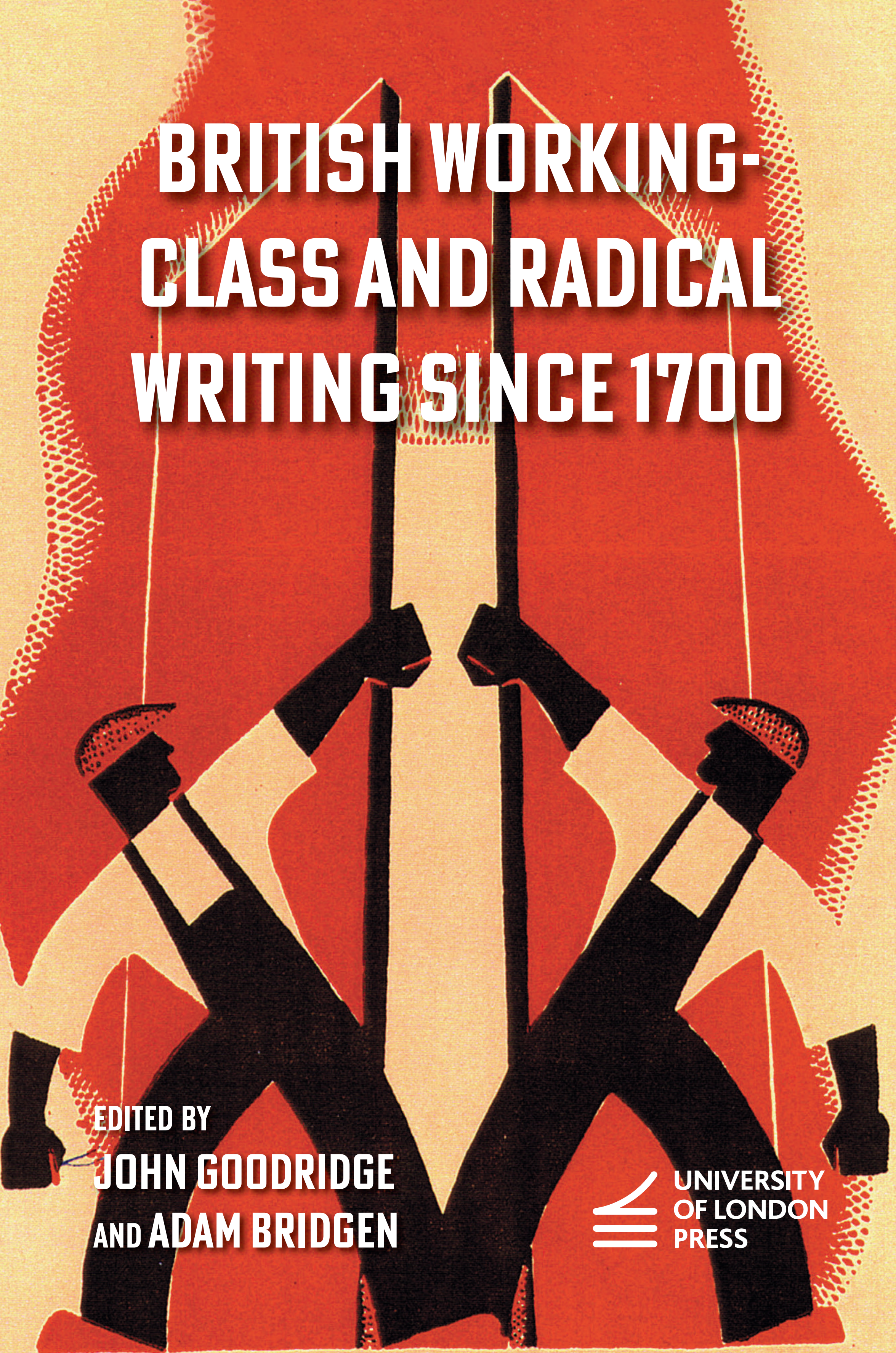

BRITISH WORKING-CLASS AND RADICAL WRITING SINCE 1700

EDITED BY
JOHN GOODRIDGE
AND ADAM BRIDGEN

UNIVERSITY
OF LONDON
PRESS

British Working-Class and Radical Writing Since 1700

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In memory of H. Gustav Klaus (1944–2020)

Correction notice

On p. 267, the percentage of houses owned among the general population was incorrectly given as thirty-five per cent. This has now been corrected to 35.6 per cent.

On p. 267, it was incorrectly stated that one in five newborn Romani babies die compared to one in a hundred among the rest of the population. This has now been corrected to state that one in five mothers experience child loss compared to one in a hundred among the rest of the population.

On pp.267–8, it was incorrectly stated that only nineteen per cent of Gypsies – as compared to sixty-five per cent of all children – take part in primary education, and 10.8 per cent – as compared to 28.9 per cent in total – do their A levels. This has now been corrected to state that only nineteen per cent of Gypsies – versus sixty-five per cent of children across all ethnic groups – achieve the 'expected standard' in primary education, and 10.8 per cent – versus 28.9 per cent – gain 3 'As' at A level.

On pp. 277 and 279, the UK Parliament Tackling Inequalities Faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities report was incorrectly referenced as published on 9 May 2019. This publication date has now been corrected to 5 April 2019.

These corrections have been made in all versions of the book.

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Tim Fulford has written extensively on Romantic-era literature and culture. Among recent projects are a Routledge edition of Robert Southey's *Lives of the Uneducated Poets* (2023) and a new edition of *The Works of Henry Kirke White* for Liverpool University Press (2024). His monograph on *Experimentalism in William Wordsworth's Later Poetry: Dialogues with the Dead*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2023. He is Professor of English at De Montfort University and runs the Robert Bloomfield and Henry Kirke White websites.

John Goodridge is Emeritus Professor of English at Nottingham Trent University, president of the John Clare Society, and a fellow of the English Association. He is the general editor of *English Labouring Class Poets* (2003 and 2006, six volumes), co-edited *A Cambridge History of Working-Class Writing* (2018) with Bridget Keegan, and edits and principally writes the online 'Catalogue of Labouring-class Poetry'. Published books include *John Clare and Community* (2013), and a number of edited volumes of poetry and critical writing. Formerly Editorial Director of Trent Editions, he posts to academia.edu, Humanities Commons, and his WordPress and SoundCloud pages.

Livi Michael has written twenty books for adults, young adults and children, and one play. Her latest novel, *Reservoir,* was published by Salt in 2023. Her academic research concerns working-class fiction and most of her novels explore issues relating to women and class. Her short stories and articles have been published in *Granta*, *The Irish Times*, *The Big Issue*, and elsewhere. She has also taught creative writing at various universities and runs a podcast on short stories with the writer and translator Sonya Moor.

John Rignall is Reader Emeritus in the English department at the University of Warwick. His publications include *Realist Fiction and the Strolling Spectator* (1992), *George Eliot, European Novelist* (2011) and, as editor, *George Eliot and Europe* (1997) and *The Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot* (2000). He also contributed to some of the collections edited by H. Gustav Klaus, among them *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (1982) and *The Rise of Socialist Fiction 1880–1914* (1987).

Stephen Roberts (1958–2022), a fellow of the Royal Historical Society, was an associate professor at the Australian National University and an honorary fellow at the University of Birmingham, UK, before his untimely death in July 2022. A major scholar of Chartism, he also wrote extensively on the history of Birmingham – *James Whateley and the Survival of Chartism* (2018) combines the two topics. His many key works include *The People's Charter* (2004), *An Annotated Bibliography of Chartism, 1995–2018* (2017) and *Recollections of Victorian Birmingham* (2018).

Matti Ron is a researcher specialising in twentieth-century working-class writing and its relationship to the avant-garde, having completed his PhD on the subject at the University of East Anglia in 2020. He has written numerous publications concerning questions of class politics and aesthetic form and received the Raymond Williams Society's Simon Dentith Memorial Prize in 2018 for an essay on modernism and 1930s proletarian fiction. He currently teaches literature in adult education and is a producer on the *Working-Class Literature* podcast.

Ingrid von Rosenberg taught English literature and language and British cultural studies at the Free University, Berlin; at the universities of

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Foreword: remembering H. Gustav Klaus

Christian Schmitt-Kilb

The admirable effort made by John Goodridge and Adam Bridgen to put together a collection of essays in remembrance of the work of H. Gustav Klaus, who died unexpectedly in February 2020 at the age of seventy-five after a short and aggressive illness, has resulted in the current volume that, I am convinced, Klaus would have appreciated a lot and been very eager to read. His dominant interest, in line with the bulk of the essays in this volume, lay with a critical focus designed to contribute to an alternative literary history, one that looks at literature from the margins and from below. His work attained a degree of visibility and recognition beyond the boundaries of German academia that remains unusual among German scholars of English literature. The present volume throws this into relief.

In many respects, the emerging critical and political discourses that were marginal in English studies when Klaus began to publish on Marxist criticism, working-class literature and socialist fiction have moved towards the centre, a development that has gone hand in hand with the radical questioning of the ideas of canonicity and of cultural centrality per se. Arguably, though, this is less true for the category ‘class’ than for the other markers of the fundamental changes in perspective that characterised the humanities in the 1970s and beyond: postcolonialism, feminism and gender studies, and, subsequently, ecocriticism. Despite its overall importance and its blatant visibility in real life, class is a category that often remains underrated and underexposed in critical (literary) discourse. Klaus was one of not too many dedicated critics who, throughout his career as an academic and writer, never lost track of the austerities and structural discriminations, but also of the solidarity and the anti-bourgeois sentiments associated with the category ‘class’.

Apart from his reputation as one of the outstanding experts in British working-class literature, Klaus is widely recognised (in Germany) as a central figure in the process of introducing themes and theoretical concepts of British cultural studies to German departments of *Anglistik* (English studies) in the 1970s and 1980s – when cultural studies was still largely a project of the political left. Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, E.P. Thompson and Perry Anderson: these now household names in theory, criticism and cultural studies, and the work and ideas associated with them, were popularised by Klaus in academia and beyond in Germany (and in German) via publications and translations (for example of Raymond Williams’s *Innovations*). This aspect plays a minor role in the context of this volume. However, it is important to understand Klaus's intellectual biography, which was profoundly influenced by the innovations, paradigm shifts and institutional transformations associated with these thinkers. Yet while his research, his collaborations and his political commitments align him with the concerns of cultural studies during the early years of the field's emergence, he continued to regard himself as a scholar of literature and literary criticism. Perhaps this was partly a response to the field's gradual consolidation as a discipline that, at times, seemed more akin to a version of critical media studies than to the political endeavour it had started out as, during the early days. His own approach to literature kept insisting upon the necessity to uncover the material conditions and means of production of writing and distributing literature, to take into account the social mediators and institutions in the process of literary communication and, more generally, to view literature as one (important) arena among many, where the struggle for hegemony between dominant, residual and emergent ideas and ideologies was acted out.

Klaus's intellectual biography had been shaped by his student years in Frankfurt am Main, Marburg and West Berlin in the late 1960s. This was the time when the cracks in the façade of what was widely recognised as the cultural, social and political post-war consensus became more and more visible, and demand for change was gaining momentum, especially among politicised students at the universities. In tune with these movements, Klaus's first editorship was an anthology of British Marxist literary criticism of the 1930s, translated and introduced by himself, in 1973, and his first monograph was a study of Christopher Caudwell's exemplary career from journalist and literary author to Marxist critic. These early publications set the course for the general direction which his future research and work would take, up until *Voices of Anger and Hope: Studies in the Literature of Labour and Socialism*. Written over a period of almost twenty years, this 2019 collection of essays was to become Klaus's last major publication. The title captures in a nutshell the major concerns and interests of a writer, literary critic and scholar with a remarkably consistent focus. Anger and hope, social protest and utopian vision, were traits and modes embodied by many of the marginalised fictional characters and some of their authors – 'radicals, agitators, rebels, tramps, opponents of conscription, militant trade unionists, socialists and communists' – that had fallen into obscurity and were now unearthed, rediscovered or brought to the attention of a wider academic readership. He insisted on the necessity of a politically charged and socially relevant form of literary criticism to keep the utopian dimensions of literature alive and to prevent literary studies from becoming the intellectual pastime of a small bourgeois elite. These convictions manifested themselves in his research but also in his university teaching. As an inspiring teacher who was deeply convinced of the integration of scholarly research and university education, many of the issues that concerned his research found their way into his seminars and lectures, thus bringing alive these texts and contexts for a fresh audience in the twenty-first century.

Critical work and personal political convictions cannot be seen as independent in Klaus's strong focus on neglected and overlooked aspects of the literary tradition – something that was also a central concern of British cultural studies during its early years. This holds true for his 1985 monograph *The Literature of Labour: Two Hundred Years of Working-Class Writing*, the two collections he edited on socialist fiction (*The Socialist Novel in Britain*, 1982, and *The Rise of Socialist Fiction, 1880–1914*, 1987), for his edition of writings by the Spanish Civil War volunteer Thomas O'Brien (*Strong Words, Brave Deeds: The Poetry, Life and Times of Thomas O'Brien*, 1994), and also for his excursion into the field of detective fiction (ed. with Stephen Knight, *The Art of Murder: New Essays on Detective Fiction*, 1998). While crime fiction is not necessarily associated with a lack of popularity, Klaus made sure that the major and well-explored lines of the generic tradition were complemented with little-known sources, ideas and authors which turn this particular type of genre fiction into an ideal site to investigate the interrelation of culture and society. Most obviously, his work at the recovery of an alternative literary tradition is predominant in *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries*, a collection of short stories of the 1920s he edited in 1993. The volume assembles writers whose names rarely make an appearance in standard literary histories. It was the odd story by well-known authors, not the majority of stories by more obscure ones, that the editor deemed in need of justification in the preface: because 'some readers might be surprised, or alarmed, to find DH Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield in this company'. His decision to place them in a context 'different from the one in which they are usually placed' throws into relief his method, as it were, of rewriting literary history. In his many writings about the literature and criticism of the 1920s and 1930s, the celebrated high modernists – Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, and so on – are marginal figures who make appearances, if at all, as a contrastive foil to the writings of less well-known, sometimes completely forgotten, authors.

Even though Klaus's critical perspective was always also a matter of personal conviction and political sympathy, he never allowed these sympathies to cloud his judgement as a literary critic. The result was a form of politically and historically engaged criticism that did not run into danger to defer to current fashions or to jump onto whichever passing bandwagon, and that often pursued trajectories counter to the zeitgeist. Following his own intellectual compass right from the beginning of his intellectual career, Klaus set himself to resurrect authors of the past and the present and to put them in their historical, political and cultural context rather than to celebrate their theoretical death. His many important contributions to the field of British literature, mainly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, bear witness to the diligence and sympathy with which he listened to the overlooked and suppressed in whose voices he often sensed an active hatred of despotism, authoritarianism and injustice – from the Scottish 'Factory Girl' and poet Ellen Johnston (Klaus, 1998 and 2008) to James Kelman's 'Busconductor Hines' (2019, pp. 183–98), and from Chartist concerns (2019, pp. 5–34) to the unhoused young men and women growing up in an environmentally ravaged Corby in John Burnside's 'industrial novel' *Living Nowhere* (2003) (2019, pp. 183–98).

One of Klaus's later publications was an obituary of Stuart Hall that appeared in the 2015 volume of the Germany-based *Journal for the Study of British Cultures*. As much a personal memoir as an obituary, it leaves the reader struck not only by the extent of Klaus's involvement with the transformation, in Germany, of English departments during the 1970s and 1980s, but also by the role he played as part of a generation that was at the same time an international community of left-wing scholars. Personal contact was always a powerful catalyst for his work. Several of his publications were based upon preceding conferences that he helped to organise, for example in Rostock or Oxford. The events he cherished most were characterised by small groups of scholars working on related issues who met in an equally familiar and intense atmosphere. They were carefully planned so that both intellectual exchange and informal talk had a good chance to come into their own. *The Red and the Green: Ecology and the Literature of the British Left* (Klaus and Rignall, 2012) is a case in point, where conference and publication went hand in hand. The 2007 conference, organised together with John Rignall, underlines Klaus's openness to critical developments (ecocriticism, literature and the environment) which, as he himself admitted in the 2010 essay 'Raymond Williams and Ecology', had been alien to him to the point that he automatically heard 'economy' when people said 'ecology'. Even though new questions are being asked across these various fields and about the writers that Klaus worked on, his work remains as important, as ground-breaking and as generative as ever, reflecting a major contribution to the history of working-class literature.

I would like to end on a personal note. Gustav and I had been colleagues in Rostock, where he held the chair for Literature of the British Isles (1994–2009) for almost ten years before he retired in 2009. Our collegial exchange and friendship continued after his retirement and his move to the south of Germany. I have personally profited a lot from Gustav's generosity in sharing his knowledge and erudition, from his commitment to the causes he believed in, but most of all from his sympathetic personality and his everyday practical politics. The mildly ironic confidence with which he confronted the impositions of an increasingly bureaucratised academic environment, in order to safeguard his liberty as a thinker and scholar, still serve as a model for me. It is for all these reasons that I am very grateful to the editors of and the contributors to a volume which, in many ways, shares the fundamental ideas and, as it were, the spirit of H. Gustav Klaus.

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Edited or co-edited by H. Gustav Klaus

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Co-edited with Stephen Knight, *The Art of Murder: New Essays on Detective Fiction* (Tübingen, Stauffenburg, 1998).

Co-edited with Stephen Knight, *British Industrial Fictions* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).

Co-edited with John Rignall, *The Red and the Green: Ecology and the Literature of the British Left* (London and New York: Ashgate, 2012).

The Rise of Socialist Fiction, 1880–1914, second edition (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2018).

The Socialist Novel in Britain: Towards the Recovery of a Tradition, second edition (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2018).

Note: there is a full bibliography of the works of H. Gustav Klaus on the University of Rostock website, including the 1973 German-language anthology of British Marxist literary criticism of the 1930s and his 1978 study of Caudwell, both mentioned in the text: https://www.iaa.uni-rostock.de/en/institut/mitarbeiterinnen/emeritierte-professoren/emer-prof-dr-klaus-h-gustav/

Acknowledgements

We set out with the idea for a twin-themed collection examining radical and working-class writings, the chief research areas of H. Gustav Klaus, as a response to the loss of a greatly admired fellow scholar and with a view to ensure that the work he began would continue to evolve. We have received vital support along the way from many individuals in the fields of working-class and radical writing, social and cultural history, and the friends and colleagues of Professor Klaus in Britain, Germany and the United States, including members of his family. We are deeply grateful for their enthusiastic encouragement which has done much to help us on our journey. We are thankful, too, to the University of London Press publishing committee and to all at the press, including our editor Emma Gallon, cover designer Nicky Borowiec and the peer reviewers for their helpful reports. We are also grateful to our friends and family for their unfailing support (and occasional assistance with German–English translations), and to the South Wales Miners' Library and the Unity Theatre Trust, for the use of the wonderful 1937 poster designed for the opening of the Goldington Street 'New Workers Theatre' for our cover image.

Besides the loss of fellow thinkers in the field such as Gustav Klaus and our contributor Stephen Roberts (on whom see further below), an unavoidable challenge which shaped this volume has been the current crisis in the academic sector, which has affected a number of our contributors directly, and more generally left many excellent colleagues in their prime facing very difficult decisions. The impact of government underinvestment, the downgrading of the arts and humanities in the UK and elsewhere, and – perhaps most of all – a devaluation of the most human dimension of the humanities, the people who teach it, has been a palpable backdrop against which this collection was formed. In thanking all our contributors for their patience, wisdom and invaluable knowledge, therefore, we especially thank those who have striven to work and contribute in spite of these difficulties. Facing precarity and crisis, albeit of a slightly different kind from that faced by so many of the authors in our study, has only increased the relevance and urgency of the work we do. In this context, we are more than usually grateful for the institutions which have, at different stages, supported the work involved in the editing of this book, in particular the Leeds Arts and Humanities Research Institute, the Department of English at Durham University, and the Leverhulme Trust.

Last, but not least, we should like to acknowledge here some of the pioneers in the field whose work has helped to shape this volume in more

indirect ways. The study of working-class writing has benefited immensely from the work of scholars who have sought to make it more accessible. In addition to the open access ‘Catalogue of British and Irish Labouring-Class and Self-Taught Poets, 1700–1900’ edited by John Goodridge, important here are Kirstie Blair and Michael Sanders’s Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded ‘Piston, Pen and Press’ project, and Simon Rennie’s ‘Poetry of the Lancashire Cotton Famine (1861–5)’ project. While ‘recovery’ work is sometimes seen as less important than the created knowledge of literary analysis, we should look at this the other way round: this is scholarship that aspires to reimagine the literature and history of Britain, and also has the generosity of spirit and public-mindedness to provide rich materials for others to explore. Recovery begets discovery, and discovery the curiosity to dig deeper, to grapple with, and to seek to render visible the often-occluded literature and insights of the great majority of the people. These recent projects are exemplars of the kind of impactful work that is possible, and of the importance of open access and large-scale digital enterprises, to ensure that writing ‘from the margins and from below’ is not just the preserve of an academic ‘elite’ but the inheritance of as wide and diverse an audience as possible.

Note: Professor Stephen Roberts died, sadly, in July 2022, not long after he submitted his chapter to the present editors. We are humbled by his early commitment to this volume, a small but valued consolation for the loss of a great scholar, whose work on Victorian Birmingham was exceptional, and whose writings on Chartism, and involvement, along with Dorothy Thompson and others, in annual ‘Chartist Days’ was of vital importance in keeping the knowledge of this inspiring radical movement alive and actively studied. Stephen worked in both school classrooms and university lecture halls and seminar rooms, and he brought a rich educational ethos and a mature, humane wisdom to all that he did and wrote. RIP.

Introduction

John Goodridge and Adam Bridgen

The eighteen critical essays in the present volume were inspired directly or indirectly by the work of the late H. Gustav Klaus. The project emerged from thinking about the legacy of Professor Klaus, whose life and work are ably and affectionately summarised by his colleague from the University of Rostock, Christian Schmitt-Kilb, in the Foreword. This is not a formal *Festschrift*, however, of the traditional and pious sort, but rather a tribute in the sense of taking further the foundational work Klaus achieved as a teacher and scholar. He looked at literature, as Schmitt-Kilb says, 'from the margins and from below'. We build specifically on two major, related strands of his research: working-class and radical writing. We also take in his interest in such areas as popular fiction, marginalised groupings, including itinerant workers, and the relationship between socialist and ecological thinking. But it is his insistence on the value of working-class writing, and an unshakeable belief in the ability of the people to change society, that gives his work its potency and inspired us to build on it here. These two main strands are not necessarily synchronous, of course: many significant radical writers come from middle- or upper-class backgrounds (some are discussed in these essays). Nor are working-class writers necessarily radical or even political in their writings, though they very often are; neither is the radicalism of their work always obvious. And although some of the most compelling writing comes where the strands coincide, we have not insisted on this in choosing subjects. Rather, we trace the progress of radical and working-class writing, side by side and intertwined, choosing authors, movements and topics that cast a wider light on both traditions, and especially the connections between them.

To explain our terms briefly, we use the term 'working-class' broadly to mean writers who had to work for a living, and thus had limited access to resources of educational, financial or cultural capital. Additionally, we use the term 'labouring-class' to specify the earlier period, 1700–1830, when a coherent, self-conscious working-class identity had yet to fully emerge. By 'radical' – from Latin *radix*, root, signalling change *at the root* – we mean writers who wished to change society, often in fundamental ways (Williams). Given the social and economic challenges faced by the writers we consider, this radicalism is most often directed at bringing about a better, more equal world; however, when in response to dramatic external transformation, radicalism might look rather more reactionary, and focus on defending the vitality of the world from forces that seem antithetical to human flourishing.

Radicalism takes many forms in the writers we study here. A critical grappling with the status quo seems to have been a major, if sometimes indirect or implicit, feature of working-class writing, ever since it broke through in the shape of Stephen Duck's 'The Thresher's Labour' in 1730. This poem challenged conventional pastoral and georgic ideas about the pleasant nature and nobility of rural labour, giving voice to feelings of alienation under profit-driven agrarian capitalism. Duck's ability to speak through the decorous register of Augustan poetics, however, gained him admittance to the court of Queen Caroline, further destabilising the long-standing relationship between literature and social status. This drew vituperative attention to Duck from other poets and literary critics: shedding scorn on his transition from manual to mental labour, some suggested he would soon '*thresh* his brains' out (quoted in Batt, p. 80). As William J. Christmas explains in our opening chapter, even the account of his unfortunate death (as suicide) reveals the endurance of this restrictive, classist ideology, which held that labouring-class poets should remain in their original occupations: to do otherwise risked losing the very thing that made their poetry special and, in connection, their psychological stability.

Not long after Duck was elevated to the royal court, a formidable challenge to his account of rural labour was presented by Mary Collier, in *The Woman's Labour* (1739). Inspired by Duck's model, but unhappy with his negative portrayal of women's contribution to agricultural labour, Collier presented a sociable alternative to his competitive male view, powerfully describing the double shift of women's work, burdened by domestic tasks and childcare, as well as cleaning for higher class women who outsourced this task to their inferiors. While Duck complains of work's endlessness, replaying itself even in his sleep, Collier ripostes: 'we have hardly ever *Time to Dream*'. Collier initiated an important female presence in labouring-class writing, even if her success at the time was undermined by her relative 'outspokenness' (Goodridge, 1995, p. 70). She may have influenced others, however, including Duck himself.[1] His later poem, 'Avaro and Amanda', expands on a short anecdote from *The Spectator* magazine, concerning a shipwrecked English merchant who woos a 'Native American' princess, before betraying her into slavery in the West Indies. In his version, Duck gives significant voice and character to a pointedly Africanised Amanda, who describes a portentous nightmare about her coming enslavement. This passage, which evokes plantation slavery in detail, was unprecedented at this time in focusing on the psychological as much as physical violence of slavery, and on Britain's responsibility for this evil (Bridgen, 2020, p. 202). If Duck poorly represented women's work in amplifying his own toils, he was curiously alert to the economic underpinnings and extreme brutality of forced labour in Britain's colonies.

Before the extension of the franchise in 1918 and 1928 to allow working-age men (and latterly women) to vote, the radicalism of working-class writing was as much about claiming an ability to speak, and embodying the existence of working perspectives, as it was about forwarding particular political positions. This collection of essays seeks to build on important recent shifts in the scholarly study of working-class writing, away from a privileging of 'more recognizable proto-proletarian perspectives', to the more complex ways in which resistance was encoded by those facing 'practical limitations [and] who wished to find their way into print' (Keegan, p. 4). The early stress Donna Landry placed on the double-voicedness or 'hybridity' (p. 29) of labouring-class writing has clearly proven influential, inspiring a reconsideration of how inherited literary forms (and the ideologies they reflect) could be questioned and adapted *through* imitation, and new archival approaches exploring the difference between public and private personae. The shoemaker-poet James Woodhouse is a case in point: his early, 1760s writing had long been dismissed in modern scholarship as sycophantic, especially when compared to his radical later works. His private correspondence, however, reveals a countercurrent stress on 'equality', physical fights to maintain access to land, and (anonymous) interventions in newspapers over his public portrayal, shedding a wholly different light on his ability 'to simultaneously occupy and oppose dominant and dominating cultural discourses' (Bridgen, 2017, p. 134).

Even after the transition to an autonomous and more clearly 'proletarian' working-class literature in the nineteenth century, radicalism still might take less apparent forms: whether it be miners' expressions of cross-species solidarity with 'pests' in their working environment, examined in Kirstie Blair's chapter, or the juxtaposition of tunes and words to comment on contemporary affairs, as discussed in Rebekah Erdman's 'Jone o' Grinfilt' chapter, working-class and radical writers used the available expressive means to comment on the world around them. That working-class writers were rarely afforded time to compose their ideas, that they faced greater scrutiny from gatekeepers, and that their reputations as well as literary remains were rarely preserved in a way they might wish, of course makes it much harder to recognise their significance today. Our contributors employ a variety of approaches to remedy this imbalance, encompassing detailed biographical treatments and historical contextualisation; close archival work and the recovery of scattered working-class lives; comparative analyses across periods or cultures; interdisciplinary work considering different expressive forms; and through the application of relevant theoretical lenses – including feminism, postcolonialism and post-humanism. They consequently present new methods and ways of thinking about how working-class and radical writers pushed back against class society, as well as other intersecting forms of domination, and how, from the margins, they attempted to participate in or even to lead the changes they wished to see.

This study is divided into five parts that are both thematic and loosely chronological, isolating changes over three centuries in writing styles and themes, the circumstances authors confronted, and authors' presentation in the literary marketplace. The coverage also aims to complement other work in the field, such as *A History of British Working-Class Literature* (2017), with its 2018 Irish and American sister volumes (Goodridge and Keegan; Pierse; Coles and Lauter). Thus our first part includes chapters on Stephen Duck, the first publicly successful working-class poet; Thomas Trotter, a Scottish poet and naval physician who made important contributions to the antislavery cause; the nature poet John Clare; and a chapter on working-class writers, the marketplace and their Romantic-period Svengali, Robert Southey. If it seems odd to begin with the *death* of a poet, William Christmas's careful investigation into the 'enigmatic' drowning of Stephen Duck, that is because a mountain of ideological opinion-making was built on the supposition that it was a suicide, which he now questions. The supposed 'lesson' of Duck's demise was one Samuel Johnson applied, in discussing James Woodhouse: that he 'may make an excellent shoemaker but can never make a good poet' (Boswell, p. 395). Despite clear evidence that Duck found a fulfilling life as a clergyman and valued sermoniser, labelling him a suicide let commentators assert that he should never have been removed from his 'simple', 'healthful' job as a fieldworker twenty-five years earlier, and that workers should do their jobs and not concern themselves with words, poetry or troublesome ideas. The cobbler should 'stick to his last', an ideology that would lead to such travesties as Sir Leslie Stephen stating in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, unevidenced, that the poet Robert Bloomfield in later years 'lacked independence and manliness and would have gone mad had he lived any longer'. It is a narrative of failure, the supposedly inevitable lot of the working-class poet.

If the ideological superstructure built on Duck's tragic death sharply illustrates the negative perception of the working-class writer, Tim Fulford explains how Robert Southey used a less toxic ideal of what a working-class poet should be in marketing figures like the 'farmer's boy' Robert Bloomfield, the young Nottingham writer Henry Kirke White and the restless Irish poet Thomas Dermody. Southey's well-intentioned promotion of working-class poets did, however, include one desideratum: that the poet should ideally be both young and dead, limiting the value of his interventions to the poet if not to posterity. Nevertheless, the 'boom' in such poetry certainly benefited some, and paved the way for later, more self-governed and independent working-class poets to thrive.

Thomas Trotter raises different issues, in Adam Bridgen's chapter. The radicalism in early working-class poets like Stephen Duck and Mary Collier often lay, not in any overt challenge their writings made to the existing order, but in the very fact that they boldly wrote their working lives in the satirical couplet style of Dryden and Pope, seizing the literary tools of the elite. But in Trotter we see the conscious emergence of a radical reforming spirit, who resented slavery but struggled to distance himself from it as a naval surgeon discharged in Liverpool in 1783. His subsequent employment on a slaving voyage, however, shaped a quite different kind of protest from his prior anti slavery verses. Embedding an unprecedentedly detailed and influential account of the slave trade within his debut medical work, *Observations on the Scurvy* (1786), Trotter exemplifies a kind of quiet, strategic insurgency that is less historically visible, precisely because he had to be careful not to alienate the ideological commitments and interests of the powerful and those whom he served.

Moving back to the fields where Duck and Collier, Bloomfield and Trotter had started out, Simon White focuses on John Clare's 'distinctive middle-period poetry' whose characteristically 'immersive' view of nature is 'not replicated in the work of any other Romantic poet', relating this to humanist/post-humanist debates. Surveying a rising interest in the treatment of animals and changing attitudes to nature, White believes these mature works 'challenge the anthropocentrism' of other writings, including Clare's own earlier verses. In the Northborough sonnets, notably, natural images may be unsubordinated to human presence, offering a 'new post-humanist poetic'. Clare's own struggles with identity perhaps fostered a less egotistical perspective than those of his contemporaries, but it should not surprise us to see a working-class poet innovating. Duck and Collier, Woodhouse and Bloomfield, Elizabeth Hands and Ann Yearsley, among others, created new and variant poetic forms and ways of looking for labouring-class poets in the century before Clare. It is always useful to see such developments closely analysed.

The five chapters in the second part reflect the wealth of material emerging in the Victorian period, fired by changes in education, the expansion of the press, new political energies born in the upheavals of the Age of Revolutions, and mass movements for greater representation and social equality. Both Rebekah Erdman and Stephen Roberts highlight the growing potency of regional culture, vitally important to the fuller emergence and reception of working-class and radical writing. The Jone o' Grinfilt 'family of ballads' from north-west England examined by Erdman were an immensely popular, proliferating form, sung and recited wherever people gathered. Based on the idea of a single, identifiable character, 'Jone o' Grinfilt', a (sometimes uncommon) 'common man' whose adventures are expounded in the ballads, they ultimately offered an 'expression of their own experiences' to the listener, especially regarding the hardship which makes 'Jone' join the army. Ballads are primarily oral, raising preservation issues, and losing or distorting such material marginalises working-class culture. Erdman looks at 'remediation', the 'representation of one medium in another', around how material of this sort is transmitted, transformed and re-contextualised, and what is lost en route, for example through pre-conceptions about 'authenticity'.

For Stephen Roberts, regional culture gains strength by reaching out to the big issues and the wider world, bringing its own particularity out of isolation. When Robert Owen came to Birmingham in 1832 to 'deliver lectures and address meetings in support of his proposal' for 'equitable labour exchanges', 8,000 people came, and earlier in that momentous year, in May, fully 200,000 had shown up for an outdoor meeting to campaign for parliamentary reform: a 'vast sea of human beings' as proudly recounted in H.H. Horton's poem *Birmingham* (1853). Change was in the air, and this forgotten poet of humble origins, resurrected in Roberts's chapter, campaigned to improve conditions in his city in his long poems; railing against poverty, he also echoes Owen's ideas in his condemnation of 'private accumulation'. In expanding commercial and industrial cities like Birmingham, Sheffield, Liverpool and Manchester, working-class poetry and popular culture reflected the growth of mass movements for reform, and resistance to the dehumanising effects of industrialisation. We get a real sense, in Roberts's deep-diving local research, of intense networking in the reform and progressive movements, often revolving around 'determined, principled men' like Horton, morally driven figures fighting 'poverty, injustice, cruelty and greed'.

If we began with how a labouring-class poet's life and death are remembered, Florence Boos raises the equally important question of how their words are presented. Having in her earlier work rediscovered an entire field of Victorian working-class women poets ghosted by earlier scholarship, she now offers a rare instance where we see a woman's poetry both before and after it has been edited. Patronage meant mediation, and Boos highlights ways that patrons, publishers and newspaper editors, the first mediators of poetry, might impose agendas of their own onto working-class women poets, such as 'norms of educated syntax and conventional metrics', or 'sentiments deemed appropriate for lower-class women: religious, patriotic, domestic, and edifying'. Needless to say, these were *not* necessarily what these women wished to say, or how they wished to say it. Clare's and Keats's arguments with their publisher about his 'cleaning up' their poems for a polite readership show that this problem had a history. For a woman poet of humble origins, the moralising element, indeed the whole process of mediation, could be markedly more severe. Boos compares early self-published 'booklets' of the poet Elizabeth Campbell with the later 'official' volume of her poems, *Songs of My Pilgrimage* (1875), produced under the patronage of male literary worthies. Her poems of intense loss and grief, written in appropriately 'broken and uneven' metrics, became smoother and more pious, while the troubles she urgently needed to express in her verses, including 'poverty, bereavements, displacements, her husband's disability, and the disruptions of war', are robbed of impact and overlaid with consolatory sentiment.

John Rignall, whose organisational and editorial collaborative work with Klaus helped link 'green' ecological thinking with 'red' Marxist theory (a topic addressed by Luke Lewin Davies in our final chapter), offers the recovered radical voice of Helen Macfarlane, a contemporary of the novelists George Eliot and Eliza Lynn Linton, yet standing apart from 'other middle-class women writers of her day' through her 'fierce radicalism' and the 'strength of her political commitment to socialism'. Macfarlane was the first to translate the *Communist Manifesto* into English, while Lynn Linton was a natural iconoclast who attacked the Church establishment into which she was born (daughter of a clergyman and grand-daughter of a bishop), while attempting in her most successful novel, *The True History of Joshua Davidson* (1872), to rescue simple Christian ideals in the cause of progressive politics and to respond to the great upheavals of her era. The study of these radical women thinkers in the key century between Mary Wollstonecraft and the Suffragettes is much enhanced by such recoveries.

In 'The Pit Mice', Kirstie Blair considers Scottish and northern miners through the fauna they encountered in their work. These verse interactions may resist the miners' own portrayal in Victorian culture as animal-like, underground creatures whose emergence provokes unease in polite society. Blair's nuanced essay discriminates between working and wild animals, seeing precedents for these poems in Burns's deeply influential mouse, and in sentimental and sensibility verse. The surprising diversity of living creatures in a mine feeds an impulse to catalogue the 'zoogeographies of the industrial workspace' and to consider how animals were seen by humans: as companions, or pests, or (as in White's reading of Clare), simply co-existing in a natural, non-instrumental way.

Perhaps the greatest social change of the century was the mass movement from country to town effected by enclosure and industrialisation, whose psychic and cultural effects continue to resonate. Heidi Renée Aijala opens our early twentieth-century material with a radical writer who uses the pastoral mode in her powerful socialist critique of capitalism to underline the immense loss this migration created. Aijala notes the contrast between Katharine Glasier's non-fiction, firmly focused on 'industrial violence and political unrest in industrial towns', and her short fiction, positing the 'rural landscapes' and 'agrarian countryside' of the Derbyshire Peak District. Glasier was neither the first nor the last to express this binary, but in her dual forms of writing she draws it out in sharp, Marx- and Morris-inflected, politically focused ways. Aware that every advance in humanity's progress could also be a step into new forms of imprisonment for many, her ruralist solutions, for Aijala, offer a 'unique ecosocialist perspective, one that imagines nature as a regenerative, sustainable system'.

In a perceptive re-appraisal of the work of Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, Kathleen Bell nails another unhelpful perception about working-class writers, the 'widespread assumption – not just among literary critics – that the role of the working-class or labouring-class writer must be to represent their own class experience, making it available for interpretation and emotional responses from a largely middle-class readership'. Carnie Holdsworth's poetry, fiction and journalism has gained fresh attention in recent years, working as it does at the intersection of class and gender, and offering an intelligent independent perspective on culture and humanity, inflected by but not confined to her class experiences. There is a lot to unpack here: about literary aspiration, its restraints and achievements; about types of reading; about how a writer like Carnie Holdsworth finds, holds and relates to her readership, and indeed how 'creative work – whether music, art or writing – is received' – and used.

In the last of our 'pioneer' chapters Livi Michael compares two novelists from opposite ends of the twentieth century, Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Tessa Hadley, and spells out something that is implicit in Aijala's and Bell's chapters: a powerful sense of how early twentieth-century writers anticipate later concerns. Both Michael's authors are concerned with women's experience, seen in terms of restriction and the desire to bypass it and live a full life, even when there is no satisfactory road map. Their differing experiences and time periods offer telling comparisons in the struggles of characters around education, sexuality, family roles and career paths.

The post-war period is represented by three distinctive studies, one on comparative masculinities, and two on how radical new cultural and educational fields could be unfriendly to women, from theatre cleaners to progressive research centres. Masculinity takes on differing colourations in Steve Eszrenyi's study of English and West German miners' novels, struggling to conform to the new orthodoxies in the rebuilt republic, often stubbornly resistant across the Channel in England. Importantly, Eszrenyi's approach – comparing the perspectives of contemporary working-class writers across different countries, and in different languages – extends a new impetus towards internationalising working-class literary studies, as exemplified in Lennon and Nilsson's expansive, two-volume survey of successive national traditions (2017 and 2020). Eszrenyi's comparative approach proves generative, shedding light on how varied political and historical circumstances shape working-class writing *across* different countries. As with Grassic Gibbon and Carnie Holdsworth in the pre-war period, and Tessa Hadley later, the evolving form of the working-class novel (much examined in recent scholarship) enables the nuancing of conceptions of masculinity, via well-realised characterisation and narrative, offering an alternative social history for the period.

But what of those who contributed to the development of post-war culture – specifically theatre – but lacked forms like the novel or poetry through which to describe their experiences? The Unity Theatre, a working-class theatre company founded in the 1930s, confronted this question, producing a rich array of progressive, polyphonous and multiracial productions (an unusually extensive archive of which remains in the Working Class Movement Library and in the Victoria and Albert Museum). Working outside the traditional archive, Sarah K. Whitfield re-creates the world of the theatre cleaner in the twentieth century, offering a rich picture of a subculture. Though based on written language, the theatre is an oral medium, which means (as with Erdman's balladry, and the Gypsy women of Ingrid von Rosenberg's later chapter) that its own history rests upon storytelling and is easily forgotten. The 'disappearing labour' of the cleaners parallels the 'ephemeral nature of theatrical performance': for 'as soon as it is done, it needs doing again'. Whitfield's powerful re-creation here is a hedge against the disappearance of this alternative history. We are invited to 'read' her 'empty mopped stage', the product of tireless, repeated female labour, as the 'blank page' on which the evening's performance will be written.

More obviously equipped to tell their own story were the second-wave feminists who 'broke into' the newly hatched Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), at its birthplace in Birmingham, during the 1960s and 1970s. However, as Monika Seidl reminds us in her chapter, institutional pushback against the feminists who wished to study critically 'the two spheres of class and patriarchy' made for an explosive encounter. While wishing to include women, the centre's initial paternalism (and even reactionary misogyny) produced a feminist insurgency which Seidl expertly narrates through the CCCS archives and Stuart Hall's recollections. Looking back to this important period, Seidl elevates the centre's early women as a model for the continuous 'contesting, negotiating, even "wrestling" and struggling' which accompanies (and indeed is a requirement of) the move from absence to presence.

The final part brings us into a period where working-class writers, radicals and the culturally marginalised became increasingly politicised, as working-class identity was complicated, but also enriched, by the breakdown of Britain's once sprawling empire. While social and economic changes after the war, as Eszrenyi's chapter explores, may have shaken traditional ideas about working-class masculinity, this period sees the increasing presence and voices of non-white authors whose class marginalisation was compounded by their 'racial' or ethnic identification. Discussing the 1971 novel *Water with Berries*, Matti Ron explores George Lamming's creative attempts to evoke the dissonance which the postcolonial turn could cause for diasporic individuals. Urged by a radicalism unlike that of the older generation of Caribbean writers, Lamming's working-class origins, as Ron suggests, lent to a sophisticated rejection of both the restitution of power to a 'native' middle class in the former colonies, as well as the continuance of colonial relations in Britain itself (in his near-allegorical depiction of this novel's main protagonist, Teeton, coming to realise his subjection to his landlady). As Lamming dramatises in the novel's *Tempest*-like final scenes, wresting language back from the rule-setters to express one's own feelings is a fundamental precondition for radical confrontation with embedded, asymmetrical power relations.

Ingrid von Rosenberg's Gypsy women, whose lifestyles raise the same issues facing characters in the earlier women's novels discussed, similarly negotiated compounded marginalisation. Exploring late twentieth-century memoirs alongside Louise Doughty's novel *Stone Cradle* (2006), von Rosenberg shows how Gypsy women writers resisted the twin poles of 'demonisation and romanticisation' and how they worked to describe the hardship of their lives while avoiding demeaning their way of life. If the memoirists' desire to defend their culture might mean glossing over the subordinate position of women within it, this is not the case in Doughty's novel, which attempts to transcend such binaries by reimagining the shared realities facing women of both the 'white working class and the Romani' – pointing, as in Ron's account of Lamming, to forms of class solidarity that underlie ostensible racial differences.

Our final essay confronts working-class responses to perhaps the most enduring legacy of empire: the climate crisis. Luke Lewin Davies brings present-day debates surrounding Marxist ecology to bear on working-class writing, considering how the latter's anticipation of such ideas might supplement and offer ways forward for current political thought. Davies provides a rallying cry for the historical, intellectual and socio-cultural importance of consulting working-class perspectives, not just for a fuller understanding of the ecological (and ethical) debt the West has accrued over the last 300-plus years, but a potentially reparative one. This raises the question of what the world might look like had the writers explored in this volume been allowed greater freedom to write, and had at their disposal the means of translating their ideas into reality – questions confronted early on in Klaus and Rignall's influential collection of essays on 'the red and the green', as Davies notes.

Having encouraged, read and edited this assembly of essays on working-class and radical writers, it is evident to us that they rarely get the credit they deserve for their ideas and interventions, both on and off the written page. As our various excavations and approaches show, recovering their significance and contributions helps to challenge historical narratives that overshadow working-class activism, and in doing so reveals a richer history whose range of participants is far wider than we may at first think. The contributions of those who could not be overt political campaigners, or lacked the cultural capital to be leaders of progressive reform, are often lost, though their small acts (like Bob Marley's 'Small Axe', in Ron's chapter) formed a significant and original part of an ongoing mission to hew at the vast structures of domination and discrimination which remain still with us. We hope that the volume does not just reflect new directions in the study of working-class and radical writing, be this on the topics of slavery and empire, masculinities and gender dynamics, or animal studies and ecology, therefore, but underlines the importance – more than ever – of paying attention to the voices of those workers and radicals who sought to tell others about their world, to bring things to light, and in various ways to change it, to shift the dial.

Note

1. Collier may have written her poem as early as 1730 (Christmas, p. 64). This raises the possibility that Duck had seen it before publishing his collected poems in 1736; in this version of 'The Thresher's Labour', Duck removed some of the verses Collier found offensive (Goodridge, 1995, pp. 62–3).

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Part I

THE MAKING OF THE WORKING-CLASS WRITER

Chapter 1

‘There is an End of the Thresher’s Labours’: Stephen Duck’s enigmatic death

William J. Christmas

Sometime in mid- to late March of 1756, Stephen Duck – the famous ‘threshing poet’, by then a rector in the Anglican church – set out for Bath from his parish in Byfleet, Surrey, probably to seek medical treatment for apoplexy. He never made it back to his rectory, having drowned at Reading on his return trip on 30 March 1756. Three weeks later, Duck’s body was recovered from the River Thames at Sonning, some two miles downstream from Reading. A quickly assembled coroner’s jury brought back a verdict of ‘Lunacy’ and Duck was ‘interr’d the next Evening in Sunning Churchyard’ (*Reading Mercury*, 26 April 1756).[1] A surviving burial record, dated 21 April 1756, shows that Duck was buried in consecrated ground at St Andrew’s churchyard, Sonning, almost certainly in an unmarked grave.[2] The coroner’s verdict, coupled with the circumstances of Duck’s burial at Sonning, show that his demise was understood by local authorities, and presumably any witnesses that testified at the inquest, as a *non compos mentis* suicide.

Duck did drown at Reading, but was his death in fact a suicide? In the quarter century before his death, Duck led something of a charmed life. After his poem ‘The Thresher’s Labour’ was read at court on 11 September 1730, he became an instant sensation as a ‘natural genius’ poet. He enjoyed the patronage of Queen Caroline, who provided him with an annuity, a place to live, and a number of court appointments before her death in 1737. Duck continued to write and publish poetry throughout the

1730s and 1740s, and he took holy orders in 1746. But his successes, both as a poet and as a clergyman, also made him a lightning rod for criticism, particularly of the classist variety. With regard to his death, suicide would have been what most people expected based on a life that wildly surpassed the typical trajectory of a Wiltshire agricultural labourer. This essay challenges that suicide narrative by building a strong circumstantial case that Duck's drowning was accidental, the result of falling into the Holy Brook, a particularly treacherous body of water at Reading, probably in the throes of an apoplectic attack.

A brief history of accounts of Duck's death

The first public announcement of Duck's death, carried in several London newspapers in early April 1756, makes no mention of suicide, and clearly attributes Duck's death to 'natural causes', specifically the apoplectic seizures Duck had apparently suffered from for some time (Batt, 2020, p. 187). The report stipulated that 'on Tuesday Morning the Rev. Mr. Duck, in his return from Bath, where he had been for the Recovery of his Health, died at Reading of an Apoplexy, being the third Time of that Distemper's attacking him' (*General Evening Post*, no. 3472). It appeared almost verbatim in at least three other London papers, and was picked up in due course by several provincials: the *Ipswich Journal*, the *Derby Mercury*, and the *Kentish Post*.[3] Curiously, perhaps due to the ephemeral nature of the source, not one of the approximately three dozen biographical vignettes about Duck published since his death has mentioned this report, until Jennifer Batt's account published in 2015.

Despite the wide distribution of this news, there is evidence that rumours Duck had died by suicide at Reading were circulating even before his body was found on 19 April 1756. In a letter to Samuel Richardson dated 15 April 1756, Thomas Edwards mentions Duck's passing in a brief aside: 'Poor Stephen Duck too! Lord, what is Man!' (Richardson, p. 398). Richardson's reply, dated 24 April 1756, four days after Duck's burial at Sonning, echoes Edwards's sentiments: 'Poor Stephen Duck, as you say! I had a Value for him, and am much concerned at his unhappy Exit' (p. 398). Though both men appear empathetic to Duck's plight, they nevertheless allude to Duck's death as a suicide, a narrative they seem to have accepted already. An additional epistolary comment on Duck's death has survived in the published letters of the Revd John Mulso. In a letter addressed to his friend Gilbert White, Mulso is comparatively more explicit about Duck's death-by-suicide: 'There is an End of the Thresher's Labours. Stephen Duck drowned himself at Reading on his way from Bath: No one can assign a

Cause but sudden Lunacy' (White, p. 107). Mulso's letter, dated 23 April 1756, originated from Sunbury-on-Thames, Surrey, some five miles north-east of Byfleet. As a local, he was positioned to hear and communicate the latest news; for example, Duck's body being found four days earlier (which he alludes to in his opening line). Mulso's comments are significant because he corroborates the initial newspaper report that Duck was returning home from Bath when he died, and he suggests a cause – 'sudden Lunacy' – that anticipates the coroner's inquest verdict published in the *Reading Mercury* three days later.

Most of Duck's early biographers would stick to the language of lunacy or melancholia to explain Duck's apparent suicide; but many also saw fit to add their own prejudicial, moralising rhetoric into the mix, in effect turning Duck's death into a didactic tale of class overreaching. The first published biographical account of Duck appeared in *The New and General Biographical Dictionary* in 1761. Although authorship remains unknown, this account is important because it contains specific details and motifs that will be repeated (or slightly modified) in dozens of accounts published well into the twentieth century. Duck's first, anonymous biographer notes that, 'falling at length into a low-spirited melancholy way, he flung himself into the Thames from a bridge near Reading, and was drowned. This unhappy accident, for he was perfectly lunatic, befell him some time in May or June 1756' (*New and General Biographical Dictionary*, p. 236). Despite the shoddy research (Duck died at the end of March), this account established two important mainstays of the genre: speculation on Duck's mental state at the time, and the location of his suicide. It also inaugurated the trend to moralise Duck's death in explicitly classist terms: 'if he had been suffered to pass the remainder of his life, after he had passed so much of it, in poverty and labour, he had not only missed the unhappy end he came to, but also been a stranger to many years of melancholy and misery, which preceded it' (p. 236).

Close comparative study of the many biographical vignettes published after Duck's death reveals several trends: most poach from previously published accounts, often using the same language or phrasing without quotation marks or citation; most resort to classist moralising to contextualise Duck's supposed suicide; and many introduce unsubstantiated 'facts', presumably to justify yet another rendering of Duck's story. The account provided in a 'supplement' to the first edition of *Biographia Britannica* (1766) copied the *New and General*'s account of Duck's death largely verbatim (*Biographia Britannica*, p. 43). Two later accounts, in *An Historical and Classical Dictionary* (1776) and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1778), added new phrasing – 'probably owing to his change in life, and cessation from his usual labor' – condensed from the earlier *New and*

General's account to explain Duck's melancholic state (*Historical and Classical Dictionary*; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, p. 2556). The worst of this classist editorialising, however, might well have been Ralph Heathcote's statement excoriating Duck's patrons: 'By turning the laborious thresher into an inactive parson, they brought lunacy first and then suicide, upon a man, who might otherwise have enjoyed himself with two cows and a pig, and ended his days in serenity and ease' (p. 38). Over time, some details given in these accounts seem more the whimsical products of the biographer's imagination than anything else, as in Fredric Turner's noting that

> there appears to have been a settled strain of melancholy in his character which developed into religious mania. Early in 1756 he took a journey into Wiltshire, and visited the barn where he had worked years before, and on his way back he threw himself from a bridge, at or near Reading, and was drowned. (p. 424)

In Turner's telling, Duck's low spirits have morphed into a 'religious mania', and his trip to Bath is reconstructed (without a shred of evidence) as a return to his native Wiltshire, insinuating that the alienation Duck must have felt in doing so was a contributing factor to his suicide.

The one exception to these trends in the eighteenth century was Andrew Kippis's effort to provide a new account of Duck for the second edition of *Biographia Britannica* (1793). Kippis served as 'editor and prime mover' for the project and was recognised as 'the leading biographer of his day' for his efforts (Ruston). Kippis personally undertook some local research at Reading that challenged the prevailing Thames narrative with an alternate location for Duck's drowning ('a trout stream which runs at the back of the Black-Lion Inn'), and he also tried to explode the classist nonsense that Duck's melancholia was the inevitable result of his estrangement from the life of labour he was born to (p. 417). 'To say that [Duck] endured many years of melancholy and misery before his death', Kippis wrote, 'seems to be asserted without a shadow of proof' (p. 417).

But Kippis's otherwise admirable revisionist vignette also had the unfortunate effect of confusing rather than clarifying the details of exactly where Duck drowned. Nevertheless, several prominent Duck biographers that followed Kippis acknowledged his work on this topic in different ways. Alexander Chalmers added the phrasing 'or, as some say, into a trout stream' to his description of Duck's drowning (p. 391). Robert Southey opted to circumvent the location issue by simply reporting that Duck 'threw himself into the water' at Reading (p. 111). For his *Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Duck, Leslie Stephen sided with Kippis, naming him as his source but slightly misquoting the 'trout stream' story (1888).

In revising Stephen's account for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, William R. Jones avoided the location issue altogether, noting only that Duck 'committed suicide by drowning'. As we shall see below, untangling the details of Kippis's 'trout stream' story is essential for constructing a more detailed account of Duck's movements in Reading on the day he died, and for building the case that Duck's death may well have been accidental.

A suicide counter-narrative

Any effort to challenge the story that Duck took his own life at Reading by throwing himself from a bridge into the Thames must begin by taking seriously the aforementioned newspaper report that Duck 'on Tuesday Morning [. . .] in his return from Bath [. . .] died at Reading of an Apoplexy, being the third Time of that Distemper's attacking him' (*General Evening Post*, no. 3472). Despite its publication in several London and provincial newspapers – not always the most reliable of print sources – there are elements that argue for its authenticity. The source of this report remains unknown, but it appears to derive from someone who had intimate knowledge of Duck's travel plans (which can be corroborated) and his recent health history (which cannot). The report is explicit in noting that Duck was 'return[ing] from Bath' when he 'died at Reading', which turns out to be quite accurate, whatever the cause. Furthermore, it remains the best source we have for dating Duck's death because the London newspaper reports were all published on Friday or Saturday, 2 or 3 April 1756, and so the 'Tuesday Morning' referred to would have been 30 March 1756.

Batt notes that Duck's 'surviving letters contain regular complaints about illnesses and afflictions ranging from colds to a bad back', but nothing on the order of apoplexy, which was quite serious and largely impossible to treat at the time (2020, p. 187). By the mid- to late eighteenth century, 'apoplexy was the term used to describe [. . .] a sudden catastrophic event characterised by a loss of consciousness, movement and sensation. Many of the conditions that would have been described under the term apoplexy are incorporated into what is now referred to as stroke' (Storey, p. 233). An apoplectic fit, then, was understood as a paralytic event of sudden onset, which raises the question: Did Duck fall into a body of water at Reading due to an apoplectic seizure? The initial newspaper report does not mention Duck drowning, but if its details about Duck's recent history of apoplectic attacks are genuine, it is possible that Duck's drowning was precipitated by his apoplexy. If there were witnesses to the event, Duck may have appeared to fling himself into the water of his own volition. Though we cannot know definitively what happened, the initial report of Duck's death-by-apoplexy nevertheless suggests that his death-by-drowning might well have been accidental.

That Duck travelled to Bath seeking treatment for apoplexy makes good sense because Bath was easily accessible from his home in Surrey, and Duck's longtime friend and patron, Dr William Oliver, was a prominent physician there. Oliver was known to have 'a large practice in the middle of the [eighteenth] century' at Bath (Murch, p. 22). Surviving letters also show that Duck had sought medical treatment from Oliver in 1740, and, in 1752, Duck wrote two letters to Oliver, one recommending a parishioner to Oliver's care, followed by another thanking Oliver for accepting her (*European Magazine*, 27, 1795, p. 80; 28, 1795, p. 79). Duck's plan may have been to see Oliver again as a patient himself, or perhaps Oliver recommended Duck to a colleague that specialized in the clinical treatment of apoplexy.

Duck's return journey from Bath would have taken him on the recently turnpiked 'northerly line' of the Bath–London road that went through Chippenham and Calne before rejoining the southern route at Beckhampton, and continuing east toward Reading (Buchanan, pp. 82–3). We know he travelled this route because a contemporary, Revd Thomas Morell, noted in his commonplace book that Duck stopped at Calne, Wiltshire, to see old friends and neighbours from his native county and to preach a sermon (Batt, 2020, p. 188). Morell had been one of Duck's most energetic antagonists in 1746 when they were both being considered for the curacy of St Anne's Church at Kew, and, though their quarrel had cooled, Morell nevertheless notes that Duck met with a 'contemptuous Reception' from his audience in Calne (p. 188). Morell goes on to suggest that this experience was the underlying cause of Duck's 'fatal stop at *Reading*' (p. 188). Most biographical accounts describe Duck as a popular preacher, but, even if this particular sermon did not go well, that alone hardly seems like a catalyst for self-murder.

Travelling east from Calne, Duck would have entered Reading from the south-west on Castle Street and then continued through town to the George Inn on Minster Street, the most prominent coaching inn in that part of town. Assuming that he did not travel by foot (which would be unusual for someone of his means and age, health issues notwithstanding), Duck would have changed coaches there to continue his journey to Byfleet, and so he probably had some time to stretch his legs or mill around in the vicinity of the George.[4] However, it seems rather unlikely that Duck ventured on foot to the Caversham bridge, the only bridge over the Thames near Reading at that time, just over a mile north-west of the George.

The body of water nearest to the George was known as the Holy Brook, a partly man-made channel designed to divert water from the River Kennet – which diversifies as it enters Reading into a number of smaller streams – to power the Abbey Mill. It flows back into the Kennet beyond the mill, and the Kennet then flows directly into the Thames just below Reading. Period maps show that the George essentially backed right up to the Holy Brook, so it flowed mere steps away from where Duck would have alighted from the coach.

The Holy Brook appears to have been one of the most dangerous waterways in England in this period with regard to drowning fatalities. One local historian points out that by 1817, at least '101 children drowned in [the Brook] within memory of people alive in that year' (Hinton, p. 133). The *Reading Mercury* often carried news of these drownings, which included reports involving many adult victims as well. For example, 'Mary, wife of William Ross [. . .] accidentally drowned in the Holy Brook', and 'Joel Assington, a private in the 10th or Prince of Wales's reg. of light dragoons, fell into the Holy-Brook stream, near the Saracen's Head inn, and was drowned' (*Reading Mercury*, 22 July 1793; 22 December 1800). Because the Holy Brook served as a source of clean fresh water for Reading residents, designated 'dipping places' not only allowed easy access to the stream but also created more opportunities for accidental drowning. Some recorded drownings are specific about this context: 'Mary Ann Hearn about nineteen years of age', a servant, fell in and drowned while procuring water for her work at one such dipping place, and James Boggs fell in and perished while 'attempting to drink out of the Holy-brook stream' (*Reading Mercury*, 21 April 1855 and 9 May 1796). The rapid flow of the stream made it particularly deadly and difficult either to rescue those that fell in, or to recover their bodies post-mortem. A report of a five-year-old girl's death notes that she fell into the Holy Brook

> in Castle-street [. . .] and was carried as far as Duke-street, before [her body] could be got out. The methods recommended by the Humane Society, for the recovery of drowned persons, were made use of for above an hour, but the bruises the child had received by the violence with which [she] was carried by the stream, rendered them of no effect. (*Reading Mercury*, 8 May 1786)

Most bodies were recovered at the Abbey Mill sluices; however, it was in fact possible that an adult body could make it past the mill and enter the Kennet. This was the case with one Sarah Brown who apparently fell into the Holy Brook at King's Road and was 'taken down by the stream through the works of the Abbey Mill, by which means the contusions as appeared on the body were occasioned' (*Reading Mercury*, 22 November 1845). Her body was recovered the next day in the Kennet. Despite this long history of what often appear to be preventable tragedies, the Holy Brook remained largely unfenced well into the nineteenth century as pleas 'to protect the public from the danger' posed by the Holy Brook were still being made in the 1840s (*Reading Mercury*, 11 February 1843).

Kippis's revisionist account of Duck's death in fact places Duck very near to the Holy Brook. In keeping with his 'passion for comprehensiveness', Kippis expanded the single paragraph afforded to Duck in the first edition of *Biographia Britannica* (1766) to four full pages (Nichol, p. 290). On the subject of Duck's death, Kippis wrote:

> Mr. Duck, after continuing rector of Byfleet somewhat more than four years, fell into a dejection of spirits, and, in a fit of insanity arising from the disorder, drowned himself at Reading in Berkshire. The accounts before me say, that he flung himself into the Thames, from a bridge near that town but this was not the case. I know, from particular enquiry made near the time, that he was drowned in a trout stream which runs at the back of the Black-Lion Inn, at Reading; and I have seen the very spot where he met with his unhappy fate. The event took place between the thirtieth of March and the second of April, 1756. (*Biographia Britannica*, p. 417)

Kippis's 'particular enquiry' was presumably undertaken with the help of a local person (or persons) with knowledge of 'the very spot' where Duck drowned. While Kippis does not question Duck's death as a suicide, he does categorically dismiss the 'flung himself into the Thames' narrative, and substitutes for that tradition a narrative that has flummoxed more than one modern scholar since (myself included).

The main problem one immediately runs up against in trying to corroborate Kippis's account is that there is no extant record of a 'Black-Lion Inn' in Reading until the 1820s, and even then, the establishment was located at the corner of West and Broad streets, some four blocks to the north of the Holy Brook and other streams of the diversified Kennet (Dearing et al., p. 219). The coaching inn that Kippis should have named in his account is the George, but he was likely confused by seeing the names 'Black Lion' and 'George Inn' alongside each other as coaches were named at the time according to their end-point destinations.[5]

Advertising in the *Reading Mercury* reveals that 'Reading Post-Coaches set off every morning from the George Inn' with the route terminus being the 'Black Lion' located at 'Water-Lane, Fleet-Street, London' (*Reading Mercury*, 4 October 1790). The coach Kippis arrived in Reading on would have been labelled 'George Inn', but for whatever reason – confusion at the time, or misremembering details when he later came to write up

Duck's new *Biographia Britannica* entry – Kippis failed to keep these coaching inn names straight.

He also failed to name the 'trout stream' that he stood near, but circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that this was the Holy Brook. Kippis's description that the stream in question ran 'at the back of the Black-Lion Inn', matches exactly the geography of the George Inn in relation to the Holy Brook, then as now. In addition, the Holy Brook is consistently referred to in local newspaper accounts of drownings as a 'stream' and the Kennet was known in the period for its trout fisheries. Kippis's language, though ostensibly vague, therefore contains its own internal coherence. More recently, Adam Sowan, a local Reading author who produced a short history and guide to the Holy Brook, briefly mentions Duck's death noting that the 'trout stream' in question 'is assumed to have been our Brook' (p. 31). Though Kippis's account does clarify the body of water Duck very likely drowned in, he appears unaware of the initial newspaper reports describing Duck's apoplexy and offers no challenge to the prevailing suicide narrative, simply repeating the accepted wisdom by the 1790s that Duck 'drowned himself at Reading'.

Once Duck's body passed through the Abbey Mill works, possibly aided by an increased flow due to rain in the area on the day he drowned, his path to the lock and weir barrier at Sonning might have been impeded by a variety of naturally occurring obstacles such as trees, reed beds, and islands, as well as artificial ones, like sunken barges or boats. April 1756 was also one of the wettest months recorded between 1727 and 1931 (Nicholas and Glasspoole, p. 301); the *London Magazine* recorded eighteen days of rain in London out of the first twenty-one days of the month (April 1756, p. 200). This much rain would certainly have made the waterways around Reading turgid and increased the silt content enough to make it difficult if not impossible to see a body submerged in the water. Not surprisingly, there are accounts of drowning victims remaining in the rivers near Reading for weeks. One newspaper report stated that the coroner 'deposed that the body [of Robert Batten] was in a shocking state of putrefaction, and must have been in the water for several weeks' (*Reading Mercury*, 10 November 1838).

Duck's body was found and removed from the Thames at Sonning on 19 April 1756, and one local historian has recently opined that Duck's 'body could not have arrived at a better place', as he was buried in consecrated ground the following evening in St Andrew's churchyard with the help of an independently minded vicar, Revd Thomas Hubbard (Peters, p. 17). No doubt an empathetic vicar helped in this situation, but it was also the case that cultural attitudes toward suicide were changing in the last half of the eighteenth century. In their ground-breaking study of suicide in early modern England, Michael MacDonald and Terence R. Murphy have shown that, by the end of the eighteenth century, 'judicial and ecclesiastical severity gave way to official leniency and public sympathy for most people who killed themselves' as '*felo de se* verdicts had become as rare as *non compos mentis* ones had been two centuries earlier' (1991, p. 109).

Duck and his family certainly benefited from these changing attitudes. English common law at the time stipulated that, in the event of a *felo de se* verdict, all of a suicide's moveable property was forfeited to the crown, often severely damaging the family's economic standing. In Duck's case, the lunacy verdict protected his wealth but had one unfortunate ramification. Duck's recently recovered probate will, executed on 30 July 1754, makes clear Duck's intentions regarding the disbursement of his wealth and goods, and details his personal burial wishes. The fact that Duck's will was administered on 5 June 1756, and his 'Goods Chattels and Credits' distributed to his surviving children speaks to a more humane, progressive culture developing around suicide in England in the mid- to late century period. But Duck also wanted, in his own words, 'to be buried according to the Custom of the Church of England in the north side of the Chancel at Byfleet as cheap as decently may be'.[6] Sadly, even in more lenient times, the lunacy verdict still carried with it the stain of suicide, and so Duck could not be buried in his own church.

But did Duck actually die by suicide? It would seem that everybody at the time thought so, and few Duck biographers have spent much effort challenging that orthodoxy since. However, one anonymous biographer writing in the mid-nineteenth century offers a simple – but nonetheless compelling – challenge to the suicide narrative:

> If poet had ever reason to be happy and satisfied with his lot it was [Duck . . . He] was a man of literary taste and habits, and he was placed in a situation in which he could indulge them – there was nothing hazardous in placing him in such a situation, and according to any theory of probabilities he should have been the last man to have committed suicide. (Anon., 1860, pp. 40, 42)

Here Duck is recognised as a 'poet', and his right to a literary life is validated, whatever his class origins. Indeed, Duck had just published a successful poem, *Caesar's Camp: or St. George's Hill* in 1755, which received positive notice in the *Monthly Review* (p. 159). Duck was also generally known to have been a popular preacher and, though his third wife (Elizabeth) had died in 1749, he seems to have been living a contented life among his parishioners and friends in Byfleet. There is nothing in the surviving historical record to suggest that he was suffering from the psychological effects of deracination that so many biographers have ascribed to him. In fact, one of the surprises of Duck's probate will is that he still owned valuable 'Implements of Husbandry' that he may well have had occasion to use as his ecclesiastical living included roughly thirty acres of arable glebe lands, which, along with the fact that he was still indulging his poetical talents and socialising with friends like Joseph Spence, paints a rich picture of Duck's life at Byfleet in the years leading up to his death.[7]

If the Thames suicide narrative does not add up, then how did Duck die that day in Reading? Given all of the above, I think it is quite plausible that Duck fell into the Holy Brook and drowned, most likely as a result of an apoplectic attack. The initial newspaper report on Duck's death is explicit in noting that he had survived two earlier bouts of apoplexy, and that he suffered a third attack at Reading 'in his Return from Bath'. We know today that having one stroke significantly increases the chances of having another, typically more severe, occurrence. Duck's third stroke, then, would likely have been strong enough to incapacitate him, and if he was standing anywhere near the Holy Brook, he might easily have tumbled into the fast-moving stream. It is also possible that Duck might have simply slipped or otherwise accidentally fallen into the Holy Brook and succumbed to the violence of the swollen waters.

In either scenario, melancholy, depression, sudden lunacy, or temporary insanity, had nothing to do with Duck's death. Nobody at the time seems to have considered a physical, rather than a psychological, cause for Duck's sudden fall into the water. But that would be in keeping with a cultural shift toward the secularisation and 'medicalization of suicide' in the eighteenth century in which 'melancholy, lunacy, and delirium' take centre stage in explaining why people ended their own lives (MacDonald, 1989, pp. 69, 85). The coroner most likely responsible for overseeing Duck's inquest, William Prince, a Reading apothecary whose jurisdiction included Sonning, could not possibly have diagnosed apoplexy as a contributing factor to Duck's drowning – even if he had the medical knowledge to do so – due to the putrefied state of Duck's body after three weeks in the water. There was, therefore, no available physical evidence to support an accidental death verdict, but that may well be the most accurate conclusion to draw now in light of Duck's history of apoplexy, among other factors. The George Inn was a busy place and so the evidence required to support a lunacy verdict would have been more readily available, likely sourced from at least one witness's (mis)interpretation of what they saw. That, mixed with people's expectations or presumptions about the negative effects of Duck's social dislocation and class overreaching on his psyche, would certainly have been enough to keep the death-by-suicide narrative circulating at the time – and beyond.

Comparing the response to Duck's death with that of his friend Joseph Spence twelve years later offers an instructive example of the power of class prejudice at mid-century. Spence was the person most responsible for Duck's entrance into London literary society in the 1730s, and later he was instrumental in securing Duck his living at Byfleet. Spence had retired to Byfleet himself in 1749, so patron and protégé became neighbours a few years later and were much in each other's company (Wright, p. 119). But twelve years after Duck's death, on 20 August 1768, Spence was found dead, lying face down in a shallow body of water in his extensive gardens. Rumours that Spence, like Duck, had died by suicide quickly began to circulate. And, also like Duck, Spence was known to have suffered from apoplexy 'for several years', so his friends, especially Bishop Robert Lowth and Dr James Ridley, 'took pains to contradict' the suicide rumours (p. 174). Their efforts proved successful for, three days after Spence's death, the coroner's inquest apparently brought back a verdict of accidental death.[8] There is, as yet, no extant evidence of Duck's Byfleet friends, especially Spence and Lord Lincoln, making a similar effort to challenge the story that Duck had died by suicide. Perhaps the lack of witnesses and the shallowness of the water made Spence's case easier to adjudicate, but nevertheless, in the court of public opinion Spence was a gentleman, and Duck – no matter how far he had come – was not. Even in death Duck could not escape the long reach of his class origins.

Notes

1. The coroner's report itself has apparently not survived; this remains the best evidence we have that a coroner's inquest did take place, as it should have, once Duck's body was recovered.

2. Royal Berkshire Archive, Sonning parish register D/P113/1/2. The date discrepancy can be attributed to the burial, which took place the evening of 20 April 1756, being recorded the next day.

3. Batt notes that the announcement of Duck's death appeared in the *Public Advertiser*, 2 April 1756, the *Whitehall Evening Post*, 1–3 April 1756, and the *London Evening Post*, 1–3 April 1756. It was also carried by another London paper, the *General Evening Post*, no. 3472, and the *Ipswich Journal*, no. 896, Saturday, 3 April 1756, the *Derby Mercury*, vol. 25, no. 3, Friday, 2 April – Friday 9 April 1756, and the *Kentish Post, or Canterbury News-Letter*, no. 4005, Saturday 3 April – Wednesday 7 April 1756.

4. Given his age and health issues, it is also unlikely Duck would have travelled by horse. But even if he did, the George Inn would still have been the most convenient place in Reading for him to stop to rest and water his horse on his way back to Byfleet.

5. Gillian Clark, Reading local historian and author of *Down by the River: The Thames and Kennet in Reading* (2009), provided invaluable assistance in clarifying

the details of Kippis's revisionist account. I remain grateful for her scholarly generosity and expertise.

6. Duck's probate will is now available on *The National Archives* website; see PROB 11/823/280. Transcription mine.

7. 'Glebe lands' typically comprised a significant part of the living for rectors in the Anglican church at that time and were often used for agricultural purposes. My acreage estimate is based on a transcription of a 1635 document, 'A Presentment of the Glebe Land belonging unto the Rectorie and Parsonage of Byfleet', shared with me by the Byfleet Heritage Society.

8. Wright mentions that 'a coroner's inquest was held on August 23' but does not provide the official verdict (p. 175). If, as Wright suggests, 'suicide was not suggested at the inquest', then the verdict would almost certainly have been accidental death by drowning (p. 247, 130n).

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Chapter 2

Other realms of labouring-class antislavery: the early verse and medical writing of Thomas Trotter

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In January 1783, aged twenty-three, Scottish naval surgeon Thomas Trotter looked out from the Ladies' Walk in Liverpool – a fashionable, poplar-lined promenade offering an elevated view of the port town – and composed these discomforting verses:

> While on thy banks, thou fam'd commercial stream,
>   Gay splendid seats and glittering villas rise,
> Thy waves with wealth in golden currents gleam,
>   With every tide increase the swelling prize.
>
> For thee the Negro, robb'd of Nature's right,
>   Bleeds from the lash, and bends, the planter's slave;
> In Christian bondage owns a tyrant's might,
>   And stains thy traffic in a shroudless grave.
>
> Did he for wealth e'er tempt the waves or wind?
>   Has he for gewgaws British freedom sold?
> That sigh which breathes good-will to all mankind,
>   How ill-exchang'd to barter souls for – gold!
>
> Behold yon dome, where oft' the massy bowl
>   Pours riot staggering from a midnight flood;
> Each drop that glads the haughty owner's soul,
>   Cost Afric's sons a torrent of their blood!

Are these the graces that shall mark thy reign
    From savage States, fair Empress of the Sea?
While all earth's blessings crowd thy happy plain,
    Still enviest thou the Negro to be free?

Ah, how unlike that golden age of yore,
    When mercy wav'd the freight of every gale!
That with her commerce British freedom bore,
    And blest the nations where she stretch'd her sail.

Trotter's poem (1790, pp. 149–50) is notable for combining a polite poetic register with incisive criticism of Liverpool's and, by extension, Britain's longstanding involvement in transatlantic slavery. Addressing the genteel sort who took leisure in the Ladies' Walk, Trotter produces an inverse prospect poem: where previous poets had celebrated the town's new-found splendour without mentioning slavery – praising 'frugal industry [. . .], | And punctual honour' as the mainstay of 'Liverpolia's wealth [. . .], | Her stately structures, and extensive trade' (Perry 1773, quoted in Dellarosa, 2014, p. 32) – Trotter instead reconnects the 'glittering' wealth of Liverpool's elites with the brutal violence through which it was extracted from enslaved people. Contesting the equivalence between blackness and slavery that had been normalised in the eighteenth century, he insists upon freedom as 'Nature's right' which had been 'robb'd' from Africans. Simultaneously, in appealing to commerce-born 'British freedom', Trotter reflects the powerful nationalist narrative that had long glorified Britain's rise as a trading nation; yet, he deploys this concept to challenge its paradoxical role in the institution of slavery.

Trotter's biographers have recently sought to contextualise his 'uncompromising' attack on slavery alongside other early forms of resistance: 'the occasional clergyman questioning the morality of the trade from his pulpit; the soul-searching of Quaker businessmen; the testimony of repentant slave captains like John Newton' (Vale and Edwards, p. 53). However, Newton did not publicise his loathing of slavery (and past involvement in it) until after the abolition watershed of 1788, and while Quakers had long protested slavery, only in mid-1783 did they found the first abolition society in Britain. In 'Verses Written in the Ladies Walk at Liverpool, in January 1783', therefore, Trotter wrote considerably in advance of the organised antislavery movement, which would first result in the Regulated Slave Trade Act in 1788 (setting a limit on the number of captives allowed per voyage, based on the ship's poundage), and eventually the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807. At this point the Royal Navy's role suddenly switched from defending and extending the British slave trade to suppressing slave trading altogether (Burroughs, p. 5). While composed remarkably early, it is important to note that, as far as we can tell, Trotter's 'Ladies Walk' was not published in 1783. It appeared in print only seven years later, in issue 17 of the *European Magazine*, alongside two other poems written in 1781 and 1782.[1]

Trotter's navy career arguably had a more complex influence on his opposition to slavery than has yet been acknowledged: if, on the one hand, it exposed him to the stark contrast between Britain's celebrated wealth and the conditions under which it was produced overseas, it also conditioned how he could speak about it, given the navy's pro-colonial, pro-commercial, and tacitly pro-slavery ideology in this period. Like many aspiring Scottish medics of 'lowly social and financial status', Trotter was likely persuaded by the hands-on training, pay and board, and advancement opportunities which membership of the naval medical branch promised (Vale and Edwards, p. 18). He signed up in 1778 at the height of the War of American Independence (1775–83); his first deployment was, as third mate, on the *Berwick* defending the Channel against the French, and the year following in the West Indies, as a convoy escort. It was here, during time in port in Barbados and Jamaica, that Trotter would have first experienced some of the structures and realities of a slave-based society. By early 1781, the *Berwick* had returned to form part of a North Sea blockade against the Dutch and would be first in the line of battle at Dogger Bank. Commended for his resolve in the ensuing bloodbath, Trotter was promoted to surgeon of a smaller vessel, the *William*, which was tasked with escorting coasters between Liverpool and Plymouth (pp. 41–6).

While the severities of working at sea may have sharpened Trotter's withering view of the ease of Liverpool's elites (cf. Harrison, p. 245), it also rendered his opposition to slavery precarious and contingent. If one significant aspect of 'Ladies Walk' is its earliness, a more surprising fact is that it was written just weeks before a twist of fate that saw Trotter accept an offer of employment on the slave ship *Brooks*. In February 1783 the *William* struck a sandbank in the Mersey; Trotter and his crew were stranded in Liverpool and shortly after demobilised without pay. In the lull of peacetime, the slave trade was not an uncommon resort of naval surgeons: 'Discharged with little or no half-pay, they needed to earn a living, and to establish a civilian practice would for most of them have been difficult if not impossible' (Vale and Edwards, p. 54). In Liverpool, moreover, peacetime prompted a surge in departing slave voyages (almost doubling to eighty-five, from forty-seven in 1782); and although such voyages remained notoriously dangerous, they were not without attractions:

competitive pay, lucrative privileges and performance bonuses for officers, and even the possibility of captaining one's own vessel in future (p. 53; see also Webster, p. 60ff., and Schwarz).

Trotter's acceptance of this berth, against his better judgement, can be further contextualised by his social background. While the navy was one of the foremost avenues for advancing the prospects of doctors from humble backgrounds, it was not without downsides. Besides the privations of life at sea, naval surgeons lacked the degree of professionalisation and respect they were to gain during the Napoleonic Wars; correspondingly, only the most senior were on the prized 'Navy List', which afforded them half-pay in peacetime (p. 47).[2] Precarity in work and the pull of a ready remedy to economic hardship – these are the contexts which saw a twenty-three-year-old become the caretaker of hundreds of kidnapped Africans, facilitating the very system of slavery he had reviled in 'Ladies Walk'.

At the time of joining the vessel in April 1783, the newly built, copper-hulled *Brooks* had none of the notoriety it does today: only in 1788 would it be immortalised, infamously, in a cross-section image illustrating the packing of enslaved Africans in the ship's hold, as per the 'regulations' established by Sir Dolben's Bill (Finley, p. 35). Back in 1783, Trotter would not have known quite how perilous slave voyages were – such as that one in four surgeons died on them (Webster, p. 60) – or, relatedly, the horror of conditions below deck. After a fourteen-month voyage beset with delays, and stunned by the violence of the captain, the brutalisation of crew and captives, and having almost died from a rheumatic disease contracted in the course of his duties, Trotter abandoned the *Brooks* on his return to Liverpool. Venturing back to the north-east of England, he set out to gain the professional status and social capital which might have prevented him from having to consider the trade in the first place. This did not mean he left slavery behind; having gained his MD and returned to the navy in 1788, he took three weeks' leave in 1790 to give 'damning evidence' about the *Brooks* before the House of Commons Select Committee on the Slave Trade (Vale and Edwards, p. 83).

Trotter's involvement in the slave trade nevertheless makes judging his verses as well as his activities as a 'dedicated abolitionist' (p. 57) a fraught undertaking, liable to veer between the poles of championing or, alternatively, dismissal. We might, for instance, reasonably doubt Trotter's sincerity and see his literary writing as a form of self-exculpation: a means of defending the respectability of physicians in spite of their critical role in enabling the slave trade (Faubert, 2023). While provocative (and pertaining to some extent to Trotter's retrospective verses from the 1820s), this theory relies on a dubious premise – namely that participation in the slave trade was considered disreputable in the 1780s. This, as I detail below, was far from the case.

Trotter's rejection of slavery and his near simultaneous employment in a slaving voyage draws into view a much more richly textured and complex relationship between written resistance to slavery, socio-economic status and maritime work in eighteenth-century Britain. Scholars are familiar with the challenges that labouring-class writers faced in the highly hierarchical eighteenth century; as they 'spoke to a refined audience from a social space alien to that audience', this often lent a 'double-voiced' quality to their writing (Keegan, 1999, p. 225) – whether that be because of a simple embarrassment about their background or, on the other hand, because of an unpardonable and hence unspoken resentment against the status quo. Building upon this insight, the present chapter re-evaluates Trotter's early antislavery writings in the light of his class position and his aspirational career in the Royal Navy. Considering the navy's practical and policy-based support of the slave trade, I argue that in large part Trotter's resistance remains covert and inconspicuous. While the significance of his early writing has therefore tended to remain unnoticed, my analysis draws attention to its importance in the genesis of Trotter's later, better-known and better-recorded role as an avowed abolitionist. While he only made his opposition to slavery public in 1790, the purpose of this essay is to shed some light on the pressures, the resulting shapes, and the potential influence of labouring-class antislavery *before* abolitionism.

From peasant to physician: Trotter's poetic aspirations

Trotter's place in the developing canon of eighteenth-century labouring-class poetry is yet to be properly established. This is likely a legacy of his own success: having been promoted in 1794 to 'Physician to the Channel Naval Fleet', Trotter's background, his literary writing and his struggles for social and professional recognition have received far less attention than his medical achievements. That said, Vale and Edwards offer an overview of Trotter as an 'amateur poet and dramatist in the British-Scots tradition', situating his early verse amid 'the emergence of rustic or peasant poets' like Stephen Duck (pp. ix and 199). Trotter's earliest verses would seem to support this contextualisation. Though excluded from Trotter's late-life collections of verses, *Sea Weeds* (1829, p. viii), some fourteen of his early poems survive in print under the pseudonym 'T.T. Melrosensis', focusing on rural scenes and the beauty of his native Melrose; these were published in 1778 across several issues of Walter Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Advertiser*, which invited contributions from young poets.

Trotter's entry into print was by no means guaranteed: some poems were evidently excluded by the editor, such as the 'Mourning Shepherdess' (Ruddiman, p. 48). Trotter was more successful with strategically timed odes to winter, spring and autumn, as well as churchyard poems, love poems and elegies.

These early poems offer some of the 'private' detail which is unfortunately absent from biographical treatments of Trotter, given the lack of a surviving diary or letters (Brockliss). Although Vale and Edwards do not discuss these poems, Trotter may have excluded them from *Sea Weeds* for the same reason that his 'relatively humble origins [. . .] needed to be concealed rather than celebrated': this 'reticence' about revealing his social origins was 'probably typical of men who achieved distinction in their chosen professions, but who lacked the wealth and aristocratic connections normally necessary for success in the late eighteenth century' (Vale and Edwards, pp. 202–3). If Trotter was uncomfortable about disclosing his rustic origins (as the son of a village baker and, possibly, small-scale farmer),[3] he may also have been concerned about his early poems' incongruity with a career of patriotic naval service.[4] Take the closing lines of his 'Ode to Autumn':

> The pregnant grape its load resigns,
> The goblet foams with mellow wines,
> While Winter nips the flow'ry spray,
> On Tweed's steep banks they die away.
> Ye banks that now I bid adieu,
>   To seek far hence some distant shore,
> No more I strain the reed for you,
>   I go where Britain's thunders roar.
> Adieu! ye fields that nurs'd my days!
> Ye banks that heard my youthful lays,
> Farewell, fair Tweed, your streams and springs!
> While harvest home the village rings.

Offering a poignant farewell to Melrose in view of his departure for the sea, where 'Britain's thunders roar', this was the final poem Trotter published in Ruddiman's magazine.

Trotter continued writing verse in the navy, with – perhaps unsurprisingly – a more patriotic tone: having completed his seasonal set with 'Ode to Winter' (published in January 1781 in the *Westminster Magazine*), he wrote rousing ballads like 'The Origin of Grog', just days before the *Berwick*'s engagement against the Dutch; when stationed in Deal, he wrote witty verses prompted by an incident at a musical entertainment, 'presumably in order to make a name with the young ladies' (Vale and Edwards,

p. 46). This writing in low and high(er) registers neatly reflects Trotter's rapid promotion through the warrant-officer class, becoming a full surgeon the following year. While Trotter has been compared to other physician or 'psychologist poets', such as the weaver-turned-physician Thomas Bakewell (Faubert, 2009, p. 10), perhaps a more pertinent category is writers 'who worked at sea', as recent bibliographical work indicates (Keegan, 2023, p. 270). The demands of a life spent working at sea (or stationed on shore) explains the insistently mobile and occasional nature of Trotter's poetry; indeed, his ability to write 'amid the hurry and incommodiousness of a seafaring life' was admired by contemporaries (Beddoes, p. 46). Described in *Sea Weeds* as a means of 'relaxing his mind' from 'human misery' or 'alleviat[ing] a pensive moment!' (p. xxvii), the connection between his line of work and his poetry becomes even more profound. Ironically, this characteristic of his verse means Trotter compares poorly to Romantic-period poets of greater magnitude, as Vale and Edward's description of him as an 'amateur poet' perhaps reflects. If the demands of work acted to compress his poetic compositions, this is also what makes his verses so interesting, being rare and insightful forms of imaginative expression produced within (and increasingly against) Trotter's occupational commitment to British imperial dominion.

Censure and censorship: 'Ladies Walk' in a local and literary context

Trotter's 'Verses Written in the Ladies Walk at Liverpool, in January 1783' is a case in point. Though a short poem, its six chain-rhymed quatrains achieve a great deal in a small space, representing an important early stage in the development of his anti-imperial stance (compare Harrison, 'Albion's coast is sick', pp. 237–55). What is more, these lines were produced against a backdrop of broad social acceptance of slavery (in Liverpool) and a still broader glorification of British commerce, both of which Trotter confronts.

Trotter's navigation of the difficulties of contesting slavery in the early 1780s becomes more visible when we consider his contemporaries. Thanks to Franca Dellarosa's landmark study of Edward Rushton (1756–1814), a blind, former slave-ship sailor and poet, we are now aware that Liverpool produced some of the most vocal labouring-class critiques of slavery in this period – despite the chilling effect of the slaving interest there (2014, p. 17; *pace* Faubert, 2023, p. 140). Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was those who had worked in (or adjacent to) this central sector of Liverpool's economy, who issued some of the most radical expressions against slavery and empire. Rushton published his *West-Indian Eclogues* in 1787 and was followed by his friend and collaborator Hugh Mulligan (1746–1802) with *Poems, Chiefly on Slavery and Oppression* in 1788. This publication gathered together Mulligan's 'powerful cycle of eclogues', two of which were first published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in late 1783 and 1784 (Dellarosa, 2014, pp. 143, 146). Both poets were likely inspired by the 'African Eclogues' of the Bristol-born charity schoolboy and apprentice clerk, Thomas Chatterton (1753–70), who had creatively adapted the eclogue form to address slavery.

While the years 1787 and 1788 saw an explosion of antislavery verse in Britain and the formation of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (SEAST), in 1783 there were few precedents for poems which explicitly attacked Liverpool's, or for that matter Britain's, involvement in slavery. At this stage the only poem to shine a light on Liverpool's role in slavery was William Roscoe's anonymous *Mount Pleasant* (1777). As the title suggests, the poem seeks to venerate Liverpool. It begins by evoking the busy cityscape and docks, where 'In loud confusion mingled sounds arise, | The docks re-echoing with the seamen's cries' (p. 9) and stresses Liverpool's fame across 'the wondering world' (p. 12). This view of a global Liverpool is, however, soon upset by a twenty-two-line passage lambasting slavery, with an appeal to freedom not unlike Trotter's: 'Shame to Mankind! But shame to Britons most, | Who all the sweets of Liberty can boast' (pp. 13–14). For this trampling of the rights of men, Roscoe blames avarice and the enervating power of 'Luxury'; he laments that before 'Foreign Climes' were known, 'Our drink, the beverage of th' Chrystal flood, | [was] Not madly purchased by a Brother's Blood' (p. 15).

While the passage indicts slavery, however, it carefully avoids attacking Liverpool's affluent classes, a moderation likely due to Roscoe's aspirations in civic society. It should be remembered, too, that Roscoe continuously anonymised his antislavery verse, something common for abolitionists cautious about reprisals or impacting their business interests in Liverpool (Baggett, pp. 48–52). Roscoe was the son of a market gardener and a successful social climber, later achieving renown as a leading banker, lawyer, abolitionist and MP. Importantly, therefore, in *Mount Pleasant*, the only active agents of trade identified are those hard-working seamen and dockers handling the goods – elsewhere, the 'bloated monster, Commerce' (p. 16) is abstracted. Subsequently, the poem's eye retreats from these cacophonous scenes and finds a surer footing in celebrating Liverpool as a 'blest retreat' of the Arts (p. 18). While to Roscoe slavery was no doubt a stain on the town's reputation, his principal aim in *Mount Pleasant* was, as Roseanna Kettle argues, to temper Liverpool's obsession with gain and to 'reinvigorate [its] cultural status and to instate himself as a key figure in its cultural renewal' (p. 75). In praising the architectural beauty and 'social amenities' on offer to the more privileged local populace, the poem thus ‘shows little interest in connecting these institutions to the sources of wealth upon which they are founded’ (p. 86).[5]

Trotter’s highly focused repudiation of slavery, by contrast, realises the hidden links between Liverpool’s civic assets and the outwardly violent and inwardly corrupting institution of slavery, targeting particularly those elites who benefited most from both. As mentioned above, the setting of ‘Ladies Walk’ foregrounds the intimate material connection between the port’s polite spaces and the scenes of slavery that it subsequently evokes. Stressing, ‘For thee the Negro, robb’d of Nature’s right, | Bleeds from the lash’, Trotter countermands the conventional dislocation of the profits of slavery from the means of their production. He also considers other ways in which this wealth was maintained by unequal distribution of risk and labour, asking of the ‘tyrant’ planter, ‘Did he for wealth e’er tempt the waves or wind?’ – as Trotter had, and thousands of young men like him, by going to work at sea. This builds into the fourth stanza, depicting intoxicated, punch-fuelled entertainments at the Town Hall and Exchange, as the ‘massy bowl | Pours riot staggering from a midnight flood’. Concluding ‘Each drop that glads the haughty owner’s soul, | Cost Afric’s sons a torrent of their blood!’, Trotter’s attack is far more personal and pointed than Roscoe’s, gothically presenting the consumption of colonial products as a kind of cannibalism.

While Trotter’s unsparing assault on Liverpool’s slave-based wealth distinguishes him from other poets in this period, his less overtly critical response to empire shares features with Rushton’s early verse. As mentioned above, Trotter’s evocation of the notion of ‘British freedom’ contributes a second strand to his antislavery argument. However, his tone suggests a degree of uncertainty about the well-trodden concept of freedom-bearing British ‘commerce’, which ‘blest the nations where she stretch’d her sail’. By situating this idea in a ‘golden age of yore’, he negates its present existence implicitly. A comparable displacement is visible in Rushton’s *The Dismember’d Empire* (1782), which, written towards the end of the American war, warns of the prospective demise of Britain in the face of colonial rebellion. As Dellarosa argues, at this stage in his poetic development Rushton was ‘fully entangled in a pro-imperial stance, and still unable either to question the parent-offspring logic of empire or articulate any unease regarding the practices of colonial economy and society, as founded on human enslavement’ (2014, p. 133). Indeed, in his brief depiction of the sugar islands’ abundance, he downplays the realities of slavery – a far cry from his sympathetic vindication, even encouragement, of slave rebellion in his 1787 *West-Indian Eclogues* (p. 76). That said, *The Dismember’d Empire* concludes unconventionally, imagining not Britain’s triumph but its ultimate ruination, which creates an uneasy sense that ‘all there is to reap from this relationship [with the colonies] is disconnection and loss' (Kettle, p. 125). Comparing Rushton and Trotter's 1782–3 verses therefore illuminates a shared strategy for encoding disquiet about British empire at this time. If Trotter implies the fictiveness of liberty-exporting British commerce by displacing it to a mythic past, Rushton reflects the fragility of Britain's greatness by imagining its desolate future state.

Ironically, the very forthrightness of Trotter's verses may explain their invisibility in scholarship today, being absent from all modern anthologies of British antislavery verse (Richardson, 1999; Basker, 2002; Wood, 2003). Though it is hard to be certain given the destruction of Liverpool's newspaper archives (Clare, p. 101), it is highly unlikely that Trotter's verses were published in 1783. The commercial and conservative leaning of the town made it very difficult for newspaper editors to accept contributions of a liberal or reforming nature, barring a brief interlude in 1788–92 (involving, as it happens, Rushton and Mulligan's brief editorship of *The Herald*) before the onset of war with Revolutionary France (p. 118). Whether rejection, self-censorship or merely the demands of naval life prevented Trotter from publishing his verses during the 1780s, 'Ladies Walk' should nevertheless be recognised as an important example of early antislavery verse, and part of Liverpool's 'isolated undercurrent' of antislavery (Dellarosa, 2005, p. 20).

Embedding antislavery: Trotter's *Observations on the Scurvy* (1786)

Reading Trotter's early verses in this way – as written against the tacit cultural acceptance of the business of slavery, into which he would himself subsequently be drawn – prompts us to think more carefully about the form that his antislavery activities took in the years following his voyage on the *Brooks*. The experience no doubt played an important role in shaping Trotter's onward life and career. For one thing, it provided a far more direct, experiential dimension to his abhorrence of slavery, and to the slave trade specifically. However, to claim that 'Trotter quitted the ship a dedicated abolitionist' (Vale and Edwards, p. 57) risks glossing over the challenging contexts for antislavery expression in this period: though in 1790 Trotter would testify before the House of Commons Select Committee (and simultaneously publish 'Ladies Walk' in the *European Magazine*), in 1784 there was no centrally organised abolition movement to stand behind. There were pioneers like Granville Sharpe who had long battled slavery in the courts, but it would be another three years until SEAST was established; it was later still that former slave ship physicians and sailors, and the formerly enslaved, would be encouraged to recount their harrowing experiences of the trade (Falconbridge, 1788; Stanfield, 1788; Equiano, 1789). In the mid-1780s, by contrast, witness accounts of the Middle Passage were extremely rare. Those which did make it into print were elusive and brief, such as an anonymous 500-word 'Report' published in Anthony Benezet's *Short Account of that Part of Africa Inhabited by the Negroes, and the Manner by which the Slave-Trade is Carried On* (Philadelphia, 1762; London, 1768). This 'searing denunciation' has recently been attributed to John Newton (Coffey, p. 13) – a finding that challenges the traditional view of a late-life religious conversion inspiring Newton to reject slavery in 1788. Rather, as Coffey suggests, Newton had long been critical of slavery but withheld his name in the 1760s to avoid 'antagonising powerful slaving interests in Liverpool', where he was already struggling to gain ordination (p. 14).

If Trotter's departure from Liverpool removed one repressive context for publicising his antislavery views, the conservatism of the naval establishment might still have made him, like Newton, wary of appearing as an 'agitator [. . .] against the iniquities of Britain's imperial expansion' (Coffey, p. 15). Promotion within the navy required the nurturing of patronage relations as well as the favour of the Admiralty Board (Vale and Edwards, p. 38), and owning his opposition to the slave trade would have put Trotter at odds with both. His principal patron was the retired vice-admiral Robert Roddam, a Northumbrian potentiate who was crucial in helping Trotter establish his 'riding practice' as a surgeon-apothecary in Wooler (p. 74). He also later ensured his return to the navy (and promotion) as surgeon of *The Edgar* in 1788. Though little is known of Roddam's later views, receipts show he purchased several slaves in Jamaica in 1756 (Paplay). More generally, the navy was practically if not ideologically committed to the defence of British overseas territories and interests; colonial commerce was considered a 'nursery for seamen' – in other words, a training ground for sailors which ensured Britain could defend itself in wartime. As naval historians now concur, this 'connection between colonial trade, naval strength and the preservation of national sovereignty [. . .] made abolitionism appear dangerous' (Petley, p. 107). It comes as little surprise therefore that the Admiralty was resistant to the nascent abolitionist cause: indeed, in 1783, they refused Sharpe's plea to prosecute the crew of the *Zong* for the murder of 132 enslaved Africans, who had been thrown overboard when the ship was stranded at sea (Faubert, 2018).

At just twenty-four, Trotter was at the very beginning of his naval career. Consequently, the Admiralty's general aversion to abolitionism seems an especially pertinent and persistent context for considering the nature of his subsequent antislavery activities. For one thing, this background may help to explain the unusual and unassuming form that his writing took on this topic. Trotter's first publication after his return to the north-east was *Observations on the Scurvy* (1786), a medical study which drew on his experience at sea – including his 1783–4 voyage on the *Brooks* – as a novel source of evidence for the possible causes and treatments of the scurvy. While this practical, experiential approach was itself innovative (Vale and Edwards, p. 69), arguably most striking was Trotter's arresting depiction of the conditions that the captive Africans faced, just a few pages in:

> It will be proper to observe here, that these poor wretches are chained two and two by the wrists and ankles: such as are suspects of doing mischief, are likewise chained to the deck during the day. The rooms below are from five to six feet in height, according to the size of the ship; and besides the number that can lie on the deck, half as many lie on a platform that runs along each side of the ship, raised about two feet and a half from the floor, equal in breadth to the length of a man. Here they are stowed *spoonways*, as it is called, and so close locked in one anothers arms, that it is not possible to tread amongst them. (pp. 31–2)

Further depicting the lack of air and the intense heat of the ship's hold, as well as the gruesome physiological details of the scurvy's progress and Trotter's activities in assisting the afflicted, the work offered a meticulously detailed, start-to-end account of a slaving voyage – preceding by some two years the 'flurry of parliamentary (and abolitionist) activity' to gather such evidence (Webster, p. 72).

Trotter, however, nowhere calls for abolition in his aptly titled *Observations*, nor rejects slavery as a practice (as he had previously done in 'Ladies Walk', where he asserted freedom as 'Nature's right'). In this instance he is far more circumspect, writing self-consciously as 'A Surgeon of His Majesty's Navy; and Member of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh'. Indeed, when he momentarily breaks from the narrative to offer a reflection on the psychological as much as physical torment of slavery, he conveys his opinion indirectly – through negation, not assertion:

> I can by no means suppose the Negro feels no parting pang when he bids farewell to his country, his liberty, his friends, and all that is to be valued in existence. In the night they are often heard making a hideous moan. This happens when waking from sleep, after a dream that had presented to their imagination their home and friends. (pp. 37–8)

While understated, this is recognisably proto-abolitionist in its stress on the 'exquisite sensibility' (p. 38) of Africans,[6] a capacity which was frequently denied in justifications of the trade (Gikandi, p. 221).

Focusing on effects rather than causes, however, Trotter stops short of any direct critical comment on the institution, the interests it served, or the government that supported it. More broadly, Trotter is careful to introduce the work by stating his patriotic commitment to Britain, stating that the work was written ‘in view of the naval and commercial interest of these realms’ (p. iv). In this practical vein, he also notes that ‘commercial interests’ would be served by reducing African deaths from the scurvy (p. 22), recommendations towards which he concludes with (pp. 103–4).

Occupying the authoritative, objective voice of a naval doctor, Trotter arguably balances the expectations placed upon him – his service of British interests – with an ulterior, proto-abolitionist motive. Carefully avoiding the outcry and anger of ‘Ladies Walk’, Trotter presents the facts of slavery in a way unloaded of explicit moral judgement. While we might justifiably assume that Trotter made this modulation with his career in mind, we might also consider that this refusal is what makes the text so effective in his contemporary context. He was no doubt aware that he was pushing at the boundaries of public knowledge and propriety. While some critics expressed a wish that Trotter had ‘treated the subject on the usual theoretical level’ (Vale and Edwards, p. 69), others had more profound problems: as the *Critical Review* concluded, ‘Mr. Trotter is well acquainted with his subject, and speaks from experience; but we are sorry to add, that his language is very exceptionable’. The reviewer is curiously silent as to what made Trotter’s ‘language’ so offensive. It is not difficult to imagine how discomforting the revelations he imported into the text were, however, exposing what had hitherto been kept out of sight and mind: the sheer brutality of the Middle Passage. In this respect, it is intriguing that the *Brooks* would be selected two years later – by two separate abolition committees – to illustrate the ‘regulated’ packing of ships (Webster, p. 153). Future research will hopefully tell us more about why the *Brooks* was chosen for illustration, and the part that Trotter’s 1786 account may have played in it.

Notes

1. The following issue included poems which had been written by Trotter in or after 1786, suggesting a possible pause in his compositions between 1783 and 1786.

2. The strikingly different trajectory of fellow Scot Sir Gilbert Blane is instructive in this regard, revealing the social and economic structures which assisted naval promotion. From a wealthy merchant family, Blane had the contacts and capital to establish a private practice in London and was awarded an honorary degree in 1778. By this route, he became the personal physician of Admiral Rodney and hence, within just a year, Physician to the Fleet (Rolleston, pp. 154–5).

3. Trotter’s father was apparently ‘a baker *and portioner*’ (my emphasis, Porter, p. 155) – in Scots law, an owner of a small plot of land (usually of a few acres)

subdivided from a larger estate. *Dictionary of the Scots Language*, 2004. Scottish Language Dictionaries Ltd. http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/portioner

4. Trotter may also have been mindful of critical expectations of marine poets. A contemporary review of *Sea Weeds* in the *Athenaeum* (*pace* Vale and Edwards, p. 208) was damning: 'There is room for a magnificent and original volume of poetry on sea-subjects. We are sorry we cannot say that Dr. Trotter has fulfilled what might have been wished for'.

5. Roscoe would duly correct this evasion in his later and more critical, again anonymous, *Wrongs of Africa* (1787–8).

6. See 'exquisite (adj.), sense 6', *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2024: 'Keenly sensitive to impressions; acutely susceptible of pain, pleasure, etc.; delicate, finely-strung'.

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Chapter 3

The rise, fall and revival of labouring-class poetry in the commercial market, 1800–1821

Tim Fulford

Labouring-class poets at the start of the nineteenth century were not so much born as made, and not so much made as manufactured. They were, that is, produced for mass consumption by a publishing industry that was changing rapidly to serve a growing middle-class reading public. They were dressed for market by pressmen who sensed a commercial opportunity and who developed marketing techniques to profit from it. They were then distributed on a scale never before seen, their books selling by the thousands and tens of thousands. These techniques affected the poets directly, influencing what they read, how they wrote, and how they conceived the role of poet. They also affected them indirectly, shaping their press treatment and their public image, creating new opportunities that they attempted to embrace and, within a few short years, new problems that they endured, as boom became bust in a capitalist market that was soon saturated with ‘uneducated’ and juvenile poets. Saturation, however, precipitated a rethink and the rise of more considered and careful forms of curation of labouring-class poetry by professional men of letters who were experienced editors and poets – Robert Southey being the most prominent of these.

The farmer’s boy and the Irish soldier go to market: Robert Bloomfield and Thomas Dermody

The first labouring-class poet to achieve mass circulation was Robert Bloomfield (1766–1823). Having started life as a farmhand in rural Suffolk, Bloomfield was, by his adulthood, a shoemaker in London’s East End. While making shoes, he composed, in his head, a four-book georgic poem seen from the point of view of a working youth – *The Farmer’s Boy*. Eventually he wrote this poem down in manuscript and tried, in 1798, to get it published. Booksellers rejected it until his brother George took it to a Suffolk gentleman who was unknown to Bloomfield – Capel Lofft (1751–1824). Lofft was a radical Whig, and as such believed himself to be a ‘friend of the people’, an opinion that recommended the poem to him. He was not simply a traditional patron, prepared to offer a local man of talent a small pension, but also an author and editor himself. If in this respect he resembled some of the female patrons of the recent past – Hannah More, Ann Yearsley’s patron, and Elizabeth Montagu, James Woodhouse’s mentor – he also had considerable influence in the new magazines and journals. He had commercial experience as well as the paternalist attitudes of a country squire or bluestocking intellectual. Lofft sent the poem to Thomas Hill (1760–1840), a businessman and connoisseur who was well connected on the London literary scene. Hill arranged to have it published by the firm of Vernor and Hood, publishers of the magazine he edited, *The Monthly Mirror* (to which Lofft was a frequent contributor). Hill’s endorsement assured Vernor and Hood that it would find a sale sufficient to repay their costs. It came out in 1800.

What was notable in the publication of Bloomfield was a move away from a traditional aristocratic patron supporting the publication with his money or his name. Nor was there a subscription list – none of that eighteenth-century method of enabling publication by an obscure writer (Griffin). Insiders were crucial: Lofft and Hill were the forebears of today’s literary agents. They had connections; they had experience of poetry publishing. They had an ‘in’ with a publishing firm and an existing media outlet to publicise the new poet – their magazine, in which excerpts, poems, reviews and news items were placed. Popular magazines were themselves rapidly expanding in the period; *The Monthly Mirror* was one of several that regularly included verse and aimed at a female readership. The publicity campaign that promoted Bloomfield in its pages gave a new impact to a not-unprecedented feature of the first volumes of labouring-class writers – a biographical Preface. Lofft added to *The Farmer’s Boy* an emotionally engaging life story that created a print persona for a writer he hardly knew. This told Bloomfield’s life-story emphasising his rural naïveté and natural gentility. It prepared book buyers to encounter a work of natural genius by a humble family man who had been a tender, sensitive boy. Lofft's prefatory framing condescended to Bloomfield but thereby made him suitable for both aristocratic patrons of the deserving poor and middle-class patrons of booksellers' shops. The biography left Bloomfield embarrassed, however, because it put his private life on parade and used the rural naïveté that he had shown when he first came to London as a boy to define his character as a man. The first Bloomfield saw of this narrative was when the book reached print. He had no say in it and was thus doubly infantilised by it: he was material being moulded to appeal to the public's sentimentality (Robert Bloomfield, 2025b, editors' introduction to *The Farmer's Boy*).

Lofft's publicity strategy worked: the reviews followed the lead of the preface. They relayed the story of Bloomfield's deserving life. The public's sympathies were engaged and it began to buy the poem in larger numbers than any labouring-class poet had ever sold – or than any contemporary poet was then selling. Bloomfield became the first publishing sensation of the nineteenth-century mass-market press. Vernor and Hood astutely catered to different income levels, selling *The Farmer's Boy* in large quartos on fine paper for the wealthy, in quartos (at half a guinea), and in smaller octavos for those with more modest means. The book's success, then, owed much to commercial acumen on its editors' and publishers' parts. Second and third editions followed later in 1800, at different price points. Demand was so great that over 26,000 copies of *The Farmer's Boy* and its follow-up volumes had been printed when, in 1809, Bloomfield's *Collected Works* were given the benefit of the latest technology used for popular titles – stereotyping, which allowed new editions to be struck off without the need to set up type again. Then, after copyright expired in 1828, Bloomfield's poems were picked up by other publishers in cheap, large print-run editions. As a result of these, it is likely that Bloomfield sold at least 280,000 copies before 1900 (St Clair, pp. 217, 720; B.C. Bloomfield). The mass production and enormous circulation of this labouring-class poet perfectly illustrate the nineteenth-century development of a competitive scramble in the expanded publishing market to issue lucrative books quickly and cheaply.

The unprecedented commercial success of Bloomfield changed the conditions of production for labouring-class writers. The wide circulation of magazines and volumes containing Bloomfield's poems at cheap prices meant that people from poor backgrounds could more easily read him – John Clare is one example – and both learn from his writing and, having read his biography, view him as a role model (Clare–Bloomfield, 7 March 1825, Robert Bloomfield, 2025a, no. 399). An aspiring young writer now had easier access to an example of someone like him- or herself forging a commercial career – and a successful career at that – without the need to attract patronage from a nobleman or to finance their volume by seeking subscriptions from the wealthy (see Christmas). Meanwhile, booksellers now had a far stronger financial incentive to publish poets from humble backgrounds, especially if they could be presented as boys or youths whom readers could feel sorry for as well as admire. As a result, there was a premium on poets of this kind and on editors capable of producing their work in ways that had public appeal. Indeed, such editors were in demand from both sides. They were middlemen: not only the publishers but also the writers needed men with experience of the literary market to fit them for print – to make them published poets.

In 1800, Lofft and Hill brought the last verse of the Irish boy-turned-beggar Thomas Dermody (1775–1802) to Vernor and Hood. Published as *Poems Moral and Descriptive*, this verse gave prominence to a young, often destitute, poet who had run away from home and then lived a feckless life, deserting all of the many patrons who had tried to assist him. The publication lacked a biographical narrative such as that which established Bloomfield's reputation but in 1802, after Dermody's untimely death, Hill and Lofft devoted many pages of *The Monthly Mirror* to making him, posthumously, an example of the tragic fate of poetic genius. There, in a 'biographical sketch', it is observed that:

> Still is genius doomed to droop in sorrow – again the tear of sensibility must fall for the sufferings of an unhappy minstrel – and yet another name is to be added to the gloomy list which groans with those of Chatterton, of Savage, and of Otway. Poor Dermody! he is now deaf alike to the voice of censure and of praise; the former he often heard in his life time – the latter cannot penetrate the grave. [. . .] No one will hear of his untimely death without regret: many will sorrow at his sorrows, and there will not be wanting some to weep over his grave! (p. 75)

Here Dermody's rough edges – his drunkenness, dirtiness and dishonesty – are omitted. The reimagined Dermody would no longer bite the hand that fed him. Now safely dead, he is aligned with a canon of boy geniuses and refurbished for readers' pity (see Cook). The function of this account is to make interest in labouring-class poetry a mark of refined, disinterested sentiment and so to promote sales: to buy his book – published by the same firm as the magazine – would now be a noble act of charity and sympathy. To strengthen this message, the *Mirror* carried sentimental elegies. 'Lines on Visiting the Tomb of Dermody, in Lewisham Churchyard' modelled the wished-for reaction to the poet:

And Pity, with a beaming eye,
Forgot the faults that laid thee low,
O'er thy cold grave shall deeply sigh,
And mourn thy pilgrimage of woe. (stanza 6, p. 197)

The desired response was further indicated by the inclusion of a letter from Bloomfield: 'The news of Dermody's death is truly afflicting; and glad am I to find the literary worthies were not backward in relieving his distress, however his distress came' (p. 195). This statement, prefacing Bloomfield's new poem 'Mary's Evening Sigh', reflected back upon its author – reminding readers that the author of *The Farmer's Boy* was himself a poet of sensibility. Implicitly, to buy Bloomfield's work would also be an act of charitably relieving a poor genius. Thus the endorsement of Dermody by a poet whom readers already admired promoted both Dermody and Bloomfield himself; they were, moreover, shown to be from the same stable – that of Vernor and Hood. So was William Holloway (1761–1854), whose *The Peasant's Fate: A Rural Tale* (1802) Vernor and Hood were currently publishing at Lofft's behest. This poem was a follow-up project to *The Farmer's Boy* – another piece about rural labour that lamented the distance of real-life agricultural work from its pastoral idealisation. *The Mirror* printed Holloway's tribute to Dermody, which mourned the plight of poor poets:

Is it for this the Muse her gifts bestows? –
Is it for this the fire of Genius glows? –
[. . .]
Wild Passion's slave – the victim of Despair;
Then, whelm'd in woes frail nature fears to brave,
To sink, dejected, to a timeless grave?
Bend, letter'd Pride, o'er DERMODY's sad urn
Die! Envy, die! – eternal Pity mourn! (p. 197)

Although Holloway is more strident, his conclusion that pity is the proper response echoes Bloomfield's and positions him as another of the poor lower-class poets that the magazine supports. In the pages of *The Mirror* the Vernor and Hood 'boys' are assembled as a group, both pitying and to be pitied, with pity, implicitly, taking the form of purchase of their works of 'genius' by the 'letter'd' reader. Here book buying becomes a form of crowdfunding, and not just of a single writer but of the many who, because they were born into poverty, form a collective deserving case – the labouring-class geniuses.

Even if their writing was being used to puff Dermody, and simultaneously to advertise their own work and to create a marketable group (cf.

the Beat poets or the Mersey poets), there is little doubt that Holloway's and Bloomfield's admiration was genuine. Because they could easily access labouring-class poetry in magazine and mass-produced book, they could envisage becoming published writers themselves, while learning versifying by example. They learnt from Dermody, from Chatterton and from each other, making common cause – recognising each other as 'brother bard[s]' (Bloomfield's address to John Clare in his letter of 25 July 1820, Robert Bloomfield, 2025a, no. 349). Poetry's ready availability in magazines and papers allowed them to do this, despite their physical isolation from others like themselves: it was the periodical press, more than local oral tradition, that made them poets and that then promoted their work and sold their books.

Death by numbers: Nathaniel Bloomfield, Henry Kirke White and the perils of promotion

The Nottingham butcher's boy turned stocking-maker turned lawyer's clerk Henry Kirke White (1785–1806) is a case in point. In 1802, when Dermody died, Kirke White was a seventeen-year-old beginning to publish verse in *The Monthly Mirror* (see Fulford). Encouraged by Lofft, he produced for the *Mirror* a remarkable elegy that treated Dermody as the defining case of youthful genius – his early death the price that juvenile poets paid for following the Muse. 'On the Death of Dermody the Poet' anticipates a similar premature end for Kirke White himself, claiming with both confidence and relish the status of a marked man:

> Say, didst thou mark the brilliant poet's death?
> Saw'st thou an anxious father by his bed,
> Or pitying friends around him stand:
> Or didst thou see a mother's hand
> Support his languid head?
> Oh none of these – no friend o'er him
> The balm of pity shed.
>
> Now come around, ye flippant sons of wealth,
> Sarcastic smile on genius fallen low;
> Now come around who pant for fame,
> And learn from hence, a poet's name
> Is purchased but by woe:
> And when ambition prompts to rise,
> Oh think of him below.

For me, poor moralizer, I will run,
Dejected, to some solitary state:
The muse has set her seal on me,
She set her seal on Dermody,
It is the seal of fate:
In some lone spot my bones may lie,
Secure from human hate.

Yet ere I go I'll drop one silent tear,
Where lies unwept the poet's fallen head:
May peace her banners o'er him wave;
For me in my deserted grave
No friend a tear shall shed:
Yet may the lily and the rose
Bloom on my grassy bed. (p. 271)

Developing a Romantic motif already applied to Thomas Chatterton (see Groom), Kirke White here suggests that to be a poet is to be ostracised and doomed. But this is, he implies, a fate he embraces, as Dermody did, and a fate rewarded posthumously by 'peace' and by the lily and the rose – symbols of purity and love. Byron's similar romanticisation of the poet as a deep-feeling outcast is anticipated here, although Byron, the aristocrat, could not make common cause, as Kirke White does, with a boy-poet born to poverty and 'misfortune'. If desertion and lonely death are the fate of poets, nonetheless, he suggests, poor and socially disadvantaged poets meet that fate earlier than others. The identification with the alienated, impoverished poet that Kirke White here displays seemed all the more tragically prophetic when read after his early death in 1806, which was just as lonely as he imagined Dermody's to have been.

As published in 1802 in *The Monthly Mirror*, the poem took its place alongside the other sentimental tributes to Dermody marshalled by Lofft and Hill, albeit more vivid, macabre, and personal than they. For the young Kirke White (yet to publish a volume) it was a means both of exploring, in Dermody's image, what being a poet might demand of him and of recommending himself to two influential middlemen (he also exchanged sonnets with Lofft in the magazine's pages). The poem may have been heartfelt but it was also an astute career move. In the following year, Vernor and Hood published his debut collection *Clifton Grove* (1803) with Lofft and Hill advising him and using their contacts to gain him the endorsement of the Duchess of Devonshire. Kirke White had now arrived: he was a fully fledged member of the group of labouring-class writers whose work he had admired in Vernor and Hood's magazine and books.

Kirke White wrote, but did not himself publish, another response to Dermody – this time to the Irish poet's 'On my own Character', which Kirke White had read in the pages of *The Monthly Mirror* (p. 79). Dermody's poem humorously asserts his independence, despite his indigent lifestyle:

> A Poet, a soldier, a coxcomb, a stoic;
> [. . .]
> Now, full of devotion, and loyal dispute;
> A democrat, now, and a deist to boot;
> Now, a frown on my front, and a leer in my eye;
> Now, heaving unfeign'd sensibility's sigh;
> Now, weighing with care each elaborate word;
> Now, the jest of a tavern, as drunk as a lord;
> By imminent woes, now, unmov'd as a stone;
> And, now, tenderly thrill'd by a grief not my own.

Celebrating his own contradictory variety, Dermody demonstrates his vitality as a poet and a man: he is the adherent of no system and the lackey of no one. Reading this tour de force of self-fashioning, Kirke White forged his own poetic character in direct imitation, declaring, in his own 'My own Character',

> my breast is a chaos of all contradiction;
> Religious – Deistic – now loyal and warm;
> Then a dagger-drawn Democrat hot for reform;
> *This* moment a fop, *that*, sententious as Titus;
> Democritus now, and anon Heraclitus;
> Now laughing and pleased, like a child with a rattle;
> Then vex'd to the soul with impertinent tattle;
> Now moody and sad, now unthinking and gay,
> To all points of the compass I veer in a day. (Kirke White, vol. 1, pp. 27–9)

Ultimately Kirke White was diligent, studious, polite and pious, very unlike Dermody. But here he is inspired by Dermody's boldness (scarcely cloaked by jokiness) to find a poetic persona that embodies liberty and candour: he will not proceed as a poet by flattering a patron:

> I'm proud and disdainful to Fortune's gay child,
> But to Poverty's offspring submissive and mild;
> As rude as a Boor, and as rough in dispute;
> Then as for politeness – oh! Dear – I'm a brute!
> I shew no respect where I never can feel it[.]

Thus the publication of Dermody's poetic declaration of independence in the magazine enables Kirke White, in solidarity, to voice his own conception of the poet as an independent despite the pressures of poverty and disadvantage. He achieves class consciousness with a discourse that refuses the deference expected from the 'lower orders'.

Kirke White's class consciousness had been reinforced by the reception of *Clifton Grove*, for it turned out that not all the reviewers were as impressed by his talents as Lofft and Hill had been; in consequence the volume sold a few hundred copies rather than the tens of thousands of Bloomfield's collections. Part of the reason for its relative failure was the absence of a commercial strategy such as that used for Bloomfield. The traditional endorsement by an aristocrat – the Duchess – did not compensate for the lack of a biographical introduction that made the youthful author appeal to readers' (especially female readers') sentimentality. Nor was there a concerted publicity campaign in *The Monthly Mirror*, although Kirke White had previously published several pieces there. Instead, the volume began with a naïve declaration by the author that he was publishing because he was in need of money to fund his ambition of studying at Cambridge. This was too openly akin to begging, and led to hostility from *The Monthly Review*, which treated the volume condescendingly as the work of a jumped-up youth who was too ignorant to realise that his rhymes were incorrect (see Kirke White, vol. 1, pp. 17–23). Charitable readers might buy it to help a poor boy get on in the world but were not to expect literary merit. Stung by this patronising treatment, Kirke White sent a letter of protest; this caused the journal to soften its tone but reiterate its judgement. Kirke White then received a letter from Robert Southey – an experienced poet and reviewer and also the editor of the juvenile poet Chatterton (Kirke White, vol. 1, p. 24; Southey–Kirke White, 18 May 1804, Southey, 2016, no. 942). Southey, who came from a similar poor, shopkeeping background to Kirke White, commended the poetry, commiserated about the *Monthly Review*'s treatment and suggested that it was not untypical for writers of humble origins to meet condescension, especially if young. He offered to use his influence in the literary world to help Kirke White get a scholarship at Cambridge. Kirke White, while replying that others were assisting him in this goal, was led to reflect on the special difficulty that being badly reviewed posed for writers who were, like himself, from the 'lower orders'. He would now be suspected of dishonourable panhandling – like a busker whom householders paid to go away (Kirke White, vol. 1, pp. 25, 98). Embarrassed and aggrieved, Kirke White was led to understand that the increased publicity given to labouring-class writers by their new prominence in magazines and books exposed them to prejudice as much as it offered them reputation. It was necessary to be carefully pitched to book buyers by people who knew how to pique their interest and appeal to their feelings – as Lofft and Hill had done, in prefaces, introductions and magazine tributes in the cases of Bloomfield, Dermody and their stable of poets.

The case of Nathaniel Bloomfield – Robert Bloomfield's brother – was salutary in this respect. In 1803 Vernor and Hood published Nathaniel's collection *An Essay on War*, complete with a preface in which Lofft, now carried away by his previous success in launching poets on the public, declared 'I regard it as a Poem of extraordinary vigor and originality: in Thought, Plan, Conduct, Language, and Versification. I think it has much indeed of the philosophic character, poetic spirit, force of coloring, energy and pathos, which distinguish LUCRETIUS'. Referring to both Bloomfields, Lofft concluded that 'It remains then for Prejudice to vanish like Mists before the Sun: while the two BROTHERS Sociably ascend PARNASSUS together; higher than ever Brothers have climbed before: I might add, each of them to an height which but few have ever reached' (Nathaniel Bloomfield, 1803, pp. xvii, xxviii). Kirke White also greeted Nathaniel's publication with admiration, but with a far more nuanced view of the production and consumption of labouring-class writing than Lofft now displayed. He realised that prejudice did not just vanish in the face of merit and that a labouring-class writer's reputation was conditional upon fashion, novelty and effective presentation.

> The author of the Farmer's Boy hath already received the applause he justly deserved. It yet remains for the Essay on War to enjoy all the distinction it so richly merits, as well from its sterling worth, as from the circumstances of its author. Whether the present age will be inclined to do it full justice, may indeed be feared. Had Mr. Nathaniel Bloomfield made his appearance in the horizon of letters prior to his brother, he would undoubtedly have been considered as a meteor of uncommon attraction; the critics would have admired, because it would have been the fashion to admire. But it is to be apprehended that our countrymen become enured to phenomena: – it is to be apprehended, that the frivolity of the age cannot endure a repetition of the uncommon: – that it will no longer be the rage to patronize indigent merit: that the beau monde will therefore neglect, and that, by a necessary consequence, the critics will sneer!! (Kirke White, vol. 2, p. 253)

Nathaniel is here a monitory example; Kirke White learns from his fate that writers like him are at the mercy of both traditional class prejudice and recent commercial influences such as the commodification of novelty and the disproportionate effect of influencers, which bring about market saturation and compassion fatigue. New labouring-class poetry will not, he predicts, be welcomed, and this prediction, which prepares him to expect neglect as the lot of the 'indigent' poet (indeed to treat that neglect as a badge of honour) was not simply sour grapes because *Clifton Grove* had been sneered at: Nathaniel's book was indeed damned with faint praise, not least because critics were becoming tired by the frequency with which Lofft hailed new geniuses with fulsome praise. The PR had become, by exaggeration and repetition, counter-productive, and Nathaniel experienced the diminishing returns of publishing in the wake of his brother and of the other labouring-class writers heralded by Lofft. Byron summed up this reaction in his satire *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* when he called Lofft 'a preface-writer-general to distressed versemen; a kind of gratis accoucheur to those who wish to be delivered of rhyme, but do not know how to bring it forth' (Byron, 1861, vol. 2, p. 53). Arrogant and condescending, the entitled Byron mocked a process that Nathaniel's reception led Kirke White to portray with empathy from the class perspective of a fellow labourer:

> If the art of writing be of difficult attainment to those who make it the study of their lives, what must it be to him, who, perhaps, for the first forty years of his life, never entertained a thought that any thing he could write would be deemed worthy of the attention of the public! – whose only time for rumination was such as a sedentary and sickly employment would allow; on the tailor's board, surrounded with men, perhaps, of depraved and rude habits, and impure conversation! (Kirke White, vol. 2, p. 254)

Writing, Kirke White perceives, is a learned labour, difficult in itself and still more difficult for a man who is also required to labour at his trade. In these circumstances it is not surprising that an editor such as Lofft is needed: the context of the labourer's literary production requires it. This is perceptive analysis: by reflecting on a fellow labourer-poet's reception he is able to understand the conditions of production and consumption not just for that poet but also for himself and for labourer-poets in general. He comprehends the labour value involved in being a self-taught poet and measures the gap between it and the value placed on the end product in the capitalised market.

Kirke White's prophecy of neglect was an astute response to his diagnosis of the problems inherent in the promotional techniques employed by Lofft and Hill. If he had cultivated Lofft and been cultivated by him so as to become one of the Vernor and Hood stable, he had arrived too late to win the rewards that Robert Bloomfield had garnered. Lofft's hype invited disbelief, while the repetition of the Bloomfield pitch – more labourer-poets and more boy-geniuses produced in short order – made each seem less extraordinary than the last. If their new accessibility in magazine and book had inspired him and others to write, it had tired middle-class readers looking for new stimulation. Extensive circulation had reduced the value of the currency. The market was over-supplied.

Dead poets resurrected: editorial curation and niche marketing

So far, I have shown that labouring-class poets achieved wide popularity in the conditions of production and consumption that characterised a rapidly expanding print culture in which affordable magazines and books circulated in greater number than ever before. This situation brought new opportunities: would-be writers more easily encountered, in print, poets from similar walks of life as themselves and were encouraged to write and to get published. They were able to make common cause and boost each other. They were, at least for a while, marketable enough for editors and booksellers to mould them – their works and their lives – into commodities that possessed more widespread public appeal than before. Indeed, they were among the first writers for whom PR marketing strategy was developed, and this worked well enough for sales to rocket and print culture to expand still further. But this commercialism also produced new versions of old problems: the poets met class contempt if the PR campaign missed the mark and also experienced, to an unprecedented extent, the downside of the fetishisation of novelty and commodification of pity. As the dust settled after the initial sales explosion of the Vernor and Hood labourer-poets, it became clear that careful curation of the verse and life-stories would be vital if poets from the 'lower orders' were not, in future, to enjoy meteoric success followed by a plunge into obscurity as their novelty value wore off.

This curation required a class of middlemen capable of understanding from the inside the pressures of trying to make a living from writing who were also experienced enough in publishing to accurately gauge readers' tastes and feelings. Lofft and Hill were rapidly superseded in this role by more astute and credible editors; Southey, whom Byron termed Britain's 'only existing entire man of letters', was one of the first and became a role model for others by virtue of his presentation of Kirke White (Byron, 1973–4, vol. 3, p. 214). After Kirke White's early death from consumption, Southey edited his writings for publication in 1807. *The Remains of Henry Kirke White* became a huge hit for Vernor and Hood, making the dead author one of the bestselling poets of the entire nineteenth century. It was Southey's dual understanding of the labour of verse-writing, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the feelings, views and tastes of the book-buying public that made it so successful. He was able to appeal to readers' discernment – to convince them of the poet's lasting literary and personal merits and assure them that their approval would be an exercise of judgement rather than the following of fashion. This was niche marketing that flattered buyers' sense of their superior taste. It helped that, like Chatterton, the poet had died young: this aroused pity and cleared him of any suspicion of writing to beg money. Southey's experience as a writer and editor enabled him to turn a mass of manuscript drafts into comprehensible published texts and, unlike Lofft, to make credible claims about their merits; his understanding of public taste allowed him to write a biographical narrative that was emotionally engaging without being mawkish. Readers admired and pitied the poor boy as they had when Lofft had presented Bloomfield's life; they were fascinated by the poetry because, Southey showed, it evinced the pathetic drama of a young man contemplating, with fear and horror but also clarity and dignity, his own coming demise (see Langbauer). Movingly, as Southey represented it, that demise was the result of a tragic flaw. Kirke White's main virtue was his determination to study his way out of poverty by educating himself, but this determination, which brought his success as a scholarship boy in the Cambridge exams, exhausted mind and body. Years of overwork, anxiety and sleep deprivation left him prey to desperation and disease. What made him an exemplary young man for middle-class readers who valued hard work, self-reliance and social advancement was also what killed him. He seemed the reader's favourite son or brother – an ordinary yet noble youth brought down by taking to an extreme course that every aspiring person might approve of – labouring with his mind to escape a life in shop or factory labouring with his body.

What Southey did for Kirke White, others tried to do for the next generation of poets. Thus Keats and Clare were edited and promoted by an experienced man of letters who, as a young man, had worked for the publisher of *The Monthly Mirror, The Farmer's Boy* and *The Remains of Kirke White* (see Barnard, 1996; and Fulford, 2022, 'Kirke White and Keats', 'Kirke White, John Clare and Labouring-class Poetry'). This was John Taylor, proprietor of *The London Magazine* and editor/publisher of *Endymion* and *The Village Minstrel*, who consciously repeated the roles of Lofft, Southey, and Vernor and Hood. Clare and Keats trusted him to present their work to the public and Taylor had learned from the presentation of Bloomfield and Kirke White how to do so. Thus the production line of labouring-class poets continued operating because it was managed, and seen to be managed, by an established family business that was trusted by its workers and by its niche market to provide reliably high-quality products. Nevertheless it still helped if the labourer-poet concerned could be seen to have suffered – Keats's early death and Clare's village poverty were facets of their popular appeal. The popularity of poetry was, at least in part, in the pity.

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Chapter 4

The post-humanist John Clare

Simon J. White

This chapter will consider John Clare's most distinctive middle-period poetry in the context of the humanism that informed and continues to inform human relations with the non-human. The chapter unapologetically brings to bear recent developments in post-humanist theory in its analysis of Clare's poetry because this is the only way to fully illuminate the radical nature of Clare's poetic vision. In his recent account of humanisms since early modernity, Tony Davies identifies several different versions, all driven by an anthropocentric 'master narrative of transcendental Man' that relegates non-human beings to subordinate status (p. 141). Of course, this does not tell the whole story, and there have always been dissenting voices. The Renaissance philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) argued that 'man is no better than the animals' (p. 330). During the period dominated by 'rationalistic humanism' (Davies, p. 140), some counter-Enlightenment figures, notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), 'associated modern science with vanity and a destructive and unhealthy urge to dominate' both human society and nature (Gerrard, p. 5). As Nathaniel Wolloch observes, Rousseau often discusses animals and 'advocates sympathy for the suffering of non-human beings'. Even in Rousseau (and Montaigne) though, 'when human and animal interests collided there was no doubt that the latter paid [the] price' (p. 67). For Wolloch 'the history of this anthropocentric outlook is almost [. . .] continuous and uninterrupted in Western culture, and it underlies all but the [rarest] instances of ethical consideration [. . .] of animals, even those [as in Montaigne] emphatically theriophilic' (p. 69).

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the British animal welfare movement gained momentum (Perkins, pp. 20–43).

In general, the movement did, as Wolloch argues, remain bound within Enlightenment 'rationalist humanism', though some more iconoclastic thinkers explicitly challenged the humanist hierarchy of being, most prominently John Oswald (1791) and Joseph Ritson (1802). Like other radicals, such as Thomas Spence and Daniel Isaac Eaton, both 'used animal metaphors to make political points' in their early writing. Significantly though, their metaphors are also imbued 'with opposition to animal slaughter' (Spencer, pp. 207 and 213). In *The Cry of Nature* and Ritson's *Essay*, however, they advocate an even more radical position on human–animal relations. Both had visited India and were influenced by the recognition of kinship between the human and non-human in Hindu doctrine, even if culture and practice did not always reflect this doctrine. Oswald remarks that the Hindu 'beholds in every creature, a kinsman; he rejoices in the welfare of every animal, and compassionates his pains; for he knows, and is convinced, that of all creatures the essence is the same, and that one eternal cause is the father of us all' (pp. 5–6). As an atheist and disciple of Rousseau, he also asserted that 'humane conduct' towards non-human animals – our 'mute brethren' – can be justified by 'arguments, independent of mythology [religion]' (p. 210). Ritson anticipates the post-humanist position regarding human–animal relations, explicitly arguing that a human's 'organization seems to differ very little, if at all, from that of the ourang-outang' and that the 'resemblance [. . .] is too strong to deny that they are, at least, distinct species of one and the same genus' (pp. 14 and 27). As Jane Spencer demonstrates, Ritson's 'proto-Darwinism' debunks 'supposedly unique human traits' and 'takes the naturalist's view that humankind is one animal among many to a conclusion that modifies the rights of man' (pp. 214–15). In other words, the rights of man are important, but they do not trump the rights of other beings. Such ideas 'were too radical for the animal welfare campaign of the early nineteenth-century', and the combination of radicalism, atheism and vegetarianism attracted considerable political hostility, 'but they inspired later vegetarians' (Spencer, p. 184).

Although not as publicly controversial as the radical Rousseauian animal-rights positions taken by Oswald and Ritson, and therefore not as contextually important, the anti-mechanistic strain in some counter-Enlightenment thought also needs to be considered before moving on to Clare's poetry. Not because it was anti-mechanistic per se, but because in some thinkers it facilitated a more imaginative and creative approach to non-human nature. Peter Hans Reill places Alexander von Humboldt at the centre of this counter-discourse: 'Alexander saw no separation between natural and human worlds; they were joined in our "most inner, receptive faculty" where "everything stands in [. . .] ancient intercourse with the spiritual life of humans"' (Reill, p. 22; citing Humboldt, p. 50). As Reill explains, for Humboldt, 'humans were deeply enmeshed in the interaction of countless natural forces, [and] it was impossible for the mind to abstract itself from nature and comprehend it as a rational object. Rather, natural knowledge could only be won by immersing oneself in nature's actions, by recording and seeing how nature recorded its pattern on the world and us' (pp. 242–3). Humboldt problematises the human–animal boundary that continues to shape attitudes to the non-human in most areas of human activity, and it is easy to see why Elizabeth Milán makes a direct link between Humboldt and the post-humanist thinkers whose ideas will inform my reading of Clare's poetry in the present chapter: 'There is a certain affinity between Humboldt's view of nature and the views of [post-humanists] such as Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, and Timothy Morton' (p. 189). It is also significant that Humboldt's so-called 'aesthetic turn', which was in part driven by his encounters with Goethe (Wulf, p. 36), stresses the need for an imaginative and creative response to nature. As Milán suggests, 'one such affinity can be found in the work that poetry does for the environmental perspective [of] each thinker' (p. 189). As far as we know, Clare was not directly influenced by Humboldt's writings, but the parallels in their approach to non-human nature are nevertheless striking. Clare's distinctive middle-period poetry is driven by an 'aesthetic' and imaginative 'immer[sion]' in nature, not replicated in the work of any other Romantic poet. This chapter traces the development of Clare's visionary poetic to *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827) and then focuses on its full realisation in the experimental sonnets written while Clare was living in Northborough (1832–7), both of which John Goodridge considers landmark works (p. 98).

Much of Clare's middle-period poetry is rooted in specific observation of the non-human (Heyes, p. 185). It is less often remarked upon (even in ecocritical responses to Clare) that, formally and rhetorically, many of these middle-period works challenge the anthropocentrism that is prominent in the poetry of the period, including most of the poems in Clare's own *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820) and *The Village Minstrel* (1821). The contrast between these early works and *The Shepherd's Calendar*, Clare's next published volume, is striking. While there are narrative passages focusing exclusively on human activities, there are also many extended series of short vignettes that represent assorted human and non-human beings going about their separate business in the landscape. Clare's editors cut many of them from the published version because they did not focus sufficiently on the human subject, or explore human subjectivity (Vardy, pp. 137–44), thereby obscuring the development of Clare's ontology and poetics. James Augustus Hessey summed up his and John

Taylor's view of the original versions of January–December (of *The Shepherd's Calendar*) in a letter dated 3 November 1824: 'The great fault of the whole of them is that they abound in too much description & are deficient in Feeling and Sentiment and human Interest'; description must be 'subordinate to higher objects' (Storey, p. 74). These vignette series are particularly interesting for the purposes of this chapter because the non-human being no longer functions as it had done in much of Clare's early poetry – that is, as a vehicle for, or a way of introducing, anthropocentric reflections on the vagaries of human existence. A germane example is the section that immediately follows the opening tavern scene in the original manuscript version of 'January':

> The t[h]resher first thro darkness deep
> Awakes the mornings winter sleep
> Scaring the owlet from her prey
> Long before she dreams of day
> That bli[n]ks above head on the mow
> Watching the mice that squeaks below
> & foddering boys sojourn again
> By rhyme hung hedge & frozen plain
> Shuffling thro the sinking snows
> Blowing his fingers as he goes
> To were the stock in bellowings hoarse
> Call for their meals in dreary close (Clare, 2006, lines 31–42)

Of course, this passage is in some respects informed by a latent anthropocentrism. The word 'stock' associates animals with inanimate commercial goods and invisible financial capital. We use the word for domesticated farm animals to elide the fact that they are living beings. The passage does nevertheless problematise the humanist 'chain of being', which, although initially a 'religiously motivated view [. . .] was later assimilated within [. . .] the Scientific Revolution and subsequently [. . .] the Enlightenment' (Wolloch, p. 69). Only a very small number of counter-Enlightenment figures (like Humboldt) questioned 'the basic human empire over nature' (Wolloch, pp. 79–80), and the humanist hierarchy of being (Reill, p. 242).

In the fragments of rural life described by the unobtrusive third-person speaker, there is no sense that the interests of one being, whether human or non-human, are privileged over, or more important than those of another. The thresher begins his walk to the threshing barn, while the owlet (small or young owl) is hunting for prey. The mice who are looking for food on the mow (fen) survive for another day as the owlet's hunt is disturbed, and the foddering boy fights the cold on his way to the cattle waiting for their feed. Humans are differentiated, in ways that non-human beings are not, to reflect the fact that within human communities we allocate different titles and responsibilities – for example farmer, thresher, foddering boy, shepherd, milkmaid – to different individuals. Nevertheless, the uncritical idea (which in practice continues to inform inter-species relations in the westernised world) that humans are or should be at the centre of things is disrupted. In some respects, this is a product of the new rhetorical structure. The anthropocentric rhetorical connecting matter that was foregrounded in so many of the poems published in Clare's earlier collections is absent here. Successive vignettes are linked by connecting words – 'scaring', 'watching', '&', 'call' – and where they have (limited) semantic significance, these words foreground the communication or inner world of non-human beings. To put it another way, the thresher blunderingly and unthinkingly disturbs the nocturnal owlet that is carefully watching potential prey, long before she 'dreams' of (or imagines) disturbance by diurnal beings.

This new post-humanist poetic is more prominent in the wonderful experimental middle-period sonnets written in Northborough (unpublished during Clare's lifetime). In the sonnets published within *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* and *The Village Minstrel*, Clare is writing from within the established sonnet tradition and generally adopts an English/Shakespearian or Spenserian rhyme scheme and elaborate figurative rhetoric. As Sara Lodge observes, the early poetry, 'anxious to claim membership of an audience capable of aesthetic taste and moral sentiment, falls too often into generic rhapsody or homily; though less well read, it appears more bookish' (p. 548). In these poems the sonnet is mostly an anthropocentric vehicle for the exploration of the human condition, as it had generally been since the development of the form. Where the non-human appears at all, it is usually as a conceit to illustrate an aspect of human experience within an anthropocentric world. While writing from within the sonnet tradition, however, Clare expressed an intense dislike for prescriptive rules regarding poetic form. In a letter to Hessey written in July 1820, and commenting on John Keats's *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820), he had expressed a wish that 'those curs'd critics could be shoved out of the fashion with their rule & compass & cease from making readers believe a Sonnet cannot be a Sonnet unless it be precisely 14 lines' (Clare, 1985, p. 80).

Intriguingly, the majority of the experimental Northborough sonnets are fourteen lines, so it seems that Clare was not in fact seriously concerned about this aspect of 'critics [. . .] rule and compass', but there is a nevertheless significant shift in his poetics. Clare began to experiment with the couplet-sonnet in the poems included within 'The Midsummer Cushion' (1832) and *The Rural Muse* (1835), but his most distinctive achievements in the form were written at Northborough and are collected in the Carcanet *Northborough Sonnets* (1995) (see Lodge, p. 547). As the editors point out, although some of the earliest Northborough poems remain marked by the 'sententious moralizing [. . .] which had never been Clare's most successful kind of writing', the majority don't treat subject matter in this way (Clare, 1995, p. ix). It is surely these poems that prompted David Duff to count Clare 'the finest of all Romantic sonneteers' (p. 16). Significantly, Clare completely rejects the rhetorical patterns and figurative language of his early sonnets in the most experimental poems. Joseph Phelan suggests that 'the boundaries between poems seem to have dissolved altogether' in these poems (p. 41). Several Clare scholars have also focused on the permeability of the Northborough sonnets, most recently Stephanie Weiner, who argues that they 'celebrate the resonance between the poems' permeable edges, the flux of time, and the infinite extension of space – celebrating, that is, the poems' structural likeness to the unbounded world, whose units of time and space are shown to be human impositions, arbitrary and transient' (p. 72). Other Clare scholars have looked for thematic coherence across groups of poems. Simon Kövesi observes that the poems in Peterborough Manuscript A61 generally involve representations of work in wintery conditions, and that they 'tend to move through active sociability towards evening, towards dinner, towards bed' (p. 102), in other words towards some kind of ending or resolution. This is by no means true of all the Northborough sonnets, and, as Weiner notes, many end with images that explicitly break 'boundaries' of enclosure: 'Especially common are birds that fly away in a sonnet's final words, but a dog also runs along', a ploughman 'lobs along', and so on (p. 71). Clare clearly wished to disrupt or escape from what Phelan calls the 'safety (or formal and rhetorical unities) to be found in the "nest of the sonnet"' (p. 41). This chapter contends that Clare opens up the sonnet to liberate the poet and the form from its narrow anthropocentric (human-centred) ethos.

The Northborough sonnets focusing mainly on humans (and their domesticated animals) portray only brief fragments of lives. In the most formally experimental, there is no attempt to maintain the limited discursive coherence present in the passage from *The Shepherd's Calendar* discussed earlier in this chapter. As Kövesi notes, there is implicit direction regarding motivation or character in some poems (pp. 103–4), but Sarah Houghton-Walker's observation that the Northborough sonnets 'are distinguished by [. . .] factual observation and lack of judgment' is broadly true (p. 103). Houghton-Walker's point is in line with other criticism of Clare's descriptive mode of writing – his accounts of human and non-human nature are not incorporated into an anthropocentric conceptual framework. Nor, as Weiner observes, are separate vignettes spatially and temporally related (p. 67). John Barrell and more recently Kövesi have explained the apparent incoherence of so many Northborough sonnets on the basis that, in an open-field landscape, ‘the field would [. . .] present itself to the observer as a scene of continuous and simultaneous activity, carried on in all parts of the field yet visible “at a glance”, and in which the entire village is engaged’ (Barrell, p. 105; see also Kövesi, p. 100). The problem with this explanation is that it is simply not possible to argue that all of the vignettes represented in many individual poems could occur within the field of vision of a single individual. Kövesi himself points out that many poems move temporally across the day. This reading also restores the all-seeing, rationalising human subject to the centre of the prospect; a composite prospect admittedly, but still a prospect with a human at the centre. The first major line of argument in this chapter is that the very notion of a human-centred world is interrogated in Clare’s Northborough sonnets.

Derrida argues persuasively that assumptions about human reason and the human *right* to dominate nature always ‘had to go hand in hand with the interpretation of the essence of beings as *objects*, an object present as representation (*Vorstellung*), an object placed and positioned *before* a subject. This latter, a [hu]man who says “I”, an *ego* certain of itself, thus ensures his or [her] technical mastery over the totality of what is’ (2004, pp. 130–1). Clare’s open and loosely structured Northborough sonnets dislocate and decentre the human speaker. For Erica McAlpine, the poems thereby separate speaker and object, and draw attention to ‘nature’s “otherness”’ (pp. 82–3). Contrary to McAlpine’s reading, it is also arguable that the dislocated and decentred speaker or observing human subject is subsumed and immersed within nature, so that, in Timothy Morton’s terms, ‘nature’ (human and non-human nature) in fact ceases to be ‘an “object” over “yonder”’ (2008, p. 73; see also 2007, pp. 119–28). The following poem is a representative example of many:

The clumbsy ploughman knocks his hands
& stirs the fire before he goes
The cleanly maiden scarcely stands
Agen the door to scrape her shoes
& hurrys with the fagot in
The boy stands in the cart & tumbles down
The frozen turnip to the waiting cows
The frails are lumping all about the town
The old hens cackle & maids begin
With brush & mop to drive the dogs away
The shepherd whistles in his fist and fear

> Drives the sheep on as if a dog was near
> & drives them homeward through the dreary day
> To keep them warm among the stacks and hay (1995, p. 102)

Vignettes are introduced by definite articles rather than the conjunctions, present participles and prepositions that bind them together grammatically and discursively in the passage from *The Shepherd's Calendar* discussed earlier. The grammar in this Northborough sonnet does not indicate either a temporal or a spatial relationship between the different individuals represented. Several of the activities described take place within the 'town' (probably a small village or hamlet, given that threshing is being completed in several places ['town' can mean farmstead too]); some within dwellings, explicitly out of sight of any observer. While other activities take place in dispersed locations within the surrounding countryside, some distance from the 'town'. The foddering boy appears to have travelled by cart to feed the cows, and the sheep are being taken 'homeward' by the shepherd 'through the dreary day'. Because the poem does not represent a clear spatial and temporal relationship between beings, it is also difficult to determine how the different activities performed by them are related. Within the mixed-farming community described in Clare's poem, different activities do contribute to a communal end: the cultivation of a basket of agricultural produce. The directing eye of the organising human mind is pointedly displaced though. (Significantly, the 'farmer' as manager does not feature in the Northborough sonnets.) Instead, the structure and subject matter of the poem implies the unmanaged cooperation that one finds in other supposedly less advanced species.

Discrete activities, described in separate vignettes, are performed by various (human) beings, all of whom are defined by their occupation (ploughman, thresher, foddering boy, milkmaid, shepherd, and so on). Each activity supports and is in turn supported by other activities. Some individuals will perform more than one role, as in insect colonies. The cooperative system suggested by Clare's poem is close to the original etymological definition of stigmergy: 'a mechanism of indirect coordination, through the environment, between agents and actions' (Marsh and Onof, p. 136). Activities do not need to be performed at the same time or in the same place to function together within a system characterised by stigmergy. Of necessity, stigmergy also involves moments of coordinating and reinforcing social interaction between individuals. The 'environment' within a stigmergic system is the mechanism whereby the commitment of colony or community members is reinforced through the social support and approval of other colony or community members. This environmental reinforcement mechanism is represented in many of the Northborough sonnets. Again, as Kövesi observes, they often move from representations of various kinds of labour or work through 'active [reinforcing] sociability towards evening, towards dinner, towards bed' (p. 102). The term 'stigmergy' was first used to describe coordination between apparently simple agents supposedly without intelligence or memory. More recently, striking parallels between the ways various species of non-human being, especially insects, and humans (in numerous fields of human endeavour) work together have been identified (Marsh, pp. 213–14; Lavoie, pp. 27–8). Indeed, human organisational systems defined by stigmergy are usually held to be more efficient than those which are not. Of course, the identification of such parallels has proven controversial, even within academia, because there is still resistance to the idea that the anthropocentric humanist boundary between humans and other animals is not quite as secure as we like to think. E.O. Wilson, most responsible for many of our ideas about insect-colony collaboration, and for the development of the discipline of socio-biology to explain human behaviour and cooperation, feared that this would be the case (p. 13).

In the experimental Northborough sonnets that represent non-human (wild) animals in the landscape, the disruption of the anthropocentric rational-visual 'mastery' of space enables an immersive Humboldtian exploration of different ways of *being* in the world. If we were to accept human sight as 'merely' the equal of, and in many instances unequal to, those other senses tailored to the world as experienced by non-human animals, we would be better able to understand Derrida's remark that 'a de-hierarchisation of the senses displaces what we call the real, that which resists all appropriation' (2005, p. 156). Kövesi's reading of 'The shepherds almost wonder where they dwell' explores the way the poem represents the disruption of sight in mist or fog, and the consequent displacing of various characters' awareness of the spatial relations between them (pp. 107–17). Although Clare's 'old dog for his night journey stares' (1995, p. 67), it goes without saying that many canines do not rely primarily on sight, and, far from 'levelling [. . .] perspective' across species lines (pp. 114–15), the mist would not have the same impact on the non-human animals that rely chiefly on other senses. This reading is still driven by the anthropocentric hierarchy of the senses that privileges sight because humans rely on it to 'master' the world around them. Either smell, hearing, touch or taste can be the main sense for non-human animals, and some possess very different senses not found in humans, for example the snail's statocysts or the frog's lateral-line receptors. (As Cary Wolfe suggests, 'does it make sense to say that the ring-tailed lemur "does not see" the object of the bat's echolocation? [Or] that a starfish "does not see" the image of an insect's compound eye?' (p. 133).) In sonnets such as the following, we are taken into the hidden worlds of beings that we habitually recoil from as 'different, foreign, and exotic' (Perkins, pp. 5–7), that experience the world very differently from humans, and that would rarely feature in a visually rationalised prospect of the landscape:

> The early snail slow paced & never brief
> Has done a journey on the cabbage leaf
> The old sows out & crawling on the trees
> Rolls up as soon as touched and turns to peas
> The maiden early starts away from bed
> The spider clicks like watches oer her head
> She milks the cows & sets the buckets down
> & pulls the [thorns] that tear her gown
> The shepherd journeys early with his dog
> Who frights the startled bird & sniffs the frog
> & pulls the grass & whistles like a bird
> The blackbirds chirp & answer from the yard
> The boy with merry face & horses come[s]
> Pelts & fills his pockets full of plumbs (Clare, 1995, p. 29)

The decentred observing eye, disarticulated from a rationalising human subject, takes us on a tour of diverse and spatially dispersed habitats. In the opening couplet, the word 'journey' is used to describe the snail's movement across the leaf, forcing an immediate immersion within the snail's 'perspective'. We unthinkingly assume that a journey is only a journey if it is on a scale that is consistent with the human experience of the world. Clare's sonnet clearly intimates that snails' daily navigation of their very different world is just as deserving of the appellation. The speaker's observation that the snail's 'journey' is 'never brief' suggests that it is not a short excursion, and that it is not lacking in consequence (from the snail's perspective). The snail's world is made up of intricate networks of vegetation. This terrain is at least as, if not more, complex and unpredictable than that which humans traverse in their day-to-day lives, even when journeying to more remote places outside of their normal routine. Given the constant threat from predators, including encounters with giant humans like Clare's speaker (several hundred times their size), the journeys of snails, and even sows (woodlice), prodded just to see them curl up into 'peas', are truly epic in kind. We now know much more about the behaviour of the snail, and Clare's suggestion that they plot their way around their environment has been demonstrated in recent research. James Atkinson's work on land-snail biology confirms that snails do alter direction in response to changes in the chemical make-up of their environment (p. 332). New research on British garden snails also indicates that they have the ability to find their way back to a preferred (home) foraging site, if they are transferred to a new location, as long as it is not too far away (Dunstan and Hodgson, pp. 7–8). One has to bear in mind that the snail's world is smaller, though no less intricate, than that of humans, so what might not seem like a great distance to us, would be a world away to a snail. Clare's sonnet is not so suggestive regarding the way in which the spider, frog and blackbird experience their worlds. The principal feature of this sonnet though is that the speaker's disarticulated observing eye facilitates transitions in perspective/scale, and immersion within a diverse range of habitats, revealing the extraordinary adaptability of many non-human animals. Frogs are masters of both water and land (they are less visible in their terrestrial homes), spiders can be found in a diverse range of habitats, including, as is the case here, the inside of human dwellings, and blackbirds are perhaps the most adaptable and resourceful of British songbirds.

The speaker's close-up Humboldtian immersion within the hidden habitats of neglected or taken for granted (by humans) non-human beings also reveals that they communicate in some distinct species-specific ways. Humans generally view the capacity for complex communication as a uniquely human trait. As Niklas Luhmann observes, however, 'humans cannot communicate; not even their brains can communicate; not even their conscious minds can communicate. Only communication [systems] can communicate' (p. 169). In other words, human language is just one of an infinite number of possible systems of communication. Significantly, none of the humans represented in Clare's sonnet are engaged in communication, but two of the non-human species are: 'the spider clicks' and 'the blackbirds chirp', receiving 'answer from the yard'. Spiders produce various sounds (in some species a clicking sound) to communicate, using objects in their environment or stridulation. Songbirds communicate through their song – this is, or should be, more obvious in the case of the blackbird's complex and varied song than in the song of many other species. The blackbird's 'answer' is symbolic because the idea that animals are incapable of complex reciprocal communication has been questioned. Derrida has demonstrated that all systems of communication (including human language and the various systems used by other species) depend for meaning upon what he calls *différance* (the difference between discrete signs in a system, and the [infinite] deferral of meaning). In *Margins of Philosophy* (1982a), Derrida defines *différance* as 'the movement according to which language or any code, [or] system of reference in general is constituted "historically" as a weave of differences' (p. 12). Even Noam Chomsky, once an adamant proponent of human exceptionalism when it comes to language, has changed his position, contending:

> the available data suggests a much stronger continuity between animals and humans with respect to speech than previously believed. We argue that the continuity hypothesis thus deserves the status of a null hypothesis, which must be rejected by comparative work before any claims of uniqueness can be validated. For now, this null hypothesis of no truly novel traits in the speech domain must stand. (Hauser, Chomsky and Fitch, p. 1574)

This is the view of many post-humanist thinkers, most prominently Haraway, who remarks:

> Hauser and his colleagues [. . .] belong to a tribe of comparative cognitive scientists and neurobiologists who have [. . .] demolished that lame figure of difference. [. . .] It is no longer possible scientifically to compare something like 'consciousness' or 'language' among humans and non-human animals as if there were a singular axis of calibration. (p 235)

Sonnets such as 'The early snail slow paced & never brief' suggest that non-human beings are also self-aware and consciously interact with the world around them. The snail undertakes a 'journey' (a word that indicates decision-making on the move, even planning), while the spider is 'watching' the maiden (considering a next course of action depending on her movements, or merely out of curiosity), and the blackbirds are engaged in interactive dialogue. All are captured during transitional moments when they will need to make decisions about their immediate future, suggesting a degree of awareness and acumen, even in beings that humans typically dismiss as completely lacking in intelligence. Interspersed with non-human beings consciously interacting with the world, there are humans unthinkingly engaged in apparently routine activities. Clare's suggestive insight regarding animal intelligence would have been controversial in his day but has been proven by developments in the science of animal cognition; for example, recent studies have demonstrated that snails are capable of associative learning and can form long-term memories (in fact the molecular make-up of the snail's brain is not that different from the human brain) (Roubos). It could be argued that, because non-human beings are captured during *moments* of conscious behaviour, an inferior fragmented consciousness is implied. This position breaks down in the face of recent developments in psychology and the philosophy of mind. Several influential thinkers specialising in consciousness have argued persuasively that it is necessarily fragmented, and that the idea of a coherent human identity is a myth.

At a given moment in time, an individual's identity (their sense of self or meaning in their life) is always dependent on context that is 'at once material, bodily, external, institutional, technological, and historical' (Wolfe, p. 12). Of course, when identity is considered from a non-anthropocentric perspective, most, if not all, of these categories apply to other species of being too. In Derrida's words, each *iteration* of a life is 'pure difference, which constitutes the self-presence of the living present, [and] introduces into self-presence from the beginning all the impurity putatively excluded from it. The living present springs forth out of its non-identity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace. It is [in fact] always a trace' (1973, p. 85). Derrida's insight has implications for the still prevalent idea that we possess a unified autobiographical identity (or personhood) which is reflected in human language/s; the idea that, as Robert Sokolowski argues, 'our rationality is exhibited and our personhood is made manifest in our ability to use the first-person pronoun' (p. 10). For Derrida there can be 'no subject who is agent, author, and master of *différance* [. . .] Subjectivity, like objectivity, is an effect of *différance*' (Derrida, 1982b, p. 28). In other words, an individual's subjectivity is a product of language rather than vice versa, and subjectivity is also fragmentary due to the way communication systems in general work. This iterative version of human subjectivity is implied by the fragmentary identity of the putative speaker in many of Clare's experimental Northborough sonnets, which, like other formal, rhetorical and thematic features of the poems, suggests that Clare was alive to at least some of the many inconsistencies inherent within humanist exceptionalism. It is not necessary to assert that Clare was a proto-deconstructionist to argue that he could detect mythical thinking and double standards in the way humans see and represent themselves in relation to other/non-human beings.

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Part II

NINETEENTH-CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS

Chapter 5

Mediated melodies: Jone o' Grinfilt and the challenges of ballad preservation

Rebekah Erdman

> *Says Jone to his woife on a whot summer's day,*
> *'Aw'm resolvt i' Grinfilt no lunger to stay;*
> *For aw'll goo to Owdham os fast os aw can,*
> *So fare thee weel Grinfilt, an' fare thee weel Nan;*
> *For a sodger aw'll be, an' brave Owdham aw'll see,*
> *An' aw'll ha'e a battle wi' th' French.'* (Harland, 1865, p. 216)

'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble', however, did not end with his enlistment to fight in France. From his first ballad, Jone's exploits were expanded into a full family of ballads, including 'Th' Owdham Weyver'. While A.L. Lloyd has traced the text for the latter to 'a Bebbington (Manchester) broadside of circa 1860, after the ballad had been circulating for nearly half a century' (p. 324), both songs circulated throughout the region, and not only on broadsides. For example, Harland's 1865 collection includes not only many of the lesser-known Jone ballads but additionally notes of 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble', that

> an Oldham man used to come every year to Gorton wakes, in order to sing this song, which he did in turn at the three public-houses then existing in the village. He was known, not only there but in all the villages round, as 'Owd Jone o' Grinfilt', from his being a regular visitor at their annual wakes, and singing this favourite ballad. (Harland, 1865, p. 215)

Weavers and their communities likely saw themselves in the text, and listening or singing these pieces provided them with an expression of their own experiences. Broadsides and collections demonstrate that these songs circulated in multiple versions, both as published text and orally, and that they continued to change, even after being captured in literary form.

As part of the larger tradition of working-class and folk song collections including Harland (1865), Bell (1857), and, more recently, Hollingworth (1977), the Jone o' Grinfilt family of ballads are a lens into the quotidian experiences of members of the working classes. They depict Jone's various experiences and specifically deal with the difficulties in the lives of different occupation groups, such as weavers, to the extent that they frequently suggest that leaving the trade is the most sensible option to alleviate suffering. The works in the Jone o' Grinfilt cycle additionally place the weaver in historical contexts: during specific wars, during the cotton famine, or in relation to figures such as Queen Caroline or John Fielden, the Oldham MP in the 1830s and 1840s. Though all provide a glimpse into weaver life and offer the opportunity to hear their narratives, of particular interest are 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' and 'Th' Owdham Weyver', both of which were immensely popular.[1]

Only the most popular songs in the Jone o' Grinfilt cycle survived in communal memory, were printed on broadsides, or were considered worthy of preservation in published collections. Consequently, the surviving songs are especially valuable. Although the lyrics and sometimes the notated music for the associated tunes have been preserved, they blur the lines between oral and literary traditions. Attributed at times to various authors, the popularity of Jone's ballads among the working classes in the nineteenth century is one factor that led to their survival. Other songs have not been so fortunate, and many pieces by and about labourers were not preserved due to economic and social barriers. Studying these pieces provides an important alternative view from groups typically marginalised in standard histories of this period. Joanna Brooks, for example, uses the ballad tradition to tell the stories of the first emigrants that left England for North America, who were typically poor and displaced and left little else in the way of narrative record (2013). Scholarship frequently discusses these working-class songs only as texts, however, without consideration of the shifting contexts of the songs' composition, collection, and classification. While scholars including Harker (1985) have recognised and discussed the issue, more work still needs to be done to address the mediation inherent in preservation practices, from oral song to transcribed music to poetic text. Using 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' as a case study, this chapter analyses how the mediation and intermediality of preservation affects the understanding and transmission of these works.

The (re)mediated melodies of Jone o' Grinfilt

Remediation is a broad term that describes 'the representation of one medium in another' (Bolter and Grusin, p. 45) and provides an avenue to examine the values that each medium espouses. If, as Bolter and Grusin argue, '*all* mediation is remediation' (p. 55), an important element of remediation is immediacy, achieved by 'ignoring or denying the presence of the medium and the act of mediation' (p. 11). As historical accounts emerged and ballads' original contexts were gradually removed, pieces like 'Jone o' Grinfilt' and 'Th' Owdham Weyver' faced remediation through their collection and preservation. However, many collections of working-class songs seem to ignore these mediators, which is to say that in being *remediated* for study in the present, the values and intents of those mediating the songs go unseen. Acknowledging the transfer from orally transmitted song, to a preserved, notated musical work, and finally to the text alone, published as a poem, not only permits space for recognition of the loss of context but also reveals how these acts of mediation shape interpretation and understanding today. Bolter and Grusin argue that remediation expresses, 'the way in which one medium is seen by our culture as reforming or improving upon another', and in this way, they view remediation as reform, which in turn suggests that 'media reform reality itself' (pp. 59, 61). Each transfer to a new medium removes a little more context, until a seemingly autonomous piece is all that remains.

In order to understand how mediation as reform has shaped the Jone o' Grinfilt cycle, it is helpful to examine how our current understanding of the songs is shaped by the limited historical context we can construct around these pieces. Most early collectors appear to have only preserved the text, effectively erasing any non-textual elements almost from the start, but typically, this erasure, as well as their intents and rationale, are unquestioned and unnoticed, following Bolter and Grusin's concept of immediacy. In one instance, 'Th' Owdham Weyver' was collected by John Higson, who had an interest in notating and preserving the Lancashire dialect, which is reflected in his version of the piece (Bintley, pp. 11–12, and Lambert, pp. 13–16). Higson's interest in dialect is an instance of mediation, and although his version captures more of the oral elements, it still removes the performative musical elements. Additionally, Higson does not note the name of the weaver from whom he took down the songs, and his account suggests that this singer was not the composer. Harland later printed Higson's version in his collection and attempted to add more context about the cycle, but his accounts show that tracing the provenance of 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' was difficult even in 1865. The earliest published account comes from Samuel Bamford's *Walks in South Lancashire and on its Borders*

(1844), although he does not reproduce the text itself. Bamford notes that the 'common opinion' was that 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' was written by James Butterworth, but then goes on to recount how he met Joseph Coupe, 'a barber, tooth-drawer, blood-letter, warper, spinner, carder, twiner, slbber[2] [*sic*], and rhymester, residing at Oldham'. Coupe related to Bamford that he and weaver Joseph Lees had composed the song to sell and claimed that 'there were thirteen "Joan's O' Grinfilt" produced within a short time' but theirs was the original (Bamford, p. 171). Unfortunately, Bamford does not date this conversation, nor provide more to go on than that the song was popular during wartime (p. 169). Considering that 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' is the first in the cycle and seems to be the inspiration for subsequent works – as well as the lines, 'Un' aw'd ha'e a battle wi' th' French' (Harland, 1865, p. 216), and 'Oather French, Dutch, or Spanish, to me it's o' one' (p. 219) – an origin dating to the Napoleonic Wars of the early nineteenth century would seem likely. The validity of Bamford's account is drawn into question, however, by James Henry Dixon's assertion in 1846 that it is 'a composition of the last century' and 'It is the oldest Lancashire song the editor has been able to procure, as well as one of the most popular' (p. 217). Dixon's account would then place 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' in the eighteenth century and Robert Bell's 1857 collection likewise confirms the earlier date (pp. 212–13). Considering the earliest surviving broadsides date from 1796 and the multiple conflicts between England and France preceding the Napoleonic era, as well as the allusion to the Dutch, a late eighteenth-century origin is likely, although unverifiable.

Provenance of 'Th' Owdham Weyver' is likewise a murky affair. Surveying Harland's collection reveals that Higson collected the song from 'an old hand-loom weaver at Droylsden' and that:

> It was written just after the battle of Waterloo, when times were bad, and hand-loom weavers' wages fell from about £3 to a guinea or 25s. a week – *i.e.*, for three or four days' work, for then weavers could seldom be induced to work on Monday, Tuesday, or often on Wednesday, these days being devoted to recreations procured with high wages. (1865, p. 223)

This would place the ballad circa 1815, which is corroborated by Lloyd's claim that it had been circulating since circa 1810 (p. 324), but the extant broadsides are from the mid-century. Much is uncertain and incomplete about the history of the Jone o' Grinfilt cycle, but what is clear is that each collector and their publications further mediate and reform modern understandings of the work.

Another common process of reforming these pieces includes separating them from the full family of songs bearing Jone's name, which is interrelated to ignoring their status as popular songs of the working classes. More recent collections do not even recognise a relationship between these two songs or that there were others in the cycle, another clear instance of immediacy. A close reading of 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' helps explain why the song was popular enough to survive, while other songs faded from history. First, even if it were written before the Napoleonic Wars, the theme of enlisting to fight against the French would have held currency in the context of eighteenth-century wars, or indeed, any war against France. Additionally, the inclusions of figures like Nan or Madge also introduce personal relationships, allowing Jone or other labourers to be seen as individuals, and not just in terms of their work. The text of the individual song does not note which trade Jone is in, allowing it to appeal to the widest working-class audience. The text might also have remained relevant because it reveals the struggles of the working classes, which increased exponentially with the rise of industrialisation, and which are reflected in the desire of the Jone character to leave his work in Greenfield for a better life elsewhere. The song's popularity in comparison to other ballads in the cycle is arguably a result of its transferability. For example, the very topical 'Jone o' Greenfeelt's Ramble in Search of th' Green Bag', which references the trial of Queen Caroline, or 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Visit to Mr. Fielden' (about petitioning John Fielden, the MP for Oldham, about the new Poor Law), would have been more difficult to repurpose beyond their original contexts (Harland, 1865, pp. 227–31). However, the subject of going to war might have also hindered the popularity of 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' in the mid-nineteenth century and onward as more workers grew disgruntled with their working conditions and sought songs that reflected their current struggles and resulted in the increased popularity of 'Th' Owdham Weyver'.

In examining 'Th' Owdham Weyver' there is an obvious difference from other ballads in the Jone o' Grinfilt cycle. The closest comparison is 'Visit to Mr. Fielden', but despite similar content, the tone clearly sets them apart. Even compared to 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble', 'Th' Owdham Weyver' is more personal, with its use of first person, and bitter in expression. While the latter song continues the theme of leaving the trade to pursue better fortunes, it also depicts the disparities between the speaker and others higher in social status, such as the parson, the landlord, the factory owner, and even the king. Repeatedly, the speaker directly addresses the listener with particularly aggrieved lines such as, 'Yo'd think it wur hard, to be sent into th' ward | To clem un' do best 'ot yo' con' and 'Aw'm tellin' yo' true, aw con foind foak enoo, | Thot're livin' no better nur me' (Harland, 1865, p. 224). Harland's version of the text is made even more personal with the alteration of the pronouns in the second stanza. In more recent collections, the line is 'We should have better times if we'd hold our tongues' (Hollingworth,

p. 11), but Harland's version is, 'We'st see better toimes, if aw'd but howd my tung' (Harland, 1865, p. 224). Dialect translations aside, the change from the older first-person singular, 'aw'd/my' to the more modern first-person plural, 'we'd/our', might suggest that many weavers identified with the sentiments and that not only the legendary Jone dared to speak out against their working conditions. Based on the rise of the various labour movements, the idea of solidarity certainly has historical precedence, especially considering its origins in the early 1800s, through the Lancashire Cotton Famine starting in 1861 and its impact on weavers. Additionally, the second edition of the collection adds that 'This ballad is still a favourite in many parts of Lancashire; and the three last lines have become "household words"' (Harland, 1875, p. 172), demonstrating that the song accurately captured their experiences and sentiments. While, again, little is certain about these pieces, reconstructing the available context of these works demonstrates how the repeated processes of remediation erode fundamental features of the cycle including tone and performative significance.

Between music and media

Untangling the mediation of the musical elements of these songs is likewise challenging. In his publication of a notated musical arrangement for 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble', Kidson notes that 'This is the most famous of old Lancashire songs' and that, 'Many Lancashire singers will be glad to see the song with its original tune, sent me by the late Dr. Watson' (1926, pp. 94–5). There are no further sources that validate Kidson's claim that this is the original melody, although Dr Henry Watson was a self-trained musician and teacher whose collection of music now forms the Henry Watson Music Library in Manchester. Kidson's version, however, presents the melody with an arranged accompaniment by Moffatt, and alters the text to remove the dialect. His use of Western musical notation is also incapable of rendering vocal timbre and inflection, or indeed, any other interpretive elements, such as the way a performer might emphasise or change certain words, act out scenes for dramatic effect, or make alterations to better suit their vocal abilities.

Lloyd's later conflation of melody and text taken from Kidson's *A Garland of English Folk-Songs* further muddles the picture. The metre and rhyme scheme of both songs are nearly identical; meaning either could match the melody. Even assuming that Lloyd is correct and both 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' and 'Th' Owdham Weyver' were sung to almost identical melodies, issues remain. In Lloyd's version using text from 'Th' Owdham Weyver', the basic melody is the same with only rhythms slightly altered to match the text; however, of concern is the penultimate note. Lloyd writes this as an F-natural, which falls outside of the key signature, as opposed to Kidson's F-sharp. While a seemingly minor alteration (and potentially a misprint on Lloyd's part as there are no other alterations to the key signature), the F-natural alters how the melody is understood. As a chromatic note, its use eschews the expected Western tonal harmony of a leading tone to tonic in the cadence, and instead suggests a tradition outside of tonal harmony, such as an old folk tradition or another antiquated style.[3] In combination with the text, either F-natural or F-sharp would make logical sense. The song might be a popular old tune, borrowed for the new text or, if created together with it, composed to seem older than it was. Such an alteration might also be a result of imperfect transcription practices, leaving collectors unable to accurately notate what they heard, or due to changes as the melody was orally transmitted from person to person. While it is impossible to know where the alteration originated, Kidson's version was published in 1926 and is referenced by Lloyd as the original, so based on what is known, the penultimate note is more likely to be an F-sharp and fall within standard Western tonal harmony.

Note discrepancies aside, there is still the issue of whether the same melody was used for both texts. It is certainly possible that the melody was so popular it was re-used; however, it seems much better suited to 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' than 'Owdham Weyver'. The 3/4 time signature is lilting and its liveliness is supported by the cheerful major key. The melodic contour gently rises and falls, the range spans just over an octave, and the climax in the penultimate line is prepared by the increased rhythmic activity of the only triplet. The effect created is one of confidence and a bit of aplomb, better matching Jone's bold decision to leave weaving and turn soldier in 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble', rather than the bitterness and angst depicted in the text of 'Th' Owdham Weyver'. That there were unique melodies for each text is also supported by modern recordings of 'Four Loom Weaver' by multiple artists, including folk revivalist Ewan MacColl. Although some sections are omitted, the remaining text is very similar to 'Th' Owdham Weyver', but is sung to a lamenting, minor melody that is more appropriate for the ballad. Furthermore, recent recordings of 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' maintain Kidson's melody, for example the 2014 version by Laura Smyth and Ted Kemp. Again, unfortunately, no answer is certain, but these issues further reveal the mediation inherent in these works, through collection, transcription, and elimination of context, and how this mediation impacts how they are studied.

Kidson's and Lloyd's publications demonstrate that for Victorian folk song hunters, collecting was an inherently mediated practice. Without the luxury of modern recording technology, collectors transcribed the oral songs they heard into standard Western musical notation. Although this provided an approximation of the song, notation was and remains unable to capture all the subtle nuances of a fully realised performance. Collectors were influenced by their own musical expectations and models, and thus they would frequently alter what they heard so that it adhered to their idea of ‘pure’ folk song. Indeed, as Georgina Boyes argues, many collectors set out to collect songs because they believed that they represented true English culture but had ‘fallen into unreliable hands. The Folk, it was authoritatively maintained, had imperilled the existence of their own culture’ (p. 63). Due to the ideology behind the motivations of many collectors, as well as the limited technology of the times, any song collected was mediated in some way.

Songs of the industrial working classes faced even further mediation by collectors due to the prevailing belief that they were not true folk songs. Folklorist Maud Karpeles notes that only songs used to ‘directly assist in the performance of the particular work with which they are associated’ are classified as work-songs, and that of these, the shanty, ‘is practically the only work-song that has survived’ in England, although she later acknowledges that ‘there are other forms of work-songs in Scotland, for example the Gaelic waulking songs, and it is possible that there were formerly other types in England’ (pp. 62–3). Karpeles’s lack of discussion of what she, in contrast, terms ‘occupation-songs’, or the songs used by workers for entertainment and expression, speaks to the belief that only work-songs are valid for inclusion as folk songs and consequently, occupation-songs were not worth collecting (p. 61). Boyes notes a similar view: ‘Folk culture hadn’t simply proved incapable of transference into a new urban context, an irreplaceable loss had almost occurred because the Folk had been wilfully derelict in their duty towards their culture’ (p. 63). Not only are occupational songs not considered to be true folk songs but folk songs could not exist in industrialised spaces.

That is not to say that all folklorists took this approach, but to note the prevailing attitude towards the songs used and created by the working classes. Even authors supporting their inclusion, such as Lloyd, have similar reservations. Although Lloyd states that ‘industrial folk songs’ are ‘a kind of folksong that, far from being destroyed by the industrial revolution, was actually created by its conditions’, he notes in the following paragraph: ‘An anxious query arises: “This so-called industrial folksong, is it *authentic*?”’ (p. 317). While Lloyd includes and provides commentary on some of the songs, it is important to note that he was one of few to do so, and his work on industrial folk songs was one of his most significant contributions to the field. With the exception of Lloyd, in many cases weaver’s songs were simply not recognised as folk songs and therefore were not considered worth the effort of collecting. What has been viewed as worthy of preservation was again heavily mediated by the collectors and their views.

Additionally, as noted in the examples by Karpeles and Lloyd cited earlier, the labels associated with weavers' songs are not consistent, making their contextualisation even more difficult. Scholars might attempt to place these pieces in a specific genre – for example, folk song, popular song, occupation-song or work-song – but all labels vary depending on who is applying them. More problematic, songs might also be labelled as 'traditional', suggesting authenticity, while further obscuring how our understanding has been shaped through the practices of mediation and what is actually known about the pieces. For example, in Hollingworth's collection, both 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' and 'Th' Owdham Weyver' are labelled as traditional, and short, summarised notes on his sources are placed separately at the back of the collection. These sources in turn took the songs from other collections, which contain more of their history than Hollingworth includes. Hollingworth's versions are not unique in obscuring what was known of the work's provenance, and it seems that no published version in fact contains all the known information; however, recognition of what the genre label might obscure helps bring into question the immediacy inherent in many presentations of these works.

On the one hand, European history and its scholars place a primacy on written traditions, and in many cases this primacy has remained unquestioned. The dominance of the written has resulted in the idea that first, oral forms were not worthy of study and second, that even if they were, they should be studied as if they were written forms. On the other hand, singing was frequently a group activity, fostering and reinforcing a sense of community, and songs were transmitted from person to person. As illustrated in the above anecdote about the man from Oldham, a song's transmission might be further increased by a travelling performer, who peddled popular songs from town to town. The oral medium highlights aspects of community musicking related to 'what people actually do and value in music, particularly in the context of performance' (Finnegan, p. 125).

Because of their existence in between orality and literacy, one more reliable way to examine these pieces is through their intermedial qualities. According to Rajewsky, in a broad sense, 'intermediality may serve foremost as a generic term for all those phenomena that (as indicated by the prefix *inter*) in some way take place *between* media' and those 'configurations which have to do with a crossing of borders' (p. 46). While these songs originated in the oral realm, subsequent attempts at preservation in various textual mediums, and the transfer back into performed song through broadsides, place the songs in Rajewsky's intermedial space. As Finnegan remarks, oral and written modes are not 'two mutually exclusive and opposed processes for representing and communicating information [. . .] they mutually interact and affect each other, and the relations between them are problematic rather than self-evident' (p. 175). More pertinent is Rajewsky's claim that intermediality 'analyses individual instances in terms of their specificity, taking into account historically changing possibilities for the functionalization of intermedial practices', as well as her subcategory of 'medial transposition' in which 'the intermedial quality has to do with the way in which a media product comes into being, i.e., with the transformation of a given media product [. . .] into another medium' (p. 51). Working-class songs exist in this transpositional space and the ways in which they have been subjected to intermedial practices shape our modern understanding of their fundamental nature. Furthermore, within the shifting transmission methods of songs like 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble', the changes between each medium need to be situated historically because they demonstrate the values being supported by the medial transposition.

Recognising the intermediality of working-class songs means rethinking the common analysis of them as poems or texts, which ignores their musical, social and historical contexts. While songs such as 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' were also printed as broadsides for dissemination, no transcription could accurately capture the nuances of live performance. Many elements have undoubtedly been lost in written transmission, including original melodies, regional dialects, idiosyncratic singing practices, and interactions between singer and audience, although these very elements gave the creators, performers and listeners agency and opportunities to express themselves as individuals. Finally, even if disseminated in a written form, additional oral performance could introduce variations, as individuals made the piece their own through their personal interpretations or created unintentional alterations during performance. Understanding these works is not as simple as understanding their original settings, because their history as in-between objects is difficult to trace and frequently negotiated by others with their own agendas. In conjunction with acknowledging mediation, theories of intermediality help explain the liminal position of working-class songs and how their collection, classification, and subsequent removal from original contexts further manipulates how these songs are interpreted today.

Reclaiming music at the margins

Songs such as 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' and 'Th' Owdham Weyver' become marginal in history not only by means of class and cultural exclusion but also due to their intermedial existence as song and text, placing them in a liminal space between the modern fields of literature and music. Due to their genesis as songs used by the working class, they have been mediated by folk-song hunters through their collection decisions and scholars through their classifications. Although the two songs are sometimes called 'traditional', this label further mediates them and obscures what is known about them. Discussing working-class songs within their contexts is vital because without the context, the original, although sometimes unknown, creators and users are deprived of their voices. Recognition of these factors, however, allows the voices of Jone and the nameless others who sang about him to begin to be heard in these mediated melodies.

Notes

1. Both also appear to have been sung to the same melody. As broadside ballads frequently set new text over existing songs, reusing a melody was not uncommon; however, there are some discrepancies with these songs, as discussed later in this chapter. Additionally, because the printed broadsides often became part of oral traditions, there are many variations on names and spellings in collections. 'Jone o' Grinfilt's Ramble' is Roud 1460 and 'Th' Owdham Weyver' (also called 'Jone o' Grinfilt Junior') is Roud 937.
2. 'Slbber' is written as 'stubber' in Harland's recounting of Bamford's writing. It appears that 'stubber' is a less common variant of 'slubber', which refers to a job of preparing cotton for spinning in a textile mill. The name likely comes from slubs or imperfections in fabric whose job it was for the workers to pick out.
3. Common practice tonal harmony only came into widespread use after 1600, gradually replacing the church modes and influencing local and regional traditions. For one perspective on harmony in medieval and Renaissance music, particularly in relation to poetry, see Pattison (1970).

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Chapter 6

Friend of the people: the poetry of H.H. Horton (1811–96) of Birmingham

Stephen Roberts

‘Birmingham, though standing deservedly high in the arts and sciences, has done little for literature, and perhaps least of all for poetry’, a journalist observed in 1846, contrasting the city to Sheffield and Manchester, who ‘have long been as proud of their bards as of their cutlery or cotton prints’ (*West Kent Guardian*, 18 April 1846). These comments preceded an admiring review of the third edition of an epic poem about Sutton Park written by H.H. Horton. Nineteenth-century newspaper reviews of volumes of verse were often effusive, but the acclaim Horton received was not entirely undeserved.

Horton wrote four long poems between 1843 and 1854. *The Pleasures of Temperance* (1843) and *The Children of the Street* (1854), at twenty-three and twenty-four pages, were the shortest. At seventy and one-hundred-and-two pages, respectively, *Sutton Park* (1845) and *Birmingham: A Poem in Two Parts* (1853) were true epics. He also published a number of short poems – ‘written, most of them “off-hand”’ – in periodicals and in the final section of *Sutton Park* (p. iv). *The Children of the Street* proved to be the last poem Horton brought out; although he lived for another forty-four years, he did not publish another line. This might seem puzzling, but the explanation is evident in the prefaces and reviews of his verse. These four poems may have sold well enough to be reprinted, but perfecting them for publication brought Horton anxiety and their composition took up time he did not really have.

Horton is now largely a forgotten poet. His poem about temperance is a curiosity – but probably still unread – among social historians and his poem about the poor children is lost, appearing only in the catalogue of Birmingham Library. In being unremembered, Horton joins the ranks of the many other nineteenth-century poets who churned out verse for local newspapers or published volumes with the aid of subscriptions. The difference with Horton is that some of his verse does not entirely deserve to be consigned to oblivion. This chapter will recover Horton's story, setting centre stage the poetic work of his young adulthood.

Harry Howells Horton was born in Birmingham on 8 June 1811, the third of five children.[1] His father, Joseph Horton, who had married Maria Booth six years earlier, was a skilled working man. An engraver, he had built a house for his family, with an adjoining workshop, in Barford Street. It was, however, at Holy Trinity in Sutton Coldfield that Horton was baptised and lines in his poem about Sutton Park inform us that he spent part of his childhood in the town. His father had aspirations for his son and had acquired enough money to send him for two years to King Edward's School, a Georgian building located in New Street:

’Twas in its classic courts my boyhood strayed,
There conned my Latin, or the truant played:
I loved my reverend tutor's easy sway,
Save when his anger roused us to obey. (*Birmingham*, p. 62)

The ‘reverend tutor’ was the second master, the Revd Rann Kennedy, whom Horton sought to emulate. While other masters Horton deemed in ‘utter want of knowledge’, Kennedy was a noted Classics scholar, preacher and poet (*Birmingham*, p. 225). He was a friend of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and an acquaintance of William Wordsworth and Washington Irving, who described him as ‘a most eccentric character [. . .] both in my admiration and my amusement’ (quoted in Thomas Winter Hutton, 1952, p. 101). Reading Kennedy's verse Horton concluded that he was ‘a poet of no mean pretensions’ (*Birmingham*, p. 62n).[2] Horton and his siblings had attended St Bartholomew's Chapel in Digbeth where ‘Forced by parental rule to note the text, | Though ever by the sermon more perplexed’ (*Birmingham*, p. 36). He was much more comfortable at Carr's Lane Independent Chapel where, from the Birmingham nonconformist clergyman and antislavery campaigner John Angell James (1785–1859), ‘I first was taught to know | That life is vanity, the world a show’ (*Birmingham*, p. 39), and at St Paul's Church listening to the Kennedy's sermons, which were ‘entirely free from bigotry and intolerance’ (*Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 6 January 1851). A travelling salesman seeking orders for paper, Horton is perhaps best described as being lower-middle class. It was a precarious living, however, and Horton often described himself as poor. Married to Sarah Rathbone in 1837 and the father of two children, he addressed a poem on his situation to his son:

> But the child of the poor, alas! must endure
> The evils that Poverty brings [. . .]
> And thus do I feel, a doubt o'er me steal,
> As I think what the future may be,
> When I look at the strife of my own chequer'd life,
> My heart beats more anxious for thee. ('To My Infant Child', *Sutton Park*, pp. 83, 84)

Throughout his life Horton had a very strong interest in the condition of working people, advocating political reform as well as practical self-improvement. When he read the arguments of Robert Owen that wholesale change to society was needed, he was impressed. There was much that made sense to Horton in Owen's statements about the private accumulation of wealth, the flaws of the Church of England, and a national system of education. Securing the vote was not enough, men and women had to change – starting with embracing temperance – and there was a need for an entirely new sort of society.

Owen visited Birmingham in November 1832 to deliver lectures and address meetings in support of his proposal for 'equitable labour exchanges', which, by enabling working people to exchange commodities they had produced, would 'relieve the industrious producers of wealth from the pecuniary difficulties against which they have been so long struggling' (*Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 26 November 1832).[3] Leading figures in the Birmingham reform movement, such as Thomas Attwood and George Muntz, put in appearances and the meetings were very crowded. One at Beardsworth's Repository, where horse auctions were normally held, attracted 8,000 people. It is difficult to believe that Horton would have missed such an exciting opportunity to hear Owen.

In March 1833, a labour exchange was established in Union Street, its lunchtime and evening opening hours convenient to working men. The exchange closed a year later, but Owenite activity continued in Birmingham (Barnsby, pp. 59–60). At the shop in Steelhouse Lane of newsagent and printer James Guest, Horton was able to find as much Owenite literature as he wanted to read. The influence of Owen's ideas is evident in the repeated condemnation of private accumulation in Horton's verse.

Reading Owen's writings shaped Horton's own religious beliefs. After Owen's death Horton wrote that it was 'not the church' but he 'that first showed the wisdom and practicability of those divine lessons of charity that Christ came to teach. He did not *profess*, but *practised* christian benevolence' (*Birmingham*, p. 283). Horton was very critical of the Church of

England which he believed knew nothing about the lives of the poor – its clergymen living in great comfort – and indeed went out of its way to exclude them. The arrival of the nonconformist preacher George Dawson in Birmingham in 1844 caused quite a stir and Horton was certainly caught up in it. At the Church of the Saviour, brightly decorated and with a choir of the highest standard, Dawson welcomed anyone, regardless of their religious attachments, and invited them to think freely (Reekes and Roberts, 2021). Horton celebrated this new way of practising religion:

> His teaching was from nature not from lore –
> He touched a chord which none had touched before.
> The people pressed, his searching words to hear;
> Fluent, yet simple – earnest, yet severe.
> Conversions sprang around on every side. (*Birmingham*, p. 40)

Curiosity took Horton to the Church of the Saviour, and he got to know Dawson well. Both venerated Shakespeare, and in November 1846 Horton gave a lecture on him to a well-attended meeting of members of the congregation. He believed that better knowledge of Shakespeare was necessary in the town. ‘I know men’, he observed, who ‘hardly know whether Shakspeare wrote Hamlet, or Hamlet Shakspeare’ (*Birmingham*, p. 252). At his lecture Horton reviewed a number of Shakespeare’s characters, finding good even in such unsavoury characters as Shylock (‘as much sinned against as sinning’) and Hamlet whose ‘language was often expressive of nobleness of sentiment’.[4] In conclusion Horton declared that Shakespeare had elevated the aspirations of the human race and was the greatest man who ‘had ever lived in the tide of times’ (*Birmingham Journal*, 21 November 1846). Admirers of Shakespeare in Birmingham were in good company: one of Horton’s closest friends, Humphrey Jefferies, a button manufacturer, regularly invited him to his depictions on stage of characters from the plays. After Dawson’s sudden death in November 1876 Horton delivered a ‘very effective and interesting’ memorial lecture in Newcastle-under-Lyme, even if there was ‘but a moderate attendance’ (*Staffordshire Sentinel*, 23 December 1876).

As a young man Horton yearned to be a poet. His infatuation with his Sunday School teacher was expressed in verse, but that poem and whatever else he wrote during those years has not survived (see *Birmingham*, pp. 36, 220).[5] By the mid-1840s, however, he had become very adept as a poet and part of a regional network. The work of the artisan poets John Critchley Prince (1808–66) and William Thom (1788–1848) inspired poetic replies from Horton. He was enthralled by a borrowed copy of Prince’s best-known volume, *Hours with the Muses* (1841), ‘for my soul hath fed | On its rich treasures with an eager eye’ (‘To the Rev. Hugh Hutton’, *Sutton Park*, p. 102)[6] and the two men established friendly relations. Horton supported a vote of thanks when Prince read extracts from his verse at a meeting to mark the anniversary of the People's Library in West Bromwich in April 1847. When the fourth edition of *Sutton Park* was published in 1850, it included a selection of Prince's poems. The short poems that Horton wrote at this time were mainly concerned with the contrast between nature and the 'moral blot' (*Sutton Park*, p. 82) that was man, the grandeur of Old Yardley Church and Aston Hall and, most especially, his perpetual concern, poverty.

Horton wanted to use his talents in aid of a cause that was important to him, but he also had to make a living as a travelling salesman and had family responsibilities, with his wife Sarah Rathbone expecting their first child as he was creating his first long poem. As with all writers of this kind, Horton had to compose *The Pleasures of Temperance* (1843) in between attending to the pressing concerns of life. With his poem finally finished, he turned to John W. Showell, a bookseller and printer of Upper Temple Street, Birmingham. Showell published almanacks, pocket books for businessmen, and account books for housekeepers, but also, on behalf of sects and societies, religious, teetotal and peace tracts. It is likely that Horton knew Showell through these causes, and that Horton was assisted in meeting the printing costs of his poem by their local supporters. The poem was not intended only for local consumption. Horton also sent his manuscript to G. and J. Dyer of Paternoster Row in London, who specialised in religious publications. Copies of the poem even found their way to America.

Horton had felt great shame when he had succumbed to inebriation, and decided to take the teetotal pledge. He became a member of the local temperance society, founded in 1830, and subsequently was attracted to the Independent Order of Rechabites, which had been formed in Salford in 1835. The Rechabites had taken their name from an Old Testament figure, who had urged his tribe to abstain from alcohol. Members paid a fee of 1s 1d, were issued with a membership card and medal (made in Birmingham), and were able to join savings and insurance schemes. The Rechabites spread their message through a periodical called *The Crystal Fount & Rechabite Recorder*. Branches – known as 'tents' – were established across the country, including in Birmingham.

The Birmingham 'tent' was part of a wider temperance movement in the town, in which Joseph Sturge, John Cadbury and the Revd Thomas Swan were the leading figures. At a procession of temperance campaigners through Birmingham in April 1840, the Rechabites, Horton amongst them, dressed in plaid and carried a bundle of barley with a placard attached to it declaring 'Better to eat it than to drink it' (*Birmingham Journal*, 25 April 1840). One of the great public moments of these years that Horton would long remember was the visit to Birmingham of the Irish Catholic priest and celebrated temperance campaigner Theobald Matthew – known as Father Matthew – in September 1843. On his arrival Matthew ate his breakfast at the Royal Hotel with the mayor Thomas Weston, Joseph Sturge and other leading local figures and delivered a speech. Afterwards at Smithfield Market he administered the teetotal pledge to an estimated 1,500 men and women, many of whom knelt in front of him. Horton was overwhelmed by it all. *The Pleasures of Temperance* was inspired by the visit and dedicated, with permission, to Matthew.

In addition to Shakespeare, Horton had also read much of the poetry of Milton and Wordsworth. It appeared to him that the clarity offered by blank verse was the most effective means of communicating the temperance message. His poem had to be understood by the working men for whom it was written. The greater part of the poem is devoted to the miseries the drunkard inflicts on himself and his family. Drunkenness, Horton asserts, leads to personal ruin, both economic and moral, crime, violence and even disease:

> deluded man,
> To think thy happiness is reason's loss,
> And in the fumes of liquor to forget
> At once thy duty, interest, and end. (*The Pleasures of Temperance*, p. 16)

Horton has no doubt that the blame for widespread inebriety lay with the rulers themselves, the clergy, magistrates and judges:

> our rich Clergy dignify the sin,
> And make that pass as blameless, which entails
> More woe by their example, than their lives
> Employ'd in prayer and preaching can undo [. . .]
> The Squire (whose acts seem wisdom to the Clown)
> Has knowledge which may guard him from extremes [. . .]
> But the poor Peasant cannot check desire:
> Again, again, he drains the poisonous cup [. . .]
> He grows more bold and quarrelsome. At last,
> By passion mov'd, he strikes the man he loved –
> They fight – the wife entreats – he still persists
> And in the struggle kills his drunken *friend!*
> The next day he is tried – by whom? – the Squire:
> *The very man who taught him first to err.* (*Pleasures of Temperance*, pp. 8, 9)

In contrast to this misery Horton offers a portrait of a sober man who drinks water, 'the chrystal friend of smiling Health'; who 'rises early with the warbling lark'; who is able 'to toil with ease'; and who returns to 'his peaceful home, | Where loving smiles await him' (pp. 17, 18). Temperance, Horton informs his readers, is the 'Best of all Reforms – *Reform of Self*' (p. 5) and would spur the political reforms that working men seek:

> Thus might our land be made the seat of bliss
> In spite of governments, or wicked laws,
> Which soon would be amended, – when men saw
> Their rights through sober Reason's hallow'd light:
> When Temperance rules us, we shall rule our foes;
> *Till then we cannot even rule ourselves*. (p. 19)

Parts of *Sutton Park* were written before Horton set about composing his poem about temperance. Henry Kirke White's long poem 'Clifton Grove' had had a profound effect on him and the similarity between it and his own poem is clear. In fact, it would not be a stretch to describe Horton's poem as a tribute to White's. Though Horton was captivated by this poem, he was, when he eventually visited the place that had inspired it, very disappointed. Sutton Park, he believed, was a much better subject for a descriptive poem. Horton's poem was completed in autumn 1844 after he re-visited 'the favourite resort of [. . .] boyhood' (*Sutton Park*, preface to first edition, 1844). The poem was published in Birmingham by the bookseller and printer John Wilson of Birmingham and by Darton & Clarke of London in October 1844 at a cost 3s 6d. The first edition soon sold out, including heartening sales outside the local area. A second edition was published in January 1845, with only minor amendments, and a third edition in February 1845, when Horton revised and extended the text and added a number of his own attractive engravings. Playing his part in the fraternity of poets, in the preface to the third edition he mentioned Georgina Bennett, who also lived in Birmingham and whose work possessed 'high poetical merit' (*Sutton Park*, preface to third edition, 1846, [p. iii]).[7] Subscribers undertook to purchase copies of all three editions – in fact 197 copies were sold in this way, including to Attwood (10) and Dawson (1).

Horton began his poem by remembering the childhood years he spent in Sutton Coldfield. He recalls 'the low cot' where he lived, his deceased schoolmaster Jervis Booth who 'requires no praise-ensculptured stone', and his playmates in Sutton Park who 'Though lost in sight, I hear their voices still' (pp. 18–19). Soon, however, he laments 'man's avarice' when he remembers the felling of trees and the poverty of the people who 'feel a brief oblivion of their woes' in Sutton Park but are driven to poaching which he is reluctant to call a crime (pp. 16, 20). Many lines then follow about the poverty of the working man:

> What follows? – crime, the workhouse, or still worse
> To starve, when plenty forms the bitter curse –
> When idle wealth in vast profusion lies [. . .]
> No law his equal interests to declare,
> Or give him in his country's rights a share. (pp. 33, 35)

Horton concludes the first part of his poem by wishing to 'Forget the vulgar cares of busy life, | Its noise – its sorrows – and its endless strife' (p. 42) and be 'Away from man, from fashion, and from pride' (p. 23).

The second part of the poem returns to Horton's well-established themes of poverty and avarice. He deplores the enclosure of land which brought to an end the traditional rights of the poor man:

> From the strong grasp of power; the land's enclosed
> On which his ancestors in peace reposed;
> Year after year the envious fences rise,
> And shut the low-roofed cottage from our eyes;
> The poet, kindling, with indignant strain
> Laments the loss, – but, ah, laments in vain. (pp. 62–3)

Horton anticipates his at times sorrowful poem about Birmingham, where 'Science lights her sons to Mammon's shrine [. . .] How many a tale of woe may there be told – | How many a struggle for the bauble – gold!' (p. 60).

The poem concludes with Horton's sadness at his own inability to change these things:

> The poet scorns the ignoble race for gain,
> And hence his life is marked by want and pain;
> He seeks in solitude to vent his grief,
> The Muse his sole companion and relief. (p. 65)[8]

Sutton Park does hymn the beauties of that place, but, like Horton's other verse, it was a vehicle for his social concerns. The poem was welcomed in local newspapers, but the well-known journalist Alexander Somerville had no time for it at all. Horton found himself accused of 'unsound sentiment [. . .] cant about "good old times" [. . .] cant less tolerable still [. . .] of "gold" and "gain" being of the cold material world [. . .] yet *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It* were written for gain and by a man who [. . .] knew how to take care of gold when he got it' (*Manchester Times*, 28 November 1846).

Poetry, Horton knew, gave vent to his feelings but changed nothing. In summer 1849 he promoted a scheme to help the poor. He set out, in a letter to local newspapers, a plan to build small houses for older people in danger of entering the workhouse. He proposed a subscription fund of at least one penny a week which, as soon as it reached £200, would enable four cottages to be built. He was sure the money would be raised to build hundreds more. His investigations had led him to conclude that the land could be obtained without charge and he indicated that he had already had pledges of support from people with money for the building fund. The residents of these little houses would be selected by the subscribers – with one vote each regardless of the size of their contribution – and would pay a very modest rent. A meeting was called at Corbett's Temperance Hotel and Horton became secretary of a committee which would 'speedily report on the subject' (*Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 25 June 1849). Alas for Horton, the committee collapsed, the report was never written and the cottages were never built. It was time to write another poem.

That poem would take as its subject the town of his birth. *Birmingham* was conceived as a companion poem to *Sutton Park*, the intent being to contrast a busy, thriving industrial town with the tranquillity and beauty of a landscape with little interference from man. It was written in the tradition of couplet verse satire, which Horton was all too familiar with from the cheap reprints of such eighteenth-century writers as Pope – whose verse is quoted in the poem – John Gay and 'Peter Pindar' that circulated in Birmingham. The poem appeared in three editions, each in turn revised. The second edition added an appendix of no less than 188 pages, almost twice the length of the poem itself. Horton enjoyed antiquarian research and added to this personal knowledge – gleaned from, in the case of his fascinating account of the trades of Birmingham, visits to the factories when he was seeking orders for paper. The appendix also gave him the opportunity to elaborate on what he regarded as urgent questions – such as implementing 'a radical change in our present unwise system of education' or shutting down gin palaces such as 'that gorgeous den of iniquity called the Crystal Palace, in Edgbaston Street, crowded every night, Sundays not excepted' (*Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 25 June 1849).

The first part of the poem offers a tour of Birmingham, encompassing its trades, its churches and aspects of its history. Horton had hardly begun telling of the 'wonders' of 'the great town' noted 'for its hatred of tyranny and oppression', before its defects showed through:

> there are evils lurking 'neath its pride,
> Which all its prosperous commerce fails to hide:
> That social maladies are but o'erlaid
> By the thin glare and bustle of our trade. (*Birmingham*. p. 15)

He deplores the manufacture of arms but sees in pen nibs 'a new staple, as sweet knowledge spreads, | Displacing bullets for the people's heads' (p. 22: see Roberts, 2016, pp. 5–20). He is shocked by the manufacturers

'Who, pressing onward in the race for gain, | Hear not the plaints around of human pain' (p. 46). And he has nothing but contempt when '*the rich clergy may look on and smile*; | That titled sin in lazy wealth should thrive, | While honest worth scarce keeps itself alive' (p. 46). Horton wants men to become 'enlightened Christians, instead of mere church-goers' (p. 31n) who

By uttering certain phrases once a week,
As if by that we cancelled every sin,
Committed oft the long six days within.
Why lay a claim to faith we do not feel?
Why practice wrongs which sermons may not heal? (p. 42)

Horton's longing for material as well as moral improvement was sincere and insistent. He took much satisfaction from the successful campaign in Birmingham against church rates. Here was proof that the people could bring about reform:

the people, by the fraud enraged,
Against their pious foes at last engaged.
Honour'd for ever be the names of those
Who, strong in truth, against the Church arose,
And, with unflinching courage, dared withstand
Her ever grasping and rapacious hand.
Despite her canon laws, and eke the state,
They called that plunder which she called a rate. (p. 31)

In the second part of the poem, Horton writes with great pride about another triumph of the Birmingham reformers – the demonstration of 200,000 people in support of parliamentary reform that he attended on Newhall Hill in May 1832. He was certain that it was Thomas Attwood – 'the people's god' (p. 73) – and the Birmingham Political Union 'which gained the Reform Bill' (p. xiii):

Oh, what a glorious sight! When far around
The countless streamers waved, and not a sound
(Save when the speaker some new burst awoke)
From that vast sea of human beings broke.
It was a day for England – her big heart
Did beat upon that spot, and every part
Of her far realm its sympathy had proved,
By pausing as we paused, and moving as we moved. (p. 73)

Lines celebrating these successes for reform were deliberately interposed throughout the poem by Horton to remind readers that the evils he described – poverty, ignorance, inebriety – could be eliminated by determined, principled men. Birmingham, he believed, was the place to lead change. Remembering the enormous demonstration he attended when the Hungarian statesman Lajos Kossuth arrived in Birmingham in November 1851, he wrote 'My native town, I never loved thee more [. . .] Oh! 'twas a beauteous sight' (pp. 75–6).

Growing disillusionment with the members of the town council was also evident in Horton's verse. He provides a portrait of one of these greedy, talentless men who

> cons his books and sighs for more;
> Sits in the Council, near the civic chair,
> And, though an Alderman, he would be Mayor:
> Soon to the throne of honour he attains,
> For fortune's smiles make up for lack of brains. (pp. 55–6)

This ceaseless pursuit of position and wealth appalled Horton:

> Now comes the question – let us try it well –
> Was man created but to buy and sell? [. . .]
> Are all his faculties so perfect made
> To be absorbed within a sea of trade? (p. 58)

There are heartfelt passages in the poem about the lives of the 'slaves of toil' who are employed 'In shops whose heated airs oppress the mind' (p. 57). Horton draws particular attention to the cruelty inflicted on children 'who wake to slavery' (p. 52) and face 'A far worse penalty than whips and chains, [. . .] What is it? but to wield a deadlier rod' (p. 53). 'I have heard of many dreadful things enacted, I am sorry to say, by the *masters* towards some of the girls employed in our manufactories', he wrote in an indignant note,

> I am informed [. . .] that one large employer dismisses them, without any notice, on the most trivial grounds. He must be a vulgar, tyrannical fellow and, if I find it to be true I shall not scruple, though he be as rich as Croesus, to brand his name as it deserves. (pp. 53n–54n)

Much like his opening discussion of its 'wonders', Horton devotes passages to describing some of the main buildings of Birmingham, but, in spite of his evident civic pride, *Birmingham* is a poem fired principally by anger at poverty, injustice, cruelty and greed.

During these years Horton lived with his wife and son in a series of lodgings in Handsworth and Hockley. In 1847 his wife died, shortly after the birth of a daughter; the child was looked after by her great-uncle's family as Horton continued to seek to make a living in different ways – selling paper locally, dealing in pictures and teaching drawing. He found picture-dealing an especially underhand business. Unable to pay his rent, he found himself, in April 1851, facing a petition for insolvency.

It is not clear how Horton cleared his debts, but he certainly recognised that it was time for a new life. When he remarried in May 1852 (by Dawson at the Church of the Saviour), he was able to re-establish his family. He relocated to Aston with his wife, her son and his two children, and entered Queen's College in Paradise Street to study theology. By 1857 he had taken over from Henry Bourne as schoolmaster at the long-established Ashted Classical and Commercial School, where, in an environment which rejected corporal punishment, boys were prepared for King Edwards and Queen's College. To promote the school Horton produced an engraving.

At the end of 1853 Horton wrote the last poem he was ever to publish. He had been reading to his son and daughter Thomas Miller's 'Babes in the Wood' (1850) and wished to point out to them that children suffered as much in towns as in the countryside. A report on the treatment of prisoners in the borough gaol was also on his mind and it was this that prompted him to make his lines public. The report, which appeared in July 1853, had revealed that prisoners had been deprived of sleep and exercise, drenched in water, fed bread and water for six days out of seven and compelled to wear the straightjacket. Horton's poetic protest was brought out in Birmingham by H. Winnall, a bookseller who also offered a medicine for cholera, and in London by Robert Hardwicke, a bookseller and printer in Lincoln's Inn. The poem ran into three editions, and the profits were donated to ragged and industrial schools in the town.

The Children of the Street: A Tale of Birmingham Life features an orphaned brother and sister, Johnny and Ellen, who are taken in by a kind-hearted widow. Johnny is taken on by a master 'tyrannous and rude' and soon 'runs the streets and lanes' before deciding to 'take a little share | Of those who have too much' (pp. 11–12). Sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour, he is subjected to the punishments set out in the report. With the widow dead, Ellen goes to work in a factory and is fundamentally changed by the conditions there – a development that reveals the influence that Owen's philosophy had had on Horton. Like its predecessors, this poem is fused with contemporary concerns, paying no heed to distinctions between art and moral responsibility.

Horton now turned his back on poetry. He found what he regarded as a better way to help the poor – as well as to escape the commercial world he so detested. Ordained as an Anglican clergyman in 1859, he spent the rest of his life as a curate and a vicar in Birmingham and Staffordshire. During these years he mixed among working people.

In 1866 Horton acquired a doctorate from the University of Rostock. It was not uncommon for men who had made something of themselves in the world of literature or school teaching, but lacked formal recognition, to be awarded such degrees at this time. The University of Rostock – and other German universities – placed advertisements in British newspapers inviting men who wanted to show the world their intellectual standing to get in touch with their agent. Horton put forward a number of testimonials and a weighty volume of prayers and selections from the Bible that he had edited under the title of *The Book of Family Worship* (1862) and a scientific paper that reflected a new area of study for him. He also paid fees to the agent and to his examiners at Rostock. Horton's doctorate cost him about twelve guineas.

And so this life-long critic of the Anglican Church spent his last decades as an Anglican clergyman. Horton, however, had not left behind the burning passion that had inspired him as a radical poet – he remained the foe of poverty until the end of his life. Presenting himself as a candidate for the chaplaincy of St John's in Deritend, Birmingham, in June 1870, he made this very clear:

> Having always felt a deep interest in the welfare of the working classes, if any candidate had a claim to their consideration, it was himself who had grown grey almost in their service [. . .] He had nothing to say against Mr Badger personally, but insomuch as the constituency of those hamlets consisted chiefly of working men, he considered that his own claim to the chaplaincy ought to be held higher than that of any other candidate, seeing that he had always moved with the working classes and should always be disposed to warmly sympathize with them in all their objects. (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 7 June 1870)[9]

Notes

1. I am grateful to Yvonne Moore who let me see, with the agreement of his widow, the notes that the late David Swinscoe compiled about Harry Horton and which she edited with Martin Walsh.

2. Kennedy's verse included *Britain's Genius: A Mask* (1840). When *Sutton Park* was published, it was Kennedy who provided the endorsement which appeared in the newspaper advertisements.

3. Owen returned to Birmingham to engage in a public debate with a local schoolmaster at the Society of Arts in New Street in January 1839.

4. Here Horton appropriates a slightly misquoted line from *King Lear* (III.ii.60) in defence of Shylock, who appears in *The Merchant of Venice*.

5. The woman in question later married the Birmingham reformer T.C. Salt.

6. The volume belonged to the Revd Hugh Hutton, minister of the Unitarian Old Meeting House in Birmingham from 1822 to 1851. Hutton is credited with the hymn called 'The Gathering of the Unions', written and recited to mark the parliamentary reform agitation in Birmingham in 1832, as well as religious verse.

7. Bennett travelled the country giving lectures on poetry as well as writing it. From 1846 she received a small annuity from the poet Samuel Rogers.

8. For a further discussion of this poem see Roberts (2020, pp. 1, 15, 27, 29, 39–40).

9. Though presented as 'The Working Men's Candidate', Horton withdrew from the contest and the Revd W.C. Badger from Wiltshire was elected.

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Chapter 7

Rewriting trauma: Elizabeth Campbell's unedited and edited poems

Florence S. Boos

Unlettered women poets of the mid-nineteenth century faced many obstacles to publication; even those minimally literate and able to access sufficient leisure and writing materials were dependent on the favour of a newspaper editor, patron or religious society to appear in print. Nineteenth-century editors would have further believed that it was their duty to impose norms of educated syntax and conventional metrics, and also, in many cases, to favour sentiments deemed appropriate for lower-class women: religious, patriotic, domestic and edifying. In cases where the original verses seemed puzzling or simplistic, such editors could reshape the originals with meanings of their own. An instance is that of Alexander Campbell, who, although sympathetic to the Highland informants for his *Carmina Gaelica* (1900–71), nonetheless drastically altered many of their texts in line with what he considered artistic norms (Boos, pp. 120–45). Collectors such as D.H. Edwards, editor of *One Hundred Modern Scottish Poets* (eventually expanded to 1,600 poets), included poems by lower-class women, but these selections pointedly eschew critique or satire in favour of more conventional sentiments. Under such conditions, it is difficult to identify the less-mediated verses and thoughts of female Victorian poets except in rare cases of what seem self-published poems, such as those by Susanna Hawkins and Jane Adams, and these are often so elemental as hardly to convey recognisably original opinions.

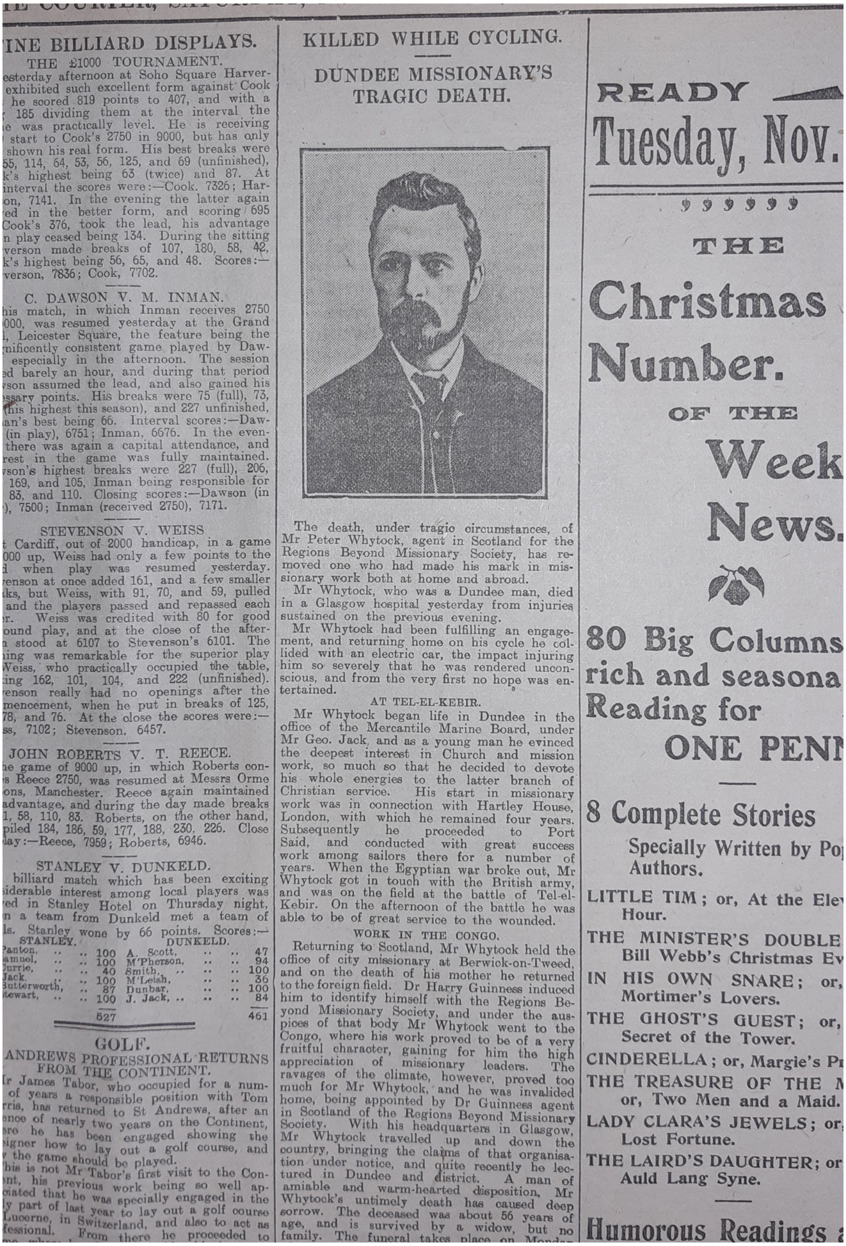
In one remarkable instance, however, both the self-published and later edited versions of the poems of a female Victorian working-class author have been preserved. These take the form of five small self-published booklets (1862–7) by Elizabeth Campbell and a later volume of her poems, *Songs of My Pilgrimage* (1875), with an introduction by distinguished Dundee critic, George Gilfillan, noted for his patronage of local and working-class poets (Black, pp. 162–4). According to Edwards, the poet, civil servant and future missionary, Peter Whytock (1848–1904) 'revised and edited' Campbell's *Songs* (Edwards, pp. 28–30), and, according to Campbell's 1878 obituary, it was 'through the kindness of Mr. Peter Whytock and other friends, [that] her poems were published in a collected form'.[1]

The contrast in tone between Campbell's earliest booklets, the self-published *Poems* of 1862 and 1863 (hereafter *Poems* 1 and *Poems* 2), and the later edited *Songs*, is striking: the earliest poems reveal an anxious, melancholy, and at times anguished woman, whose verses respond in immediate and personal terms, often in broken and uneven metres, to the many traumatic difficulties of her life – poverty, bereavements, displacements, her husband's disability and the disruptions of war.

Poems 3 and *Poems* 4 (1865 and 1867), however, seem to represent an intermediate stage: while some contents exhibit the same uneven stanza forms and direct expressions of personal grief of earlier booklets, others adopt more conventional metrics and a religious, admonitory and patriotic tone consistent with that of the later *Songs*. Finally, *Songs* recasts a few of the earlier titles in condensed and self-consciously literary language and, though the collection repeatedly returns to themes of loss, it offers more calmly pious sentiments in soothing and varied metres. The early self-published poems thus offer a rare glimpse of an impoverished woman's views on the repeated traumas of her life, whereas the later volume reflects the socially approved responses of a virtuous member of the Victorian underclass.

Elizabeth Duncan Campbell (1804–78)

Elizabeth Campbell prepared a brief nine-page memoir, 'The Life of My Childhood', to affix to her 1875 *Songs of My Pilgrimage*, in which she recalls some of the pleasures, as well as the deprivations, of her early life. Gilfillan had remarked that 'The whole volume seems an experiment [in] how much can be done by *naked nature*, and it appears to us completely successful' (Boos, p. 143).[2] Accordingly, the contributions of Whytock are not mentioned; the memoir seems designed to emphasise Elizabeth's childhood love of beauty, as well as her intense response to loss. By contrast, her adult



INE BILLIARD DISPLAYS.

THE £1000 TOURNAMENT.

esterday afternoon at Soho Square Harver-
exhibited such excellent form against Cook
he scored 819 points to 407, and with a
185 dividing them at the interval the
e was practically level. He is receiving
start to Cook's 2750 in 9000, but has only
shown his real form. His best breaks were
55, 114, 64, 53, 56, 125, and 69 (unfinished),
k's highest being 63 (twice) and 87. At
interval the scores were:—Cook. 7326; Har-
on, 7141. In the evening the latter again
ed in the better form, and scoring 695
Cook's 376, took the lead, his advantage
n play ceased being 134. During the sitting
verson made breaks of 107, 180, 58, 42,
k's highest being 56, 65, and 48. Scores:—
verson, 7836; Cook, 7702.

C. DAWSON V. M. INMAN.

his match, in which Inman receives 2750
000, was resumed yesterday at the Grand
, Leicester Square, the feature being the
nificently consistent game played by Daw-
especially in the afternoon. The session
ed barely an hour, and during that period
son assumed the lead, and also gained his
ssary points. His breaks were 75 (full), 73,
his highest this season), and 227 unfinished,
an's best being 66. Interval scores:—Daw-
(in play), 6751; Inman, 6676. In the even-
there was again a capital attendance, and
rest in the game was fully maintained.
son's highest breaks were 227 (full), 206,
169, and 105, Inman being responsible for
83, and 110. Closing scores:—Dawson (in
), 7500; Inman (received 2750), 7171.

STEVENSON V. WEISS

t Cardiff, out of 2000 handicap, in a game
000 up, Weiss had only a few points to the
when play was resumed yesterday.
enson at once added 161, and a few smaller
ks, but Weiss, with 91, 70, and 59, pulled
and the players passed and repassed each
r. Weiss was credited with 80 for good
ound play, and at the close of the after-
n stood at 6107 to Stevenson's 6101. The
ing was remarkable for the superior play
Weiss, who practically occupied the table,
ing 162, 101, 104, and 222 (unfinished).
enson really had no openings after the
mencement, when he put in breaks of 125,
78, and 76. At the close the scores were:—
ss, 7102; Stevenson, 6457.

JOHN ROBERTS V. T. REECE.

he game of 9000 up, in which Roberts con-
s Reece 2750, was resumed at Messrs Orme
ons, Manchester. Reece again maintained
advantage, and during the day made breaks
1, 58, 110, 83. Roberts, on the other hand,
piled 184, 186, 59, 177, 188, 230, 226. Close
lay:—Reece, 7959; Roberts, 6946.

STANLEY V. DUNKELD.

billiard match which has been exciting
siderable interest among local players was
ed in Stanley Hotel on Thursday night,
n a team from Dunkeld met a team of
ls. Stanley wone by 66 points. Scores:—

STANLEY.		DUNKELD.	
anton, ...	100	A. Scott, ...	47
amuel, ...	100	M'Pherson, ...	94
urrie, ...	40	Smith, ...	100
Jack, ...	100	M'Leish, ...	36
utterworth, ..	87	Dunbar, ...	100
tewart, ...	100	J. Jack, ...	84
	527		461

GOLF.

ANDREWS PROFESSIONAL RETURNS FROM THE CONTINENT.

r James Tabor, who occupied for a num-
of years a responsible position with Tom
rris, has returned to St Andrews, after an
ence of nearly two years on the Continent,
re he has been engaged showing the
igner how to lay out a golf course, and
the game should be played.
his is not Mr Tabor's first visit to the Con-
nt, his previous work being so well ap-
ciated that he was specially engaged in the
ly part of last year to lay out a golf course
Lucerne, in Switzerland, and also to act as
fessional. From there he proceeded to

KILLED WHILE CYCLING.

DUNDEE MISSIONARY'S TRAGIC DEATH.

The death, under tragic circumstances, of Mr Peter Whytock, agent in Scotland for the Regions Beyond Missionary Society, has removed one who had made his mark in missionary work both at home and abroad.

Mr Whytock, who was a Dundee man, died in a Glasgow hospital yesterday from injuries sustained on the previous evening.

Mr Whytock had been fulfilling an engagement, and returning home on his cycle he collided with an electric car, the impact injuring him so severely that he was rendered unconscious, and from the very first no hope was entertained.

AT TEL-EL-KEBIR.

Mr Whytock began life in Dundee in the office of the Mercantile Marine Board, under Mr Geo. Jack, and as a young man he evinced the deepest interest in Church and mission work, so much so that he decided to devote his whole energies to the latter branch of Christian service. His start in missionary work was in connection with Hartley House, London, with which he remained four years. Subsequently he proceeded to Port Said, and conducted with great success work among sailors there for a number of years. When the Egyptian war broke out, Mr Whytock got in touch with the British army, and was on the field at the battle of Tel-el-Kebir. On the afternoon of the battle he was able to be of great service to the wounded.

WORK IN THE CONGO.

Returning to Scotland, Mr Whytock held the office of city missionary at Berwick-on-Tweed, and on the death of his mother he returned to the foreign field. Dr Harry Guinness induced him to identify himself with the Regions Beyond Missionary Society, and under the auspices of that body Mr Whytock went to the Congo, where his work proved to be of a very fruitful character, gaining for him the high appreciation of missionary leaders. The ravages of the climate, however, proved too much for Mr Whytock, and he was invalided home, being appointed by Dr Guinness agent in Scotland of the Regions Beyond Missionary Society. With his headquarters in Glasgow, Mr Whytock travelled up and down the country, bringing the claims of that organisation under notice, and quite recently he lectured in Dundee and district. A man of amiable and warm-hearted disposition, Mr Whytock's untimely death has caused deep sorrow. The deceased was about 56 years of age, and is survived by a widow, but no family. The funeral takes place on

READY
Tuesday, Nov.

THE
Christmas
Number.
OF THE
Week
News.

80 Big Columns
rich and seasona
Reading for
ONE PENN

8 Complete Stories
Specially Written by Po
Authors.

LITTLE TIM; or, At the Ele
Hour.
THE MINISTER'S DOUBLE
Bill Webb's Christmas Ev
IN HIS OWN SNARE; or,
Mortimer's Lovers.
THE GHOST'S GUEST; or,
Secret of the Tower.
CINDERELLA; or, Margie's P
THE TREASURE OF THE
or, Two Men and a Maid.
LADY CLARA'S JEWELS; or
Lost Fortune.
THE LAIRD'S DAUGHTER; or
Auld Lang Syne.

Humorous Readings

Figure 7.1 Obituary photograph of Peter Whytock, *Dundee Courier*, 4 November 1904 (in the public domain).

life had been bleak: ‘full of toils and sorrows so many and so deep that I never could tell them’ (p. 140), and *Songs* returns often to the theme of a more innocent but vanished childhood.

Elizabeth describes her father, James Duncan, as a ploughman who (at some point) worked for the local proprietors of the Castle of Findlowry, near Brechin, whose environs she remembered with fondness: ‘That great kail-yard in a wilderness was the paradise of my childhood [. . .]. I loved the bourtree’s white blossom, and the sweet briar roses, the bed of sweetwilliam, the southern wood, like a great bush of broom, the lint, with its sweet blue bells’ (p. 136). The family had included ten children; one brother had died young and Campbell had lost her mother at the age of three: ‘Her death was to me like a dream. The morning she died my elder sister milked the cow, and gave us our porridge with the new milk by the side of the turf stack, and I have never thought any feast half so grand since’ (p. 136). She remembered her dog Cherry fondly, and by implication a severe childhood: ‘“Cherry” was a cunning dog, and saved us children from many a beating. If my father laid a hand on us he was on him in a twinkling’ (p. 137). Her first job as a servant at age seven had been harsh, even abusive: her employer ‘beat me and pushed me out of doors into the dark, and called on the ghost of Brandy Dan to take me. I was as unhappy as a banished convict in that ugly cot on the whinny moor’ (p. 138).

Many of Elizabeth’s memories suggest a poetic or musical sensibility; during her second job as a cowherd and shepherdess, ‘I was at the top of the hills before the sun rose in the month of June, with my dog, [. . .] singing like a mavis’ (p. 140). Though deprived of any formal education, except in sewing, she had learned to read the few written materials available to her. Later employments as a cook in Edinburgh improved her status and the high point of her memories may have been her two-year sojourn in Brittany as a servant to the Grays of Carsegray: ‘I liked France, it was such a beautiful country with its vines growing in the fields by the river, where I used to watch the vessels and pleasure boats sailing like swans in the clear sunlight’ (p. 140).

Later, Elizabeth became a handloom weaver and, sometime after the age of twenty-six, she married William Campbell, a flaxdresser.[3] The couple had eight children, though Campbell continued to work as long as possible, ‘I filled pirns to four weavers for two years, when my boys were wee toddlin’ things’ (p. 140). After the couple moved from Brechin to the larger town of Arbroath, William unfortunately suffered an accident ‘by which for a long time he was never able to work, and which at last brought on his death’ (p. 140). It seems notable that in her memoir and poems, Campbell mourns the deaths of her sons and the difficulties faced by her children, but no comments are made on William. The stress of caring for herself and her remaining children without a husband's income may have prompted Campbell to gather some of her poems in the hope of earning money through their sale, though the poems themselves evince a deep urge to express her emotions amid a sense of personal isolation.

Campbell's early *Poems*: the Crimean War

In 1862, Campbell printed a small booklet, *Burns Centenary: An Ode and Other Poems*, and this effort seem to have been well received because, later that year, she brought out the first of four slightly longer booklets, the 1862 *Poems*. The twenty-six pages of *Poems* 1 gather verses on her most powerful themes: the Crimean War, the deaths of family members, and the anxiety and grief of a mother unable to know, or influence, her children's fates.

Of the thirteen poems in *Poems* 1, five express anguish over her son Willie's absence in the Crimean War, anger at the conduct of the war itself, and concern for the many others for whom the war has brought suffering. In 1853–6, Campbell would have been in her late forties and early fifties, but since *Poems* 1 appeared six years later, it likely contained verses selected from among those preserved from earlier periods, including the mid-1850s. The reference to Lord Aberdeen in 'The Attack on the Great Redan, and the Fall of the Malakhoff', for example, dates this poem from before the British prime minister's resignation in 1855 in the wake of the unsuccessful Battle of Balaclava (made infamous by Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade').

The Crimean War brought an outpouring of verse, augmented by the fact that no previous British war had benefitted from rapid telegraph dispatches or extensive newspaper coverage. Tai-Chun Ho observes that, of the dozens of war poets from Tennyson downwards (Sydney Dobell, Gerald Massey, Thomas Campbell, Tom Taylor, and many others), a vanishing few would have visited the Crimea.[4] To frame Crimean War poems, therefore, Ho notes that many drew upon their formal education in such classics as the *Iliad* and Tyrtaeus's war elegies, which celebrated individual heroism and bravery rather than focusing on the impersonal slaughter of battle (pp. 31–2). He also observes the relative critical neglect of female war poets (pp. 42–3), among them Louisa and Arabella Shore, Emma Tatham, Adelaide Ann Proctor, Dinah Maria Craik and Louisa Stuart Costello, an accomplished author whose allegorical and pacifist 'The Lay of the Stork' (1856), became a popular success (pp. 43–4). None of these humanitarian middle-class women were related to ordinary soldiers, however. It is a striking testimony to Britain's class hierarchies that the more frequently remembered Crimean War poets, whether male or female, seem to have been personally unacquainted with the soldiers whose fate was the object of patriotic solicitousness. Besides some broad commonalities, Campbell's war poems are thus quite distinctive, as witnesses to psychological trauma in their enactment of a mother's distress, horror, and anger at the circumstances that threaten her son.

A striking series of poems in *Poems* 1 respond with fear and shock to the Crimean War: 'The Attack on the Great Redan, and Fall of the Malakhoff', 'The Windmill of Sebastopol', 'The Mother's Lament', 'The Absent Soldier' and 'Bill Arden' were clearly inspired by her anxiety for her son Willie. These enact the frenzied immediacy of her response to accounts of the Battle of Sebastopol at a time when she cannot have known whether Willie had survived. In 'The Attack on the Great Redan', the poet conjures up a dream-like vision in which she imagines herself as onlooker and witness:

> What a scene, what a scene! no mortal can dream, –
> Forbid, O forbid such a one come again;
> As when great shells and balls flew in clouds o'er the walls,
> Tearing up churches and murdering men.
>
> Guns roaring like thunder, the earth rocking under,
> Echoes resounding o'er mountain and plain,
> Smoke to the clouds bounding, the war trumpets sounding,
> Mixing with moans and screams of the slain. (p. 3, stanzas 1–2)

Campbell focuses on individuals – some, such as Lord Aberdeen, have (in her view) been traitors – and warns the army's ostensible leaders that they should not claim credit for England's victories, for these have been won by common soldiers: ''Twas the stout limbs of England the Malakhoff gained'. Even the Queen is portrayed ambivalently for her role in promoting war: 'Weep, Queen of England, weep for the great Redan, | There Britain's brave men fought and fell bleeding, | Sold life for liberty – all at your bidding; | If war be a glory, on their's [*sic*] is no stain'. Her particular concern, however, is for those like herself who wait at home: 'Mothers of England, weep for the great Redan, | Weep for your murdered sons there that were slain; | [. . .] They thought of sweet home amid trickling rain'; and for the slain, 'Where faint they did lie, and dim grew their eye [. . .] | Narrow and cold is the bed that confine[s] them'. When searching for a final consolation, the poet seems uncertain and minimalist, asking 'Has Jesus been pleased to heal all their pain?' (p. 4). If Campbell's syntax occasionally falters, she captures the battle's essential elements:

mayhem, smoke, explosions and carnage; and evokes populist distrust of distant leaders whose decisions have led to widespread desolation.

Another 1862 poem, 'The Windmill of Sebastopol', similarly captures a series of desolate scenes based on contemporary accounts – wandering soldiers fearing a night-time attack, a sentinel surveying a lonely ruin, a father who lies wounded on the battlefield longing for his loved ones while his distraught wife fears for his death – all associated with the homely image of a deserted windmill:

> And war has made the old mill dumb,
> Stilled it's [*sic*] clattering tongue,
> Rusty's its wheel and drum, this heavy time. [. . .]
>
> With its battered walls, and its flails torn,
> Stood the old mill forlorn, beating the winter storm,
> Where sweet peace once hailed the morn
> That land within. (p. 19)

Again, Campbell's disjointed imaginings, uneven lines, and insistent, echoing stresses reflect the combat zone's bleakness. And in what (in this context) seems an unexpected extension of empathy, she notes the grief of the similarly displaced Russian soldiers (an estimated 450,000 Russians were killed in the Crimean War as opposed to 22,000 British) (Figes, p. xix):

> Deep did the Russians mourn for their broad fields of yellow corn,
> Home by the reapers borne, when peace was the theme;
> Now deserted in cot and town,
> Away are the inmates flown,
> And a hundred thousand cut down
> Of that unhappy band. (p. 19)

Repeatedly, Campbell faces her own helplessness in the face of outer events and the unresponsiveness of the universe, its immensity a source of fear rather than romantic exultation. 'The Mother's Lament' poignantly conveys a parent's inability to protect, or even to communicate with, her son:

> I leaned against a wooden rail,
>   And sighed beside the sea,
> And wondered, if ye were in life,
>   If ye remembered me.
> Ah, there I stood and wept aloud,
>   And call'd aloud to thee,
> As if through the horizon,
>   Or up out of the sea,

Ye like a vision in a dream,
    Would come and speak to me.

[. . .]
I felt I was a thing of earth,
    A filthy little worm,
Yet in my great undying soul
    Such love and grief did burn. (pp. 20–21, stanzas 3 and 7)

The later series of *Poems* contain fewer Crimean War poems, though evocations of the carnage of battle surface unexpectedly. In *Poems* 2 (1863) the speaker of ‘The Comet’ is awed by the comet ‘Shin[ing] on bloody fields of war’ (p. 9). Likewise, the female speaker of ‘A Dream’ hears the roar of cannons, where ‘my two sons, my only sons, | Were fiercely fighting there’ (p. 6), though with the illogic of dreams, as she rushes to defend them she is distracted by the plight of an orphan child, whom she is likewise unable to save. *Poems* 3 (1865) includes ‘The White Russian Tower’ and ‘Malta’s Isle’, and *Poems* 4 (1867) two additional war-themed poems, ‘The Amber Cloud’, and ‘The Crimean War’. The tone of the lattermost resembles the frenzied pain of the earlier 1862 Crimean War poems, but is also striking for its consideration of wider issues of morality and causation:

I think it’s a pity that kings go to war,
And carry their murd’rous inventions so far;
Since Adam did blunder such blunders have been,
And I weep for those that’s the victims of kings.
I weep for the coward, I weep for the brave,
I weep for the monarch, I weep for the slave,
I weep for all those that in battle are slain;
I’ve a tear and a prayer for the souls of all men. (p. 24)

With its thirteen irregular stanzas, ‘The Crimean War’ is relatively lengthy, as Campbell returns repeatedly to the theme of the senseless slaughter of battle:

The King of kings, with power and will,
Said blood of men shall dye the rills,
And stain the plain and Crimea hills
’Neath glowing skies so starry.
The God of War, in Heaven’s car,
Cried, haste, I shall not tarry;
Go, kill! kill! kill! For slain shall fill
The trenches and the quarry. (p. 25)

Characteristically, she imagines the painful plight of the most abject – British deserters shot by their own army – from the perspective of grieving mothers:

> 'Twas well for those that found a grave
> Aside those walls when fighting brave,
> It many a mother's tears did save
> From seeing her son a British slave,
> 'Neath Britains's boasted Freedom's flag,
> Deserters out their life must drag,
> White fear their footsteps dogging. (pp. 26–7)

The very gaps, disjunctions, and incoherence of Campbell's outbursts seem fitting as the expressions of a mind nearly unhinged by pain. At a political level, Campbell's responses may seem somewhat inconsistent – she assumes British superiority and bravery, sympathises even with deserters and the Russian wounded, but as we have seen, condemns war itself as a product of monarchical 'murd'rous inventions' (p. 128). As a poor woman, the poet represents the condition of many, separated from their offspring across an unbridgeable distance of space and silence and deprived of their loved ones by a conflict fomented and prosecuted by others.

Campbell's early *Poems*: transcendence and loss

Throughout her earliest poems, Campbell's theme is loss in all its forms, with an emphasis on the desperation of those who must struggle to cope. Space precludes full discussion of some of her more specific preoccupations – motherhood as a source of anxiety and pain;[5] the search for comfort in the numinous and sublime, in stars, rivers, oceans and nature in general; and her compassion for outcasts of all varieties. In 'The Summer Night', for example, she returns to her childhood home, now entirely deserted and decayed:

> My eyes reached the spot, where once stood my father's cot,
>   'Mid broom, 'side a purple heath;
> With dim and misty eyes, like stars in disguise,
>   I trembled and pressed back my breath.
>
> [. . .]
> I stepped very slow, with a heart full of woe,
>   From wounds that death can but heal;
> I wept like the cloud, and praised God aloud,
>   Who else would have cared for my tale?

I passed a brow that shut the scene from my view,
    And the glory that over it shone;
Lit up every tree, and flower on the lea,
    All so calm, all so still, but my moan. (*Poems* 1, p. 14)

Like many of Campbell's other early poems, 'The Summer Night' reenacts unresolved trauma, with its intense intermixture of sublimity and grief, at once repetitive, alienating and consoling.

Several early poems centre on the plight of the truly marginalised. 'Francis the Slave', for example, offers an account of a fugitive slave most likely based on a reading of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856).[6] Francis is a fitting subject for Campbell's interest, as she imagines the victim's fear and torment as he hides from his violent pursuers:

Francis fled to the swamp, where serpents did ramp,
'Mid slime, with vapouring smoke,
Where wolves did howl and wild dogs growl,
Round his bed on the shelf of a rock. (*Poems* 1, p. 24)

Campbell chastises the United States as a site of brutality, where (as Stowe's novels emphasise) slaves were denied literacy and, often, attendance at religious services:

In the land where each tyrant a monarch may reign,
For spreading the Gospel the lash causes pain.
When the last link it broke in humanity's chain,
Francis fled to the North with the underground train. (p. 25)

In 1862, of course, the outcome of the Civil War would have been uncertain and the poet rather trustingly sends her beleaguered protagonist to Britain, in whose 'musical vales no slave ever trod' (p. 26).

As we have seen, Campbell's earliest poems are rough in metre and often ungrammatical, but they seethe with anger and confusion at a hostile world and consistently identify with the victims of social hierarchy – the itinerant, the marginalised, Crimean soldiers, and slaves. At times, these verses become performance pieces, as the poet enacts in her own fractured voice her sense of wrong and challenges the authorities responsible for society's injustices. In these early verses in *Poems* 1 and 2, Campbell's appeals to a God or afterlife, though sincere, are brief, for any divine order seems to operate in a realm above and apart from the poet's personal pain.

By *Poems* 3 (1865), however, although the poet's musings still turn on the arbitrariness and inevitability of death, these are intertwined with her visits to local sites of Scottish history ('A Visit to Burns' Monument', 'Ossian's Grave'). Her interest in the outcast and marginalised continues ('A Prison Cell', 'The Criminal's Death Knell') and something of the earlier style returns in the blunt, uneven rhetoric of the personified figure of Death, who in 'The Bereaved Mother' ominously threatens his victim: 'O Loving mother hark, lo, I come an angel dark, | With a sword that's ever sharp, | To shear branches from your tree [. . .]' (p. 35). Although the tonal and stylistic shifts in Campbell's verses over time are not linear, the progression toward smoother diction and more mellifluous versification creates the effect of greater resignation and control. These gradual changes suggest the possibility of some prior editorial influence and anticipate the modifications in style and content apparent in her final, edited volume.

Songs of My Pilgrimage, 1875

As we have seen, Campbell's small pamphlets might well have been forgotten, had her self-published verses not come to the notice of Peter Whytock, and through him George Gilfillan, pastor of the School Wynd Church in Glasgow. Gilfillan was noted for his literary labours and broad-minded contributions to the culture of his native region, and he had previously written introductions to the poetry of Scottish working-class writers Ellen Johnston and Janet Hamilton. Gilfillan's praise of Campbell emphasises her memoir, 'Anything more simply graphic and unostentatiously beautiful, we have seldom, if ever, read' (*Songs*, p. iii), and in confirmation of her character he quotes 'a gentleman', perhaps Whytock, who testifies, 'Her life is a wonderful life! [. . .] And as an evidence of the high principles which actuate our best humbler classes, it is above price to show upon what solid foundations of hidden worth and pious resignation our noble old country rests' (p. iv). Her poetry is viewed through a similar lens, as Gilfillan praises its share in 'that simplicity and earnestness which distinguish her prose. [. . .] Her devotion, like her poetry, is of the very simplest and sincerest character' (pp. iv–v). Though the verses of *Songs of My Pilgrimage* bear out these descriptions to some degree, the tone adopted by her patrons also reflects a desire to discern natural piety among the poor and, perhaps especially, poor women. Such attitudes may well have influenced editorial selection, so that the more polished and hopeful poems of *Songs* testify to the effects of middle-class mediation of an unlettered poet's original verses.

The 129 pages and 72 poems of *Songs* constitute a relatively extensive collection for a working-class poet, especially since, with some exceptions, poems from her earlier collections are not reprinted intact.[7] Interestingly, however, at least eight earlier selections reappear in highly altered

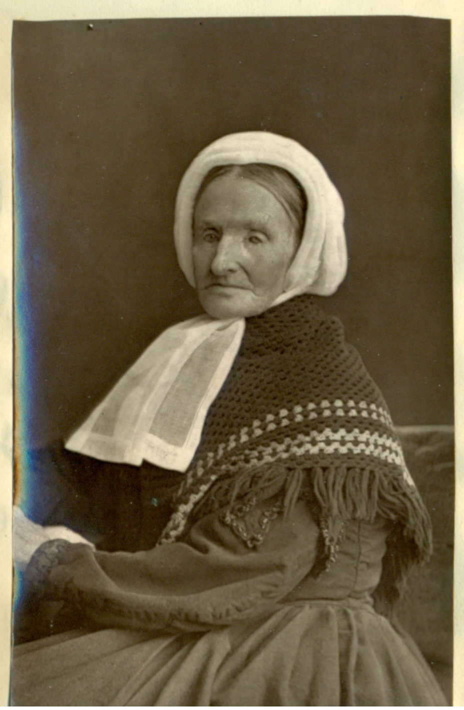


Figure 7.2 Elizabeth Campbell, frontispiece to *Songs of My Pilgrimage* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1875) (in the public domain).

versions, providing a clear contrast of styles. Here are Campbell's opening two, out of twenty-two, stanzas of 'Ossian's Grave' as they had appeared in *Poems* 3:

I wandered among Scotland's hills,
  When summer suns did shine
Around the rocks and mountain rills,
  At noon, where shepherds dine.

Their gun and flute aside them mute
  Upon a mountain stone,
Where darts the swallow o'er the trout,
  In mountain lakes so lone. (p. 18)

The later, edited *Songs* version condenses the poem to five stanzas, adding fuller lines and emotionally evocative allusions:

The wind blew through a woody creek, clouds raked across the sky,
The dark'ning shadows slowly crept upon Ben Ledi high –

Where ancient Druids victims slew in human sacrifice,
While mothers moaned and fathers stood with salt tears in their eyes.
(p. 126)

Another contrast occurs between the twenty-four stanzas of 'Long, Long Ago' (*Poems* 2) and the later ten-stanza version:

The morning stars shown brighter gold,
Long, long ago;
Wore brighter spangles o'er the wold,
When I walked with my Joe. (p. 26)

Here is the later, more poeticised recasting in *Songs*:

Bless'd was the witching twilight gray
Long, long ago;
Soft stealing o'er the new-mown hay
In ricks in many a row.

The evening star shone brighter far
Long, long ago;
And broad moons shot their silvery bar
Through clouds of purer snow. (p. 83)

Even more drastic revisions appear in 'Prince Charlie', which in *Poems* 3 had begun:

When Charles Stuart with his broad sword
Fought Culloden fairly,
And lost his clan to a man.
The brave Prince rued it sorely.

Prince Charlie from Culloden fled,
With 'thirty thousand' on his head;
Without a home, without a steed,
When drift was driving sairly. (p. 23)

Ten years later, the *Songs* version retains little beyond the ballad rhyme scheme (from William Glen's 'Wae's Me for Prince Charlie'):

Mid rugged rocks where eagles soar,
Where storms and tempests rave and roar,
And often by the lonesome shore
Did wander Royal Charlie.

A price was set upon this head,
They cared not if alive or dead;

They pressed him sorely in his need –
  The hapless Royal Charlie. (p. 91)[8]

Since many of the topics of Campbell's poems repeat – a motherless child; a bereaved parent; the sublime and threatening aspects of nature – it is possible that Campbell had composed more verses than she could include in her previous booklets, leaving the overage available for later re-editing. She would have been sixty-nine when *Songs* was published and, as in her memoir, the poet focuses on her memories of childhood, its lost pleasures and imaginings, and the sense of an irretrievable barrier between an innocent past and bereaved present. Several 'songs' recount her sadness at the deaths of family members ('Noran River'; 'The Cot by the Moor', which seems a calmer reprising of *Poems* 1's 'The Summer Night'; 'The Robin Redbreast'), as well as her youthful imaginings of a fairy kingdom ('The Fairy King's Wedding', 'The Man in Satin Shoon'). Others regret an early aborted courtship with a lover who 'crossed the Indian Sea' never to return ('Early Love'), who had died at sea ('The Bygone Days'), or whose 'tale was false' ('First Love') though fondly remembered. Her appreciation of sublimity in nature continues, with 'The Sea' and 'Address to the Morning Star', as well as her compassion for orphans ('Fatherless Mary', 'A Motherless Babe').

Moreover, Campbell's bitterness toward the monarchy seems to have abated somewhat, perhaps as the widowed sovereign increasingly took up summer residence in Scotland from the 1860s onwards. Although 'My Tramp to See the Queen' reproves London's 'pleasure-seeking tourists' who crowd to see the monarch, her local pride is gratified that 'in Scotland's royal tartan I saw the great John Brown', as well as 'modest, Highland matrons in their Sunday mutch and gown' (*Songs*, p. 62). Campbell even celebrates a royal wedding, recasting Louise, Princess of Argyle, as natively Scottish ('And Scotch blood [is] in Louise's veins', 'The Royal Wedding', p. 96). And *Songs*' sole poem on the Crimean War, 'The Battle of Alma', offers celebratory patriotism, although a trace of the poet's former regrets remains in its conclusion:

But o'er that glory falls a shade,
For many in the Highland plaid
To sleep their last long sleep were laid
    On the bloody hill of Alma! (p. 68)

It is possible that Campbell's emotions softened with age into patriotic and religious acceptance. It is also likely, however, that in selecting and recasting her verses, her editor chose topics more likely to attract middle-class readers, and/or to recast the poet's responses into more congenial and uncontroversial channels. Several of the volume's poems conclude with final stanzas of religious affirmation and a few centre directly on moral themes ('The Battle of Alma', 'Death and Sin'), admonishing readers to anticipate a consoling afterlife. These anticipations, however, are chiefly presented as antidotes to a diminished present:

> Though dim-eyed and gray-haired and laden with care,
> Hope drives off the demons of black-winged despair;
> And I hear as I sit 'neath this tree by my door
> Strains of music divine from the radiant shore. ('The Pear Tree', p. 76)

Though *Songs* offers more third-person narratives than the earlier booklets ('Anna Bell – A Ballad', 'Mary Lee – A Ballad'), as we have seen, the autobiographical themes of the poet's earlier verses remain: her pain at the rupture of her childhood sense of security within a natural setting and her grief at the loss of her children. Two poems especially add details of these losses, 'My Infant Day and My Hair Grown Gray', and 'The Graves of My Sons'. Fittingly, 'The Death of Willie, My Second Son' is the volume's final selection, and a headnote explains its context:

> On the 20th April 1866, my son, William Campbell, was killed at Aberdeen, in the 35th year of his age. It was caused by a hair-teasing machine insufficiently covered, at which he was employed. They telegraphed for me to come to identify his corpse [. . .]. There was a fearful wound in his brow over the left eye, and all his body was terribly mangled. Filled with deep and bitter grief for the sad fate of my poor son, I wrote this piece. – E. C.
>
> I tucked him in his white shroud and hid him in the ground,
> I saw how deep in earth he'll sleep with many a gory wound!
>
> [. . .]
> His ever welcome footsteps and voice I'll no more hear,
> No more tales in my ear he'll pour my heart to chill or cheer;
> O! Nellfield lonely graveyard, I'll often think of thee,
> Where Willie sleeps 'mong strangers, by the silvery flowing Dee. (p. 128)

Campbell's own obituary in the *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 25 December 1878, describes her last years:

> Since the publication of her poems, which met with the most unexpected success, her health has gradually been giving way, and she has been unable for any sustained mental effort. She has recently produced several pieces, portions of which have displayed considerable imaginative power, but cannot, from a literary point of view, be classed as

> equal to those contained in the volume. [. . .] [A]bout three weeks ago she lost one of her daughters [Agnes]. Out of a family of eight, only two daughters survive.

Since the writer notes the 'unexpected success' of Campbell's poems and seems able to judge her writings 'from a literary point of view', might this be the voice of Whytock?

In conclusion, the greater concision, flowing metre, varied diction, and allusiveness of these later Campbell/Whytock poems provide some softening distance for the poet's sorrows. Unlike Campbell's earliest verses, in which the speaker seems trapped within grief, these later poems assume a more controlled authorial voice, as personal monologue and declamation give way to narrative. *Songs of My Pilgrimage* lives up to its title as the poems merge in tone – nostalgic, mildly cheerful, and accepting by turns – making the edited *Songs* a more coherent volume than its predecessors, if also more generic and indirect in its allusions to buried trauma. The contrast between Campbell's earlier series of *Poems* and the later Whytock-revised *Songs*, thus suggests the extent to which the writings of poor mid-Victorian women (and others) may have been altered by editors who, in some cases, smoothed over fractured, raw, and troubled poetic works. Indeed, we might expect proletarian writings to reflect the recurrent distress later identified by psychologists as 'complex post-traumatic stress disorder', as opposed to the more polished and generalised versions approved by their literary patrons (Herman, p. 33).

The poems of Campbell's anguished Crimean sequence remain among the very few contemporary works that questioned, even briefly, the morality and destructive consequences of Britain's imperial mission in south-west Asia. Unconstrained by the 'womanly' virtues of resignation and propriety preached to the less prosperous, Campbell's sincere, troubled, and angry early self-published poems seem a fitting embodiment of the repeated losses experienced by their impoverished author. Their reshaping into more patriotic, quiescent and polished verses by a middle-class editor provides a striking instance of the imposition of normative standards on the writings of a member of the Victorian underclass.

Notes

1. The 1871 census describes Whytock as a 'Deputy Superintendent of the Mercantile House', and around 1877 he became a missionary in the Congo. 'The Skein o' 'Oo', in Edwards's *One Hundred Modern Scottish Poets*, exhibits a facility with dialect and a blend of humour and moralism. His *Dundee Courier* obituary describes him as 'a

man of amiable and warm-hearted disposition'. Black notes that it was Whytock who introduced Campbell's poems to Gilfillan (p. 163). For both obituaries and census information I am indebted to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and Charlotte Lauder.

2. Unless otherwise noted, page numbers for the memoir are from Boos (2008).

3. According to the 1841 Census, William Campbell and his wife Elizabeth, both aged thirty-five, and their children John, seven, William, five, and Agnes, one, resided at Mickle Mill, Brechin, Forfarshire. By 1851, the family resided in Upper Tenements, Brechin, William is listed as forty-five and Elizabeth forty-seven, 'laundress', and John, seventeen, and William, fifteen, are linen weavers. There are now two new daughters, Helen, nine, and 'Jean' (error for Jane), two. By 1861 the family had moved to Panmun Street, Arbroath, and all three daughters are 'Flax Factory' workers. By 1871, the family are in thirty-one East Abbey Street, Arbroath; William is deceased, Elizabeth sixty-seven, and the three daughters mill workers.

4. Dereli (2003) traces the press's shift in emphasis between enthusiasm for an early victory at the Battle of the Alma in 1854 and dismay at the mismanagement that had led to the needless death of British soldiers throughout 1855, responses reflected in Campbell's poems.

5. In addition to *Poems* 1's 'The Mother's Lament', the theme reappears in *Poems* 2's 'The Snow-Drop', 'The Absent Soldier' and 'The Farewell'. *Poems* 3 contains two striking examples, 'I Stood by the Wooden Rail' and, as mentioned later in the text, 'The Bereaved Mother'.

6. In an attempted correction to the representation of an overly compliant male hero in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Stowe's Dred, a Black revolutionary maroon exiled to a swamp, calls for his fellow slaves to revolt.

7. 'Malta's Isle' is also in *Poems* 3 and 'The Evening Star' in *Poems* 4.

8. Several additional selections from *Poems 4* appear in revised form in *Songs*: 'The Lily of the Valley', 'Robin Redbreast' ('The Robin Redbreast' in *Songs*), 'The Sea' and 'Edinburgh'. 'Edinburgh' has been greatly altered: for example, the earlier reference to 'many a dissolute maiden | [. . .] living on the street' has been removed.

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Chapter 8

Helen Macfarlane: a radical among middle-class women writers of the mid-nineteenth century

John Rignall

In her very brief career as a published writer in 1850, Helen Macfarlane (1818–61) seems to stand apart from other middle-class women writers of her day in the strength of her political commitment to socialism and the fierce radicalism of the articles she wrote mainly for the *Democratic Review* and, under the pen name of Howard Morton, for the *Red Republican*. She also produced the first English translation of the *Communist Manifesto* for the latter journal in November 1850. Nevertheless, in drawing on her knowledge of languages and displaying a wide range of learning, her writing has elements in common with that of her female contemporaries; by exploring its affinities with the work of Eliza Lynn Linton (1822–98) and George Eliot (1819–80), this chapter aims to relocate Helen Macfarlane in a wider literary context than that of campaigning journalism.

I begin by returning to an article I wrote for Gustav Klaus's first collection of essays, *The Socialist Novel in Britain* (1982), since, in focusing on the period between Chartism and the 1880s (pp. 26–44), it dealt in part with a novel by Eliza Lynn Linton, *The True History of Joshua Davidson, Christian and Communist* (1872), which has surprising ideological affinities with Macfarlane's writings of 1850. In 1848 Lynn Linton became the first woman to draw a regular salary as a journalist when she was taken on by the *Morning Chronicle* and in 1850 she met Marian Evans, the future George Eliot, when both of them were, like Helen Macfarlane, young women from the provinces who had come to London to make a living by the pen. Much later, long after Eliot's death, Linton left an account of that first meeting which mocked the future novelist as looking 'underbred and provincial' (Linton, 1899, p. 95) and was equally dismissive of the famous figure she became in later life, as someone suffused with self-importance. This could be attributed to jealousy of a more successful writer, but the description is also characteristic of Linton in its iconoclasm. She was always inclined to knock idols off their pedestals, without showing any ideological consistency in her choice of targets. In the same year, 1854, she could publish both an eloquent celebration of the achievement of Mary Wollstonecraft in the *English Republic* – a journal edited by her future husband W.J. Linton, the Chartist and republican wood-engraver and writer – and also 'The Rights and Wrongs of Women', an attack on women's emancipation in Dickens's *Household Words* (Anderson, 1989, p. 137). It was typical of her that, although she had led an emancipated and independent life herself, she achieved her greatest notoriety by campaigning against women's emancipation in the conservative *Saturday Review* in the 1860s and 1870s.

It is possible that her association with W.J. Linton helped bring out the socially and politically radical potential of her iconoclastic nature, but her early novel *Realities* (1851), written before she had got to know him, already contains an attack on the callousness of the Church and an association of Christ with communism that are to feature in *The True History of Joshua Davidson* (Anderson, 1987, p. 60). First published anonymously in 1872 in response to news of the Paris Commune, this proved to be the most successful of her novels, going within three months into a third edition in which she acknowledged her authorship (Layard, pp. 179–80). It is the story, told by a friend, of a Cornish carpenter who tries to lead a life such as Christ might have led had he been born in the nineteenth century. Convinced that a modern Christ would be a politician opposed to class society, he breaks with the established Church, 'this jewelled, ornate, exclusive Ecclesiastical Christianity, who is the ancient Pharisee revived' (Linton, 1872, p. 57), goes to London and works philanthropically among the poor. He joins the International Working Men's Association as one of its earliest members in the belief that only concerted working-class action could bring about necessary social change, and, as soon as the Commune is declared, he goes to Paris to help in the cause of humanity. He survives its violent suppression and returns to England, only to be beaten to death by a mob – enraged by the words of a reactionary clergyman – when he attempts to give a lecture on the Communism of Christ and his apostles.

Enlisting Christ and his teachings in the cause of democracy and in the attack on the iniquities of class-society and its hypocritical defender, the established Church, seems directly to echo Helen Macfarlane's writings just over twenty years earlier in the *Democratic Review* and the *Red Republican*. Macfarlane had experienced the temporary success of revolutionary action at first hand in Vienna in March 1848, where she enjoyed precisely the 'universal tumbling of imposters and impostures into the street' that Carlyle had lamented (Black, p. 4), and, had she lived, she would surely have been an enthusiastic supporter of the Paris Commune in 1871. Her fierce articles of 1850 attack the same targets and advance many of the same arguments as Linton's novel, where they are put in the mouth of the compassionate and eloquent Joshua. Macfarlane points out how the Church receives 'ten to twelve millions a year of national property' while its 'priests read prayers and discourse on theological dogmas, to well-fed, well-dressed persons, chiefly of the middle and higher classes', while neglecting to preach the gospel to the poor or to breathe any criticism of a modern society based on the anti-Christian principle of selfishness, 'with its two great ramifications of despotism and mammon-worship' (Black, p. 13). Linton who, as the daughter of a conservative Church of England clergyman and granddaughter of a bishop, had intimate knowledge of the state Church, embodies this priesthood and its failings in the figure of the reactionary cleric Mr Grand, who 'had no love for the poor, and no pity: he always called them "the common people" and spoke of them disdainfully, as if they were different creatures from the gentry' (Linton, 1872, p. 35). When Joshua, after Grand has stopped in his new 'pair-horse phaeton' to ask why he had not seen him in church recently, respectfully but firmly declares that 'the Church is but the old priesthood as it existed in the days of our Lord' and that 'I see no sacrifice of the world, no brotherhood with the poor' (p. 38). To this declaration the clergyman reacts with an angry assertion of class superiority and contempt: 'And you would like us to associate with you as equals? – Is that it, Joshua? Gentlemen and common men hob-and-nob together, and no distinctions made? You to ride in our carriages, and perhaps marry our daughters?' (p. 40). He ends the exchange by threatening to take the whip to the importunate carpenter's son, at which the mild Joshua loses his temper and resorts to invective as powerful as Macfarlane's polemics:

> 'God shall smite thee, thou whited wall!' he cried with vehemence. 'Is this your boasted leadership of souls? – this your learned solving of difficulties? – this your fatherly guidance of your flock? "Feed my lambs" – with what? With stones for bread – with insult for sincerity – with the gentleman's disdain for the poor thought of the artisan – with class insolence for spiritual difficulties! Of a surety, Christ has to come again to repeat the work which you priests and churches have destroyed and made of no effect, and to strip you of your ill-used power.' (pp. 42–3)

Macfarlane makes a similar case against the established Church in general terms, expressing her disgust

> at seeing priests of Baal, professing the religion of fraternity, standing up in pulpits and audaciously blaspheming this holy idea. Professing it with their lips, reading it aloud at altars, while their whole lives give it the lie; while they defend a social system which is based on the principle that one man, or one class, has a right to enslave and trample on another. (Black, p. 85)

The novelist, for her part, gives the priest of Baal a local habitation and a name, and she channels the disgust he and his kind arouse through the character of Joshua, whose anger at the overbearing clerical defender of the class system is expressed in language which draws similarly on the Bible and attains a comparable rhetorical power to Macfarlane's.

Both writers use the example of Christ and his teachings to argue the cause of democracy and advance the progress of socialism (or what Joshua terms communism), and they do so in closely comparable terms. When Joshua sets out the creed he has developed to his friends, his words often seem to carry a direct echo of Helen Macfarlane's. His pleas, 'Let us then strip our Christianity of all the mythology, the fetichism that has grown about it', 'let us go back to the MAN, and carry on His work in its essential spirit in the direction suited to our times and social conditions', and his insistence that 'Christianity is not a creed as dogmatised by churches, but an organization having politics for its means and the equalization of classes as its end' (Linton, 1872, p. 83), chime with Macfarlane's assertion that 'Modern democracy is a Christianity manifested in a form adapted to the wants of the present age, it is Christianity divested of its mythological envelope' (Black, p. 7). Moreover, Joshua's reference to Christ as 'the MAN' here recalls Macfarlane's practice of not usually referring to him as Christ but using descriptive phrases that stress his human nature and lowly social status, such as 'the Galilean carpenter's son' or 'the crucified Nazarean proletarian' (pp. 6, 9).

Eliza Lynn Linton was never as revolutionary as Helen Macfarlane and her republican hero Joshua only calls for 'a thorough reorganisation of society' (Linton, 1872, p. 144) rather than full-blooded revolution, but both writers were more outspokenly radical than the more cautious and conservative George Eliot. As a young woman, Marian Evans, as she was then called, may have welcomed the revolutions of 1848 with a degree of radical fervour in a letter to her friend John Sibree, but she never thought a revolution in Britain either likely or even desirable (Eliot, *Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 253–4), and she became more obviously conservative in her later years. In relation to the 'woman question', however, she retained her radical edge in ways that set her apart from Linton. It is noticeable that the principal female figure in *Joshua Davidson* – the young woman Mary Prinsep – is a subordinate and largely passive figure. She is rescued by Joshua from prostitution after she had been abandoned by the man who first seduced her, and becomes a loyal housekeeper to Joshua and the narrator of the novel. She accompanies them to Paris only to die a violent death at the hands of the anti-communard mob when she is wrongly taken to be a *pétroleuse* (female incendiary). This miserable end confirms her status as essentially a victim, and at no point in her short life does she display any of the rebellious energy and independence of spirit of George Eliot's young women, such as Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Indeed, Linton's limitations as a novelist can be seen in her handling of character in general: *Joshua Davidson* is in this respect more of a polemical tract than a successful novel, and the characters remain representative types rather than being brought vividly to life as individualised men and women with their own distinctive modes of expression, as Eliot's characters regularly are. However powerful Joshua's verbal assault on Mr Grand may be, it is delivered in the language of the practised preacher rather than that of a poorly educated Cornish working man. There is no sense of a local idiom or the inflection of a particular class or trade that would root the character in his time and place and social position. What is lacking can be illustrated by comparison with another scene of class confrontation, this time in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, where the tenant-farmer's wife Mrs Poyser turns on their penny-pinching landlord Squire Donnithorne when he is keen to hand some of their land to a new tenant. She puts him to flight with a series of earthily expressed home truths:

> I should like to see if there's another tenant besides Poyser as 'ud put up wi' never having a bit o' repairs done till a place tumbles down – and not then, on'y wi' begging and praying, and having to pay half – and being strung up wi' rent as it's much if he gets enough out o' the land to pay, for all he's put his own money into the ground beforehand. See if you'll to get a stranger to lead such a life here as that: a maggot must be born i' the rotten cheese to like it, I reckon. (Eliot, [1859] 1996, p. 348)

The radical element in George Eliot comes to light in the action and characters of her fiction rather than through any political statement or overt engagement.

The similarities in the intellectual lives of George Eliot and Helen Macfarlane do not involve politics – beyond their enthusiasm for the revolutions of 1848 – but revolve mainly around their knowledge of German. Both read German literature, engaged with German philosophy and translated German works into English. Before she became George Eliot, Marian

Evans published her translation of David Strauss's *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* anonymously in 1846, and then, under her own name, Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* in 1854. Helen Macfarlane produced the first English translation of *The Communist Manifesto* for the *Red Republican* in November 1850, while her articles for the *Democratic Review* earlier that year contain her own translation of passages from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Black and Watson, pp. 19–20). Her knowledge of German was not confined to philosophers. She concludes her article, 'Signs of the Times: Red Stockings *versus* Lawn Sleeves', *The Friend of the People* (December 1850), with a sketch of the society to which she aspires: 'A society, such indeed as the world has never yet seen – not only of free men, but of free *women*; a society of equally holy, equally blessed gods'; and, as David Black has pointed out, she is drawing here on an essay by Heinrich Heine, 'The New Pantheism' (Black, p. 110). George Eliot also knew Heine's work well, writing four articles on him in 1855–6, the longest of which, 'German Wit: Heinrich Heine' in the *Westminster Review* in January 1856, is a survey of his life and work which was instrumental in introducing the poet to the English-speaking world (*Essays*, p. 216). In that essay she refers to Heine's pantheistic phase in which he 'attacks what he considers the false spiritualism and asceticism of Christianity as the enemy of true beauty in Art, and of social well-being' (p. 243), indicating that she had read the same text as Macfarlane; but where Macfarlane seems simply to recruit Heine as a fellow partisan in the cause of an ideal republican future, George Eliot is more aware of, and more sympathetic to, Heine's sceptical reservations about revolution, arguing that he had 'too keen a perception of practical absurdities and damaging exaggerations ever to become a thorough-going partisan' despite 'a love of freedom, a faith in the ultimate triumph of democratic principles, of which we see no just reason to doubt the genuineness and consistency' (*Essays*, pp. 238–9). Despite the interests and abilities the two writers had in common, the difference here points to the distance between the committed republican polemicist and the sceptical future novelist.

Macfarlane's concluding sentence in 'Signs of the Times' with its italicised emphasis on a society of 'free *women*' (Black, p. 110), reveals a concern for women's rights that is not otherwise prominent in her writings under the male pseudonym of 'Howard Morton'. When writing for the *Democratic Review* under her own name, she inveighed against 'the position of women, who are regarded by the law not as *persons* but as *things*, and placed in the same category as children and the insane' (Black, p. 19). Her glimpse of a future society where men and women could consort on equal terms would have won approval from George Eliot, who, in her 1855 essay on 'Madame de Sablé: Woman in France', praised the French salons of the seventeenth century precisely for being places where women were 'admitted to a common fund of ideas, to common objects of interest with men', which, she insisted, 'must ever be the essential condition of true womanly culture and of true social well-being' (*Essays*, p. 80). Moreover, both women in the early 1850s were making their way in the predominantly masculine world of journals and journalism on equal terms with men – the future George Eliot effectively editing the *Westminster Review* for John Chapman, who was wise enough to defer to her superior ability, and Helen Macfarlane writing for George Julian Harney as a regular contributor to his short-lived journals and winning the acclaim of Karl Marx as a 'rara avis' with truly 'original ideas' (Black, p. i). Since they were both moving in radical intellectual circles in the same part of London, it is quite possible that their paths crossed, though there is no evidence that they ever met.

In 1852 their lives took different turns: while George Eliot was editing the *Westminster Review* for Chapman in the Strand, Helen Macfarlane, who had married a Belgian, Francis Proust, in late 1851, gave birth to a daughter and in 1852 set off for South Africa with her – but without her husband who seems to have started the journey but was detained in England by illness – to settle in Natal. A few days after their arrival in Durban, in March 1853, the baby daughter died. Macfarlane stayed on for fifteen months, returning to England in September 1854 by which time Francis Proust, too, had died. She moved in with her sister Agnes in Manchester and at some stage made the acquaintance of an Anglican clergyman, Revd John Wilkinson Edwards, who seems to have had radical sympathies. In 1856 she married him and had two sons before dying prematurely of bronchitis at the age of forty-one on 29 March 1860 (Black, pp. xxix–xxxii). Ending her life as the wife of a country vicar in Cheshire is an apparently ironic conclusion for a writer who attacked the Church of England so vigorously and cogently in her polemical writings of 1850, but it may well be that the Christianity she and her husband practised in the parish of Baddiley was closer to the teachings of 'the crucified Nazarean proletarian' than those 'state priests' she mocked, who 'pocket all the wages they can get, cry out for more, and leave the work to take care of itself' (Black, pp. 9, 15).

This pattern of rebellion giving way to apparent conformity has a parallel in the life of George Eliot who, after creating a scandal by going off to Germany with the already married G.H. Lewes and then living with him for the rest of his life as 'Mrs Lewes', achieved respectability in the final year of her life: after Lewes's death she married in church the much younger John Cross. But in general the novelist's life was far less dramatic than Macfarlane's. When the latter was experiencing the revolutions of 1848 at first hand in Vienna, Marian Evans could only read about them in the newspapers in Coventry; and when she did go to Europe in the following year, after her father's death, she ended up spending a quiet winter of reading and writing in peaceful Geneva with the sympathetic family of the artist François d'Albert Durade. Her later European travels mainly involved either writing in seclusion or sight-seeing and holidaying, often in sleepy German spa towns and villages. Macfarlane's experiences of childbirth and emigration she could only witness from a distance; she helped to raise Lewes's sons and watched while two of them emigrated, like Macfarlane, to South Africa with similarly unhappy consequences, both dying prematurely.

It was in the life of the mind that the two writers had most in common. When, in her article for the *Democratic Review*, Macfarlane writes of how the Christian dogma that Jesus is the incarnation of God reveals 'the identity of the divine and human nature' and how this implies the equality of all human beings since 'this divine nature is common to us all' (Black, p. 6), she comes close to, and may be drawing on, Feuerbach's argument in *The Essence of Christianity* that the incarnation expresses the human nature of God; as George Eliot puts it, 'the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of a goodness entirely human (that is, an exaltation of the human)' (*Letters*, vol. 6, p. 98). But there are differences of emphasis. In elaborating on the notions of equality and a divine nature common to all, Macfarlane outlines a position that is both ethical and implicitly political:

> *In virtue of our common nature*, we are bound to do to others, as we would they should do to us. This rule is *universally valid*, without distinction of birth, age, rank, sex, country, colour, cultivation, or the like. Wherever you find a human being, you must consider him a brother and treat him as such. (Black, p. 7)

George Eliot would certainly have agreed with this as an ethical statement although, as a novelist, she tends to avoid absolute assertions of universal validity, always aware of the elusive nature of 'that complex, fragmentary, doubt-provoking knowledge which we call truth' (Eliot, [1860] 1996, p. 456). But the most significant difference lies in the two writers' relation to Christianity. George Eliot, having renounced her Christian faith in her early twenties while remaining respectful of Christianity as 'the highest expression of the religious sentiment [. . .] in the history of mankind' (*Letters*, vol. 3, p. 231), is more clearly secular than Macfarlane. The earlier part of the sentence cited above about the Feuerbachian idea of god as the expression of a human ideal spells this out: she refers to the conclusion she has reached 'without which I could not have cared to write any representation of human life – namely, that the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent on what is not man'. Whether Macfarlane shared such an emphatically secular outlook is uncertain, although she would have no doubt assented to the notion of human fellowship as the principle of social and moral development given that fraternity was a central plank of her republican creed. What is difficult to assess is the importance for her of Christianity in its own right rather than as simply a useful rhetorical tool in promoting the cause of democracy. She clearly had a thorough knowledge of the scriptures, not only quoting copiously and cogently from the Bible but also drawing on St Augustine and St Basil as well as St John, while the final stage of her life as the wife of a clergyman indicates that she was never as estranged from the Christian faith as was George Eliot. If, to judge from her writings, her strongest commitment was to the cause of democracy, liberty and a republic of equal citizens, this political faith was clearly supported by her Christian one, the two beliefs being mutually reinforcing. For her, indeed, they appear to have been inextricably connected. She writes of 'the democratic, or Christian idea' as if the two terms are interchangeable, and maintains that 'in the whole civilisation of the human race, there is not a trace of the democratic idea to be found, until the appearance of the Nazarean' (Black, pp. 12, 13). That event was crucial in her understanding of political history:

> I think one of the most astonishing 'experiences' in the history of humanity, was the appearance of the democratic idea in the person of a poor despised Jewish proletarian, the Galilean carpenter's son, who worked – probably at his father's trade – till he was thirty years of age, and then began to teach this idea, wrapped in parables and figures – to other working men. (Black, p. 8)

When the future George Eliot makes a connection between Christ and working men inspired by a democratic and republican ideal in her letter about the Parisian February revolution in 1848, the inferences to be drawn are rather different:

> I would consent, however, to have a year clipt off my life for the sake of witnessing such a scene as that of the men of the barricade bowing to the image of Christ 'who first taught fraternity to men.' One trembles to look into every fresh newspaper lest there should be something to mar the picture. (*Letters*, vol. 1, p. 253)

That Marian Evans, no longer a professing Christian, should be so moved by this scene suggests not so much an identification of Christianity with the cause of democracy, even though she concedes its importance for fraternity, but rather the reassuring effect of the sight of conventional Christian piety in the context of revolutionary action with its potential for destructive violence and bloodshed. When she writes that she trembles to find that consoling picture marred, she is clearly prey to the fear of violent disorder that marks so many middle-class reactions to social and political revolution. To such fears Helen Macfarlane seems to have been entirely immune, siding fiercely with the proletarians – 'my proletarian brothers' as she repeatedly called them (Black, pp. 19, 93, 106) – whose cause she had embraced so whole-heartedly.

In their response to modern German philosophy there were also differences of emphasis. While Macfarlane may have taken something from the 'Young Hegelian' Feuerbach who was so important for George Eliot, her greatest debt was to Hegel himself, whom she termed 'the last and greatest of modern philosophers' (Black, pp. 7–8). Her view of history is essentially Hegelian. She sees the 'Idea of Democracy' unfolding through four stages: the teaching of 'the divine Galilean republican', the Reformation of the sixteenth century, German philosophy from Kant to Hegel, and the 'Democracy of our own times' (Black, p. 5); and the next stage will be its practical implementation in the revolutionary reconstruction of society. Even if she does not specifically invoke Hegel's dialectic in this historical process, the notion of the progressive realisation of an idea is clearly indebted to him, and she cites in its support a passage from his *Philosophy of History*, in her own translation, in which he describes the emergence of the idea of human freedom from being an 'undefined feeling' into the light of full consciousness and acceptance as 'the source of all jurisprudence' (Black, pp. 11–12).

The evolutionary dimension of this argument, if not the revolutionary call for the wholesale reconstruction of society which emanates from it, certainly chimes with George Eliot's view of history; but although she generally held to the notion of what she terms in the finale to *Middlemarch* 'the growing good of the world', she had none of Macfarlane's fiery confidence in the ultimate inevitability of progress. Her sceptical, questioning intelligence could see that history might be, as she infers from travelling down the valley of the Rhône in *The Mill on the Floss*, a series of disasters unredeemed by any sense of 'the onward tendency of human things' (Eliot, [1860] 1996, pp. 272–3). She was also sceptical of philosophers like Hegel who construct universal systems: reviewing in 1855 a book by the German academic philosopher, Otto Friedrich Gruppe, whom she and Lewes had met in Berlin, she cited with approval his assertion that the 'age of systems is passed [. . .]. System is the childhood of philosophy; the manhood of philosophy is investigation' (*Essays*, p. 148). She was intellectually opposed to abstract system-building and professions of absolute, unquestioned faith.

To compare George Eliot's essays with Helen Macfarlane's is to be struck how different they are in ideology and expression despite the similarly wide reading and erudition they display. Macfarlane's are marked by a fierce partisanship alien to George Eliot. In their journalism the two writers may sometimes have focused on similar subjects, but in their style and approach and underlying ideology they were poles apart.

Had she lived, Helen Macfarlane would have surely approved of Eliza Lynn Linton's *Joshua Davidson*, but would doubtless have dismissed her 'Girl of the Period' essays as a frivolous distraction from the pressing need to fight for democratic social change. Dying four days before the publication of *The Mill on the Floss* in 1860, she could only have read George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858) and *Adam Bede* (1859), had she been inclined to. Recently married to a Church of England vicar, she might have been attracted by the title of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, but had she read the stories, George Eliot's treatment of an evangelical preacher and two Anglican clergymen with no radical sympathies might well have struck her as altogether too understanding and sympathetic for a class of men she regarded primarily as hypocritical supporters of an iniquitous social system. Her own deployment of Christ's example and teachings in the cause of a democratic and socialist re-shaping of class society might seem to ally her with Christian Socialists like Charles Kingsley and F.D. Maurice, but she never refers to Christian Socialism directly, and when she mentions the journal associated with the movement, *The Leader* (one of whose founders was George Eliot's partner G.H. Lewes), it is only to cite their critical description of writers in the *Red Republican* as 'violent, audacious, and wrathfully earnest' while whole-heartedly embracing those epithets and wrapping herself proudly in their mantle (Black, pp. 55–6). This was entirely compatible with her version of Christianity since Christ, for her, was the angry proletarian revolutionary who scourged the moneylenders from the temple.

How interested she was in contemporary fiction is unknown. The only novelist she mentions in her essays is Dickens, whom she refers to as Mr Boz, and she shows direct knowledge only of his journalism, dismissing him and his kind as 'rosewater political sentimentalists' (Black, p. 54). When she goes on to condemn middle-class charity as 'atrocious, inhuman humbug', she would seem, by implication, to condemn Dickens the novelist as well as the social reformer. From this evidence she might have had little time for George Eliot's fiction, especially the later, more clearly conservative work which she did not live to see, like *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1865). In the one novel by George Eliot she might have read, *Adam Bede* (1859), class society is certainly taken as given, but the tensions and resentments, and indeed the suffering, that it causes are not glossed over but vividly dramatised in scenes like the confrontation between Mrs Poyser and the Squire cited earlier, and the dairymaid Hetty Sorrel's solitary ordeal when she discovers she is pregnant by the Squire's grandson. The novelist deals not in denunciation and polemical agitation for revolutionary change, but in a realistic rendering of the social world that does not shrink from criticism; and, in its implications, her fiction can be far more radical and questioning of the social status quo than the views she expresses in her letters and essays. It is, indeed, in the light of her probing fiction rather than her statements in essays and letters that it is possible to argue that, had she and Helen Macfarlane ever met, they might have engaged in a fruitful dialogue of similarly powerful intellects and equally matched eloquence, as is ingeniously imagined in a recent play (Hoyle).

As it is, the writings of these three women authors set up their own dialogues, sometimes chiming with each other but more often reverberating with the friction generated by different views of the same mid-nineteenth-century world. These visions confront, challenge, and interrogate each other. All three writers were pioneers in their own way, women of the middle class who took radical and adventurous steps to make a distinctive impact in a profession, and a society, dominated by men. Helen Macfarlane stands out as the one whose radicalism was clearly and consistently political, even revolutionary, but, since her extant writings were confined to a period of less than a year, the brevity of her career as a writer leaves many questions unanswered, especially about the course her work might have taken had she enjoyed the opportunities afforded by a longer life.

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Chapter 9

The pit mice: animals in the mines and the working-class poet

Kirstie Blair

As several historians have noted, efforts to recover animal history have parallels to, and have learned from, the recovery of working-class history (Kean, pp. 58–60). Most recently, Anna Feuerstein has argued that animals are central to the development of Victorian liberalism: ‘Beginning in the nineteenth century, alongside the rise of anti-cruelty legislation, certain animals – mostly domestic – were increasingly *liberalized*; not only were they viewed as subjects with thought and feeling but they were frequently represented with liberal qualities such as reason, character, and disinterest’ (p. 5). As she notes, Victorian legislators and commentators sought to reform ‘animal’ qualities ‘such as instinct, wildness, appetite and brutality’ which were widely attributed to ‘racialized subjects and the lower class’ (p. 3). Harriet Ritvo’s foundational 1987 study observed that embodying the lower classes as different groups of animals justified ‘the authority and responsibility exercised by their social superiors’ and ‘the need for their masters to exercise strict discipline’ (p. 16). However, as Feuerstein’s study suggests, both animals and the working classes were also subject to a logic which suggested that giving them greater rights and agency would render them better, because more docile, workers.

Exploring miners’ literary writings about animals in the mines, this chapter traces the character of working-class responses to these discourses. In the substantial body of work on animals in Victorian literature, working-class writing has not been studied as a genre. Jason Hribal’s arguments that ‘animals are part of the working class’ (2007, p. 109) briefly mention and cite Samuel Bamford and Thomas Cooper (Hribal, 2003, p. 453), and Coral Lansbury, in her seminal study of Victorian animal welfare activism, notes that the ‘occasional text by a worker’ might reveal a very different picture of worker–animal relationships than emerges from mainstream commentary (p. 42). Yet investigations of Victorian literary animals, particularly animals that operate in man-made spaces, generally draw from Dickens or other established authors’ work or lives as key examples: consequently, they also tend to be London-centric. The small selection of literary work I discuss here, by Scottish and Northern miners, is therefore unusual in Victorian animal studies both because of the authors’ background and circumstances, and because of the locations in which these animal encounters happen.

Among middle-class commentators, the encounter between animals and humans in the space of the mine tended to elicit a specific kind of unease about the status of the latter (both in terms of their animality, and in terms of their mechanisation) (Ketabgian, p. 77). The entanglement of animals and industrial workers, I will argue here, looks different when the animals are perceived and represented *by* an industrial worker, especially when that worker is well aware of this unease. Evidence of such reflections appears throughout the poetry recently unearthed in the ‘Piston, Pen and Press’ project (focusing on locating writing by industrial workers produced between the 1840s and the 1920s), which is almost certainly representative of a much larger body of work on the same theme, either lost or still awaiting recovery. This essay therefore also supplies insight into an archive which could be used to think further and more broadly about the zoogeographies of the industrial workspace, and how *non*-working animals, less pets than ‘pests’, operated within it.

Focusing on poetry, the genre most likely to be produced by workers, additionally demonstrates the intertextuality of every literary representation of a ‘real’ animal encounter. When a literate collier in Scotland, the north of England, or beyond, saw a mouse, they saw not only the live creature in front of them but the mouse Robert Burns had turned up in a field in 1785, and they were very alert to the differences and similarities in the encounter. This alertness comprises, as it did for Burns, the fact that the ability to write a poem to commemorate and communicate this encounter is never available to the mouse – and not always available to the worker, given literacy rates for industrial workers for most of the nineteenth century. Tobias Menely, focusing on eighteenth-century writers like William Cowper, whose poems were known to well-read Victorian workers, suggests that the poetry of sensibility is distinct from earlier representations of animals in that it 'took on the vocation of representing animal voice in an emerging public sphere and of thereby speaking for animals in a specifically political sense' (p. 16). This remains true for the mid-Victorian to early twentieth-century poems discussed here, all of which draw heavily on a long tradition of 'sensibility' in animal poems. But a literary work which speaks for a disenfranchised and silenced animal from the perspective of a classically educated and well-connected poet has an obvious and different resonance than a literary work written by a disenfranchised miner, with no expectation that it could reach an audience beyond their local and immediate context. The strong awareness that, like the animal they describe, the working-class poet has little say in the public sphere and is part of a group commonly represented as 'dumb', and needing to be spoken for, is part of the impetus to produce such poems. In a nineteenth-century context, this renders such poems always political, enmeshed in movements for reform and enfranchisement.

As coal mining rapidly expanded and grew in scale, animals moved into the mines. From the 1842 commissioners' reports onwards, animals are included in descriptions of the mining 'community' in periodical and other accounts:

> The community consists of men and boys – and, in some, of women – horses, and asses. Rats and mice find their way in the provender; and cats are brought down to keep these in check. The cricket is chirping everywhere; the midge, and sundry varieties of insects, are found. ('Colliers and Collieries', 1842, p. 162)

> Moths, flies, and gnats – some, doubtless, of a novel kind – are attracted to this newly discovered yet so ancient region. The rats, too, soon find their way thither, to the great discomfort of the miners: they eat their crusts, and nibble their candle-ends, and are met with everywhere scampering along the levels, or timidly hiding beneath the stays [. . .]. The bat, too, finds a congenial home in abandoned workings, which are warm, damp, and quiet. ('Mines and Miners', 1870, p. 31)

There is a distinction, in these reports, between the animals that are 'brought down' for a purpose, like ponies and cats, and the creatures which find their own way into the mines and can make use of their advantages (heat, damp and plenty of space, for instance). In the accounts of miners themselves, especially the accounts of child miners in the 1842 Children's Employment Commission reports, animals are fairly frequent. A particularly notable set of responses from the South Durham coalfield, in which a number of young respondents discuss animals, may have been the result of sub-commissioner Dr James Mitchell's interest in the topic, as he specifically addresses the animals' presence in his introductory report in order to demonstrate that the air in the pit is of good quality:

> Midges are in millions. Wood-lice are not uncommon, nor the insects called forty-legs; and beetles are found in all parts of the pit [. . .]. A few stray mice coming down in the hay multiply and swarm in every part of the pits, wherever the men and boys work. (*Appendix to First Report*, p. 135)

His South Durham interviewees agreed that they were working amid a host of lively animal life. Trapper William Laws, aged ten, 'sets mice-trap in the pits, and catches two sometimes; brings them to the cat in the stable of the pit. There are midges in the pit which fly at the candles' (p. 161). Thomas Hoggins, aged fifteen, recalled of his first working years:

> There were swarms of mice in the pit and I could sometimes take them by a cut of the whip: midges were abundant; they sometimes put out the candle. The pit is choke full of black clocks (beetles) creeping all about; they are nasty things; they never bit me. (p. 157)

Thomas Lawton, an older collier working in the same mine as Laws, remembered his work as a trapper in terms of his encounters with the mine animals:

> The mice are numerous in the pit. They get at your bait-bags, that is, the victual, and they get at the horse's corn. Cats breed sometimes in the pit, and the young ones grow up healthy. Black clocks breed in the pit [. . .]. A great many midges came about when I had a candle. (p. 161)

Other than Hoggins's memory that the beetles were 'nasty', there is little sense of positive or negative emotional investment in animals from these reports. Largely the child workers' interests (at least as reported by the commissioners) are in animals as a source of inconvenience (stealing food, putting out candles) or alternatively sporting entertainment, with a number of reports about catching, torturing and killing mice and rats. For these child miners, animal interactions are reported as an integral part of working life in the mines. From the commissioners' perspective, however, animals are only relevant in so far as they show (ironically) that the mine can be a healthy environment for 'young ones', and because reports of animal cruelty practised by child miners spoke to anxieties about child labour creating a generation of amoral and brutish adults.

Unsurprisingly given Burns's influence, the majority of literary works which consider these animal presences focus on the interaction between a miner and a mouse. Such poems ask questions about whether mice are 'problem' animals, or whether they have a place in the mine economy. As

Jerolmack notes, ‘examining how species of animals are defined as problems can mirror and inform processes of how human groups are constructed as problematic’ (p. 73), and in all these miner – mice encounters, there is a recognition that the mouse’s ambiguous value may mirror the way in which colliers are perceived by the surface world.

The first two poems I will consider were both written in Ayrshire, in the 1880s: there is no evidence that the authors knew each other’s work, but it is not unlikely. In his ‘The Wee Pit Moose’, published in 1883, George McMurdo, a miner since the age of twelve in Muirkirk, Ayrshire, opens with a statement of companionship and sympathy:

> The wee pit moose, my cronie lang,
> My present theme shall be:
> Tae plead its cause, wi a’ my poo’r,
> I’ll raise my voice wi’ glee.
> Wi’ danger hemm’d a’ roun’ and roun’.
> Just like the miner’s sel’;
> But whaur tae creep frae open scaith,
> The beastie canna tell. (p. 24)

Trapped underground in the darkness, away from the ‘safe retreat’ of a domestic space and a ‘cosie nest’, the mouse, like the miners, lives in a state of precarity and danger. McMurdo, addressing not the mouse but his fellow-workers, makes the case that the similarities between mouse and miner mean that the mouse is worthy of their support, and they should not begrudge it enough to live on. His poem is explicitly against animal cruelty on these grounds:

> Oh, dinna lift the cruel fit,
> Nor fling the deadly coal –
> Forgie the scamp’rin’, frichted thing,
> For hunger’s ill tae thole.
>
> And what are we, that’s whiles sae prood?
> On wha dae we depend?
> As circumstances carve the line,
> We rise, or we descend. (p. 25)

By composing a poem that pleads with his fellow miners for kindness to those weaker and worse off than themselves, McMurdo also indicates that he possesses sensibility and feeling – a form of cultural capital rarely attributed to Scottish colliers in wider discourses of the period. In describing the mouse as a ‘cronie lang’ (long-term friend) and reflecting on how hard its life is underground, McMurdo also incorporates a politicised reflection on the working conditions and pay of the collier. ‘Rise’ and ‘descend’, while used in a broad sense, relate to the descent into the mine, a descent from which miners did not always return. Like the mouse, the miner ‘maun dae’ his best in a space marked by darkness and danger, and like the mouse, he knows what it means to suffer (‘thole’) hunger. Though the ‘who’ in ‘on wha dae we depend?’ may refer to God, it also refers to the masters and mine-owners. The poem invites the reader to consider whether their power over the miners’ lives – which, of course, can also include power over the domestic lives and leisure time of the miners in this period, through company housing, shops and amenities – is equivalent to the power differential between miner and mouse.

McMurdo’s poem is not about the perspective of *one* mouse, but about mice and men in this specific environment, and the ways in which they might peacefully co-exist and acknowledge their shared situation. Arthur Wilson’s ‘Lines Addressed to a Mouse’, in contrast, is, like Burns’s poem, addressed to a specific mouse, caught ‘inside my bread napkin’ in the Ryesholm Pit, Dalry (Ayrshire) in 1881.[1] ‘Lines Addressed to a Mouse’ is also written, following Burns’s poem, in the habbie stanza. It follows the miner’s thoughts as he moves from irritation on finding that the mouse has ripped his napkin, eaten his lunch, and bitten him, to sympathy and a willingness to let the mouse escape. The turning point in the poem is when the miner admires the mouse’s enterprise and daring:

My certie! But ye had a speel –
    In faith, but ye hae climbed weel;
    It’s clear four fit untae the nail
        Whaur hung the napkin;
    An’ hoo ye managed it – atweel,
        It’s past my reckonin’ (1884, p. 51).

The mouse’s intelligence and bravery in scaling (‘speel’) the pit prop to reach food arouse the miner’s approbation, reflected in the surprise and admiration in his opening exclamation. He moves to a consideration of what the mouse has brought to his working hours, and then to a determination to treat it henceforward as a companion animal:

Hoo aft I’ve wrocht and nae ane near me
    Tae help tae wile the time sae dreary;
    The hours they wad hae been gey weary
        Wer’t not for thee;
    Yer presence it did oftimes cheer me
        Right merrily.

[. . .]

An' come, wee moosie, come each mornin',
  Aboot the happy hour o' cornin',
  Ye'll get yer fill, withooten girnin'
    O' Cheddar sweet;
  We'll leeve on frien'ship, never spurnin'
    Frien'ships' meet. (1884, p. 52)

As I have examined elsewhere, Victorian working-class writers often rework 'To a Mouse' by offering concrete help and assistance to the small creatures who populate their poems, as Burns does not (Blair). In the mine, as opposed to Burns's ploughed field, this assistance is possible, since the mice are in close daily proximity to the miners and rely on them for food. Although the mouse's presence in the mine (and in the miner's lunch napkin) is initially seen as transgressive and harmful, Wilson's poem shifts towards a position of solidarity and mutual aid. Significantly, Wilson revised this poem in later editions to induce greater sympathy for the mouse. By his 1916 edition, it is now a 'Wee, trembling' creature, driven to steal by the 'hunger-squeals' of 'A wheen o' youngsters' in a nest (pp. 45, 46). At this point, Wilson had advanced from being a Scottish collier to being a Labour politician in Australia, where he continued campaigns for better health and safety in the mines. His revisions make this poem both more respectable, and more politically charged, since rather than the collier and the mouse finding common ground in their boldness and daring in the face of a dangerous environment, they now find common ground as creatures subjected to danger in the cause of feeding their families. Both versions emphasise the loneliness of pit labour and the function of a mouse as a companion animal, but the later versions have a clearer ideological bent.

The last and latest 'mouse' poem I have located, Frederick J. Kitt's 'The Pit Moose', was written in Northumberland rather than in Scotland, where Kitt was part of an active group of local miner-poets (and Burns fans) who operated in the Blyth area, north of Newcastle upon Tyne. Kitt's poem does not appear to have been published in a collection and its first appearance is unknown: it was reprinted in the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*'s 1915 series on pitmen poets. (The version here is taken from a clipping from this series, in the newspaper scrapbook of Kitt's friend and fellow Earsdon miner-poet, John Hume.) Unlike McMurdo and Wilson, Kitt represents himself as surprised to see a mouse in the pit, where it seems out of place and terrified: 'What d'ye think aa saa | Doon the pit? | Wey, just a freetened moose' (1915). The poet immediately pauses in his labour ('glance' is the blow of the pick) to give the mouse a chance to escape:

Aa stopped t' gie't a chance
  Doon the pit,

To get clear uv me glance
    Doon the pit.
Ind when it went belaa,
Then wiv surprise aa saa
It wasn't flaid at aa
    Doon the pit.

The poet, on observing the mouse more closely, revises his opinion of its feelings, because the mouse does not appear to be at all frightened ('flaid') by the working environment of the mine. The remainder of the poem contrasts the suffering mouse, whose chances of survival are slim, but who does not experience the misery and fear this should invoke, with the miner, who is able to recognise that things are not what they could be:

Thowt aa – Though poor me
    Doon the pit,
Aa hev life's bettor share
    Doon the pit
Than thoo, poor little sprite,
Thit gits full many a fright,
Ind hes for life to fight
    Doon the pit.

Yor chance uv life is smaal
    Doon the pit,
It isn't lang it all
    Doon the pit.
Thoo grummels nowt like mi
Aboot hoo things shud be,
Thoo feels nee misery
    Doon the pit.

Although the overt message of these stanzas is that the mouse is more to be pitied than the miner, the implicit point being made is that miners do feel misery and dissatisfaction ('grummels', or grumbles) with their work. And while their chances at survival might be higher than the mouse's, mining work is still a threat to long-term health and safety. The ability to recognise that things *should* be better than they are is represented here as a distinctive human trait. The poem ends with the same rhetorical move as Wilson, in identifying the mouse as a friend and fellow worker who should be entitled to subsistence:

What if thoo steals me bait
    Doon the pit,

Wey, moose, thoo is me mate
  Doon the pit.

Through the repeated refrain of 'Doon the pit', hierarchies between human and non-human animal, mouse and man, are dissolved through their unique shared experience of surviving this environment. Like Wilson, Kitt was heavily involved in (local) politics and trade unionism, as well as the co-operative movement. This poem's emphasis on the mouse as 'mate', on the need for friendship, co-working and support even across species barriers, speaks to themes of class unity, of the need for those who are ignored by the rest of society to support one another.

It is not surprising that there are surviving literary accounts of pit mice, building on the mouse's long presence in English literature. It is perhaps more surprising to find one poem that deals with the midge, by the late nineteenth-century Fife miner-poet Robert Macleod. Midges, tiny biting flies particularly common in Scotland, were a significant inconvenience or even workplace hazard for the miners. While usually perceived as a minor nuisance for humans, usually dispersed by bright light and the slightest breeze, midges could be a much more significant problem in a warm, enclosed space. If a coal mine is perceived as an 'indoor' space, then the midge is an instance of a boundary-crossing animal. Macleod's comic poem, 'The Miner Tae the Midge', again in Scots, probably dates from the early twentieth century (its original place of publication, if it was published, is not yet known). By this point, open candles would have no longer been used and so the danger of clouds of midges extinguishing the flame (as mentioned by miner Thomas Hoggins, cited earlier) might be less immediate. Substantive technological developments in mining, however, had little effect on keeping out small pests like the midge. But did the miners want to be rid of them? Macleod's opening lines identify the midge as 'Wee harmless craiter wi glossy wings', managing not only to defend the midge but to find something attractive about it. Though it is a 'bother', the poem is affectionate, and the midge is 'oor freend':

But still we ken ye'll dae nae hairm,
As ye go creepin up oor airm,
Ye keep us on the move I'm shair,
Hoo ye bother us little dae ye care. (p. 40)

As in the poems on enterprising mice, Macleod is impressed by the midge's resilience and cunning, 'Ye hae us gey often in a fidge, | Although ye're only a wee pit midge' (p. 40):

Ye little buzzer, ye're aye on the mooch,
What impudence gaun intae a collier's pooch!

> But the thing that puts us in a hoax,
> Hoo the devil ye get in oor piece box? (p. 41)

The 'impudence' of the midge is an admirable trait. Though it is a tiny creature, it holds its own against the miners and manages to play 'pranks' on them in thieving their food, like the mouse climbing into the miner's napkin. The narrative of the poem ends with the midge stuck and accidentally killed in the miner's jam sandwich, leading to a slightly tongue-in-cheek moral about greed:

> Wee silly craiter whit makes ye sae greedy,
> Frae a simple miner sae puir and needy?
> On him for yer mite ye hae depended,
> And yer short life ye noo hae ended. (p. 41)

Like these other literary accounts of animals in the mine, this conclusion is about interdependence in a hostile environment with limited resources to share. In return for the midge's 'company', the miner was prepared to share his food, but the midge has gone too far and suffered the consequences.

Are mice and midges 'pests', and if so, from whose perspective? Dawn Day Biehler's 2013 history of 'pests in the city' examines how the histories of creatures like flies, and the attempts to control them, are bound up with those of poor and marginalised communities. During the Victorian period, while there was considerable agitation about mining safety, as well as about the morals and behaviour of 'impudent' miners, there was no particular legislative attention to or major effort to suppress mice, rats, midges, beetles and other liminal creatures in the mine economy, because their effect on productivity was minimal, and because, unlike pests in the city, they were invisible to the respectable above-ground populace. Only the miners encounter these creatures first-hand and are pestered by them: these poems and other reports are the closest that non-mineworkers can get to them. What happened in the mines between human and animal stayed in the mines, as an 1895 RSPCA report, complaining about mines being closed to its inspectors, noted (cited by Ritvo, p. 145) – and the RSPCA inspectors were concerned about pit ponies, not any other animals that might happen to be living underground.

These literary works, as well as some of the other accounts by miners and factory workers, are important precisely because they suggest that, to the miners, there is a significant ambiguity as to whether a midge or a mouse is a pest to be destroyed or a companion animal to be protected. Kendra Coulter has noted that:

> It is true that workplaces are where the most widespread and extreme examples of violence against animals occur. But spaces of work are also

> sites of compassion, devotion, learning, resistance, and possibility. In multispecies relationships, we can see the best in people, how much and how many humans benefit from animals, and examples of how people could act more ethically. (p. 1)

In common with other considerations of animals in the workplace, Coulter focuses only on working animals, but her argument about 'spaces of work' is also applicable to the animals who encounter working humans, yet are not 'working' in the same sense themselves. Industrial workers were profoundly dehumanised by Victorian mechanistic discourse, as were many working animals.[2] They were also, like these border-crossing 'pests', seen as relatively harmless as individuals, yet highly dangerous in combination. The persistence, cunning, adaptability and capacity to bother people with greater power, displayed by the midge and the mice, supply an evident parallel with the miners themselves, in relation to how they were also perceived as nuisances by authorities, especially due to their engagement in industrial disputes.

Yet there is a designed contrast between the individual, literate miner-poet, writing about an individual mouse, and a threatening collective of either mice or men. Indeed, these literary texts are explicitly designed to have a humanising effect through the concentration on one person and one animal, and to show that industrial workers are capable of thoughtfulness and often kindness to animals, thus inducing sympathy for their plight. Moreover, all the poems adopt an argument about power relations which is reliant on sympathy and charity. The mouse's position in relation to the miner is like the miner's position in relation to the authorities, and kindness shown by the miner should be mirrored by kindness shown *to* him. Structural arguments about broader needs for changes in industrial relations, in workplace health or safety, or in hierarchies of mining labour, are implicit rather than explicit. Similarly, sympathy with the transgressive mice and midges, found in surprising and unexpected locations, might be transferred to the miner *poet*, boldly attempting to access literary spaces.

Mice and midges in these poems are 'in between' animals, 'curiously transgressive beings, neither purely wild nor purely tame' (Philo and Wilbert, p. 21), who inhabit spaces that were alien to most middle-class Victorians, yet essential to the maintenance of British national, imperial and colonial projects, due to the dependency of new networks of transportation and industry on coal-powered steam. As Elizabeth Carolyn Miller has recently examined, 'industrial extraction [. . .] transformed humans' relation to and perception of the natural world' (p. 2): while Miller does not discuss writings by miners' themselves, this genre of poems is a significant contribution to reflections on a new relationship between worker and animal formed through extraction. Like the animals represented in them, these poems themselves are also liminal, border-crossing in terms of their linguistic communities and perceived audiences. They use local forms of language which might, to some extent, be unintelligible to the established literary world of this period, but they also position themselves as knowledgeable about an existing literary canon and the forms it took. They were published regionally, but in the case of some of these works, like Wilson's, circulated globally. And in the act of producing a poem, these industrial workers themselves crossed into a different world of labour, one that displayed their distinctiveness – both from animals and from some of their human colleagues – even as their poems argue for likeness and solidarity. These lesser-known texts exemplify how literary works set in industrial spaces portray animals and humans as 'subjects to be negotiated with' (Fudge, p. 265), serving as intricate, imaginative sites for exploring agency, resistance, exploitation and interspecies collaboration within the working communities of these emerging industrial environments.

Notes

1. There are slightly different versions of this poem, with differing titles, in each of Wilson's collections. The text here is taken from the earliest 1884 edition. Later editions of Wilson's poems were published in Australia, after he emigrated, and the Scots in this poem and others is significantly toned down.
2. See for example McShane and Tarr on the horse as a 'living machine' (p. x).

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Part III

TWENTIETH-CENTURY PIONEERS

Chapter 10

Paving the road to socialism: the political leadership and pastoral writing of Katharine Glasier (1867–1950)

Heidi Renée Aijala

In her 1894 pamphlet, *The Road to Socialism*, Katharine Glasier (née Conway) describes how technological advances, brought on by burgeoning industrialism, allowed humankind to tame the natural world and usher in an age of innovation. Glasier reflects that 'men have discovered how to make the earth yield us abundant food of every description' (p. 1). They have used 'the cotton plant, flax, and the mulberry tree' as well as the 'wool, hair and skin of animals' to 'clothe themselves, not only warmly in wool or securely in leather, but beautifully in linen and silk' (p. 2). Moreover, not only have men brought 'the winds and waves and lightning storms' partially under their control but technology works away tirelessly: 'spinning and weaving machines tur[n] out a hundred or more yards of finished cloth in the time that the man or woman who stands before them would have taken to complete even one before steam power came to their assistance' (p. 2). Glasier continues:

> Whether it be in the tunnelling of hills, draining of swamps, and bridging of rivers, or in the fashioning of the wheels of a watch, the eye of a needle, or the strap of a baby's shoe, everywhere machines are at work with a power and a speed that no human hands or feet could ever have approached, much less attained. (p. 2).

Such innovations – which, in many ways, undertake a majority of the hard labour – would seem to usher in a 'summer of ease and plenty', especially for the workers of the world who are ‘committed to the great task of feeding, clothing and sheltering the human race’ (p. 2). However, these workers, whose bodies might be ‘relieved from the burden of overwork and all the fear of mere physical want’, continue to find themselves, in Glasier’s words, ‘prisoners’ (p. 2). Echoing William Morris, in his *Chants for Socialists* (1892), Glasier argues that these workers are prisoners in a ‘“house of pain”, built up higher and higher [. . .] by each one of their “patient days”’ (pp. 2–3).

Glasier’s insights, clearly influenced by Morris and expanded through her own experience, highlight how nineteenth-century industrial technologies, while impressive, were also instrumental in deepening economic rifts between social classes. Glasier reflects that ‘[a]s far back as 1865, John Stuart Mill acknowledged that “The deepest root of the evils and iniquities which fill the industrial world is the subjection of labor to capital, and the enormous share which the possessors of the instruments of industry are enabled to take from the produce”’ (p. 4). In other words, Glasier posits that, while the technological advances of the nineteenth century were remarkable, the rise of industry and capitalism simultaneously heightened the injustices of the nineteenth-century social strata. Glasier expresses disgust at the degrading transformations that accompanied industrialism, arguing that the needs of the people, particularly ‘healthy homes, [and] good food and clothing’, are not produced. Her analyses reveal that, far from improving them, the material conditions wrought by industrialisation were unemployment, resource scarcity, and the poor living conditions of the working class. If anything, as technology advanced, working and social conditions worsened for many. Industrial modernity failed to deliver on its promises of relative ease and fair labour, creating deep rifts in economic and social structures instead.

While Glasier’s non-fiction explores industrial violence and political unrest in manufacturing towns, thus drawing attention to the problems wrought by the dual application of industrialism and capitalism, Glasier’s short fiction focuses on rural landscapes to imagine solutions. Turning to the agrarian countryside in *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills* (1907), Glasier rejoices in the ‘consciousness of the soil’, the ‘depths of the earth’, and the ‘rich, red earth of Devonshire’ (pp. 60, 61, 162). Here, Glasier posits alternative narratives, ones that draw from the cycles of the natural world. The characters in this collection live ‘vigorous, open-air’ lives, where ‘every white bird-fleck on grass or ling or mossy stone intrudes itself upon’ the scene (pp. 1, 27). The collection’s vignettes take place ‘On the wide plains of the mid-east coast of England, all through the season of harvest', where the 'scarlet poppies set the yellow corn ablaze' (p. 40). This idealised setting allows Glasier to resolve the issues caused by industrialisation – in particular, industrial violence, class conflict, poverty and environmental degradation – through an exploration of regeneration, growth and renewal in the natural world. Its implication is that capitalism is fundamentally incompatible with the earth's ecological balance. Like Morris, Glasier's dual focus on socialism and the environment in this short fiction provides a unique ecosocialist perspective, one that imagines nature as a regenerative, sustainable system.

Though the term 'ecosocialism' itself did not arise until the twentieth century, environmental scholar Tani E. Bellestri posits that '[t]races of what we today call "ecosocialism" can be found in the works of late nineteenth-century British socialist William Morris, who espoused preservation of natural resources and protection of the natural environment from pollution and industrialism'. Bellestri describes ecosocialism as 'a movement that advocates replacing capitalism with a system that promotes common ownership of the means of production' (p. 2). Citing the 'yawning gap' between rich and poor, Bellestri argues that ecosocialist thinking apprehends a profound breach in capitalism, where exploitive practices benefit only a small percentage of individuals. For this reason, ecosocialists see capital as the enemy of the poor and working classes and understand capitalism as working in opposition to nature itself, including the environment and all of human life (p. 3). Though applying ecosocial theory to Glasier might risk anachronism, she, like Morris, anticipates the concept in an interesting and articulate manner.

In many ways, Glasier's ecosocialist perspective, including her stark critique of capitalism, challenges a pro-industrial ideology and condemns the industrial system holistically, criticising its negative effect on labour practices, living standards and ecological sustainability. Ultimately, Glasier rejects industrial modernity under capitalism and presents an alternative socialist worldview intimately linked to ecological regeneration and sustainability; and, while *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills* might seem removed from the scenes of sprawling industrialism and limited resources depicted in Glasier's political pamphlets, there is an intimate connection between these genres. *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills* turns to the countryside as a way to mitigate anxieties related to scarcity and the cultural transformations caused by the industrial-capitalist complex. Although removed from scenes of industrial violence, these short stories offer alternative systems as a means of realising the 'hope' of socialism.

A socialist response to sprawling industrialism

Glasier's political writing is a prime example of the intersection between political treatise and socialist thought. Accordingly, throughout her political pamphlets, Glasier highlights how the dual pressure of industrialism and capitalism oppresses workers and limits their access to resources. Workers engage in 'exhausting toil' and are 'burden[ed] by over-work' and the 'fear of mere physical want'; all the while, 'the rapid increase of labour-saving machinery is hastening the process' (*Socialism for Children*, pp. 2, 14). Similarly, early in her 1894 pamphlet, *The Road to Socialism*, Glasier turns to Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (first pub. 1860, in book form 1862) to posit that the problem of industrialism is that it does not cater to workers' needs, so much as capitalists' desire to accumulate even greater wealth. 'The master-classes', Glasier writes, 'only seek to discover what will sell' and '[t]hus the world is filled with what Ruskin calls Illth, rather than wealth; and the healthy homes, good food and clothing, which are needed of the people [. . .] are not produced' (p. 6). Like Ruskin, who uses the term 'Illth' to signify the types of accumulation that cause degradation, Glasier similarly highlights the relationship between the production of capital and the subjugation of the working classes, who 'must be content to be out of work and starve' (p. 6). For both Glasier and Ruskin, the coinage 'Illth' – with its replacement of wealth's root word, 'weal', with 'ill' – is a shorthand for the creation of wealth that has poverty and degradation as its cost. In other words, 'Illth' is that which comes at 'the expense of human and material resources in producing what is irrelevant or inimical to our real needs' (Rosenberg, p. 138).

Speaking of the problems with the capitalist economy, Glasier writes, '[t]he monopolists, want food, clothing, and shelter for themselves, as well as a thousand other comforts and luxuries' (*Socialism for Children*, p. 5). To accommodate these needs, the industrial classes 'graciously permit a portion of their dependents to work on their land [. . .] and are content with a bare subsistence for themselves in return'. This system, argues Glasier, is 'often spoke of as wage-slavery' and, under its conditions, 'the children of [the working classes] have to go to work before either their bodies or brains are fully developed, the average age has sunk to less than half the allotted span', and workers live in 'a time of physical suffering' and 'social degradation' (p. 5). Through this example, Glasier critiques a system where workers are, to quote Ruskin in 'The Nature of Gothic' (1880), 'sent like fuel to feed the factory smoke' (p. 163). The system, which treats the working class as disposable resources, functions much like what MacDuffie terms 'an entropic one-way street' where workers' bodies are 'used up like batteries in a system of mechanical production' (p. 152).

Glasier suggests, however, that such inequities are not insurmountable, and she proposes that socialism is the solution to the ‘evil of [. . .] class ownership of the land, labour saving machinery, and other instruments of production, distribution, and exchange’ (*The Road to Socialism*, p. 4). More specifically, Glasier finds the exploitation of the working classes problematic. For this reason, she outlines the power of trade unions, the importance of shortened work hours, and the value of productive employment. ‘Under Socialism’, Glasier writes, ‘all [workers] would have the fullest possible supply of their material necessities in return for the shortest possible number of hours worked’ (p. 11). This is a system ‘where each will give according to his capacity and receive according to his need’ (p. 15). To illustrate, Glasier briefly sums up socialism in three points: ‘(1) All able-bodied citizens must be willing to work in the service of the State, (2) All work must be productive, and (3) Co-operation must take the place of Competition’ (*Socialism for Children*, p. 8). Glasier explores these points with a brief, utopic glimpse into a socialist community. She reasons that a socialist community includes ‘well treated land, and good workers, which soon comes to mean well treated workers too’ (p. 4). These workers are ‘men and women who have been fed both body and mind all their lives’, meaning they have been well educated and well fed on ‘food stuffs like wheat and barley and oats, etc.’ that are grown by the community (p. 4). In this utopic vision, ‘men have learned how to plough instead of digging with spades and to reap and bind and thresh with wonderful machines, often driven by steam power’ (p. 4). In this way, Glasier imagines the ways in which machinery, when owned and operated by the workers, could be an unequivocal good. Yet, unlike the industrial technology owned by capital, which drives down the cost of wages and increases the work hours, the machinery in Glasier’s utopic vision allows men to reap the ‘gift(s) of the land which hides coal and ironstone under its surface’, all of which can be ‘worked upon by good workers’ (p. 4). Hence, Glasier acknowledges the potential value of mineral extraction when the workers, machinery and land exist in a symbiotic relationship.

Undoubtedly, Glasier’s socialist perspective was informed by her early life and education. Born in London on 25 September 1867 to a Congregationalist minister and his wife, Katharine St John Conway had a remarkable upbringing (Rothwell, p. 121). Her parents believed that women should have an education equal to that of men, and thus young Katharine was educated alongside her brother Seymour, who later became Hulme Professor of Latin at the University of Manchester. At the age of nineteen, she attended Newnham College, Cambridge, with a scholarship in Classics. There, she was influenced by feminist thinkers and scholars. For instance, in *The Labour Woman* (1 October 1929), she would write about meeting Olive Schreiner:

> In the early starting days of my life, when I was only a Newnham student, determined to claim for women all the opportunities of education which men had won, I had the great privilege of meeting Olive Schreiner. . . . Eagerly, she encouraged every bit of courageous aspiration or rebellion she found in us. (quoted in Rothwell, p. 121)

Katharine Conway graduated in 1889, and, although Cambridge University refused to award degrees to women, she thereafter listed BA after her name, including on the title pages of her novels and pamphlets, in defiance of this gender discrimination. It has been argued that the status this title conferred aided her attempt to popularise socialism and effect reform.

After graduation, Katharine Conway taught at Redland High School in Bristol, which was plagued by industrial unrest. While senior Classics mistress there, in 1890, she witnessed female cotton workers striking, and this incident seems to have had a profound effect on her social and political ideologies. In large part, Katharine Conway was 'deeply impressed by the contrast' that the 'poorly dressed and work-worn female protesters made with the richly decorated interior of the church where they had taken refuge from the rain' (Rothwell, p. 121). After this incident, she briefly became a member of the Bristol Socialist Society, an offshoot of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF) which was affiliated with the Fabian Society in Bristol. She soon after resigned from Redland High School to take a teaching position in a working-class school. This was a courageous move, as Katharine Conway simultaneously rejected her comfortable lodgings and position to move in with a socialist working-class family of an SDF organiser.

From the autumn of 1891 until the spring of 1892, she lectured for the Fabians and was a Bristol delegate at the Fabian Society's first annual conference in February of 1892. Afterward, she became a member of a group of provincial Fabians, who were among the founders of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), and she was later appointed to a committee to organise a conference to found a national ILP (Wrigley).

The SDF, Fabians and ILP all advocated for 'the Cause' of socialism and sought to dismantle capitalism. However, each had a slightly different approach to that goal. The SDF was a Marxist organisation that believed class struggle in a capitalist society would eventually resolve class antagonism and form a classless society. The task of these members, whose slogan was 'Educate, Agitate, Organise', 'was to expose the pernicious nature of capitalism and attempt to channel discontent into outright opposition to the system' (Hannam, p. 3). Hannam further notes that the party emphasised class conflict, a central focus in Britain and internationally. The International Labour Party, in contrast, did not as readily appeal to class antagonism.

While lecturing for the ILP, Katharine met John Bruce Glasier, and the two were married on 21 June 1893 (Wrigley). After marriage, Katharine Glasier continued her activities as a socialist propagandist, editing the *Labour Leader* from mid-1916 until April 1921 and continuing her work with the ILP (Rothwell, pp. 125–26). In addition to her membership in political groups, Glasier espoused her political beliefs in writing. She published several socialist pamphlets and three novels: *Husband and Brother* (1894), *Aimee Furniss, Scholar* (1896), and *Marget* (1902–3). She later published her collection of short stories, *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills* (1907).

Glasier's work, which stands at the intersection of socialism, feminism and environmentalism, is of particular importance because, as H. Gustav Klaus observes, 'feminist criticism (and publishing) has yet to rediscover its socialist mothers of the novel' (p. 3). Rather, in many ways, women socialist authors, such as Glasier, have been consigned to the margins. Indeed, Klaus condemns 'the selective critical consensus which has assigned out authors to the graveyard of the justly forgotten' (p. 4). Although the recovery of women's socialist writing has been slow, scholars such as Klaus have begun to reclaim Glasier's work, insisting on its importance in the literary history of the socialist movement. Indeed, Glasier's oeuvre is of particular importance not only due to her socialist perspective but also for her intersectional focus on capitalism, industrialism, feminism and the environment. In large part, Glasier's understanding of these connections was deeply influenced by Morris, whose socialist vision rejected industrial modernity in favour of an ecological socialism.

Although the nineteenth-century socialist and environmental movements developed separately, scholars such as Raymond Williams understand Morris as the writer who 'first began to unite these diverse traditions' (Williams, p. 46). Moreover, as Bradley J. Macdonald has argued, Morris was not the only one to sense the catastrophic changes occurring to human and natural life in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, but he was 'one of the first to see that its resolution could come about with the development of socialism' (p. 298). Thus, Morris's vision was a clear example 'of how ecological sustainability is intimately linked to socialism' (Macdonald, p. 299). Jan Marsh writes that 'Morris's initial response to contemporary industrial society was to turn his back on it, espouse the values of Malory and Chaucer and attempt as far as possible to live in the fourteenth rather than the nineteenth century' (pp. 12–13). According to

Marsh, Morris 'proclaimed that the present social and economic system would have to be abolished for beauty to be produced'. Similarly, Ruskin 'said that industry, by turning men into dehumanised extensions of the machine, prevented the achievement of good art'. Thus, for Morris and his followers, abolition 'or even reform' of the existing industrial-capitalist system 'meant getting rid of the cities and the industrial and commercial conditions they had spawned' (Marsh, p. 144).

In some ways, Morris's initial escapist reaction was a response to the sprawling devastation caused by industrialism. Speaking of the role of nostalgia in late nineteenth-century pastoral literature, Marsh writes, '[t]he visible decline of the countryside prompted a sudden rush of nostalgia for rural life [whereas] [t]he city was seen as physically and morally corrupting, damaged by "the inner darkness in high places which comes with a commercial age"'. As such, 'Health and happiness were to be found in the country, in rural life and agricultural occupations' (p. 4). This urge to retreat into a rural utopia, a Golden Age – which Raymond Williams describes as a 'myth functioning as memory' – is evident in nineteenth-century pastoral literature, specifically the genre of the village sketch (p. 43).

Yet, while early pastoral writing expresses anxieties regarding industrial development, it differed substantially from the late nineteenth-century ecosocialism espoused by Morris, Glasier, and others. For nineteenth-century ecosocialist thinkers, capitalism was uneven and unsustainable, 'filled with contradictions' that included 'social alienation, vast disparities between the rich and poor, imperialism, destruction of the environment, global hegemonic systems, and repressive states' (Bellestri, p. 2). Not only did ecosocialists, such as Glasier, see capital as the enemy of the poor and working classes, but they also understood capitalism as working in opposition to nature itself, including all of human life. For these reasons, nineteenth-century ecosocialism supported the 'systemic disassembling of the state and capitalism' as well as the creation of a new system focused on community and collective ownership (p. 2).

Thus, it is not surprising that Glasier imagines a type of intentional, utopian community in *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills*. Comprised of ten short stories, *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills* was compiled and 'given to the ILP National Campaign Fund by the writer and publisher free of royalty or profits of any kind, in faith and comradeship of socialism, the hope of the world' (preface). The stories in *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills* explore cycles of growth, both for individuals and the natural world, and demonstrate that, for Glasier, the natural world is a system that inspires transformation and leads to rejuvenation.

Ecosocialist alternatives in *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills*

By connecting socialism and nature in *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills*, Glasier espouses her ecosocialist perspective. And while Glasier's ecosocialist writing turns to the countryside as a means of realising a socialist vision, it is much more than simple nostalgia for the past. The natural imagery in Glasier's *Tales* is of particular importance in highlighting the regenerative cycles of the natural world. In the fictional Leigh Milton, 'bilberries ripe[n] on Coombs Moss', fields are 'shorn of their promise' only to regrow the following season, seasons change, flowers die and then rebloom, and characters alter their perspectives and understanding of the world (pp. 63, 29). The 'horrible slums' and 'depositories of death' featured in Glasier's political pamphlets are replaced with 'spring air', 'sun-warm[ed] water', and the 'clear, cold sun-shine' of her *Tales* (*The Cry*, p. 12; *Tales*, pp. 23, 60, 27). In this way, *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills* offers a vision of an ecologically sustainable world that draws its energy from the natural environment.

Nearly all of the stories in Glasier's *Tales* begin with natural imagery, thus foregrounding the setting as important to regeneration and transformation. Take, for instance, the opening of 'Coltsfoot', where Glasier writes, 'On the wide plains of the mid-east coast of England, all through the season of harvest, sheer against the blue of sea or sky, the scarlet poppies set the yellow corn ablaze' (p. 40). Glasier offers this image only to signal its contrast. 'But for the dwellers in "Peakland"', writes Glasier, 'Dame Nature holds no such obvious splendours [. . .] for the most part our flowers wear the sober hues of hard times patiently endured, and have to be sought for before they discover their presence' (p. 40). The most common flower of the Peak District is coltsfoot, and Glasier notes that 'even on its inhospitable sides the Coltsfoot has found a home' (p. 41). Glasier continues, 'Some exquisite moral force would seem to govern the little plant's life from its first feather flight as a tiny, one-seeded fruit to its consummation in the purple-scaled stem and yellow-crowned flower of its second spring' (p. 40). This opening presents the coltsfoot in terms of resiliency and strength. Even under the most 'inhospitable' conditions, the coltsfoot grows and develops.

Furthering her discussion of the coltsfoot's resiliency, Glasier observes that 'it is to the "slope of barrenness" that the baby Coltsfoot wings its way, or to the scarred sides of the new railway cutting and the sorry heaps of sour, unsunned soil brought out from the bowels of the earth by the workers in tunnel or mine' (p. 41). Here, the comparison combines the natural and industrial environments; the coltsfoot ‘finds a lodging’ by a railway, tunnel, or mine and ‘the tiny seed sets itself with giant energy to wrestle with the inanimate forces about it’ (p. 41). And, despite the degrading industrial conditions, the coltsfoot will ‘thrust a sturdy “storage” stem horizontally through the hard, unfriendly soil, making use of every suitable crack or fissure to send up wide, spreading leaves into the sunshine and air above, there to work for it the spring and summer through’ (pp. 41–2).

Glasier maintains that the coltsfoot survives in oppressive environments because it is fuelled by the natural weather cycle, or the ‘material’ of ‘the upper world’ (p. 42). Moreover, when the seasons change and ‘winter comes’ the flower’s ‘leaves are content to die and leave their work behind them, certain that in the following spring, at the earliest possible hour, the Coltsfoot spirit will send up bright yellow flowers to justify their labours and bear fruit in their turn’ (p. 42). Thus, even though the coltsfoot may have taken root in industrial, inhospitable soil, the flower is renewed through natural cycles. Although the leaves may die and wither, the natural cycle promises that the flower will return.

Emphasising the cycles of the natural world, Glasier comments on the purple patches of the coltsfoot’s stem, which have ‘their special use’ in this progression: ‘[T]heir [use] is the wonderful cunning to utilise to the utmost the scanty sunshine of bleak regions or of the chilly days of March, converting the energy of the rays of light into vital heat for the sustaining of the plant life as a whole’ (p. 42). Thinking on this cycle in ‘the land of the Coltsfoot’, which has been ‘preserved by the watchful Spirit of the Ages’, the narrator expresses a ‘longing desire to enter into the consciousness of the soil, suddenly withdrawn from its long sleep in the depths of the earth and bathed for the first time in the light and air of the upper world’ (pp. 60–61). This opening highlights the relationship between natural cycles, growth and transformation.

As ‘Coltsfoot’ suggests, transformation in *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills* is largely enacted in or through the natural world. This is similarly true in the short story ‘What Art Tha For’, where Glasier writes:

> In a village that can boast of lying 900 feet above sea level, Spring is apt to be late, and to make her appearance a trifle over-consciously. The white gleaming of the east wind sunshine draws a sharp outline between hill and sky, and shortens the time for the opening of the buds. In one morning a bank that yesterday was brown with last year’s leaves will break out into a glory of white and gold. Anemone and celandine, together as if at the wave of a magician’s wand, have sprung into the

> open in full blossom. The subdued cawing of the rooks in the beeches becomes a clamour, and the bluey, brown-clouded egg shells lie broken under the trees before we have had time to realise that the bundles of twigs overhead have been fashioned into nests. (p. 27)

The paragraph brims with transformation: the movement from winter to spring, the sun rising on the day, the transition from bud to flower, the rooks breaking from their shells to fly away, and – notably – the flowers opening into full bloom 'as if at the wave of a magician's wand'. Yet, it is not magical. Rather, 'it is all the work of that clear, cold sunshine!' (p. 27). It is in this functional light, quite literally, that 'every white bird-fleck on grass or ling or mossy stone intrudes itself upon our vision' (p. 27). This imagery of regeneration, which Glasier carefully notes as part of the natural cycles of growth, foregrounds the restorative work nature performs throughout the narrative.

The plot of 'What Art Tha For' follows the working-class Ellen Bateman, who travels to the country with her mistress. Excited to leave the bustling city, Ellen anticipates 'a cottage in the midst of fields, neatly furnished, with an unbroken view of the surrounding hills' (p. 28). However, 'there had been nothing to prepare [Ellen] for the disappointment she had experienced' when she 'discovere[d] that under her bedroom window the fields had been shorn of their promise' (p. 28). Instead of lovely country views, 'no soft growth of grass under the alternate shower and sunshine of April; no lambs to excite a kindly laughter by their uncouth gambols; no peaceful chewing of the cud by complacent cattle' (p. 29). Instead, Ellen finds 'a miserable mass of a mortar yard' with 'great heaps of lime and ashes' and a 'pile of yellow sandstone lying beside them, waiting to be crushed under the heaving roller' (p. 29).

The 'miserable mass of a mortar yard', a symbol of industrial labour, contrasts significantly with the springtime imagery that opens the narrative, and Ellen is not wrong to feel as if 'a barrier' had been 'set up [. . .] between her and the green world that lay beyond' (p. 29). Indeed, beyond the mortar yard, Ellen sees 'farther away' the hills, which 'rose one behind another', and 'the blue of the more distant ridge [that] blended into the brown of the nearer [. . .] birch branches, not yet in leaf' (p. 29). The setting is indicative of Ellen's state of mind. In the narrative's first half, Ellen is barred from acknowledging the beauty of her surroundings or recognising the goodness of those she meets. For instance, Ellen initially associates the labourer Will Laycock with the 'miserable' mortar yard (p. 29). However, as the narrative progresses, Ellen alters her 'hasty surmise' and eventually finds that 'mingled pity and love had lifted' her prejudice (pp. 31, 39).

The tale underscores several ecological and socialist concepts, especially the appreciation and inherent value of *all nature*, meaning the physical environment as well as human nature itself. Moreover, in its focus on the simplicity of country life, 'What Art Tha For' highlights the reduction of human impact on ecological systems. In contrast to the noisy factories and dirty streets of Glasier's political pamphlets, the Devonshire village of 'What Art Tha For' is 'laden with the sweetness of the gorse and the heather' (pp. 29–30). For Morris, the adoption of a simpler way of life 'would not only provide a healthier human environment' but could also 'reduce or eradicate many other ecological problems' (O'Sullivan, p. 449). This is certainly true in 'What Art Tha For', where one is not struck by the bustle of the factory town but – instead – by the 'viscid glistening of the maple shoots and the round fatness of the sheathes in which the chestnut leaves lie folded' (p. 27). In the end, Ellen sees beyond the 'mass of mortar yard' to find 'a new impulse of friendship' and love (p. 33). In essence, this simpler way of life fosters a sense of community cultivated through an ecological appreciation of the natural world.

Ultimately, Glasier's late nineteenth-century narratives in *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills* offer a critique of capitalism while, at the same time, proposing agrarian life as a contrast to industrialism. The wasteful industrial world that Glasier critiques in her political pamphlets is replaced with stories of country villages, nature and community. Taken together, the pastoral stories offer alternatives to the 'entropic one-way street' of industrialism, to use MacDuffie's phrase. They combine socialist tenets with natural regeneration and growth and – in doing so – foreground a radical ecosocialist perspective. Thus, *Tales from the Derbyshire Hills* offers alternative and sustainable systems that contradict the waste and degeneration of industrial modernity. In celebrating the rustic village and the bucolic countryside, Glasier reconciles industrial progress with her socialist vision and imagines generative societies that celebrate work, human relationships, and the environment. She crafts narratives that resolve class conflict through understanding and compassion. For Glasier and other late nineteenth-century reformists, ecosocialist thinking provided a way to imagine alternative social and economic systems based in community and the natural world.[1]

Notes

1. An early version of this work was submitted by the author as part of the doctoral thesis, '"The Steam That Is to Work the Engines": Women's Writing and the Rise of Steam Power in Victorian Britain', the University of Iowa, 2021.

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Chapter 11

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth and the question of audience

Kathleen Bell

One of the most difficult questions a working-class writer is required to address is the question of audience. This is exacerbated by the widespread assumption – not just among literary critics – that the main role of the working-class or labouring-class writer is to represent their own class experience, making it available for interpretation and emotional responses from a largely middle-class readership. There is a continuing tendency to identify working-class writers in terms of that class only in so far as they fit readers' expectations, offering seemingly naïve, autobiographical reflections on what they have seen and experienced. This elevates the role of the critic. When working-class writers operate in popular genres, which may enable them to reflect more widely on society, or are formally experimental, they largely elude the working-class tag. Hilary Mantel and George R.R. Martin, despite their working-class origins, are rarely considered in relation to that class – perhaps because their acute observations of the brutal demands and workings of power would be too discomfiting if class were brought into the equation. Meanwhile, after the controversial success of James Kelman's Booker prize winning *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994) – too often read as if it were the author's unmediated stream-of-consciousness – his follow-up novel, *Translated Accounts*, mystified many reviewers because it was not located in his native Glasgow and treated oppression in a more obviously experimental way than in previous novels. Yet Kelman's earlier works were carefully thought out literary constructs, written from a concern to challenge the hierarchical tendency wherein readers feel superior to oppressed and suffering characters.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth (1886–1962), many of whose works are once again in print thanks to the endeavours of Nicola Wilson, may seem as far as is possible from Kelman in terms of literary technique but she was, from an early stage in her writing career, just as aware as he is of the question of audience – in particular of the risk that a working-class writer, dependent on a middle-class establishment for both publication and audience, may find she gratifies her audience by providing an opportunity to wallow in heightened emotions when presented with a portrait of other people's suffering. This is sharply detailed in Carnie Holdsworth's Wildean children's story, 'The Blind Prince', published in her 1913 collection *The Lamp Girl*.[1] The embedded 'Slave's Story', which emphasises the exploitation of creative workers under oppressive hierarchical systems, opposes free life outside the law to the lure of wealth and fame. Before his capture, the slave had worked as a shepherd and played the flute but, against his family's wishes, he agreed to be taken to the city to entertain the wealthy. As the flute player's pirate father expressed it:

> the life of a mountain pirate was cleaner than many fine lives led in the cities, and for his part he could see less wrong in relieving overburdened travellers of their cares than in stealing the bread of the poor to put learning into the heads of lazy, rich men's sons, in order that they might still further rob the next generation. (*The Lamp Girl*, p. 161)

The full horror of his exploitation is brought home to the flute player when, after hearing of his mother's death and responding in music, his rich listeners 'thundered such applause as almost lifted the roof' (p. 164). This is when he realises that by offering both his mother's life and his own grief to a wealthy audience he evokes neither sympathy nor a will for change; he has simply offered poverty and sorrow as entertaining objects for emotional consumption.

It is impossible to know exactly when 'The Slave's Story' was written or submitted to the publisher but its publication is intriguingly close to the June 1913 premiere of Ethel Smyth's *Three Songs*, which included two of Carnie Holdsworth's poems, in London's Queen's Hall. There is certainly a possibility that the 'Slave's Story' was written as an oblique response to Smyth since it makes no particular contribution to the narrative structure of 'The Blind Prince' but simply adds a layer of intensity. Certainly Smyth's settings could be said to have appropriated Carnie Holdsworth's words and experience for her own musical, emotional and political purposes. The two songs, settings of 'Possession' and 'A Marching Tune' (retitled 'On the Road') (*Collected Poems*, pp. 134 and 119), with their dedications to Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, redirect the passion of the poems from their original working-class context. When, as in 'A Marching Tune', Carnie Holdsworth writes of rebellion and the quest for freedom from slavery, she implicitly refers, as often elsewhere, to class oppression and the exploitation of workers – a struggle in which she hopes women will be involved side by side with men as equal comrades. By contrast the first poem set in Smyth's three-song cycle, Maurice Baring's 'The Clown', uses images of dungeons and enslavement – very like the subject matter of 'The Blind Prince' – metaphorically as a counter to imaginative freedom. Superficially this links well with Carnie Holdsworth's poem, but it undermines her rootedness in everyday material reality. The most obvious political element in Smyth's setting, beyond the dedications, is the quotation of a musical phrase from her suffragette anthem, 'March of the Women', towards the conclusion of 'On the Road', but this narrows down the politics of Carnie Holdsworth's poem to a single issue, albeit one with which she presumably agreed.

The question of audience is not merely one of how a particular written experience might be contextualised, framed or appropriated. There are also material differences in how creative work – whether music, art or writing – is received. These differences, especially in relation to the act of reading, make frequent appearances throughout Carnie Holdsworth's writings. She is interested in particular in how and where reading takes place, the needs it may meet, and the different ways in which readers respond. Her treatment of reading raises crucial questions about what is critically valued in literature and what forms and aspects tend to be dismissed.

Carnie Holdsworth's most direct writings about the oppression of women as workers come in her early stint as editor and columnist for *The Woman Worker* in 1909 where, in an article titled 'The Factory and Content', she wrote: 'The factory worker is practically a beggar and a slave. | So are all other workers dependent upon the whims of a master class' (1 March 1909, p. 312). This allusion to factory workers as slaves runs through her work and is most notable in the title of her radical novel of 1925, *This Slavery*. But while she identifies the oppression of workers by powerful bosses and owners and sees the need for revolutionary political change (not necessarily violent) she is also alert to the need many workers – especially women workers – have for escape and the way in which some of those means of escape, including reading, may function as a mode of resistance. Three weeks before her comparison of factory work with beggary and slavery, her article 'Factory Intelligence' describes cotton mills as a place where reading happens during working hours and against the rules:

> If you ever took a stroll through a cotton factory whilst the 'hands' were away in their homes having dinner, and were inquisitive enough to poke

> into the square, tin boxes that are for the purpose of holding weft, you would find a varied assortment of literature. You might find, deftly hidden (lest the eagle eye of the overlooker pop on them), Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, Silas Hocking, Dickens, 'Daily Mail,' 'Comic Cuts,' and (sometimes) the 'Clarion.'
>
> Have you ever tried to read in the working hours of a factory? It is a weird experience.
>
> So between the breaking of the threads and the throwing of the shuttle we thieve back a little of the time that they are thieving from us. It needs patience, too. In some six hours, with good luck, you may manage two pages of pretty open print.
>
> Does it not argue a love of learning when we attempt to read in such hells as these? And it is better to pursue the adventures of the Pink Kid in the 'Comic Cuts' than never get out of one's self – it does at least save us from going mad. Taken from the ugly schoolroom and plunged into the factory we waste our youth, our health, our beauty in weaving cotton. Shade of Shakespeare, what have we to do with thee? Surely thou wast meant for the rich and not for us!

(*Woman Worker*, 10 March 1909, p. 219)

This passage indicates several key aspects of Carnie Holdsworth's awareness which feed into the treatment of reading in her works. First she notes the practical difficulty of reading in a life dominated by the need to work – a need which, for women, is frequently exacerbated by the 'double shift' of paid work and unpaid domestic labour. In another *Woman Worker* article of this period she urges women to free themselves from domestic drudgery by going out onto the moors and being willing to play ('Our Right to Play', 14 April 1909, p. 342). But for working-class women in a factory who are poor in both money and time, the opportunity to read is something they steal back from their employers as they give what attention they can snatch from repetitive paid labour to the books and magazines they have concealed from the overseer. This is far from the pleasant middle-class image of the reading woman who reclines on a couch or in an armchair as she fends off the boredom of a leisured life. The wealthier reader may have time to spend on a lengthy build-up of plot, slow revelation of character or convoluted sentence constructions. The stolen reading of factory workers demands that every sentence and paragraph offers something immediate, whether an exuberance of expression, a joke to be relished, or a mystery about character or plot which will feed the imagination when work needs active attention or the overlooker patrols. Aesthetic values are often slanted toward reading methods available to a more leisurely lifestyle but there is no reason why this should be so. It is worth considering what kind of writing works best in snatched moments; their technique as well as their views and plot might help to explain the long popularity that Dickens and Dumas had among working-class readers before they were admitted to the canon or pantheon of literary greats. Short chapters, powerful emotion, high tension, frequent action and vivid language all provide welcome counters to the tedium and exhaustion of the factory's ten-hour day.

Carnie Holdsworth's concern with the partial fulfilment that reading provides as a form of imaginative escape dates from her first published poem, 'The Bookworm' (*Rhymes from the Factory*, pp. 1–3), in which she sees reading as a space of mental freedom and metaphorical wealth. By 1909 she is concerned with what happens to the women who have no imaginative or real outlet but are most strongly aware of their confined and oppressive circumstances. In her article 'How Colour is Introduced' (*Woman Worker*, 7 April 1909, p. 323), she suggests that consciousness of their material circumstances is liable to drive women into flirtation and sexual liaisons (with the implication of prostitution), just as men who cannot bear factory life might take up soldiering. This suggests that what is lacking in workers' lives is a recognition of feelings and an outlet for strong emotions, including desire. If reading provides a vicarious means of experiencing strong emotions through reaction or sympathy, it has particular value. Those emotions may well include, when reading the work of Dickens and Silas Hocking, strong sympathy for the plight of the poor, if not an effective remedy for their poverty.

It is evident that Carnie Holdsworth does not value all reading matter equally. *Comic Cuts*, a magazine reproducing largely American comic strips comes near the bottom of her implied hierarchy because she feels obliged to make an excuse for its presence in the factory. Dickens is listed among the popular authors because in 1909, when Carnie Holdsworth was writing, he tended to be seen as a popular rather than the canonical writer he has become today. Moreover, the existence of a canon of English literature, although beginning to be implicitly accepted by critics and the authors of colonial textbooks, rarely impinged on twentieth-century working-class readers who, as in earlier centuries, tended to be led by chance rather than critical guidance in their reading choices. The inclusion of the *Clarion* is presumably partly because of Robert Blatchford's role as owner of *The Woman Worker* and mentor to Carnie Holdsworth. It is also a reminder of the extent to which any evaluation of writing is not simply a matter of literary taste but also relies on our own ethical and political concerns. The concluding ironic reference to Shakespeare indicates not so much his absence from working-class reading (Carnie Holdsworth alludes to *Romeo and Juliet* in 'The Bookworm' and was clearly familiar with Shakespeare's work) but as someone whose writings working-class people are not expected to understand, both because of their paucity of education and because of condescending attitudes which see working-class people as lacking both value and taste.

Later novels suggest the possibility of interest in a wider range of reading matter by working-class people. For instance, Bill Cherry in *The Taming of Nan* is given a copy of Southey's *Life of Nelson* (1813), *Helen of Four Gates* features Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), while Rachel Martin in *This Slavery* is an enthusiastic reader of Marx's *Capital* (1867–94, trans. into English from 1887), borrowed from the local Co-operative Library. This indicates considerable access to books and willingness to read complex works among people with minimal access to formal, state-provided education. However, romantic novelettes do come in for occasional criticism. In *The Taming of Nan*, the romantic novelette may seem to offer escape but when life offers her no easy romantic resolution, Polly finds such novelettes unsatisfactory because they are so 'dreadfully unreal' (*Taming of Nan*, p. 262).

In several of her works Carnie Holdsworth suggests that the highest value of books may lie in their connection to truth and feeling but that these connections do not often receive an adequate response from the middle-class readers among the employing class. A bleak assessment of the inadequacy of middle-class reading comes in the poem 'His Books' (*Voices of Womanhood*, pp. 18–21), written in the voice of a domestic servant who has fallen in love with the cold employer who pays twenty pounds a year for her humility, quietness and distance. Loving him, she uses his bequest of a hundred pounds to purchase his books, which she cannot read because they are 'mostly dry' – but she keeps them so that their presence can remind her of the man who gave them far more care and attention than she ever received.

The 1924 novel of domestic service, *General Belinda*, is clearer about what Carnie Holdsworth considers the responsibility of both readers and writers. As the protagonist Belinda takes on a series of jobs as a general domestic servant, the novel with its episodic structure provides a variety of depictions of members of the employing class. These include readers and a writer while Belinda herself enjoys and is affected by her reading. The employers Belinda encounters include Mr Wells, who admires *Silas Marner* but can think of 'nothing but getting on' in life (*General Belinda*, p. 110), as well as a fourth-rate writer who lectures on 'Genius and Poverty' (p. 126) but is annoyed when Belinda remarks that a woman accustomed to stand at her factory work for ten hours a day is unlikely to faint from the stress of sitting beside a patient for the same length of time (p. 122). Meanwhile Belinda, reading about Fantine in *Les Misérables*, finds the book a call to action and responds by giving her favourite skirt to a poor woman with many children to support (p. 126). She eventually draws the conclusion that ‘the people who made other people weep on their printed pages achieved their success, not from greater feeling, but a shade less feeling, which allowed them to stage-manage their effects’ (p. 130). However, she remains convinced that for the greatest writers – she names Charles Lamb and Victor Hugo – there can be no such disconnection between their lives and works, and Carnie Holdsworth addresses the reader directly, declaring that in the greatest writers there is a unity between their lives, their feeling and their writing which is ‘deep and intense’ (p. 136).

The kind of sincere authenticity which Carnie Holdsworth values is presented in the chapter in which Belinda reads one of her father’s dialect poems praising the pleasures of home to the Bransworth Poets’ Society. When the poem meets with respect and applause, Belinda is reassured that the authenticity and sincerity of his words, despite flaws, is combined with ‘the true poetic spark’ and that, as a result, his ‘sterling worth’ will not be forgotten (pp. 244–6). It would be easy to dismiss Belinda’s view of writers and their works as naïve, especially since her admiration for writers and expectations of them and their readers are so frequently disappointed by her employers. However, her more generous and humane responses are implicitly endorsed by Carnie Holdsworth and serve as a reminder that the activities of reading and writing do not take place in a vacuum apart from human ethics and responsibilities.

While writers and readers have moral responsibilities and may in some cases unite great writing with human sympathy, Carnie Holdsworth does not assume that virtue is the key to writing. As she says, ‘There can be mediocrity with sincerity’ (*General Belinda*, p. 136). Nor is an ability to be moved and influenced by books an exceptional marker of sensitivity or worth. Many of Carnie Holdsworth’s characters are moved and influenced by books though other sympathetic, kind and hardworking characters – Bill Cherry in *The Taming of Nan* (1919) and Bess Hind in *All On Her Own* (1929) – attempt to engage with literature but find it does not fit their needs.

It is reasonable to assume that Ethel Carnie Holdsworth’s interest in the way readers respond to literature and the role reading can play in working-class lives affected the form and structure of her own novels, but this cannot be entirely disentangled from the demands of publishers and the marketplace. As a working-class writer, Carnie Holdsworth wrote for money and was liable to encounter middle-class gatekeepers at her various publishers. However, we can assume a largely working-class audience for at least some of her works, such as her writing for *The Co-operative News*, including the 1915 serialised novel *The Iron Horses*, and her final novelette, *All On Her Own*. Here and elsewhere in her work is a form of writing distinct from the kind of literary 'realism' often favoured by middle-class critics. Working-class writers are often expected to be literary realists, perhaps because if such writers are seen simply as reporters of their everyday situations, the first responsibility of the critics becomes one of interpretation and evaluation rather than active response. Yet literary realism, with its focus on the predictable and everyday, has its own constraints, especially when the everyday is viewed from a perspective of middle-class security. It avoids the juxtaposition of extremes of wealth and poverty and assumes an overarching continuity, allowing no space for dramatic external events or sudden changes of circumstance. This has limitations when considered in relation to working-class lives. By contrast, the popular form of melodrama focuses on bodily vulnerability, permits the intervention of luck, acknowledges the fact of oppression and permits – even encourages – strong emotion. This means that melodramatic elements can reflect the precariousness and anxieties of working-class life more accurately than literary realism, which responds most readily to the security and unquestioning certainties of the comfortable middle classes. Melodrama, with its frequency of action, extreme characters and intensity of emotion, can also fulfil the requirements of the secret women readers in the factory Carnie Holdsworth described in 1909, allowing them to relish both emotion and incident in the ten hours of their draining and repetitive daily work. Pamela Fox finds melodramatic romance in tune with Carnie Holdsworth's socialist-feminist aims; I think it is also important to consider the ways in which melodramatic tropes can bring fiction closer to the rhythms of impoverished working-class life than a realist approach can achieve.

Although the 1917 novel *Helen of Four Gates* was probably Carnie Holdsworth's most successful novel in the melodramatic mode, it is possible that her later novels, written in popular genres, are more consciously suited to an audience of her own class. While *The Quest of the Golden Garter* (1927) begins as though it were an aristocratic thriller, it is prefaced by a poem which attacks those who, under the protection of the law, rob the poor and weak. The story includes flashes of anger at oppression, exploitation and ignorance of suffering so that one central character can declare to a wealthy man: 'I hated you all, hated all you who could pass by on the other side – whilst humanity clawed and ate the dust, as though it was vermin, not flesh of God, left there to die, or rot, or prostitute itself' (p. 73). A footman likewise betrays a 'blaze of absolute hatred' for a moment when patronised by an upper-class man (p. 79). This acknowledgement of class anger, published in the year following the General Strike, is presumably something that working-class readers would recognise, whether or not they shared that perspective.

Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's final novel, *All On Her Own*, was published on 23 November 1929 as a cheaply produced fortnightly 'Ivy Stories' novelette (no. 178) published by Leng, a subsidiary of DC Thomson, and priced at 4d (fourpence). Its two-colour cover in red and black shows a woman half reclining in a bleak moorland landscape with an expression and gesture presumably intended to suggest romantic longing. The advertisement inside the cover is for Dr J. Collis Browne's Chlorodyne – a popular panacea aimed at working-class people who might struggle to afford a doctor's fees and advertised as a remedy for everything from influenza to diarrhoea and from asthma to gout. It's hard to find an exact comparison today but in terms of production values the nearest are probably the Pocket Library series produced by the *People's Friend* – a descendant of the *People's Friend Library* novelettes (also produced by DC Thomson but with the slightly higher price of 6d, sixpence). The production values are low: the paper is cheap and the type, in two columns on each page, while clear enough, is small with occasional smudges and defects, comparing poorly with the larger clear type of her final hardback novel, *Eagles' Crag* (1928). Its expected audience might be identified by the use of metaphors familiar to mill-workers, such as 'the flying shuttle-weft of the sunrise' (*All On Her Own*, p. 15) or the fear that a metaphorical thread had broken 'which could never be pieced again' (p. 14, referring to the work Carnie Holdsworth herself had done as a child piecener in a cotton mill). Although the setting is mostly rural the perspective is largely urban, which may derive from a sense of audience as well as a Marxist view of history (that is, that historical change would be propelled by the urban proletariat). The aristocratic old gentleman Sir Michell Tyburn is described as 'sympathetic so long as his interests and traditions were not involved. Those interests, at least, were not based on exploiting sewing-shop girls and anaemic mill-hands'. He is also 'the fading symbol of an age that was passing, or soon to pass' (p. 30).

There is a fairly longstanding tendency to lump all novelettes that include love stories together and then to treat them with dismissive condescension. In his study of popular reading and publishing, Joseph McAleer moves from Orwell's discussion of boys' novelette fictions to a generalised criticism of the escapism of similar publications for women, remarking that 'The ubiquitous happy ending added to the lack of realism' (McAleer, p. 5). He cites in his own sweeping criticism of women's novelettes Kathleen Box, one of the leading proponents of 'Mass Observation' in the 1930s, who assumed working-class people were influenced by the books they obtained from 'public libraries, twopenny libraries, and grubby little sweet shops' (p. 7). While McAleer does look at women's papers and what he terms 'romance papers' published by DC Thomson, his focus is on twopenny papers rather than the slightly more expensive novelettes and more on titles and short summaries than full contents. His survey omits the Ivy Stories novelettes, published by Leng which was by then a branch of DC Thomson.

While *All On Her Own* might easily be classified as a romantic novelette since it follows to some degree the conventional pattern of dislike turning to love but interrupted by obstacles, the romantic plot is only one of many elements of Ivy Stories novelettes which tend to focus on many more characters than the conventional couple-to-be. Happy endings are not a given. The previous fortnight's novelette, *The Hidden Wife* by Anne Middleton (Ivy Stories, no. 177) is a reworking of the popular Maria Marten story whose many fictionalised versions in the early twentieth century tend to present Maria as an innocent working-class girl seduced and then murdered by the local squire. Rather than viewing *All On Her Own* as romance, it is more helpful to consider how Carnie Holdsworth employs familiar melodramatic tropes. These enable her to pack the tale with incident so that each short chapter offers excitement and suspense for the reader who is short of time – or perhaps reading in secret while standing by a factory machine. Melodramatic tropes include bodily weakness interrupting paid work (in this case a career as a singer and actress), a home lost when fire causes financial reverse, and death caused by the selfless act of caring for a dangerously ill child. While these may seem excessive and unrealistic to comfortable middle-class readers, for Carnie Holdsworth's working-class audience – and perhaps for many readers today – the risk that illness or disability may damage or end the ability to earn, the danger of a sudden catastrophic loss of home and security or even the threat posed by contagious disease remained potent and fearful elements of everyday life. Writing from and for a working-class audience can mean drawing on a strong awareness of such material circumstances as well as writing in forms which speak to those circumstances and with which readers are most familiar.

The problems in writing about romance from a working-class perspective were familiar to working-class readers long before Walter Greenwood's anti-romantic *Love on the Dole* (1933) showed both working-class people's capacity for romance and the impossibility of achieving, in the circumstances of the time, a realistic happy ending. In her 1909 poem 'Love and Poverty' (first published as 'A Proletarian's Song', *Collected Poems*, p. 101), Carnie Holdsworth wrote of the need to renounce all thoughts of romance until an imagined future when 'Poverty is not a crime'. This is perhaps why Estelle, the heroine of *All On Her Own*, is a Cockney foundling brought up by an elderly actor, and therefore in some ways outside the class system.

This allows for comments and debates about class, wealth and privilege which are often spoken by Estelle or mediated through her perspective. While as a character she arrives as an outsider in the northern rural landscape, her conversations and observations suggest as much acquaintance with poverty and exploitation in northern mill-towns as with extremes of wealth in London. The novel is written for immediate consumption rather than enduring literary status, so it includes contemporary debates such as discussion of the Settled Land Act of 1925 (*All On Her Own*, p. 30) and the contested practice of tithing, with Estelle and the author frequently observing oppression and injustice and always speaking up for radical change. Thus the novel speaks from and to the circumstances of working-class readers, plainly putting a point of view with which the reader is at liberty to disagree. As the dramatist John McGrath wrote of the difference between working-class audiences and middle-class audiences, working-class audiences ‘have minds of their own and they like to hear what your mind is’ (p. 54).

Carnie Holdsworth’s own political perspective is made plain by authorial comments on the small acts of kindness most likely to appeal to all working-class readers. For instance, the help a thin, poor Yorkshirewoman offers in cleaning the house is seen as an example of ‘the good, universal earth, which grows charity and love and mutual aid’ (*All On Her Own*, p. 39). This presumably deliberate reference to the Russian anarchist Kropotkin and his seminal work *Mutual Aid* (1902) can be linked with Carnie Holdsworth’s 1924 declaration that she belongs to ‘the folk – from the most undeveloped and illiterate, so confused that they are the bedrock of even reaction, to Whitman and Morris, and Marx, Kropotkin and Bakunin’ (*Freedom*, October 1924, p. 54). The generous and instinctive mutual aid practised by a woman whose life is a struggle forms a telling contrast with the young Bess Hind, who clings to tales of wealthy ancestors and fears that her brother’s loss of land might deprive her of her class position and force her to live among the ‘uncultured masses’ (*All On Her Own*, p. 12).

It is not easy to reconsider what reading may have meant to working-class readers in the past – or even what it may mean now. Working-class readers are too often seen as the passive recipients of literacy, unlikely to have literary taste and incapable of intelligent judgements on what the role of literature should be. In reality, working-class readers have always possessed perception, imagination as well as the ability to form opinions of their own and contest the views of others. Ethel Carnie Holdsworth through her various writings offers some suggestion of what reading may have meant to working-class women in the past – and the critiques with which it might challenge contemporary assumptions and judgements about what constitutes ‘good’ literature.

Note

1. Probably published towards the end of the year, given the British Library acquisition stamp of 7 November 1913.

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Chapter 12

Intersections of class and gender in the fiction of Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Tessa Hadley

Livi Michael

The cover of the Jonathan Cape edition of Tessa Hadley's *Clever Girl* (2013) features a pencil study by James Cowie, titled 'Schoolgirl'. This study was for Cowie's painting, *A Portrait Group* (1940). Coincidentally, the cover of the 1986 Penguin edition of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's trilogy, *A Scots Quair* (1932–4) features a detail from the same work. Although this portrait is presumably meant to suggest Stella, the eponymous 'clever girl' of Hadley's novel, it might equally serve as a portrait of the young Chris Guthrie in *A Scots Quair*, who is regularly described as cool and reflective.

It is an interesting coincidence, since Tessa Hadley and Lewis Grassic Gibbon are rarely linked in any other context. Their fictions differ in terms of setting, representation of language and narrative technique. There is no sense in which *Clever Girl* was written in response to Gibbon's trilogy, it is not imbued with the same Marxist or diffusionist ideology that permeates *A Scots Quair*, or the same nationalist concerns. Yet, in terms of the representation of female subjectivity and experience, these texts have much in common.

Prompted by these correspondences, this chapter compares Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* with Hadley's novel *Clever Girl* and two stories from her short story collection, *Bad Dreams* (2017), exploring the complex subject positions resulting from the intersections of class and gender in the depictions of the female protagonists. I will argue that education contributes to the hybrid subject positions of these protagonists, whose experience, as represented in these respective texts, is characterised by liminality, discontinuity and division. This chapter proposes that the changing social landscape of the twentieth century accounts for the different trajectories of the protagonists. Thus, the texts provide unequalled insights into the experience of the clever girl from a lower-class background over the century.

Together, the timelines of these books include most of the twentieth century, a period of significant social change for women. The changes featured in *A Scots Quair*, written in the early 1930s and depicting the 1910s and 1920s, are necessarily different from those presented in *Clever Girl*, but both texts explore issues such as contraception, single motherhood, the shifting class positions of the female protagonists, and education. In addition, both texts take their protagonists from childhood to middle age. *Clever Girl* begins in Stella's childhood, setting her personal history against the background of post-Second World War England, and the novel concludes in the early twenty-first century, when she is fifty. The 'Prelude' to *A Scots Quair* starts in prehistory, but Chris's story begins in 1911, when she is fourteen, and ends in the mid-1930s, when she is about forty.

Gibbon was unusual in selecting a female protagonist for his trilogy. While the 'clever boy' is regularly represented in working-class fiction from the 1930s to the 1960s, few texts focused on 'clever girls' from the working class or traced their ambiguous relationship to education and the opportunities that are, in theory, afforded by it. The fictions of Gibbon's contemporaries – Walter Brierley, Lewis Jones and Richard Llewellyn – all focus on the struggles of working-class men against poverty and oppression. Like Huw Morgan in Llewellyn's *How Green Was My Valley* (1939), Chris Guthrie comes from a nation that has suffered from its political relationship to England. Like Huw, she lives in a rural community where education is divisive, and in many cases, disadvantageous, but also, like Huw, she is unusually intelligent and responsive to the English language and literature. However, unlike Huw, Chris is female and her family are crofters rather than working-class in the proletarian sense. Her progress through *A Scots Quair* – her relationship to education, language, and to the Scottish nation itself – is therefore complicated by gender as well as class.

By contrast, Hadley does not seek to represent national interests, or to engage with any specific political cause. The settings of her novels and short stories are usually domestic. Even so, there are interesting similarities between *A Scots Quair* and *Clever Girl*. Most obviously, both authors choose 'clever girls' as their protagonists, not least because this cleverness sets them apart from their social backgrounds. Although Hadley uses a first-person narrator, and Gibbon a flexible third, in both texts we see events from the perspectives of these protagonists – that is to say, from a marginalised 'outsider' perspective that is often critical or at least ironic and distanced. There are several references, for instance, to Chris's 'coolness' and distance throughout *A Scots Quair*: 'And then that went by, she was suddenly cool. It was only a speak, a daft blether of words' (p. 275). Similarly, as Kate Kellaway notes (2013), Stella herself is always partially withheld, unavailable. At school, Stella is 'too good at English comprehension for [other] girls to trust' (*Clever Girl*, p. 13). She loves her cousins 'but doesn't belong to their tribe' (p. 110). At university, she feels 'a steely satisfaction in my singleness, as though I was sealed up and made self-sufficient by my work' (p. 226). And when she ultimately finds work as an occupational therapist, her co-workers find her arrogant and aloof (p. 234).

Hadley, like Gibbon, is critical of education. Stella feels out of place at her own High School. Her first son is born when she is eighteen, and her pregnancy results in her being thrown out of the family home. Later, as a single parent, she becomes a cleaner in a private school, an experience which elicits an ironic dissociation from educational hierarchies: 'It was only when it was empty that I felt the power of that ideal of gilded, privileged youth. Set apart for a different destiny' (*Clever Girl*, p. 136). She works as a waitress while studying for her A levels in the evening, before applying to university, at the age of thirty, by which time she has two children. This is 'before the big rush of mature students', so again she feels separate from the other students (p. 225). She is not, like the students at the private school where she previously worked, 'set apart for a different destiny', just set apart. The text glosses over the issue of money, but it is likely that in this period, the 1980s, she would have received a government grant. However, her experience of university causes her to feel alienated from both her working-class family and the middle-class academics who fail to impress or inspire her. Her status is both liminal, in the sense of between social classes, and hybrid, combining elements of working- and middle-class experience. Despite her later marriage to a wealthy industrialist, this liminality remains unresolved at the novel's end.

Gibbon presents education as a tool of imperialistic and class-based oppression which operates specifically through language. Chris's experience of language is the experience of division: between English, which is the language of social improvement and education, and Scots, which is associated with a rural, deprived economy but also with home and family. Throughout *A Scots Quair* this linguistic bifurcation manifests itself as a division in her subjective experience:

> So that was the college place at Duncairn, two Chrises went there each morning, and one was right douce and studious, and the other sat back and laughed a canny laugh at the antics of the teachers, and minded

> blawearie Brae, and the champ of horses and the smell of dung, and her father's brown grained hands, till she was sick to be home again. (p. 45)

At school Chris wins prizes for arithmetic, 'shines' at Latin, history and essay writing and is given a bursary to continue at college. But her prospects end when her father can no longer afford the rent on the farm and the family moves to a less tractable croft. This initial misfortune is followed by her mother's suicide, then the death of her father. On discovering that her father has left money in the bank, Chris's first thought is that she can 'go up to the College again, and pass her exams, and go on to Aberdeen, and get her degrees, come out as a teacher and finish with the filthy soss of the farm' (p. 96), but soon this impulse passes. 'She walked weeping then, stricken and frightened because of that knowledge that had come on her, she could never leave it, this life of toiling days and the needs of beasts and the smoke of wood fires' (p. 97).

Alan Bold has written of linguistic division as a key feature of Scottish literature: 'fiction haunted by history and constantly aware of linguistic division becomes distinctively Scottish when it admits the element of unsettled psychology' (1983, p. 128). The divisions in Chris's psychology are referenced throughout *A Scots Quair*. The first division is between the Scottish and English Chris, but there is also a third Chris who stands apart from the others, who is described as whimsical or uncanny: 'maybe that third and last Chris would find voice at last for the whimsies that filled her eyes' (p. 64). This is not the 'last Chris' however, since later there are references to many Chrises (p. 297). The initial division, however, is associated with education: 'So that was Chris and her reading and schooling, two Chrises there were that fought for her heart and tormented her' (p. 37). Education, therefore, is actively disadvantageous to Chris. Likewise, in *Clever Girl,* Stella is upwardly mobile, but education both facilitates and complicates this trajectory. Her sense of alienation at university leads her to reject an academic career, despite her obvious ability, in favour of a 'more useful' career as an occupational therapist (*Clever Girl*, p. 234). It affects her relationship with her husband, who expects her to listen to him, as if she were 'the wife of a great philosopher'. However, she reflects, 'Mac wasn't a great philosopher, he was a factory owner and it was me who had the humanities degree' (p. 244). Stella's education also compounds her difficult relationship with her stepfather, Gerry, who is 'hostile to the power my education brought me' (p. 84).

Both protagonists have complex relationships with their fathers. In *Sunset Song* (the first part of *A Scots Quair*) Gibbon portrays the incestuous desire of John Guthrie for his daughter, a taboo and controversial subject for that time. In *Clever Girl*, Stella doesn't know her real father and spends much of the novel yearning after the unattainable dream of 'Father'. Stella's early world is female-centric and marked by a closeness to her mother (a single parent) and grandmother. Men are peripheral at this stage, intruding disastrously and with sporadic violence. Uncle Derek, who has beaten Aunt Andy for many years, and who kills their son, exercises his 'little despotism' because of the 'whole towering, mahogany-coloured, tobacco-smelling, reasonable edifice of male superiority in the world outside' (*Clever Girl*, p. 21).

This 'edifice of male superiority' is illustrated in both texts by the effects of marriage on the social fortunes of the protagonists. In *A Scots Quair*, Chris's social position changes when she marries firstly a crofter, secondly a minister and thirdly a joiner. In *Clever Girl*, Stella's fortunes change when her mother marries a factory overseer, and when she herself marries a wealthy industrialist.

Both protagonists are sexually transgressive in terms of the eras in which they live. Chris marries three times, has one sexual encounter with Long Rob while still married and twice kisses a girl. She has two sons in two separate marriages, although one dies shortly after birth. Stella also has two sons to two different partners, marrying later. She initially falls for a young man who is gay, then lives in a commune where sexual fidelity is not the norm. There, she has sexual encounters with two men and one woman.

Both protagonists share an androgynous quality. The name 'Chris', is, in itself, androgynous, and Chris's mother tells her she would 'make a fine lad' (*Scots Quair*, p. 56). Carla Sassi identifies a 'subtle "androgynous" subtext' in the trilogy, a 'cross-gender identification' that creates 'a "dislocated" discursive system, whose inherent tensions and ambivalences powerfully subvert contemporary notions of nation and gender identity' (pp. 116, 133). This is also evident in *Clever Girl*. Stella dresses to appear more powerful and taller in the mirror (p. 287), and from an early age her self-image is gender-transgressive: 'I fancied I walked with a masculine casual bravado [. . .]. I wasn't interested at that point of my life in being girlish' (p. 29).

This 'dislocated subversive system' also applies in *A Scots Quair*, to Chris's self-alienated sense of identity, or subjectivity, which is especially evident in the scenes in which she looks at herself in the mirror: 'Chris took off her clothes in front of that other who watched and moved in the mirror's mere' (p. 255). Chris returns to the mirror at moments of change and transition in her social identity, such as her wedding, as if to find a stable point of identification. Deirdre Burton considers the scenes in which Chris reflects on her own image as essential to Gibbon's portrayal of the split subject (p. 35), which he particularly relates to female experience. While other characters, such as Robert, are shown to be divided between religion and socialism, only Chris is depicted in these mirror scenes which suggest a split in self-perception and subjective awareness of self-as-not-self.

Mirrors are also significant in *Clever Girl*, where they also signify self-alienation in the same way as in *A Scots Quair*: 'I could see my own face as if it wasn't mine' (*Clever Girl*, p. 75). However, on this occasion, the reflected self is also used to signify Stella's awareness of her own intelligence: 'This was how I got to know that I was clever' (p. 75). Stella's awareness of her reflected self is associated with a sense of power and superiority, whereas Chris's reflection seems powerless, condemned to extinction:

> And so she supposed, behind this newness and those cool eyes in the mirror, the fugitive Chris was imprisoned at last, led in a way like the captives long syne whom men dragged up the heights to Blawearie Lock to streek out and kill by the great grey stones. (*Scots Quair*, p. 434)

Mikhail Bakhtin wrote that 'our development as individuals is prosecuted as a gradual appropriation of a specific mix of discourses that are capable of best mediating their own intentions' (p. 36). The 'mix of discourses' to which Chris is subject, however – nationality, religion, socialism, class, and gender – are too contradictory for her to appropriate. They appear not to mediate Chris's intentions, so much as translate her into linguistic terms over which she has no control. Hanne Tange has commented on the range of linguistic registers used in *A Scots Quair*: 'As we move from Kinraddie into the worlds of Segget (*Cloud Howe*) and Duncairn (*Grey Granite*), Gibbon employs a broader range of linguistic repertoires, expressing through language his narrators' social identity and status' (Tange, p. 26). This is exemplified in *Cloud Howe* when Chris becomes wife to the minister at the Manse:

> Others of the choir that had missed a service would say to her with a shy-like smile, I'm so sorry, Mrs. Colquhoun, I was late; and Chris would say that they needn't fash, if she said it in Scots the woman would think, Isn't that a common-like bitch at the Manse? If she said it in English the speak would spread round the minister's wife was putting on airs. (*Scots Quair*, p. 209)

The 'linguistic repertoire' here expresses divisions in gender, nationality and class. As a woman whose class position has altered, Chris now has no appropriate language available to her.

The narrative mode here is Gibbon's own innovation, 'the speak'. 'The speak' is a uniquely complex and flexible medium, a collective voice, which situates the individual in the context of a divided and conflicted society. It supplies a critical or satirical commentary on various characters, placing them within the community or marking them as outsiders. As the trilogy progresses 'the speak' is increasingly critical of Chris. Chris's own narration slips fluidly between third person and free indirect discourse. As Makiko Minow-Pinkney suggests in her essay on Virginia Woolf, free indirect discourse offers us a subject which has no simple unity, no clear boundary between self and other (p. 157). This complex fluidity renders the subject vulnerable to fragmentation and even disintegration, within the social medium of 'the speak'.

Hadley's narrative style is very different, but equally complex. As Sue Vice comments, 'all of Hadley's literary effects, including the representation of class, rely on a complex use of voice in an instance of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of polyphony, which takes the form of what he calls a "plurality of consciousness"' (p. 148). Although this 'plurality of consciousness' does not resemble Gibbon's 'speak', it does involve subtle shifts between the individual and the collective. As Vice suggests, we frequently cannot establish exactly who is speaking in Hadley's fictions or determine the nature of the stories' central event. Hadley also employs a variety of techniques, such as analepsis, prolepsis and shifting narrative frameworks, to suggest the limitations of individual knowledge, and what can be known.

In 'An Abduction', for instance, the first story in Hadley's collection, *Bad Dreams*, a fifteen-year-old girl, Jane, gets into a car with a group of boys. She has sex with one of them, Daniel, whom she later discovers in bed with another girl. She retreats into the garden, where one of the other boys says to her: 'So now you know' (*Bad Dreams*, p. 25). 'But what does Jane know,' Rosemary Rizq asks, and 'what is the nature of the knowledge that she has acquired?' (p. 10). The narrator doesn't answer these questions, so the reader encounters a narrative gap that 'reminds us of the instability of our organised schemes of knowledge' (p. 23). In a similar way, Gibbon also draws attention to what Chris cannot know. On her wedding night, for instance, Chris wants to ask Mistress Mutch 'something', but doesn't know how (*Scots Quair*, p. 127). Throughout the trilogy the 'third Chris' perceives what cannot be known or put into words. But the moment when Chris walks weeping and frightened, because she knows finally that she cannot leave the land, is an illustration of what Rizq terms cataleptic knowledge, in which something fundamental, and inescapable is perceived. Similarly, in 'An Abduction', Jane undergoes a process of maturation in which she moves from unknowing to knowing, by venturing into the unknown. This essential, cataleptic knowledge operates irrespective of intelligence or education (we are told, in fact, on the first page of ‘An Abduction’, that Jane is not a ‘clever girl’), but in both texts it drives the narratives.

Hadley describes the process of maturation as a ‘fated trek towards adulthood’ (*Bad Dreams*, p. 4). In this ‘fated trek’, Rizq suggests, Jane is both particularised and representative: ‘For just as Freud wanted to find something in the singularity and distinctiveness of his psychoanalytic case histories that could answer to a more general frame of reference, so too Hadley is concerned to find something within the particularity of her tale that speaks to us all’ (Ellmann, cited in Rizq, p. 22). Like Gibbon, therefore, Hadley creates characters who represent something larger than themselves. Although the effect is achieved differently in *A Scots Quair*, many critics have commented on the fact that Chris is both individualised and mythopoeic, representative of the Scottish nation. Glenda Norquay has written about her (not unproblematic) identification with the Scottish nation (p. 80). This mode of characterisation allows the text to be read on multiple levels and permits the reader to both acknowledge and participate in the ‘fated trek’ of the protagonist.

It is particularly evident in the title story of Hadley’s collection, *Bad Dreams,* which deals explicitly with a ‘clever girl’ who is younger than Jane, on the cusp of childhood and adolescence. The story itself is deceptively simple. A child wakes up in the middle of the night. She has had a bad dream about the book she’s been reading – *Swallows and Amazons* – which is not, in itself, a scary story. She gets out of bed and goes into the lounge, where, on an unexplained impulse she upends the furniture. When her mother sees this, she initially assumes they have been burgled. Her second thought is that her husband must have done it in a moment of anger against her. Her immediate response is to act as if nothing happened.

In this story, Hadley prompts us towards a symbolic reading by not naming her protagonists. Only the fictional characters from *Swallows and Amazons* are named, the actual protagonists of the story are referred to as ‘the child’, ‘the child’s mother’, ‘the husband’. The absence of naming contributes to the sense that Hadley is describing not only a particularised child in a specific family, but an archetypal process of growing up into a gendered version of ‘reality’. The anonymity contrasts with the specificity of the period detail – the appliqué, the perfume *L’Air du Temps* all of which is suggestive of an aspirational middle-class family. The precision creates a textured, tangible world, as though we are in the realm of social realism, but the narrative shifts quickly, almost imperceptibly, into surreality, blurring the lines between fiction, reality, fantasy, play, memory and imagination. In *Swallows and Amazons*, six children play together, pushing across thresholds in the natural world into the unknown. It is a classic children’s book, not fantasy like the Narnia stories, although it is not, strictly speaking, social realism either. It offers a parallel dimension to the child's world. The child dreams about this fictional world, which offers a third dimension of reality. Specifically, she dreams about the children from *Swallows and Amazons* growing up. There is an especial focus on Susan, whom the child perceives as the dullest of all the children. In her dream, Susan grows into old age, and the fear this provokes in the child may be her response to an awareness that the world of childhood must end. There seems to be a parallel in the child's mind between Susan and her mother. Her mother lives a routine, domestic life, although she wanted to be an artist. In her role as mother, however, she suppresses the child's imaginative world, taking the book from her.

The child does not conform to gender expectations. When she spends too much time in the bathroom it is because she is reading and immersed in her fictional world, rather than grooming (she is described as 'scruffy'). Her action of upending the domestic furniture can be read as her attempt to disrupt a pre-written narrative of gendered expectations. By this action, the child engages with shaping reality, as she could be said to 'author' her dream. The child inhabits more than one kind of reality because she has not yet been trammelled into a female role. It could be said that she occupies 'fragmented, hybrid subject positions' (Roy, p. 78) between childhood and adulthood, waking and sleeping, fiction and 'reality'. 'Reality' in this story is unreliable and contingent. There is a destabilisation of narrative framing, and an interrogation of identity, particularly female identity. The moment when 'the mother' corrects her image in a mirror suggests a social construction of identity, and a socialised gaze.

Like many of Hadley's fictions, 'Bad Dreams' is set in the 1960s. The female role, or domestic narrative which the child disrupts, is period-specific, so the story suggests a change in the construction of female identity across the generations.

Some of the techniques used in Hadley's short stories are also employed in her novel, *Clever Girl*, where the use of a first-person narrative creates the impression that Stella 'owns' her own story, as Chris Guthrie does not. However, Hadley highlights the limitations of the first-person narrative. In the earliest sections of the book, for instance, there is a focus on what the child protagonist can't know, the gap between what is told to her by adults and what she learns later: 'My father was supposed to be dead, and I only found out years later that he'd left' (*Clever Girl*, p. 1). The continuity of the narrative, taking Stella through various phases of her life, is interrupted or disrupted by her urge to escape from social expectations of class and gender. Her urge to escape is described as a 'switch flicking between two different versions of herself' (p. 185). She describes this urge as 'anarchic and destructive' (p. 187). She leaves her son, takes her friend's car, and ‘does a runner’. But she associates it also with strength: ‘And yet I felt this strength like a knife inside me, anarchic and destructive, able to cut through whatever outward forms of authority I met’ (pp. 187–8). Like the ‘clever girl’ in ‘Bad Dreams’, Stella disrupts the narrative prescribed for her.

Like Chris in *A Scots Quair*, Stella has several intersecting identities. She is a working-class child, a single mother, a cleaner, a member of a commune, a mature student, an occupational therapist and a wife. Like Chris, she is not defined by any of them. She retains a sense of her own separateness, which is preserved in her ‘runners’. She escapes initially to her childhood friend Madeleine, then to more anonymous destinations, to a guesthouse where she gets ill, and on one occasion, contracts a sexually transmitted disease. Stella cannot explain her urge to run, which frightens her: ‘I was always frightened, all the time I was running away’ (*Clever Girl*, p. 200), except to say she ‘isn’t responsible’. She cannot find the words to describe what she wants from them: ‘If I was free, If I was just me, then what was I? What could I do; what could I become?’ (p. 201).

Chris also yearns for escape, although the awareness that this isn’t possible, that she is bound to the land, supersedes (*Scots Quair*, pp. 97 and 429). In both texts the awareness of a fugitive self is associated with alienation: ‘And now she stood by a stranger’s side, she slept in his bed’ (p. 207). In *Clever Girl*, Stella and Mac, her husband, seem like ‘strangers joined by meaningless accident, unfathomable to one another’, and everything in her life seems ‘too far off and too tiny’ (*Clever Girl*, p. 267). Chris’s third husband, Ake, senses a quality in her that he cannot control or possess, ‘Ay, a strange quean, yon, and not for him: “He’d thought that glimmer in her eyes a fire that he himself could blow to a flame; and instead ’twas no more than the shine of a stone”’ (*Scots Quair*, p. 487). Stella’s third partner, Mac, also senses something untameable in her: ‘I guessed then that you were a little savage, a revolutionary’ (*Clever Girl*, p. 209). In *Clever Girl*, this quality is associated with class. Men are consistently attracted to Stella’s working-class roots, yet Stella is resistant to the definition: ‘Aren’t I middle-class?’, she says to one man (p. 90). This might suggest a certain naïveté, but also, perhaps, that her social position, like Chris’s, is too complex for any simple linguistic or class-based terminology.

In both texts the unconfined, unsocial quality of the protagonist surfaces in the closing paragraphs: ‘Some dark shape – a cat or a fox – flows across the road for an instant ahead of us, then disappears into a hedge. I switch on the headlights and the car leaps forward into the night’ (*Clever Girl*, p. 309). In the final paragraph of *A Scots Quair*, Chris: ‘sat on as one by one the lights went out and the rain came beating the stones about her, and falling all that night while she still sat there, feeling no longer the touch of the rain or the sound of the lapwings going by' (p. 496). These closing words are frequently interpreted as referring to Chris's death, since they suggest an absolute passivity and loss of self. By contrast, the closing words of *Clever Girl* suggest agency. Stella is driving, which she loves, and taking a literal leap into the dark. Both texts describe this fugitive self as mysterious, semi-conscious, inarticulable. In *A Scots Quair* it is presented as mystical, fey or uncanny, whereas in *Clever Girl* it is anarchic and disruptive. Yet it is possible to see this mysterious 'other self' as constituted by the discourses of class, gender and economics, in the same ways as the social identities of the protagonists. The different trajectories and outcomes of their narratives can be accounted for by the social changes in the time periods represented in the texts.

In *British Working-Class Fiction*, Roberto del Valle Alcalá writes about the socialisation of labour as one of the key effects of post-war capitalism. This socialisation has encouraged fewer differentiations in gender-assigned work, a 'fundamental levelling of pre-existing qualitative distinctions' (pp. 49–50), which in turn has permitted forms of autonomy and resistance in the subjective experience of working-class women. In novels such as *Poor Cow* (1967) by Nell Dunn and *Blow Your House Down* by Pat Barker (1984), there is an increasing 'articulation of agency' (p. 52) and a 'vindication of subjective areas of autonomy'. Del Valle Alcalá contrasts this with the 'obliteration' of female characters that he finds in the fictions of Sillitoe and Storey, although, he stresses that there is no 'fully realized emancipation' in the novels by Barker and Dunn. In fact, he says: 'the women inhabiting these pages are compelled to forms of resistance that are often ambiguous, contradictory and self-defeating' (p. 74). However, he describes their capacity for 'rupture and innovation' as a form of resistance, that 'soon develops, in the context of neoliberal society, into a fully-fledged dynamic of subjective transformation' (p. 133).

A similar comparison can be made between the protagonists of *A Scots Quair* and *Clever Girl*. Significant opportunities are available to Stella as a result of developments in post-war capitalism. She can choose a profession, drive, access further education and birth control. None of these, however, leads to full emancipation – Stella's sense of autonomy, her social status, are dependent on certain support granted by men and by the various characters who help her to look after her two sons. At the end of the novel her social position is not easily defined. She has completed a degree but decided against an academic career. After marrying a wealthy man, she works part-time and does not feel she belongs in the country house where they live. She frequently regrets her marriage and still feels a need for her 'runners'. Her social position seems both hybrid and liminal; she fully belongs to no class but feels most power when using her credit card (*Clever Girl*, p. 251).

She feels set apart from other women; however, when her aunt confides that she has also done ‘runners’, Hadley suggests a commonality of female experience that is almost absent from *A Scots Quair*. Despite her three marriages and her son, Chris, throughout the trilogy, seems unsupported and alone. Her relationships with women are fleetingly close and warm but they are disrupted by men, or by death. Ultimately, Stella is able to participate more fully in her society and in more ways than Chris. There seems to be no place, in the world of *A Scots Quair*, for the clever girl.

In summary then, these two texts offer an invaluable insight into the experience of the ‘clever girl’ through a century of radical change. The connection between the two covers seems to advertise a certain relationship between the texts, however any similarities may be accounted for by the fact that both writers reflect the social changes affecting women in the twentieth century through the lens of the subjective experience of their protagonists. It is unlikely that Hadley was consciously responding to Gibbon’s work, but she is equally sensitive to the key issues of gender and class, motherhood, contraception and education as they are experienced by her principal female character. These issues persist throughout the twentieth century and are only partially resolved by the political changes represented in these fictions. Both Hadley and Gibbon reveal the limitations of social and political change with regard to women. The radical changes that do occur in the timeframes of their respective novels correspond to shifts, fragmentation and discontinuities within the characters themselves. While the possibility of education for the working-class woman is often viewed as one of the most progressive changes of the twentieth century, for instance, both writers demonstrate how the emancipation it offers may be illusory or incomplete. It is shown, in fact, to contribute to the liminality, hybridity and discontinuity of female subjective experience. Education does, however, along with other social and political developments of the later twentieth century, allow Stella, like the ‘clever girl’ in ‘Bad Dreams’, to intervene in the narrative prescribed for her in various creative and disruptive ways. Stella’s first-person narration, while demonstrating a limited and incomplete cognisance, also suggests a developing subjectivity that identifies itself separately from the larger narratives of class and nationhood. At the end of *Clever Girl*, Stella’s position is hybrid and liminal with respect to class and gender, but she is not without agency, or a voice. By contrast Chris, in the earlier part of the twentieth century, remains deeply embedded in the social discourses of class, nationhood, gender and religion, and is apparently subsumed by them. Unable to find an adequate reflection of herself in either language or society, or to create a sustaining narrative from the contradictory social discourses within which she is embedded, she lapses into silence at the end.

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Part IV

POST-WAR ISSUES: DEINDUSTRIALISATION, CASUAL WORK AND FEMINISM

Chapter 13

A crisis in masculinity? A comparison between English and West German miners' novels, 1945–70

Steve Eszrenyi

H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight's observation that 'the nature of working-class fiction remains a topic for future essays and collections' (p. 2) could not have been more accurate. The two volumes of *Working-Class Literature(s)* by Lennon and Nilsson, published in 2017 and 2020, constitute a landmark development in the study of working-class writing. Placing chapters on the history of and research into the working-class literature of various nations alongside one another, Lennon and Nilsson introduce a much-needed international perspective to this field. However, the comparative, side-by-side analysis of different national working-class literatures remains beyond the scope of these volumes, perhaps lagging behind as scholars adjust to operating across different languages as much as literary traditions.

Stepping into this new terrain, this chapter compares the presentation of working-class masculinity in English and West German miners' novels, 1945–70, focusing on Georg Breuker's *Jörgen der Bergmann* (1956), Len Doherty's *A Miner's Sons* (1955), Max von der Grün's *Irrlicht und Feuer* (1963) and Stan Barstow's *Ask Me Tomorrow* (1962).[1] It addresses the fact that there is a class dimension to masculinity which these texts begin to expose. I will begin with a post-war contextualisation of masculinity and coal mining in England and West Germany, before interrogating the concept of masculinity in mining novels by looking at the fictional representation of miners and male figures both at work and at home.

The Second World War had a considerable impact on men and on the concept of masculinity in both England and West Germany. In addition to the vast scale of destruction during the Blitz, the British men who returned to England from the war 'faced uncertainty about their position in society' (Crowley, 2020, p. 22) which had been exacerbated by the critical role women had played in the workplace during the war. Yet this uncertainty was perhaps belied by the triumph of victory: on VE day 'Britain was Great and felt Great; it was one of the "Big Three" – militarily, economically and politically' (Lee, p. 1). For this reason, historians have undoubtedly registered 'a special feeling of [masculine] pride in Britain's role in the defeat of the Axis' (Bartlett, p. 2), and post-war novels including Eric Williams's *The Wooden Horse* (1949) reflected this heroic sense of masculinity.

Men returning to Germany from the war faced a more complex set of circumstances. During the war, masculine identity had been strongly influenced by the National Socialist ideal of 'fanatical militaristic masculinity' (Beynon, p. 91), represented by images of the all-conquering male fighter and protector. After the war, this construct of masculinity was considerably discredited and was replaced instead by '[f]eelings of failure and humiliation' (Vaizey, p. 113). The returning German soldier was 'barely recognizable, scruffy, emaciated and hobbling. [He was a] stranger, an invalid' (Jähner, p. 116). The Allied occupation between 1945 and 1949 further threatened the concept of German masculinity as Allied soldiers 'appeared so strong, healthy and manly, in comparison to German men [who had been] physically and often psychologically weakened by war and captivity' (Vaizey, p. 114). The extra-marital relationships between 'occupation soldiers and German women [had] also enhanced the German male's sense of defeat' (p. 114). In the aftermath of the war, German male identity needed to be reshaped and reconstructed: according to Jeffords, masculinity became a site where 'growing anxieties about consumerism, identity, Americanism [. . .] and domesticity could be resolved' (p. 163).

Coal, coal mining and miners were pivotal in the rebuilding of the economies of post-war West Germany and England, and this centrality was reflected in the different literary interpretations of masculinity in West German and English mining novels. Between 1945 and 1970, coal mining in both countries peaked but also began to experience the first waves of deindustrialisation. Coal had helped to power the German 'economic miracle' and the subsequent post-war recovery. The miner in the Ruhr was seen as 'a key figure' (eine Schlüsselfigur) aware of his 'importance and responsibility' (Bedeutung und Verantwortung) (*Ruhr Almanach*, p. 199). Coal was also seen as the key to Britain's industrial recovery. In 1951 Geoffrey Lloyd, the Minister for Fuel and Power stated that '[i]n peace and war alike, King Coal is the paramount Lord of Industry' (Hall, p. 271). The economic importance of coal fed into the post-war concepts of masculinity in West Germany and England. Miners in both West Germany and England were prominent, almost totemic figures and this is reflected in English and West German mining novels in the statements of fictional characters who worked hard to 'serve the material needs of industrial capitalism' (Jenkins, p. 2). The central character and miner Jürgen Fohrmann in *Irrlicht und Feuer* states that 'miners were the economic spine of the nation' (Bergleute waren das wirtschaftliche Rückgrat der Nation) (von der Grün, p. 43). Fohrmann's observation is echoed in Doherty's *A Miner's Sons* by the union representative Barratt when he makes the case for the importance of the miner to the British economy after the Second World War: 'they've forgot how hard we worked then to get 'em through their bloody crisis. We was big heroes then [. . .]. It were in all the papers and on the wireless' (p. 115).

From the end of the war until 1961, West German novelists faced obstacles in representing working-class experience in fiction, and this hinged on a number of ideological and socio-cultural factors, including the onset of the Cold War, the division of Germany into two separate countries, the suspicion surrounding communism and socialism, and America's growing influence on West German culture. The socio-cultural climate began to change in the 1960s, and the formation of the Gruppe 61 by a group of writers, including Max von der Grün, was instrumental in bringing the representation of the working world to the fore. However, between 1945 and 1961 the production of working-class novels and novels dealing with mining communities was not completely prevented. Among the latter were Heinz Wrekk's *Jungens an der Ruhr* (1947), Willi Reschke's *Schlagende Wetter* (1949), Anni Geiger-Hof's *Jan Ellerbusch* (1952) and Georg Breuker's *Jörgen der Bergmann* (1956).

Typically, these novels were for and about young people and stressed the positive benefits of mining. The focus on younger men at this time was a deliberate ploy to recruit young men into the mining industry, where lowering the age profile of the workforce was on the agenda. The optimistic representation of young men in these texts functioned as a counter to the post-war crisis in masculine identity in West Germany. Heralding a new generation, these novels sought to re-invent the image of the young German male and to present him as a young, healthy anti-communist man, anxious to work hard and to create opportunities for himself and his family.

Breuker's novel *Jörgen der Bergmann* (1956) reflects these ideas and also the different complexities around post-war German masculinity. The novel can be read as a metaphor for the re-emergence of West Germany post 1949. In particular, Jörgen's masculinity functions as a site where issues around gender roles, the relationship between the industrialist and the worker, and the image and status of the new worker are explored. In contrast to the more oppositional depictions of working-class life and experience in English working-class novels of the 1950s, Breuker's idealised and romantic vision of the miner and his work glosses these concerns. At the start of the novel, following a family disagreement, the Baumann family move from the country to the more urban environment of Bochum. This upheaval embeds the representation of masculinity in the contexts of family and work.

There was a concern in West Germany that the war had 'drastically altered pre-war conceptions of gender roles' and there was a drive to reinstate the 'traditional conceptions of the family' (Vaizey, p. 151) which included clearly defined roles for women in the home. Breuker's novel reflects the post-war move back to the traditional family model in West Germany where the man would once again be the breadwinner, while the woman would again focus on the home. This 'structure of feeling' (Williams, pp. 131–2) continued well into the 1960s. Bruno Gluchowski's *Der Durchbruch* (1964) opens with a description of Klara Holtkamp, wife of the miner Wilm Holtkamp, and her morning routine. She is described as being hard-working and after making breakfast for her husband and seeing him off to work, she sets to on the housework, and dutifully cleans the bedrooms, kitchen, and mops the stairwell. This is also reflected in English miners' novels of the 1950s and early 1960s. For example, in Doherty's novel, miners are attributed with 'features of an elite masculinity that separate men from women' (Jenkins, p. 156) and the novel reinforces Marwick's observation that '[t]he most rigid segregation of rôles [is] to be found in [. . .] mining communities' (Marwick, p. 68). Mrs Mellers is described in the novel as 'a cleansing gale' (Doherty, p. 19) and the priorities for the miner Jud Rodger's wife are 'my house, that kid upstairs and t'baby that's coming' (p. 59).

On discovering coal on the land his father has acquired, the titular character Jörgen assumes a number of roles and positions in the mine in the course of the novel before becoming the pit manager. Breuker does not avoid descriptions of the physicality of pit work, but his focus is on work as a restorative, spiritually and physically uplifting activity. There is a clear sense that the work undertaken by Jörgen is for the wider benefit of all, reinforcing the contemporary ideal of the male as a confident, contributing citizen. This sense of masculinity has nothing to do with the confrontation or class antagonism seen in some English working-class novels. Jörgen is clearly not a worker who represents 'an iconic figure in the class struggle between the militant proletariat and the exploitative capitalists' (Moitra, p. 337) as is the case, for example, with Robert Mellers in

A Miner's Sons. Jörgen's masculinity is a productive, creative 'soft' entity and not a destructive force.

Through Jörgen's capacity as pit manager, Breuker explores the image crisis of the post-war West German industrialist and his relationship with the West German worker. Many industrialists were complicit with Nazism and the industrialist was regarded in the post-war working world as 'an unsavoury figure and an anti-hero' (Wiesen, pp. 173–89). This image needed to be addressed so that the post-war West German industrialist could not only be seen as a bulwark against communism, Marxism and other dangerous Cold War influences but also as a role model for the West German worker and crucially as 'the source of [West] Germany's [post-war economic] renewal' (p. 173). This re-imaging or rebranding of the West German industrialist also incorporated the West German worker as it was important to 'protect the worker [and] to keep the worker happy' (p. 81) to ensure that he would not fall prey to socialist or revolutionary tendencies.

In Breuker's novel, Jörgen values the individual worker and is proud to share both the work and the profits: 'we must work together and share the returns of our collective efforts' (so müssen wir [. . .] zusammen arbeiten und den Ertrag unserer gemeinsamen Arbeit teilen) (Breuker, p. 335). The relationship between Jörgen the pit manager and his workers is of 'a more individual than collective nature' (Mason, p. 55), however, and reflects the post-war managerial emphasis in West Germany 'to pacify and befriend the worker' (Wiesen, p. 191). The workers in Breuker's novel are not exploited at all and do not seek 'a confrontation [with Jörgen's mining company] in order to pursue their own interests' (Moitra, p. 336), as Jörgen is of the view that 'one [worker] is no more or less important than another' (der eine ist nicht mehr und nicht weniger als der andere) (Breuker, p. 336). There is no 'us against them' mentality in Breuker's novel which characterises the fiction of Doherty, for example.

Taking Jörgen's trajectory into account, Breuker's novel can be read as a 'folklore to capitalism' (Wiesen, p. 134), in which a young man from a poor background achieves the heights of business glory by dint of sheer hard work and perseverance. He is the literary embodiment of the post-war conflation of industrialist and worker, a benevolent 'factory father' who cares 'as much for his firm and his family of workers as he [does] for profit' (p. 137). Jörgen's masculinity functions as a bridge between the Nazi past and 'the promise of future material glory' (p. 139). It may also be the case that Jörgen represents a post-war conservatism in West Germany, where the 'positive values of harmony and beauty [are] stressed [and] where the negative and seedy sides of social reality' are avoided (Berghahn, p. 335). Jörgen is an unblemished individual and functions as a symbolic counter to any threat posed by communism and the Cold War.

The ideological identification of masculinity in Breuker's novel is also replicated in Doherty's *A Miner's Sons*, which focuses on Robert Mellers and his relationship and work with the local Communist Party. Doherty's communism reflects the greater openness to socio-political concerns and this is a significant difference between English and West German working-class novels in the 1950s. English working-class novels were able to include the languages of socialism and communism whereas West Germany in this period was characterised by a virulent anti-communism. Not only was the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) banned in West Germany in 1956, but the literary language of overt criticism was largely absent as West German writers of the 1950s 'put on a good face and kept quiet' (machten eine gute Miene zum unguten Spiel – und schwiegen) (Estermann et al., p. 12). Doherty's novel was politically driven, being 'deliberately written to support the [British] Communist Party's cultural policy' (von Rosenberg, p. 151), and in *A Miner's Sons*, it is the task of the central character, Robert Mellers to reinvigorate the local Communist Party branch in Mainworth and to show that a Party man defines himself by word and deed. As the communist hero figure in the novel, the character of Robert Mellers is central to, but not the sole source for, the novel's interpretation of masculinity.

Doherty, like Breuker, stresses the physicality and dangerous, demanding nature of pit work as a badge of pride, but whereas Breuker's novel focuses on the development of the young boy Jörgen Baumann and his unalloyed relish for work, Doherty emphasises the miner's fundamental alienation. This distance between the miner and his work is immediately underscored at the start of the novel with a focus on an unnamed collier who works in the pit and with 'powerful two-fisted swings of the short-handled six pound hammer [. . .] drives the prop home as tight as he can'. This scene is immediately followed by the aggression of Robert's brother, Herbert, who 'attacked the coal as though he hated it' (Doherty, p. 6). Masculinity is not just determined by physical strength, skill and power but it is also predicated on an unswerving allegiance to the pit and pit work and is best exemplified in the novel by Robert's father, Jim Mellers. Jim is an ageing miner approaching retirement, suffering from silicosis (lung disease). However, giving up working in the pit would rob Jim of his identity because 'his whole attitude to life was that of a man who worked in the pit. Completely he was a miner. To become something else would mean no longer being himself at all' (p. 15). It is part of Robert Mellers's function in the novel as the lead communist figure to see beyond this worthy but limited sense of masculinity and to take others with him. Through his reading of Marx and Engels, Robert believes that miners are 'locked into [. . .] restrictive patterns of male behaviour required of industrial capitalism' (Jenkins, p. 8) and that 'lives [are] being frittered away to no real purpose – good minds being wasted' (Doherty, p. 193). The novel charts Robert's efforts to win back the trust of the local Party lads, help his father leave the pit, and to resolve his relationship with his girlfriend, Irene. Throughout, Robert's masculinity is determined by his involvement with the Communist Party, and he exhibits a firm conviction that the communist way 'is the only way' (p. 40).

As a Communist Party novel, *A Miner's Sons* is at its simplest the working out of an 'us' versus 'them' conflict between the pit workers and the pit management, having at its heart a dispute over wages. The novel focuses on confrontation, aggression and violence inside and outside the workplace, but also on the changing role of women. All of this inevitably determines the different masculinities in the novel. The latent sense of aggression is referenced by Jud Rodgers in an underground scene in which the miners are discussing German rearmament and the Potsdam Agreement. Jud's comment that he would 'be ready for shooting the silly sods' (p. 83) can be interpreted as a casual, throwaway comment. However, it also shows a masculinity and sense of bravado 'sanctioned [by the] violence [of the Second World War which] elides effortlessly' into everyday behaviour (Jenkins, p. 17). The underlying violence in Jud's comment finds a physical manifestation in Robert's character. At the beginning of the novel, he returns to the mining village of Mainworth, having served a three-year prison sentence for the manslaughter of the miners' lodge delegate Mathews who had sworn at Robert and his girlfriend, having also turned 'gaffer's man' (Doherty, p. 48). Robert's returning status in the mining community is immediately defined by the handiness of his fists, a sense of macho pride and an unshakeable identification with his fellow miners.

Aggression, and the concomitant idea of it validating masculine status, is not just represented through physical violence but also finds representation through the collectivity of industrial action and trade union involvement in Doherty's novel. This, too, is a point of difference with Breuker's novel, and although Breuker had a strong union background, there is no reference at all to any form of confrontation between union and management in Breuker's novel. While for Doherty the wage is similarly an important element of the miner's status and his breadwinner masculinity, he describes in detail the episode with the miners on docket day where there is 'an excited thrill of [. . .] an open fight' (p. 143) as the miners consider an overtime ban after having had their wages docked. This scene shows that mining communities 'demonstrate the effects of patriarchal dominance in the trade union movement' (Campbell, p. 251), as their very show of strength and power is founded on a masculine 'solidaristic work culture' (Savage, p. 27) and a distrust of pit management. Union action is also seen on an individual basis and Doherty charts the union representative Barratt's aforementioned act of defiance towards the pit management at the end of the novel.

In a powerful scene, Barratt's masculinity is a complex of his detailed knowledge and understanding of union procedure, his tough, uncompromising stance toward management, and of his identity as a working miner. Doherty contrasts this depiction of a working masculinity with the 'swelling paunch[es], [. . .] fleshy featured face[s], [. . .] nervous hands and perfect false teeth' (p. 251) of members of the pit management. This contrast between Barratt and the pit management reflects the masculine fight for power, and the desire for 'uncompromising control' (Jenkins, p. 16) of the workplace. Barratt had been identified by the Coal Board as the ringleader in disputes in the Mainworth pit and so the Coal Board management team, led by Soskins, were anxious to recruit Barratt to their side. However, despite attractive offers of a car, an office and a salary of a thousand pounds, Barratt does not sell out and he rejects the management's bribe out of hand. In so doing, he maintains his allegiance to his fellow miners, his status in the workplace and his resentful distrust of '[b]osses who had never envisaged – nor tried to – a miner's daily life' (Doherty, p. 261). Barratt's identity, like that of Robert Mellers at the opening of the novel, continues to be bound up with that of his fellow miners and after the meeting and on returning to the hall where the other miners are waiting, Barratt is proudly received as being 'of them and from them' (p. 262).

The 'precise nature [and timing] of [a] crisis in masculinity is ill-defined and elusive' (Beynon, p. 75) but English and West German societies from the late 1950s were moving, according to Zygmunt Bauman's thinking, from the 'heavy, solid' certainties of industrialisation to a new 'consumer-friendly "liquid" modernity' (Bauman, pp. 25, 63, 120). Bauman's concept has a wider relevance and can also be applied to the changes in masculinity. Seen like this, two triggers can be identified in England and West Germany from the late 1950s onwards which threatened the 'solid' perceptions of working-class masculinity. These were firstly the threat of unemployment and changes to the stable pattern of male employment in the coal industry, and secondly that women were beginning to have 'more scope to determine their own personal lifestyle [. . .] [and to find and] create their own place in society' (Kolinsky, p. 1).

The threat of unemployment is not a major concern in *A Miner's Sons* nor in Barstow's *Ask Me Tomorrow*, where Harry Cotton makes the observation that 'I can get a job easy enough [. . .]. Plenty more pits' (Barstow, p. 188). However, the role of women inside and outside of the home is a significant theme. In Doherty's novel, the growing threat to traditional gendered roles is often stressed, where (as Robert would have it) 'men and women [. . .] cling to the old idea of work and politics for the one and the kitchen for the other – their lives sharply divided' (p. 175). The Party recognises this change and organises a meeting of local women who wished to break away from their feelings of entrapment – their 'responsibility [. . .] to make sure that their husband's [. . .] home is comfortable' (Pitt, p. 76) – and to contribute to wider local concerns about poor street lighting and the lack of a clinic. Doherty does not fully develop this theme in the novel and, instead, continues to reflect the idea that any involvement of women outside the sphere of the home is somehow taboo and unacceptable.

English working-class novels of the 1960s did begin to represent women in a more nuanced way and Stan Barstow's novel *Ask Me Tomorrow* (1962) is a case in point. The late 1950s saw the emergence of the term 'Angry Young Men' being applied to a number of writers in England including Stan Barstow. Although the term 'should be treated with caution' (Crowley, 2019, p. 57), it does perhaps evoke expectations of a masculinity predicated on being less respectful, more aggressive, unruly and chauvinist. Barstow's novel focuses on the Cotton family and in particular on the contrasting lives and masculinities of Wilf Cotton, a wages clerk and his brother Harry, a miner, in the Yorkshire pit village of Calderford. Harry Cotton is the 'stereotypical image of the ultra-masculine, working-class northerner' (Kalliney, p. 94), who was 'a man in a man's world' (Barstow, p. 22), someone 'who did a man's work' (p. 162) and looked down upon women's work. Harry's affair with June Betley, wife of the union official Ronnie, defines both his masculinity and his perception of women. Harry's sexual prowess and virility are for him a badge of honour and his relationship with June Betley is just another no-strings-attached sexual conquest. The affair also enables Harry, like Sillitoe's character Arthur Seaton, to judge and categorise men based on their sexual prowess: 'those that looked after their wives, and those that were slow' (Sillitoe, p. 42). If 'looking after' is defined in narrow terms of masculine sexual gratification, then Harry is able to look after women, but 'slow' men – like Ronnie Betley – who is 'shy with his wife' (Barstow, p. 173) are perceived by Harry as being somehow less masculine and sexually inadequate.

Although Wilf Cotton affirms his masculinity through his physical relationship with his landlady Poppy Swallow, the novel does show the emergence of newer, more sensitive forms of working-class masculinities which run counter to the 'Angry' label. Although born into a mining family, Wilf Cotton has a grammar school education which offers him different prospects. The novel opens not with a description of physical pit work, but with Wilf listening to classical music before the radio performance of his play. Although the broadcast of the radio play signifies a form of success for Wilf, his overriding ambition is to be a novelist. Wilf's education leads him to a different form and expression of working-class ambition and masculinity, as he moves away from the pit to the world of writing. Wilf's masculinity is a hybrid of the 'macho' but also of the insecure deskbound writer who 'pushed a pen and messed about writing in his spare time' (p. 162). Wilf's crisis is that he does not easily and readily conform to the fixed and established categories of working-class masculinity which define his brother. His writing begins to move Wilf from the old, 'solid' masculinity to a more 'liquid' and uncertain sense of masculinity and one in which women have an important influence beyond the mere physical.

Wilf's efforts at being published meet with rejection and it is only through his relationship with Marguerite Fisher and by following her advice that he becomes not only more self-confident and successful in his writing but also more conscious of women as individuals and as equal partners. Marguerite's role in the novel explodes the myth, maintained in Doherty's novel, that women's sphere is domestic. Marguerite is public-school educated, speaks French and her move back to Calderford, after breaking up with her American boyfriend Floyd, is in part a journey back to confront her own past. This reinforces her independence. She is able to quickly find a job and rejects the advances of Stephen Hollis, her employer. In so doing, Marguerite understands that she has turned down the chance to be the stereotypical boss's wife. Moreover, her relationship with Wilf is not just based on physical attraction but is also intellectual and emotional. This marks a huge step for Wilf and there is a suggestion that Wilf's masculinity is taking not an 'angry' turn but a more progressive direction – both his education (and his prospects) tend towards a more deferential view of women, though the fact of Marguerite's higher social status should be a consideration here also. Despite Wilf having constantly eschewed the idea of marriage and commitment, in meeting Marguerite's father at the end of the novel, he seems to return, in a different way, to the matrimonial conventions of working-class life exemplified by his mother and father at the start of the novel.

Max von der Grün's *Irrlicht und Feuer* (1963) was a key text of the Gruppe 61 and had the same path-breaking impact in West Germany in the early 1960s as the working-class novels of the late 1950s had in England. The novel is seen through the perspective of the miner Jürgen Fohrmann, and it deals with a number of issues including West Germany's National Socialist past, consumerism, conflict with the union, the effects of pit closure, Jürgen's search for fulfilment in other jobs outside mining and the fracturing of the traditional working-class family ethos. Von der Grün makes the self-determination and self-awareness of women one of the central themes of the novel and he questions the conventional, hitherto accepted roles of man and wife inside and outside of marriage.

At the start of the novel, Jürgen Fohrmann works in the pit and experiences the associated pressures, dangers, health impacts and concerns about money. His work is physical and his sense of masculinity, like his job, would appear to be ‘fixed and stable’ (Beynon, p. 3). However, this certainty begins to be undercut almost immediately. Fohrmann is concerned about being late for his shift and openly states that he hates his job, and his growing alienation from his work is exacerbated by his difficult and uneasy relationship with the union and its works council. All of this is underpinned by a deep sense of mistrust and cynicism on Fohrmann’s part. The union and its officials are criticised by Fohrmann on three occasions in the novel, beginning with the episode of the first union meeting at the pit.

Fohrmann is angry about the inability and indifference of the union and management to see miners as individuals. He articulates his justified concerns about the introduction of a new but dangerous cutting machine (which caused the decapitation of one of the foremen), and is frustrated that his physical power in the pit does not transfer easily to the more formal union meeting setting. Fohrmann’s reception at the end of the meeting is telling. Though praised by some, he is vilified by many others, and is unceremoniously thrown out for speaking, as he puts it, ‘my version of the truth which was not their version’ (meine Wahrheit, die nicht ihre Wahrheit war) (von der Grün, p. 55). Fohrmann’s attempts to challenge management reflect a significant change in the socio-political attitudes from those exhibited in Breuker’s novel, but Fohrmann’s anger is not shared by the other workers. The workers who eject Fohrmann from the meeting have been fed a diet of co-determination and the promise of increasing affluence, and are resistant to change. Fohrmann’s lone voice exposes him to the harsh, brutal realities of working life in affluent West Germany. He does not emerge triumphant from the meeting and his masculinity as a consequence becomes less secure. Fohrmann falls victim to the decline of the West German coal industry and is made redundant, and his already uncertain masculinity begins to fragment and becomes more ‘liquid’. The novel describes Fohrmann’s unsuccessful search for some sort of fulfilment and identity in his subsequent jobs in an iron works, a building site, and finally a plastics factory. It is in this last job where the disconnect between Fohrmann, his masculinity, and his work becomes clearer to him. The factory does not have a name and this anonymity reinforces Fohrmann’s sense of the meaninglessness of his task of boring holes into pieces of plastic: ‘I drill holes and I don’t know why I drill holes’ (ich bohre Löcher und weiß nicht warum ich die Löcher bohre) (p. 150). Fohrmann’s personal life does not offer a counterbalance to his growing insecurities and uncertainties in the workplace.

In Fohrmann's eight-year marriage to Ingeborg, there are difficulties and a slow and gradual fracturing of the ideal working-class patriarchal family. Jürgen would like a child but only because this would then force Ingeborg to stay at home to validate his chauvinist understanding of the woman as housewife. This hope proves illusory because Ingeborg does not want children and has her own ideas on leading her life. She is undoubtedly influenced by the growing affluence in West Germany and sees children as just another consumer item and as being 'no longer modern' (nicht mehr modern) (p. 38). Ingeborg's independence and affront to Fohrmann's patriarchal masculinity are further emphasised when she takes a job in a machine factory in Unna, which also results in further humiliation and a role reversal for Fohrmann as he now has to do the housework and recognises that 'my housework is a part of her money' (meine Hausarbeit ist ein Teil ihres Geldes) (p. 90). Fohrmann's concept of masculinity is eroded still further in an argument with his wife over voting. Fohrmann is adamant that Ingeborg should vote the way he votes, but Ingeborg openly defies him and laughs at him, commenting 'the times have long gone when you could tell me what to do. Once and for all' (Die Zeiten sind vorbei, wo du mir etwas vorschreiben konntest. Ein für allemal) (p. 111). Ingeborg is 'no longer content to fit into [her] assigned roles' (Blackshaw, p. 8) and is keen to break with convention. Her independence and at times anger is a direct threat to Fohrmann as she steadily undermines his masculinity and sense of control.

As this chapter has shown, although mining played an important role in the post-war economies of both England and West Germany, masculinity developed along different lines during this period – a fact which is captured in the respective novels of both countries. The shame of defeat after 1945, together with the threats of communism and the Cold War, led to an uncertain and depoliticised masculinity in West German miners' novels, whereas in England, miners' novels reflected a more emboldened and politically aware masculinity. That being said, points of convergence emerge in the mining novels in the wider context of deindustrialisation, the threat of unemployment and the emergence of women as equal partners in the workplace. Perhaps most significantly, the novels of both countries demonstrate the ways in which working-class masculinity – as identified with strength, ability and power – was paradoxically undermined by the fact that, within a capitalist system, working men were 'dispensable and dependent figures' (Jenkins, p. 16). This inherent fissure within working-class masculinity was clearly only brought into greater crisis in the post-war era. What can also be seen, however, is the prospect of different masculinities, reflected most in Barstow's *Ask Me Tomorrow*, where through education (and partnership with a more educated woman), Wilf breaks free from narrow patriarchalism into a more equal and respectful relationship. Evidently, by the 1950s and 1960s, what emerges in both countries is a masculinity that was no longer a singular, uniform or fixed entity but was 'composed of many masculinities' (Beynon, p. 1).

Note

1. Len Doherty was born in Scotland but left Scotland at the age of sixteen and lived his adult life in England. His novels reflect his work in the pit in South Yorkshire and, with this in mind, the chapter looks at Len Doherty through a specifically English working-class lens.

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Chapter 14

'Woman Wanted. Theatre Cleaner (8–12 daily)': the missing literature of the empty mopped stage[1]

Sarah K. Whitfield

> *Until with heat and work, 'tis often known,*
> *Not only sweat but blood runs trickling down*
> *Our wrists and fingers: still our work demands*
> *The constant action of our lab'ring hands.*
>
> (Mary Collier, from *The Woman's Labour,* 1739)

This chapter emerges from a strange silence where there should be so much more noise. We are beckoned by ghosts slipping in and out of theatre history without any real literature about their material working practices, or indeed any other kind of literature *by* theatre cleaners or even *about* theatre cleaning. Since ghosts are always around in the theatre, we must acknowledge at the stage door the ghost of theatre director Joan Littlewood (who no one would want to piss off) standing with a broom. The now legendary story of Barbara Windsor's first audition at Stratford East, saw the actor confuse Littlewood for the theatre's charlady, though the director assured her 'you got the job at the door' (Windsor). In fact, everyone – including the actors – cleaned at Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, and, perhaps not unrelatedly, Littlewood had herself worked her way through drama school (the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts) as a cleaner. If theatres are full of ghosts, those who laboured in them surely leave an echo. We cannot properly address the material working practices of the industry without acknowledging their part in it. Imagine a theatre without cleaners: litter-strewn aisles, sticky floors and spilled drinks, the stage space left uncleared of detritus, rodent droppings all over the place, the bars left to pile up with dirty glasses, and best not mention the toilets. Their role is critical: without cleaners, theatre *cannot* operate. After a brief and unpleasant interlude, say two to three days tops, the working processes of theatre – rehearsals, technical runs, opening nights – grind to a halt. Yet despite cleaning's fundamental role, it is barely seen. The disappearing labour of cleaning echoes the ephemeral nature of theatrical performance: as soon as it is done, it needs doing again. Front-of-house teams like ushers and ice-cream sellers remain a continuous if undervalued form of theatre's operating system, but since they are there when the audience are, their work is noticed if not fully appreciated. Other backstage theatre workers might be unseen by the audience, but the results of quick changes and set transformation make the performance. Some theatre workers' labour is often physically inscribed onto the building, even decades after it was made unnecessary or less onerous by electrification. Permanent alterations to theatre buildings leave behind traces of work: trapdoors, rigging and fly towers that dropped in elaborate scenery, or pulley systems that flew up Peter Pans, had to be operated by *someone*. Cleaners' work is erased as soon as the audience enter the theatre, and the only way an audience might really notice it is if it is not done: the cleanliness of the theatre is assumed and invisible.

Until someone finds some of it, we do not have examples of writing by theatre cleaners. To be clear, I am sure that such writing existed and probably still survives, but for now there is no body of literature to explore. The presence of this chapter within this collection might seem curious: yet a celebration of H. Gustav Klaus's pioneering work in attending to working-class literature, and its 'alternative and discontinuous traditions that might contain recalcitrant elements' that could upset dominant ideology (Klaus, p. 1) opens space to think about what we are to do when there is no surviving tradition. How can we reconcile the 'constant action' of 'lab'ring hands' which may have historically prevented access not only to literacy but also to the requisite cultural and social capital necessary for such writing to be produced, performed and above all preserved? Whose notebooks with scribbled thoughts and ideas gets posthumously preserved, and who gets the man-with-a-van house clearance service? The words of those on the margins of literacy may have been preserved in other forms, court records or in interviews with journalists. Theatre cleaners *will* have written (or have been written for) whether or not we can currently locate that writing, but in the meantime, I want to consider the labour of cleaning in new ways. Theatre is a socially produced art form, and the work theatre cleaners do matters to its existence.

Theatre historians usually have very little choice than to work with the ephemeral, the missing and poorly documented – there is not much else to go on. Well into the twentieth century, text-based records are more likely to be preserved than extensive images or any kind of filmed snippets. Scripts, newspaper clippings, and perhaps a programme or the occasional set of production photos might be the only documents that represent a theatrical event. Not unrelatedly, the labour of writing has been elevated for practical, archival and indeed ideological reasons at the cost of other kinds of work. Labour dismissed as craft, or worse still, as manual labour, is therefore ‘unimportant’. The faulty assumption, which hardly needs reiterating here, goes, *anyone can mop a floor, hardly anyone can write a play*. Copyright and intellectual property laws have further established matrices to distinguish what counts as important or lasting creative work – work which morally belongs to its originator after the point of sale – from the temporary, repetitive work which is apparently completed solely through physical activity. The history of theatre has been largely told through writers as enactors of creative and cultural change, with some attention to theatre architects, designers and, more latterly, performers, but categorically *not* through the role of the cleaner.

The hidden work of cleaning theatres has received vanishingly little academic attention. Writing in 1994, Tracy C. Davis notes that ‘to date no one has examined the structures and traditions of backstage labor by asking basic questions about the sociopolitical organization of the work’ (p. 32). Davis goes on to explore Covent Garden’s 1821 season, noting that theatre cleaning had become ‘a female occupation’ (p. 34). Jim Davis’s 1990 article on the troubled status of London’s East End theatres in the 1840s notes an 1858 report from the newly appointed ‘Examiner of Plays and Inspector of Theatres’, which remarked on theatre managers’ responsibility to render their houses ‘cleanly’ (p. 235). He notes that theatre reports condemned women’s lack of knowledge of appropriate hygiene practices: ‘The women employed are not strong enough to cleanse such floors – and go the wrong way to work’ (quoted, at p. 241). The report suggests a man be employed and the whole enterprise be treated like a ship’s deck to ensure cleanliness. Clearly, there is a great deal of research to be done in tracing the labour practices involved and the assumptions around gender here, beyond the kind of theoretical positioning I am exploring. Other approaches have considered staging cleaning in live performance art or contemporary theatre: Charles Spence’s work on scent considers performances which use cleaning fluids to create a particular olfactory environment (2021). Live artist ‘The Vacuum Cleaner’ (James Leadbitter) has also been considered, for his piece *Cleaning Up After Capitalism*, in which he ‘literally clean[s] the public spaces of Wall Street and the City of London' (Greer, p. 28). Unsurprisingly, work on Joan Littlewood has considered the presence of cleaners. Nadine Holdsworth, in her biography of Littlewood, notes that 'theatre-making is a collaborative process that relies not on the vision of one person but the creative engagement of many: performers, designers, technicians, playwrights, producers and the people who make the event of theatre possible: theatre managers, box office staff and cleaner' (Holdsworth, p. 2). Indeed, though there was little to go around, Littlewood shared profits with the entire company including the 'boilerman and cleaner' (Anon., 2002). Holdsworth notes that 'there are points [. . .] when it is tricky to distinguish exactly what Littlewood was responsible for as her tentacles stretched far beyond the parameters traditionally associated with the director figure' (p. 2). When we come to talk about theatre cleaners, I intend to borrow this image, since it sets up the idea that we may find certain characters far beyond where we expect them to be.

Despite their relative absence in scholarship, theatre cleaners are represented across a surprising range of cultural forms, perhaps most famously in Norman Rockwell's 1946 painting, 'Charwomen in Theater', which depicts two cleaners in a movie theatre taking a moment's rest to read the cinema programme. Film has had a long fascination with cleaners: whether revealing the cleaner's untapped intellectual potential in *Good Will Hunting* (1997); or their romantic potential, in romcoms like *Maid in Manhattan* (2002), or the romantic fantasy *The Shape of Water* (2017). Luis Aguiar notes that these kinds of representations have created 'An aestheticized image of cleaners [which] is repeatedly substituted for the real conditions of cleaners' work' (p. 68). More grisly crime scene cleaning is the subject of multiple films including *Cleaner* (2007), *Sunshine Cleaning* (2008) and TV series like *The Cleaner* (BBC, 2021). Elsewhere, social activism through film-making has considered the experiences of Global Majority people and/or immigrant populations: Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Fear Eats the Soul* (1974), Sergio Arau's *A Day Without a Mexican* (2004), Ken Loach's *Bread and Roses* (2000), or Stephen Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002). Children's films have also responded to these trends: *Wall-E* (2008) is a robot who essentially cleans up after the waste humans have subjected the planet to – and even Mary Poppins cleans, albeit with magic. Film and TV have been used as a medium to reveal and protest the working conditions of cleaners; for example, the 2021 TV series *Maid* (Netflix), or the Berwick Street Collective's documentary film, *Nightcleaners* (1975), which raised awareness of the real conditions for women working nightshifts.

The specific work of theatre cleaning has also been less frequently depicted in films: US director Harold Shaw's early British film, *The Two*

Columbines (1914), depicts the tragic tale of a former dancer turned impoverished charlady. The earnestly sentimental film, prepared ‘with a view to catching the Christmas audiences’, is about ‘the career of a once-pretty Columbine, who, having experienced poverty and hardship, ended her life as a theatre cleaner’ (East, p. 290). Tragedy befalls her when she decides to re-perform the same dance routine that caused her career-ending injury, as a gift for her daughter to brighten their meagre Christmas. She is fatally overcome in the process, as she tragically recalls what the intertitles call the ‘light of other days’ (Sargeant, p. 36). Somewhat later, Judy Garland’s 1943 star vehicle, *Presenting Lily Mars*, also features a cleaner. Garland’s small-town-girl-trying-to-make-it-on-Broadway character is inspired by a meeting with an older and wiser theatre cleaner (Connie Gilchrist). Gilchrist’s cleaner sings an inspirational song, ‘Every Little Moment’, to cheer on the young performer.

Theatre itself has had a long love story with depicting all types of cleaners: charwomen or ‘scrub ladies’ were an enduring trope of music hall and in turn variety theatre and pantomime. Theatre has a similarly long relationship with washerwomen, albeit one beyond the scope of this chapter. The charwoman trope is closely tied to drag performance traditions: one 1860s advertisement for performer Frank Hill, notes the praise he had received for his ‘gin partial charwoman’ (*The Era*, 5 July 1868, p. 1). The character endured for many years: Arthur Lucan’s ‘Old Mother Riley’ character started on stage and was continued for decades across radio and film (from the mid-1930s to mid-1950s), when taken up by Roy Rolland who continued the character well into the 1980s. Drag here is frequently across gender *and* class: charladies might be portrayed as a born-and-bred East Ender, as someone who has fallen on hard times, or a woman who is a little *too* fond of alcohol. In more serious theatre traditions, working-class actors could be typecast as charlady characters, something Gordon Rogoff notes was only challenged in British theatre after John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (1956): ‘[Before then] if you came from the bleak wastes of the North or from the Rhondda Valley in Wales you were automatically limited to comic char-ladies or wizened postmen’ (p. 33). If British theatre can have a problem with class, it will have a problem with class.

Women also played ‘chars’. The infamous character Mrs Mopp, created by Dorothy Summers (with her euphemistic catchphrase, ‘Can I do you now sir?’), rose to radio stardom on the BBC wartime programme *It’s That Man Again*, and remained a lingering presence in sketch comedy. On TV, Carol Burnett’s singing (but silent) charwoman who ‘never had a name and [. . .] never spoke’ (‘CEMA’) was the star of Burnett’s sketch show. Though Burnett’s charlady was not specifically a stage charwoman, one 1973 sketch did have her attempting to clean up after ballet dancers Edward Villella and Lucette Aldous. Again, playing across both gender and class, *Monty Python* returned to charladies, not least in their Mrs Sartre, Mrs Premise and Mrs Conclusion characters, with the idea of inappropriate – albeit surreal – knowledge. Python also used the theatre cleaner trope; Michael Palin appears as a theatre cleaner turned merchandise seller at the credits of *The Secret Policeman's Other Ball* (1981). Other comedians drew from the success of the cleaner trope: Ken Dodd's 'Tickling Stick' feather duster originates from music hall cleaner props, and on his death in 2018, fans left both flowers and dusters outside his Liverpool house.

Clearly, within this plethora of cleaners, the specific stage cleaner/charlady trope also perseveres. Ida Laurie was praised for her 'unexaggerated sketch of the conventional stage charwoman' (*The Era*, 6 October 1906, p. 14). There are numerous mentions of theatre charwoman acts in variety theatre reports in the early 1900s, and she prevails into the beginning of revues (somewhere between short sketches and fully fledged plays/musicals). Such sketches tend to nod and wink at the structure of the theatre: the leading lady is ill, so the theatre's cleaning lady appears just in time to play the big part and save the day. Reports of a 1903 sketch 'The Little Charwoman' explain its plot: a theatre's cleaner comes 'bashfully to the rescue' when the star is taken unwell and gives such a good performance her salary is raised from 'two shillings a week and beer money' to £20 (*Music Hall and Theatre Review*, 20 November 1903, p. 10). A decade later, Sewell Collins's music-hall playlet, *The Scrub Lady*, continues to play on the mistaken identity trope; the producer and director wait for the star who is to play the cleaner, who they doubt to be capable of such a downtrodden part. The star arrives disguised as the theatre's cleaner, and after convincing the others, can reveal herself to be the true performer who has deceived them with her talent (*Sporting Life*, 28 February 1913, p. 7).

Stage depictions of theatre cleaners frequently revolve around mistaken identity plots, or the cleaner's disguised identity. One review of a performer called Miss Mary Moran, who 'as the theatre cleaner and afterwards the leading lady, proves herself an artist of a very high standard' (*Belfast News-Letter*, 18 July 1916, p. 2). Equally possible is the charwoman's incorrect assessment of their own identity: one of Wilkie Bard's acts was an impersonation of 'a stage charwoman who herself has histrionic aspirations' (*The Era*, 13 September 1916, p. 23). Such tropes still appear in theatrical reports of variety in the 1930s, and were apparently appreciated by audiences, keeping them 'in merry mood' (*The Era*, 26 March 1930, p. 4; later accounts in *The Era*, 20 October 1938, p. 11). Amateur theatre productions of the period also employed the trope: one report of Bashley's Women's Institute theatricals report 'Mrs Feltham's turn' as the 'Theatre Cleaner' (*New Milton Advertiser*, 25 January 1936, p. 6).

Real theatre cleaners remain frustratingly hard to access and even finding their names is a trial. Very occasionally names do slip through. One record of an anniversary celebration at the Bedford Theatre in 1949 notes that a cleaner from the 1890s – Mrs Dibbles – met the present cleaner, Mrs Diggs (*Daily News*, London, 18 October 1949, p. 3). There are glimpses of women at work. One short film introduction to the wartime work of CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) depicts a cleaner momentarily distracted from her work by a rehearsal of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (‘CEMA’). Cleaners being distracted – or not – is a common thread. In 1895, *The Stage* reports on a copyright premiere performance of Bernard Shaw’s *Candida*, given to secure the UK and international rights: ‘There were only two persons as the audience, excepting the theatre cleaners, who were busy and noisy with their sweeping’ (4 April 1895, p. 14). Fifty years later, one pantomime publicity photo similarly captures real but unnamed theatre ‘charladies’ smiling and meeting the pantomime dame (outfitted as a cleaner) at the Alexandra Theatre Birmingham (*Evening Dispatch*, 14 December 1953, p. 1).

There are many adverts for cleaners which reveal the desired qualities managers had for them, and the habitual gendering of such work as female: one advert in 1891 calls for ‘two respectable women as cleaners at Theatre Royal, mother and daughter preferred’ (*Leicester Daily Post*, 11 February 1891, p. 1). An advert in 1892 in the *Gloucester Citizen* requests a ‘strong, middle-aged woman, without encumbrance. Wanted as Cleaner’ for the theatre in the town (2 March 1892, p. 4). Men do sometimes appear in these adverts: one advert requires ‘a strong couple (man and wife), no family, as Cleaners in a theatre in Leeds: must be strict abstainers and trustworthy’ (*Yorkshire Evening News*, 24 February 1914, p. 2). Adverts often emphasise the physicality of the job: ‘Wanted Women Cleaners must be willing and active’ (*Aberdeen Evening Express*, 30 January 1918, p. 4).

Searching in newspapers and periodicals necessarily reveals more newsworthy incidents, so the occupational hazards faced by theatre cleaners are preserved. One terrible incident at Liverpool’s Star Theatre of Varieties is recorded, when ‘the iron curtain [. . .] fell suddenly today and killed a charwoman. Tonight’s performance has been abandoned in consequence’ (*Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 26 December 1896, p. 3). There are several accounts of charwomen raising the alarm for fires (see *Hucknall Morning Star*, 1 February 1895, p. 2), and discovering corpses and even murder victims left in the building (*The Scotsman*, 21 November 1929, p. 14; *Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, 9 August 1919, p. 24). Other much lighter stories reflect theatre cleaners’ struggles with the audience: ‘[cinema] theatre cleaners dread the green pea season, because it is no uncommon thing for women to bring a bag of peas which they shell while watching the pictures. And they drop the empty "swads" on the floor' (*Newark Advertiser*, 7 February 1929, p. 15).

Elsewhere, contemporary attitudes to cleaners are revealed, perhaps accidentally, such as in the sarcastic note that playwrights occupied 'a position midway between theatre charwoman and the theatre cat' (*The Referee*, 1899, p. 11). Cleaners' economic status is also reported. In 1895, the *Pall Mall Gazette* reports on concerns over slum clearance, about what would happen to the 3,000 'very poor people' being moved out of Clare Market: 'Out of all this number probably nine in every ten are either employed in Covent-garden or as theatre cleaners or as office cleaners in Lincoln's inn' (8 October 1895, p. 2). After the death of Edward VII, *Lloyds* reported on the theatre cleaners who had experienced 'a sudden and complete stoppage of wage earning' (8 May 1910, p. 1), noting that very few theatre managers managed to give their workers a half wage. The most detailed economic description of theatre cleaners' work lays out what their labours involved:

> The housemaids, or in theatrical language the cleaners of a theatre, if an average were taken of London theatres, would number a dozen. Every day the whole of the auditorium has to be swept and dusted, and the actors' dressing rooms cleaned and made ready for their occupation at night. The work is under the superintendence of a housekeeper who gets a salary of at least £3 a week, while each cleaner gets about £1. (*Longford Journal*, 24 December 1910, p. 7)

Tragic, or at least pathetic, depictions of cleaning illustrate the underlying sentiment that *The Two Columbines* exploits. Winslow Forbes's description of auditions at Daly's Theatre recounts the tale of an elderly woman who, on being turned down, begged for 'something to do to earn a living', offering to 'do anything, even clean the floors' (1944, p. 41). One 1899 anonymous ten-verse poem, published in the theatre pages of the *Empire News & The Umpire*, performs the skit of the theatre cleaner who sits outside charitable society for working in the theatre at all: 'No, mem, the district-visitor don't call on the likes of me | And the clergyman's missus keeps away – I'm "theatrical" don't you see' (27 January 1899, p. 7). Her 'sin' was cleaning the theatres on Sunday morning, which cannot have been entirely implausible given the poem's place within a theatrical section of the paper.

Some of the reports reveal similar concerns about cleaners knowing their place, whether in terms of class or in the theatre's hierarchy. The most repeated anecdote is perhaps that of Anthony Burgess, who relates, from the Abbey Theatre, that their cleaner famously 'complained to Lady Gregory about the filth of *The Playboy of the Western World*. "Isn't Synge [the playwright] a bloody old smutty for using the word 'shift' in his bloody old play”’ (p. 128). Elsewhere, other cleaners might end up in the wrong bit of the theatre. One story reports a mill manager’s wife’s trip to the theatre and how, not wanting to spend too much, she buys a ticket for the circle, only to notice her own charwoman in the more expensive seats of the dress circle. The *Accrington Observer and Times* reports she ‘received an economic shock. There was [her] charwoman sitting in the dress circle, munching surreptitiously from a half-hidden paper of fish and chips’. The next day, the manager’s wife confronts her cleaner, who tells her employer that she’s got a good family income coming in, ‘and I don’t see why I can’t enjoy misel’ sometimes’ (9 March 1920, p. 2). Cleaners might wander into the wrong bit of the stage: one account of King George V seeing *Aida* at the opera, reports he was surprised at the laughter, only to understand when ‘a theatre charlady working behind the stage had mistaken the cheese cloth [on stage gauze] for one of the back drops [the very back scenery cloth] and was sauntering across the stage’ (*Westminster Gazette*, 13 June 1925, p. 8).

In such stories cleaners might resist being put into their expected place: one 1913 story of an actor being mistaken for a theatre cleaner when she was stood in the wings reports she was told off by a stagehand for being in the wrong place. She recalled being startled but, putting on the Cockney dialect she used in the play, told him: ‘Ah’ve as much roight ’ere as you’. The stagehand threatened to report her to the management until he realised his mistake (*Sevenoaks Chronicle and Kentish Advertiser*, 11 July 1913, p. 7). Cleaners’ apparent brusque attitudes were a source of great comedy. When a lion reportedly broke free of its cage at the Coliseum, one theatre cleaner was scrubbing a dress room and looked up and saw the roaming animal: ‘Thinking it was an acrobat dressed up for a comic performance all she said was, “Go away, go away! Can’t you see I’m busy!” And the lion went’ (*Dundee Courier*, 25 October 1928, p. 4).

The crediting of theatre cleaners as part of the community of the theatre production is unusual. One history of the Players Theatre reflects both a moment of working-class resistance and later crediting: ‘The Director was interviewing Ann before she became the theatre cleaner. “Right, Mrs Jones”, he told her. “We’ll try you for a week and see if you suit us.” “Right, Mr Sachs, and I’ll see if you suit me”’ (Anon., 1943, p. 18). One Ann Jones is at least listed in the ‘Helpers’ section in the account of all those who worked at the theatre (Anon., 1943, p. 118). Joan Littlewood credited her cleaners in the programmes, a fact widely written about at the time (see *Bristol Evening Post*, 18 September 1957, p. 10).

Elsewhere another thread of reporting reveals cleaners doing more than they are expected to or having unexpected knowledge that becomes vital to the running of the theatre. One incident in Glasgow was reported in the national press, regarding a young woman cleaner who had ended up conducting the Chauve-Souris Company [a choir with orchestra]. As the newspaper recounted, the company was struggling to find a pianist for rehearsals, and so the cleaner 'went on to the stage and offered her help. She played the piano and led the singing, and in the course of an impromptu rehearsal provided the Russians with free and genuine tuition'. She was then booked by the company to be 'their instructress in Scottish melodies' (*Daily Herald*, 28 February 1927, p. 1). In her autobiography, Julie Walters recounted how Winnie, the Everyman Theatre cleaner, 'put many an actor through their paces when it came to learning the Liverpool lingo'. On their meeting Winnie asked, 'So you want educatin', do you?' Walters recalls, 'she took me through my speeches, writing them phonetically' (2009, pp. 171–2). The Abbey Theatre reappears in other anecdotes about cleaners: Barney, their one-time theatre cleaner, is described as 'a gentle, silent, beautiful old man who, with a sad sense of care, carried out his cleaning duties by day' (de Valois, p. 109). By night, Barney worked as the prompter, sitting by the side of the stage delivering forgotten lines, working on a range of plays from Shaw to Yeats's *Plays for Dancers*. Again at the Abbey, in earlier years, Bernard Shaw's contemporaneous description of Lady Gregory as the 'Charwoman of the Abbey' (because she did everything and took on all tasks), is perhaps the richest way of conceptualising these threads. Cleaners have held a multiplicity of often invisible and unrecognised roles in theatrical productions.

If there is no literature, there is a working tradition that shows how working-class women and men who fulfilled the role of theatre cleaners disrupted certain social niceties. The cleaners we have encountered were uncontainable and asserted their right to the space of the theatre, whether that be in the face of the lion or badly costumed acrobat, or of the class structures which subjected them to what was clearly very low paid, dangerous, and physically demanding work. They sat in the wrong place, ate the wrong food, knew things that they were not supposed to, ignored things that seemed valuable to others, all while being entirely vital to the running of theatre. So what if we were to read the iterative and embodied practice of cleaning and of restoring the empty space as an act of writing the blank page on which theatrical performance must take place. A radical reconceptualising of their labour will entail addressing why we have failed as theatre historians to adequately incorporate such working practices within the history of the form. How might we consider the work contemporary cleaning staff carry out, particularly after our shared experiences of Covid-19, and the subsequent emphasis on clean and safe spaces? Joan Littlewood's ghostly figure, with her broom, reminds us that untroubled class-based expectations can limit the revolutionary potential of theatre makers. Without proper acknowledgement of what women’s ‘lab’ring hands’ have been doing, theatre history is not complete. We had better clean up our act.

Note

1. Quotation from the *Thanet Advertiser*, 22 June 1948, p. 8.

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Chapter 15

Thieves in the night: women in the early days of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies

Monika Seidl

In 1978, *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination*, a collective publication by the Women's Studies Group, catapulted feminist studies to centre stage in Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). In this chapter I shall comment on the anxieties sparked by 'women who take issue', which culminated in Stuart Hall's retrospective look – in a 1990 Illinois University lecture – at the 'interruptions in the work of the Centre', when 'feminism broke in [. . .] As the thief in the night, [. . .] interrupted, made an unseemly noise, seized the time, crapped on the table of cultural studies' (Hall, p. 282). This emotionally loaded description reveals the implicit threat posed by the radicalism of the early feminists at the time, and the resistance with which they were met. This longer passage from the 1992 article (based on the lecture) gives a vivid impression of the tense atmosphere in the early days of the CCCS:

> The title of the volume in which this dawn-raid was first accomplished – *Women Take Issue* – is instructive: for they 'took issue' in both senses – they took over that year's book and initiated a quarrel. [. . .] Because of the [. . .] early beginnings of the feminist movement outside in the very early 1970s, many of us in the Centre – mainly, of course, men – thought it was time there was good feminist work in cultural studies. And we indeed tried to buy it in, to import it, to attract good feminist scholars. As you might expect, many of the women in cultural studies

> weren't terribly interested in this benign project. We were opening the door to feminist studies, being good, transformed men. And yet, when it broke in through the window, every single unsuspected resistance rose to the surface, fully installed patriarchal power, which believed it had disavowed itself. There are no leaders here, we used to say; we are all graduate students and members of staff together, learning how to practice cultural studies. [. . .] And yet when it came to the question of the reading list . . . Now that's where I really discovered about the gendered nature of power. Long, long after I was able to pronounce the words, I encountered the reality of Foucault's profound insight into the individual reciprocity of knowledge and power. Talking about giving up power is a radically different experience from being silenced. (pp. 282–3)

Hall admits to his retrospective realisation that women and feminism had no access to knowledge and power for the simple reason that their position was absent, simply not accounted for. The paradigms dominant at the Centre were epistemologically powerful in terms of class and economic analysis but were silent in terms of gender or race. Also, the objects of analysis had no particular focus on women's issues apart from the occasional work on women's magazines with a focus on semiotic analysis, as will be explored below.

My research is based on the digitally available annual reports of the Centre,[1] and I will also take up opinions voiced by Charlotte Brunsdon (1996) and arguments developed by Homi Bhabha in an article dedicated to Hall after the latter's death in 2014. Brunsdon and Bhabha make both a strong case for seeing voices from positions of absence (such as the work done by the Women's Study Group at the CCCS) as radical and provocative moments of interruption, which may open new lines of enquiry. Such emotionally charged moments can trigger constructive struggles and, via continuous negotiations, may allow new perspectives and space for change.

There were indeed silences and absences, but once women spoke up and made themselves heard, the 'dawn-raid' Stuart Hall remembered really took place and found its way into the annual reports of the CCCS: in a nutshell, first women tried to fit a feminist agenda into existing paradigms, like the Marxist paradigm, but later they came up with new theoretical approaches of their own. Many of the women who studied at the CCCS in its early days carved out specialised and unique fields; they did not become 'general' cultural studies scholars but pioneers, for example, in feminist media studies, in feminist film studies or in TV studies, among many other fields.

In what follows I will briefly introduce the history of the CCCS and its aims and then turn to women at the Centre in its early days, their topics and topics related to them, which will lead up to the volume *Women Take Issue*. I will then end with Hall's affect-laden response to radical changes that were initiated by positions of absence, and what this response may mean in times of conservative backlash.

The history of the Birmingham Centre starts with Richard Hoggart (1918–2014), who was appointed Professor of Literature and Contemporary Society at Birmingham in 1962 and who founded the CCCS in 1964. Hoggart had won a scholarship to study English at Leeds and became senior lecturer at the University of Leicester in 1959. By then he had written a book on the poetry of W.H. Auden (1951) and the influential semi-autobiographical study *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (1957), in which he looked back nostalgically at a pre-war 'popular culture', which he saw as threatened by a post-war 1950s 'mass culture'. He earned some reputation with *The Uses of Literacy* and in 1960 was a key witness at the so-called obscenity trials, when Penguin Books was publicly prosecuted for the 1960 unexpurgated publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) by D.H. Lawrence. Penguin Books won, not least because of Hoggart's expert witness testimony.

The Centre's first annual report gives some details about the CCCS finances leading back to the obscenity trials: 'The main grant is from Penguin Books, who have generously covenanted the Centre £2,400 a year for seven years. This grant started the Centre and pays for the first research fellow [Stuart Hall] and the secretary' (CCCS, 1964, p. 13). Stuart Hall came to Britain from Jamaica on a scholarship to Merton College, Oxford, where he took an MA in English. He started a PhD on Henry James, which he never finished, became involved in left politics, and worked in secondary and adult education. Together with Paddy Whannel (1922–80) from the British Film Institute, he published *The Popular Arts* (1964), a book in which the two authors argued that popular cultural forms, such as the Western, Mickey Spillane, advertising and the television industry ought to be taken seriously within the academic analysis of culture. This book may have motivated Hoggart to hire Hall (compare Dyer, pp. vii–xxvi).

From the beginning, the Centre followed an innovative approach to cultural analysis, which was outlined in their first report under the heading 'Scope of Research'. Central to the new approach were so-called 'critical-evaluative studies [. . .] of mass art, popular art and culture and the mass media. [. . .] This field includes popular fiction, the press, film and television, popular music and advertising' (CCCS, 1964, pp. 3–4). In 1964, it was new to analyse cultural products across diverse media without claiming to be a specialist in filmic, musical or TV analysis, as there was no established discipline that worked across media, as would later be the case in cultural studies. The first annual report therefore dutifully claimed that ‘the Centre will try to bring together disciplines of literary criticism, sociology and social psychology, and social history’ (CCCS, 1964, p. 3). The second report calls for ‘a clear definition of the contribution which the various disciplines can make to “cultural studies” (which is, properly, an interdisciplinary and evaluative field of studies)’ (CCCS, 1965, pp. 3–4). The Centre’s third report has a lengthy section on research methodology advocating that the CCCS should get away from ‘close studies of texts and events here – “social background”, “history of ideas” or “conditions of production” there’. The report continues: ‘it is our intention to try to develop an [. . .] integrated style of work’ (CCCS, 1966, p. 8). The promotion of ‘group work wherever possible’ was also new as an academic practice at the time, as was no formal MA or PhD supervision but extensive work in study groups (CCCS, 1964, p. 4). Another important element of the work of the Centre was a commitment to extramural work or, as in the first report, ‘Links with Teachers’ (pp. 11–12).

Though beyond the scope of this chapter, the inner dynamics of the CCCS are also an area worth exploring, as they may shed more light on the place of women in the Centre. There are a number of good sources: the working practices of the Centre are described in an article published in 2015 (Connell and Hilton) and there are examples of life writing and individual reminiscences, ranging from Stuart Hall’s 1990 lecture quoted above (Hall, 1992), to contributions by individual members, such a Charlotte Brunsdon’s ‘A Thief in the Night’ (1996) or Lawrence Grossberg’s ‘The Formation(s) of Cultural Studies: An American in Birmingham’ (1997). Common across these reports is the observation that the inner dynamics of the Centre, and early cultural studies work in general, were characterised by what Charlotte Brunsdon called a ‘contested plurality’ and ‘the arguing of positions’ (1996, pp. 277, 283). In the words of Stuart Hall, cultural studies ‘had many trajectories, [and] many people had and have different trajectories through it; it was constructed by a number of different methodologies and theoretical positions, all of them in contention’ (1992, p. 278). Within this unstable territory, women were slowly carving out spaces for themselves, moving from positions of absence to positions of presence. In what follows I will go over the annual reports in chronological order, using these contemporary records as a form of evidence to document women’s work and work on women’s issues in the early days of the Centre.

In the first report women are invisible; only the secretary is mentioned (identified as ‘Miss Eleanor Insch’ (CCCS, 1965, p. 1) in the second report), who was paid with the Penguin money. The second report names two female research students, Moira Megaw, working on George Orwell and the documentary genre, and Nancy Bradburd, working on the sociology of adolescence and popular music. They are both, however, absent from the 'Centre Staff and Students: 1965–6' list at the end of the report (p. 22). This list gives the names of about a dozen male research students and mentions one woman as 'Colloquial assistant', namely Lidia Curti,[2] an exchange student from the University of Naples, who most likely introduced the work of Antonio Gramsci to the Centre. On Tuesdays the CCCS had a general seminar with invited speakers, such as Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall or Raymond Williams. The only female speaker (among a dozen males) was the German émigré Hilde Himmelweit (1918–89), who established social psychology at the London School of Economics and who had published a ground-breaking attitudinal study on the effects of television on young people entitled *Television and the Child* (1958). In its section on publications the report mentions that Rachel Powell was working on a piece on 'local radio'. As the next year's report will show, Powell's work (1965) would become the first ever of the Centre's legendary *Occasional Papers* publications.[3]

The Centre's third report from November 1966 is quite lengthy and has long sections seemingly defending the Centre's unconventional methodologies and topics. Women now surface in greater numbers. They are employed as researchers for externally funded and designed projects: Elizabeth Glass on the attitudes and assumptions of the popular press (Rowntree Project); and the above-mentioned Rachel Powell on the relationship between television programmes and their audiences (Gulbenkian Project). The report also lists the readings done in the text seminar: there are no texts by and about women and no invited female speakers in the general seminar. There was, however, one talk dealing with women's issues: Clive Irving, a then famous journalist, who in 1963 co-authored a book on the Profumo Affair (*Scandal '63*), gave a presentation entitled 'A Look at Women's Magazines' (CCCS, 1966, p. 24). This topic would be the first women's studies-related subject matter at the Centre and an area of study that the Centre would return to.

The fourth (1966–67) and, in particular, the fifth and sixth reports from October 1969 and December 1971, respectively, are likely to have been the first ones written by Stuart Hall, and no longer by Hoggart. The fifth report shows a distinctive change in tone and a more complex diction and is also tentatively critical of Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* (See CCCS, 1969, p. 2). Both reports praise Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* (1958) and the fifth report quotes Williams's definition of culture from *The Long Revolution* (1961), 'culture as the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life' (CCCS, 1969, p. 3). From the 1966–7 academic year onwards a greater number of female students started to study at the CCCS, among them American photographer Janet Mendelsohn, who produced photographic essays of the streets of Birmingham, in particular the Balsall Heath district, as part of her MA project. Mendelsohn used photography as a tool for cultural analysis with a particular focus on sex workers in Varna Road and the Indian community living in the same area.[4]

The fifth report had one of Mendelsohn's photographs on its cover and Rosalind Brunt featured in it as a graduate student.[5] In 1969 Brunt worked on 'the sensitive area' of current affairs programmes on TV (CCCS, 1969, p. 9). During Christmas term 1968 Stuart Hall gave two presentations relating to women in the graduate seminars, one on 'Methods in Cultural Analysis: A Study of Women's Magazines' and another on 'Women's Fictions' (p. 15), meaning the short narratives printed in women's magazines. This shows that Hall himself played a leading role in what he would later call the 'benign project', namely in introducing women's topics to the Centre, a project the women at the Centre themselves were not 'terribly interested in', as Hall also mentions in his retrospective quoted above. The reports clearly show that in the beginning men were deciding on the agenda and it was some time before the women at the Centre started to question that initiative. The academic year 1968–9 clearly marked a watershed, as from then onwards women's issues and eventually feminism were getting on the radar, albeit still under male supervision and male leadership. The fifth report mentions a new 'Working Seminar' under Stuart Hall's leadership, doing 'a common project' on the analysis of women's magazines.[6] The description also mentions 'a selection of literature on "the feminine mystique"' (p. 19), which suggests that Betty Friedan's second wave-feminism primer, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), must have been on the reading list.

The sixth report (1969–71) showed a masculine backlash, although the number of female graduate students was on the rise.[7] 'Boys' topics' gained momentum as seminars were devoted to the US American Western and graduate students' work dealt with football and cultural values, while Paul Willis[8] worked on 'The Motorbike Boys', and Richard Dyer[9] on 'The Meaning of Tom Jones' (CCCS, 1971, pp. 11, 18, 17). In this period a PhD on 'The Language of Advertising and the Feminine Role' was completed by Trevor Millum.[10] According to its description it offered a 'detailed micro-analysis of visual communication with a firm grasp of the wider implications of advertising's presentation of an idealised image of women' (p. 17).

This year also saw a new addition to the reading list, Juliet Mitchell's *Woman's Estate* (1971), which was to become a very influential feminist statement from the political left. Mitchell later became famous for her book on feminism and psychoanalysis, but for our present purposes her early monograph is of interest. Mitchell's early work had a focus on the silence about the condition of women in contemporary socialism. In 1966 she wrote an article for *The New Left Review*, with the title 'Women: The Longest Revolution' (a play on Raymond Williams's book *The Long Revolution* (1961)), which was reprinted in a reworked and extended version in *Woman's Estate*. While Mitchell argues that Marxism provides insights into all forms of oppression and has a lot to offer as an epistemologically sound analysis of capitalist society, she also advocates the need of a feminist consciousness: 'The size of the "absence" of women in socialist theory and practice is immense' (Mitchell, 1971, p. 75). She stresses that the condition of women must be seen as 'the product of several structures', such as 'production, reproduction' (in Marxist terms) and 'sexuality and the socialisation of children' (p. 101). All these elements are, according to Mitchell, contingent and require close attention to contextual parameters, such as time, place, and so on, of the women's situation to be analysed. Mitchell's work became a major influence on the work of the women at the CCCS. The topic of women's advertising and women's magazines from a semiotic perspective, introduced by Hall and other men at the Centre, was still on the agenda, as can be seen from the annual reports, but from 1971 onwards the focus shifts to women's suppression, either as working women or in the family, a topic that is also very prominent in the collection *Women Take Issue* (1978).

In 1973–4 Richard Hoggart resigned as Chair of English and left the Centre; the university decided that the CCCS should become independent within the Faculty of Arts with Stuart Hall as its new director. In the seventh report (1972–4) genuine feminist topics start to emerge: the report mentions 'the study of the "culture" of the family' as a new topic (CCCS, 1974, p. 15). Janice Winship, a graduate student who would later contribute an analysis of women's magazines to *Women Take Issue*, is mentioned as a contributor to extramural work on women's roles and family.[11]

The next report (*Eighth Report*, 1974–6) is the longest ever, with fifty pages, including a 1976–77 supplement. This report shows that women and feminist issues had developed from being largely absent into a powerful presence. The report lists a new subgroup, called 'Women's Studies' (CCCS, 1976, pp. 16, 25–26; CCCS, 1977, p. 6) with its own reading list, mainly containing contemporary feminist texts, like Sheila Rowbotham's *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973) or John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) based on the BBC series of the same year. The report explicitly states: 'NB: The group is open to men' (CCCS, 1977, p. 6). Angela McRobbie[12] joined as graduate student in 1974, and Charlotte Brunsdon[13] and Dorothy Hobson in 1975, who would both contribute substantially to the volume *Women Take Issue*. The eighth report also proudly claims that 'many of our best applicants are women and in our recent intakes we have been able to strike nearly an equal balance in the sex ratio' (CCCS, 1976, p. 2). The report for the first time runs a general section on 'Living in Birmingham', where 'those of you with children' are addressed and playgroups inside and outside university advertised (CCCS, 1977, p. 14).

The Women's Studies group started work on the now well-known topic of 'images of women as portrayed in newspapers, (ranging from women in "news" articles, through to women in cartoons to women as nudes) in magazines and on television' (CCCS, 1976, p. 1). The group, however, also dealt with a second topic influenced by debates in the women's movement of the time, namely housework, domestic labour and the family, claiming that 'women's feminine roles are products of both patriarchal and capitalist society'. It continues:

> The group therefore decided to take our analysis to the family (specifically from 1945 onwards) as being the location in which the two spheres of class and patriarchy are constantly lived out in women's daily existence, where constant overlapping and intermeshing of spheres is to be found. [. . .] Since the main location of women, even if they take part in outside production, is always within the family, it could be that a study at this point could give the group the beginnings of an articulation of the relations of Class and Patriarchy which is so badly needed for women's theory. (CCCS, 1976, p. 16)

The group eventually wanted to limit their analysis to women in the 1960s by means of conducting interviews with housewives or having a closer look at welfare legislation to see how the notion of 'family' surfaces within rules and regulations.

The ninth report (1977–8) announces the imminent publication of *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination*, as a result of the work of the Women's Studies Group to develop a 'Marxist feminist theory together with empirical work on women' (CCCS, Jan 1978, pp. 15, 22). The tenth report (1978–9), which was the last one under Hall's directorship,[14] mentions the importance of the publication of *Women Take Issue* in making the Centre's work more widely known. The report also states that '*Women Take Issue* was [. . .] a break-through in a larger and more important sense, in that it marked publicly the strong presence of work by women on the present position of women at the Centre' (CCCS, December 1978, p. 4). This comment refers to the introduction of the volume, which makes clear that Women's Studies will mean a challenge to established structures of learning and will come up with new objects of knowledge: '[. . .] working from the point of view of women reveals that there is a systematic absence of this viewpoint, and the presence of whole sets of assumptions about women (and, usually, their place in the family)' (Bland, p. 9).

The 1978–9 report furthermore mentions a new study group, exclusively devoted to the issues of family and school and the new 'race and politics' group founded in reaction to a 'growth in racist activities [. . .] at a time when there appears to be a general ideological and political shift to the right' (CCCS, December 1978, p. 8). The so-called 'Winter of Discontent' (1978–9) was marked by extensive strikes, while the Conservative Party, under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, was claiming in advertisements that 'Labour isn't working'. The Conservatives eventually won the May 1979 election and Margaret Thatcher became the first female prime minister of the UK. This extract from the 1978–9 report, describing the political situation of the late 1970s, shows striking similarities to the upwelling of conservative populism in the present day:

> The question of Law and Order, the fears around sexual politics and break-up of the family, add to the fuel and is used by politicians and the media to support the institutionalised forms of racism that exist. The economic crisis has led to unemployment and a holding down of the real wage. This appears to be a classic model for the exploitation of fears and dissatisfaction by those who seek to provide 'simple' and 'immediate' solutions to the crisis. (CCCS, December 1978, p. 8)

In times of conservative backlash, lessons can be learned from the work of the women at the CCCS in general, but in particular from Stuart Hall's memorable comment on the feminists. As I see it, some general issues arise from the 'dawn-raid', in the words of Stuart Hall, from the pretty abrupt change from an absence of women and feminism to the unruly presence of women at the Centre, to the 'interruption'. To clarify why this 'interruption' might be of interest for us today I will utilise the help of two critics who commented on Hall's feminist nightmare story, namely Charlotte Brunsdon, a thief in the night herself, and Homi Bhabha in his 2014 article.

Charlotte Brunsdon wrote in 'A Thief in the Night':

> I see [Stuart's account] as a contribution to a continuing project for [. . .] social change. Stuart writes about the gap between intentions – to encourage feminist work in Cultural Studies – and the unpredictable consequences of the resulting challenges to the status quo. He tries to tell a story about the materiality and particularity of power – the way it is inscribed in reading lists and psyches, as well as theoretical paradigms. (Brunsdon, 1996, p. 278)

She continues:

> [the] choice of verb [*crapping* on the table of cultural studies] proposes to both provoke and evoke the scandal of feminism in the 1970s – to remind a theoretically sophisticated 1990s audience that the second-wave women's movement (with its many problems) was once potent in its disruptive challenge in the name of 'woman' – while also registering the sense of betrayal and rejection felt by those who understood themselves as sympathetic to this feminist project. (p. 279)

It goes without saying that the ideas that were then being negotiated in the CCCS are now commonly accepted; everyone working in cultural studies pays at least lip service to gender, race or class and the way this trinity intersects. What Stuart Hall's emotionally powerful evocation of a moment in the history of a discipline makes obvious is, in the words of Brunsdon, the insistence 'on the great difficulty of even minute changes in practice' (p. 238). This awareness of a never-ending project, of a continuous struggle, with theoretical positions, of the 'wrestling with angles' as Stuart Hall used to call the work on theory, is the issue of interest for us today.

Particularly in reactionary times a heightened awareness is needed, which calls for a struggle with positions far away from easy solutions. The so-called 'Grievance Studies Affair' made academic headlines between 2017 and 2018. This project was initiated by a group of people (Peter Boghossian, James S. Lindsay[15] and Helen Pluckrose) who advocate 'a traditionally liberal approach to human rights which accepts shared humanity and individuality as it attempts to eradicate prejudice and discrimination' (Pluckrose). This sounds like a promising project, but it comes with a twist. The article the quotation comes from gives clear-cut and unambiguous solutions of how to achieve this aim. Here is a passage:

> Deeply culturally constructivist arguments are often made about gender in which even biological sex – the naming of a penis as a male sex organ or a vagina as a female one – is argued to be a cultural construct. This has the hallmarks of Butler, Foucault and Derrida which is very different to a liberal, rational, and scientific approach to sexuality and gender identity which seeks to end discrimination against LGBTQ and also to understand the biology of gender and sexuality. (Pluckrose)

The 'solutions', it is suggested, can be found in the so-called hard sciences, which neither need 'to wrestle or struggle' nor 'to construct'.

To counter this pervasive argument let me finish with Homi Bhabha,[16] who in his article on Stuart Hall for *Critical Inquiry* shares personal memories of Stuart Hall but also argues along with Hall for the importance of 'the refusal of final closure' which may 'create the very space and time for [. . .] new voices and emergent interests'. He continues, 'such leading-edge moments [like the emergence of feminism at the Birmingham Centre in the 1970s] are memorable in retrospect, for revealing the dramatic imbrications of affect and analysis, of anxiety and theory' (Bhabha, p. 7). At moments in times which seem messy and show 'signs of indeterminacy', he further contends that 'solidarity "without guarantees" is deeply etched in the ethical imaginary of the best work in Cultural Studies, protecting it from the purism of identity politics' (p. 10). Looking back at the early work of the feminists at the Centre teaches us that the real work lies not in easy answers, a route favoured by liberal humanists as well as by conservative politicians, but in the radical arguing of positions and in the continuous process of contesting, negotiating, even 'wrestling' and struggling. The CCCS women's move from absence to presence serves as a model of how paradigm shifts can happen, as the space an absence offers, as Homi Bhabha would argue, makes room for something new. This example, however, also shows that such powerful changes are always accompanied by painful and prolonged negotiations, continuing struggle, and never by final and definite answers.

Notes

1. The CCCS reports are accessible online, via the University of Birmingham Special Collections catalogue (UB/CCCS/A/3).

2. Lidia Curti (1932–2021) became affiliated to the Università di Napoli L'Orientale (English and Feminist Studies). Among other publications, she is the author of *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity, and Representation* (1998). After her death, Kieran Connell, senior lecturer at Queen's University Belfast, wrote on Twitter: 'Sad to hear of the death of Lidia Curti, an often-overlooked player in the history of Cultural Studies, who played a key role in helping to popularize the work of Gramsci at the Birmingham CCCS.' See also Curti (2017).

3. See also Mowitt (2011), who discusses Powell's paper in the context of Raymond Williams's contribution to *Tribune*, 'Just What Is Labour's Policy for Radio?' (1966). See also Striphas (2013) on the publication method of the Centre and the innovative potential of Powell's paper on local, community-based radio.

4. Mendelsohn came to Birmingham on a scholarship from the US together with her partner Richard P. Rogers, who also contributed to the photodocumentary of 1960s Birmingham. See Mendelsohn (2016).

5. Rosalind Brunt introduced the MA Women's Studies to Sheffield Hallam University in the 1970s and later became director of Sheffield's Centre for Popular Culture.

6. In an interview in 2020 Charlotte Brunsdon (Brunsdon, 2020) talks about a lost joint project on women's magazines in which Stuart Hall was also involved. The report mentions the same project under the section 'Working Seminars' (CCCS, 1969, pp. 18–19).

7. Next to the above-mentioned Rosalind Brunt and Rachel Powell, the report names Angela Lloyd, Judith Scott, Marina da Camargo and Margaret Ashby.

8. Paul Willis's (b. 1945) work had always had a strong focus on working-class and on youth cultures; he went on to become Professor of Sociology at Keele.

9. Richard Dyer (b. 1945) held the position of Professor of Film Studies at King's College London. He is best known for his work on the star system.

10. After finishing his PhD at Birmingham Trevor Millum (b. 1945) had an international career in teacher education and EFL and devoted a lot of work to poetry teaching for children.

11. Janice Winship worked as Reader in Media and Film Studies at Sussex University. She is best known for her monograph *Inside Women's Magazines* (1987).

12. Angela McRobbie (b. 1951) is Professor Emeritus at Goldsmiths (University of London), Department of Media, Communication and Cultural Studies. Valuable commentary on her time at the CCCS is offered in McRobbie (2013) among her other works.

13. Charlotte Brunsdon (b. 1952) is Professor Emeritus in the department of Film and Television Studies, Warwick University. Both McRobbie and Brunsdon are Fellows of the British Academy.

14. In 1979 Hall accepted a Chair of Sociology at the Open University.

15. Lindsay is known as a conspiracy theorist who fears an impending genocide of white people if Critical Race Theory is not stopped. He also promotes the theory that LGBTQ+ individuals groom children.

16. See, for example, the attacks on Critical Race Theory of Republican state laws in the US, with Ron DeSantis signing the Florida 'Stop W.O.K.E. Act' in April 2022 as a frequently publicised example. See Schwartz (2023).

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Part V

CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS: EMPIRE, ECOLOGY AND BELONGING

Chapter 16

The Caribbean radical tradition and diasporic politics in George Lamming's *Water with Berries*

Matti Ron

As Ron Ramdin explains in his landmark text, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (1987), Black politics underwent a significant shift in the mid-1960s from the 'tolerant and accommodationist' groups of the immediate post-war years to a politics typified by 'a greater militancy as reflected in the industrial struggles [. . .] and community-oriented social and cultural organisations created to fight racism and fascism during the 1970s and 1980s' (p. 371). This rising militancy was cemented by visits from a number of well-known Black radicals from the United States (Malcolm X in 1965; Kwame Ture, then known as Stokely Carmichael, in 1967; Muhammad Ali in 1971), not to mention the growing frequency of assertive street protests, such as those against over-policing during Notting Hill Carnival in 1976 and in opposition to the far-right National Front in Lewisham in 1977.

However, there was also a degree of disconnect between the Black politics of the period and some Black writers. As pointed out by legendary Black liberation activist and intellectual, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, by the mid-1970s 'the youth had begun to emerge into the vanguard of Black struggle' (p. 140) and, by this point, were increasingly British-born and raised. By contrast, the majority of Black writers from this period were still from the older generation of post-war migrants, many of whom had cut their teeth as part of the 1950s 'great decade of the West Indian novel' (Hughes, p. 90). Yet while some of this generation were supportive of this newfound militancy among young Black working-class people, such support was by no means universal: in particular, V.S. Naipaul and Sam Selvon both put to paper their ambivalence towards Black Power in their respective 1975 novels, *Guerrillas* and *Moses Ascending*.

Yet one writer with a much more affirmative approach to the radical Black politics of the time was George Lamming (1927–2022). Born to a working-class, single mother in Barbados, in many ways Lamming was the archetypal 'scholarship boy' outlined by Richard Hoggart in his 1957 book, *The Uses of Literacy*, gaining a place at the prestigious Combermere School. This education, and Lamming's resulting socialisation alongside a different social class, gradually separated him from his background. However, like the protagonist, 'G', in his semi-autobiographical novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), Lamming refused to follow those 'who had one way or another gone to the island's best schools and later held responsible posts in the Government service' (2010, p. 18) or 'the lawyers and doctors who had returned stamped like an envelope with what they called the culture of the Mother Country' (pp. 18–19). Rather, as Douglas Mao points out, Lamming's life would turn out to be one of 'public recognition permitting him to serve, ongoingly, as a voice of social critique' (p. 43).

Lamming's social critique was one fundamentally rooted in anti-colonialism; however, Lamming was not content with the formal transfer of administrative responsibility from the British Empire to new local elites. Instead, what one reads across Lamming's novels is an anti-colonialism inseparable from the politics of class: one need only look at the eulogies he gave at the funerals of Walter Rodney, Maurice Bishop and C.L.R. James to understand the extent of his connection to the Caribbean Marxist intellectual culture. Indeed, it is the last of these that Lamming most notes as an influence on his writing, particularly citing the idea of 'the creative power of the mass' (1992, p. 29) as an inheritance from James present in his novels *Age of Innocence* (1958) and *Season of Adventure* (1960). Yet *In the Castle of My Skin*, written before he met James, displays a similar interest in the creative power of the mass, incorporating the 1937 Barbados labour rebellion into its narrative. As Lamming once noted, 'the major thrust of Caribbean literature in English rose from the soil of labour resistance in the 1930s [which] had a direct effect on liberating the imagination and restoring the confidence of men and women in the essential humanity of their simple lives' (2001, p. 22). Though not always in the form of an overt narrative structuring device (as in *Castle*), the reverberations of the 1930s Caribbean labour rebellions can be felt throughout Lamming's fiction.

Lamming's relationship with James, then, was one of overlapping interests rather than Damascene conversion. But it also underlines how Lamming's long-standing commitment to a working-class anti-colonialism was well suited to Britain's emerging Black liberation movement, whose inspiration 'came partly from radical Marxism and class-based politics, but was just as informed by anti-colonial politics from Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent'; this politics sought 'to present a black British identity with a colonial legacy, rather than merely colonial subjects in the "Mother Country"' (Smith, p. 19) and to produce a 'black self-organisation for socialism which is autonomous of, but not cut off from, the white majority' (Farrar, p. 9). Against that political context, it is interesting to note that while most of Lamming's novels are set in the Caribbean (either Barbados or the fictional island of San Cristobal), the publication of *Water with Berries* (1971) was his first literary 'return' to Britain since he had published *The Emigrants* (1954). Yet while *The Emigrants* depicted (and was produced out of) a freshly arrived Caribbean community in Britain on the cusp of decolonisation, *Water with Berries* reflects a radically different moment both for West Indians in Britain and the Caribbean itself, where decolonisation had begun in earnest. With one foot in the Caribbean and one in the diaspora, *Water with Berries* emanates a class-based anti-colonial Black politics which, despite Lamming's generational separation from that aforementioned vanguard of Black struggle, was well tuned for the moment it was written in.

It should be noted, however, that *Water with Berries* was written at a time that was less receptive to Caribbean authors than when Lamming had published his first novel: the termination of the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* in 1958, a radio programme that had been vital for Caribbean literature in the early post-war period, resulted in a general decline in opportunities for West Indian writers (the obvious exception being the award-winning V.S. Naipaul). In response, E.K. Brathwaite, John La Rose and Andrew Salkey (among others) founded the Caribbean Artists' Movement (CAM) in 1966 with a view to remedying the 'perceived decline in West Indian cultural visibility in Britain since the postwar literary boom' (Brown, p. 176). However, CAM was 'effectively finished' by 1972 (McLeod, p. 95), beset by internal disagreements around aesthetics and CAM's relationship to Black politics. As such, McLeod describes the 1970s as 'something of a watershed in the fortunes of postwar black British culture, and especially as regards literary production' (p. 94). Specifically, he argues that it 'marks an ending of a particular moment in the history of Black British writing with many of those identified with the postwar migrant generation of writers moving away from Britain, both on the page and in their travels' (p. 95). Continuing, McLeod explains that while it is

> possible to speak of Black British *writers* of the 1970s, it is much harder to identify a distinctive Black British *writing*, formulated (contentiously

> or confluently) across a body of writers who interacted with each other or wrote in the cognisance of the examples of others. Black British writers of the 1970s were far more isolated figures, siloed within an often unaccommodating political and cultural landscape. (p. 96)

With this in mind, McLeod goes on to describe the thematic concerns of Black British fiction: he notes the depiction of the 'bleak, racist social landscape of the time and the political necessity of challenging prejudice' but also the sense that these works seem 'much more wearied when contemplating the enormity of the task' (p. 97). Ultimately, there is an overriding sentiment among Black authors from this period that 'a sense of progressive, productive change for the better is difficult to discover or, when envisioned, to sustain' (p. 98).

This concern with the struggles of Black British life, as well as an engagement with the radical politics of the Caribbean, runs right through Lamming's *Water with Berries*. The novel follows three West Indian artists living in London: Teeton, a painter; Roger, a musician; and Derek, an actor. The principal protagonist of the novel is Teeton, whose living situation Lamming uses to symbolise colonial relations in this period of decolonisation: Teeton is lodging with his landlady (known only as the Old Dowager), in a room which he has come to think of as 'a separate and independent province of the house', explaining: 'The house was the Old Dowager's; but the room was his; and house and room were in some way their joint creation; some unspoken partnership in interests they had never spoken about' (Lamming, 2016, p. 35). It is useful to read Lamming's use of free indirect style in this passage against what Jeri Johnson, in her introduction to *Ulysses*, describes as the technique's capacity for 'representing character through pre-verbal or unspoken "thoughts"' (p. xxi). This raises the question of what it is that Teeton (and on a deeper level, Lamming) might be getting at in his reference to an 'unspoken partnership': Teeton's phrasing highlights his contradictory perception of the room as an 'independent province' despite the fact that the house 'was the Old Dowager's' so that, by extension, the room cannot – by definition – be 'his' nor the house 'their joint creation'. One reading, then, of what Lamming is illustrating is that, in the context of the accelerating pace of postcolonial independence for many Caribbean nations, the colonial relationship continues even in the apparently *post*colonial era, manifesting in the enduring nature of their dependency on the so-called 'Mother Country'. This analogy is actually reinforced later in the novel by the fact that Teeton perceives the Old Dowager's feelings toward him in maternal terms, believing she loves him 'as a son, as she might have loved her own offspring' (p. 221). The structural nature of this dependency (in that a room is structurally dependent on a house) is reinforced by a psychological aspect: Teeton is simply not ready to confront the inherent contradictions in his relationship to the Old Dowager. Yet the appearance of these contradictions within their 'unspoken partnership' – while simultaneously not acknowledging them – suggests that those contradictions exist on the edge of Teeton's consciousness; they are contradictions in the colonial relationship which Teeton attempts to repress, a psychological manoeuvre which Lamming highlights through his use of free indirect style.

As Anthony Bogues notes, concern with the enduring nature of colonial relations recurs throughout Lamming's novels, many of which take place on the fictional island of San Cristobal. This concern emerges as he

> begins to think about how Caribbean anti-colonial nationalism had secured a formal political independence that shattered the possibilities of West Indian federation and established nation states. In this formal constitutional decolonisation process the middle classes became the new political elite without any rupture from the forms of political rule established by British colonial power. (pp. xxv–xxvi)

However, as stated above, *Water with Berries* is set almost entirely within the United Kingdom, with San Cristobal existing on the text's periphery. It does, however, remain ever-present in Teeton's membership of the 'Gathering' – a group of revolutionaries exiled after their failed rebellion against the country's post-independence neocolonial government – who plot their return from a basement 'tunnelled deep underground' (Lamming, 2016, p. 62). For Teeton, San Cristobal's sovereignty was 'no more than an exchange of ownership. There had been no end to the long and bitter humiliations of foreign rule' (p. 39). Teeton's analysis of post-independence San Cristobal here seems to channel another major figure from the radical Caribbean: the Martiniquan revolutionary Frantz Fanon, and his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). In particular, strong parallels can be read with the chapter 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' in which Fanon describes the existence and function of a 'national middle class' within colonised nations which believes 'it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country' but whose vision of independence 'will oblige it to send out frenzied appeals for help to the former mother country' (1963, p. 149). Ultimately, according to Fanon, this national middle class from among colonised peoples merely seeks 'the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are the legacy of the colonial period' (p. 153).

Within the context of *Water with Berries*, this self-interested national middle class is depicted in the character of Jeremy, the cultural attaché at the San Cristobal Embassy. Teeton suspects Jeremy's presence indicates infiltration of the Gathering by San Cristobal's new government. Teeton describes Jeremy as being 'Flexible as a worm, he seemed to penetrate the narrowest spaces' (2016, p. 107), suggesting simultaneously the 'spineless' adaptability of the national middle class to neocolonial structures and the potential danger of him penetrating that narrow space of the Gathering's subterranean meeting.

However, an interesting – and specifically diasporic – politics begins to emerge from the intellectual sparring which ensues between the two: sitting in the typically British setting of Teeton's local pub, the Mona, Jeremy asks pointedly, 'You like them?' (p. 111), gesturing to the pub's regular clientele, though the 'them' being referred to are 'the English' as a collective national entity. Interestingly, Teeton notes he 'had come to the defence of the English with surprising ease' (p. 112). Conversation later moves onto 'Flamingo', an anti-colonial intellectual disparaged by Jeremy as thinking 'the Thirties were yesterday', to which Teeton responds, 'He also thinks the slave is very much with us today' (p. 115). In this back and forth, one cannot help but read Flamingo as a veiled allusion to C.L.R. James himself, particularly when read against Lamming's eulogy which underlined James's ability to make 'any historical event [. . .] come alive' (1992, p. 195). Like James, Flamingo is similarly able to make the struggles of the past reverberate in the present. That Jeremy wishes to diminish the contemporary relevance of those struggles, and specifically the labour rebellions of the 1930s, underscores his national middle-class status, seeking to limit the imaginations liberated by that period of unrest to the simple 'exchange of ownership' so castigated by Teeton for leaving intact the structures of colonialism. However, the passage's dramatisation of the antagonism between neocolonial national bourgeoisie and Fanonite revolutionary anti-colonialism is only one aspect of its politics: returning to how Teeton defends 'the English' with 'surprising ease', it is not an abstract, classless Englishness which he defends. Rather, in the context of the passage, the people being defended are the working-class coded characters of the Mona. Though it must be noted that the Mona is no anti-racist utopia as some of its customers engage in overt racism (Lamming, 2016, p. 234), Teeton's defence gestures towards the potential for multi-ethnic conviviality with 'the English' working-class. For Lamming, then, this multi-ethnic working-class conviviality is a possibility only achievable by a Black politics rooted in the diaspora, influenced by anti-colonialism, autonomous of, but not cut off from, the white majority.

The political radicalism of *Water with Berries* mirrors its aesthetic radicalism. This can be read in the text's generic shifts between novel and drama, how it works with space and the distension of temporalities and its use of free indirect style to diminish narrative authority and emphasise the clashing interiorities of its characters. At some points, Lamming also uses a form of fragmented interior mono/dialogue to transcribe the fragmented interiority of the colonised subject. In one passage, Teeton meets a white woman called Myra on Hampstead Heath, who, it transpires (though this is never revealed to the characters themselves), is the Old Dowager's daughter. However, as they talk, Teeton begins to think of his escape from San Cristobal:

> But I did leave. You took up the offer to get away. It was not even escape. I might have stayed. It was your duty to stay. Whatever the consequences, he had a duty to honour his promise to the men he had left behind. Your courage was then a promise which required no oath. There was a chance you would have died. It happened to some you left behind. You knew it was more than a chance. Your commitment had accepted such a certainty. Was it, then, his fear? Was it your fear of death which, after all, is soon over? It was his fear of knowing that he would have to die. He would have to bear witness to his dying. You would have been condemned for life to the spectacle of yourself about to die. (pp. 131–2)

With this shift between first, second and third person, it is valuable to once again read Lamming against (or, rather, alongside) Fanon, in this case *Black Skin White Masks* (1952). Fanon explains the experience of Blackness in a white-dominated world: 'I existed triply', he writes, describing the feeling of simultaneous responsibility 'for my body, for my race, for my ancestors' (2008, p. 84). This 'triple-existence' can be read in Lamming's passage above: the first-person (Teeton's 'body') for self-reflection – 'I might have stayed' – but also the second person for the imagined direct interrogation from Teeton's 'race' and the third person representing a more removed discourse with his ancestors. Under this lens, the increasingly accusatory nature of the second and third-person statements (along with their dominance within the passage as a whole) itself indicates the weight of such 'triple-existence' on Black interiority. Within his own head, Teeton hears the words, 'It was your duty to stay. Whatever the consequences, he had a duty to honour his promise to the men he had left behind', a phrasing which evokes not only his comrades in San Cristobal but also the victims of colonial abuses throughout history (whose memory he feels he has betrayed through his departure). Yet its weight is also part of what reconfigures the colonised subject as an antagonistic political subject, impelled to resolve this fragmented interiority by breaking the colonial relationship to create a post-racial, postcolonial world – beyond the unequal transference of power and resources to a national middle-class as described by Fanon (1963, p. 153).

Teeton's interactions with Myra on Hampstead Heath also indicate the possibilities for a post-racial world, in part because of the suggestiveness of their meetings in complete darkness (where their racial difference cannot be seen) but also because of the therapeutic and altruistic nature of their interactions: on their second meeting, Myra tells Teeton of her rape in San Cristobal, the divulging of which leaves her 'exhausted' but also with 'a feeling of relief' (2016, p. 175). However, as with the fragile potential of the Mona pub as a multi-ethnic space, further meetings between the two (and the post-racial potentialities they imply) are interrupted by subsequent narrative events; that is, the discovery of a woman's body who had died by suicide in Teeton's room, and the Old Dowager and Teeton's subsequent escape from London. Ultimately, purely communicative strategies for repairing the damage of colonial violence are unable to move beyond the realities of a world structured by racial hierarchies.

Here it becomes important to discuss the text's profound engagement with *The Tempest*, latticing as it does the entire novel. As will be elaborated below, the title comes from Caliban's introductory speech in the play, but Lamming also peppers his text with other references. For instance, Lamming reconfigures Shakespeare's Miranda as Myra and Randa (Teeton's ex-wife) and includes the recitation of quotes from the play in a passage focused on two transitory characters who discuss the protagonists in their absence (itself a typically Shakespearian technique).

Lamming's interest in *The Tempest*, and the Caliban/Prospero analogy for the colonial relationship, can be traced back to at least his 1960 essay collection, *The Pleasures of Exile*, in which he discusses the need to appropriate 'Prospero's magic' (2005, p. xviii) – that is, language and culture as a signifier of colonial authority: 'we shall never explode Prospero's old myth until we christen Language afresh [. . .] until we make available to all the result of certain enterprises undertaken by men who are still regarded as the unfortunate descendants of languageless and deformed slaves' (2005, pp. 118–19). Yet as Brown suggests in his introduction to the 2016 Peepal Tree Press edition, it is necessary to read Lamming's title in the context of Caliban's initial speech from which it is drawn:

> When thou cam'st first,
> Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
> Water with berries in't (I.ii.334–6).

According to Brown, Lamming wants to illustrate 'the intimate, bedevilling ties of interpersonal colonial contact. [. . .] Prospero did not just come and conquer, but instead exchanged kindnesses under the pretence of mutual affection and only later emerged as a tyrant. Water with berries thus references a loving gift from Prospero to Caliban, a gift whose fruit has, only in retrospect, turned bitter' (2016, p. 10). Indeed, these 'intimate, bedevilling ties' are most clearly manifest in Lamming's text in the aforementioned 'unspoken partnership' between Teeton and the Old Dowager, which suggests that the colonial relationship is not maintained solely through force but also consent: despite his utter dependence on the Old Dowager within the house, Teeton nonetheless believes it to be 'their joint creation' while the Old Dowager herself does indeed show a genuine affection for Teeton.

These 'intimate, bedevilling ties' are further evident in another passage filled with subversive references to *The Tempest*, in which Teeton, the Old Dowager and her (violently racist) brother-in-law Ferdinand sail on a small boat to the Orkney islands. Responding to Teeton's questions about the boat, the Old Dowager responds, 'it's [Ferdinand's] boat [. . .] It's his and mine [. . .] Which means it's also yours while you're here. It's ours. The boat belongs to all of us' (2016, p. 210). This unsatisfactory response – whereby the boat initially belongs to Ferdinand, then only by two degrees of separation comes to include Teeton, and even then, only on the assumption that he eventually leaves – functions in a similar way to the Old Dowager's house earlier in the novel. Much as how he had earlier evaded the contradictions in their (colonial) relationship, here Teeton buries discontent by thinking that the Old Dowager had been 'so protective of his interests, that he felt no impulse to show displeasure' (p. 211). However, Teeton now begins to perceive 'a sense, deep and subtle and even dangerous, in which she had achieved some powerful hold on the roots of his emotion' (p. 211). The contradictions of Teeton's inclusion in the shared ownership of space begin to reveal themselves: the boat, then, symbolises another attempt to start afresh, but undermined by the inability to confront the colonial violence – to break the 'bedevilling ties' of the colonial relationship – that has brought them together.

By the end of the novel, such delicately balanced relationships collapse as Teeton and the Old Dowager 'demolished the rules of their private game; and now she was confirming that she didn't care about their preservation anyway. [. . .] She was prepared to come out from behind their codes' (p. 255). The collapse of these codes thus reveals their essential function of concealing the colonial relationship; moreover, once Teeton is ready to break with that relationship there is little that separates the Old Dowager from Ferdinand. For instance, Ferdinand is figured around an overt racism, at various points commenting on Teeton's 'animal claws' (p. 248) and excoriating the racial contact that occurred as a result of the colonial project as 'a curse' which will 'plague my race until one of us dies' (p. 254). Yet with the collapse of the 'private game', the gap narrows between Ferdinand and the Old Dowager, the latter now also discovering an 'animal treachery' in Teeton (p. 259), 'the ancestral beast [. . .] forever in hiding, dark and dangerous as the night' (p. 260). In the words of C.L.R. James, 'imperialism remains imperialism' (2012, p. 68); through the Old Dowager, Lamming exposes the imperial hauteur and colonialist race-thinking which underpin Britain's relationship to the colonised.

In his leap from a repressed awareness to an open acknowledgement of the colonial contradictions in his relationship with the Old Dowager, Teeton however finds himself incapable of finding words to express that acknowledgement. Returning to Caliban's relationship to 'Prospero's magic', Lamming depicts Teeton's 'total speechlessness', not knowing 'what sound his tongue should make; what language he could make his own. But he wanted to speak [. . .] he had no language; no tongue that he could call his own' (2016, p. 256). Resolution, then, comes through unspeakable action, as Teeton finally murders the Old Dowager and burns her body. As he sails away from the island, Lamming depicts Teeton's thoughts: 'Calm, you are so calm. He was so calm. I am, he was struggling not to say, so calm. A trinity of voices came up from the floor of the ocean. Calm, Teeton was ready to move; and he was so calm' (p. 274). In contrast to the aforementioned accusatory 'triple-existence', there is now a soothing concordance in the statements of body, race and ancestors. In contrast to the earlier passage's shift towards and dominance of interrogatory second and third-person interior mono/dialogue, this passage sees the move from second and third to the first person and then, finally, to the voice of a more conventional third-person heterodiegetic narrator: 'Calm, Teeton was ready to move; and he was so calm'. The clear break with the colonial relationship effected by the Old Dowager's death has resolved the 'triple-existence' of Teeton's interiority, as reflected in Lamming's conscious use and stabilisation of competing narratorial voices.

Lamming's textual resolution suggests that the colonial relationship cannot be ended by benevolence or even a 'simple parting of ways' but rather by a decisive break even with 'a certain kind of violence in the breaking' (2011, p. 164). For Lamming, coloniser and colonised cannot continue to awkwardly occupy the same boat, nor can independence be more than formal if an 'independent province' remains part of the coloniser's house. Teeton's decisive break in murdering the Old Dowager is therefore not one of personal enmity – as evident in his aforementioned calmness – but rather, as Lamming writes in the novel, that the 'future had come between them' (2016, p. 275); that is, the fragile possibilities of a postcolonial, post-racial 'future', glimpsed in his interactions with Myra or at the Mona, necessitated an active breaking from the 'unspoken partnership' of the past.

It is equally significant that Lamming's 'break' is focused on both the Caribbean and the diaspora. As discussed above, diasporic politics emerges in Teeton's conversation with Jeremy, as a representative of Fanon's 'national middle class'; yet this politics is evident from the very start of the novel. Lamming describes a 'black tree trunk' in Teeton's room, 'no taller than a man of average height with its twin branches stuck out on either side like arms cut off at the elbows' (p. 32). Following the difficulty of bringing the tree trunk to his room, 'the fight went on to keep it [. . .]. The Old Dowager had relented; and the tree trunk remained. But she kept an eye on it just in case "things" began to accumulate' (p. 32). The tree trunk is itself deeply symbolic: a tree severed from its roots as a metaphor for the enslaved Africans taken to the Caribbean (and Americas more generally) while the 'arms cut off at the elbows' alludes to the punitive amputations enacted on them.[1] Meanwhile, the Old Dowager's keeping an eye on '"things"' lest they 'accumulate' suggests a reluctant tolerance of Black presence in Britain which figures that presence as a potential problem to be monitored and managed. As such, while we might read the contradictions of Teeton's 'independent province' in relation to postcolonial national independence from empire, this passage can also be read as a comment on Black presence in Britain; specifically, the impossibility of 'the house' (that is, Britain) being a 'joint creation' between Commonwealth migrants and those who run the country while racial hierarchies, and the colonial logics that underpin them, continue to prevail. In the context of Britain's increasingly stringent immigration acts restricting Commonwealth migration (in 1962, 1968 and 1971, the year of *Water with Berries*' publication), the implication here is that 'the fight' to maintain Black presence is one rooted in the struggle against colonialism and that there can be no 'joint creation' while the colonial relationship is maintained (a point made all the more poignant by the 2018 Windrush scandal).

In the same vein, then, it is similarly significant that the novel closes with Teeton's comrades from the Gathering not planning revolution in San Cristobal but struggling for justice in Britain, 'def[ying] the nation with their furious arguing that Teeton was innocent. | They were all waiting for the trials to begin' (p. 276). Teeton's 'innocence' here must be read in the historic rather than specifically legal sense; that is, though guilty of murdering the Old Dowager, he is 'innocent' in relation to the broader historic crime of colonialism which it was necessary to break with. Meanwhile, the closing sentence works with a similar double-meaning of 'trials' as both court case, but also the struggles to come in navigating, unpicking and, ultimately, breaking with colonial logics as they manifest in Britain. Teeton's actions, then, signal both an end and a beginning: the end of colonial subjecthood and the beginning of an assertive diasporic anti-colonial identity.

When asked in an interview whether Teeton's revolutionary comrades would return to San Cristobal, Lamming responded: 'I think no. [. . .] They are not going to return. What they will have to deal with now is the new reality in the experience – that is, the world – the increasing world of Blacks in England, rather than what they propose to do about the world on the island' (2011, p. 168). As such, while the text clearly addresses the relationship between the imperial core and periphery (not to mention the effect of that relationship on the colonised subject itself), it is also deeply engaged with the question of Black politics in Britain. To that end, it is significant that the novel both opens and closes with images relating to Black diasporic politics (in 'the fight' to keep the tree trunk, and the Gathering's 'trials', respectively). This structure is supplemented by passages such as that in which Teeton defends the English working class with 'surprising ease' against the 'national middle class' Jeremy, indicating a diasporic anti-racism steeped in anti-colonialism and class politics. As such, while Lamming writes *Water with Berries* with an awareness of his relative detachment from developments in the lives and politics of British-born and/or raised Black youth, he nonetheless succeeds in writing a novel very much in tune with their radical aspirations, inspired by a Marxism and class politics informed by the anti-colonial struggles of the Global South. Lamming's novel is therefore a fictional contribution to the Caribbean radical tradition he was himself steeped in, which like Lamming himself, sought to break with the colonial relationship and fundamentally transform society (both in Britain and the Caribbean) beyond a mere 'exchange of ownership'.

Note

1. It might also be noted that the oak tree is often invoked as a symbol of Britain. This symbol is itself subversively referred to in Caribbean culture, such as in the proverb 'small axe fall big tree' that was subsequently popularised by the 1970 Bob Marley and the Wailers song 'Small Axe', which points to 'the David-and-Goliath dynamic between a marginalised community and a country not set up to nurture it' (Clark). Beyond my reading outlined above, then, there is certainly another layer of meaning in which we might make intertextual links between the symbolism of Lamming's tree trunk and these elements of a popular Caribbean culture of resistance.

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Chapter 17

Gypsy women's lives: facts, autobiographies and Louise Doughty's novel *Stone Cradle*

Ingrid von Rosenberg

A brief history of the Gypsies in Britain

Gypsies[1] have lived in Britain since Elizabethan times and over the centuries have evoked much fascination, revulsion and hostility on the one hand, attraction on the other. Where did they come from? For a long time Egypt was the answer, as the term 'Gypsies' indicates. Isabel Fonseca, in her encompassing panorama of Europe's Gypsies, reports that the citizens of Elizabethan England believed the newcomers deliberately painted their faces with walnut juice, 'causing their faces to be made blacke, as if they were Egyptians' (quoted from a pamphlet of 1610, pp. 236–7). But thorough historical and linguistic studies have since confirmed that the immigrants originally came from Rajastan in India (Cressy, pp. 2–4). They left this region for unknown reasons in the twelfth century and spread around Europe, some of them reaching the British Isles about 300 years later. Recently, in the 1990s, their group experienced a fresh growth by the arrival of distant relations from the Balkans who, to distinguish them from the descendants of the original immigrants, are often termed *Roma*. The Gypsies of continental Europe kept many of their cultural traditions over the centuries as well as their language *Romani* (or *Romanes*), which was, however, gradually mixed with the tongues of host countries. The British version, officially called

Angloromani or *cant* by the people themselves, has been fast declining; this is largely due to changes in their way of life, but the authors of the texts considered in this chapter proudly use many of the old words, adding glossaries to their books for the uninitiated – with the exception of novelist Louise Doughty, who provides only a few explanations under 'Acknowledgements'.

Traditionally, despite their special lifestyle and unfamiliar language, the itinerant Gypsies were an accepted part of the British population, as they fulfilled important tasks for the general society: above all they helped farmers with planting and harvesting corn, hops, vegetables and fruit, but they also dealt in horses, repaired tools, pots and pans, picked and sold wild flowers, made objects from copper or wood and collected, repaired and resold rags and old clothes. Yet their little-known private lives in their vehicles and their communal life on the stopping places – *actchin tans* in Romani language – caused much speculation, oscillating between demonisation and romanticisation. Damian Le Bas, a graduate from Oxford born in 1958 of gypsy parents, in his book *The Stopping Places*, does away with romantic fantasies about the living conditions in the open countryside, targeting especially certain painters he calls 'the Gypsylorists'. He writes:

> they found their favourite Gypsies in the finest of wagons on beautiful windswept heaths, by the shores of picturesque Welsh lakes, or slumbering in first-class tents among sheltered dunes. Eighteenth-century landscape painters placed Romani families in the gently cupping roots of great willows and beech groves. Later the painters Dame Laura Knight and Sir Alfred Munnings depicted 'their' Gypsies at country fairs, dressed in elaborate clothes, smiling and smoking cigarettes, dancing at leisure. (p. 24)

And he continues:

> It was not that all this was untrue, but it was askew, lopsided. It was only part of the picture. [. . .] the Gypsy reality also comprised frozen copses and hilltops. Old maintenance roads with potholes and bad light. Scrap yards. Council waste ground. Lay-bys near the edges of tips. Slag heaps and drained marshes. Fen ends. Chalk pits, yards and quarries. (p. 25)

Life was tough for Gypsies in pre-industrial times, not only because of bad routes and uncomfortable stopping places, as the books to be discussed here will prove. But they stuck to it passionately until their lifestyle gradually began to change since the 1930s and with increasing speed since the Second World War.

In 1976 the Gypsies of Britain were recognised as one of the ethnic groups of the country, protected by the Race Relations Act. Their number today is estimated at between 150,000 and 300,000.[2]

Changing lifestyle

Several causes came together to force the Romani to make changes in their traditional lifestyle. On the one hand the mechanisation of agriculture put an end to their main sources of income, and on the other hand a long series of local and national laws continually restricted their freedom of movement by prohibiting camping on ever more public sites and even on private ground they had rented or owned themselves.

According to government statistics, nowadays only a minority (twenty-four per cent) still live in caravans, old buses or other temporary homes, indicating a mobile lifestyle, while the majority of Romani live in permanent dwellings, preferably in single houses, most of them semi-detached, 9.5 per cent of which they own (as compared to 35.6 per cent of houses among the general population).[3] Quite a large number of them, however, try to at least spend some weeks or months every year on the move with their vehicles. In many areas Gypsies have fared and still fare worse than the average Briton. Though not systematically persecuted and murdered as in Nazi Germany, they have been victims of expulsion, discrimination, legal restrictions and violence in Britain as in many other countries worldwide. As a result, even today their health is poorer. Of those answering the 2021 Census, 12.5 per cent rated their health as bad, in contrast to only 5.2 per cent of the total population; one in five mothers experience child loss compared to one in a hundred among the rest of the population; life expectancy is ten to twelve years lower than that of non-Travellers, with one-third of men dying before the age of fifty-nine. Part of the explanation is their economic situation. Most Gypsies work in dependent, only modestly paid routine jobs or are self-employed, and 31.2 per cent are unemployed or have never worked at all as compared to only seven per cent of the total population. Yet a growing number of businessmen, academics, artists and writers has come to the fore, due to changing attitudes to education.

For centuries, Gypsies did not attend school and remained illiterate, one consequence being that they could not leave any written records of their lives. But from the 1930s onwards schooling was made compulsory, first only for a hundred days of the school year, but after the Second World War full compulsory education was introduced for all children, though still numerous young Gypsies dropped out. Even today only nineteen per cent – versus sixty-five per cent of children across all ethnic groups – achieve the 'expected standard' in primary education, and 10.8 per cent – versus 28.9 per cent – gain 3 'As' at A level. Nevertheless, over the twentieth century the majority of Romani have learnt to read and write.

Quite a few have begun to produce their own literature. Poetry is particularly popular among Gypsies, but in the last three decades a substantial body of autobiographical writing has been produced in attempts to correct widespread fantasies with real life memories. Women are in the foreground of this movement. Moreover, some novelists have emerged, too, though not many yet. One of them is Louise Doughty, born in 1963 into a Romani family in Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. She is an example of the lucky minority socially rising through education, as a response in a 2009 interview reveals: 'The idea that my family has produced a writer! My father left school when he was thirteen. My mum when she was fifteen. My brothers and sisters and I were the first generation to even finish secondary education and then go to university' (Pirker, p. 38).

The testimony of Gypsy women's autobiographies

Aiming to explore how Gypsy women writers see Gypsy culture in past and present and especially the place of women, I will first examine some autobiographies. I have concentrated on texts by three authors of different generations as relevant examples. Two memoirs were written by Betsy Whyte, a Scottish Gypsy born in 1919: *The Yellow on the Broom* (1979) and *Red Rowans and Wild Honey* (1990). The other two authors are English Romani: Maggie Smith-Bendell, born in 1941, wrote *Our Forgotten Years: A Gypsy Woman's Life on the Road* (2009); and Jess Smith, born in 1949, published *Jessie's Journey. Autobiography of a Travelling Girl* in 2002, followed by two more memoirs of her later years. Finally, I will examine the novel *Stone Cradle* (2006), by Louise Doughty, which covers a time span of roughly one hundred years, from 1875 to 1960, reflecting the cultural changes the Romani went through in individual life stories.

Gypsy women's memoirs can be considered a particular sub-genre of working-class women's autobiographical writing, which – with a few earlier examples, such as Margaret Llewelyn Davies's collection of accounts, *Life as We Have Known It* (1931) – flourished from the 1950s on, stimulated by left-wing academics, literary critics and publishers with a special interest in working-class culture and literature. In a seminal text of 1956, French philosopher George Gusdorf had characterised the classical male autobiography (by, for example, Rousseau, Goethe, and others) as motivated by 'the curiosity of the individual about himself, the wonder that he feels before the mystery of his own destiny' (p. 31). By contrast, Sheila Rowbotham, writing about women's autobiographies in general, pointed out that 'a woman can never see herself as a unique entity, as she is always forced (by male identification) to see herself as woman, i.e. as a member of a group' (quoted in Stanford Friedman, p. 38). Regenia Gagnier has carried this thought further with reference to working-class women's autobiographies, arguing that these women are communal and communicative authors in a double sense, writing on behalf of women, not in general, but of women as members of their class, 'to record lost experiences for future generations, to raise money, to warn others, to teach others, to relieve or amuse themselves' (p. 265). And, one may add: to inform middle-class readers about how the women of the other half live and have lived.

Gypsy women writers have even more reason than white working-class women to focus on their group's way of life rather than the development of their personality, as the gap between their lifestyle and that of the majority is even wider, which in the past has led to much misunderstanding, suspicion, fear and hostility, but also to romanticising and eroticising, not only in painting but also in literature and certainly in popular perception. We all know examples from classical literature: sinister thieves or conspirators living in filth on the one hand, fascinating men and women, musicians, dancers, fortune-tellers on the other. In Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), for instance, we find unscrupulous Gypsy men trying to persuade an old Englishman to steal for them, frightening his little granddaughter, who overhears their conversation. As an example of the opposite stereotype is D.H. Lawrence's novella *The Virgin and the Gipsy* (1926), in which the encounter with an attractive Gypsy man makes an English girl realise the bigotry and shallowness of her family. Not only does he arouse her sexual desire: in an unselfish action he rescues her from drowning. So it does not surprise that the female chroniclers' first focus of interest is to present Gypsy culture and traditional lifestyle in a fair light, while their second motive is to describe the role of women in that context.

Though the writers differ in temperament and talent, with Betsy Whyte even having help from professional writers, the texts have many features in common. All stories are told in the first person, in chronological order and in an oral style; formative events and experiences are told, sometimes with a touch of humour, and always connected with general observations on cultural habits and traditions. Whyte, Smith and Smith-Bendell include much dialogue and mix Standard English with a certain amount of Romani words. They write at length about their youth, when the traditional lifestyle was still flourishing, but also address the great cultural changes that Gypsies had to cope with in later years.

As to the first focus, ‘group culture’, the natural and material conditions of the Gypsy way of life are remembered and described in detail, for example, landscapes, the conditions of roads and stopping places in the different seasons, the vehicles and shelters, types of work, kitchen equipment, furniture, clothes, jewellery, and so on. What strikes the reader immediately is the passion for moving freely in the open country. Whyte, for example, explains about some relatives: ‘like all travelling people, they just had to keep moving. It is only with this sense of freedom that they can get any joy out of living. And they are willing to bear discomfort, even hardships, to keep that freedom’ (*Red Rowans*, p. 183). Pleasure in nature is a strong part of that love. Here an example from Smith-Bendell’s book:

> Spring was in full bloom as we travelled on the road. May blossom packed the hedges and their heavy perfume followed us along. Primroses and violets brought up the rear and seemed to smile as we slowly eased past. This was our world – the only one we knew. Open roads and hedges in full bloom. We could watch the badgers at play and hear birds singing as they made their nests [. . .]. Foxes would bark to a mate. (p. 117)

Similarly Whyte: ‘Kate started the horse to trot and I soon got lost in the beauty of the scenery [. . .]. A brilliance of wild flowers patterned the grass and couthy masses of honeysuckle caressed some of the trees’ (*Red Rowan*, p. 5). Life in houses, by contrast, which had been traditional during the winter months, but became permanent for many after 1945 because enforced by law, was hated by most characters. They felt ‘like wild birds in cages’ (Whyte, *The Yellow*, p. 184), in a ‘tea box’ or in a ‘wee square hole like a moose that’s been chased wi’ a pussy cat’ (*Red Rowan*, p. 126).

The various vehicles used as means of transport as well as shelters are lovingly described. Most impressive were the horse-drawn *vardos*, with their round shaped roofs of canvas and colourfully painted wooden sides and doors, which emerged in the 1830s. But they were too expensive for many, so that poorer families, as the texts document, often simply walked from place to place, men as well as women and children, carrying their possessions in bundles or, if they could afford it, with the children sitting on a small pony cart. At night tents were put up, the tarpaulins supported by branches and sticks to be collected nearby. After the invention of motor cars, converted old buses and finally caravans were most commonly used. Water was fetched in buckets from the nearest well or burn, milk occasionally asked for at a farmer’s door. Simple meals, mostly made from wild plants and animals like fish or rabbit, were cooked outside the shelters in big pots over an open fire, some of them true antiques. Smith writes: ‘Now, folks, if you could just see the size of the family heirloom and the colour of it – jet black with soot, from hundreds of years hanging over a blazing fire. A great muckle brute that took two hands to carry it' (p. 90).

Socialising was of great importance. Relocating was not always done in search of work but often from the wish to meet up with other family members and friends, to live and work together and to enjoy *ceilidhs* (informal parties) in the evenings: sitting round the fire, making music, singing, telling stories or simply chatting and drinking. Men especially apparently drank a lot, while men and women and even older children indulged in smoking pipes. Friendly strangers were treated hospitably. Smith describes how, as a child, she once brought a Scot she had met playing the pipes in the wilderness to the family camp. After all had eaten, the party began: '"Piper, would you start a ceilidh for us?" I asked him touching his pipe box. Mammy drew her Jew's harp from her skirt pocket and joined him [. . .]. The rest of us sang and danced while night drew in all round on sad Culloden Moor' (Smith, p. 91). But enjoying the family circle was of prime importance: the camps built of vehicles owned by relations provided security and warmth. In some cases family bonds were so strong that they bordered on incest. Whyte writes:

> Travelling people liked to marry into their own breed. A breed was usually two or perhaps three names. Our breed was made up of Johnstones, Fownleys, and Reids. They intermarried for generations, knew their faults and weaknesses, also the good points, and did not like any person marrying into another breed. (*Red Rowan*, p. 91)

Nevertheless, marrying outside the inner circle and even *gorjers* (members of the white majority) became more and more frequent over time.

In one feature, Gypsy culture differed most remarkably from the capitalist society around: their attitude to wealth and presents. Whyte reports: 'Few travellers put much value on any material thing. They like to have them as well as anyone else, but don't worry one bit if they are taken from them or if they lose them' (*The Yellow,* p. 140). And she explains: 'We just lived one day at a time [. . .]. Travellers thought it a bad sin to hoard up things and money for an event, or thing or person [. . .] and believed the very planning and hoarding would bring death or disaster to the person or project' (p. 138). Gypsies loved to have gold jewellery or coins to stick in the women's long plaits but easily gave them away to a friend or relation: 'To give away something that you really liked yourself was considered the only way to give' (p. 54). A striking result of this attitude was a unique funeral rite: when someone had died, all his or her belongings were burnt, even big and precious *vardos* with everything in them, even if it might bring poverty on the surviving family members.

This does not mean that Gypsies are presented as angels, but the cases of misbehaviour reported are negligible. Women are sometimes short-tempered or jealous, some men are described as lazy, very few as occasionally thieving, but – what is remarkable, considering the amount of drink men are described to consume – no heavy fighting among clan members is recorded. The reason is, of course, the overall aim: to represent Gypsies in a positive light. The 'baddies' are always white people, in the first place policemen, who chase them from forbidden sites, but also neighbours, suspecting them of dirty habits and complaining about noise. Schools were often uncomfortable places for Gypsy children, where the other pupils ignored or attacked them and teachers tended to treat them unfairly. Even some nuns were full of scorn, as Smith remembers: 'For reasons known only to herself, Sister Alice had by now shown her dislike by using me as an example of "how not to be." I was, she told everyone, disobedient, unwilling to learn, full of cheek, and, oh, yes, a heathen gypsy!' (Smith, p. 18). Many cases of skipping school or running away are reported, but Whyte fondly remembers an instance of remarkably fair treatment by her headmaster. When a classmate out of spite once accused her of copying, a teacher was ready to strap her, but little Betty, feeling 'the rebellious pride which I had inherited from my mother, well up', kicked the teacher on the shin bone and fled out of the room. Finally the headmaster, who had realised her intelligence, rather than punishing her gave her books and extra lessons (Whyte, *The Yellow*, p. 17).

When we now focus on the role of women in traditional Gypsy culture as documented in autobiographies, they by no means come out as queens of the road. Wagons and caravans were always driven by men, and to be allowed to sit next to the coachman of a *vardo* was a special honour for a woman. There can be no doubt: it was a patriarchal society. Whyte writes: 'A man's word was law and women were supposed not only to keep them but to serve them hand and foot' (*The Yellow*, p. 33). And in another place: 'Men and boys were the VIPs among the travelling people. First their mothers and sisters, then their wives and daughters, treated them with the greatest respect and protected them most unselfishly from anything that might hurt them or damage their health' (*Red Rowans*, p. 115). In some cases women obviously had to do even more: though the men in Whyte's family always worked, she confirms 'there were other breeds of travellers whose men folk never did a hand's turn, depending entirely on the women to keep them. They would scoff at men who worked, saying "Women must be scarce when you can't get one to keep you"' (*The Yellow*, p. 47).

Even if none of the autobiographers experienced this extreme form of gender inequality in her family, surely all the women figuring in the texts, authors as well as their female relations and friends, coped with an enormous amount of work, beginning with managing the household, that is, cooking, cleaning and washing, all without the help of modern equipment, and caring for children. As a matter of course they also contributed to the family income by helping with the farm work or doing special jobs such as 'doing the doors', that is, going from door to door, often accompanied by their daughters, to sell wildflowers, berries and self-made things like baskets, clothes pegs or wax- and paper-flowers or asking for rags and old clothes to repair and resell. Fortune-telling, according to the testimony of the texts, was actually performed only by a few women who were believed to have a special gift. Smith writes: 'Traveller women who have the "gift" never disclose their secrets, not even to their own daughters! They say if an individual is to be clairvoyant, then they will know from within from an early age' (p. 216). This hard life, which the writers remember with a remarkable lack of self-pity, follows on a childhood they all remember with nostalgia: they enjoyed great freedom playing in the open country and were protected and spoilt by all grown-ups. Children were so much treasured that, as Whyte reports, 'many a young wife received a beating from her husband, if a child got badly hurt or had an accident' (Whyte, *The Yellow*, p. 21). But for girls, helping their mothers began early. Whyte, who had only sisters, remembers 'one day watching a girl washing a huge heap of shirts and socks belonging to her father and brothers, and I actually envied her – wishing that I had brothers to wash for and to serve' (pp. 150–51).

Sexuality in Gypsy culture – in striking contrast to popular and literary fantasies – was apparently treated with great reserve. Boys and girls were allowed to play together but prevented from meeting in private. Girls in particular were watched over closely and educated to prudery. As all the family slept in the same shelter, girls learnt to undress under a blanket, and were taught to take care that they always hung up their washed underwear out of sight of the boys. In some families, girls were not allowed to wear a dress without sleeves or go bare-legged (Whyte, *Red Rowan*, p. 27). Although girls usually married very early, that is to say, in their teens, they were left in total ignorance about sex. This ignorance produced some funny moments of discovery. Smith, for instance, remembers, how she and a group of kids observed a couple having sex in a field and believed: '"God almighty, the wimmin's gitten murdert" roared wee Tommy'. And they ran for help (Smith, p. 42). But in other cases the prudery led to a shock on the wedding night, or worse, to lasting aversion to sex. Giving birth and caring for the babies were exclusively women's concern: they helped and supported one another in many ways. When a woman was about to give birth, she was accompanied to a separate place, for instance an empty barn or even a protected corner of a field, by female relations, who acted as midwives and also took over cooking for the family for four weeks, as young mothers were considered to be unclean.

Despite the subordinate role of women our memoir writers were brought up to, they all made a career in later years, as storytellers or singers of traditional songs at folk festivals, on radio or TV, or as activists, campaigning for the rights of Gypsies to live in accordance with their culture. Why did they not include this part of their lives in their books? The answer is probably that they are not feminists fighting for equal rights for women but were primarily concerned with the defence of their culture as a whole, including the traditional second-class place of women.

The view of a woman novelist: Louise Doughty's *Stone Cradle*

In 2009 an article with the title 'Waiting for the great British Gypsy novel' appeared in the *Guardian*. Author Ben Myers must have missed *Stone Cradle* by Louise Doughty, first published in 2006. After Doughty had already published *Fires in the Dark* (2003), a harrowing novel on the persecution of Gypsies in Eastern Europe in the 1940s, in *Stone Cradle* she turned to the Gypsies of Britain. In an interview of 2018 Doughty explained her motivation, which is very similar to that of the memoir writers. '*Stone Cradle* is very much my family ancestry, my family were Cambridgeshire Smiths', she said and continued:

> My great granddad was a horse dealer in Cambridgeshire and we had lots of stories about him when we were growing up and has always been a big part of our family mythology. [. . .] That was the last generation on the road, after that our family was settled in Peterborough, but it was a big part of my dad's personal identity, and we grew up with amazing stories about him and I was always fascinated by them and that is why I went on to write *Stone Cradle*, it's my family history. (Smith, 2018)

In the first chapters Gypsy culture plays an important role. Actually, in this novel we find the same two focuses of interest as in the autobiographies, yet the order of importance is reversed: Gypsy lifestyle is an important element, but the main focus is on the role and fate of women, Gypsies as well as *gorjer* women. Many of the features of Romani culture, familiar from the autobiographical texts, are woven into the narrative: life in tents or *vardos,* moving from place to place and all the traditional types of work. Even the loving decoration of a *vardo* is described as well as its traditional burning after the owner's death (Doughty, 2007, pp. 66–8). Clem, one of the main characters, sets fire to the elaborate *vardo* left by her partner of many years: 'I had promised him that much, and up in smoke it went with him. I could have sold it for a pretty penny [. . .] But it had to go with him, his *vardo,* he had planned and painted every inch of it' (pp. 87–8).

Yet in Doughty's novel scenes of Gypsy culture alternate with scenes from *gorjer* life in country and town, for the story consists of the intertwined life stories of two women and one man; the Gypsies Clementina Lee, called Clem, and her son Eliah, called Lijah, and the white working-class orphan Rose, who escapes slavery on a farm in The Fens by running off with and marrying Lijah. Clem and Rose express their often contrasting views of the events, taking turns in telling the story as first-person narrators expressing their (strong) emotions in an oral, simple style, fitting their modest level of education. Both had grim experiences in their early youth. They lost their parents early, and Clem, as a young girl, was raped by an elderly Gypsy, which made her a mother but left her sexually frozen. For many years she remained single, until she finally agreed to live with a warm-hearted man, Adolphus, in a loving but sexless partnership. Meanwhile, in the first part of the novel, the young Rose is ruthlessly exploited by a farmer and his son. By linking their fates, Doughty subtly indicates how much two underprivileged groups in British society, the white working class and the Romani, have in common.

Rose falls for Lijah's charm and sex appeal: 'I looked at Eliah. He was a handsome man, with his crooked teeth and a smile that made me dizzy' (p. 122). And he is kind and gentle when they first have sex (p. 138). But over time he proves to be an unstable character, an unreliable provider for his family, unable to show his affection to anyone and a heavy drinker. Yet he is not at the centre of interest; the main message of the novel is the praise of women's strength in difficult circumstances (partly caused by the social circumstances, partly by Lijah's character) and their solidarity, even if they come from differing cultural backgrounds and their connection is not voluntary. Though Clem, who loves her only son Lijah fiercely, initially feels betrayed by his secret marriage to Rose, she gradually comes round and helps the young family, who have left the Gypsy camp for a house in a small town and are permanently threatened by poverty. Beginning as opponents, the two very different women get closer and closer so that Rose on her premature deathbed wants only Clem by her side. After her death, Clem explains to her granddaughter: 'Your Mum and I were close as close can be for 30 years. I don't know what to do now that she's not here' (p. 310). Doughty celebrates their final closeness by an ironic symbolic scene: Clem and Rose end up in the same grave, as Clem, for want of space in the cemetery, several years later is buried above Rose.

Birth and death play a strong symbolic role in Doughty's novel. The story begins in 1875 with Clem giving birth to Lijah on a gravestone, symbolising the Gypsies' low social position at that time: young Clem, living temporarily with her parents in a cottage on a village cemetery near Peterborough left to them by a compassionate priest, finds no better place when the pains set in while her mother is absent. The last chapter offers a hopeful view into the future. The topic is Lijah's funeral with his three grown-up children attending. It is 1960, and the traditional Gypsy way of life has practically come to an end, but something new has begun: the children, all successful in bourgeois professions, have integrated into mainstream British society.

Whether the optimism of the ending is justified by real changes in the social acceptance of Gypsies, is a matter of speculation. Louise Doughty has become a very successful writer, some of whose novels have been adapted as even more successful film versions, in the first place the thriller *Apple Tree Yard* of 2013, which was turned into a four-part TV drama broadcast by BBC in 2017 and watched by millions of people worldwide. But all Doughty's later fiction figures white protagonists. Does this mean she doubts that the general readership has developed a great interest in the life and fate of Gypsies? When asked in the 2018 Ruby Smith interview, if she would write another book about Roma and why, Doughty answered that her two books on Gypsy life 'got very good reviews but they didn't sell particularly'. Nevertheless she expressed her intention to take up the topic 'at one stage', and this time would 'write about Eastern European Roma in London perhaps [. . .] because the whole issue of immigration and migration is incredibly important at the moment'. But she has not done so yet. Perhaps Doughty assumes that – against her hopes – the sympathetic interest in migrants has actually not increased since the 2000s, when *Fires in the Dark* and *Stone Cradle* came out, and that it might even be better for her career not to remind readers of her gypsy origin. Interestingly, though in Doughty's online biography her 'Romany ancestry' is mentioned in passing in connection with *Stone Cradle* – though not as an important part of her life data – neither her publisher, Faber, nor Wikipedia makes any mention of it.

Note

1. In contrast to the German, *Zigeuner*, the English term Gypsy, with a capital G, is not a 'non-word' yet. Though deemed derogatory by some Traveller organisations, it is used by official government institutions as well as by many of the people themselves, often with pride. Together with some people of Irish or Scottish origin and New Age Travellers, they form part of the larger group of the population called

Travellers, who all prefer to live an itinerant lifestyle. To distinguish them from the other subgroups, Gypsies are sometimes termed Gypsy Travellers or Romanichal Travellers, referring to their specific ethnic background: Gypsies are not of Anglo-Saxon or Celtic origin, but *Romani* (also spelt *Romany*).

2. Strangely, in the 2021 Census, Gypsies are grouped together with Irish Travellers. According to the census, both groups, identified through a tick-box or write-in response, together numbered only 71,440 (Office of National Statistics). Yet the authors admit that the actual figures are much higher, explaining the difference is due to obstacles to participation in census surveys. Other sources estimate the number of Romani in the UK is between 150,000 and 300,000 (Minority Rights Group International).

3. The following statistical information is mainly based on three government sources: *Ethnicity Facts and Figures. Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller Ethnicity, Summary*, updated 29 March 2022; Office of National Statistics, *Gypsy or Irish Traveller Populations, England and Wales: Census 2021*; and UK Parliament, *Tackling Inequalities Faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities,* published 5 April 2019.

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Chapter 18

Degrowth and Marxist ecology: new directions for criticism after Gustav Klaus

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In their introduction to *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left: The Red and the Green* (2012), H. Gustav Klaus and John Rignall reflect on the compatibility between left-wing and environmental criticism. They begin by suggesting that it is ‘not true that the founding fathers of Marxism skipped over the problem of lasting environmental damage’, noting Marx’s observation that capitalist production ‘develops technology’ that exhausts both ‘the soil and the labourer’ (p. 3). At the same time, Klaus and Rignall concede that ‘such local insights were not central to the main body of Marx and Engels’s work’ (p. 4). Perhaps relatedly, they also note that ‘for much of the nineteenth century’ leftist and environmentalist sensibilities ‘developed in separate ways, indifferent, if not inimical to each other’ (p. 1), with ‘socialists of all persuasion’ ultimately ‘[coming] to see unlimited economic growth, no matter its environmental consequences, as the key to solving the problems of hunger, poverty and social inequality’ (p. 4). Acting as a corrective to this tendency, they suggest that ‘there is no reason’ why those on the left ‘should not be able to accommodate a commitment to “environmental justice” in the double sense of balanced relations with the non-human world and a heightened vigilance towards the pollution and degradation of impoverished neighbourhoods, regions and countries’ (p. 3). Arguing that ‘the social and the ecological agenda’ should thus ‘be brought together and thought through together’, their essay collection strives to demonstrate the interconnectedness of these concerns through the lens of literary history (p. 9). In the process, they showcase writers (from William Wordsworth to John Berger) who combine 'red and green perspectives in their attempts to understand a world where the development of society under capitalism has wrought damage on both man and nature' (p. 15).

This essay builds on Klaus and Rignall's defence of the compatibility of left-wing and environmental criticism by exploring recent developments within literature on degrowth, an area 'increasingly mobilized by scholars and activists' (Vansintjan et al., p. 3). In outlining the degrowth turn in recent writing on ecology, feminism, automation and postdevelopment, the following pays special attention to discussions concerning Marx's attitudes towards productivism: a phenomenon defined as 'the ideological fetishisation of productivity growth' (Tony Fitzpatrick, p. 214). Subsequently, the implications of Kohei Saito's intervention in this area will be considered: exploring how his analysis challenges degrowth theory's susceptibility to Prometheanism, while also locating Saito's dismissal of degrowth theory's focus on the work ethic's social basis. This will lead to a consideration of new directions for contemporary literary and cultural criticism along these lines, outlining recent studies by Roberto del Valle Alcalá, Alastair Hemmens, Abigail Susik, Adam Bridgen and myself.

Early critiques of work

A significant precursor to degrowth theory can be found in twentieth-century critiques of work and defences of freedom from work. It should be clarified that neither necessarily entails opposition to work in all forms, more often taking aim at a 'concept of work that equates work with paid labour', traceable to the late modern period and typically taking the form of 'non-domestic, paid, legally codified, institutionalised and socially safeguarded employment' (Komlosy, p. 8). It should also be noted that this literature is ambivalent on Marx: sometimes claiming him as a critic of capitalist work and at other times underlining his productivist tendencies.

In the twentieth century, two theoretical accounts stand out for developing comprehensive critiques of this model of work. First, Max Weber's inquiry into the '"social ethic" of capitalist culture' and the religious origins of a work ethic that looks beyond 'satisfying the material needs of life' (pp. 13, 12). Second, Jean Baudrillard's account of Marxism's efforts to convince workers 'that they are alienated by the sale of their labor power' and how this implicitly censors 'the much more radical hypothesis that they might be alienated *as* labor power' (p. 31, my emphasis). Beyond this, exemplary pleas for freedom from labour include: the anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin's defence of 'the Right to Well-Being' in place of the right to work (p. 90); the autonomist Marxist Mario Tronti's call for 'mass passivity at the level of production' (p. 260); the *Wertkritik* (value criticism) theorist Moishe Postone's efforts to reclaim Marx as an author interested in 'overcoming [. . .] the concrete labor done by the proletariat' (p. 749); and the 'type 3' anarchist Bob Black's appeal for 'a new way of life based on play' (p. 17).

While critiques of capitalist work are thus evident, they nonetheless remained marginal throughout most of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In a 1956 dialogue, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argue that '[t]he idea of freedom from labour' had by the mid-century been replaced on the left by 'the possibility of choosing one's own work' (p. 16). Friedrich Engels's 1880 *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* offers a clear encapsulation of this development, observing the demise of 'eclectic, average' utopian socialism in favour of a 'scientific socialism' prioritising the seizure of 'the means of production' (pp. 70, 61, 94). Reinforcing Adorno and Horkheimer's insistence on the subsequent marginality of work critiques, Alastair Hemmens has recently argued that French thinkers engaged in this project have generally been 'dismissed as naïvely utopian and even as reactionary' (p. 2). Thus, while some critiques of work claim Marx's allegiance, the broader consensus is that the ascendance of Marxism coincided with the marginalisation of early critiques of work.

Degrowth

While, as Aaron Vansintjan, Andrea Vetter and Matthias Schmelzer note, 'traditions of growth criticism date back to the late eighteenth century', the concept of degrowth – entailing not just a critique of work, but criticism of the entire growth paradigm – is relatively recent (p. 11). Indeed, they suggest that degrowth was 'formed as a political project' in the early 2000s in order to counter the combined spectre of neoliberalism and 'the hegemony of "sustainable development"' (p. 12). Confirming this, in their recent inventory, Nick Fitzpatrick, Timothée Parrique and Inês Cosme find that 'degrowth literature' has 'grown over five-fold, from ~220 texts in 2014 to 1166 by the end of 2020' (Nick Fitzpatrick et al., p. 2). Under the umbrella of what might be termed degrowth theory, Vansintjan, Vetter and Schmelzer identify 'the convergence of seven forms of growth critique – the ecological, socio-economic, cultural, anti-capitalist, feminist, anti-industrialist, and South-North critique' (p. 169). The following presents a selective overview of recent developments within the social sciences and humanities, thematically divided into literature on ecology, feminism, automation and postdevelopment – focusing on how authors position themselves in relation to socialism and Marxism. This survey will underpin my subsequent analysis of Saito's recent intervention in this area.

Ecological

While the claim that '[i]nfinite growth is not possible on a finite planet' is integral to the degrowth movement as a whole, certain texts might be singled out for foregrounding this consideration (Vansintjan et al., p. 79).

In his pioneering work in this area, André Gorz commences by criticising practised models of twentieth-century socialism, advocating instead a return to 'the original, primal meaning of "socialism"' (p. 8). Drawing on Jürgen Habermas, Gorz laments socialism's evolution into an 'autocratic and oppressive planning apparatus' pursuing 'total industrialization' through 'the collectivization (or socialization) of the means of production' (pp. 5–8). He contends: 'Socialism cannot and must not be conceived as an alternative *system*; it is, rather, nothing other than the transcendence of capitalism which social movements open up when they fight for a development modelled on people's lived needs' (p. 12). In order to return to socialism's original premise, Gorz suggests limiting 'the field in which economic rationality may find expression' by utilising 'the potentialities of technology not to reinforce the domination of the apparatuses over people's lives, consumer choices and time, but to free social individuals from the constraints of the social megamachine and increase their power over their own lives' (pp. 8, 20). Following this, Gorz warns against environmentalist visions of a '"de-industrial" utopia', instead advocating an 'ecological restructuring of society' that involves subordinating economic rationality to 'eco-social rationality' (pp. 6, 12).

As indicated previously, in the early 2000s a wave of degrowth activists sought 'to re-politicise debates about desired socio-environmental futures' (Demaria et al., p. 191). Many within this movement echo Gorz's demand to limit the field of economic rationality in order to minimise environmental harm, for instance Jason Hickel arguing that the 'structural imperative for growth' under capitalism should be addressed as the leading cause behind the present biodiversity crisis (pp. 87, 7). Similarly, Giorgos Kallis, Susan Paulson, Giacomo D'Alisa and Federico Demaria claim that the 'goal of degrowth is to purposefully slow things down in order to minimize harm to humans and earth systems' (p. 1).

Ecological degrowth theory has had a notable impact on recent post-capitalist accounts foregrounding the environmentally destructive effects of overwork: for instance, David Frayne writes of the 'disturbing set of environmental and social implications' of 'constant growth' (p. 6), while Will Stronge and Kyle Lewis defend 'the need to place working time reduction at the centre of any post-carbon political economy' (p. 77). Beyond this, ecological degrowth theory has significantly impacted upon ecosocialist literature, with Jason W. Moore describing degrowth as one of 'our era's emergent movements', signalling a 'new ontological politics' that he celebrates for overturning prior dualistic representations of nature and society (p. 10). It is worth noting here that the degrowth turn within ecosocialism has its critics, with Matthew Huber arguing that 'the politics of less is bad strategy', instead proposing that 'solving climate change requires massive development of the productive forces' – which he claims as a Marxist position (2022, p. 173; 2023).

Feminist

As Vansintjan, Vetter and Schmelzer put it, the 'feminist critique of growth is based on the thesis that, in a capitalist economy geared towards economic growth and productivity, the vital reproductive work of society – which is largely carried out by women, in particular Indigenous and Black women, and women of colour – remains fundamentally unacknowledged, invisible, devalued, and precarious' (p. 133).

A number of feminist accounts have recently emphasised the need to integrate reproductive labour into post-capitalist theory. Kathi Weeks, for instance, builds on Weber in developing an understanding of work as a 'biopolitical force [. . .] that renders populations at once productive and governable', a process enhanced by neoliberalism's foregrounding of work as 'the rightful center of life' (pp. 54, 76). Weeks's study also addresses the 'productivist tendencies' within socialist and feminist thought, with their 'sometimes explicit, sometimes tacit pro-work suppositions and commitments' (p. 5). Concerning the former, she draws on Baudrillard in noting that while work-based class formations can 'serve as a tool of insubordination', they also 'expand the scope of the work ethic' (pp. 59, 68). Concerning the latter, she focuses on the feminist movement Wages for Housework, arguing that while its plea for paid housework can be defended as a 'first step towards refusing to do it', it ultimately serves to entrench the 'gender division of labor' and 'to preserve [. . .] the integrity of the wage system' (pp. 124, 137). Thus, while Weeks identifies 'sub-traditions' challenging 'the normative discourse of work' within feminist and Marxist thought, she maintains that both have generally functioned to reinforce productivist values (pp. 5, 80). Notwithstanding Marx's 'insistence that freedom requires a shortening of the working day', Weeks therefore affirms

Baudrillard's reading of his productivist valorisation of humankind's 'transhistorical capacity for labor' (pp. 83, 89). Against these limitations, she proposes a 'postwork utopianism to replace socialism as the horizon of revolutionary possibility and speculation' (p. 30). More specifically, she presents Universal Basic Income as the anti-productivist foundation of a 'concrete Utopia' with the potential to forge 'new political alliances [. . .] across race, class, and gender lines' (pp. 197, 173).

This outlook is both mirrored and challenged by Silvia Federici, a prominent figure within the Wages for Housework movement. In a recent study, Federici echoes Gorz and Weeks in highlighting the limitations of leftist attitudes towards work, in particular bemoaning 'the limits of Marx's political theory' and its 'concept of work' (p. 3). While Federici defends Marx for equipping feminists with 'the tools to think through the specific forms of exploitation to which women have been subjected', she argues that his 'reduction of the working class to waged labor' compromised 'the power of his analysis of capitalism' for two reasons (pp. 32, 84). First, Marx's narrow conception of labour allegedly caused him to overlook 'the strategic importance of reproductive work in all its different dimensions (domestic work, sex work, procreation) for the reproduction of the workforce' (p. 33). Second and relatedly, it prevented him from recognising that 'large areas of work in capitalist society' – especially reproductive work – 'are irreducible to mechanization', meaning that emancipation cannot be achieved through means of 'science, industry, and technology' (p. 3). On this last point, Federici acknowledges that 'in the last years of his life Marx [. . .] began to reconsider his idealization of capitalist industrial development', noting how his later notebooks emphasise its environmentally harmful effects (pp. 45–6, 61). Ultimately, however, she states that Marx believed that the negative effects of productivism 'could be reversed' as he continued to promote a 'Promethean view of technological development' while underestimating 'the knowledge and wealth produced by non-capitalist societies' (pp. 61, 46, 64). Against Marx's alleged Prometheanism, Federici proposes a feminist 'politics of the commons' that eschews 'productive forces' by questioning 'the threats posed [. . .] by capitalist development' (p. 68). In turn, she envisages resistance not through the appropriation of the means of production but through the refusal of labour: 'Not production, but the power to withhold it, has always been the decisive factor in the social distribution of wealth' (p. 13). Thus, whereas Weeks posits a feminist post-work utopianism as an alternative to socialism, Federici develops a feminist politics of refusal, echoing the autonomism of Tronti and others.

Picking up on these themes, Helen Hester and Nick Srnicek have recently taken aim at the neglect of 'social reproduction' by degrowth and automation theorists engaging in ‘speculations about the “end of work”’ (p. 4). They single out Gorz for suggesting that ‘the goal of post-work should not “be that of liberating women from housework but of extending the non-economic rationality of these activities beyond the home”’ (p. 4). Against this, they argue that ‘the post-work project, suitably modified, has significant contributions to make to our understanding of how we might better organise the labour of reproduction’, in particular by integrating the work of ‘socialist feminists’ who have urged recognition of how unwaged work ‘remains *work*’ (pp. 9, 10). Subsequently, they propose a post-work social model ‘that *recognises* reproductive labour as work’, that ‘*reduces* this work as much as possible’, and that ‘*redistributes* any remaining work in an equitable manner’ (p. 11). While Hester and Srnicek’s foregrounding of reproduction as a site of resistance plainly echoes Federici, their proposed post-capitalist vision of collectivised ‘domestic technologies’, utilised to enable ‘public luxury’, bears a closer resemblance to Weeks’s utopianism than to Federici’s rejection of Prometheanism (p. 162). At the same time, Hester and Srnicek arguably place a greater emphasis on the compatibility of their vision with Marx than either Weeks or Federici, suggesting that he supported both worker autonomy and alternative models of socialised reproductive labour (pp. 155, 158).

Automation

There has also been a recent surge of interest in degrowth among writers concerned with the threats posed by automation. For instance, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams respond to fears that ‘anything from 47 to 80 per cent of current jobs are likely to be automatable in the next two decades’ by proposing the introduction of distribution mechanisms designed to bring an end to ‘huge swathes of boring and demeaning work’ without financial loss for workers (pp. 88, 108, 1). Unlike many degrowth thinkers, Srnicek and Williams stress the compatibility of a reduction in work with Marxist thought, echoing Postone in casting Marx as someone who ‘rejected the centrality of work’ by arguing that ‘shortening [. . .] the working week [. . .] represented a “basic prerequisite” to reaching “the realm of freedom”’ (pp. 86, 115). In this sense, Srnicek and Williams’s position is less anti-productivist and more productivism-reformist, with a strong anti-work bent.

A similar line of argument has since been adopted by several automation theorists, among them Aaron Bastini, who argues that the age of capitalist realism has been superseded by an age of crisis defined by climate change, resource scarcity, societal ageing, surplus poverty, and 'perhaps most critically, a new machine age that will herald ever-greater technological unemployment' (pp. 18, 22–3). Bastini reinforces this claim by suggesting that 'machine learning' in the UK threatens '40 per cent of the labour market' (pp. 76, 86). Echoing Srnicek and Williams, he proposes building on these technologies to create a form of 'fully automated luxury communism' in which 'work is eliminated, scarcity is replaced by abundance and [. . .] labour and leisure blend into one another' (pp. 30, 50). Again paralleling Srnicek and Williams, Bastini presents this vision as essentially Marxist, arguing that Marx 'recognised capitalism's tendency to progressively replace labour' in view of passages in his *Grundrisse* illustrating a belief that automation represents 'a momentous opportunity' (pp. 51–2). In turn, Bastini embraces productivism as he proposes the utilisation of technological advances in the form of solar energy, space mining, genetic engineering, and synthetic food production as a means of fusing a 'green politics of ecology' with 'a red politics of shared wealth' (pp. 104, 125, 149, 173, 188).

Significantly, Aaron Benanav challenges some of the central claims made by Srnicek, Williams, Bastini, and others. While Benanav remains 'sympathetic to the left wing of the automation discourse', he nonetheless opposes its core argument that automation lies behind the 'chronic labor underdemand [. . .] manifest in economic trends such as jobless recoveries, stagnant wages, and rampant job insecurity' (pp. 11, x). Following the economic historian Robert Brenner, he instead proposes that 'global waves of deindustrialization find their origin not in runaway technical change, but first and foremost in a worsening overcapacity in world markets for manufactured goods' arising in large part from 'rising competition with low-cost producers' (pp. 24, 25). Benanav demonstrates how 'the mistake of automation theorists has been to assume that productivity is rising at a rapid pace; whereas in fact, output growth rates have declined sharply over time', indicating that deindustrialisation is a product of 'global redundancy of productive and technological capabilities' (pp. 33, 26). In turn, he suggests that the automation theorists' misdiagnosis of the cause behind globally low demand for labour has led them to condone inadequate remedies in the form of Universal Basic Income, which as a redistributive mechanism can do little 'to reduce capital's sway over production' (p. 78). Benanav instead proposes 'a conquest of production' designed to wrest 'the power to control investment decisions away from capitalists', paving the way for 'a post-scarcity future' – thus, while challenging automation theorists, retaining their commitment to reducing 'the common labors of necessity to expand a realm of individual freedoms' (pp. 79, 85). Benanav claims this as a Marxist position – indirectly challenging Srnicek, Williams and Bastini by describing Marx as one of the 'original theorists of post-scarcity' for proposing that post-scarcity is 'possible without the automation of production' (p. 80).

Postdevelopment

Lastly, degrowth has also become a preoccupation within recent postdevelopment discourse. Postdevelopment posits 'that "development" is a construct and an ideology of the West' (Vansintjan et al., p. 158). After having emerged in the 1990s, it rose to prominence following its adoption by 'social movements' such as *Buen Vivir* (Escobar, p. 455). As Vansintjan, Vetter and Schmelzer note, it has found further advocates among 'the Zapatistas, Indigenous struggles for self-determination, Afro-diasporic struggles, peasant movements such as La Via Campesina and the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Workers Movement) in Brazil' (Vansintjan et al., p. 160). While postdevelopment discourse is distinct from degrowth theory and is generally associated with the Global South, Arturo Escobar has recently defended the need to place 'these two sets of discourses and strategies into a dialogue' (p. 452).

Gustavo Esteva, Salvatore Babones and Philipp Babcicky reflect several recurring themes within postdevelopment discourse. First, a core insistence that the '[e]conomic growth' agenda imposed on the Global South 'does not improve people's wellbeing, social justice, or the use of natural resources' but instead 'generates poverty, inefficiency, injustice, and environmental destruction' (p. 69). And second, the promotion of 'localization' and 'radical pluralism' when identifying alternatives in the form of existing Global South communities 'operating outside of the rules of the market' and 'creating new worlds [. . .] beyond development' (pp. 114, 149, 136, 1). In heralding 'communitarian social movements', Esteva, Babones and Babcicky significantly eschew 'the collectivism that plagued the socialist experiment', engaging in a critique of the left that echoes Gorz (p. 99).

A competing vision is put forward in the Native American advocacy group Red Nation's *The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Planet* (2021). On the one hand, *The Red Deal* presents a political programme that similarly looks beyond 'the path of development' towards existing models of Indigenous resistance founded upon the principle of 'just relations between human and other-than-human worlds on a planet thoroughly devastated by capitalism' (pp. 12, 8). On the other, it does so by infusing 'traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge' with 'principles of ecofeminism, ecosocialism, and anti-imperialism' – reversing Esteva, Babones and Babcicky's critical stance on socialism, although continuing to express a disregard for leftist statism and reformism in line with a bold divestment agenda (pp. 5, 40).

Summary

The above accounts indicate a growing level of interest in degrowth focused on the negative impact of productivism on the environment, women, workers and the Global South. At the same time, an ambivalence is discernible among these authors, mirroring Klaus and Rignall's two-sided account of Marx, as some (in particular Gorz, Federici and Weeks) echo Baudrillard in emphasising Marx's productivism while others (Srnicek, Williams and Bastini) echo Postone in emphasising his interest in a post-work society, typically with reference to his alleged interest in the emancipatory potential of automation. This uncertainty is mirrored in postdevelopment's conflicted attitude towards socialism. Out of these authors, Benanav stands alone in presenting Marx as a degrowth advocate (although Federici does acknowledge this possibility in reference to his later writing).

Kohei Saito's *Marx in the Anthropocene*

The dramatic impact of the late publication of Karl Marx's *1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* in the 1930s is well documented (da Silva and Vieira, pp. 62–96). Less clear is the full impact of the 2019 publication of the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA) Volume IV/18*, containing Marx's later economic manuscripts and notebooks written between February 1862 and December 1872, not previously published in their entirety (Otani et al.). However, Kohei Saito – who co-edited the *MEGA IV/18* – has sought to present this as a similarly momentous turning point, in large part for overturning assumptions regarding Marx's productivism, as documented above. Saito's *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism* argues that tracing (among other things) disparities between Marx's manuscripts of later volumes of *Capital* and Engels's published editions, together with his neglected later notebooks, may allow us to overturn interpretations of Marx's ecology founded upon select passages of the *Grundrisse* and mis-transcribed editions of *Capital Volume III*.

At the centre of Saito's revisionist account of Marx's ecology is the concept of metabolic rift: the disruption of natural processes through human intervention, for instance capitalism's 'material disruption of cyclical processes in natural metabolism', such as soil exhaustion resulting from modern agriculture (p. 24). More specifically, Saito suggests that for Marx 'metabolic rift is consistently deduced from his labour theory of value' – as in, Marx came to theorise the basis of these rifts using his theory of value creation as a product of labour exploitation in *Capital* (p. 122). In other words, Saito suggests that Marx developed an interest in the rifts between the natural and the non-natural world that the capitalist mode of production results in. Saito proceeds to define this position in ontological terms, describing it as a form of 'methodological dualism' through which Marx both acknowledged the duality of the natural and the human while attributing this to schisms produced by capitalist production (p. 96). Thus, Saito views Marx neither as 'a Cartesian dualist who believed that nature is something distinct and separate', nor as 'an absolute monist who views human society as an expression of nature' – but instead as someone who ultimately viewed dualism as a structurally determined reality (p. 153). Saito goes on to argue (predominantly through analysis of the later manuscripts and notebooks) that this methodological dualism eventually transformed Marx's 'analysis of the capitalist mode of production' (p. 153). While the younger Marx succumbed to the 'latent Promethean idea of the domination of nature in the *Grundrisse*', Saito suggests that the later Marx 'consciously distanced himself from his earlier technocratic productivism' (p. 155).

More specifically, Saito argues that Marx's worldview was transformed when 'he investigated the material aspect of the production process unique to capitalist production, especially how [the] material world – human and non-human – is reorganized by capital's initiative in favour of its own accumulation' (p. 155). Saito suggests that Marx subsequently came to see the limitations of his former focus on the 'relations of production' and specifically on the appropriation of the means of production as an emancipatory strategy (p. 155). As evidence for this, Saito cites Marx's later Preface to *Capital*, in which he finds evidence of a 'transformation of Marx's vision of post-capitalism' – in particular in Marx's rejection of the assumption 'that a socialist revolution could simply replace the relations of production with other ones after reaching a certain level of productive forces' (pp. 155–6). According to Saito, this moment marks a turning point in Marx's conception of the limits of human liberation from capitalism. Paraphrasing Marx, he writes:

> Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature. (p. 60)

After presenting further evidence of this shift – for instance, identifying a passage in *Volume III* of *Capital* in which Marx declares that society must learn to 'govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way' (p. 158) – Saito summarises by suggesting that Marx's later alertness to the environmental harm wrought by capitalism resulted in 'a radically different conception of the alternative': the *modification* rather than the *appropriation* of capitalist modes of production (p. 173). He in turn argues that this had a profound impact on Marx's outlook, causing him to abandon his former 'Eurocentrism and Prometheanism' as he developed an interest in how 'non-Western and pre-capitalist rural communities' might be studied to determine 'different ways of organizing metabolism between humans and nature' (pp. 173, 200) – indirectly challenging Federici's account of Marx's lack of interest in 'the knowledge and wealth produced by non-capitalist societies' and affirming the value of recent postdevelopment discourse.

In light of his revisionary study, Saito identifies flaws in several interpretations of Marx's ecology, for instance criticising traditional Marxists (like David Harvey) for their unwillingness 'to recognize the necessity of integrating environmentalism into the Marxian critique of capitalism' (pp. 104, 111) alongside 'monist' ecosocialists (like Jason W. Moore) for their attempts to combat the alleged Cartesian dualism in Marx with holistic accounts of 'the society-nature relationship', enabling proposals for 'further technological intervention in the name of stewardship of the Earth system' (p. 104). Relatedly, Saito also takes aim against '[c]ontemporary utopians' who promote visions of 'a luxury future' enabled by technology, not only presenting their writing as a deviation from Marx but also dismissing it as fantasy, well suited to satisfying 'people's immediate desires without challenging the current imperial mode of living in the Global North' (p. 160).

Against these defective accounts, Saito explores post-capitalist possibilities that steer clear both of Moore's essentialised vision of nature and of Promethean utopianism. Building on Marx's late shift from Prometheanism and Eurocentrism, he argues that a proper conception of Marx's ecology must lead to a 'much more radical' agenda than 'the re-appropriation of the means of production by the working class', instead prophesying a 'radical reorganization of the relations of production [. . .] so *that the productive forces of capital disappear*' (p. 156, my emphasis). Saito thus redefines the late Marxist post-capitalist project as one centred on revolutionising production while limiting productivism to correct unsustainable metabolic rifts produced by capitalist work. Along the way, he argues that this approach would still result in a more abundant society than under capitalism – as it would involve overcoming capitalism's structural dependence on scarcity while also, crucially, minimising environmental harm and allowing 'free and autonomous activity' to flourish (pp. 232–3).

Saito and degrowth

While Saito's analysis reinforces concerns expressed in Gorz, Vansintjan, Vetter, Schmelzer, Frayne, Stronge, Lewis, Moore, Huber, Weeks, Federici, Hester, Srnicek, Williams, Bastini, Benanav, Escobar, Esteva, Babones, Babcicky, the Red Nation, and others regarding the dangers of growth, his analysis plainly challenges both the celebratory and the denigratory accounts of Marx's productivism found in most of these authors. On the one hand, Saito's study clearly warns against the Promethean suggestion that productive forces might be positively appropriated – most explicitly formulated in Srnicek, Williams and Bastini, but also mirrored in the utopianism of Weeks, Hester and Srnicek (although not by Benanav or Federici) – by demonstrating Marx's opposition to this notion with his theory of metabolic rift. On the other, it also overturns theories that reject Marxism for its alleged productivism (such as Gorz, Federici and Weeks) on the same grounds. Simultaneously, Saito's analysis may be seen to reinforce the merits of postdevelopment's engagement with Global South alternatives, while also challenging its occasional rejection of socialism and reification of nature.

At the same time, Saito's analysis would perhaps benefit from a greater level of attentiveness to earlier critiques of work and literature on degrowth. In his study, Saito attempts to explain why 'Western Marxism neglected Marx's extensive research in the natural sciences and marginalized the central concept of "metabolism"', pointing towards the rejection of Engels's 'mechanistic dialectic of nature' in the *Anti-Dühring* by Western Marxists intent on distinguishing themselves from the 'crude materialism of Soviet Marxism' (pp. 44, 48). Straightforwardly attributing the refusal to acknowledge Marx's ecological writings to an intellectual distrust of Soviet Marxism does not, however, adequately account for the broader conditions – famously described by Foucault as the discursive 'rules of formation' – that enabled this to happen (p. 89). In this respect, Saito's dismissal of Weber's 'genealogical' attempt to offer a 'cultural explanation' for productivism (Weeks, pp. 40–41) – an effort subsequently developed by Baudrillard, Federici, Weeks, and others – is a serious shortcoming, ensuring that he does not fully account for the role of ideology in enabling productivism to pollute interpretations of Marx. Federici's description of how Marx's narrow focus on political economy limited his proposed postcapitalist strategies of resistance is relevant here – implying that without acknowledging the diverse means through which productivism has gained social ascendance, our proposals for countering it will necessarily be inadequate.

New directions in criticism

What, then, are the implications of this for literary and cultural critics? Clearly, to begin with, these recent redevelopments signal the validity of Klaus and Rignall's initial suggestion that 'the social and the ecological agenda' need to be 'thought through together'. At the same time, they also point towards some significant indications as to *how* this might be done in the present. First, the steep rise in studies emphasising the environmentally destructive effects of growth reinforces the need (already articulated by Klaus and Rignall) to present degrowth as the focus point in such inquiries. Second, Federici, Weeks, Hester and Srnicek's contributions indicate the importance of attending to the gendered dynamic of productivism when doing so. Third, Benanav and Saito's interventions serve as a warning against envisaging Promethean solutions when theorising possible avenues of resistance. Fourth, postdevelopment accounts (reinforced by Saito) indicate the need to underline the disproportionate role of the Global North in facilitating a growth agenda, together with the significance of Global South alternatives. Fifth, and perhaps most importantly, Saito's account warns against naïvely characterising such a project as antithetical to Marxism. And lastly, sixth, Saito's dismissal of the broader social and cultural causes that have enabled productivism to advance reminds us of the vital importance of foregrounding these determiners.

Taken together, these recent developments may be seen to indicate the urgent need (from an environmentalist, feminist, socialist and developmental standpoint) for criticism that addresses and resists productivism, while steering clear of promoting Promethean alternatives – and at the same time acknowledging the compatibility of this project with Marxism, together with the broad social and cultural basis of productivism.

While not necessarily fulfilling all of these criteria, what follows is a select account of recent literary and cultural studies that take significant steps in this direction by addressing the negative effects of growth, in particular by excavating neglected examples of anti-productivist resistance within the cultural domain.

The first of these is Roberto del Valle Alcalá's *British Working-Class Fiction: Narratives of Refusal and the Struggle Against Work* (2016), a study that challenges 'the traditional vindication of labour by the working-class movement' by developing an *operaismo* approach concerned with identifying within post-war working-class novels 'a logic of negativity and "impotentiality", of radical passivity and capacity to *not do*, to abstain – either militantly or evasively, joyfully or traumatically – from the socially structured injunctions of capitalist work' (pp. 3, 7, emphasis in original). Alastair Hemmens's *The Critique of Work in Modern French Thought: From Charles Fourier to Guy Debord* (2019) similarly adopts a *Wertkritik*-inspired approach (following Postone in emphasising Marx's 'radical critique of the labour form') in developing an account of the 'singularly rich' French intellectuals who, in Hemmens's view, surpass other anti-work thinkers in staging a '"categorical break" with the ontology of labour' (pp. 15, 1, 32). Abigail Susik's *Surrealist Sabotage and the War on Work* (2021) makes the related claim that among surrealism's 'most intransigent demands were its overarching attack on the ubiquity of paid labour in modern life, its call for the total abolition of waged conscription, and its declaration of an ongoing "WAR ON WORK"', which she suggests functioned less as a 'social critique' and more as 'part of a passionate struggle to ensure the survival of emancipatory art practices and communities in a world that increasingly devalues the role of art in favour of a totalising life of work' (pp. 1, 14). Adam Bridgen's contribution to *Romantic Environmental Sensibility: Nature, Class and Empire* (2022) – an essay collection that seeks to establish links between the 'Romantic turn to nature' and the environmental 'catastrophe that we are facing today' (Tee, p. 7) – argues that the eighteenth-century poet James Woodhouse represents 'the emergence of a labouring class ecosocial sensibility' for his assessment of 'ways in which the ascendance of capitalist ideology not only led to the exclusion and impoverishment of working people, but also severely degraded the environments they relied upon' (p. 175). Lastly, my own study, *The Tramp in British Literature, 1850–1950* (2022), explores 'a neglected strain' of British fiction and life writing that celebrates the tramp's 'apparent failure to contribute to the welfare and wealth of the population' through work – in the process promoting 'a radical anti-productivist agenda' (pp. 326, 53, 317).

What, it might be asked, is the specific value in excavating instances of degrowth resistance? And how might these accounts contribute to the current effort to combat productivism's deleterious effects upon the environment, women, workers and the Global South? Building on his scepticism towards depictions of the emancipatory potential of automation, while also echoing Saito's distrust of Promethean post-capitalism, Benanav has argued that if 'neither technological advancement nor technocratic reform leads inevitably to a post-scarcity world, then it is only the pressure of social movements, pushing for a radical restructuring of social life, that can bring it about' (p. 95). As if responding to this claim, Susik suggests that ‘the flourishing present-day discourse of work critique stands to gain significant insights from [. . .] under-acknowledged’ social and cultural movements (such as surrealism) for the reason that they function as key examples ‘of protest strategy against the economic coercion of humans into a life of value-production’ (p. 14). The combined suggestion that only a social movement can save us and that previous cultural movements are the best available blueprint offers a clear justification for the critical project undertaken by the above authors.

To return to the starting point of this essay, it should be noted that as well as acknowledging the risk of succumbing to productivist bias when studying socialist fiction (Klaus, 1982, p. 1), H. Gustav Klaus’s edited collection, *Tramps, Workmates and Revolutionaries: Working-Class Stories of the 1920s* (1993), was among the first attempts (if not the first) to excavate cultural works operating outside of a traditional work-oriented framework (p. 4). The developments described above indicate both the prescience of Klaus’s work and the urgent need for further efforts along these lines.

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