dislocation."<sup>10</sup> Jerome Christensen sees romanticism itself as potentially anachronistic—and puts this feeling of dislocation to use for political ends. In his "Romanticism at the End of History,"

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<sup>8</sup> William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Austen, "Advertisement by the Authoress, to *Northanger Abbey*," in *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sandition* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) xliii.

<sup>10</sup> James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998) 107.

Christensen recommends romantic anachronism as the utopian alternative to the “progressive” march of history.<sup>11</sup> Christensen is responding to Fukayama’s *The End of History and the Last Man*, as is Derrida in his *Specters of Marx*. Derrida, who is not—like Christensen—concerned with the early nineteenth century, is concerned nonetheless with the attempt to harness the energy of the past for utopian ends. For Derrida, the specters of Marx are valuable in that they “recall us to anachrony.”<sup>12</sup> The early 1990s thus saw an interest in the political potential of anachronism as a practice, an interest that often coincided with an interest in the early nineteenth century, as the disappointments of the French Revolution resonated with the disappointments of Socialism. These critical projects are quite distinct from mine, but they do provide an important framework for thinking about nineteenth-century practices of anachronism as politically radical, rather than conservatively nostalgic.

Anachronism is worth doing in (and about) the Romantic period because it can allow for the reclamation of an idealized revolutionary moment, just before a significant radical movement was nearly destroyed by a repressive British government and the fallout of the violence in France. At first glance, this may seem like exactly what the editors and publishers of the radical press were doing—reclaiming the ideal moment of the 1790s by reprinting the texts from that decade. But while anachronism is an important concept for this historical period, I argue that it does not in fact accurately describe the practices of the radical press. What is most significant about the ways in which Southey

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<sup>11</sup> Jerome Christensen, “Romanticism at the End of History,” *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994): 452-476. In a different, but related argument, William Galperin values the Romantic period for its “horizon of possibility.” See *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: U of Penn P, 2003) 5; and “Lord Byron, Lady Byron, and Mrs. Stowe,” *The Traffic in Poems*. Ed. Meredith McGill. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2008. 125-138.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

and Wordsworth's poetry appeared throughout the nineteenth century is that this poetry does *not* participate in structures of dislocation. When excerpts from these poems appeared in these radical papers, they felt anything but out of place, tuned as they were to contemporary issues. While Hazlitt and Austen both point to the significant changes that took place in Britain between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the editors and publishers of the radical press insisted that the 1790s were completely contiguous with later radical movements. By regularly reprinting the literary texts of the recent past, radical editors and publishers argued that the radical movements of the nineteenth century were the direct offspring of the radical 1790s, a decade that remained both alive and relevant.<sup>13</sup> Taken as an admittedly unwieldy whole,<sup>14</sup> these radical papers construct their own distinct historical narrative, in which the revolution continued, rather than being snuffed out with failure of the French Revolution.

### **Parodying *Peter***

Although the focus of this chapter will be on the ways in which Southey and Wordsworth's early poetry was co-opted by the radical press, I will turn first to Wordsworth's strange poem *Peter Bell: A Tale in Verse*. *Peter Bell*, like *Wat Tyler*, was composed in the 1790s, but first published in the 18teens. But whereas the reception history of *Wat Tyler* tells an unexpected story of long-lived radicalism, the reception history of *Peter Bell* offers instead an example of the more familiar narrative of apostasy and failure. The second generation Romantics felt betrayed by Wordsworth's

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<sup>13</sup> I argue, in addition, that this shared use of texts helped construct a sense of shared purpose among a diverse assortment of radical groups. The same passages from *Wat Tyler*, for example, were cited by journals devoted to the fight for the free press, the Co-operative movement, and Chartism.

<sup>14</sup> For a brief discussion of my categorization of number of different kinds of papers under the umbrella title "the radical press," see my Introduction.

conservative political turn, and they expressed their anger, in part, by attacking *Peter Bell*. This poem by Wordsworth demonstrates just how much had changed between the poem's composition and its publication—this is a poem that might have benefitted from Austen's prefatory warning, about "considerable changes." *Peter Bell*, contemporaries seemed to agree, was incapable of surviving the transition from the 1790s to the 18teens. As a poem that did indeed feel dislocated—out of place and out of time—*Peter Bell* highlights the challenges which radical editors and publishers would face, and overcome, as they worked to pull the 1790s directly into the nineteenth century.

*Peter Bell* may appear infrequently in current scholarship on Wordsworth, but briefly in 1819, the figure of Peter Bell loomed large in literary circles, as it, like *Wat Tyler* was attacked for being published at the wrong time. *Peter Bell* was Wordsworth's best-selling poem; the first edition was quickly followed by a second, in less than two weeks.<sup>15</sup> Of course, *Peter Bell* never reached the circulation numbers of *Wat Tyler*, but its popularity was, like that of Southey's play, largely thanks to a publication scandal. When *Peter Bell* first appeared in April, 1819, it had already been scooped. A few days before, a parody, "Peter Bell: a Lyrical Ballad," by John Hamilton Reynolds had appeared. Reynolds composed his parody sight-unseen, based on an advertisement for Wordsworth's poem, and managed to get it into print before the original.<sup>16</sup> This new *Peter Bell* leapt onto the scene almost instantaneously, beating Wordsworth to the punch,

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<sup>15</sup> John E. Jordan, "Introduction." *Peter Bell*. Ed. John E. Jordan. *The Cornell Wordsworth* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 17. *Peter Bell*, first composed in 1798, was first published in 1819. The poem begins with a first-person prologue, but consists largely of a long third-person narrative in a ballad-like metre, in which Peter, a rambling, violent, bigamist potter, comes to moral enlightenment through a series of events which the potter thinks are supernatural, but which are in fact simple natural phenomenon. Peter Bell's moral renovation occurs over a series of stages, but the poem's central scene is Peter's discovery of an ass who refuses to leave a riverside, a river which, Peter discovers, houses the dead body of the ass's master. The catalyst for Peter Bell's reformation is then his experience of another human being's suffering, as represented by the wife of the drowned man.

<sup>16</sup> James Chandler, *England in 1819* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). 484.

thanks to the speedy and flexible publication practices which had also pulled *Wat Tyler* from his grave, ready to surprise Southey. Reynolds's parody was the talk of the town—it was reviewed by his friend Keats in *The Examiner*, and the confusion between the two poems was such that when Charles Lamb wrote to Wordsworth himself in order to congratulate him on his *Peter Bell*, he had to clarify: “Peter Bell (not the mock one) is excellent.”<sup>17</sup> News was not all bad, however. Sara Hutchinson thought Reynolds' parody “very stupid,” but explained, “I have no doubt that it has helped the sale of the true one—which has nearly all been sold in about a week.”<sup>18</sup>

Of course, also like *Wat Tyler*, *Peter Bell* was quite old by the time it made it to publication, something Wordsworth himself chose to foreground in his dedication to the poem, addressed to none other than Robert Southey. There, Wordsworth explained that *Peter Bell* had “nearly survived its *minority*;--for it first saw the light in the summer of 1798.”<sup>19</sup> Wordsworth's ostensible explanation for his decision to dedicate this poem to Southey is the fact that critics had “often coupled” the two poets' names and work—and to differentiate his own focus on “the humblest departments of daily life” from Southey's interest in the supernatural. I suggest, however, that the dedication to Southey of a poem written in the 1790s, and first published in the late 18teens, would have undoubtedly called up memories of the *Wat Tyler* scandal. We should thus consider *Peter Bell* as in conversation with Southey's radical play. *Wat Tyler*'s publication had demonstrated to the world just how scandalous a text from the recent past could be. One of Wordsworth's goals in his dedicatory letter is to convince his readership that *Peter Bell*, rather than

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Woof, *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2001) 641.

<sup>18</sup> “Introduction.” *Peter Bell*. Ed. John E. Jordan. *The Cornell Wordsworth*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985. 17. From *Sarah Hutchinson's Letters*. p.154.

<sup>19</sup> Wordsworth, *Peter Bell*. Ed. John E. Jordan. *The Cornell Wordsworth* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985) 41.

appearing, like *Wat Tyler*—as a blight on Southey’s career—would function as a perfect addition to his own career. The twenty years that had passed since *Peter Bell*’s original composition had been, according to Wordsworth, well spent: “During this long interval, pains have been taken at different times to make the production less unworthy of a favourable reception; or, rather, to fit it for filling *permanently* a station, however humble, in the Literature of my Country.”<sup>20</sup> By filling this “long interval” with his efforts, Wordsworth here hopes to overcome the problems inherent in importing a poem from the 1790s into the 18teens.

But despite Wordsworth’s seeming confidence here, his anxiety about the time that passed between *Peter Bell*’s composition and publication appears elsewhere, in the person of the poem’s speaker. The revisions which Wordsworth made to his poem during that “long interval” highlight the ways in which *Peter Bell* itself thematizes the issues of belatedness which are treated with such assurance in the poem’s opening letter to Southey. After this dedicatory letter, *Peter Bell* offers an additional frame; the poem begins with an extended first-person prologue, in which the speaker—who is explicitly named “Poet” (l. 86)—takes a flying tour in a boat “[w]hose shape is like the crescent-moon” (l. 5).<sup>21</sup> The ostensible claim of this weird preface, in which the speaker tours the outer reaches of space, only to give up the moon-boat in order to focus his attention on “the town where I was born!” (66), is a justification of Wordsworth’s decision to leave the supernatural behind in order to focus on the everyday. Of interest for my purposes here, however, is the fact that the time the speaker spends in the moon boat makes him late. The speaker must return because his listeners have been long assembled, and he

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>21</sup> Parentheticals from here on refer to line numbers. All *Peter Bell* citations are to *The Cornell Wordsworth*.

must tell his tale, “ere the light of evening fail” (173). As “little Bess” exclaims upon the speaker’s arrival, “We’ve waited anxiously and long” (183). This line, asserting unequivocally the impatience of the listeners and the lateness of the teller, was added by Wordsworth in his later changes to the poem between 1806 and 1808. Wordsworth and his speaker share, then, their lateness in bringing the poem to its listeners. But whereas Wordsworth, in his guise as writer of the dedicatory letter, attempts to turn that belatedness into a claim for the poem’s “permanence,” the speaker of the poem seems to be thrown entirely off course by his eager, expectant listeners. So, whereas the prefatory letter reads like a claim to power, in the poem itself, Wordsworth suggests that belatedness functions as a significant obstacle to the speaker’s ability to tell his story.

The speaker positions himself as one who *owes* his story to these anxious listeners, calling his tale a “well-remembered debt” that “promptly shall be paid” (189-190). The payment of that debt is anything but easy—instead, the very act of telling is a painful, distinctly bodily, problem: “Breath fail’d me as I spake—but soon / With lips, no doubt, and visage pale, / And sore too from a slight contusion, / Did I, to cover my confusion, / Begin the *promised* Tale” (191-5). The highlighting of “*promised*” (the word is not italicized in the original manuscript) again suggests that the poet is almost forced to speak. And his unexplained “contusion” might imply an almost physical coercion. When the speaker arrives in the garden, he is immediately beset by his listeners who “all around me throng, / full nine of them, or more!” (184-5). If this stampeding is the cause of the contusion, then his listeners have forced their story with both monetary and physical pressure, insisting that the “debt” be paid.

As it turned out, Wordsworth was right to imagine an angry, aggressive audience for *Peter Bell*. The poem became a lightning rod for critiques of Wordsworth in the late 18teens. Most often these critiques took the form of parody. After John Hamilton Reynolds's opening parody of the poem, Peter Bells began to proliferate at an astonishing rate. Byron wrote his own brief parody of the poem in manuscript, and Shelley followed suit, writing a very extended parody, *Peter Bell the Third* in October of 1819. But the second generation Romantics were not alone. An 1819 parody of Wordsworth's *The Waggoner*, entitled "Benjamin the Waggoner," is based almost entirely on *Peter Bell*; Reynolds's lengthy parody, "The Dead Asses" (1819) takes the ass in Peter Bell as its starting point; an anonymous "Lyrical Ballad," from 1822 ends with the unredeemed Peter Bell; William Frederick Deacon's "Old Cumberland Pedlar" (1824) makes Peter Bell its main character; Thomas Hood's "Ode to Mr. Graham," is modeled closely on the poetic preface to *Peter Bell*; and even Hartley Coleridge wrote his own "tale of a wonderful potter / And a very remarkable Ass."<sup>22</sup> I argue that *Peter Bell*'s belated publication—belated both in that it was written twenty years earlier *and* that it was pre-empted by Reynolds's parody—accounted, in part, for this aggressive, parodic response.

Wordsworth's attempt to transform *Peter Bell*'s belatedness into a sign of its worth was met by Byron's angry parody of *Peter Bell*, which hinges on the hubris of Wordsworth's dedicatory letter. Byron notes that "It saw the light in Ninety eight, / Sweet babe of one and twenty years! / And thus he gives it to the Nation / To

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<sup>22</sup> See Kent, David A. and D.R. Ewen, eds. *Romantic Parodies, 1797-1831* (London: Associated University Press, 1992) for "Benjamin the Waggoner" (194-202), "The Dead Asses" (203-212), "Lyrical Ballad" (299-301), "Old Cumberland Pedlar" (339-342), and "Ode to Mr. Graham" (354-360). For Hartley Coleridge's parody, see his *New Poems*. Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. (London: Oxford UP, 1942) 99-100. The sheer numbers of parodies of *Peter Bell* demonstrates just how well-known the poem was in its time, as parody depends for its effectiveness on the reader's previous knowledge of the text being parodied.

'permanently fill a station,' / And deems himself of Shakespeare's peers—."<sup>23</sup> Byron is here critiquing the arrogance of Wordsworth's claim that his poem should join the canon, as well as satirizing the poem's outdatedness. Reynolds too found the poem annoyingly out of date. When asked to justify Reynolds's parody, his publishers described his motivation, noting that he had been annoyed by the "announcement of a new poem with so *untimely* a title as that of 'Peter Bell'" (my italics).<sup>24</sup> Keats was also struck by the title, complaining, "Wordsworth is going to publish a Poem called Peter Bell—what a perverse fellow it is! Why wilt he talk about Peter Bells?"<sup>25</sup> One way in which the title *Peter Bell* felt untimely was that it seemed to mark a return to *Lyrical Ballads*, a move which felt like a step backward to many. In his parody Reynolds embedded Peter Bell in the family of the *Lyrical Ballads*:

Betty Foy—*My* Betty Foy,  
Is the aunt of Peter Bell;  
And credit me, as I would have you,  
Simon Lee was once his nephew,  
And his niece is Alice Fell."<sup>26</sup>

One of Reynolds' objects of parody here is Wordsworth's return to his earlier work, at this "untimely" juncture, a juncture at which the social and political landscapes had shifted significantly since the 1790s. But perhaps the most important shift which had occurred between Wordsworth's composition and publication of *Peter Bell* was in his own political and economic status, thanks to his new position as Distributor of Stamps in Westmoreland. Like Southey's acceptance of the Poet Laureateship, Wordsworth's

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<sup>23</sup> "Epilogue," inscribed in a copy of *Peter Bell*. *The Complete Poetical Works*. Ed. Jerome McGann. Oxford, Clarendon P, 1986. Vol 4: 285-286. My thanks to Don Herzog for directing me to this parody.

<sup>24</sup> John Strachan, "Introductory Note to *Peter Bell. A Lyrical Ballad*, John Hamilton Reynolds, 1819." *Parodies of the Romantic Age*. 5 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999) Vol 2: 181.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

<sup>26</sup> Reynolds, John Hamilton. "Peter Bell. A Lyrical Ballad." *Parodies of the Romantic Age*, 189.

acceptance of this bureaucratic post signaled for second generation Romantics his abandonment of his radical youth. Reynolds makes a stab at Wordsworth's post in his preface to his *Peter Bell*, writing as Wordsworth, who calls himself "a man of my inveterate morality and independent stamp, (of which Stamps I am proud to be a Distributor)." <sup>27</sup>

In one way then, Wordsworth's return to the genre of his earliest published work highlighted the changes the poet had undergone since, just as the sudden appearance of *Wat Tyler* showed up just how significant an about-face Southey's politics had taken. Although Wordsworth's politics had changed according to the times, his poetry seemed to have stayed the same, stuck in *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth's new conservatism did, however, mean that *Peter Bell* was revised to include more religious overtones. *Peter Bell* thus seemed to have the worst of both old and new: an outdated formal structure and newly disappointing politics. It was the conservatism of the poem itself which drew Shelley's ire. His *Peter Bell the Third*, so named because Shelley placed Reynolds' parody first, and Wordsworth's poem second, attacks Wordsworth for both his religious and poetic conservatism. <sup>28</sup> Shelley thus joined a host of other parodists who chose to respond to Wordsworth's increasing conservatism through the genre of parody. <sup>29</sup> This aggressive response demonstrates just how difficult it could be to revive a text from the recent past. For Shelley and others, Wordsworth's change in politics had made his poetry useless and inaccessible. But as I will demonstrate in the rest of this chapter, the agents

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>28</sup> *Peter Bell the Third*. 1819. *Romantic Parodies*, 213-238.

<sup>29</sup> Although parody has traditionally been understood as a largely conservative force—critiquing innovation and experimentation—more recent studies of the parodic have emphasized its ability to function in both conservative and radical ways. The parodies of *Peter Bell* take as their target Wordsworth's conservatism, and critique not so much his innovations as his belated return to his own earlier style. For helpful overviews of the body of criticism on parody, as well as the dominant trends in Romantic-era parody, see the introductions to both *Romantic Parodies, 1797-1831* and *Parodies of the Romantic Age*.

of the radical press were not swayed by such pronouncements. The radical press was able to overleap the time gap between the 1790s and the 18teens, pulling the radical texts of the recent past into the present with little to no regard for the intervening political transformations. Conservative Wordsworth and Southey may have become, but their poetry could still be put to radical ends.

### **Raising Wat Tyler**

Although Wordsworth was probably the “Romantic poet most widely parodied by his contemporaries,”<sup>30</sup> Robert Southey met with his own share of critical imitation. Southey was lucky enough to be parodied *both* by conservatives in the 1790s, and then by radicals in the 18teens. Both Byron and Thomas Hone (who published one of the many successful editions of *Wat Tyler*) wrote extended parodies of Southey’s *The Vision of the Judgment*, using the opportunity to critique Southey’s conservative politics. Parody and satire thus provided a crucial means by which literature was used to do political work. Wordsworth and Southey’s poetry and politics were regularly met with parody; apostasy punished by parody is a familiar narrative of the 18teens. But the less well-known response to Southey is the one I will trace here. This is not a story of satire; it is, instead, the story of the ways in which radicals throughout the nineteenth century took Southey very seriously. The best way to radicalize Southey, it turned out, was not to parody him, but to take him at his word.

*Wat Tyler* is a short, three act play, based on a fourteenth-century peasant uprising, which was fueled by an increase in taxes. Central figures in this uprising included Wat Tyler, who killed a tax collector after the collector molested Tyler’s

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<sup>30</sup> Kent, David A. and D.R. Ewen, “Introduction.” *Romantic Parodies, 1797-1831*, 17.

daughter, and John Ball, a “seditious preacher” who asserted everyone’s “equal right to liberty,” at least according to Hume’s *History of England*, the relevant section of which William Hone reprinted in his 1817 edition of *Wat Tyler*.<sup>31</sup> The play consists largely of extended, often public speeches by Tyler, Ball, and others on the state of the country, the corruption of government, the need for equality, and calls to action. Act 1 is the exception, as it includes mostly shorter moments of dialogue, employed for character development. The play’s public speeches cluster in Act 2, where the revolutionary group has gathered on a heath to await direction and inspiration, which comes mostly at the hands of John Ball, the preacher. Although *Wat Tyler* received pride of place as Southey’s title character, the majority of the play’s space goes to John Ball, who becomes the central figure in Act 3, after Tyler is stabbed to death in a parley with the king at the end of Act 2. John Ball is then also executed at the end of Act 3, after the king has betrayed his promises to the people at the advice of his malignant Archbishop. Act 3 sees its share of public speeches, in the form of Ball’s addresses to the court during his trial. As we shall see, it was these public speeches which would prove most useful for the radical press.

*Wat Tyler* is anti-taxes, anti-war, and rigorously anti-monarchy. Or, at least, most of the main characters are. But in the scandal surrounding the play’s publication, the most effective attack on Robert Southey was to take the play’s words literally, as a statement of his own personal beliefs. *The Black Dwarf*, one of the more successful of the radical papers of the 18teens and 20s,<sup>32</sup> hastened—tongue in cheek—to correct their

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<sup>31</sup> “From Hume’s *History of England*,” *Wat Tyler; A Dramatic Poem. A New Edition, With a Preface suitable to Recent Circumstances* (London: Hone, 1817; Oxford: Woodstock Bks, 1989) xviii.

<sup>32</sup> *The Black Dwarf* was a radical weekly, published from 1817 until 1824. Thomas J. Wooler, who had a background in printing, edited the weekly, and wrote the majority of the content. The weekly’s style was



his very breath becomes venomous, and every page which he sends abroad carries with it poison to the unsuspecting reader,”<sup>34</sup> and this same passage from *Wat Tyler*, asserting that this was just the kind of literature to which the author of the *Quarterly Review* alluded. Smith of course knew, and suggested, that both texts were the work of the same author, and he furthered his point—as did the *Black Dwarf*—by giving Southey full credit for the opinions expressed in the play. Smith was careful, in fact, to call the text not a play, but a “poem recently published,” and to assert that “its author did not stop short of exhorting to general anarchy; he vilified kings, priests, and nobles, and was for universal suffrage, and perfect equality.”<sup>35</sup>

Both Smith and Wooler imagined Southey speaking in the first person. In his published response to William Smith, Southey tried to restore to *Wat Tyler* its original dramatic structure, insisting that “For the book itself I deny that it is a seditious performance; for it places in the mouths of the personages who are introduced nothing more than a correct statement of their real principles.”<sup>36</sup> Southey admits that the play is still a radical work—a claim which would be impossible to deny. It would take a serious effort of misreading to conclude that the author of *Wat Tyler* did not sympathize with the views expressed by its characters. But, Southey insists, his critics have simply not paid enough attention to the play’s formal structure. In order to adequately judge of his political feelings in the 1790s readers should compare *Wat Tyler* with Southey’s other poems of the period, in order to assess “what arose from [the author’s] feelings, and what from the nature of dramatic composition” (377). The best way to insist upon Southey’s

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<sup>34</sup> Southey, “Article XI” 227.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, “Extract from Mr. William Smith’s Speech in the House of Commons, March 4, 1817,” Appendix, *Life and Correspondence*, ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey, 4: 368.

<sup>36</sup> Southey, “A Letter to William Smith, Esq., M.P., from Robert Southey, Esq. 1817,” Appendix, *Life and Correspondence*, ed. Charles Cuthbert Southey, 4: 372.

radical politics was perhaps not simply to reprint *Wat Tyler* entirely, but to reprint it in *parts*, treating it not as a play, but as a first-person statement of political principles. And Southey knew as much: “to select passages from a dramatic poem, and ascribe the whole force of the sentiments to the writer as if he himself held them, without the slightest qualification, is a mode of criticism manifestly absurd and unjust” (377).

Absurd and unjust this kind of excerpting may well be, but it would characterize the presence of *Wat Tyler* in the radical press through the 1840s. In the early days of *Wat Tyler*, this tendency to attribute the speeches directly to Robert Southey functioned as both a satirical joke—playing on the fact that everyone knew such sentiments were now antithetical to the conservative Poet Laureate—and a scathing critique of Southey’s apostasy. But although the scandal surrounding *Wat Tyler* was widespread (Southey complained that “my name has served in London for the very shuttle-cock of discussion”) it eventually faded from public memory (374-5). *Wat Tyler*, however, did not. The 60,000 copies of the text sold that first year remained in circulation. The play continued to be in print long after the scandal about Southey’s apostasy had cooled. It remained free of copyright, and thus could be printed for a fraction of the cost of Southey’s other texts. New editions were printed in the 30s, 40s, and 50s for only a couple pence, and Richard Altick records that *Wat Tyler* was selling 450 copies a week in Manchester in the 1850s.<sup>37</sup>

*Wat Tyler* lived long enough to overcome its status as a joke. In 1833, *The Cosmopolite: A Cheap Substitute for a Stamped Paper* published the play in one of its

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<sup>37</sup> A writer for *The Cosmopolite* in 1833 credits the publisher Sherwin with first “compressing the whole in a sheet of demy, and selling it for two-pence. Of that and similar editions, thirty thousand copies have been sold.” *The Cosmopolite: A Cheap Substitute for a Stamped Paper* 1.21 (September 1833): 166. Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1957) 352.

numbers, recommending it as an (anti) model for revolution: “Could we once again reach the point of resistance, which Wat Tyler had reached in Smithfield, we would make a very different use of it,” by insisting on the “entire overthrow of the oppressors.” The editor declares, “Let the people read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Southey’s Drama of Wat Tyler. Let them see what is to be imitated and what avoided.”<sup>38</sup> In 1841, the *National Vindicator*, edited and published by Chartist activist Henry Vincent, ran an advertisement for the play: “Every Young Man should read the Drama of Wat Tyler, by Robert Southey, Poet Laureate to her Majesty. Price Two pence (originally published at 4s. 6d.). Ask for Cleave’s Edition.” The advertisement ends by quoting another journal, *The Patriot*, which argued that “Every lover of his species should make an effort to circulate this splendid and truly invaluable poem.”<sup>39</sup> *Wat Tyler* went from being a publication scandal to becoming a main text of the radical canon, thanks both to its radicalism and its affordability. This shift happened quickly—even on the pages of *The Black Dwarf*, which as we have seen, greatly enjoyed making fun of Southey. In March of 1820, *The Black Dwarf* opened with an article on trial by jury, preceded by an epigraph from *Wat Tyler*: “—There’s nothing like / A fair, free, open trial, where the King, / Can chuse his judges, and appoint his jury!” As the editor explains “The trials at the approaching sessions will probably elucidate this motto from Robert Southey.”<sup>40</sup> Although it is impossible to say to what extent Wooler expected his readers to remember *Wat Tyler*’s publication scandal, it is nonetheless true that his use of Southey’s “motto”

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<sup>38</sup> *Cosmopolite* 1.21 (September 1833): 166-167.

<sup>39</sup> *National Vindicator* 2 (1841): 8. The advertisement continues through several numbers of the *Vindicator*. Vincent Collection. Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester.

<sup>40</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 4.8 (March 1820): 253.

here does not rely on a joke. Instead, the critique of the English trial by jury system offered in *Wat Tyler* serves as the starting point for Wooler's criticism of the trial system.

Wooler's application of this quotation directly to his commentary on current political conditions is just the first of a long tradition in which passages from *Wat Tyler* were regularly transformed into social commentary. In 1826, *Wat Tyler*'s most quoted passage—that read aloud by Smith in the House of Commons—was being put to use in a new context. That year found the Lancashire handloom weavers suffering intensely from the coincidence of a trade slump and a significant increase in power looms. John Lancaster, secretary of the Blackburn Weavers' Union, wrote to Robert Peel, Home Secretary, in hope of government intervention. Lancaster concludes his description of the living conditions of the handloom weavers with a close paraphrase of John Ball's speech: "Were the humane man to visit the dwellings of four fifths of the weavers and see the miserable pittance 16 hours' hard labour can procure...divided between the wretched parents and their starving little ones, he would sicken at the sight and blush for the patience of humanity!"<sup>41</sup> Lancaster's use of Southey here demonstrates the extent to which passages from *Wat Tyler* had been incorporated into the radical canon, with John Ball's speech here simply sliding into Lancaster's detailed depiction of conditions in northern England in the 1820s. This pseudo-quotation also demonstrates the flexible availability of *Wat Tyler*—its applicability to conditions to which the play could not have referred. Lancaster is here able to simultaneously remain focused on the historical specifics of his own complaint, while referencing and drawing rhetorical strength from

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<sup>41</sup> John Lancaster, "Address of the Weavers' Union Society of Blackburn to the Right Honourable Secretary of State for the Home Department," *Riot!: the Story of the East Lancashire Loom-breakers in 1826*, William Turner (Preston: Lancashire County Books, 1992) 201.

the radical canon. A play composed in 1794, and set in the fourteenth-century, was thus applied with ease to the conditions of 1826.

Robert Southey and the character John Ball are not the only figures being “quoted” every time this particular passage appeared. The final line (“blush for the patience of humanity”) was, in most editions and excerpts of the play, set out in quotation marks. There, Southey is quoting James Mackintosh’s 1791 defense of the French Revolution, *Vindiciae Gallicae*. In his own context, Mackintosh is “blushing” at Louis the XIV’s decisions to “butcher the Protestants of his own kingdom, or to lay in ashes the villages of the Palatinate.”<sup>42</sup> Southey’s decision to quote Mackintosh in *Wat Tyler* shows up just how contemporary the play was in the 1790s, despite its historical location in the fourteenth century. In his public letter to William Smith, where Southey argues for *Wat Tyler*’s status as a drama, he also tries to resurrect the play’s historical location, insisting that “The sentiments of the historical characters are correctly stated.”<sup>43</sup> Southey’s claims for fourteenth-century historicity, however, are certainly compromised by his own quotation of a 1791 political pamphlet. *Wat Tyler*’s social and political commentary were particularly flexible, because in the play’s original condition, it was already jumping gaps in time, combining its description of the social problems of the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the revolutionary language and energy of the 1790s. When this play was quoted throughout the nineteenth century, it functioned as a chain of transmission, funneling energy from the radical 1790s, through to the 18teens, and on to the 1830s and 40s.

The early 1830s saw a dramatic increase in the number of radical weeklies, both in response to the exclusions of the 1832 Reform Bill and as part of a raging debate on

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<sup>42</sup> James Mackintosh, *Vindiciae Gallicae: Defense of the French Revolution* (1791; Oxford: Woodstock Bks, 1989) 20-21.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Southey, “A Letter to William Smith” 4: 376.

the freedom of the press. One such weekly, *The Working Man's Friend and Political Magazine* (1832-33), relied heavily on Southey's play as a source of epigraphs. The weekly was only in existence from December of 1832 to August of 1833, and in that time, it quoted *Wat Tyler*, often at length, no less than thirteen times.<sup>44</sup> Without dates or context, these epigraphs could be tuned to those issues most important to *The Working Man's Friend*. Like Lancaster, in his letter to Peel, *The Working Man's Friend* applied *Wat Tyler* directly to current conditions, often linking excerpts from the play to its opening articles. In May of 1833, for example, the *Working Man's Friend* opened with an epigraph in which John Ball reminds his listeners that their strength lies in their numbers: "They will use every art to disunite you, / To conquer separately by strategem, / Whom in a mass they fear—but be ye firm." This quotation precedes an article excitedly documenting the size of the proposed "National Convention," a "Great Public Meeting."<sup>45</sup> And then in June, the paper led with the following passage, criticizing the idea of aristocracy:

There is enough for all; but your proud baron  
 Stands up, and, arrogant of strength, exclaims,  
 "I am a lord—by nature I am noble:  
 These fields are mine for I was born to them,  
 I was born in a castle—you, poor wretches,  
 Whelped in the cottage, are, by birth my slaves."<sup>46</sup>

This excerpt from *Wat Tyler* is immediately followed by an article calling for hereditary legislation to be abolished. One of the reasons Southey's play worked so well for *The*

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<sup>44</sup> *The Working Man's Friend and Political Magazine* was edited by John Cleave and published first by H. Willis and later by James Watson. It sold for 1 penny. Journals Collection. Bishopsgate Institute, London.

<sup>45</sup> *Working Man's Friend* 22 (May 1833): 169; *Wat Tyler; A Dramatic Poem. A New Edition, With a Preface suitable to Recent Circumstances* (London: Hone, 1817; Oxford: Woodstock Bks, 1989) 32.

<sup>46</sup> *Working Man's Friend* 31 (July 1833); *Wat Tyler* 29-30.

*Working Man's Friend* is evident here: aristocratic privilege, a fourteenth-century problem in the context of *Wat Tyler*, remained a problem in 1833.

One of the governing structures of *Wat Tyler* is the play's ceaseless focus on that inequality. In a similar passage, also excerpted in *The Working Man's Friend*, Wat Tyler argues:

Think of the insults, wrong, and contumelies,  
Ye bear from your proud lords—that your hard toil  
Manures their fertile fields—you plow the earth,  
You sow the corn, you reap the ripen'd harvest—  
They riot on the produce!”<sup>47</sup>

Such a division between labour and profit was still very much in place in the 1790s. Southey's initial attempt to translate the fourteenth century into the eighteenth century meant that he built his play not on particular, historical inequalities, but rather on large, generalized systems of exploitation, which could then be applied to his own historical moment. Similar critiques of inequality and exploitation fill the play, as do their flip side—a repeated claim for inalienable human equality.

In yet another passage quoted by *The Working Man's Friend*, John Ball pleads guilty at his trial, arguing that “If it be guilt / To preach what you are pleased to call strange notions; / That all mankind as brethren must be equal; / That privileged orders of society / Are evil and oppressive...I plead me guilty.”<sup>48</sup> Just as Southey had relied on James Mackintosh's 1791 “blush,” John Ball's calls for equality here are clearly informed by the rhetoric of one Thomas Paine. Elsewhere, as we saw above, Ball assures his gathered listeners that “Ye all are equal: nature made ye so, / Equality is your birth-right.” This version of equality, with its source in nature, rather than in political

<sup>47</sup> *Working Man's Friend* 12 (March 1833): 89; *Wat Tyler*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> *Working Man's Friend* 29 (July 1833): 225; *Wat Tyler* 64.

structures, is powerfully transhistorical—applicable to all men, at all times. In another passage quoted by the *Working Man's Friend*, Wat Tyler reminds his listeners of “Your sacred, your inalienable freedom.”<sup>49</sup> It is unclear from *Wat Tyler* what exactly this freedom or equality would actually look like—in part because the revolution fails. But thanks to this lack of specificity, these ideas could be put to any number of purposes. Words like “equality,” “freedom,” and “liberty,”—all of which show up repeatedly in both the original *Wat Tyler* and its many excerpted forms—are eminently flexible, thanks to their generality. *Wat Tyler* relies on not exactly empty rhetoric, but on a kind of spacious rhetoric, in which powerfully loaded but abstract terms could be injected with a contemporary focus.

*Wat Tyler* is ceaseless in its deployment of this kind of rhetoric. Despite the fact that different characters deliver these speeches, the ideas and language are themselves so consistent, that the play does seem at times to represent a single speaker. In fact, the characters themselves seem to recognize this fact. When Wat Tyler complains that although “Nature gives enough / For all” the wealthy “hoard[] up superfluous stores,” his listener responds, “So I have heard our good friend John Ball preach.”<sup>50</sup> And he’s right. In the next act, John Ball too asserts “Abundant is the earth... There is enough for all” (29). Because *Wat Tyler*’s political rhetoric feels so internally consistent, and because so much of the play consists of political speeches, it is perhaps understandable that later radical editors tended to conceptualize *Wat Tyler* as more speech than play. Although *Wat Tyler* does have many sections of short, exchanges of dialogue, those moments are never excerpted. *Wat Tyler*, as it appears in the radical press, is always in monologue—

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<sup>49</sup> *Working Man's Friend* 22 (May 1833): 169; *Wat Tyler* 32.

<sup>50</sup> Southey, *Wat Tyler* 10.

one speech by one speaker.<sup>51</sup> Two of the thirteen excerpts from *Wat Tyler* deployed in *The Working Man's Friend* (from January and June of 1833) are the long passage already quoted above, by me, John Lancaster, *The Black Dwarf*, and William Smith in the House of Commons, but which I will include here in the format in which it appears in both *The Working Man's Friend* and in *Wat Tyler* itself:

Ye all are equal: nature made ye so,  
 Equality is your birth-right; --when I gaze  
 On the proud palace, and behold one man  
 In the blood-purpled robes of royalty,  
 Feasting at ease, and lording over millions;  
 Then turn me to the hut of poverty,  
 And see the wretched labourer, worn with toil,  
 Divide his scanty morsel with his infants;  
 I sicken and indignant at the sight,  
 "Blush for the patience of humanity."<sup>52</sup>

In *Wat Tyler*, these stirring lines are delivered by John Ball during his first public speech, addressed to a "heath" that "tis throng'd with men / Ardent for freedom" (26-27) and preparing for their attempt at revolution. This context is not entirely absent from the *Working Man's Friend*. By starting the quotation two lines earlier than *The Black Dwarf*, with "Ye all are equal: nature made you so," this excerpt incorporates the "all" of the public audience. Those texts which were the most quotable, in the radical press, were often those that seemed the least like written texts, and the most like speeches.

In my first chapter, we saw that the *Chartist Circular* excerpted those passages from *Caleb Williams* which, similarly, feel the most like speeches. This penchant for the genre of the public speech should come as no surprise in the pages of the radical press.

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<sup>51</sup> Two exceptions are the *Cosmopolite*, which printed *Wat Tyler* in its entirety, and the *London Democrat*, which printed Acts 2 and 3. The *London Democrat's* selection of these final two acts reflects the radical press's penchant for the play's public speeches, which cluster in those sections of the play. "The Second Act from the Play of Wat Tyler," *The London Democrat* (May 1839): 46-48; "The Third Act from the Play of Wat Tyler," *The London Democrat* (June 1839): 62-64. "Wat Tyler, a Dramatic Poem," *The Cosmopolite: A Cheap Substitute for a Stamped Paper* 1.21 (September 1833): 161-167.

<sup>52</sup> Southey, *Wat Tyler* 31; *Working Man's Friend* 4 (Jan 1833): 25; and 27 (June 1833): 209.

Gilmartin differentiates between the bourgeois and radical presses by looking at the links each had to the public space:

As the bourgeois public sphere was assimilated to the constitutional state, it tended to abandon certain forms of political sociability and retreat to the virtual space of print [...] A radical counterpublic, meanwhile, remained stubbornly active and physical, never confined to the printed page. Radical weeklies were saturated with speeches and debates, and with rich evidence of collective reading practices.<sup>53</sup>

Nineteenth-century commentators were themselves fully aware of this distinction.

Gilmartin cites none other than Robert Southey himself, who worried over the difference between the bourgeois reader, “casting his eyes over [the newspaper’s] columns while he sips his coffee” and the radical papers “read aloud in tap-rooms and pot-houses to believing auditors.”<sup>54</sup> Although Gilmartin is here describing the radical press of the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the deep connection between the press and public speech remained entrenched through the Chartist period. Radical papers often quoted public speeches almost in full. This publication of speeches contributed to the radical press’s project of contemporaneity—readers could stay abreast of political meetings, lectures, and other events, and could feel connected to those current public events through the medium of the press. John Ball’s speech in *Wat Tyler*, however, seems to be anything but contemporary—a 1790s text, sporting a speech by a fourteenth-century historical figure. I would argue, however, that the aspects of this passage from *Wat Tyler* which mark it *as* a public speech—the appeal to “ye all,” the melodramatic “blood-purpled robes,” the extreme contrasts between rich and poor—also mark it as particularly apt for excerpting. Despite the archaic “ye,” a passage like this feels more contemporary

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<sup>53</sup> Gilmartin, *Print Politics* 30.

<sup>54</sup> Southey, “Essay IV: On the State of the Poor, the principle of Mr. Malthus’s Essay on Population, and the Manufacturing System,” *Essays, Moral and Political*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1832) 1:120.

than it is, in part, because it mimics a public speech which, in its real-world form happens in real time, rhetoric relayed directly from speaker to listener.

John Ball's speeches—particularly those excerpted by the radical press—are largely in the present tense. The preference for the speech is also a preference for present-tense, direct address. The present-tense aspect of these speech-like passages provided one more way in which the radical press was able to overcome the gaps in time which divided the 1830s from the 1780s or 1790s. By extracting passages from *Wat Tyler* in a way that highlighted the play's tendency toward present-tense address, the editors of the radical press turned *Wat Tyler* into powerful contemporary commentary, expressed in the present.

Importantly, this reliance on public speeches means that the imagined audience for that direct address was not a single listener, but many—to return once more to the most quoted excerpt from *Wat Tyler*: “Ye *all* are equal” (my italics). As the nineteenth century continued, the reading public expanded by leaps and bounds. There were thus more and more “listeners” in John Ball's audience. The expansion in the reading audience was exactly what had Southey in such a state of anxiety in 1816, when he wrote his article for the *Quarterly* opposing the radical press. There, Southey worried that Cobbett's twopenny *Register* was selling between 40 and 50,000 copies a week. He hopes these numbers are “greatly exaggerated...but if only a tenth of that number be circulated among the populace...the extent of the mischief is not to be calculated.”<sup>55</sup> Southey's worry, that the radical press was reaching an expansive readership, was well-founded. When Southey was forced to defend his own radical play just one year later, part of his defense was to differentiate between the size of his intended audience in the

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<sup>55</sup> Southey, “Article XI” 275.

1790s, and the upsetting size of his audience in 1817; he argued that the play “was written when republicanism was confined to a very small number of the educated classes.”<sup>56</sup> If the number of participants in radical movements had already expanded too much for Southey, from the 1790s to the 18teens, then his concern at the mass involvement in the Chartist movement in the late 1830s must have been considerable.

Just as *Wat Tyler* had proved surprisingly useful in both the late 18teens and in the early 1830s (during the agitation for both electoral reform and the freedom of the press), it continued to be of service to the Chartists, as they looked back to the recent past in order to move forward. The *Southern Star* and *National Vindicator*, both Chartist journals, ran advertisements for *Wat Tyler*, and sections of the poem were excerpted at length in both the *National Association Gazette* and the *Chartist Circular*. The *National Association Gazette* followed the excerpting practices we have seen thus far, pulling out another of John Ball’s lengthy speeches for its 1842 audience, one which we have seen before:

Friends! Brethren! for ye are my brethren all;  
 Englishmen met in arms to advocate  
 The cause of freedom! [...]  
 There is enough for all; but your proud baron  
 Stands up, and, arrogant of strength, exclaims,  
 ‘I am a lord—by nature I am noble:  
     [...]you, poor wretches,  
 Whelp’d in the cottage, are by birth my slaves.’  
 Almighty God! such blasphemies are utter’d!  
 Almighty God! such blasphemies believ’d!<sup>57</sup>

The excerpt in the *National Association Gazette* is much lengthier—I have done the condensing. This passage offers the appealing qualities we have seen already, with its

<sup>56</sup> Southey, “A Letter to William Smith” 4: 372.

<sup>57</sup> *National Association Gazette* 26 (June 1842): 210. Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester.

opening, expansive address to “Friends! Brethren!” and its critique of hereditary wealth. But this particular passage, as it appears in this journal, reminds us of yet another way in which Southey’s play was transformed into a more useful, accessible form.

Thus far, I have been emphasizing the ways in which the public speeches of Southey’s play are pulled out so that they stand alone, addressed not to the other characters of *Wat Tyler*, but to the readers of the radical press. Although these excerpts do draw upon the genre of the public speech, they are of course not actual public speeches. So although the characteristics of the public speech are relevant to the analysis of these excerpts so too is a different (expansive) genre—the short poem. The above passage from *The National Association Gazette* makes no reference to the play *Wat Tyler*. On the contrary, this excerpt has a title of its own: “The Rich Oppressor and his Slaves.” Granting this excerpt a title, the *National Association Gazette* transforms John Ball’s speech into a self-enclosed poem. As we saw during the original publication scandal, it made good political sense to call *Wat Tyler* a poem rather than a play. It was much easier to ascribe the political opinions expressed in *Wat Tyler* to Robert Southey if this was a freestanding, first-person poem, rather than an assemblage of opinions of various *dramatis personae*. As we saw, Southey attempted to defend *Wat Tyler* by insisting on its dramatic structure.

But historically, Southey seems to have lost that battle. In *Towards a Working Class Canon*, Peter Murphy divides his study of literary criticism in the British working-class press up generically: fiction, poetry, and drama. His discussion of *Wat Tyler* takes place entirely in the poetry section, where he takes the treatment of *Wat Tyler* in the radical press as emblematic of its attitudes toward poetry. Murphy mentions only in

passing that *Wat Tyler* is a closet drama, and this many pages after his initial discussion of Southey's play.<sup>58</sup> I am not suggesting that Murphy's classification here is incorrect—*Wat Tyler* is more closet drama than drama. But the reception history of *Wat Tyler* demonstrates that the generic classification of Southey's text is itself a political choice. If *Wat Tyler* is a play, then its opinions belong to its characters, but if it is a poem, then its radical politics creep all the closer to the poet. Poets and speakers may technically be distinct entities, but in the radical press, Southey was by no means safely separate from his poetic politics. In fact, the near constant identification of Southey with his play's politics meant that he became known not simply as the author of *Wat Tyler*, but as himself a radical poet.

In 1840, *The Chartist Circular* ran the seventh number of its series "Politics of Poets," this one devoted entirely to Southey and his radical poetry. Although the author admits that Southey has not "done all that he might have done, yet he has rendered great service to liberty."<sup>59</sup> Not surprisingly, *Wat Tyler* looms large in this article, where it figures as a series of passages, most of them imagined as spoken by Robert Southey: "To his countrymen, he [Southey] says:-- 'Think not my countrymen, on private wrongs; / Think of the insults, wrongs, and contumelies / Ye bear from your proud lords?'" The article's closing passage is the clincher, ending with Tyler's threat to the king: "Think you we do not feel the wrongs we suffer? / The hour of retribution is at hand, / And tyrants tremble! mark me, King of England" (251).<sup>60</sup> Of course, Tyler is not mentioned, and the passage is prefaced with the information that "Mr. Southey has ministered...to

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<sup>58</sup> Murphy, *Working-Class Canon* 104-105, 121.

<sup>59</sup> "Politics of Poets," *The Chartist Circular* 62 (Nov 1840): 251.

<sup>60</sup> We have seen both these passages before. When the Chartists excerpted *Wat Tyler*, we might imagine them quoting either Southey *or* the earlier incarnations of the radical press, as the same passages reappeared, over and over again.

the noblest feelings of human nature—to the great cause of social improvement, and the recognition of popular rights.” It is undoubtedly *Wat Tyler*’s long presence in the radical canon that accounts for this most extreme version of a radical Southey, in which the still current Poet Laureate is imagined as threatening the king.<sup>61</sup> Importantly, however, *Wat Tyler* is not Southey’s only radical text, according to this author. The first poem excerpted is “Hymn to the Penates,” and Southey’s poetry is praised in the plural: “His works, the noblest and best—the works that will last with language, itself; his poems, great and small, are before the public, and cannot be put under the bushel of oblivion” (251). According to this author, it is Southey’s radical works, particularly those written in his younger days, which will be remembered. My analysis of Southey’s presence in the nineteenth-century confirms that claim; for a significant group of readers, it was exactly those radical poems which lived the longest.

Although it was *Wat Tyler* that catapulted Southey onto radical reading lists, his status as a radical poet meant that other poems followed suit. Poems by Southey began to appear in the radical press, fairly soon after *Wat Tyler*’s publication. *The Black Dwarf*’s editor, Thomas Wooler, dove into Southey’s *Poems* (1797), publishing six of the eight “Inscriptions” as well as “Written on Sunday Morning,” and “The Chapel Bell.”<sup>62</sup> *The Black Dwarf* also published an excerpt from *Joan of Arc*, from 1796, and Southey’s early “To The Exiled Patriots Muir and Palmer.”<sup>63</sup> *Wat Tyler* seems to have served for Wooler

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<sup>61</sup> Southey was Poet Laureate until his death, in 1843.

<sup>62</sup> Southey, “Inscription for Monument at Oxford,” “Part of an Epitaph on King John,” and “For a Monument at Taunton,” *The Black Dwarf* 2.29 (July 1818): 464; “Inscription for a Column at Newbury,” 6.25 (June 1821): 880; “Inscription for the apartment in Chepstow Castle, where Henry Marten, the Regicide, was imprisoned thirty years.” 7.1 (July 1821): 18; “Inscription for a Monument in the New Forest.” 8.5 (Jan 1822): 161; “Written on Sunday Morning,” 6.20 (May 1821): 700; “The Chapel Bell.” 7.7 (August 1821): 233-4.

<sup>63</sup> Southey, “Excerpt from *Joan of Arc*,” *The Black Dwarf* 7.16 (Oct 1821): 547-8; “To The Exiled Patriots Muir and Palmer,” *The Black Dwarf* 8.11 (March 1822): 372-3.

as a demonstration of the unexpected usefulness of the poetry of the now-conservative first-generation romantics. In addition to raiding Southey's early volumes, Wooler also reprinted early Coleridge (including "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter" [1786]) as well as many of Wordsworth's Liberty Sonnets.<sup>64</sup> The *Chartist Circular* continued this pattern, itself making use of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and reprinting Southey's "The Battle of Blenheim," first published in 1798, in 1841.<sup>65</sup>

As it turned out, Southey's status as a radical poet was such that not only the poems from his radical youth were recuperable. A single stanza from his "Ode, Written During the War with America, 1814" would become yet another standard, this time for the Co-operative movement, inspired by Robert Owen. This poem, written while Southey was Poet Laureate, is unsurprisingly largely a poem in praise of "glorious England!"<sup>66</sup> The poem encourages the nation to continue to spread its influence and knowledge around the globe, but it does offer some stringent critique of the unhappy ignorance and poverty of many Britons. In what turned out to be the poem's most quotable stanza, the speaker encourages England to support its most vulnerable members:

Train up thy children, England,  
In ways of righteousness—and feed them  
With the bread of wholesome doctrine.  
Where hast thou thy mines—but in their industry?  
Thy bulwarks where—but in their breast? Thy might—  
But in their arms?  
Must not their numbers, therefore be thy Wealth,  
Thy strength, thy Power, thy Safety, and thy Pride!  
Oh! grief, then grief and shame,  
If in this flourishing land there should be dwellings  
Where the new-born babe doth bring unto its parents' soul

<sup>64</sup> Coleridge, "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter," *The Black Dwarf* 8.14 (April 1822): 485.

<sup>65</sup> Southey, "The Battle of Blenheim," entitled "A Glorious Victory," *The Chartist Circular* 69 (Jan 1841): 296.

<sup>66</sup> Southey, "Ode, Written During the War with America, 1814," *The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Southey*. (New York: Appleton, 1848) 203, l. 48.

No joy! where squalid Poverty receives it at the birth,  
 And on her withered knees  
 Gives it the scanty bread of discontent.<sup>67</sup>

In 1830, the *Chester Co-operative Chronicle, and Magazine for the Working Classes* opened its very first number with this stanza as the epigraph.<sup>68</sup> In 1833, Owen's own journal, *The Crisis*, reviewed another co-operative text, *The National Advancement and Happiness considered in reference to the Equalization of Property and the Formation of Communities*, which apparently also took as its opening the same stanza from Southey. Instead of simply referencing the stanza, *The Crisis* reprints it in full as above, with the introduction that the following is "an extract from the eminently gifted Southey, and we shall frequently adopt it as an appropriate exemplification of the objects wheron, in our succeeding numbers, we shall essay to amuse, enlighten, or inform." The stanza thus becomes a founding example of the goals of Owen's journal. Six months later, in December of 1832, the *Working Man's Friend* was starting its first number with the same epigraph.<sup>69</sup> *Wat Tyler* was a founding text for the radical movements of the nineteenth century, but so was the eleventh stanza of Southey's "Ode."

I argue that this particular stanza owed its popularity to its close connections with *Wat Tyler*. Thematically, its claim that the strength of England lies in the might of its workers echo *Wat Tyler's* claim, that government is useless ("of what service is the

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<sup>67</sup> "Review of *The National Advancement and Happiness considered in reference to the Equalization of Property and the Formation of Communities*," *The Crisis* 1.1 (April 1832). Journals Collection. Bishopsgate Institute, London. In the versions of this poem published under Southey's direction which I have been able to locate thus far, this stanza's final line references the "scanty food of discontent," not the "scanty bread." But in each of the three times this stanza is excerpted, the line reads "bread." It is possible that I have not yet located an early version of Southey's poem which uses "bread," which these journals are using. But if the shift from "food" to "bread" happened in one of the excerpts, and was then picked up by the others, we can see the ways in which these radical journals were using each other as source material.

<sup>68</sup> *Chester Co-operative Chronicle, and Magazine for the Working Classes* 1.1 (July 1830). Bishopsgate Institute, London.

<sup>69</sup> *The Working Man's Friend and Political Magazine* 1 (December 1832). Bishopsgate Institute, London.

state?”), and that everything of real value is provided by the peasants (“You sow the corn, you reap the ripen’d harvest”).<sup>70</sup> Moreover, a closer look at this stanza’s final lines makes clear its resonance with *Wat Tyler*: “Where the new-born babe doth bring unto its parents’ soul / No joy! where squalid Poverty receives it at the birth, /And... Gives it the *scanty* bread of discontent” (my italics). The single most quoted passage from *Wat Tyler* is also that which was first quoted, in the House of Commons, in which John Ball “blushes for humanity” when he turns from the “proud palace” to the “hut of poverty” to “see the wretched labourer, worn with toil, / Divide his *scanty* morsel with his infants” (my italics).<sup>71</sup> There was more continuity, both in politics and language, between the Southey of the 1790s and the Southey of the 18teens than we may think. It just took some careful excerpting to find it.

*Wat Tyler*’s presence in the radical canon meant that for many, many nineteenth-century readers, Robert Southey, Poet Laureate, remained a serious radical poet. I argue that this largely ignored readership forces us to rethink Southey’s position in literary history. We know him as an apostate, but there was another version of Southey—a Southey who stayed radical against his own desires well into the 1840s. Southey himself seems to have had an inkling of just what kind of fame he would achieve. Already in 1821, he had noticed the Co-operative movement’s fondness for the eleventh stanza of his “Ode.” As he reported in a letter, “the committee of journeymen who propose to adapt what is practicable and useful in Owen’s plan, quote in their report the eleventh stanza of my ode.” He continues, “This is the first indication of a sort of popularity which, in process of time I shall obtain and keep, for the constant tendency of whatever I

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<sup>70</sup> Southey, *Wat Tyler* 7, 21. Both these excerpts are quoted in *The Working Man’s Friend*.

<sup>71</sup> Southey, *Wat Tyler* 31.

have written.”<sup>72</sup> The extremely radical version of Southey we have seen here is not exactly what he had in mind, but he was correct in realizing that it was the ways in which his poetry would be used by just such “journeymen” that would account for his long presence in the nineteenth century. The impressive consistency and longevity of this version of Southey is evidenced in the repetitive regularity with which the same excerpts from *Wat Tyler* were published again and again. Southey himself could change his politics, but he could not change the accreted weight of his poetry’s presence in the radical press. That poetry could be radicalized with little to no regard to the poet’s politics. The same was true, as we shall see, for William Wordsworth and his Liberty Sonnets.

### **The GOOD OLD CAUSE: Wordsworth’s Radical Sonnets**

By 1815, Wordsworth was actively campaigning for local Tory politicians. Like Southey, Wordsworth had become a public conservative—a turn which horrified Byron and Shelley and inspired the parodies of *Peter Bell* we saw above. One place to locate Wordsworth’s shifting politics, at least in terms of his poetry, is the Liberty Sonnets, which he began in 1802, but continued to compose through the 18teens. Carl Woodring locates in the sonnets “the clear emergence of Wordsworth the patriot,” and argues that their goal is “to goad all persons who were in any way capable of flagging in the contest against Napoleon.”<sup>73</sup> The Liberty Sonnets, closely identified with the goals of the British government, are thus often seen as marking Wordsworth’s increasing conservatism. Charles Mahoney argues that the sonnets themselves chart the shift: “By 1816, the

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<sup>72</sup> Southey, *Life and Correspondence* 5: 65.

<sup>73</sup> Woodring, Carl. *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1970), 125, 115.

austere republican ethos and the crowded momentum that energize the Miltonic persona of the 1802 sonnets have been all but abdicated to the righteous, shrill prophet of the Waterloo sonnets.”<sup>74</sup>

As we shall see in this section, Wordsworth’s conservative turn in the 18teens did not make his poetry unusable for radical purposes. The Liberty Sonnets—particularly the earliest ones—appear in the radical press, in both the early 1820s and the early 1840s. In that new context, they become much less poems “goading” Britons against Napoleon—in fact, by the time of their publication Napoleon was a thing of the past—and instead become poems critiquing Britain itself. The Liberty Sonnets are transformed by this context into radical sonnets, as a look at one of the many sonnets published in *The Black Dwarf* demonstrates:

O friend! I know not which way I must look  
 For comfort, being, as I am opprest;  
 To think that now our life is only drest  
 For shew; mean handywork of craftsmen, cook,  
 Or groom! We must run glittering like a brook  
 In the open sunshine, or we are unblest:  
 The wealthiest man among us is the best:  
 No grandeur now in nature or in book  
 Delights us:--rapine, avarice, expense,  
 This is idolatry; and these we adore:  
 Plain living and high thinking are no more:  
 The homely beauty of the GOOD OLD CAUSE  
 Is gone: our peace, our fearful innocence,  
 And pure religion breathing household laws.—<sup>75</sup>

The opening address here, despite the singularity of “friend,” reminds us of the shared ground between the direct address of this kind of poem and the direct address of the public speeches which were so important to the radical press. We have a first-person speaker, functioning entirely in the present tense, and offering a trenchant critique of

<sup>74</sup> Mahoney, 109.

<sup>75</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 7.24 (December 1821) 834.

wealth. In fact, as Wordsworth aged, this critique began to feel a little too strong too him. At the age of 73, he tried to provide a context for this poem which would help explain its criticism. It was written

immediately after my return from France to London, when I could not but be struck...with the vanity and pride of our own country...as contrasted with the quiet, and I may say the desolation, that the revolution had produced in France. This must be borne in mind, or else the reader may think that in this and the succeeding sonnets I have exaggerated the mischief engendered and fostered among us by undisturbed wealth.<sup>76</sup>

Here, Wordsworth expresses his concern at the potential this poem might have for exaggeration. For Wordsworth, this sonnet only makes sense in the context of the contrast between France and England, a contrast which underpins the structure of the Liberty Sonnets. As we shall see, without that underlying structure—a historical context which was simply no longer as important in the 1820s—Wordsworth’s sonnets could be made to do very different work. As he feared. It is unlikely that Wordsworth was thinking of the use to which the poem was put by *The Black Dwarf* (he was probably not even aware his poems were reprinted there), but his apprehension is well-founded. On the pages of the radical press, this poem is a serious critique of the mischief of wealth. But even then, Thomas Wooler of the *Dwarf* seems to have felt that the poem was in need of even more exaggeration—thus the capitalization. In Wordsworth’s many editions of this poem, the “good old cause” is never capitalized. The phrase itself hearkens back to the English Civil War—it was used regularly by Parliamentarians, describing their cause after Cromwell’s failure. But this reference is by no means explicit in Wordsworth’s version, which provides its own explanation of the phrase post colon: what has been lost is peace, innocence, and religion. But such an explanation makes much less sense when

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<sup>76</sup> *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984. fn710. From Isabella Fenwick Notes.

the cause goes all caps. In the *Black Dwarf*'s version, the GOOD OLD CAUSE is adamantly, aggressively political. Whereas Wordsworth's original version conjures up an idyllic British past, Wooler's edition mourns the loss of a more radical, active, politicized past.

The shift in reference mobilized by Wooler's capitalization is emblematic of a common method by which Wordsworth's Liberty Sonnets were radicalized. In its original context, in Wordsworth's collected sonnets, the following poem's critique seems mainly directed at France. In the editions of the Liberty Sonnets, this poem immediately follows one in which the speaker regrets that in France "whole myriads should unite / To work against themselves such fell despite," in "phrenzy" and "drunken mirth."<sup>77</sup>

There is a bondage which is worse to bear  
 Than his who breathes—by roof, and floor, and wall  
 Pent in,—a tyrant's solitary thrall;—  
 'Tis his who walks about in the open air,  
 One of a nation, who, henceforth, must wear  
 Their fetters in their souls. For who could be—  
 Who, even the best, in such condition,—free  
 From self reproach,—reproach which he must share  
 With human nature? Never be it ours,  
 To see the sun how brightly it will shine,  
 And know the noble feelings, manly powers,  
 Instead of gathering strength, must droop and pine,—  
 And earth, with all her pleasant fields and flowers  
 Fade and participate in man's decline.<sup>78</sup>

It seems more than likely then, that it is the French who "walk about" with "fetters in their souls," while England appears in the final sestet, as being warned against such a fate. But when this sonnet appeared in *The Black Dwarf* in 1822 when England was no longer at war with France, and without the preceding sonnet, there is no sign that a different country is being referenced at all.

<sup>77</sup> Wordsworth, William. "October, 1803." *Poems*. 1815. Rpt. Oxford: Woodstock Bks, 1989. Vol II. 216.

<sup>78</sup> *Black Dwarf* 8.17 (April 1822) 596.

In the *Black Dwarf* then, it is the Britons who walk about fettered, as Wooler had made clear in one of the “Letters of the Black Dwarf” several months before: “*Free, indeed!* The *list of freemen* in England might be enrolled in a sheet of foolscap paper... There is no man who can call his property his own: and though he may be allowed to walk a little farther than I, he... must return to the stake to which he is tethered.”<sup>79</sup> Freedom in Britain is an illusion, Wooler argues, and Britons are tethered to the stake, whether or not they know it. But Wooler knew, in part because when he wrote this letter, as well as this entire volume of the *The Black Dwarf*, he was in prison, in Warwick Gaol. This context—Wooler regularly reported on his prison conditions in *The Black Dwarf*—makes quite a difference to Wordsworth’s sonnet. The sonnet employs the powerful imagery of imprisonment in its opening lines (“by roof, and floor, and wall / Pent in”), but imprisonment here is poetic and distanced. The victim described is beholden to “a tyrant’s solitary thrall,” and must thus exist in some other time and place—the medieval past, perhaps. It becomes clear in line four, of course, that this vision of physical, embodied imprisonment is only an opening image which is immediately exchanged for the worse bondage of a fettered soul. But for the oft-imprisoned radicals of the early nineteenth-century, including the *Black Dwarf*’s editor, these opening lines would have read as a description of a real and immediate condition. Wooler was physically imprisoned, not by a single “tyrant,” but by the British government for the radical politics of his publication. Imprisonment was just one more method by which the government might increase its hold over people’s souls. On the pages of the *Black Dwarf*, the embodied imprisonment of this sonnet is not replaced by

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<sup>79</sup> *Black Dwarf* 8.2 (January 1822) 57.

spiritual bondage; instead both coexist as versions of ways in which Britons were held in thrall.

The new context of this sonnet thus shifts the object of critique from France to Britain, and powerfully literalizes its opening, poetic image. Britain, which in the poem's original context occupied the sonnet's sestet, suddenly becomes the object of the octave, the part of a sonnet that usually lays out problems, not solutions. That shift from France to Britain was enabled, in part, by the poem's belated publication. The poem was composed in 1802, and first published in 1807 (during the war with France), but neither of those dates is in play when the sonnet appears in the *Black Dwarf* in 1822,<sup>80</sup> in a context in which, as we have seen, poems were transformed into contemporary political commentary. As it turned out, several of Wordsworth's sonnets were of particular use for the *Black Dwarf* and *Chartist Circular* for their very emphasis on the present moment. Also in 1822, *The Black Dwarf* would cite the Liberty Sonnet which begins "Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour: / England hath need of thee: she is a fen / Of stagnant waters."<sup>81</sup> In this instance, Wooler does include Wordsworth's title: "London, 1802," thus presumably clarifying which "hour" counts as "this hour." In this title, we can recognize Wordsworth's penchant for providing detailed temporal information about his poems.<sup>82</sup> But no readers, except perhaps Wordsworth's inner circle, could have read this poem at a time at which the present-tense call of "this hour" would have corresponded with the 1802 title. The poem, although composed in 1802, was first published in 1807. Since 1802 was never "this hour," then, the poem has embedded

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<sup>80</sup> Although Wooler does include a reference to his source, that reference is a later edition: *Poems*, 1820.

<sup>81</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 8.1 (January 1822) 17.

<sup>82</sup> Consider the following title: "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798."

within it opposing pulls—to the historical specificity of 1802 on the one hand, and to the insistent, lyric present of “this hour,” on the other.

One thing is clear, however. The writers and readers of *The Black Dwarf* were sure in 1822 that England was still “a fen / Of stagnant waters.” And when the opening octave of this poem was reprinted twenty years later in the *Chartist Circular* that was still the case. The *Chartist Circular*’s decision to print only the opening octave is no accident—as is the case with many of Wordsworth’s early sonnets, the most critical vision of England appears in these early lines. The *Circular* also reprinted only the opening octaves of Wordsworth’s “Feelings of the Tyrolese,” “Sonnet XXVI,” and the famous “Great men have been among us.” Although Wordsworth’s sonnets were usually reprinted in full (the *Chartist Circular* is the exception here), I would suggest that they are nearly always printed *for* the opening octave, not for the concluding sestet. The radical press wanted Wordsworth’s sonnets for their rendition of the problem with England, not for their solutions. And, of course, for the radical press, the problem with England was not with its past, but with its present. When Wordsworth’s sonnet to Milton appeared in part in the *Chartist Circular*, the sonnet had no title, so that “this hour” becomes August, 1840, the date of the Chartist weekly’s publication. As the author of the article “The Politics of Poets No. 3,” where this excerpt appears, explains, Wordsworth “would have Milton living at this hour, if he could.”<sup>83</sup>

The ever-present tense of this and other sonnets made them particularly useful for radical publishers, in that their social critique could always be directed at the present moment. The following sonnet, entitled by Wordsworth “October, 1803,” appeared in both *The Black Dwarf* and *The Chartist Circular*:

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<sup>83</sup> “Politics of Poets, No. 3,” *Chartist Circular* 45 (August 1840) 182.

These times touch monied worldlings with dismay:  
     Even rich men brave by nature, taint the air  
     With words of apprehension and despair:  
 While tens of thousands, thinking on the affray,  
 Men unto whom sufficient for the day  
     And minds not stinted or untill'd—are given,--  
     Sound healthy children of the god or Heaven,--  
 Are cheerful as the rising sun in May,  
 What do we gather hence but firmer faith  
     That every gift of noble origin  
 Is breath'd upon by Hope's perpetual breath;  
     That virtue and the faculties within  
     Are vital,--and that riches are a kin  
 To fear, to change, to cowardice and death!<sup>84</sup>

Part of what made this sonnet useful, of course, is its criticism of those “monied worldlings,” and attendant praise of the presumably not so wealthy men who remain unconcerned. But although the “affray” of this sonnet originally referenced the war with France, neither the *Black Dwarf* nor the *Chartist Circular* includes the poem's dated title. The historical context is thus erased, and “These times” shifted to reference 1822 in one case, and 1840 in the other. In both instances, the “monied worldlings” would be worried not so much by war with another nation, as by the radical movements of the 18teens and the Chartism of the 1840s. In these different contexts, the poem reads less as a celebration of the unworried common man, and more as a threat—a suggestion that the “monied worldlings” should indeed be worried. The perpetual openness of “these times,” like “this hour,” made Wordsworth's sonnets particularly flexible. These phrases which, in context, read as references to the specific years of the titles, in this new context carry with them the contemporaneity which was so important to the radical press, engaged as it was in current social critique.

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<sup>84</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 9.9 (September 1822) 308 [misnumbered p.240]; *Chartist Circular* 11 (December 1839) 43.

Wordsworth never became, like Southey, a regular on radical reading lists. But he could still be conceptualized as a radical poet, as is evidenced by the *Chartist Circular*'s article to that effect. There, the author argues that if we were to "Look at [Wordsworth's] poems altogether, [to] consider the spirit of them altogether," we would find that "they are Radical—deeply, essentially, entirely Radical."<sup>85</sup> Despite this claim for Wordsworth's entire canon, all four of the excerpts included in this article come from the Liberty Sonnets, which is perhaps less perverse than it seems, as Wordsworth's entire radical canon *was* these sonnets. Paul Murphy too comments on this careful selection, noting that "the critic never mentions that all the poems are carefully culled from the same narrow source."<sup>86</sup> Murphy is right to point to this author's somewhat misleading selection; I would only add that the *Chartist Circular* author is not alone in his selection; he is simply continuing the selection process laid out by *The Black Dwarf*, which never printed anything else by Wordsworth.

### **The Spirit of the 1790s**

For the author of the *Chartist Circular* article, Wordsworth gets his radical credentials thanks to his regular citations—and imitations—of Milton. Wordsworth's Miltonic sonnets were undoubtedly favorites; every sonnet which mentions Milton specifically was reprinted in the radical press. The author of "The Politics of Poets" uses Milton as the lynch pin in his argument for a radical Wordsworth, referencing the sonnet in which Wordsworth calls for Milton's return: "There is no need to tell a man of Mr Wordsworth's genius and information, what sort of a man Milton was. He knows that he

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<sup>85</sup> *Chartist Circular* 45 (August 1840) 182.

<sup>86</sup> Murphy, 127.

was a stern Republican; and he calls upon him to give us freedom and power.”<sup>87</sup>

Wordsworth’s repeated calls for Milton’s return, for the return of a radical from the past, model thematically the very process in which the radical press was engaged with both Wordsworth and Southey, pulling their poetry from the past into “this hour,” where it could be used to “raise us up...And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.”

In the early Liberty Sonnets, Wordsworth seems to have been busy trying to raise Milton. But the most useful historical moment for the nineteenth-century radical press was not the era of the English Civil War, but the era of the 1790s. It was that ghost that the radical press was trying to raise. They looked back to the 1790s, just as Derrida, two hundred years later, would look back to Marx, for the “untimely specters that one must not chase away but sort out, critique, keep close by, and allow to come back.”<sup>88</sup> Southey might have preferred to chase away the ghost of Wat Tyler, but there were plenty of radical publishers bringing him back. In the preface to his hugely successful second edition of *Wat Tyler*, still in 1817, William Hone repeatedly conceptualized *Wat Tyler*’s publication as a haunting of Southey. He blamed the play’s appearance on Southey’s article in the *Quarterly Review*, suggesting that had Southey stuck with poetry, “perhaps no ghost had risen from the grave,” but since Southey insisted on critiquing the radical press, “scarcely [had he] put down his pen, when, as in retribution, up jumped WAT TYLER” a “spirit” not to be laid to rest.<sup>89</sup> But Southey was haunted not so much by the spirit of the historical figure Wat Tyler, as by his own ghostly text. The nineteenth century was repeatedly haunted by the 1790s, most significantly through the radical

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<sup>87</sup> *Chartist Circular*, *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Derrida, 87.

<sup>89</sup> Hone, William. “Preface.” *Wat Tyler; A Dramatic Poem. A New Edition, With a Preface suitable to Recent Circumstances*. London: Hone, 1817. Rpt. Oxford: Woodstock Bks, 1989. vi-vii.

republication of texts from that decade. Although, as I demonstrated in my first chapter, conservative critics liked to claim that the Jacobinism of a text like *Caleb Williams* had been “flung into oblivion,” the texts of the 1790s were still very much alive. Perhaps “ghost” itself is too insubstantial a word for something that could, as Hone says, “jump” up in retribution.

Although conservative commentators throughout the nineteenth century would argue that the 1790s were long dead, radical publishers and editors repeatedly pulled the decade from its grave. This specter of the past was perhaps all the more powerful for being pronounced dead—it was not simply alive, but a living ghost. To return once more to Derrida, “a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back.”<sup>90</sup> And importantly, this ghost was a talking one. The radical press consistently excerpted *Wat Tyler* to create the illusion of a first-person speaker, addressing the reader in the present-tense, in real time. They turned *Wat Tyler* into speeches and poems—all spoken by a live ghost. The present-tense poetic addresses of the Liberty Sonnets were put to similar use, so that the sonnets provided contemporary political and social commentary. These texts were not only useful for their carefully constructed contemporaneity, however. It was not just their liveliness that was of use, but also their ghostliness, as the radical energy of the revolutionary 1790s was dragged directly into the nineteenth-century, providing present-tense commentary from the recent past.

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<sup>90</sup> Derrida, 99.

### Chapter 3

#### The View from Gaol: British Poetry and Radical Prisoners

As we have seen in both Chapters 1 and 2, representations of imprisonment could make the texts of the 1790s politically useful later in the nineteenth century. Such representations proved so apt because imprisonment was a widely shared experience for radical leaders, both in the 1790s, and throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. One of the British government's most common responses to radical political activity was the wide-spread arrest and imprisonment of radical leaders, starting with the mass arrests of the 1790s. As E.P. Thompson reports, by 1799 "nearly all the old leaders were in gaol or in exile."<sup>1</sup> In the 1830s and 40s, the Chartists would face the same conditions. In August of 1839, huge numbers of local Chartist leaders were arrested—more people at once than ever before.<sup>2</sup> As Dorothy Thompson notes, by "the autumn of 1839 nearly all the leaders of Chartism were either in prison or on bail awaiting trial."<sup>3</sup> But the British government faced a problem: many of these imprisoned radicals were publishers, editors, and authors, who did their best to continue their political work from within the prison's walls. Such was the case for Henry Vincent, a Chartist leader arrested on May 9, 1839. Although his widely attended speeches were the immediate cause of Vincent's arrest, also troubling for the British government was his political paper, *The Western Vindicator*.

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<sup>1</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1964) 174.

<sup>2</sup> See Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists*, 73. The government took the planned "National Holiday"—a threatened strike—as the excuse for these mass arrests.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

As he awaited trial, in the summer of 1839, Henry Vincent continued to write for the *Vindicator*, penning articles which advertised his location in Monmouth Gaol and demonstrated the extent to which prison and arrest, while keeping him off the podium, were not keeping him out of the papers. In his first letter to the *Vindicator*, from Monmouth, Vincent assured his readers, “I shall address you weekly from this place in the pages of the *Vindicator*,” a promise which he kept for many months, until his prison conditions made it impossible.<sup>4</sup> Even the *Vindicator*’s title insisted upon Vincent’s continuing involvement: as of May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1839 the paper’s title ran *Western Vindicator, Edited and Conducted by Henry Vincent, now Resident in Monmouth Gaol*.

Vincent was not the first radical editor to conduct his business from prison. Twenty years before, Thomas Wooler had edited two entire volumes of the *Black Dwarf* from prison, while Richard Carlile managed to keep his radical press going long after his imprisonment.<sup>5</sup> Vincent’s active continuation of the *Vindicator* was so successful that in late October, when he had been in prison since May (with only part of June and July off for bail), Lord Segrave could complain to Lord John Russell, “One thing is very certain. The *Western Vindicator* is very widely circulated and eagerly sought after by the lower classes; it is producing a mischievous and discontented spirit. There is need to instigate legal proceedings against its editor, Vincent.”<sup>6</sup> Lord Segrave’s request for legal proceedings is somewhat surprising, since by October, Vincent was already serving a

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<sup>4</sup> *The Western Vindicator, Edited and Conducted by Henry Vincent, now Resident in Monmouth Gaol*, 1.13 (May 1839), Vincent Collection, Labour History Archive, Manchester.

<sup>5</sup> Wooler wrote regularly about his prison experience in the pages of *The Black Dwarf*. Carlile kept both his paper, *The Republican*, and his printing shop going thanks to the help of more than 150 volunteers, who among them ended up serving 200 years of imprisonment. See E.P. Thompson, *Making of the Working Class*, 720-728.

<sup>6</sup> Lord Segrave, letter to Lord John Russell, 18 October 1839, in Owen R. Ashton, “The *Western Vindicator* and early Chartism,” *Papers for the People*, eds. Joan Allen and Owen R. Ashton (London: Merlin P, 2005), 54.

twelve month sentence, but in March of 1840, Vincent would indeed be tried again, on more charges, and sentenced to another year of imprisonment.

A glance at Vincent's articles for the *Western Vindicator* helps explain Lord Segrave's anxiety. In early June, while still awaiting his first trial at Monmouth, Vincent was reassuring his readership that, rather than separating him from the movement, his imprisonment was making him an even better Chartist: "Thank God I have a pen to denounce these fellows! Thank God the tyrants have placed me in this prison. I shall here learn how to make myself of most use to my oppressed fellow countrymen."<sup>7</sup>

Vincent's belief, that imprisonment would *further* rather than slow the cause of Chartism was all-important to Chartists, faced as they were with the imprisonment of their leaders. Radical editors and publishers throughout the nineteenth century turned prison to their own ends, transforming the gaol into a central site of radical print culture. Although the British government attempted to isolate radical leaders from their respective movements, the radical press became adept at overcoming prison walls to keep their readership in touch with its leaders.

In the first half of this chapter, I will trace Henry Vincent's surprisingly textual experience of prison: Vincent's story provides an intriguing case study of the ways in which writing from and about prison became a means by which radicals shored up their sense of community. Radical weeklies published articles and letters written from prison, petitions written on behalf of prisoners and more.<sup>8</sup> In the second half of this chapter, I

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<sup>7</sup> *Western Vindicator*, 1.16 (June 1839), Vincent Collection, Labour History Archive, Manchester.

<sup>8</sup> In this chapter, I focus my attention on *The Black Dwarf*, a radical weekly from the 18teens, and several Chartist papers from the late 30s and early 40s. There were certainly significant differences in the political programs of these different papers; I argue, however, that these papers, and many more like them, participate in a shared tradition of representing—and counteracting—the experience of prison.

focus on one aspect of this collection of writings: poetry written from prison.<sup>9</sup> These poems work tirelessly to combat the isolating effects of prison; they too are engaged in community building. As twenty-first-century readers, schooled in the tropes of Romanticism, we might expect to find in prison poems the absolute ideal of isolated lyric. But instead, these poems engage in complex negotiations of the ideals of community and isolation. The familiar tropes of Romantic poetry are turned on their head in this poetry, when the lyric speaker finds himself well and truly in gaol. Imprisonment, as we shall see, could mean isolation, but it could also serve as an experience around which radicals constructed a shared political identity. Writing from and about prison came to serve as a crucial site for radical debates about the advantages and disadvantages of isolation, independence, and mass political movements.

### **Henry Vincent Goes to Prison**

Henry Vincent regularly reassured his readers that though he might be stuck in prison, he was by no means bowing out of the Chartist movement. As he wrote to his cousin, John Minniken, “there are men in this country who are fools enough to imagine that *imprisonment* will stop the progress of our Noble Cause. Fools that they are! We shall all be better men.”<sup>10</sup> While in prison, Vincent was already making himself useful by actively increasing the literacy of his fellow prisoners. As he wrote to Minniken in June, he and his fellow radical inmates had met a “welchman, a hand worker [who] could neither read nor write, we have provided him with spelling book, and copy book, and he

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<sup>9</sup> For a related discussion of poetry written in prison during this period, see John Bugg’s “Close Confinement: John Thelwall and the Romantic Prison,” *European Romantic Review*, 20, no.1 (2009), 37-56. Bugg argues for the influence of Thelwall’s 1790s prison poetry on Coleridge’s conversation poems.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent, Letter to John Minniken, 15 February 1840. 1/1/21, Vincent Collection, Labour History Archive, Manchester.

is making wonderful progress under us as a reader and writer.”<sup>11</sup> When he wasn’t busy writing for the *Vindicator*, or teaching other prisoners to read, Vincent devoted himself to his own reading, as his schedule, again reported to Minniken, suggests: “We breakfast at ½ past 7. We then clean the table, and read and write until nearly one o’clock.” Vincent read more each afternoon, and was then luckily awoken regularly, by his favorite bird at 4:00 a.m, “so that I get two hours good reading before six o’clock every morning.”<sup>12</sup>

Vincent thus structured his day—as much as he was able—almost entirely around reading and writing. These were his dominant activities in Monmouth Gaol, as he transformed the experience of imprisonment into an opportunity for self-education, to make himself “of most use.” Vincent thus participated in a particular radical tradition: political prisoners from at least the 1790s had often used prison as a chance to perform the self-education which was otherwise hard to undertake, particularly for those from the working-class.

Vincent’s access to reading and writing materials meant that, from the perspective of the British government, he remained a troubling radical leader, even behind bars. When Vincent was actually tried and sentenced, in August of 1839, part of his sentence attempted to redress that problem. As *The Sun* reported, when Vincent “applied for the use of his books and writing materials, [] he was told he could not have any but religious books.”<sup>13</sup> Many an article in the Chartist press strongly resented this sentence, but it was *The Sun* that offered perhaps the most fear-mongering argument for letting Vincent read what he wanted:

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<sup>11</sup> Vincent, Letter to Minniken, 1 June 1839. 1/1/16, Vincent Collection.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *The Sun* (August 5, 1839). Mic.Reel 35, Francis Place Collection. British Library

Let us ask why Mr. Vincent is to have none but religious books? Is it part of the sentence that he must feast exclusively on his own thoughts—that he must always be forced inward on himself to gloat over his wrongs, real or imagined—to nurse his own wrath—to sharpen his desire for vengeance—to convert him perhaps, from a political enthusiast into a fanatic or murderer? What if he thinks that the books, which some of the clergy call religious are very irreligious books? What if he can draw out of the Bible horrible justifications of vengeance, and find in it admonitions to slay without mercy those who are opposed to the children of the Lord? And what if he concludes that the persecuted Chartists are those children? It would be wiser, in our humble judgment to allow him to have any books he can command.<sup>14</sup>

As I have demonstrated in this project’s previous chapters, radical readers, editors, and publishers were adept at transforming literary texts to serve their own purposes. Here, the writer for *The Sun* plays on what was thus a recognizable political strategy—the co-opting of texts for the radical political project. But the British government, as represented by whomever handed down the mandate against Vincent’s reading, clearly found the Bible less dangerous than Vincent’s other reading. This is perhaps no surprise, given the fact that Vincent seems to have devoted much of his time to the writings of the most widely read, widely known, radical author of the early nineteenth century, William Cobbett. As he told Minniken, he had “several of Cobbett’s works and [was] reaping much instruction therefrom.”<sup>15</sup>

One of the reasons that Vincent and his reading practices presented such a conundrum for the British penal system (his reading conditions would remain a point of contention for the next year) was that the first half of the nineteenth century saw the advent of an entirely new kind of prisoner, incarcerated in a new prison system. Until the

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<sup>14</sup> *The Sun*’s suggestion that Vincent might put passages from the Bible to his own purposes was particularly relevant, as Vincent was known for a speech he gave in Newport on April 19<sup>th</sup>. There, he was reported to have said: “let your cry be to your Tents of Israel, and then with one voice, one heart and one blow—Perish the privileged orders. Death to the aristocracy. Up with the people and the government they have established.” qtd. in Ivor Wilkes, *South Wales and the Rising of 1839: Class Struggle as Armed Struggle* (London: Croom Helm, 1984) 98.

<sup>15</sup> Vincent, Letter to John Minniken, 1 June 1839. 1/1/16, Vincent Collection, Labour History Archive.

nineteenth century, very few Britons faced lengthy prison sentences. Most crimes were addressed with the pillory, transportation, execution, or dismissal. As Michael Ignatieff explains in his history of the English penitentiary, “the prison before 1775 was more a place of confinement for debtors and those passing through the mills of justice than a place of punishment.”<sup>16</sup> The American Revolution, however, made the usual methods of transportation impossible, and “almost overnight, imprisonment was transformed from an occasional punishment for felony into the sentence of first resort for all minor property crime.”<sup>17</sup> The changes enforced by the American Revolution coincided with pre-existing dissatisfaction with the eighteenth-century criminal system, which offered no middle ground between the extreme punishments of hanging and transportation or simple dismissal. Imprisonment as a punishment offered a solution to this problem, and over the course of the nineteenth century, it became the primary way of dealing with criminal and political offenders.

Up until the advent of the French Revolution, political prisoners in Britain tended to be aristocrats, or at least members of the landed gentry. Laborers and other less wealthy radicals would have been hung immediately, rather than imprisoned. Aristocratic political prisoners were generally allowed the privileges of their class, including reading and writing materials. But in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as radical movements became the work of artisans and the working classes, both the number and class status of political prisoners shifted dramatically, as the British government responded to political uprisings by arresting the radical leadership. The

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<sup>16</sup> *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850*. (New York: Pantheon, 1978) 28.

<sup>17</sup> Ignatieff, 81.

British penal system was thus faced with scores of prisoners who were neither aristocrats, nor felons, and could thus be difficult to categorize.

Although eighteenth-century political prisoners had traditionally been allowed reading materials, we can see in the case of Henry Vincent that the British government found the reading and writing practices of nineteenth-century, working-class, political prisoners particularly threatening. Although the authorities did limit Vincent's reading materials at Monmouth Gaol, they were unable to fully detach him from the *Vindicator*, which was still stirring up controversy. Vincent was still able to sneak articles and letters out because Monmouth Gaol remained, structurally, an old-fashioned prison, in which prisoners of various kinds (debtors, criminals, those awaiting trial) were allowed to intermingle, with one another and with visitors from the outside world. Thus Vincent's continued role in the production of the *Vindicator*, as well as his access to other prisoners, including the hand worker whom he taught to read.

This situation was untenable for the authorities working to stamp out the radicalism of both Vincent and the *Vindicator*, so in March of 1840, Vincent was tried and sentenced again, and immediately removed to a very different kind of institution: Millbank Penitentiary, in London. The penitentiary, though technically an eighteenth-century invention, came into its own in the Victorian period, and has become, thanks to Foucault and his work on Bentham's panopticon, one of the reigning symbols of nineteenth-century discipline and institutionalization. Nineteenth-century penitentiaries differed significantly from the eighteenth-century prisons, most powerfully in their emphasis on isolation. John Howard, one of the leading prison reformers of the late eighteenth century recommended isolation as a means by which the prisoner could reflect,

and ultimately, hear the voice of God—thus the designation “penitentiary.” Howard himself knew the dangers of total isolation, and would probably have been horrified by the measures taken at penitentiaries like Millbank and Pentonville, where prisoners were kept completely isolated from each other, occupying separate cells, but also occupying separate cubicles during religious services, and forced to wear masks whenever they were outside, so that they could not recognize or form any type of connection with other prisoners.<sup>18</sup>

The goal of the penitentiary was isolation, both from fellow prisoners, and from the outside world. Millbank—the national penitentiary—was surrounded by a perimeter wall and moat.<sup>19</sup> Francis Place—who was largely responsible for eventually getting Vincent out of Millbank Penitentiary—recorded the rationale for Vincent’s stay at Millbank: “The reason assigned for his removal was that at Monmouth he could not be prevented writing and abusing the Government, so he was sent to the Penitentiary where he could be prevented.”<sup>20</sup> At Millbank, the British government may have hoped, Vincent would be entirely separated from the accelerating events of the Chartist movement. There, his separation from current events was built directly into the “Rules for General Penitentiary Millbank,” which stipulated that prisoners could write one letter upon arrival, but could not write again for four months. Additionally, the prison would not accept more than one letter for the prisoner, from outside, every four months. And the point of these letters, the rules explain, was to “enable” the prisoner “to keep up a

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<sup>18</sup> For more on the history of the penitentiary, see Ignatieff, and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995). For the influence of the eighteenth-century novel on the idea of the penitentiary, see John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> Ignatieff, 171.

<sup>20</sup> Francis Place, letter to William Lovett, 4 June 1840, Mic.Reel 33, Francis Place Collection, British Library.

connexion with the respectable part of their friends [...] and not that they may hear the news of the day, with which they can have no concern.”<sup>21</sup> The problem with Henry Vincent, we have seen, was not so much that he might hear the “news of the day,” but that he was capable, with his radical paper, of creating that news. The wishful thinking of the penitentiary’s rules, that Vincent could have “no concern” with that news, demonstrates how decisively the prison hoped to separate him from his own political movement. Luckily for Vincent, he was still deeply connected to the Chartist movement, the members of which immediately set to work to get him out of Millbank. In early April of 1840, John Cleave (later to be Vincent’s father-in-law and one of the most successful of the radical publishers) wrote to Francis Place explaining that Vincent had asked for Place’s advice on how to get around the penitentiary’s strict rules. Place seems to have responded by taking on Vincent’s problem full force.

Francis Place, born 1771, has long been considered one of the most important commentators on early nineteenth-century radicalism. Place carefully documented the many radical movements of his long political life, and his collection of texts is an invaluable resource. Place was a member of the London Corresponding Society in the 1790s, and continued to be involved in political movements up through the Chartist movement, with which he was connected, although he ultimately became disillusioned with its emphasis on the use of force. Place thus provides a human embodiment of the many connections amongst the radical movements of the nineteenth century, as he

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<sup>21</sup> “Rules for the General Penitentiary Millbank.” Francis Place Collection. Reel 36. Restrictions on “news of the day” have resurfaced recently. In its 2006 *Beard v. Banks* decision, the Supreme Court supported a Pennsylvania prison’s decision to deny newspapers and magazines to its “most incorrigible” prisoners. The connections to the nineteenth century were made explicit when Justice Thomas referenced nineteenth-century prison practices of denying prisoners’ reading materials as justification for his decision. See Meg Sweeney, “*Beard v. Banks*: Deprivation as Rehabilitation.” *PMLA* 122.3 (2007) 779-783.

regularly brought his knowledge and experience from the 1790s to bear on later radical agitations. Place now has a reputation as a too-conservative radical. According to E.P. Thompson, already in the 18teens, Place “was deeply hostile to any open strategy of popular agitation and organization.”<sup>22</sup> After the Napoleonic Wars, Place embraced Utilitarianism and Malthusian economics, a shift which, as Thompson argues, colors the historical record he left behind: “when he came to write his reminiscences [Place] was anxious to emphasise the contribution of the moderates, and to belittle the importance of the ‘mob agitators’.”<sup>23</sup> Place was deeply opposed to the violence of some Chartists, and recommended, as we shall see, that political leaders like Henry Vincent devote themselves to their own upward mobility, rather than to the class struggle. He is nonetheless a crucial figure, and the man who managed to get Henry Vincent out of Millbank.

Apparently in response to John Cleave’s letter, Francis Place composed a petition, in which he complained about the extreme conditions of Millbank, and argued that Vincent should not be exposed to them, as he was not a “depraved” prisoner. Place worked to differentiate Vincent, a political prisoner, from Millbank’s criminals, arguing that the conditions that might apply to them, should not apply to him. Place quoted directly from the “Rules for the General Penitentiary Millbank,” and argued that the severe restrictions on correspondence were unacceptable, as was the fact that “his books have been taken from him and he is debarred the use of pens, ink, and paper.”<sup>24</sup> Of course, as we have seen, keeping Vincent away from pen, ink, and paper was exactly the

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<sup>22</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 613.

<sup>23</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 486.

<sup>24</sup> Petition for Vincent’s Removal from Millbank. Sent to Sergeant Talfourd 20 May 1840, and presented by him to House of Commons. Mic. Reel 37, Francis Place Collection.

point of his imprisonment at Millbank. In order to manage his removal, Place would have to recast Vincent's use of books as a means of self-improvement, rather than as a way for him to further the Chartist movement.

Place sent his petition to Sergeant Thomas Noon Talfourd, who had appeared for the Crown against Vincent in his several trials. Talfourd had been impressed enough by Vincent's eloquent defense that he regretted having taken the case for the prosecution, and became one of Vincent's staunchest supporters.<sup>25</sup> In his letter to Talfourd, requesting that he present the petition on Vincent's behalf to the House of Commons, Place explained why Vincent's access to books would actually be in the best interests of the country. Place argues that books would not be a source of disturbance. On the contrary, Vincent would actually improve and become calmer, "if he were permitted the use of such books as judicious friends would supply him with." The right books, chosen by the right people, would enable Vincent to become "a most useful, honourable, and able member of Society."<sup>26</sup> As Vincent's involvement with the Chartist movement had convinced many that he was downright opposed to "Society" as it stood, the argument that he could be educated into being a "useful" member of that Society had some weight. Talfourd himself picked up the phrase, telling the House of Commons that he had always hoped that Vincent "might at the termination of his imprisonment be suffered to become a useful and valuable member of society."<sup>27</sup> The question of Vincent's removal from Millbank was debated in the Commons, with opposing speakers reminding the House of

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<sup>25</sup> See R. Gammage's *History of the Chartist Movement* (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Browne & Browne, 1894), 178. Talfourd, lawyer, MP, and prolific writer, is perhaps best known as a friend to Charles Dickens; *The Pickwick Papers* is dedicated to him.

<sup>26</sup> Place, Letter to Sergeant Talfourd, 20 May 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>27</sup> Tucker, Clifford. "The Prisoner in Monmouth Gaol. A Study of Henry Vincent (1813-1878)." *Presenting Monmouthshire: the Journal of the Monmouthshire Local History Council*. 20 (Autumn 1965): 21. Quoting from *Parliamentary Debates* 1840. Vol 55.

Vincent's practice of abusing those indulgences he was granted by "using writing materials to continue to conduct *The Western Vindicator*," but Talfourd, with Place's petition, was ultimately successful, and Vincent was removed to Oakham Gaol.<sup>28</sup>

Oakham Gaol's greatest advantage over Millbank was that it was no penitentiary, and thus, like Monmouth, allowed for much more contact between prisoners and the outside world. Vincent took immediate advantage of his move to Oakham, starting a correspondence with Place in which he requested both reading suggestions and books themselves. Over the next six months, while Vincent was imprisoned at Oakham, Vincent and Place would carry out a detailed dialogue, nominally about Vincent's "assigned" reading, but in which they would also debate the end goals of Vincent's reading, with Place hoping for Vincent's self-improvement, and detachment from the Chartists, and Vincent insisting all the while on maintaining his connection to "the people." Vincent opened his correspondence to Place with appreciation for Place's role in helping him escape Millbank, but also with his concern at the opportunity which he had already missed: "I regret to inform you that I have not been able to profit as much in my solitary house as I could have wished, in consequence of the care which men in power have taken to keep from me instructive books, and those means of improvement which it should be the duty of rulers to place within the reach of all." Vincent is careful here, and elsewhere in his letters to Place, to treat his access to texts as an opportunity for self improvement. He proceeds with his request: "I have no books in this gaol [...] this deprivation causes the time to hang heavily and uselessly upon me [...] if you could do

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<sup>28</sup> Tucker, 22.

anything, towards obtaining my permission to receive useful texts you would much oblige me.”<sup>29</sup>

In his carefully negotiated request to Place, Vincent makes use of the same word which had been so important for both Place and Talfourd, as they argued for Vincent’s future role as a “useful” member of society. In those contexts, I would suggest, “useful” serves as a kind of code for “not-a-Chartist.” That is not, of course, what Vincent means when he asks for “useful” books, but I would argue that he too is taking advantage of the idea that his reading will serve as a means of calm self-improvement. Vincent’s careful phrasing here was important, as Place would forward parts of this letter, particularly Vincent’s requests for books, back to Sergeant Talfourd, whom Place asked to speak to Lord Normandy on Vincent’s behalf. Such a complicated relay of requests was necessary (Vincent to Place to Talfourd to Normandy) since even at the relatively relaxed Oakham Gaol, Vincent was not allowed any books without an order from the Secretary of State, Lord Normandy, and without the approval of the prison chaplain.<sup>30</sup>

Fortunately for Vincent, this chain of requests was successful, and Place soon wrote to inform him that Lord Normandy had agreed, and that both Place and Talfourd would send him books to read.<sup>31</sup> In their continuing correspondence, Place and Vincent discuss his studies of geometry, mathematics, and more, but their most extended discussion (at least in the letters collected and saved by Francis Place) is of a book which Vincent requested specifically: William Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Vincent seems to have known that he was pushing the boundaries of allowable books with this request—as we saw in Chapter 1, Godwin’s image as a dangerous, if supposedly

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<sup>29</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 22 June 1840. Mic. Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>30</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 26 June 1840. Mic. Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>31</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 27 June 1840. Mic. Reel 37, Place Collection.

forgotten, Jacobin, was still in circulation. And *Political Justice* remained one of the standard texts of the radical canon. So Vincent checked to make sure: “I have a strong desire to read “Political Justice”—there is no doubt as to its admission. I have spoken to the chaplain on the subject—a standard work of that kind cannot be objected to.”<sup>32</sup>

Vincent’s insistence that there is “no doubt” belies his awareness that there might be some doubt after all. And he does not actually say here that the prison chaplain *has* agreed, just that a “standard work of that kind cannot be objected to,” with “cannot be objected to” occupying a kind of future tense, in which the objection could still appear, without warning. In fact, *Political Justice* was allowed, but I focus on this particular moment to demonstrate the ways in which Godwin’s treatise was still a contested text. Vincent argues here for its position as a “standard work,” but it was most standard for radical readers, for whom it could often feel quite relevant and contemporary: excerpts from *Political Justice* fill the nineteenth-century radical press. I suspect that *Political Justice* was allowed by the chaplain not for those reasons, but because Godwin’s text was by 1839 over forty years old and seemed anything but contemporary—“standard” as in old and harmless.

By reading Godwin’s *Political Justice* (1793) with Francis Place, who began his radical political career with the London Corresponding Society in the 1790s, Henry Vincent was carefully and consciously putting himself in touch with the 1790s radicalism which, as we have seen, was a regular source of inspiration and information for the radical movements which followed it. For Vincent, even being housed at Oakham Gaol provided access to that radical past. He reminded a concerned Minniken, “Perhaps you may not remember that Davison the printer of Smithfield was in this prison two years,

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<sup>32</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 29 August 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

(twenty years ago) for printing Paine's works.”<sup>33</sup> Vincent reminds us here of how often the imprisonment of radicals, from the 1790s through the 1840s, was based upon their practices of textual production and reproduction. Luckily for the Chartists, publishers like Davison had risked making texts like Paine's and Godwin's available for mass readerships. As we have seen, those later radicals were adept at transforming the texts of the 1790s to serve their own purposes. Francis Place, in fact, recommends a method of reading to Vincent that emphasizes his own response *to* Godwin's text, rather than the text itself. Place recommends he start by reading it “right through noticing as far as you are able your own thoughts while reading,” before returning to make a more careful study of Godwin's claims. And even then, “I do not mean that you should in any case adopt Godwin's inferences, but that you should, to the utmost of your ability, calmly judge of them, and decide for yourself as Godwin has done for himself.”<sup>34</sup> Place's reading instructions encourage, not a direct absorption of Godwin's principles, but instead, an opportunity for Vincent to exercise his own judgment, deciding for himself which parts of *Political Justice* he finds most convincing. This careful reading technique might seem to have little in common with the practices of opportunistic extraction and quotation which are the topic of my first two chapters, but I would like to point to the similar ways in which both strategies make use of a text from the recent past, making it serve contemporary, political needs. In fact, Vincent and Place's discussion of Godwin quickly became a debate about that very current issue, Chartism—particularly about the value and usefulness of mass movements.

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<sup>33</sup> Vincent, Letter to Minniken, 12 June 1840. 1/1/28 Vincent Collection, Labour History Archive.

<sup>34</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 9 September 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

Although Place generally approves of Vincent's written response to *Political Justice*, assuring him that "were you to follow your own observations as a rule you could not fail to do well,"<sup>35</sup> he disagrees with Vincent's assessment of Godwin's opinions on political combinations. Godwin, in *Political Justice*, is deeply suspicious of men combining together for political reasons. In Godwin's view, solitary rational thought, and rational conversation between two people are the best means of improving men's reason, but groups are always detrimental to rationality.<sup>36</sup> But Vincent, in a critique that anticipates twentieth-century critiques of Godwin, argues:

Godwin underates the good effect resulting from 'political combinations' or 'clubs'...I think that the combination of the intelligent and virtuous portions of the middle and working class must be productive of the greatest good—the mixing of men together generates discipline...and correct opinions are more rapidly imparted to the rest of society than they would be if left to isolated efforts of individuals...I think Godwin was half afraid of the prevailing prejudices of his day against the Corresponding and other societies.<sup>37</sup>

It is not surprising to find that Vincent, an avowed Chartist, would differ substantially from Godwin on the value of political groups, although his careful historicization of Godwin's own prejudices is notable. Vincent continues, addressing perhaps Godwin's greatest anxiety about political combinations—the demagogue: "I do not believe that political societies favor Demagogues—I think the contrary." We might expect Place to agree with Vincent here, as he was indeed a member of the Corresponding Society Vincent references. But experience has apparently taught him differently: "You do not think that Political Associations form demagogues—I know that they do."<sup>38</sup> Although

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<sup>35</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 11 November 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>36</sup> See my Chapter 1. Godwin claims that, "everything that is usually understood by the term co-operation is, in some degree, an evil." *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Ed. K. Codell Carter, 301.

<sup>37</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 10 November 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>38</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 11 November 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

Place speaks from experience here, a closer look at this correspondence demonstrates that his target is not so much the political associations of the past, but of the present. This debate, about political associations, is part of a larger disagreement between Place and Vincent about the aims and methods of Chartism. Just one letter earlier, after providing the reading instructions for *Political Justice*, Place complains bitterly about the Chartists, “all of you really like other fanatics actually believing that you had the power to force upon the government and the nation the 6 points of the Charter.”<sup>39</sup> Place and Vincent disagree fundamentally on the political power of mass political movements, and this difference of opinion has significant implications for the ways in which the two imagine the ends of Vincent’s imprisoned reading.

In many ways, though, Vincent and Place are in agreement about just what Vincent should get out of his reading. Crucial for them both is the idea that Vincent’s reading will mean that his imprisonment will not have been for naught. As we have seen, at the opening of his correspondence with Place, Vincent regrets that he has “not been able to profit as much in my solitary house as I could have wished.”<sup>40</sup> But thanks to Place and his books, “I am now in a position which will enable me to profit by my imprisonment.”<sup>41</sup> If Vincent, with Place’s help, can make prison be worth the time, then the British government has won no advantage. By the time of Vincent’s release from prison in January of 1841, he and Place both seem confident that Vincent has successfully transformed his imprisonment into an education. In October, Vincent

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<sup>39</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 9 September 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>40</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 22 June 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>41</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 29 June 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection. This phrase is repeated from an earlier letter from Vincent to Minniken, assuring him, of his prison experience, that “I shall derive great profit from it.” Letter to Minniken, 28 February 1840. 1/1/23, Vincent Collection, Labour History Archive, Manchester.

invited his cousin Minniken to his first scheduled public address after his release, which he called “the conclusion of my collegiate studies...my maiden oration in the Town Hall of Leicester.”<sup>42</sup> At the time of his release, Place would repeat this actually quite serious joke, concluding that Vincent should be very pleased with his new ability to discover truth, “for which you may thank your recent college education.”<sup>43</sup>

But what, exactly, had Vincent learned during his prison education? Vincent concludes (and this is the line most often quoted from his letters), that *Political Justice* “is well calculated to calm my impetuous mind...I feel that Godwin will exercise considerable influence over my future conduct.”<sup>44</sup> Vincent is here directly in line with Place, who had suggested that reading Godwin would hopefully result “in making you a much wiser and better man than you would otherwise have been, and enable you to judge so much more correctly than you would otherwise have been.”<sup>45</sup> Both these comments fit neatly into Place’s originally stated goals for Vincent, that he become “a most useful, honourable, and able member of Society.”<sup>46</sup> In fact, Place would write to Talfourd, during the last month of Vincent’s sentence, that he had “supplied Vincent with such books as seemed to me most likely to assist in forming his character permanently.”<sup>47</sup> Both Place and Vincent seem to take Vincent’s reading of Godwin as a transformative moment, one which Vincent thinks will powerfully “influence [his] future conduct” and one which Place feels has made him into a different kind of man.

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<sup>42</sup> Vincent, Letter to Minniken, 5 October 1840. 1/1/36, Vincent Collection.

<sup>43</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 21 January 1841. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>44</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 10 November 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>45</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 9 September 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>46</sup> Place, Letter to Sergeant Talfourd, 20 May 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>47</sup> Place, Letter to Talfourd, 1 January 1841. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

We might take this success story—with Vincent learning just as he should—with a grain of salt, since Vincent’s correspondence with Place was anything but private. Early in their correspondence, Place had warned Vincent, “don’t write anything likely to be offensive to the Chaplain and the Magistrates.”<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, Vincent’s enthusiasm for Godwin seems genuine, and he seems to have indeed been “convinced that the true plan of action for the political and moral reformer is Godwin’s plan of progressively improving the minds of the people.”<sup>49</sup> It is in this continued focus on the “people,” that we can see the ways in which Vincent departs from the narrative of self-improvement laid out for him by Place and Talfourd. After hoping that reading Godwin will help Vincent judge all the better, Place continues to explain what exactly his new mindset will provide: it will “enable you to become a respectable and flourishing man of the world.”<sup>50</sup> Here we can see the different valences that the oft-appearing word “profit” could have in this correspondence: Place’s hope for Vincent seems to be that he will transcend his class-status, and, as he says in a different letter, “make your way in the world.”<sup>51</sup> Vincent disagrees with this suggestion directly, insisting that he is “determined to adhere to the working classes and to aid them in every possible way to obtain the Charter.”<sup>52</sup>

This is the hitch in the plan to rehabilitate Vincent—he does not seem to have departed from his earlier declaration to Place, that “[m]y desire is to learn; and do all the good I can in pushing on the improvement of my fellow workmen.”<sup>53</sup> I do not mean to villify Place here, who was by no means opposed to the improvement of those fellow

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<sup>48</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 27 June 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>49</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 10 November 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>50</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 9 September 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>51</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 11 November 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>52</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 31 December 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>53</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 29 August 1840. Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

workmen. But I would suggest that he and Vincent have very different notions of the kinds of improvement that reading could provide. For Place, reading offers specifically a method of solitary self-improvement, a process which will separate Vincent from his fellows, rather than adhere him more firmly to them. Vincent, on the contrary, consistently thinks of the “improvement” offered by reading as occurring on a mass scale. The Chartist press, with its ever-expanding readership, was thus particularly appealing for Vincent, who spent the length of his imprisonment working to stay connected to the radical press, and thus to its readership, both by writing for papers—his own and others—and by reading them. As we saw above, Vincent spent his first months of imprisonment, at Monmouth, writing regularly for the *Vindicator*, itself no easy task. Francis Hill, who helped Vincent edit the *Vindicator* records in a letter that “I have had a letter from V., with articles for the *Vindicator*, smuggled out. I must be cautious, else his friend [the smuggler] may be compromised.”<sup>54</sup> A year later, while at Oakham, Vincent published an article recommending teetotaling to the Chartists which was published widely, appearing in several of the leading Chartist papers.<sup>55</sup>

While working to get his own writing *out* of prison, Vincent was also doing his best to get radical writing *in*. In June of 1840, Vincent thanked his cousin Minniken for his offer of papers: “You were kind enough to offer to send me a paper daily [but] *You must not send anymore*—as I am sorry to say I am not permitted to receive them.”<sup>56</sup> But a month later, things had changed, thanks to Francis Place’s interference, and the

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<sup>54</sup> Francis Hill, Letter to John Minniken. 28 August 1839. 3/5/1 Vincent Collection, Labour History Archive.

<sup>55</sup> “To the Working Men of Great Britain.” *Chartist Circular* 64 (December 1840) 263. The *Northern Star* advertised the article for sale as a pamphlet: “AN ADDRESS TO THE WORKING MEN OF ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, & WALES; written by Henry Vincent, in Oakham Gaol.” *Northern Star, and Leeds General Advertiser* 195 (August 7, 1841) 2.

<sup>56</sup> Vincent, Letter to Minniken. 17 June 1840. Labour History Archive.

Secretary of State had agreed, conditionally, that Vincent could receive newspapers. In a long letter to Minniken from Oakham, Vincent tries to figure out what exactly this ruling will mean: “I am a radical...therefore My Lord Melbourne of Normandy cannot mean that I should not be allowed Radical stamped newspapers.” Vincent intuits, of course, that since the Chaplain will take a look at anything before it is admitted, the radical papers might not make the cut. But he concludes with a request to his cousin anyway: “No legally stamped paper can be defined by my Lord Melbourne as a seditious paper [...] Let me have what papers you can.”<sup>57</sup> Despite Vincent’s concerns, the radical stamped papers must indeed have been permitted, for by January of 1841, Vincent was in the position of being not only a recipient of papers, but a source. That month, he sent Francis Place a collection of papers: the *Chartist Circular*; the *Midland Counties Illuminator*; and *The Gateshead Observer*, so that he could see a good example of “working men ‘ma[king] themselves heard’...in a most creditable manner”—i.e., an example of the positive possibilities of political associations. Knowing Place’s penchant for collecting papers, Vincent explains that he sends them because “I know you like to see such things.”<sup>58</sup>

This letter marks a shift in the Place/Vincent correspondence, in which both reading material and political analysis begin to flow in the opposite direction. After Vincent’s stand in favor of Chartism, and his impressive analysis of Godwin, Place begins to ask Vincent for his opinions on political questions, rather than the other way round. And in another letter, Vincent regrets not being able to fulfill Place’s requests for more papers: “Unfortunately, I have been in the habit of sending my radical papers to

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<sup>57</sup> Vincent, Letter to Minniken. 29 July, 1840. Labour History Archive.

<sup>58</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place. 6 January, 1841. Place collection. Reel 37.

Ireland when done with.”<sup>59</sup> This moment gives us considerable insight into how important the space of the prison could be to the circulation of the radical press, as Minniken sent Vincent papers, who then sent them all the way to Ireland, or south to Francis Place in London. Such a series of transfers also reminds us how inaccurate circulation numbers can be in predicting the readership of the radical press, since in this case, one paper saw a minimum of three different readers. In my first two chapters, we have seen the ways in which the radical press overcame the obstacles of history, connecting the radical movements of the nineteenth century back to the 1790s, through the republication of texts from that decade. And here, in the case of Vincent, we can see how crucial the radical press was in simultaneously overcoming the present-day obstacles of imprisonment, keeping radical leaders connected to the radical readership, with little regard for the walls of the prison.

### **“Your Own Sweet Voice”: Poetry from Prison**

It was not necessarily a safe thing to do, this writing from prison. Place warned Henry Vincent to be more careful about the writing he was publishing from his cell at Oakham Gaol: “You have been very indiscreet in some at least of your correspondence, which has been published.” For Place, this “seems [...] the very height of folly. [It] would be insanity...to provoke persecution simply from a desire ‘to hear your own sweet voice’.”<sup>60</sup> For Vincent, I would argue, publishing in the radical press was not a solipsistic act, but rather, an attempt to maintain a sense of connection with “the working classes” to

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<sup>59</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place. 15 January 1841. Place Collection. Reel 37.

<sup>60</sup> Place, Letter to Vincent, 11 November 1840, Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

whom he was “determined to adhere.”<sup>61</sup> But Place’s cranky warning, accusing Vincent of singing to himself, raises intriguing questions about the goals of imprisoned writing, and, more broadly, of poetry itself. Place puts the phrase, “your own sweet voice,” which is from Lady Blessington’s *Grace Cassidy; or, The Repealers*, in quotes. We might also hear an echo, however, of Percy Shelley’s famous description of the poet as a nightingale that “sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds.”<sup>62</sup> Prisoners, it would seem, might make the very best poets, writing their poems in total solitude, expressing the despair of the prisoner with no hope for an audience. We will see, however, that on the pages of the radical press, prison poems might serve quite a different purpose.

On May 17, 1820, *The Black Dwarf* (one of the most successful radical weeklies of the eighteen-teens and twenties) published a poem by the political radical Samuel Bamford composed just seven days before, while Bamford—who had been “arrested on a charge of high treason” immediately after Peterloo—was in prison.<sup>63</sup> Both the poem’s title and content emphasize the poet’s particular location. The title “Lines to Jemima” is followed by precise information on the poem’s site and date of composition: “Written in the King’s Bench Prison, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 1820.”<sup>64</sup> This kind of detailed information about a poem’s composition is itself a poetic tradition (“Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on the banks of the river Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798,” for example) but in the case of “Lines for Jemima,” this information serves a very particular purpose.

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<sup>61</sup> Vincent, Letter to Place, 31 December 1840, Mic.Reel 37, Place Collection.

<sup>62</sup> Shelley, “A Defense of Poetry: or, Remarks Suggested by an Essay Entitled ‘The Four Ages of Poetry,’” *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), p. 516.

<sup>63</sup> Samuel Bamford, “Preface,” *Hours in the Bowers* (Manchester: J.P. Jennings and H. Cowdroy, 1834). Bamford, weaver and radical political reformer, is known for his poetry (much of which celebrates and employs the Lancashire dialect), and for his memoirs, which include *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, which George Eliot read while composing *Felix Holt, a Radical*. Bamford was arrested and imprisoned several times, most famously after the Peterloo Massacre; his description of the massacre was reprinted often in the radical press.

<sup>64</sup> *The Black Dwarf*, 4.19 (May 1820), 680.

Knowledge of Bamford's exact location, whether provided by Bamford or not, demonstrates the detailed awareness the writers and editors of the radical press had about the position and conditions of radical political prisoners. Articles on prison conditions were a regular feature of radical weeklies, and when these conditions proved unsatisfactory, prisoners' supporters would often compose and publish petitions to attempt to improve the prisoners' situation—just as Francis Place did for Henry Vincent. These petitions were not necessarily effective, but the radical press's regular reports on prisoners' location and conditions must have provided some sense of oversight. These prisoners had not simply disappeared—the various radical weeklies knew exactly where they were, what they were eating, and what their days were like.<sup>65</sup>

Of course, prisoners and their supporters must still have worried about the effects imprisonment might have on the relationships among members of the movement (and their families), as does Bamford in “Lines to Jemima,” which affirms

I'll not forget thee, O my love!  
 Though in a prison far I be!—  
 I'll not forget thee, O my love,  
 For thou wilt still remember me.<sup>66</sup>

The speaker's insistence that he will not forget depends entirely, in this stanza, on his not being forgotten. The first guarantee of that desire might well be the fact that Bamford's poem was so quickly published by Wooler, the *Black Dwarf's* editor. Bamford, and his prison experience, would not be forgotten because his words were being broadcast to the *Black Dwarf's* significant readership one week after their composition. Although in my first two chapters we have watched the radical press publish texts from the recent past,

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<sup>65</sup> Reel 33 of the Francis Place Collection at the British Library includes an extensive collection of the many articles which appeared in the Chartist press discussing the prison conditions of William Lovett and John Collins, for example.

<sup>66</sup> ll. 1-4

we should not overlook the press's deep investment in the contemporary social, political climate. Many prison writings were published very quickly after their composition. This speed of publication was part of the press's larger project of keeping radical leaders in contact with their followers. If political figures like Bamford and Vincent could still get their writings into the press the same week that they wrote them, then their imprisonment was not effectively isolating them from the radical audience.

In addition to publishing "Lines to Jemima," the *Black Dwarf* took pains to assure Bamford that, whatever Jemima might do, his fellow radicals would certainly remember him. The weekly's very next issue included a brief article on radical political prisoners, providing both biographical information and commentary on their imprisonment. The last prisoner described is Mr. Bamford, a "man of considerable genius" who "might have tuned the harp in the deathless record of his country's fame; but *from whence* should the strains of panegyric issue? From the *darksome cell* to which *that country* has consigned him, without fault and without crime!"<sup>67</sup> Immediately following this article comes another poem, this one "To Mr. S. Bamford, A Patriot and Prisoner in Lincoln Gaol." Bamford, after awaiting trial over the Easter Term, was sentenced and moved to Lincoln Castle, presumably in the very weeks at issue here.<sup>68</sup> The poem foregrounds its connection to Bamford's poem from the week before, explaining below the title that "The following was suggested by his 'Lines to Jemima'."

This poem, whose author appears only as the pseudonym "Elfou," largely ignores Bamford's focus on Jemima, and instead treats exclusively the prisoner's relation to his political supporters:

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<sup>67</sup> *The Black Dwarf*, 4.20 (May 1820), 722.

<sup>68</sup> Bamford, "Preface," *Hours in the Bowers*.

We'll not forget thee, noble Man!  
 Tho' a dungeon's darkness hide thee,  
 Disgrace thee never tyrants can,  
 We'll bless thee more, the more they chide thee.<sup>69</sup>

The opening “we” of this poem, as opposed to the single “I” of Bamford’s poem (addressed to the also singular Jemima), immediately puts Bamford in relation to multiple supporters, making him part of the very group which those responsible for his imprisonment hoped to exclude him from.<sup>70</sup> The stanza insists not only that Bamford is *not* invisible, but that the more “tyrants” attempt to isolate him, the more he will become an honoured figure (“What manly mind but honor thee” [l. 9]). The previous article, on Bamford and his fellow prisoners, had agreed, arguing that “these men consider it AN HONOUR—and count their destiny the surest test of their merit... there are thousands, who envy their confinement.”<sup>71</sup> With both this article and the poetic reply, Thomas Wooler works to transform arrest and imprisonment into a badge of honour, thereby assuring his readers that the British government’s attempts at repression were in fact furthering the radical cause. Elfou’s poem to Bamford suggests that it is his very imprisonment which will, rather than erasing him from radical history, carve his name for eternity. Thanks to Bamford’s willingness to “rush[] to the prison’s gloom,”

The name of BAMFORD on her scroll,  
 Thy goddess [of Liberty] traces with applause,  
 Among the great of daring soul,  
 Who combat in her holy cause.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 4.20 (May 1820) 723. ll. 1-4.

<sup>70</sup> Although “Lines to Jemima” is addressed almost entirely to Jemima, Bamford does end that poem with a recognition that she is not, in fact, the only audience of importance. The poem’s final stanza asserts that they may *bind* but *cannot break*,

This heart so fondly full of thee:--  
 That liveth only for THY sake,  
 And the high cause of LIBERTY. (ll. 13-16)

<sup>71</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 4.20 (May 1820) 722.

<sup>72</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 4.20 (May 1820) 723. ll. 8, 13-16.

Bamford is not only writing in prison—composing poetry for the radical press—he is also *being written*, as his time in prison means that he is inscribed on Liberty’s scroll, not to be forgotten. And just as a reminder of Bamford’s presence (not absence), Elfou’s poem to Bamford is itself immediately followed by yet another poem by Bamford, whose only title is its precise situation: “A scene in the King’s Bench Prison on the night of May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1820.”<sup>73</sup> In this poem, Bamford records his farewell to a fellow patriot, who is being removed to a “prison sure.” The prisoner goes on alone, but Bamford ends by assuring the reader that “the patriot’s God is with him gone, / And he will not be left alone.”<sup>74</sup> Bamford, for one, has already been assured by the *Black Dwarf*, that as long as he writes, he too will not be left alone.

The possibility that texts and their circulation can counteract the dangerous forgetting induced by imprisonment and isolation is a regular feature of prison writing in the radical press. Unsurprisingly, poetry written in prison is particularly interested in the possibilities of permanence offered by the idea of inscription. In 1823, the *Black Dwarf* would publish a poem written by John Bowring, while imprisoned in Calais in 1822.<sup>75</sup> Bowring’s prison poem is itself a meditation on all of the other attempts, by his cell’s long history of prisoners, to be remembered. Bowring’s cell is covered with prisoners’ graffiti, and he muses upon “the various minds, / That had left transcripts on these prison-

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<sup>73</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 4.20 (May 1820) 724.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* ll. 14, 17-18.

<sup>75</sup> Bowring was arrested in France in 1822, and accused of “complicity in an attempt to secure the release of four sergeants” accused of singing republican songs “and of carrying sealed letters of a treasonable nature.” He was released thanks to the intervention of Canning, the foreign secretary. “John Bowring,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* Vol 6 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), p. 988. Bowring’s poem was originally published in *Details of the Arrest, Imprisonment, and Liberation of an Englishman by the Bourbon Government of France* (London: Rowland Hunter and Effingham Wilson, 1823). The poem appears, untitled, in *The Black Dwarf*, 10, no.11 (March 1823), 365-6.

walls.”<sup>76</sup> The speaker records several of the different stories he finds there, from a history of a fall from virtue, to an assertion of innocence. He then begins to quote smaller phrases: “Men / Are bowed by circumstance” and “Man is trained / to perfect wisdom but by perfect woe.”<sup>77</sup> In fact, this poem is composed largely of quotations—of the poem’s 75 lines, 20 of them are set off in quotes, transcriptions of the walls’ transcriptions. The speaker insists that the knowledge and eloquence available on these walls form its own literature:

How oft,  
Have I, with listening ear and busy sense,  
Waited upon your moralizers! Come,  
Classical proud one! Come and show a page  
In all thy catalogue, so rich in lore,  
As this cold wall.<sup>78</sup>

The opening phrase here, with its Wordsworthian echoes (that poet’s speakers “oft [...] In vacant or in pensive mood,” think of daffodils, or “oft, in spirit” turn to the river Wye)<sup>79</sup> offers a different object of repeated, Romantic meditation—prison graffiti. Bowring here turns the prison walls into text, a transformation which also opens the poem: “I have marched up and down this foul abode, / And read its tales of misery: ‘tis a book / Crowded with vice and virtue.”<sup>80</sup> Bowring’s transformative metaphors demonstrate just how deeply the world of prison was imbricated with the world of texts. Many prisoners were not writing letters, or articles for the radical press, but they were still writing on the prison walls. Bowring creates a doubled process of recording, as with

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<sup>76</sup> ll. 26-27.

<sup>77</sup> ll. 53-54, 58-59.

<sup>78</sup> ll. 60-65.

<sup>79</sup> Wordsworth, “I wandered lonely as a Cloud,” *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), pp.303-304, ll.13-14; Wordsworth, “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey,” *William Wordsworth*, pp.131-135, l. 56.

<sup>80</sup> ll. 1-2.

his poem he manages to record for the radical press the bits of text which his fellow prisoners had left on the prison walls.

Of course, most of the prisoners Bowring mentions in his poem are his fellow prisoners only in that they once inhabited the same cell. Their previous efforts at inscription allow Bowring to trace a line of connection between himself and these prisoners. Bowring was a Briton imprisoned in France, and his speaker is silenced by the experience of reading those inscriptions written by other Britons.

There were two trembling lines  
 From one just hurrying to the scaffold: ‘I  
 ‘Now end my course and perish. It were sweet  
 ‘To die in England!’ Carved upon the floor,  
 There were most strange and hieroglyphic forms,  
 Which spoke of British captains—British crews,  
 Captured and there confined [...]  
 I was not mournful—I could not be gay.  
 I heaved no sigh—I could awake no smile:  
 [...] I’ll muse no more. Alas!  
 I am a prisoner.<sup>81</sup>

Bowring’s poem ends here, when the speaker’s identification with those former British prisoners reminds him of his own identity as prisoner. Despite the finality and silence this realization ushers into the poem, I would like to point to the importance of Bowring’s speaker’s identification with those earlier British prisoners. Like Henry Vincent, reminding his cousin that Davison, 1790s radical publisher of Paine’s works, had shared his same prison twenty years before, Bowring here creates a community of prisoners, connecting them across stretches of time, thanks to their shared experience of prison. And more specifically, perhaps, thanks to their shared practice of *recording* that experience.

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<sup>81</sup> ll 64-70, 72-75

Nineteenth-century radicals were adept at constructing bridges between their own political movements and earlier ones—especially those of the 1790s. Like Bowring and his treatment of the prison graffiti, radical editors often made such connections by recycling texts from earlier periods. Editors like Wooler picked and chose, selecting the poems from the past which could be transformed into contemporary political commentary. So although Robert Southey certainly never wrote poems in prison, nineteenth-century radicals’ understandable fascination with prison poems explains Wooler’s decision to publish Southey’s “Inscription for the apartment in Chepstow Castle, where Henry Marten, the Regicide, was imprisoned thirty years,” first published in 1797.<sup>82</sup> Wooler would himself have been particularly interested in prison poems when he published Southey’s poem on Marten in 1821, since he was himself then publishing the *Black Dwarf* from Warwick Gaol. The regularity with which radical publishers were imprisoned, and continued to publish from prison, explains in large part the regular appearance of prison poems in the radical press. Southey’s poem for Marten also boasts the valuable attribute of celebrating a regicide. Marten was sentenced with the death penalty after the English Civil War, for regicide, but because of inaction by the House of Lords, he was left in prison instead.<sup>83</sup>

In his short inscription, (the young, radical) Southey mourns for Marten, who he claims was punished for “Shap[ing] goodliest plans of happiness on earth--/ And peace and liberty.” In return:

For thirty years secluded from mankind—  
Here Marten linger’d. Often have these walls

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<sup>82</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 7.1 (July 1821) 18.

<sup>83</sup> “Henry Marten,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* Vol 36 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), p.911. Southey exaggerates Marten’s isolation somewhat; he was in fact allowed liberty to travel outside Chepstow Castle, and shared his suite of rooms there with his common law wife.

Echoed his footsteps, as with even tread  
He paced around his prison.<sup>84</sup>

In this “Inscription,” Southey’s speaker imagines inscribing the apartment where Marten was held, and thus performing the same work of recording as Bowring and the other prisoners of his poem. This passage also suggests that Marten may have left his own physical inscription on the floor of his prison, with his “even tread.” We might be reminded of Byron’s “Sonnet on Chillon,” in which the prisoner’s “very steps have left a trace.” And even if we weren’t reminded of that sonnet, if we were readers of the *Black Dwarf* we soon would be, as it was published just one week later.<sup>85</sup>

The radical press’s interest in poem’s written *by* prisoners (which would continue in the Chartist period) thus also influenced the (now) canonical Romantic works which appeared on the press’s pages. These poems by Southey and Byron were of course not written from prison, but they do participate in a particular Romantic conception of imprisonment, a conception which looks different when seen in relation to the poems written from prison in the radical press. Byron’s “Prisoner of Chillon,” printed with the “Sonnet on Chillon” as a preface, is perhaps the most famous of Romantic poems about imprisonment, but the Romantic fixation on isolation and solitude means that metaphors of imprisonment crop up often—Coleridge’s “This Lime-tree Bower My Prison,” for example.<sup>86</sup>

The radical press was less than enthralled by this Romantic fascination with isolation, since one of the British government’s central means of attack was to isolate radical leaders. As we have seen, it was politically necessary for the radical press to

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<sup>84</sup> ll. 1-4

<sup>85</sup> “Sonnet on Chillon.” *The Black Dwarf*. 7.2 (July 1821) 54. ln 11.

<sup>86</sup> For more on this trope, see Brombert, “The Happy Prison: A Recurring Romantic Metaphor.”

convince its readers that imprisonment was not really isolation at all, that radical prisoners like Samuel Bamford and Henry Vincent remained connected to the movement and their followers despite their physical location in gaol. *The Black Dwarf's* decision to publish the "Sonnet on Chillon," but not "The Prisoner of Chillon" reflects just this perspective. Scholars have long been dissatisfied by the lack of coherence between Byron's prefatory sonnet and the poem which follows it. Most agree that "Prisoner" was written first, and that the Sonnet and a prose introduction were added later, out of deference to the historical figure Bonnivard, who is mentioned specifically in the Sonnet, but whose historical experience seems to have very little to do with the events of "The Prisoner of Chillon."<sup>87</sup> The "Sonnet on Chillon" provides a utopian vision of hope which is decidedly lacking from the longer poem.

The "Sonnet," which appears alone on the pages of *The Black Dwarf*, runs as follows:

Eternal spirit of the chainless mind!  
 Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art,  
 For there thy habitation is the heart—  
 The heart which love of thee alone can bind;  
 And when thy sons to fetters are consign'd—  
     To fetters and the damp vault's dayless gloom,  
     Their country conquers with their martyrdom,  
 And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.  
 Chillon! thy prison is a holy place,  
     And thy sad floor an altar, for 'twas trod—  
 Until his very steps have left a trace,  
     Worn—as if thy cold pavement were a sod—

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<sup>87</sup> See, among others, Ian Dennis, "'Making Death a Victory': Victimhood and Power in Byron's 'Prometheus' and 'The Prisoner of Chillon.'" *Keats-Shelley Journal* 50 (2001) 144-61, esp. 150. It also seems likely that Byron added the sonnet out of his own commitment to political liberty. See Vincent Newey, "Byron's 'Prisoner of Chillon': The Poetry of Being and the Poetry of Belief," *Bulletin of the Keats-Shelley Memorial* 35 (1984), 54-70. For a reading of "The Prisoner of Chillon" that argues that its politics are not radical at all, but rather that the poem grieves for the fall of the aristocracy, and the loss of identity based on hierarchy, see Andrea Henderson, "From 'race' to 'place' in 'The Prisoner of Chillon,'" *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

By Bonnivard! May none these marks efface!  
For they appeal from tyranny to God.<sup>88</sup>

This sonnet constructs imprisonment as an aid, rather than a hindrance to the spread of freedom. Like Henry Vincent, telling his readership that he appreciates this chance to “denounce” the tyrants from his prison cell, Byron argues here that freedom springs *from* the prison, finding “wings on every wind.” This poem insists that liberty and freedom defeat imprisonment, that “martyrdom” conquers. Essential to both this poem, and to the ideology of the radical press, was the belief that prisoners would not be forgotten. Thus Byron’s insistence that Bonnivard’s own inscription, the trace of his steps, remain: “May none these marks efface!”

The suggestion lingers, however, especially given the rhyme of “trace” with “efface,” that Bonnivard’s inscription could indeed disappear. That is why the poet himself is necessary—to record Bonnivard’s experience for posterity even if he cannot. But while the prisoner of the “Sonnet” seems to remain connected, however tenuously, to the march of freedom, the speaker of “The Prisoner of Chillon,” tells a different story, in which, during his long imprisonment, the prisoner has become completely disconnected from both the outside world and any desire for liberty. By the poem’s end, the speaker has habituated himself so thoroughly to his prison, that he “Regain[s] [his] freedom with a sigh.”<sup>89</sup> The prison has become “a second home,”<sup>90</sup> not so different from the outside world since

I had buried one and all,

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<sup>88</sup> “Sonnet on Chillon,” *The Black Dwarf*, 7, no.2 (July 1821), 54. The sonnet was originally published as a preface to “The Prisoner of Chillon.” Both were first published, together, in 1816.

<sup>89</sup> Byron, “The Prisoner of Chillon,” *Byron’s Poetry*, ed. Frank D. McConnell (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 123, l. 392.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 380

Who loved me in a human shape;  
 And the whole earth would henceforth be  
 A wider prison unto me:  
 No child—no sire—no kin had I,  
 No partner in my misery;<sup>91</sup>

The speaker has, by this point in the poem, seen both his brothers pine and die in his same cell, and might be imagined to feel even more profoundly alone than a prisoner who had been alone from the start (as was the case with the historical Bonivard). The death of the speaker's second brother causes a breakdown, in which the speaker feels himself surrounded by "vacancy absorbing space," and "had no thought, no feeling—none-- / Among the stones I stood a stone."<sup>92</sup> The unsettling power of Byron's "Prisoner" lies in its delineation of the psychological effects of isolation. Rather than transforming prison into an opportunity for self-education and improvement, this prisoner is transformed *by* prison, becoming in the end, not a friend to liberty, but a "friend" to his chains.<sup>93</sup>

We might imagine Byron's "Prisoner of Chillon" as the lacuna in the radical press's representation of prison, as the experience that cannot be represented there, for reasons of both politics and practicality. On one level, the radical press was right; this kind of extended isolated imprisonment was simply not how imprisonment tended to work in Britain. When Byron wanted to imagine soul-destroying isolation, he turned to Chillon, a prison in Switzerland. Vincent Newey sees a chain of connection between Byron's "Prisoner" and the "Bastille" section of Cowper's *The Task*, whose long-isolated prisoner is of course in France.<sup>94</sup> In most British prisons in the early nineteenth-century,

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. ll. 320-325.

<sup>92</sup> ll. 243, 235-6.

<sup>93</sup> l. 389.

<sup>94</sup> Newey, 66-69.

prisoners shared cells, and had varying amounts of contact with the outside world.<sup>95</sup> But as the interest in penitentiaries rose over the course of the century, extreme isolation become more and more a possible condition of British imprisonment. Henry Vincent, as we have seen, spent several months in isolation at Millbank penitentiary, several months which account for a blank space in Vincent's story as I have recounted it here. There are no letters from Vincent in Millbank, of course, since no letters were allowed. The project of Millbank was to make Vincent unrepresentable—to make him invisible and unavailable to his radical followers.

Even Byron's prisoner was not entirely isolated, however, even after his brothers' death. At his lowest moment, the prisoner is awoken from his torpor by a visitor:

A light broke in upon my brain,--  
 It was the carol of a bird;  
 It ceased, and then it came again,  
 The sweetest song ear ever heard<sup>96</sup>

This scene offers one of several moments in which the prisoner seems to be aided by the beneficence of nature (contemporary reviews of the poem pointed out this poem's similarities to the work of the "Lake School"<sup>97</sup>) but since the bird all too quickly abandons the prisoner, other critics have seen it as an example of the inability of nature to remedy psychological torment.<sup>98</sup> But what I would like to focus on in this scene is the bird's possible position as a figure for the poet, with its "sweetest song."

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<sup>95</sup> There were exceptions, of course. As John Bugg explains in his "Close Confinement: John Thelwall and the Romantic Prison," in the 1790s some political prisoners, including John Thelwall, were kept in solitary isolation in the Tower of London.

<sup>96</sup> ll. 251-255, 268-270.

<sup>97</sup> See *The Critical Review*, 4 (1816), 568-73.

<sup>98</sup> Newey, "Byron's 'Prisoner of Chillon': The Poetry of Being and the Poetry of Belief." Gerald Wood, on a different note, argues that the prisoner's central problem in "Chillon" is his isolation from nature ("Nature and Narrative in Byron's 'The Prisoner of Chillon.'" *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 24 [1975], 108-17).

Birds, prisoners, and poets have a long history together: Henry Vincent himself turned to metaphors of birds and poetry in order to articulate his relationship with his friends and followers outside the prison's walls. Vincent's friend Minniken seems to have assumed (like the British government) that he would not be hearing from Vincent while in prison. Vincent hurries to correct this misapprehension:

Brother—You were wrong in supposing that the bird, which had long enjoyed the sweets of Liberty and which had warbled forth his lays of freedom amidst the cultivated and uncultivated fields of nature, would, when caught within the meshes of a net cunningly woven by the hands of jealousy and tyranny and afterwards placed within a cage—you were wrong, I say, to suppose that, when thus pent up, he would burrow himself in the sand at the bottom of *that cage*, and not cherish and sing ‘the songs of other days.’ The bird loves his mates the more when he is forcibly torn from them—and he cherishes more fondly that Liberty which first called forth his sonnets.<sup>99</sup>

Vincent here imagines himself as a poetic bird, but he uses that trope, not to express his isolation, but rather to present himself as a bird with mates, as a bird who sings his songs as a means of remaining connected to those mates. But Vincent's deployment of this trope is somewhat unique: when birds and prisoners appear in the canonical nineteenth-century depictions of the poet, they offer nothing if not solitude.

John Stuart Mill's meditation on poetry, first published in 1833, famously differentiates poetry from eloquence by arguing that “poetry is overheard [...it] is feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude.”<sup>100</sup> Mill clarifies what he might mean by “overheard” elsewhere in that original essay (in a passage that Mill removed from

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<sup>99</sup> Vincent, Letter to John Minniken, 21 May 1839, 1/1/15, Vincent Collection.

<sup>100</sup> “What is Poetry?” *Monthly Repository* (January 1833); rpt. in *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, eds. Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview P, 1999), p. 1216.

later editions).<sup>101</sup> There, Mill muses upon a poem by Burns which begins “My heart’s in the Highlands.” Mill wonders, “Who can hear those affecting words, married to as affecting an air, and fancy that he sees the singer? That song has always seemed to us like the lament of a prisoner in a solitary cell, ourselves listening, unseen, in the next.”<sup>102</sup> Burns’ poem itself is wistful and homesick, but the content in no way suggests imprisonment—that is Mill’s own imaginative addition. The striking similarity between this description and Mill’s definition of poetry suggests, I think, that the vision of an imprisoned poet is central to Mill’s conception of poetry. If “moments of solitude” are the prerequisite for the creation of poetry, then, for Mill, prison would seem to be the ideal space for creating poetry.

As we learn from Percy Shelley, though, prisoners are not the only lonely poets. In “A Defense of Poetry,” Shelley anticipates Mill (although his essay, written in 1821, was not published until 1840) with a very similar definition of the poet, which I will now quote in full: “A Poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.”<sup>103</sup> Birds and prisoners flit in and out of these definitions—twin figures for the poet. The idealized prisoner offers perfect isolation, while the vision of the bird offers a free-wheeling independence—an idea that helps cover over the decided *lack* of independence which too much thinking about real prisoners might suggest. The similarity of Mill and Shelley’s definitions of poetry should perhaps not surprise, in that they are both

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<sup>101</sup> The version of “What is Poetry” reprinted as the first half of “Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties” in *Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical, and Historical* (1859) does not include the Burns passage. Rpt. of *Dissertations and Discussions* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1973).

<sup>102</sup> “What is Poetry?” 1217.

<sup>103</sup> “A Defense of Poetry,” 516.

powerfully informed by the vision of the poet constructed by the Romantic poetry of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Shelley is in fact referencing in part his own poem, “To a Skylark,” published a year before he wrote “Defense of Poetry.”

There, Shelley compares the skylark to

a Poet hidden  
In the light of thought,  
Singing hymns unbidden,  
Till the world is wrought  
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not <sup>104</sup>

But Wordsworth, for one, might not have been so pleased to imagine himself as “unbidden” and only overheard—when he defines the Poet in his 1802 “Preface,” he famously imagines a “man speaking *to men*” (my italics).<sup>105</sup> The debate about the extent to which the Romantic poets should be considered “expressive” rather than “pragmatic” is a complicated one, and goes all the way back to Shelley, Mill, and Wordsworth themselves.<sup>106</sup> But what we can conclude here is that the radical press would have had very little interest in their imprisoned poets being only overheard, or in them singing only to themselves. Henry Vincent’s “own sweet voice” had in it the sweetness of eloquence, rather than poetry. Despite Place’s fears, Vincent’s voice in the radical press was powerfully directed outward; to return to Mill, “Eloquence is feeling pouring itself ‘out’ to other minds, courting their sympathy, or endeavoring to influence their belief, or [and this is perhaps the most relevant for a Chartist leader] move them to passion or to action.”<sup>107</sup> Vincent was singing not to himself, but to his followers. And in this he was directly in line with the radical press: the last thing radical editors wanted was for their

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<sup>104</sup> “To a Skylark.” *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*. 305. ll. 36-40.

<sup>105</sup> “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,” *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, p.603.

<sup>106</sup> See M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1953).

<sup>107</sup> “What is Poetry?” 1217.

readers to be “entranced [...] yet know not whence or why.”<sup>108</sup> Thus the careful tagging of poems like those by Bamford, marking the poet’s exact date and location, and providing biographical details, so that everyone knew “whence or why.”

The goal of the radical press was to open up the prison, using the textual transfer from prisoner to the outside, and from the outside back to the prisoner to keep open the lines of communication, convincing everyone that the prison could not hold. But in Mill’s metaphor for poetry, he imagines things moving in the opposite direction; in order to hear the imagined imprisoned poet, the listeners too must enter the prison: “listening, unseen, in the next [cell].”<sup>109</sup> Of course, that was all too real a danger for the radical friends of political prisoners, who might easily find themselves in the next cell over. Mill’s passage shares with Byron’s “Prisoner of Chillon” a fascination with the isolating effects of imprisonment. It is no accident, of course, that we find this fascination in the writings of authors who were never themselves in prison. Byron and Mill are here trading on the important Romantic trope of imprisonment—prison as metaphor rather than experience. In my final section, we will see the ways in which Chartists drew on both these traditions, negotiating the complex combination of prison as both Romantic trope and painfully lived experience.

### **The Chartist Thrush**

Thus far, my focus has been on the prison poetry of the 1820s, printed—or reprinted—by *The Black Dwarf*. But I will now turn briefly to the 1840s, and to William

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<sup>108</sup> Shelley, “A Defense of Poetry,” 516.

<sup>109</sup> “What is Poetry?” 1216

Aitken,<sup>110</sup> one of the many, many Chartist poets. Although the early nineteenth century certainly saw its own radical, working-class poets (Samuel Bamford, for example), the wealth of poetry written in aid of the Charter, by Chartists themselves, was unprecedented. Although the Chartist press did continue to reprint some poetry written earlier in the century, the vast majority of the poetry on its pages was contemporary, a fact which distinguishes it from the radical press of the 1820s. Also distinguishing the prison poetry of the 1840s from that of the 1820s is the fact that by the 1840s, the Romantic tropes of nature, inspiration, and isolation were themselves being put to use by Chartist poets.

In 1841, *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal* published William Aitken's "The Thrush." Just as Samuel Bamford's poems from prison in *The Black Dwarf* were preceded by detailed information on their place of composition, *McDouall's* prefaced "The Thrush" with an explanatory note by Aitken: "The following little Poem was composed while suffering nine months' imprisonment for what is termed "Seditious Conspiracy." upon hearing, in the summer months, a Thrush sing, night and morning, while locked up in my cell."<sup>111</sup> With its careful positioning of the imprisoned poet, this poem follows the tradition of radical prison poetry we saw in *The Black Dwarf*—a tradition which *McDouall's* renewed in its opening number. There, the weekly's "Poetry" section began the very long "The March of the Bondsman" (which was continued over multiple issues) with the head note, "When these verses were written the

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<sup>110</sup> For more on Aitken, particularly on his own autobiography, see Robert G. Hall "Chartism Remembered: William Aitken, Liberalism, and the Politics of Memory," *The Journal of British Studies*, 38, no.4 (1999), 445-470. Aitken was arrested in August of 1839 for his role in encouraging a three-day strike, "on charges of seditious conspiracy and speeches and unlawful assembly" ("Chartism Remembered," p. 466).

<sup>111</sup> "The Thrush." *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal* 3 (April 1841) 24. Later *McDouall's Chartist Journal and Trades' Advocate*. Rpt. New York: Greenwood Reprint Corporation, 1968.

writer had no other book allowed him save the Bible. His home was a dungeon.”<sup>112</sup> This poet is never identified. William Aitken, however, who is identified as the author of “The Thrush,” was an important Chartist, and the publication of his poem draws on the radical tradition of keeping radical readers in touch with their imprisoned leaders. But the poem “The Thrush” itself draws on the other tradition I have been tracing in this chapter—the idealized Romantic version of the solitary poet as bird and/or prisoner. Chartist poets drew heavily upon the Romantic poets that came before them,<sup>113</sup> most particularly Percy Shelley, whose “To a Skylark” is a clear precursor for Aitken’s “The Thrush.” In the work of a Chartist poet like Aitken, we can see the confluence of these two very different strains of prison poetry—the ideal and the very real.

Although Aitken’s preface, detailed and resentful as it is of his imprisonment for “what is termed ‘Seditious Conspiracy’” feels like a call to his fellow radicals, his poem privileges isolation more than we might expect. Although the speaker regrets that he is “bound in prison strong” while the thrush “sing’st in triumph all day long,” he celebrates not only the bird’s “LIBERTY” but also its solitude. The thrush, an apparent follower of Mill and Shelley, seems to be singing for itself.

Rejoicing in thy loud notes clear,  
 Thou hast no sorrow, know’st no fear,  
 Compar’d with thine, man knows no joy,  
 His fellow-man his hopes destroy;<sup>114</sup>

The idea that birds are better off than people is a common enough conceit, especially in early nineteenth-century poetry, where Shelley begs his skylark to “Teach me half the gladness / That thy brain must know”<sup>115</sup> and Keats’s nightingale “hast never known, /

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<sup>112</sup> *McDouall’s* 1 (April 1841) 8.

<sup>113</sup> See Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: a Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-class Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1974) and Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*.

<sup>114</sup> *McDouall’s* 3 (April 1841) 24. ll. 7-10.

The weariness, the fever, and the fret”<sup>116</sup> of human suffering. At the century’s end, Hardy’s own thrush is the possessor of “Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew / And I was unaware.”<sup>117</sup> The beauty of all these birds’ songs, including Aitken’s, seems to depend on their distance and immunity from the human condition. But in Aitken’s “The Thrush,” the problems of that condition are not the general ones of mortality so much as the particular problem of “fellow-man.” This indictment of “fellow-man,” while clearly directed at those responsible for Aitken’s imprisonment, nonetheless suggests that a better human life might be one of solitude. Aitken’s final wish for his thrush is that it remain undisturbed:

May no rude school boy find thy nest,  
Or e’er disturb thy peaceful rest;  
But sit and sing for summers long,  
Pleased and pleasing with thy song,<sup>118</sup>

Aitken’s closing line here offers another version of Mill and Shelley’s definitions of poetry, with the thrush managing to “please” its audience because it begins by “pleasing” itself. The thrush seems to be able to do just that because of its peaceful, solitary rest. I am not suggesting that in idealizing the thrush’s solitude Aitken is idealizing prison—on the contrary, his poem and its preface offer a clear critique of his unfair imprisonment. But I do want to point out the tensions that emerge around the questions of solitude and community when a poet like Aiken builds upon these two opposing traditions—his poem criticizes prison while idealizing solitude, and reaches out to mobilize the radical community while simultaneously longing for the undisturbed peace and quiet that seems

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<sup>115</sup> “To a Skylark,” *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*. 307. ll. 101-102

<sup>116</sup> “Ode to a Nightingale,” *John Keats: The Major Works*, ed. Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), p.286, ll. 22-23.

<sup>117</sup> “The Darkling Thrush,” *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Samuel Hynes. Vol 1 (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1982), p.188, ll. 30-31.

<sup>118</sup> Aitken, ll. 21-24.

to make for poetry. The very fact that Aitken composes his own “song” while in prison suggests that perhaps prison does provide the conditions for poetic composition.

Of course, we might expect these poets to argue that they were able to compose poetry *despite* not because of their imprisonment. *The Black Dwarf*, as we saw above, suggested that Samuel Bamford “might have tuned the harp in the deathless record of his country’s fame” but was instead issuing “the strains of panegyric [...] From the *darksome cell* to which *that country* has consigned him.”<sup>119</sup> Here, the *Dwarf* is sure that Bamford would have been a poet either way—what his imprisonment has done is to shape the kind of poetry he will write. Whereas he could have been a patriot poet—praising his country—he instead offers a powerful voice of critique. Prison did not make Bamford a poet, but it did make him the kind of poet he is. It was absolutely crucial for the radical press to transform prison into something useful, an opportunity, rather than a defeat, so prison does tend to emerge as a catalyst for poetry, particularly the poetry of radical critique. When Thomas Wooler of *The Black Dwarf* was himself imprisoned, he complained bitterly of the experience, but did point out that his position had uniquely equipped him for the project at hand. Wooler explains that while in prison he planned to write a history of English injustice, as “My leisure affords me the opportunity of collecting the materials and my indignation at perceiving the deceptions that are passing current, will be a sufficient incentive.”<sup>120</sup> Prison provides both leisure and indignation—two prerequisites, perhaps, of radical poetry.

The critiques of England that emanated from prisoners like Wooler and Aitken depended on their particular perspective, on their position as prisoners. But of course you

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<sup>119</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 4.20 (May 1820) 722.

<sup>120</sup> *The Black Dwarf* 8.2 (January 1822) 59

can't *actually* see very much from prison—some cells certainly had windows, of course, but the idea of what can be “seen” from a cell is almost necessarily metaphorical. These prisoners have a privileged vision because they *can't* see. If we return to William Aitken's “The Thrush,” we can see that though the poet describes the bird's freewheeling flights and restful nest, Aitken's readers are well aware that the poet is envisioning the bird only in his mind's eye, since he is careful to remind his readers that he is in prison. This kind of imaginative vision accounts for the bulk of Aitken's poem “The Captive's Dream,” which was published in both *The Chartist Circular* and *McDouall's Chartist Journal and Trades Advocate*.<sup>121</sup> Like “The Thrush,” “The Captive's Dream” is prefaced by a brief description of the conditions of its composition: “The following verses were composed in my cell, at the close of a nine months' imprisonment, for ‘Seditious Conspiracy,’ which means, in these days, haters of poverty and oppression.” It is difficult to imagine that Aitken can see much from his cell, but either way, he makes clear his lack of actual vision by opening the poem as darkness descends: “When night o'er earth her mantle threw, / Screening earth's beauties from our view.”<sup>122</sup> With his eyes closed, “lull'd . . . to sleep,”<sup>123</sup> Aitken's speaker begins to dream:

While in my cell confin'd I lay,  
And slumbers rul'd with leaden sway,  
I dream'd that happy time was come,  
That brought me to my long lost home.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> “The Captive's Dream.” *The Chartist Circular* 88 (May 1841) 372; “The Captive's Dream.” *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal* 7 (May 1841) 56. Later *McDouall's Chartist Journal and Trades' Advocate*. Rpt. New York: Greenwood Reprint Corporation, 1968.

<sup>122</sup> ll. 1-2.

<sup>123</sup> l. 4.

<sup>124</sup> ll. 5-8.

At first, the speaker dreams of his home and family, but quickly transitions to a utopian vision of his fellow working men, who sit down in the midst of their frustration, and start to discuss their problems:

The working-men commenced debate,  
Concerning the affairs of state;  
Bright reason pointed out their wrongs,  
And what to ev'ry man belongs.

Then indignation seiz'd them all,  
[...]  
And by a friendly unity,  
They slew the monster tyranny.

EQUALITY her banner wav'd,  
And from destruction Britain sav'd;  
Despotic laws were known no more,  
And freedom rang from shore to shore.<sup>125</sup>

The speaker ends his poem when he awakes, “alas! ‘twas but a dream.”<sup>126</sup> He ends with the return to prison, like Bowring’s speaker, who returns from his imagined identification with generations of prisoners to his own condition: “Alas! / *I* am a prisoner.” But these final lines do not, of course, negate the possibility and potential of the flight. Keats too finds himself back with his “sole self,” although he, famously, is not so clear on the waking or sleeping.<sup>127</sup> Keats and his nightingale serve to remind us how birdlike such dreaming flights of fancy could be, flying free from prison walls, and free from human travail.

The idea that imprisonment could provide a kind of heightened perception is one more place in which the Romantic traditions of the isolated poet, and the radical press’s tradition of turning prison to good use, converge. In his “Working-Man’s Song,” Ernest

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<sup>125</sup> ll. 21-32.

<sup>126</sup> l. 36.

<sup>127</sup> “Ode to a Nightingale.” ll. 72, 80.

Jones, the most famous of the Chartist poets, explains that working men see England “from gaol and Bastille!” Such a view enables them to see a very different England, one in need of correction.<sup>128</sup> And Samuel Bamford’s “Hymn to Hope,” offers its own utopian vision from prison.<sup>129</sup> But prison doesn’t just make for utopian poetry; it could also, for the radical press and its readers, make for good advertising. Bamford used the “Preface” to his 1834 collection, *Hours in the Bowers*, to explain the story of his imprisonment (he too was moved from prison to prison), and to finally claim “that, in short he has been confined in a greater number of English Prisons, for the cause of freedom, (by which he means that of reform), than any other Englishman living.”<sup>130</sup> Bamford’s collection was reviewed in *Tait’s*, and that review itself was then reprinted in *The Chartist Circular* in 1841.<sup>131</sup> The review takes its cue from Bamford’s preface and focuses on the poet’s prison history as a way of recommending his collection. As the article explains, Bamford was “dragged from prison to prison, charged with high treason [...] branded as a felon—punished because his heart loved all men—because he wished to see them all free, happy, and comfortable.” The suggestion of this review is that the value of Bamford’s *Hours in the Bowers* lies, at least in part, in the poet’s experiences in prison. Bamford himself seems to recognize this fact, in his decision to spend most his preface talking as much about prison as about poetry.

I will close here by turning much too briefly to the most famous of the Chartist poems written from prison, Thomas Cooper’s epic, *Purgatory of Suicides*. As I am

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<sup>128</sup> Ernest Jones, “The Working Man’s Song.” *Northern Star, and National Trades’ Journal* 10.492 (May 1847) 3. ll. 11-15.

<sup>129</sup> “Hymn to Hope.” *Hours in the Bowers*, 50-51.

<sup>130</sup> “Preface.” *Hours in the Bowers*.

<sup>131</sup> “Politics of Poets No. IX.” *The Chartist Circular* 67 (January 1841) 283. Abridged from *Tait’s Magazine*.

concerned primarily here with thinking though the genre of the short, lyric prison poem, I do not have the space to devote my full attention to Cooper's fascinating epic.<sup>132</sup> But this significant poem serves as a reminder of how important an author's status as prisoner could be. The advertisements for *Purgatory* make much of Cooper's having written the long epic in prison. The poem's subtitle is "A Prison-Rhyme," which became the primary title by which the poem was referenced in the Chartist press.<sup>133</sup> The *Northern Star* advertised Cooper's poem along with an advertisement for a series of lectures by the Chartist: "Mr. THOMAS COOPER (late of Stafford Gaol, and author of the forthcoming Chartist epic, written in his imprisonment [...]) will commence a series of TWELVE LECTURES." Since this advertisement also includes the poem's subtitle ("A Prison-Rhyme") this brief advertisement references Cooper's imprisonment three times—his prison experience is the mark of his authority and credibility as a lecturer. Henry Vincent too knew the importance of his status as a former prisoner. In a speech reported in *The Northern Star*, Vincent gave "an account of his [...] imprisonment, and his sufferings in Monmouth Gaol, the Milbank Penitentiary, and in Oakham Gaol."<sup>134</sup>

Vincent and Cooper were both popular figures on the lecture circuit after their release from prison, but both these Chartists were also, of course, lecturers before their imprisonment, famous for just those inflammatory speeches which would land them behind prison walls. Thomas Cooper was arrested and ultimately indicted for seditious conspiracy for a speech he made in August of 1842—known as the "Slaves, toil no more!" speech. Cooper was imprisoned in an effort to silence him, but when he sat down

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<sup>132</sup> For a detailed reading of the ways in which Cooper's formal strategies convey the poem's politics, see Kuduk, Stephanie. "Sedition, Chartism, and Epic Poetry in Thomas Cooper's *The Purgatory of Suicides*," *Victorian Poetry* 39.2 (Summer 2001): 165-86.

<sup>133</sup> Kuduk, 183.

<sup>134</sup> *Northern Star, and Leeds General Advertiser* 4.208 (November 1841) 2.

to write his epic poem while in prison, he began by rewriting that speech, in Spenserian verse.<sup>135</sup> The poem's opening stanzas consist of a poeticized version of his speech, the very speech for which he had been imprisoned. While in prison then, Cooper was continuing to do exactly that for which he had been imprisoned.<sup>136</sup> This was the problem of nineteenth-century radical prisoners, who were so often imprisoned for their textual exploits, but if given the chance continued those exploits with relish from within their prison's walls. The imprisonment of early nineteenth-century radicals was overwhelmingly directed at their text-based political agitations, but thanks to the flexible accessibility of most nineteenth-century prisons, and the ceaseless efforts of the radical press, those radical texts could not be so easily contained. The prison became a central site for radical print culture, as poems, articles, and radical papers themselves moved in and out of prison. Nineteenth-century radical readers did not have to strain their ears to hear the "sweet voice" of the radical prisoner.

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<sup>135</sup> Not writing, technically. Cooper was denied pen and paper at first, and committed the early stanzas to memory. Kuduck, 168.

<sup>136</sup> Cooper's original "crime" was the spoken word rather than the written, but the line between the two is blurred by the fact that political speeches were routinely reprinted in the radical press.

## Chapter 4

## George Eliot, George Jacob Holyoake, and the Politics of Quotation

In 1842 George White, an imprisoned Chartist, posted a letter from Warwick Gaol to his friend George Jacob Holyoake, imprisoned for atheism<sup>1</sup> at Gloucester Gaol.

Brother George,

How are you getting on in your Country Seat at Gloucester? [...] I think we had better act like the Aristocracy in future, that is give up our old surnames and adopt the title of our respective Country Seats, You would then be called George Jacob Gloucester and my title would be George Warwick.<sup>2</sup>

White uses the experience of prison to bring together Chartist and Atheist, both George's, and both—tongue in cheek—looking to usurp aristocratic power. Although Holyoake certainly had acquaintances with various Chartists before his imprisonment, I would argue that his six months in prison cemented his position as a political radical. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, although the British government worked to isolate Chartists (and in this case atheists as well) by sending them to gaol, prison nonetheless became a crucial site for building political alliances. Henry Vincent shored up his relationship with the longtime radical Francis Place while in prison, whereas Holyoake's

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<sup>1</sup> Holyoake came to the notice of the local authorities while lecturing for Robert Owen's movement, when—after avoiding religion in his talk—he replied, in answer to a question, and in response to a colleague's recent arrest, "I flee the Bible as a viper." He was officially arrested for atheism several days later, when he gave a talk which he knew the authorities would attend, and for which he knew he would be subsequently arrested. He served six months imprisonment in Gloucester Gaol, and later published his own account of the trial in *The History of the Last Trial by Jury for Atheism in England* (London: James Watson, 1851). See Joseph McCabe, *Life and Letters of George Jacob Holyoake*. 2 vols. (London: Watts & Co, 1908) 1: 65.

<sup>2</sup> George White, Letter to George Jacob Holyoake, 4 September, 1842. George Jacob Holyoake Collection, #73. National Co-operative Archive, Manchester.

sentence brought him to the attention of Richard Carlile, the most important radical publisher of the early nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Carlile, himself a veteran prisoner, was also an expert at turning imprisoned “time” to good use. In a letter to Holyoake, he assured him that his time spent in prison would be worthwhile: “The moral world shall lose nothing in progress through your imprisonment [...] Let your imprisonment be like a rod in pickle for your enemies. This was my sustaining resolution through nine years.”<sup>4</sup>

In his autobiography, *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, Holyoake describes his imprisonment as a foundational moment in his political career: “These were [my] college days of learning [...] Graduating in a gaol was not a recommendation afterwards to profitable employment, and [I] became a wandering speaker on prohibited subjects of usefulness and progress.”<sup>5</sup> Holyoake’s ensuing career, which would span the remainder of the century, would see him involved in almost every radical political movement of the nineteenth century. Born in Birmingham in 1817, he began his working life in the iron foundry where his father also worked. He was an active proponent of Robert Owen’s brand of socialism in his early days, an involved though often reluctant Chartist, a central figure in the movement to repeal the “Taxes on Knowledge,” a leader of both the Secular and Co-operative movements in the second half of the century, and an important voice in the debates over the Second Reform Act.<sup>6</sup> The diversity of Holyoake’s political interests—coupled with his very long political life—makes for an exceedingly complex

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<sup>3</sup> During his imprisonment, Carlile kept both his paper, *The Republican*, and his printing shop going thanks to the help of more than 150 volunteers, who among them ended up serving 200 years of imprisonment. For more on Carlile, see E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the Working Class*, 720-728.

<sup>4</sup> Qtd. in McCabe *Life and Letters*, 1: 80-81.

<sup>5</sup> *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*, 2 vols. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893) Vol 1: 5.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Holyoake’s biography, see McCabe, *Life and Letters*; Barbara Blasak, *George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) and the Development of the British Cooperative Movement* (Lewison, NY: Edwin Mellen P, 1988); and Lee E. Gregel, *George Jacob Holyoake: A Study in the Evolution of a Victorian Radical* (Philadelphia: Porcupine P, 1976).

political identity. At times, Holyoake was seen as a heroic fighter for working-class rights, at others as a traitor to that cause, thanks to his enthusiasm for middle-class liberalism. The complexity of Holyoake's politics owes much to his lifelong effort to build consensus amongst diverse and distinct political groups. It is that effort that I will trace in the pages that follow, particularly as it was reflected in Holyoake's strategies of quotation.

In this chapter, I turn my attention to the second half of the nineteenth century, using George Jacob Holyoake's long and expansive career to trace the continuities and transformations in the ways in which radical political papers quoted, excerpted, and reprinted the standard works of literary history over the course of the nineteenth century. There was no author Holyoake liked quoting better than George Eliot. A look at the methods by which Holyoake extracted and reprinted Eliot's novels and poetry offers a window onto the large-scale shifts in reading practices which occurred over the second half of the nineteenth century. As the century progressed, the class lines between reading publics—quite firm in the early decades of the century—began to blur. In part due to these shifts, George Eliot's own relation to these processes of quotation is significantly different from that of Wordsworth, Southey, or Godwin. Whereas those three authors would have had very little knowledge of the ways in which their texts were being reprinted in radical journals, George Eliot was much more aware of the afterlives of her texts. As Holyoake read and quoted Eliot, Eliot was also reading Holyoake. Thus this chapter will treat not only Holyoake's reprinting of Eliot, but Eliot's own response to his reprinting.

Holyoake's quotations of Eliot function quite differently from the practices of quotation I have explored thus far in this project, largely thanks to Holyoake's distinctive political project. Over the course of the century, Holyoake worked his way through a variety of political movements. One thing, however, stayed the same: Holyoake's attempts to bring together representatives of different classes and political persuasions. He worked ceaselessly to unite the interests of middle-class intellectuals, like George Henry Lewes, with those of working men. An early biographer speaks of Holyoake's "persistent wish for union instead of divisions."<sup>7</sup> In this chapter, I will argue that Holyoake deployed quotation as a particular political strategy, one designed to bring together readers and writers of different classes. As quotations traveled across class lines, thanks to Holyoake's redeployment of them in new contexts, they might knit together the political projects of different groups, divided by class. Before turning to Holyoake's methods of quotation, I will begin with an overview of the different type of quotation which I have traced thus far—the aggressive quotation which pulls texts out of context, making them do entirely new political work. George Eliot seems to have been worried about such quotation herself, as least as evidenced in *Felix Holt: The Radical*, the novel with which I will begin.

As we have seen, when earlier nineteenth-century radical editors and publishers excerpted texts and turned them to their own purposes, they often purposefully ignored the contexts which might limit the usefulness of those texts. So, for example, in 1841 the *Chartist Circular* excerpted Raymond the thief's defense of thievery from *Caleb Williams*, with no compunction about the fact that the novel itself is decidedly critical of

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<sup>7</sup> McCabe, *Life and Letters*, 1: 147n

Raymond. When Wordsworth's Liberty Sonnets, originally written in critique of France, appeared in the radical journal *The Black Dwarf*, they became poems criticizing England. George Eliot's *Felix Holt: The Radical* (1866), a novel set in its own recent past of the 1830s, reflects Eliot's concern with the kinds of political work performed when particular ideas and phrases are pulled out of context. Leah Price has argued, quite convincingly, for the importance of practices of extraction and reprinting for our understanding of the history of the novel.<sup>8</sup> Price analyzes Eliot's aesthetic and moral concerns over the ways in which her texts were extracted. I add to Price's argument an examination of Eliot's sense of the political stakes of excerpting in the nineteenth century.

*Felix Holt* is concerned with the intertwined fates of Felix Holt, a political radical who is determined "to stick to the class I belong to,"<sup>9</sup> Esther Lyon, supposed daughter of the local dissenting minister, and Harold Transome, a landed gentleman who decides to run for the Radical party in the first, all important election after the passage of the First Reform Act of 1832. Early in the novel, Mr. Scales, butler to Sir Maximus Debarry, hosts a gathering in his rooms which includes staid Mr. Sircome, a miller, and Christian, Sir Phillip Debarry's sometimes flippant manservant. The servants and tradesmen discuss the surprising news of a landed gentleman, Harold Transome, running as a Radical candidate. Mr. Sircome, weighting his choices of candidate, notes his possible allegiances to two different forces: "There's land and there's trade—I hold with both. I swim with the stream." Christian who, "knew that Mr. Sircome's last sentence was his favorite formula" warns the miller against it: "Hey-day Mr. Sircome! that's a Radical maxim!...I advise you to give it up." "A Radical maxim!" Mr. Sircome replies, "in a tone

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<sup>8</sup> Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel*.

<sup>9</sup> George Eliot, *Felix Holt: The Radical*. Ed. Lynda Mugglestone (London, Penguin, 1995) 64.

of angry astonishment. ‘I should like to hear you prove that. It’s as old as my grandfather, any how.’” But Christian goes on to argue that since “Reform has set in by the will of the majority...the stream must be running toward Reform and Radicalism; and if you swim with it, Mr. Sircome, you’re a Reformer and a Radical.”<sup>10</sup> We might imagine that Mr. Sircome’s favorite phrase, as “old as his grandfather” was also used by his grandfather, that it is a phrase that has been passed down through his family for generations. But despite the historical rootedness of this phrase, Christian is able, with the ease of a joke, to turn the words against Sircome, claiming them, tongue-in-cheek, for Radical political purposes.

Lest we think this joke a passing one, Eliot is careful to bring Sircome back for an encore, where he again finds himself in political conversation. This time, Mr. Sircome seems to be coming around to the arguments of the Whigs, “For they don’t want to go so far as the Radicals do...And the Whigs have got the upper hand now, and it’s no use fighting with the current. I run with the—‘ Mr. Sircome checked himself, looked furtively at Christian, and to divert criticism, ended with—‘eh, Mr. Nolan?’” (210). Mr. Sircome seems to have lost the use of his own phrase, at least in the context of political discussion, the only place we see him. The rootedness of the phrase in Sircome’s own experience, and that of his family, offers no defense. Sircome’s experience here points to a reappearing anxiety in *Felix Holt*, the worry that serious words and politics can be taken out of context and twisted for political ends. Felix Holt himself may be labeled a radical by the novel’s title, but he is emphatically not the kind of radical who likes to see things recontextualized. On the contrary, he seems to have as much trouble controlling his own phrases as does Mr. Sircome.

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<sup>10</sup> Eliot, *Felix Holt*, 102.

When Felix takes himself to Sproxtton, the local mining town, to talk with the miners, he finds himself in competition with someone from his own (political) side: Mr. Johnson, electioneering agent for Harold Transome, the Radical candidate. Felix's serious attempts to educate the miners about Reform cannot rival Johnson's expert politicking, and Felix finds himself almost tempted to violence: "There is hardly any mental misery worse than that of having our own serious phrases, our own rooted beliefs, caricatured by a charlatan or a hireling. He began to feel the sharp lower edge of his tin pint-measure, and to think it a tempting missile" (136). When Felix interrupts Johnson, to call him out on his assertion that the Sproxtton men should be thinking only of their own individual interests, Johnson responds by arguing that Felix is himself manipulating language: "I call it a poor-spirited thing to take up a man's straightforward words and twist them. What I mean to say was plain enough" (138). Mr. Chubb, the pub owner, falls squarely on Johnson's side. After getting rid of Felix, he assures Johnson that "no man shall take the words out of *your* mouth" (138).

*Felix Holt* thus explores the problem of whose words are whose, and the political ends of taking those words out of context. Eliot's novel, written in the 1860s during the agitation for the Second Reform Act, but set just after the passage of the First Reform Act in 1832, occupies a strange middle-ground between the two phases in radical political quotation I look to identify in this chapter. As I will demonstrate, thanks to the interference of George Jacob Holyoake, the 1860s saw an alternative to the aggressive political quotation which Eliot seems to worry over in *Felix Holt*. Nonetheless, Holyoake himself was no stranger to the practice of taking words out of people's mouths, and "twisting" them. In the early 1840s, he "adapted" several lines from a poem by radical

poet Ebenezer Elliott, popularly known as the Corn Law Rhymer.<sup>11</sup> As Holyoake tells the story, Elliott had written: “O pallid want! O labour stark! / Behold! behold! the second Ark— / The Land! The Land!”<sup>12</sup> For the last line, that is, for the identity of “the second Ark,” Holyoake substituted his favorite cause, “Co-operation.”<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Holyoake seems to have misquoted Elliott a second time when he remembers this incident in *Sixty Years*: so far as I can tell, Elliott never wrote the above lines. He *did* write, in his famous poem “The Press”: “O pallid Want! O Labour stark! / Behold, we bring the second ark! / The Press! the Press! the Press!”<sup>14</sup> If this is a slip, then it is an odd one for Holyoake to make, as he was himself an important proponent of the free press. But my point here is less about the ways in which Holyoake transformed Elliott’s poem, and more about what he gained from having done so. When Holyoake’s insertion of “co-operation” into Elliott’s poem came to the poet’s attention, he wrote Holyoake on the subject. Again, as Holyoake tells it, “This brought me the acquaintance of Ebenezer

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<sup>11</sup> Martha Vicinus calls Elliott “The single most important predecessor of Chartist poets.” Born in 1781, Elliott was known for his “powerful indictments of the rich and their pernicious taxes on corn and other necessities” (*The Industrial Muse*, 96-97).

<sup>12</sup> Qtd. in *Sixty Years*, 1: 135.

<sup>13</sup> *Sixty Years*, 1: 136. The members of the Co-operative movement were adept at inserting their politics into other people’s poetry. As we saw in Chapter 2, one stanza of Southey’s “Ode to America” was quoted almost religiously in the co-operative literature. Holyoake himself quotes the stanza in his *History Of Co-operation*, specifically the version used by Robert Owen in *The Economist*, as he explains: “I preserve the distribution of capitals employed by Mr. Owen in the *Economist*, in 1821. It was a popular quotation long after 1840, and is not untrue or entirely inapplicable in 1874. The *Economist* considered that ‘it deserved to be written in diamonds’” (*The History of Co-operation in England: Its Literature and its Advocates*. 2 vols. [Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1875] 15). In addition to Southey’s, Wordsworth’s poetry also proved useful. In 1861, *The Co-operator: Monthly Journal of Co-operative Progress* turned his “Yew-trees” into evidence of co-operation, carefully italicizing “those fraternal Four of Borrowdale, / Join’d in one solemn and capacious grove.” The same issue includes a section from the *Excursion* there entitled “The Good Time Coming,” and clearly expected to be read as a reference to co-operation. *The Co-Operator* 12 (May 1861): 176, 181. National Co-operative Archive, Manchester.

<sup>14</sup> Elliott, *The Poetical Works of Ebenezer Elliott*. Ed. Edwin Elliott (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1876), 403.

Elliot, the Corn Law Rhymer [...] Elliott sent me a friendly protest against changing his terms and destroying his metre, and an invitation to breakfast.”<sup>15</sup>

Here, misquotation results in acquaintance, specifically an important political acquaintance. Holyoake and Elliott had their political disagreements—Holyoake often quoted Elliott’s jesting prod at Communism in order to show how wrong Elliott was on the subject<sup>16</sup>—but as one of Holyoake’s biographers points out, Elliott’s “friendship [was] a distinction” for Holyoake, who was still acquiring his own political credibility.<sup>17</sup> As his political career continued, Holyoake became an expert at acquiring political friends of distinction, none more distinguished, perhaps than George Henry Lewes and George Eliot.

### **The Three Georges: Lewes, Eliot, and Holyoake**

Lewes and Eliot were very important to Holyoake. So important, in fact, that tucked behind the famous couple’s tombstones at Highgate Cemetary, is George Jacob Holyoake’s. It is no coincidence. As Holyoake explains in *Bygones Worth Remembering*, “when I found a vacant place at the head of their graves which lie side by side, I bought it, that my ashes should repose there, should I die in England.”<sup>18</sup>

Holyoake’s choice of gravesite is, at the least, startling—the surviving remains of the relationships among these three Georges, who now rest side by side by side, are sparse. In fact, Holyoake’s relationship with both Lewes and Eliot, at least as it exists in the historical record, is to a surprising extent a relationship based on the textual strategies of

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<sup>15</sup> *Sixty Years*, 1: 136

<sup>16</sup> Holyoake, *The History of Co-operation in England*, 1: 3.

<sup>17</sup> McCabe, *Life and Letters*, 51

<sup>18</sup> Holyoake, *Bygones Worth Remembering*, 2 vols. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905) 1: 64.

reference, review, and quotation. Holyoake's acquaintance with Lewes began in 1849 when Holyoake reviewed Lewes's *The Life of Maximilian Robespierre*—and also apparently sent Lewes several numbers of his own secular, political paper, *The Reasoner*. Lewes responded with an invitation: “Your review of my “Robespierre” gratified me exceedingly by its tone and talent, however I may dissent from most of its conclusions; and I should be happy to talk over that and other subjects with you, If you will smoke a cigar with me on Monday Evening next.”<sup>19</sup>

Here a review, rather than a misquotation, accounts for the opening of an acquaintance. Holyoake and Lewes would soon become business partners: when Lewes and Thornton Leigh Hunt started their own journal, *The Leader*, in 1850 they immediately brought Holyoake on, in part for his acumen as a business manager, and in part for the many articles he could contribute on both secularism and the Co-operative movement.<sup>20</sup> *The Leader*, at least in the early years of its existence, was a perfect project for Holyoake. As Allan Brick explains in his study of the journal, it “was founded [...] to give both working-class and middle-class radicals a common focus for action and belief.”<sup>21</sup> In its early days *The Leader* managed the tricky task of “yoking the principles of Chartism with those of intellectual radicalism.”<sup>22</sup> *The Leader*'s investment in this early form of coalition politics fit neatly with Holyoake's own attempts to combine the interests of radicals split by class.

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<sup>19</sup> Lewes, Letter to Holyoake, 8 August 1849. Holyoake Collection, #316. National Co-operative Archive, Manchester.

<sup>20</sup> As Allan Brick explains, “After helping in 1850 to found the *Leader*, Holyoake served in varying degrees as its business manager and contributor from 1850 through 1854.” (*The Leader: Organ of Radicalism*. [Unpublished Dissertation, 1973] 18.

<sup>21</sup> Brick, Prefatory material.

<sup>22</sup> Brick, 104. By the mid 1850s, *The Leader* had a new editor, Pigott, whose allegiance was fully with the middle classes. Holyoake soon left the paper, once this shift became clear (Brick 236).

Although Holyoake shared many of Chartism's principles—he was for most of his life a supporter of the Charter and had close ties among the Chartist leadership—his longstanding frustration with Chartism was its refusal to align itself with middle-class liberalism. He criticized Chartism for its “war on the middle class.”<sup>23</sup> Holyoake's frustration was matched, not surprisingly, by Chartists' frustration with him. The Chartists had very good reasons for resenting—and doubting—the Whigs, and Holyoake's commitment to the middle class flew in the face of Chartism's status as a truly working-class movement. But at least according to Holyoake, the movement's inability to overcome its hatred of the Whigs accounted for its failure: “The Chartists suffered indignities at the hands of the Whigs and allowed their resentment to shape their policy. To spite the Whigs the Chartists gave their support to the Tories—their hereditary and unchanging enemies.”<sup>24</sup> As Holyoake adds in this section of his autobiography, he insisted on maintaining friendly connections with the Whigs of his acquaintance. Holyoake's insistence on maintaining such ties meant that he was seen by many Chartists as a traitor to their cause.

Holyoake's attempts to combine quite different groups—Chartists and Whigs, for example—often meant that he didn't fit very well anywhere. He was also widely known as an atheist, an appellation which was reason enough for most publications to refuse to publish his work. Holyoake's militant atheism eventually evolved into a more palatable secularism, but even in the 1860s, his most popular work, *Self Help by the People: History of Co-operation in Rochdale*, was sold widely without his name. Although the anonymous edition was originally published without his knowledge, Holyoake gave his

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<sup>23</sup> Qtd. in McCabe, *Life and Letters* 1: 147.

<sup>24</sup> *Sixty Years*, 1: 85.

permission that it remain in publication, hoping that without the prejudice attached to his name it would reach a wider audience.<sup>25</sup> Holyoake's status as a dangerous atheist explains in part just why George Henry Lewes played such an important part in his life. Lewes made Holyoake's name respectable: he "included me in the public list of writers and contributors to the *Leader*—the first recognition of the kind I received, and being accorded when I had only an outcast name, both in law and literature, I have never ceased to prize it."<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, Holyoake would call Lewes his "first friend in opinion."<sup>27</sup> Holyoake's connection with Lewes by way of *The Leader* also accounts for his acquaintance with George Eliot, who was "residing [...] a few doors down from our editorial office [...] My evening repasts were unexpected when I first introduced them, and George Eliot, who sometimes came in and joined us at table used to call me 'the Providence of the Office.'"<sup>28</sup>

I find the thought of these three Georges all sitting down to dinner together delightful. But my focus here will be less on their dining habits and more on their habits of quotation. While Holyoake was working for *The Leader*, he was also editor of *The Reasoner*, a paper devoted to both radical politics and Secularism. Holyoake maintained the paper, in different formats, and with some hiatuses from the 1840s until the 1870s. Although *The Leader* was already hard at work pulling together multiple audiences, Holyoake used his editorship of the more working-class-directed *Reasoner* to convince his readers that the middle-class radicals at the helm of *The Leader* were on their side.

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<sup>25</sup> Charles William Frederick Goss, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Writings of George Jacob Holyoake, With a Brief Sketch of his Life* (London: Crowther & Goodman, 1908) 24.

<sup>26</sup> *Bygones Worth Remembering* 1: 64.

<sup>27</sup> Holyoake, Letter to Herbert Spencer, 15 Dec 1878. Qtd. in Rosemary Ashton, *G. H. Lewes: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1991) 277.

<sup>28</sup> *Sixty Years*, 1: 238.

He often praised *The Leader* in the pages of *The Reasoner*, and he used his paper to reproduce ideas he found particularly compelling from *The Leader*, in an attempt to broaden the audience for those ideas. For example, he asked Lewes if he might use *The Leader*'s motto in *The Reasoner*. Lewes responded, "My Dear Holyoake, Take the motto by all means if you desire it; I hope we shall keep it for The Leader also—I want the public to be familiarized with the idea expressed by it."<sup>29</sup> Holyoake and Lewes' shared project, of breaking down the barriers between groups divided by class and politics is appropriately reflected in the motto in question, from Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos*:

The one idea which History exhibits as evermore developing itself into greater distinctness is the idea of Humanity—the noble endeavour to throw down all the barriers erected between men by long prejudice and one-sided views; and by setting aside the distinctions of Religion, Country, and Colour, to treat the whole Human race as one brotherhood, having one great object—the free development of our spiritual nature.<sup>30</sup>

For Holyoake, the most important way to break down those barriers was to increase access to knowledge. One of the political movements most important to Holyoake was the agitation to repeal the "taxes on knowledge," the taxes which were designed to keep the news out of the hands of the working classes. Holyoake repeatedly risked imprisonment and hefty fines in the fight over the newspaper taxes. In addition to large-scale political agitation, Holyoake also worked busily to make particular texts which he considered especially important more affordable. Apparently, Holyoake repeatedly requested that John Stuart Mill make his *Principles of Political Economy* available in a cheaper form. In 1863, Mill wrote Holyoake, presumably in response to a

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<sup>29</sup> Lewes, Letter to Holyoake, Undated, early 1850s. Holyoake Collection, #1153. National Co-operative Archive, Manchester.

<sup>30</sup> *The Leader* 1 (March 1850) 1.

query by him: “I have had some thoughts of printing a cheap edition of my Political Economy, but as I cannot do so without my publisher’s consent until the edition now on sale is exhausted, I should be glad of any information you could give me, that might lead him to think his interest would not suffer by it.”<sup>31</sup> It is impossible to say, of course, whether Mill is just being polite here, but his turn to Holyoake as an expert on the publication of affordable editions is nonetheless telling. Holyoake seems to have followed up, perhaps, either with such information, or with an even stronger request. Several months later, we find another letter from Mill, this time promising “When I return to England, I will [?] Mr. Parker on the subject of publishing at once a cheap edition of at least the Political Economy.”<sup>32</sup>

Holyoake’s relationship with George Eliot was not such that he could ask her to change the selling price of her novels. His next best solution was to make her work accessible to his readership by quoting, referencing, and reviewing her novels—and poems—in the pages of his weekly journals, his pamphlets, and his books. As Leah Price has shown, starting in the 1870s, the excerpting of passages from Eliot’s novels became a business in its own right, with Alexander Main’s *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot* (1872).<sup>33</sup> But Holyoake was

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<sup>31</sup> J.S. Mill, Letter to Holyoake, 30 July 1863. Holyoake Collection, #1504. National Co-operative Archive, Manchester.

<sup>32</sup> Mill to Holyoake, 25 September, 1863. Holyoake Collection, #1511. National Co-operative Archive, Manchester. Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy* was a particularly important text for Holyoake, who recommended that it be required reading when he proposed an expansion of the suffrage to those who could pass a test on Mill’s text. See *The Workman and the Suffrage. Letters to the Right Honourable Lord John Russell* (London: Holyoake & Co, 1858). Mill’s *Political Economy* was first published in 1848, by J.W. Parker. The sixth edition, published by Longmans in 1865 (after this correspondence with Holyoake) was presumably more affordable, although I have yet to determine its selling price.

<sup>33</sup> Price argues that, thanks to this work and others like it, Eliot wrote both *Daniel Deronda* and *Theophrastus Such* “in the expectation of being excerpted” (106).

ahead of Main—he began his excerpting of Eliot in the 1860s, a practice he continued through to the next century.

### **(Mis)Quoting George Eliot**

Holyoake's *The Reasoner*, which was published for over fifteen years, was one of the most important working-class journals of the century.<sup>34</sup> The paper went through a variety of runs and titles, but it remained committed, throughout, to secularism, the expansion of the franchise, and the Co-operative movement. With *The Reasoner*, Holyoake was able to combine his various movements, using the paper to build connections between readers and movements alike. In the late 1860s, the paper—at that point named the *English Leader*, perhaps in an attempt to attract the readers of the 1850s *Leader*—took seriously to the project of recommending George Eliot. In January of 1866, the *English Leader* took a moment to praise Lewes' work at the *Fortnightly Review*, quoting with approval his editorial policy. At the *Review*, Lewes had insisted, free speech would be fully recognized: "We propose to remove all those restrictions of party and of editorial 'consistency' which in other journals hamper the full and free expression of opinion," with writers never being "required to express the views of an Editor or of a Party."<sup>35</sup> Over a decade before, Holyoake had carefully recommended *The Leader* from the pages of *The Reasoner*, and here we find Holyoake praising Lewes' new project, as he sought to build connections between these two journals.

The writer here, presumably Holyoake, contrasts Lewes' productive dedication to free speech with the new breed of churches which avoid being linked to any concrete

<sup>34</sup> In 1853, the journal was selling nearly 5,000 copies a week, to a "predominantly working class audience." See Grugel, *George Jacob Holyoake*, 80.

<sup>35</sup> Lewes, qtd. in "Reticence Giving Way," *English Leader* No.2 Jan 13, 1866.

opinion at all, explaining that they “‘go in’ for what George Eliot happily describes as the ‘sacred right of private haziness’.” This phrase comes from an article which Eliot herself wrote for *The Fortnightly Review*, a review of W.E.H. Lecky’s “History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe.”<sup>36</sup> Just a few months later, Holyoake’s *English Leader* would cite this passage from Eliot again, this time in the form of an extensive passage that Holyoake entitles “The General Reader.”<sup>37</sup> It is this “general reader” whom Eliot skewers for refusing to commit to any firm opinion, one who “is fond of what may be called disembodied opinions, that float in vapoury phrases above all systems of thought or action.” It is perhaps a little too neat to point out that Eliot’s criticism has itself been lifted, to become a “floating” phrase used, in the earlier example, to support Holyoake’s praise of Lewes’ editorial-ship of the *Fortnightly Review*. Importantly, though, the opinion in question is by no means “disembodied” here—George Eliot is cited specifically, both times, and in the case of the lengthy citation, the source in the *Fortnightly Review* is also specified.

In both these examples, Holyoake’s quotations of Eliot work to bolster relations between Holyoake’s journal and the *Fortnightly*. They serve as signs of a network of journalistic relationships amongst two editors, Holyoake and Lewes, and a famous writer, participating in the same journalistic network. Several months later, however, Holyoake’s journal would expand its reach, recommending Eliot to its readership not only as a journalist, but as a novelist. In July the *English Leader* included, under its “Book Notices,” elaborate praise of both *Felix Holt: The Radical* and *Romola*:

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<sup>36</sup> Eliot “The Influence of Rationalism: Lecky’s History” a review of W.E.H. Lecky’s “History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe.” *Fortnightly Review* 1 (May 1865): 43-55.

<sup>37</sup> *English Leader* No. 39 (May 12, 1866).

George Eliot has written another of those great books which have placed her at the head of all living writers of fiction. Wilkie Collins is absolutely unendurable after reading one of George Eliot's books. Thackeray seems thin and cynical, and Dickens himself, with all his great qualities, turns out an inferior novelist by the side of this incomparable artist. Her "Romola" had a great moral which no other writer ever drew. She showed for the first time that to be weak is to be wicked [...] "Felix Holt," who has in his character strong dashes of that political blindness common to modern Radicals, is yet drawn with all the great personal elements which have marked the growth of Radicalism, not in England only, but in Europe. Its disdain of any authority but that of common sense, its intrepid maintenance of self-mastered truth, its contempt for fashion, poverty, and penal consequence, are drawn as they were never drawn before.<sup>38</sup>

Here, Holyoake (or at least his paper) recommends Eliot to his politically-minded readers as *the* novelist to read, amongst "all living writers of fiction." Although this passage begins with more general praise of Eliot, the description of *Felix Holt* makes it clear that what makes Eliot's latest novel a particularly important read is her representation of "modern Radicals." This reviewer recommends Eliot's representation of modern radicals *to* those radicals, the readers of his paper. Whether or not Holyoake's readers rushed out to find copies of *Felix Holt*—and they probably did not—this recommendation is nonetheless an important instance of Holyoake's attempt to transfer Eliot's work from its expected upper and middle-class audience to working-class readers.

In fact, this reviewer for *The English Leader* notes that Eliot's novel has already created an unexpected connection between diverse readerships: "We do not often agree with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, but we quote with gratitude the following judgment with which it concludes its notices of the book, and which is the best thing yet said about it." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, which is then quoted at length, wishes that *Romola* and *Felix Holt* could be "class books," so that "the next generation" could "take to heart the lessons" of

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<sup>38</sup> "Book Notices," *English Leader* No. 48 (July 14, 1866) 397

the two novels.<sup>39</sup> Eliot's novels here serve as a single point of agreement between Holyoake's radical paper and the conservative *Pall Mall Gazette*. Both papers wish the "next generation" could be raised on Eliot, although we might imagine that the two papers would disagree heatedly about just what that "new generation" might learn from their reading. Holyoake would continue to cite Eliot for such lessons in the pages of his journal. In 1871, for example, the journal, now re-titled *The Reasoner*, included a brief passage from *Romola* entitled "Morals from Romola."<sup>40</sup>

This turn to Eliot for wise, moral sayings is clearly representative of Eliot's emerging persona as a "sage" in the final decades of the nineteenth-century, as explored in detail by Price.<sup>41</sup> But although Holyoake is by no means resistant to using Eliot for generalized moralism, that does not in fact typify the ways in which passages from Eliot's novels and poems fill his books, speeches, and journals. As we will see, Holyoake preferred to apply quotations from Eliot directly to his own particular political projects. And there was perhaps no project closer to Holyoake's heart than his propagation of secularism. His *Reasoner* was indeed a political paper, but it was first and foremost a secular paper. This was the movement for which Holyoake suffered the most, from his early imprisonment to his life-long experience of being excluded from various communities by the stigma of atheism. By the 1860s, Holyoake's early atheism had become secularism, a switch in titles which turns out to have been important to George Eliot herself. As she argued in an 1861 letter, "I thought Holyoake had renounced the term 'Atheist' long, long ago: I have often [heard] Mr. Lewes speak of his having done

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> "Morals from Romola," *The Reasoner* 30.8 (August, 1871): 126

<sup>41</sup> Price, 105-156.

so.”<sup>42</sup> It made good sense for Eliot to be concerned about Holyoake’s religious—or non-religious—identity, as he would use quotation to turn her into a supporter of his own secularist mission.

In 1872, *The Reasoner* excitedly quoted three passages from Book II of *Middlemarch* at length. The writer introduces this section, entitled simply “George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*. Book II” with the claim that the second book “abounds with those inimitable passages of secular description which every work by this authoress contains.”<sup>43</sup> The review starts by quoting a long description of Bulstrode, disliked by the community for his annoying Evangelicalism, and then turns to the passage in which Bulstrode explains to Lydgate that Farebrother should not be chaplain of the new hospital since he cannot sufficiently cater to the “spiritual interests” of the patients. Farebrother emerges as a heroic figure later in the novel, but already by Book II, *The Reasoner* was both idealizing and defending this irreligious clergyman, as the victim of Bulstrode’s misguided religion. This article ends with an extended passage on Drs. Sprague and Minchin, focusing on the fact that the Middlemarchers value Dr. Sprague’s medical expertise in proportion to their sense of his minimal religious commitment:

The Doctor was more than suspected of having no religion, but somehow *Middlemarch* tolerated this deficiency in him [...] indeed it is probable that his professional weight was the more believed in [...] At all events, it is certain that if any medical man had come to *Middlemarch* with the reputation of having very definite religious views [...] there would have been a general presumption against his medical skill.

This series of passages is given very little framing by *The Reasoner*, other than the introductory praise of Eliot’s “secular description,” and it is somewhat unclear what

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<sup>42</sup> Eliot, Letter to Sara Sophia Hennell, 13 April 1861, *The George Eliot Letters*. Ed. Gordon S. Haight. 7 vols. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955) 3: 404.

<sup>43</sup> *The Reasoner* 30.15 (March 1872): 230.

exactly the reviewer is praising here. Does he value Eliot's recognition of the already existent secularism of English society? These passages certainly suggest that religion does not motivate the decisions of the Middlemarchers, who dislike Bulstrode's religiosity and like Sprague's lack thereof. But it is also certainly the case that Eliot's narrator does not align herself with these secular, practical Middlemarchers.

This review, however, does its best to align Eliot with secularism, a project *The Reasoner* would continue several months later. In May of 1871, *The Reasoner* ran an article entitled "The Secular Singer," praising William Morris and his *Earthly Paradise*. This article pairs Morris and Eliot as the two literary representatives of the secular movement:

Reading [Morris's] pages, gives the impression of living in a perfectly sane world which has the elements of a healthy and robust Paradise in it. The genius of George Elliott [sic] drew the portrait, as the *National Review* said, of a 'secular carpenter,'—brave, pure, strong-thinking, strong-acting 'Adam Bede,' and afterwards the same eminent writer gave us 'Felix Holt, the Radical.' Now Mr. Morris has sung of the secular aspects of life, and its philosophy.<sup>44</sup>

As we saw above, a reference to George Eliot had allowed the *English Leader* to temporarily agree with the *Pall Mall Gazette*; here, this reviewer manages to bring together Eliot, Morris, and the *National Review*, all under the secularist banner. Eliot's novels were, of course, reviewed regularly by a host of papers. By bringing Eliot into the pages of his paper, Holyoake constructs a conversation between his radical, political, secular journal and middle-class literary society. The idea evidenced in this passage, of Eliot and Morris as the twin literary prophets of secularism, really stuck with Holyoake, so much so that it began to cause confusion. In the second volume of his widely read *The History of Co-operation in England: Its Literature and Its Advocates*, Holyoake includes

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<sup>44</sup> "The Secular Singer," *The Reasoner* 30.5 (May 1871): 65.

an epigraph from Eliot's "The Legend of Jubal." But for whatever reason, when the volume was published in 1879, the passage was cited as coming from Morris's *Earthly Paradise*—just the poem we saw praised above. It appears in *The History of Co-operation* as follows:

When Cain was driven from Jehovah's land  
 He wandered eastward, seeking some far strand,  
 Ruled by kind gods who asked no offering,  
 Save pure field fruits, or aromatic things  
 To feed the subtler sense of frames divine,  
 That lived on fragrance for their food and wine;  
 Wild, joyous gods, who winked at faults and folly,  
 And could be pitiful and melancholy.  
 He never had a doubt that such gods were,  
 He looked within, and saw them mirrored there.  
 Morris's "Earthly Paradise"<sup>45</sup>

These lines represent most of the opening stanza of "The Legend of Jubal," Eliot's mythological poem about a figure who introduces music to the world. Whereas Eliot's stanza ends with an additional four lines about Cain claiming his new home, Holyoake carefully cuts the stanza in order to emphasize the newly final lines which suggest that Cain creates the idea of these "kind gods" because he sees them mirrored in himself. With some careful excerpting, Holyoake turns these lines into a final couplet, a neat secular "epigram" on religion as a construction of humanity.<sup>46</sup> And this passage may seem all the more secular when labeled as belonging to William Morris, rather than George Eliot. As we shall see, this strange moment of misquotation—one that Eliot

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<sup>45</sup> Holyoake, *History of Co-operation*. 2: 397.

<sup>46</sup> Eliot was herself, of course, very interested in the ways in which Christianity was a form of human myth-making—a topic she explored in her translations of David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus (Leben Jesu)* and Ludwig Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity (Das Wesen des Christenhums)*. For more, see Barry Qualls, "George Eliot and Religion," *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*. Ed. George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001).

herself noticed—serves as a particularly apt example of the ways Eliot appears in Holyoake’s texts, even when she is under cover as Morris.

The first volume of Holyoake’s *History of Co-operation* appeared in 1875. Holyoake’s history, which in its two volume form traces the history of the movement from 1812 to 1878, was apparently a book that Eliot and Lewes were anxious to read. In 1875, Lewes wrote to Holyoake to request the first volume: “Mrs. Lewes would *very* much like to have your book.”<sup>47</sup> Just two weeks later, the two were thick into the reading, and Lewes wrote again:

Mrs. Lewes wishes me to thank you for sending her your book, which she is reading aloud to me every evening, much to our pleasure and profit. The light firm touch and quiet epigram would make the dullest subject readable; and this subject is *not* dull. We only regret that you did not enter more fully into working details. Perhaps they will come in the next volume.<sup>48</sup>

Quotations from Eliot, all correctly attributed to her, appear four times in the first volume of *The History of Co-operation*, three of them as chapter-heading epigraphs. I suspect, then, that when Eliot and Lewes are praising the “epigrams” of Holyoake’s text, they are at least in part praising his selection of epigraphs by Eliot. As Price has argued, Eliot’s thoughts on the excerpting of her work in other contexts were informed by “the tension between . . . the fear of having her work appropriated and the wish to have it read.”<sup>49</sup> Holyoake’s history may have offered Eliot a venue for excerpting about which she felt less equivocal. Far from the gift books of Alexander Main, Holyoake’s history offered a site in which quotations of Eliot were linked to an important—but also respectable—political movement.

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<sup>47</sup> Lewes, Letter to Holyoake, 1 August 1875, *George Eliot Letters*, 6: 160.

<sup>48</sup> Lewes, Letter to Holyoake, 15 Aug 1875. Qtd. in Holyoake, *Bygones Worth Remembering*, 1: 66.

<sup>49</sup> Price, 137.

One difference between Holyoake's *History* and the gift books that were quoting Eliot at the same time is the fact that Eliot was *reading* Holyoake, with interest. And it is this fact that also accounts for the significant difference between Holyoake's quotation of Eliot and the aggressive strategies of quotation I have analyzed elsewhere in this project. Holyoake worked to make Eliot useful for his working-class readership, but at the same time, he had an eye for a different readership, one which included George Eliot herself. Eliot seems to have read the second volume of *The History of Cooperation* with as much care and interest as the first.<sup>50</sup> In August of 1879, Eliot wrote directly to Holyoake:

I have been able already to read a good deal in your volume. A misprint at the head of a chapter pays Mr. Morris what he might think the bad compliment of attributing to him the opening lines of 'Jubal.'...The description of the ruined school at New Lanark has an almost tragic impressiveness.<sup>51</sup>

I cannot say with any certainty that this is the only letter Eliot wrote directly to Holyoake—it is nonetheless the only surviving one I have been able to identify. There are multiple letters, as we have seen, in which Lewes sends thoughts or regards from Eliot to Holyoake, but by 1879, Lewes was dead. By misquoting Eliot, Holyoake created a line of direct communication between himself and the now very famous author.

Although we might assume that Holyoake would be abashed to receive this letter from Eliot, we would be wrong, I think. Rather than downplaying his mistake, Holyoake repeated the whole story, in a reminiscence of the novelist published in the *American Free Religious Index*, and then reprinted in the *Boston Daily Globe*. There, Holyoake

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<sup>50</sup> Eliot did not treat all of Holyoake's work with similar interest; she was no fan of *The Reasoner*: "I am afraid to tell you how much I dislike the Reasoner, since you seem to have a friendly inclination towards it. It has always been matter of astonishment to me that so superior a man as Holyoake, who has written so well elsewhere, can't turn out something better than that imbecile paper. I should have thought the Reasoner could do no good to any good cause. But since you feel so differently, I hope I am wrong" (Eliot to Sara Sophia Hennell, 28 July 1858, *George Eliot Letters*, 2: 473).

<sup>51</sup> Eliot, Letter to Holyoake, 11 August 1879. *George Eliot Letters* 7: 193.

reported his receipt of Eliot's letter as a mark of connection, even intimacy, with the now deceased author. The letter—in addition to other proofs of relationship cited by

Holyoake—grants him the authority to write this reminiscence:

The day before I sailed for America I received a letter from her in which she spoke of a passage in my "History of Co-operation," describing "the ruins of education in New Lanark," which she said had to her mind "a tragic impressiveness." In the same work I had quoted some lines from the opening of her poem of "Jubal," to which I had put the name of William Morris, the author of the "Earthly Paradise." Having made a quotation from Morris in the same work, I had not noticed the error, being blind when the proofs went to the press. She said in a very pleasant way that Mr. Morris might not be gratified by having lines of hers imputed to him. It was a modest way of putting it. Mr. Morris would probably think the error a compliment.<sup>52</sup>

Holyoake did indeed suffer from blindness, and there is no reason to doubt his account of the mistake. It is important, nonetheless, that just as Holyoake's purposeful misquoting of Ebenezer Elliott resulted in a valuable acquaintance, Holyoake's mistake here results in a personal letter from George Eliot, one in which she not only alerts him to his error, but also praises the "tragic impressiveness" of his description of New Lanark, one of Robert Owen's failed co-operative communities. By misattributing Eliot's words, Holyoake managed to shore up his relationship with George Eliot. But perhaps even more importantly, Holyoake deployed quotation to shore up Eliot's relationship to the co-operative movement. Throughout *The History of Co-operation*, Holyoake enlists Eliot as another version of himself, as one more historian of this movement.

*The History of Co-operation*, as Holyoake tells it, is the story of a series of failures. New Lanark, the ruins of which Eliot found so moving, is by no means the only

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<sup>52</sup> "George Eliot: George Holyoake's Reminiscences of the Novelist." *Boston Daily Globe* (Feb. 6, 1881). Ian Peticrew. "George Jacob Holyoake." *Minor Victorian Poets and Authors*. Web. 28 March 28, 2010.

failed co-operative community in Holyoake's *History*. In this text, Holyoake attempts to knit together these failures into a narrative of ultimate success, arguing that the successful Co-operative movement of the late nineteenth century was in fact built upon the failures of the first half of the century. His history must recover and record these earlier moments of failure, and he does so, in part, with quotations from Eliot.

Holyoake describes the 1845 failure of Queenwood, another Owenite community, as follows:

All this care, patience, toleration, labour, generous sacrifice, and endurance had proved fruitless. They had created but a new and startling confirmation of the prediction of the enemy—schemes of associated life must always end in failure. None of them, probably not the youngest of the number, would live to witness the renewal in England of their honourable efforts.<sup>53</sup>

But Holyoake finds consolation in this moment of defeat, not only for himself, but for the people he describes, who though they did not live to see the second half of the nineteenth century, can still somehow be appeased by the 1860s writing of George Eliot. Holyoake continues:

They had, however, the proud consolation so generously expressed for them by the great Midland poetess:--

The greatest gift the hero leaves his race  
Is to have been a hero. Say we fail:  
We feed the high traditions of the world,  
And leave our spirit in our country's breast.<sup>54</sup>

Holyoake found these four lines, from *The Spanish Gypsy*, eminently quotable—he had already used them in an 1868 speech to the Birmingham electors.<sup>55</sup> It is no wonder Holyoake turned to these lines, which neatly perform the task of transforming failure into

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<sup>53</sup> Holyoake, *History of Co-operation*, 1: 321.

<sup>54</sup> *History of Co-operation*, 1:321.

<sup>55</sup> Eliot also found these lines quite quotable, quoting them in a letter on the death of Italian radical politician Giuseppe Mazzini, himself an acquaintance of Holyoake (Price 112).

success, remaking the moment of defeat into a source for inspiration. But what I find most interesting about this moment of quotation is Holyoake's assertion that these lines were "so generously expressed *for them*," (my italics) the members of the Queenwood community that is, "by the great Midland poetess." We might read "for them" as simply meaning "on their behalf," rather than "as an offering," but even that reading suggests quite strongly that Eliot had Queenwood in mind when she wrote these lines. With the addition of the word "generously," Holyoake presents this passage as a gift from Eliot to the Co-operative movement, thereby portraying Eliot as a committed supporter. Of course, the lines themselves, from *The Spanish Gypsy*, Eliot's extended play set in 15<sup>th</sup>-century Spain, are certainly *not* referencing the Queenwood community. Rather, Zarca the Gypsy king uses this rhetoric to encourage his daughter, Fedalma, to abandon her fiancée and join him in his effort to save the Gypsies.<sup>56</sup> A reader who was intimately familiar with *The Spanish Gypsy* might catch that Holyoake is stretching here, but that reader is somewhat difficult to imagine. Holyoake cites Eliot as the author of these lines, but not the work from which they come, and *The Spanish Gypsy* itself was by no means one of Eliot's most popular works.

Holyoake's quotation of Eliot ends this chapter of *The History of Co-operation*, a chapter tellingly entitled "The Lost Communities." The members of the Queenwood community emerge from this passage fully recovered, turned into heroes, remembered rather than forgotten by both Holyoake, historian of the movement, and George Eliot, the "Midland poetess." Quoting Eliot seems to have functioned for Holyoake as a means of

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<sup>56</sup> Eliot, *The Spanish Gypsy*. *George Eliot: Collected Poems*. Ed. Lucien Jenkins. London: Skoob Books, 1989. 313. In context, the gendered dynamics of this passage are particularly interesting. Zarca's response, which imagines an explicitly masculine hero comes in response to this question from Fedalma: "O father, will the women of our tribe / Suffer as I do, in the years to come [...] is it worth the pains?" (313).

combating the dangers of forgetting. In the final chapter of *The History of Co-operation*, Vol 1, “Forgotten Workers,” he would turn to Eliot twice more. The epigraph to this final chapter comes from Eliot’s poem “A Minor Prophet”:

By my hearth I keep a sacred nook  
 For gnomes and dwarfs, duck-footed waddling elves  
 Who stitched and hammered for the weary man  
 In days of old. And in that piety  
 I clothe ungainly forms inherited  
 From toiling generations, daily bent  
 At desk, or plough, or loom, or in the mind,  
 In pioneering labours for the world.<sup>57</sup>

In this strange poem, Eliot’s speaker listens to the prophecies of a utopian vegetarian—who claims that all of humanity will be perfected—and then turns away to consider all of the eccentricities that would be lost in such a case. In Eliot’s poem, these “ungainly forms” are valued for their weirdness, and the aesthetic piquancy which they add to the speaker’s experience, providing the “flavour of my daily food.”<sup>58</sup> In the poem, the labourers, modern day versions of the “gnomes and dwarfs,” offer one example of the collection of “nature’s blunders” which the speaker values. It is perhaps too harsh a reading of this poem to suggest that these “blunders” seem to exist only for the entertainment of the speaker. But I point to this possibility to highlight the difference to be found in Holyoake’s treatment of the quotation. Whereas in the poem, we might say that the labourers serve the speaker’s interest, in this excerpted quotation, placed at the beginning of a chapter on “Forgotten Workers,” the speaker serves the labourers, “clothing” them in “piety,” but even more importantly, clothing them in memory. The “sacred nook” which the speaker reserves is another version of Holyoake’s chapter, a

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<sup>57</sup> *History of Co-operation*, 1: 397.

<sup>58</sup> George Eliot, “A Minor Prophet,” *George Eliot: Collected Poems*. Ed. Lucien Jenkins. (London: Skoob Books, 1989) 37.

chapter which records these forgotten workers both in the abstract and in particular. Holyoake devotes an extended footnote in this chapter, for example, to George White, the Chartist of my own chapter's opening letter, who died forgotten, "in the poorhouse in Sheffield."<sup>59</sup>

Several pages into this "Forgotten Workers" chapter, Holyoake returns again to the epigraph by Eliot, commenting upon "The unremembered workers, so nobly regarded in the words of the poetess placed at the head of this chapter." This phrase, "so nobly regarded" is reminiscent of the earlier "so generously expressed." In both cases, Holyoake uses the adverbs "nobly" and "generously" to describe (or rather create) a direct relationship between Eliot the "poetess" and the recipients of the quoted praise, recipients assigned to the quotation by Holyoake. By eliminating context in both cases, Holyoake assures his readers—particularly his working-class readers—that the famous George Eliot not only values "forgotten workers," but is engaged, like Holyoake, in the project of remembering and recording them. Holyoake returns once more in this chapter to Eliot's "A Minor Prophet," this time to honour those who have died for the cause, but who received no renown in their own time:

Were their services understood in their time they would receive honour  
 exceeding that which the successful win who are greeted by—  
 The patched and plodding citizen,  
 Waiting upon the pavement with the throng,  
 While some victorious world-hero makes  
 Triumphal entry; and the peal of shouts  
 And flash of faces, 'neath uplifted hats,  
 Run like the storm of joy along the streets!  
 He says, "God bless him!" almost with a sob,  
 As the great hero passes: He is glad. . . .  
 'Tis glory shed around the common weal,  
 And he will pay his tribute willingly,  
 Though with the pennies earned by sordid toil.

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<sup>59</sup> *History of Co-operation* 1: 404n.



context is destroyed by that context. In Eliot's poem, this moment is forgotten; in Holyoake's *History*, it is remembered.

### **Holyoake and *Holt*: How to Address a Working Man**

This moment in "A Minor Prophet," in which the "honest citizen" turns away from the public spectacle, is oddly reminiscent of a similar scene in *Felix Holt: The Radical*, which Eliot began work on several months after composing "A Minor Prophet." As the title of Eliot's novel makes clear, Felix's identity is largely circumscribed by his status as a political radical, and one who likes to talk about his radicalism. Given that, it comes as some surprise that Felix gives only one political speech in the course of this long novel. But what is even more striking is the fact that he doesn't even get to finish it. When Felix steps up to give his off-the-cuff speech, he does so in order to disagree with someone ostensibly on his side, a trades unionist pushing for universal suffrage. Felix argues against the idea of the vote as a be-all, end-all, and against any kind of immediate solution to the problems working men face. He argues instead that working men must first become sober and informed, and not pin "vain expectations" on the vote. When Felix warns against the foolishness of expecting immediate change, he raises a cheer: "Hear, hear," said several voices, but they...belonged to some strollers who had been attracted by Felix Holt's vibrating voice, and were Tories from the Crown."<sup>62</sup> Felix's critique of the working men's ignorance has reached an audience, but an audience who disapproves of the vote for their own reasons. Felix then launches into a biting critique of Johnson's electioneering techniques. When he calls Johnson out, the crowd enjoys the

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<sup>62</sup> *Felix Holt*, 292.

joke, and then the “well-dressed hearers turned away...thinking they had had the cream of the speech in the joke against Johnson” (295).

Crucially, and this is a fact about this novel that continues to surprise me, so do the readers. When these “well-dressed hearers” turn away from Felix’s speech, the narrator follows them, never to return to Felix’s speech, which may or may not continue. We, the readers, have no way of knowing—thanks to this narrative technique, the readers are powerfully linked to the Tory listeners. Felix Holt may be the titular character of Eliot’s novel, but in this moment the narrative turns its back on him and his politics. Although Felix does speak briefly at his trial, he does not get to deliver another political speech until William Blackwood asked Eliot to take Felix himself out of context, pulling him out of the novel and putting him in the pages of the conservative *Blackwoods Magazine*. Blackwood’s own response to *Felix Holt* is oddly reminiscent of the Tories who cheer Felix’s speech in the novel. The Tory Blackwood wrote to George Eliot “I suspect I am a radical of the Felix Holt breed.”<sup>63</sup> Blackwood was so taken with Felix’s politics, that he repeatedly requested that Eliot write a piece for his magazine, in the voice of Felix Holt. Sure enough, in January of 1868, “Felix Holt’s Address to Working Men,” ran as the magazine’s lead article. A look at Felix’s speech reveals a kind of conservatism very much in keeping with *Blackwoods*. We might imagine that this “Address to Working Men,” published in the Tory *Blackwoods*, was probably not read by many of them. To find a moment of connection between the fictional Felix and an audience of working men we must turn, not to *Blackwoods*, but back to George Jacob Holyoake.

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<sup>63</sup> Blackwood, Letter to Lewes. *The George Eliot Letters*. Ed. Gordon S. Haight. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1954-78) 9 vols. Vol 4: 246.

William Blackwood was adamant about the importance of Eliot publishing an address by Felix Holt because in 1867 Britain was seeing its Second Reform Act. In October of 1868, Holyoake gave his own speech to working men, on the advent of the bill, his *Working-Class Representation: Its Conditions and Consequences*, an address which he gave to “Electors of Birmingham,” and which was reprinted as a pamphlet and cited at length in the *Westminster Review*. Reading these addresses—one by George Eliot and Felix Holt and one by George Jacob Holyoake—in tandem opens up the significant political distance between Eliot and Holyoake. Of course, we should not collapse Felix Holt’s opinions with those of George Eliot, nor should we collapse the Felix Holt of this freestanding speech with the Felix Holt of the novel.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, the palpable differences in political perspective evident in these two speeches makes visible for us the kind of transformative work Holyoake had to perform in order to enlist Eliot as a supporter of his kind of working-class politics. Felix Holt’s speech is a warning about the dangers of change—it expresses a widespread (middle-class) fear that the extension of the franchise would have powerful, threatening results. Holyoake’s speech, on the other hand, acknowledges just how little change the Bill will bring, and works to come up with possible strategies whereby, in the future, working class electors could have some real effect on politics.

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<sup>64</sup> Hilda Hollis argues that Eliot is not simply endorsing Felix’s opinions in the speech (and novel), but that she is encouraging her readers to be critical of Holt, and that in this speech in particular Eliot is satirizing Matthew Arnold (“Felix Holt: Independent Spokesman or Eliot’s Mouthpiece?” *ELH* 68.1 (April 2001): 155-77). I take Hollis’s point, but I simply do not believe that Eliot would publish a stand-alone piece in *Blackwoods*, without any explanatory frame, that she intended to be read as a barely-visible satire. Eliot took her own didactic project much too seriously, I believe, to publish a work in that context that did not at some level represent her political beliefs. Certainly, in the case of the novel, Felix Holt’s particular political opinions are often criticized for their naivete. Hollis’s argument, that Eliot is criticizing Arnold with *Felix Holt*, is in direct disagreement here with Catherine Gallagher’s important argument that Felix Holt the character is an idealized stand-in for Matthew Arnold’s version of “Culture.” See Gallagher, “The Politics of Culture and the Debate over Representation.” *Representations* 5 (Winter 1984): 115-47.

In his address, though, Felix works to slow his listeners down, to convince them that too much change is destructive:

But I come back to this: that, in our old society, there are old institutions, and among them the various distinctions and inherited advantages of classes, which have shaped themselves along with all the wonderful slow-growing system of things made up of our laws, our commerce....Now the only safe way by which society can be steadily improved and our worst evils reduced, is not by any attempt to do away directly with the actually existing class distinctions and advantages.<sup>65</sup>

In Felix's words we might hear an echo of Edmund Burke's famous contribution to the 1790s debate over the French Revolution, "Reflections on the Revolution in France," where he upholds tradition and long held institutions in opposition to the calls for revolution. Burke praises England's long tradition of "adhering...to our forefathers": "The institutions of policy, the goods of fortune, the gifts of Providence, are handed down, to us and from us, in the same course and order."<sup>66</sup> Felix's proximity to Burke here certainly raises questions about his radical credentials (questions that have been raised often in criticism of the novel). Here, we can see why the Tory William Blackwood thought himself "a radical of the Felix Holt breed."<sup>67</sup>

Holyoake too recognizes these "old institutions," but not in order to protect them. Rather, he worries about just how difficult they will be to change, even with the expansion of the franchise. In familiar-sounding phrases, Holyoake explains:

All that the sons of labour have gained at present, is the advantage of being consulted. Whoever is member will have to take them into account. This is a great thing gained. But the electoral machinery of England is centuries old; and the people cannot expect to come into possession of it without conditions, nor to master its use all at once.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> "Appendix B." *Felix Holt: The Radical*. 490.

<sup>66</sup> *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Ed. J.C.D. Clark. (Stanford, Stanford UP, 2001) 184.

<sup>67</sup> Blackwood, Letter to George Henry Lewes. *The George Eliot Letters*. Vol 4: 246.

<sup>68</sup> Holyoake, *Working-Class Representation: Its Conditions and Consequences: An Address to the Electors of Birmingham, Delivered at the Town Hall, Oct. 16, 1868* (Birmingham, 1868) 9.

Out of context, Holyoake sounds an awful lot like Felix here. But in context, it becomes clear that Holyoake is not warning his listeners against taking possession of those institutions; he is attempting to prepare them for the fact that no one will allow such a thing: “Though Representation is open to us, we cannot understand too soon, that the House of Commons, like the London Tavern—is only open to those who can pay the tariff. The House of Commons is a rich man’s club, and at present it is meant to be so.”<sup>69</sup> Holyoake recognizes that longstanding strategies of exclusion have by no means been eliminated with the Reform Act. In fact, he suggests, things might get worse before they get better: “This new line of duty is not a smooth one; and we shall have a good many people complaining that the pathway of Democracy is wholly unmacadamized. When you abolish patrician privileges, you abolish patrician manners.”<sup>70</sup> To macadamize a road is to repair it, by means of a particular nineteenth-century system (developed by one J.L. McAdams) in which layers of broken stone are compressed one layer at a time. No one, Holyoake suggests, has been busy preparing the way for democracy—on the contrary, the threatened upper and middle-class politicians may well do their best to make things difficult.

Holyoake’s resignation here should not be taken as defeatism. On the contrary, he suggests a particular strategy whereby working men can extend their influence:

Working-men will have to create a great Political Fund, and contribute their share of all these costs, as a first step to representative action. Until this is done, all sorts of inane, monotonous people, with money bags about them, will elbow the working-man to the bottom of the poll, and he will never know how he got there.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Working-Class Representation*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> *Working-Class Representation*, 15.

<sup>71</sup> *Working-Class Representation*, 9.

Holyoake's ultimate goal is not for working men to gain some influence over which middle or upper-class politician is chosen, but rather for them to represent themselves. Holyoake conceptualizes the franchise not as a privilege, but as a challenge and opportunity. And, importantly, Holyoake presents the gaining of the franchise as a single stage on a long and difficult battle for representation. It is perhaps with this emphasis on the slowness of the process that Holyoake comes the closest to assuaging the fears of Felix Holt, who hopes in his speech that change, if it comes, will come ever so slowly. Evan Horowitz, in his "George Eliot the Conservative" persuasively argues that despite Eliot's "desperate yearning for a new social organism," her works demonstrate a deep seated fear of the unpredictable effects of any kind of change, even those changes that seem to signal improvement.<sup>72</sup> Hence Felix Holt's political impotence—and near martyrdom—in Eliot's novel.

Despite the powerful political differences evidenced in these two "Addresses to Working Men," political martyrdom brings them back together again. Holyoake closes his speech with a rallying cry, one that recognizes the hard slog yet to come:

We do not shrink from the struggle for freedom and equality on these austere terms. We know that the conditions of Democracy are difficult, but the consequences are worth all they cost. We know that those can never lose who never hesitate in this contest. The greatest writer these Midland counties have nurtured, since the days of Shakspere—has told us that—

The greatest gift the hero leaves his race,  
Is to have been a hero. Say we fail,  
We feed the high traditions of the world,  
And leave our spirit in our country's breast.<sup>73</sup>

George Eliot gets the last word, then, of both these speeches, the fictional and the real.

Eliot may have expressed her own concerns about the extension of the franchise in Felix

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<sup>72</sup> "George Eliot the Conservative." *Victorian Studies* 49.1 (August 2006): 25.

<sup>73</sup> *Working-Class Representation*, 16.

Holt's "Address" in *Blackwoods*, but in Holyoake's speech of the same year, she appears as a devoted supporter of the fight for an extended franchise. After all, in the frame for the speech's closing quotation, Holyoake insists that "The greatest writer these Midland counties have nurtured [...] has told *us* that—The greatest gift the hero leaves his race, / Is to have been a hero." I have italicized the "us" to emphasize what I think is the most important moment in this passage—Holyoake's strong suggestion that Eliot composed those lines *for* the working men. Here, as in his *History of Co-operation*, Holyoake assures his audience that despite the threats of exclusion they will face from middle- and upper-class members of Parliament, at least one great middle-class author is on their side.

But ending with Eliot comes at some cost to Holyoake, who must end his speech on a note of practical failure, if sublimated success. In this moment, we can see why Eliot was particularly useful for Holyoake when it came time to celebrate the forgotten working men of *The History of Co-operation*, those who served the movement but did not effect powerful, individual change. To attempt change, but to fail in that attempt, is perhaps the attribute most likely to qualify you for heroism in the world of George Eliot's novels and poetry, where the most famous novel ends celebrating those like Dorothea who perform "unhistoric acts [and live] faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."<sup>74</sup>

This tendency in Eliot's work may also explain a telling fact about *Felix Holt: The Radical* which I have not yet discussed—the fact that the novel, published in 1866 is set in 1832, just after the passage of the First Reform Act. Much has been written about Eliot's tendency to set her novels in the recent past—*Middlemarch*, *Adam Bede*, and *The*

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<sup>74</sup> Eliot, *Middlemarch* (New York: Bantam, 1985) 766.

*Mill on the Floss* all share this structure with *Felix Holt*.<sup>75</sup> In the case of *The Mill on the Floss* in particular, Eliot's own nostalgia for the time of her childhood is certainly a relevant factor. But with its focus on the 1832 Reform Act, *Felix Holt* treats a national, political nostalgia. From the perspective of a Second Reform Act, an act which Felix (in his *Blackwoods* speech) feared would change everything, Eliot looks back to the forgotten, failed efforts of 1830s radicalism. Midway through the novel, Eliot's narrator describes this historical moment, "when faith in the efficacy of political change was at fever-heat in ardent Reformers [...] Such a time is a time of hope. Afterwards, when [...] wisdom and happiness do not follow, but rather a more abundant breeding of the foolish and unhappy, comes a time of doubt and despondency. But in the great Reform-year Hope was mighty."<sup>76</sup> Eliot herself surely wished for such "wisdom and happiness," but I would emphasize Eliot's penchant for lost causes, and suggest that this penchant may in part explain why *Felix Holt* is set in 1832 rather than in 1866. Causes can only be lost when viewed backwards, from the standpoint of history, and in the 1860s, the Second Reform Act seemed full of potential for enacting serious, lasting, threatening change.

Eliot was of course not the only nineteenth-century thinker to treat the Second Reform Act by thinking about the first one. In his own speech on working-class representation, Holyoake regularly compared the acts of 1832 and 1867, imagining the

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<sup>75</sup> Much has been written, in particular, on Eliot's engagement with history in *Middlemarch*. J. Hillis Miller argues that the novel deconstructs any version of history as an explanatory, master narrative, whereas, on the contrary, Michael York Mason argues that Eliot returns to the First Reform Act in *Middlemarch* because she wants to construct a narrative of origins—to explain the second reform crisis by returning to the first one. Henry Staten argues that *Middlemarch* is adamantly political in its representation of the past, in that the novel is all about changes in class consciousness. Jerome Beaty argues, on the other hand, that despite the historical detail in *Middlemarch*, history remains a backdrop—an important one, but a backdrop nonetheless. See J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative and History," *ELH* 41.3 (Fall 1974): 455-73; Michael York Mason, "*Middlemarch* and History," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 25.4 (March 1971): 417-431; Henry Staten, "Is *Middlemarch* Ahistorical?" *PMLA* 115.5 (Oct 2000): 991-1005; Jerome Beaty, "History by Indirection: the Era of Reform in *Middlemarch*," *Victorian Studies* 1 (1957): 173-79.

<sup>76</sup> *Felix Holt*, 179.

working-classes of 1867 as occupying the same position as that occupied by the middle-classes in 1832. In his description of the obstacles working men were liable to face, he warned his listeners that “The aristocratical classes, who governed before 1832, did not like to meet the middle-class as equals in Parliament: and the middle-class of 1868, will not take cordially to the companionship of workmen there.”<sup>77</sup> In his preface to this speech, when it was reprinted as a pamphlet, Holyoake justifies working men’s desire for the vote by comparing their struggle to the middle-class fight for the vote of the 1830s:

It is constantly said that the working-class have no reasonable measures to propose which the middle-class would not pass. This is not true; for the master class no more feels as the workmen feel, than the old aristocratical class before 1832 felt, as the middle-class proved they did, when afterward they came into power [...] Experience shows that no class learns wisdom by another class thinking for it; and the working-class will never attain to equality until they act for themselves.

By mapping the different classes onto historical moments, Holyoake presents a version of history in which the working classes are separated from the middle classes not so much by economic factors, but by a gap in time—the thirty-year gap between 1832 and 1867. And the best way for the working classes to “catch up,” to close that gap is to “act for themselves.”

It is here, on this question of “acting for themselves” that Holyoake would eventually come right out and disagree with both George Eliot and Felix Holt. In his 1905 *Bygones Worth Remembering*, itself written forty years after the passing of the Second Reform Act, Holyoake addresses those critics who had complained that the extension of the franchise had not yielded good results. Holyoake complains that the real problem is *not* the extension of the franchise, but the fact that the newly enfranchised working classes have not yet been sufficiently educated:

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<sup>77</sup> *Working-Class Representation*, 16.

Has not education been impeded? Have not electoral facilities been hampered? Has not the franchise been restricted by onerous conditions, which keep great numbers from having any vote at all? [...] Before reformers have misgivings concerning the extension of liberty to the masses, they must see that the poor have the same opportunity of reaching the poll as the rich have. George Eliot, who had the Positivist reluctance to see the people act for themselves, wrote: “Ignorant power comes in the end to the same thing as wicked power.” But there is this difference in their nature. “Ignorant power” can be instructed, and experience may teach it; but “wicked power” has an evil purpose, intelligently fixed and implacably determined.<sup>78</sup>

This quotation comes from Felix Holt’s interrupted speech in the novel.<sup>79</sup> In context Felix too is arguing for education; the difference is that Felix wants education rather than the vote, or at least, for education to precede the extension of the franchise. Holyoake would argue, I think, that working men would only be able to insist upon education with the power of the vote. Felix and Holyoake certainly agree, however, on the importance of education. In his own speech from 1868, Holyoake took a moment to praise Felix Holt, specifically, as an example of what a working man could be *with* the benefits of an education: “when instruction reaches him, he will exhibit that pride and simplicity, that indomitableness and energy, which George Eliot has depicted with such generous wisdom in “Felix Holt, the Radical,” who despised alike pretension and self-suppression.”<sup>80</sup>

In this moment, Felix Holt, a fictional character who is himself the “author” of a speech on working-class representation, appears as a praiseworthy reference in Holyoake’s speech on the same topic. Despite the political differences at stake, Holyoake takes the time to recommend *Felix Holt*, as providing an ideal image of the working man, and as such, as recommended reading for his audience. If *Felix Holt*

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<sup>78</sup> Holyoake, *Bygones Worth Remembering*, 1: 277-8.

<sup>79</sup> *Felix Holt*, 292.

<sup>80</sup> *Working-Class Representation*, 14.

reached a wider audience on this question of representation and reform than, I would argue, he reached that audience through the medium of Holyoake's speech (and his recommendations elsewhere) rather than through the medium of the speech that Eliot wrote for *Blackwoods*. With references like these, Holyoake transferred Eliot's work to his own audience; he worked simultaneously to both strengthen links between working and middle-class radicals and to expand the access working men had to important contemporary literature. Indeed, for Holyoake the questions of education and expanded access to knowledge were inextricable. Holyoake was at the forefront of the movement to abolish the "taxes on knowledge," designed to severely limit working people's access to the news by pricing newspapers out of their reach.<sup>81</sup> By 1815, the stamp tax on newspapers was four pence, which meant that newspapers which might themselves charge two or three pence went for six or seven—a price that kept them out of the hands of most readers. The nineteenth century saw a series of political battles over these "stamps," and in 1849, Holyoake joined the Newspaper Stamp Abolition Committee, along with many famous nineteenth-century radicals, Francis Place included. Holyoake worked tirelessly to urge the abolition of these taxes, publishing illegal unstamped papers to make a point, and insisting that papers which were usually *not* forced to pay the tax, thanks to their political leanings (Dickens' *Household Narrative of Current Events*, for example) be required to pay.

For Holyoake, the successful abolition of the newspaper stamp in 1855 was a determining moment in working-class political agitation. In his memoir, *Sixty Years of*

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<sup>81</sup> It was Leigh Hunt who designated these taxes the "Taxes on Knowledge"—they date from the early eighteenth century.

*an Agitator's Life*, Holyoake would remember the problems of the 1840s as hinging upon the lack of access working men had to contemporary news:

In those days there were no village reading-rooms. Hetherington's *Poor Man's Guardian* had never been heard of in Stockbridge. Newspapers were then sixpence and ninepence each, and were seen only by the squire or the clergyman, who never lent them to the cottagers. No union of agricultural labourers was thought of. The company I was in reached the highest point of their existence with a mug of beer and a song. There was no assembly in the Queen's Head of long pipes and village philosophers such as George Eliot has depicted in 'Silas Marner.'<sup>82</sup>

Here we again find Holyoake at odds with Eliot, this time on the combined questions of class, reading, and history. Holyoake argues that in Stockbridge of 1840, the lack of affordable newspapers or reading rooms meant that there were no village philosophers. Since *Silas Marner* is set in the early nineteenth-century, long before the historical moment Holyoake describes here, we can assume that he is less than convinced by Eliot's historical portrayal of agricultural labourers in her novel.

We might disagree with Holyoake here, that reading newspapers is the only way to become a "village philosopher." But what I would like to point to is Holyoake's belief that access to reading materials is a necessary prerequisite for the formation of "assemblies" or "unions" of working men. Central to Holyoake's political work were his longstanding attempts to form communities of working-class readers, and to break down the barriers between those communities and readers of other classes and political beliefs. The repeal of the newspaper stamp act is perhaps the clearest example of this project. Without the stamp, there was no longer a clean line drawn between those who could afford access to contemporary news and the many who could not. Looking back from the vantage point of the 1890s, Holyoake explained:

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<sup>82</sup> Holyoake, *Sixty Years*, 1: 199.

The Midland Railway, by putting third class carriages in all its trains, was the first to bring the workman to his destination at the same time as the gentleman. It was foreseen that the repeal of the newspaper stamp would do more for the workman, for it would bring all the news of the world to his door before his employer was out of bed. Instead of having to wait a week for his master's second-hand newspaper, he would have one of his own. This was worth working for.<sup>83</sup>

Here Holyoake makes explicit the fact that economic gaps between readers are also gaps in time. And both could be closed. Holyoake's metaphor itself might bring to a close the story of belatedness that characterizes the previous chapters of my dissertation. It is no accident that while the radical papers of the first half of the nineteenth century often reprinted texts from the recent past of the 1790s, Holyoake quoted and excerpted Eliot's works in the same years and decades that they were first published. By quoting Eliot, Holyoake worked to bring together this middle-class intellectual with his working-class readership, but perhaps even more importantly, he worked to bring them together *in time*, recommending that the audience of his 1868 lecture, for example, read *Felix Holt*, published just two years before. In the second half of the nineteenth century, thanks largely to the efforts of radical publishers, working-class readers were more and more likely to arrive on time.

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<sup>83</sup> *Sixty Years*, 1: 289.

### Coda

But was this necessarily a good thing, this being on time? Or rather, reading on time? An important context for this chapter has been the significant improvements in access to knowledge which characterized the second half of the nineteenth century. Working-class readers' improved access to texts was paired with increased access to the British political system, thanks to the 1867 expansion of the franchise and the increased political power of trade unions in the second half of the century. This concurrence, of access to texts and access to politics, provides me with the opportunity to examine the interrelations between the two. This coda will consider the advantages and disadvantages of increased access; what did it mean for working-class politics to be on the "train," so to speak, of British politics? And what are the implications for the strategies of quotation I have traced thus far?

In the early chapters of this dissertation, I examined *not* the advantages of being on time, but rather, the advantages of being behind, belated, and delayed. When the agents of the radical press made use of the cheaper texts from the recent past—particularly those like *Wat Tyler* which had fallen out of copyright—they were able to access the revolutionary energy of the 1790s. Old texts, practical for reasons of economics, could also provide a radicalism undimmed by the failures of the French Revolution. And by reusing the same affordable texts, over and over, nineteenth-century radicals created a literary canon which helped knit together the diverse radical

movements of the early nineteenth century. But although texts like Southey's *Wat Tyler* and Godwin's *Caleb Williams* carried with them their 1790s radicalism, their status as older texts also made them all the more flexible, when pulled out of their original historical moment, pulled to pieces, and applied to new political movements. In the 1790s, for example, it would have been much less likely that the new novel *Caleb Williams* could be excerpted against Godwin's intentions, with the king of thieves emerging as a hero, as he does in 1840, in the *Chartist Circular*.

The flexibility with which radical editors could turn these texts to their own wills depended in part on the ways in which their delayed access to texts freed them from the march of literary chronology. This separation—between the radical timeline I have traced in this project and the received timelines of literary history—was matched by a productive segmentation of the reading public. Paradoxically, radical editors could twist Southey and Wordsworth into supporters of their political cause because of the significant social and political distance between their readers and these poets. Political affinity was enabled by political distance. These strategies of quotation were also made possible by Southey and Wordsworth's disregard for (and presumably their ignorance of) the ways in which their texts were being used by unstamped, illegal, radical papers.

We might say, therefore, that the techniques of quotation deployed by the radical press were facilitated by these papers' position outside of mainstream literary and political society. This is certainly one way in which historians have characterized the radical movements of the first half of the nineteenth-century. Kevin Gilmartin has argued that early nineteenth-century radicalism was held together largely by the idea of being "oppositional"—the radical press defined itself as being opposed to (and outside of) the

British government.<sup>1</sup> The Chartist movement has been lauded by Marxist historians for its “independent class politics,” a phrase which signals both Chartism’s status as the first truly working-class political movement *and* Chartism’s separation from mainstream British politics.<sup>2</sup> The history of working-class politics in the nineteenth century is often written as the story of a shift from outside to inside, from the “outdoor politics” of Chartism to increased participation in the British political system.<sup>3</sup>

Whether or not this transition is cast as a change for the better has been one of the central debates of British history in the twentieth century. This political movement “inside” can be charted on multiple fronts. Most clear, perhaps, is the expansion of the franchise which came with the second reform act of 1867.<sup>4</sup> Although, as we saw Holyoake explain in his *Working-Class Representation: Its Conditions and Consequences*, there was still much work to be done before working men could represent *themselves* in Parliament, advantages had nonetheless been won. As Richard Price insists,

Post-1867 politics contained new opportunities for engagement in the political world—opportunities that promised access to the centers of political power to groups whose exclusion had been specifically ordained by ancien regime strictures [...] New kinds of politics emerged [...] and the political agenda was transformed.<sup>5</sup>

Importantly, however, Price makes this argument in response to James Vernon’s very different argument in *Politics and the People*, that the nineteenth century saw not increasing access to politics, but rather an increased disciplining and surveillance of

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<sup>1</sup> Gilmartin, *Print Politics*.

<sup>2</sup> A.L. Morton and George Tate, *The British Labour Movement, 1770-1920* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1956).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Price, “Languages of Revisionism: Historians and Popular Politics in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Britain.” *Journal of Social History* 30.1 (Autumn 1996): 231.

<sup>4</sup> The 1867 Reform Act did not provide universal male suffrage; only the more successful strata of the working classes were enfranchised, that is, the male householders.

<sup>5</sup> Price, “Languages of Revisionism,” 239

political participation.<sup>6</sup> Vernon sees the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867 as marking, not progress for democracy, but rather the closing down of real public participation in the political process. Vernon's influential book is still probably best described as a minority opinion, but his argument demonstrates the ways in which traditional narratives of working-class progress can no longer be taken for granted. Indeed, on the topic of the working classes in England, the same evidence can be used to tell a story of either progress or decline.

The debate, over the question of working-class progress, is perhaps to be found at its height in regards to the question of the Labor movement. The rise of Labor was once a given of nineteenth-century history. And not without reason, as the second half of the nineteenth century saw a significant increase in the power of trade unions, an increase that would eventually lead to the birth of the Labour Party. One way of charting the trajectory of working-class activity over the century is to argue that after the decline of Chartism in the late 1840s, working-class energy and attention was shifted away from specifically political efforts, and over to the unions and the Co-operative movement. A.L. Morton and George Tate's Marxist *The British Labour Movement* sometimes blames the unions (and Co-operation) for diverting energy away from the class struggle—a struggle in which Chartism was clearly engaged. The problem for Marxists, of course, is that neither trade unions nor Co-operativists are explicitly opposed to the capitalist system.

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<sup>6</sup> *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993).

On the contrary, the 1860s and 70s saw trade union leaders become all the more interested in shoring up relations with both employers and the British government.<sup>7</sup> Peaceful negotiations emerged as a preferable strategy to the strike. And trade union leaders become more and more closely involved with the new Liberal Party. The Liberal Party, a combination of Whigs, Parliamentary Radicals, and Peelites, first came to power under Gladstone, after the 1867 Reform Act. This Liberal Party is often seen as a success for the middle classes, who successfully contained the radical and working-class agitation that had preceded the Reform Act. As Paul Adelman summarizes, the working-class leadership

subordinated their own class interests to the needs of the Liberal Party [...] the mid-Victorian middle classes [...] largely succeeded in imposing their own conception of class collaboration upon a newly enfranchised working class—as the rise of the labour aristocracy and Lib/Labism shows.”<sup>8</sup>

With these final references, Adelman returns us to the question of the trade unions, whose leadership (the so-called “labour aristocracy”<sup>9</sup>) worked alongside the Liberal Party, in a cooperative project now known as Lib/Labism. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, this trade union leadership did succeed in pushing through a collection of bills which gave unions official, legal status.<sup>10</sup> The increasing proximity between the Labor movement

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<sup>7</sup> Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861-1881* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965) 10.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Adelman, *Victorian Radicalism: The Middle-class Experience, 1830-1914*. London: Longman, 1984.

<sup>9</sup> The idea of a “labour aristocracy,” that is, the most successful members of the Labour movement, is itself up for debate. The labour aristocracy is often held responsible for the class collaboration between the Labour movement and the Liberal party, since the labour aristocracy’s interests were more closely identified with the employers than with the other workers. But Alastair Reid, for example, argues not only that there was no labour aristocracy, but that rather than blame them for their supposed conservatism, we must come to terms with the deeply held conservatism of the Victorian working class as a whole. See Reid, “Intelligent Artisans and Aristocrats of Labour: the Essays of Thomas Wright.” *The Working Class in Modern British History: Essays in Honor of Henry Pelling* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983)

<sup>10</sup> The 1871 Trade Union Act, the 1875 Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act, and the 1875 Employers and Workmen Act all created a more favourable legal status for the unions. See Morton and Tate, 123.

and the British government offers another version of the outside-to-inside narrative of working-class politics in Britain, and one which has also been subject to very different interpretations. The class collaboration of Lib/Labism is often seen as a cooption of working-class politics by middle-class politicians—critics of Lib/Labism argue that despite their supposed increased influence in government, the trade unions had gained very little real power.<sup>11</sup> But some historians have also looked to re-examine, and even rehabilitate Lib/Labism; Eugenio Biagini and Alastair Reid's *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* provides one example.<sup>12</sup>

The question of whether class collaboration can ever be in the service of working-class political and social improvement returns us to George Jacob Holyoake, and his strategies of quotation. Holyoake's repeated efforts to construct alliances between diverse political groups are in some ways quite typical of the turn working-class politics took in the second half of the nineteenth century. The new project, for better or worse, was not to change Britain from without, but to change it from within. And this meant an acceptance, at some level, of Britain's capitalist class system. Holyoake's favorite project, the Co-operative movement, is itself often seen as an example of the shift I have been mapping thus far. While in the early years of the nineteenth century, Co-operation was associated with Robert Owen's utopian brand of socialism, in the second half of the century, the Co-operative movement turned its attention to business. The shift, in Roydon Harrison's words, was from "community building to shop-keeping": "In place of

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<sup>11</sup> This argument often turns on the problems brought on by the Great Depression of 1874, which the trade unions were in many ways powerless to mitigate.

<sup>12</sup> Eugenio Biagini and Alastair Reid, eds. *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991).

romantic and reckless experiments in community building, the Co-operators of the ‘sixties devoted themselves to the methodical development of retail trading societies.’<sup>13</sup>

In the second half of the century, Co-operation, like the trade unions, seems to have made its peace with capitalism.

As working-class politics lost its radical, outsider status, it did gain official “insider” recognition. The 1860s and 70s saw the trade unions gaining a newly legal status, and along with that status, serious, positive attention from employers. And though the Liberal Party may well have gone forward with largely middle-class policies, it was nonetheless required to court the vote of the newly enfranchised working men. We might imagine this new attention as a version of what Holyoake himself gained for his texts, as he carefully quoted up and down the social scale. By shoring up his relationships with George Eliot, for example, Holyoake transformed her into both a supporter of his movement and a *reader* of his history of that movement. In this new culture of increased access and class collaboration, Holyoake’s texts could find both a wider, and more varied, audience than the radical papers of the early nineteenth century. But having Eliot as a reader has both its advantages and its disadvantages—Holyoake could trade on the interest and attention of the “Midland poetess,” but he could not transform her entirely into a radical, as per the radicalization of Southey in the first half of the century. When he misattributed a passage from her works, as we have seen, he was corrected. With Eliot’s attention came also her own assertion over her texts.

Thus far I have treated the arc of working-class politics through the 1870s, but things certainly did not stop there—and neither did Holyoake’s long career (he lived until 1906). The 1880s and 90s saw a massive increase in trade union membership, as industry

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<sup>13</sup> Harrison, 6, 9.

become increasingly nationalized and semi-skilled and unskilled workers were finally unionized. It is this final push which is often seen as the birth of the Labour Party, which would emerge at the close of the century and come to power in the 1920s. But even this late-century moment—the moment, for Eric Hobsbawm, in which the working class came into its own<sup>14</sup>—can no longer be seen as an unequivocal moment of progress. For Gareth Stedman Jones, for example, the whole idea of a “rise of labour” is false; Stedman Jones points specifically to the working-class culture of the late-nineteenth century as evidencing *not* increasing power, but rather resignation in the face of capitalism. Ultimately, for Stedman Jones: “Class consciousness in twentieth-century Britain has been a conservative rather than a revolutionary phenomenon.”<sup>15</sup>

The historical debates which I have sketched very briefly here are of course in actuality much more complicated. Many hinge upon the question of what relation working-class culture has to working-class politics. The high stakes of these debates owed much to more recent political events in Britain, namely the election of Margaret Thatcher. Here, I want simply to point to the immense amount of political, interpretive weight borne by the topic of working-class politics in the nineteenth-century. When shaped into a narrative, the story of working-class politics in the nineteenth century can be told as one of grand success or epic failure, or, most accurately of course, as a mix of both. Much of the excitement of early nineteenth-century radicalism—for both its participants and for latter-day observers—does stem from its exclusion from British politics, an exclusion which functioned as independence. This is undoubtedly true of the

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<sup>14</sup> “The Making of the Working Class, 1870-1914,” *Workers: Worlds of Labor* (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983) 246.

second chapter of my dissertation, in which radical editors and publishers could blithely ignore the contemporary politics of poets like Wordsworth and Southey. Radicals turned their exclusion to their advantage, just as they managed to turn the experience of imprisonment into an opportunity to bolster the radical community.

The independence of early-century radicalism can make Holyoake's late century politics look staid, even compromised. But Holyoake's interest in reforming—rather than remaking—the British political system itself has a long history; British radicalism is notable for its constitutionalism.<sup>16</sup> Even the Chartists wanted, not so much a revolution, as the opportunity to be recognized by Parliament. George Eliot is, of course, no stand-in for the British government, but I am drawn to the parallels between her recognition of George Jacob Holyoake's words (including his use of her words), and the new recognition of working men by the British government in the second half of the century. It is on this front, the fight for increased recognition as political agents, that I think we can point to real gains for the working classes in the nineteenth century.

The narratives of working-class politics in Britain I have traced here, whether they be narratives of progress or defeat, provide a particularly important frame for the shifting strategies of quotation deployed by the radical press in the nineteenth century. With these narratives, we can see how techniques of quotation were shaped by a changing political climate. Ultimately, though, I would like to resist the idea that these political—and material—conditions necessarily determined how literary texts were put to

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<sup>16</sup> For E.P. Thompson, this constitutionalism was a limiting force for radicalism, as it “implied the absolute sanctity of certain conventions” but James Epstein emphasizes the flexibility—and longevity—of constitutionalist rhetoric, which could be made to serve a number of purposes. For James Vernon, “the discourse of popular constitutionalism [] represented the master narrative of nineteenth-century politics.” See Thompson, *Making of the Working Class*, 88; Epstein, *In Practice: Studies in the Language and Culture of Popular Politics in Modern Britain* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003); Vernon, *Politics and the People*, 9.

use. In the case studies I have included here, literary texts were deployed, over and over again, in the service of political change. Radical editors and publishers were not bound to the existing form of social and political conditions any more than they were bound to the existing forms of the literary texts they excerpted. On the contrary, they pulled apart, reshaped, and retooled novels, poems, and plays, all in order to reshape British society itself. The work of the radical editors and publishers that fills these pages ultimately eludes master narratives of progress and decline, just as the texts they reprinted elude the master narratives of literary history.

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