

OF FACTORY GIRLS AND SERVING MAIDS:  
THE LITERARY LABOURS OF WORKING-CLASS WOMEN IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

by

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For dad

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## ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the political and formal aspects of poetry written by working-class women in England and Scotland between 1830 and 1880. I analyse a poetic corpus that I have gathered from existing publications and new archival sources to assess what I call the “literary labour politics” of women whose poetry encounters, represents, and reacts to socio-historic change. The poetry of working-class women sheds light on the multidimensional intersections between poetry *about* labour and poetry *as* labour. I show that British working-class women writers were essential in the development of a working-class poetic aesthetic and political agenda by examining how their poetry engaged with European politics, slavery, gender inequality, child labour, education, industrialism, and poverty. The first section surveys the political and formal nature of the poetry written by working-class women immediately before and during the Chartist era to argue that gender complicates the political rubric of the working class during a period of intense social upheaval. I discuss the poetry of women who were published in James Morrison’s *The Pioneer*, as well as E.H., F. Saunderson, Eliza Cook, “Marie,” and Mary Hutton. I read their poems against those written both by eighteenth-century working-class women writers and male Chartists to illuminate the intervention of nineteenth-century women in these literary and cultural contexts. The second section interrogates the politics of working-class women’s poetry published after the dissolution of the Chartists in 1848 through a discussion of two pseudonymous “factory girl” poets, Fanny Forrester, and Ellen Johnston. I argue that even as working-class women’s poetry increasingly engaged with broad social issues, it also reflected the continuing importance of poetry itself as a means of individual empowerment and worked against the prose tradition to argue for the unique possibilities of poetic expression. The thematic and formal complexity of the poetry of these working-class women allows us to assess the various poetic strategies they developed to respond to the urgent and vexed issues of social reform and personal and national relationships, as they articulated poetic and personal identities as women labouring poets against a society not attuned to their voices.



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## CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION.

[...] the creative genius which makes the poet, seems as likely to come from the field or factory as from the abodes of learning. That power which belongs to true poetry—the power of evoking sympathies, calling up passions and emotions, and with a few bright, glowing words making the heart throb and the brain teem with the creations of thought and the phantoms of memory—mere cultivation and learning does not seem able to confer. In respect to that, the taught and the untaught are about equal. It is an individual power. In short, we mean to say, that poets are born, and not made.

“Passable Poetry.” *Eliza Cook’s Journal* 224 (13 August 1853): 248.

I may not sway the multitude  
With witchery, wild and strong;  
But here, amidst my solitude,  
I weave a hopeful song.  
I am content with these my powers,  
With these my lowly deeds,  
Rememb’ring, He who formed the flowers  
Hath also made the weeds!

- “Marie,” “My Mission” (1850)

### *“Weaving a Hopeful Song”: The Politics of Working-Class Women’s Poetry*

During the fall of 2007, I journeyed to Manchester, England, with a single purpose: to discover (and recover) the poetry of working-class women in Victorian Britain. More often than not, however, I was met with scepticism from archivists, librarians, and historians as to whether such poetry even existed. The following study is the product of the rewarding, and sometimes surprising, discoveries I made during my three months in the archives of Cottonopolis, as Manchester was often known in the mid-1800s.<sup>1</sup> Not only did I find a substantial amount of poetry written by working-class women, but I also identified a large number of poems written about the industrial revolution.<sup>2</sup> As a result, I have chosen to examine how working-class women poets between 1830 and 1880 actively respond to the changes brought about by

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<sup>1</sup> In the mid-1800s, Manchester was known to many as “Cotton City” or “Cottonopolis.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* shows that the term was first used in 1851.

<sup>2</sup> For reference, I have provided Appendix B: a collection of the poems by the working-class women whom I discuss in this study.

industrialism—changes surrounding factory legislation, child labour, slavery, poverty, religion, familial relationships, and discourses of nationalism and internationalism.

This dissertation is the first book-length investigation of the politics of working-class women’s poetry from nineteenth-century England, Scotland, and Ireland. In theme, language, form, and purpose, Victorian working-class women’s poetry was political, taking aim at the social changes wrought by industrialism. This claim is bolstered by Michael Sanders’s study, *The Poetry of Chartism* (2009), in which he charts the “conjunction of aesthetics and politics effected by the Chartist movement” and asserts that “the political and aesthetic are not just closely related concepts but are thoroughly imbricated practices” (2-3). Consequently, I focus specifically on the politics of working-class women’s poetry: how these women encounter, represent, and react to socio-historic change. As I will show in subsequent chapters, working-class women participate in the mobilization of working-class politics, and their poetry heightens the contradictions of what it meant to be a woman, and working class, and a writer in the nineteenth century. Like the Chartists, Victorian working-class women poets used both traditional and innovative poetic themes and forms to participate in discourses of social reform. Their poetry provides a fascinating glimpse into the imagery and literary modes that are most salient to representations of working-class life.

### *Framing Working-Class Women Poets*

Throughout this dissertation, I analyse the poetry of women who were either themselves labourers or writing from positions *as* working-class women—the cohering

element is *labour*. By defining these women under the rubric of “labouring,” I thus have the potential to include a wide range of working-class women including (but not limited to) seamstresses, factory workers, domestic servants, colliers, shoemakers, agrarian labourers, and cottagers.<sup>3</sup> I examine poetry that is extant solely in the radical periodical press, as well as poems from a handful of full-volume works. Specifically, I explore the poetry and politics of the women who published in James Morrison’s *Pioneer*, in addition to E.H. (a factory girl from Stalybridge) and F. Saunderson (a female cottager), who both published in the foremost Chartist periodical: *The Northern Star*. In later chapters, I discuss Mary Hutton, two anonymous “factory girl” poets, Fanny Forrester, and Ellen Johnston. My study, regrettably, does not discuss women of the lower classes who were prostitutes, thieves, or mendicants, in part due to the unavailability of their texts.<sup>4</sup> I also do not discuss dialect poetry in detail given the regionalism of dialect poetry and the specificity of dialect as a literary convention.<sup>5</sup>

My project discusses women who seem to be engaging in some way with the social landscape of the 1830s through the 1880s. It is not my intention in using the label “working-class women poets” to reduce the diverse experiences of women across the strata of the very broad “working class.” Neither is it my intention to suggest that

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<sup>3</sup> I delimit my subject by drawing on Florence Boos, who states in her *Anthology* that she does not want to “impose overdetermined notions of ‘working class’”; instead, she considers “little-regarded poetry by Victorian women whose more affluent contemporaries would probably have said lived ‘in humble circumstances’” (30).

<sup>4</sup> Given Henry Mayhew’s social survey of the conditions of the London working class in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851), and especially because of the fourth volume, which deals with prostitution, crime, and beggary in London (1861), perhaps this is a study that still needs to be done.

<sup>5</sup> One could write an entire study on dialect poetry alone. While dialect poetry is another field that is in need of critical attention, to stay within the scope of this project I am more than happy to leave dialect poetry in the hands of more capable scholars such as Brian Hollingsworth, Larry McCauley, Maidment, and Boos.

*all* working-class women poets in Victorian Britain wrote political poetry. Within the multiplicity of working-class women's voices, I have chosen to discuss the specific ways in which these poets grapple with some of the major issues of the Victorian era—child labour, industrialism and poverty, slavery, gender inequality, and even European affairs of state. Ultimately, I argue that through their poetry Victorian working-class women poets were involved in a continual process of redefining what it meant to be working class, a woman, and a poet.

The work that most influences my own thinking is Sanders's *The Poetry of Chartism* (2009). In a study of Victorian working-class women's poetry, Chartism is the most logical place to begin because of its literary articulations of the desire for political emancipation and its historical influence and poetic legacy as a subgenre of nineteenth-century poetry. However, Sanders's groundbreaking study of the poetry published in *The Northern Star* deals almost exclusively with male poets.<sup>6</sup> Thus this study fills a gap in the history of working-class culture and finds a place for working-class women in Sanders's definition of Chartist poetry, "a form of resistance undertaken in the name of an emancipatory project" (*Poetry of Chartism* 46).

Helen Rogers, Jutta Schwarzkopf, Dorothy Thompson, Barbara Taylor, Sally Alexander, and Anna Clark, in their important historical studies of the gendering of radical politics, have done much to illuminate the ways in which women played an active and crucial role in Chartism.<sup>7</sup> Working-class women vigorously supported the Ten Hours Movement, as well as pushed for factory reform and living wages. Women

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<sup>6</sup> Sanders does not ignore working-class women; the fact is that *The Northern Star* published only a handful of poems by working-class women. Sanders discusses both E.H. and the author of a poem called "Beauty's Tear," as well as the representations of women in Chartist poetry.

<sup>7</sup> For Barbara Taylor see especially 264-65, 266-8. See also J. Humphries.

were actively involved in organizing Chartist schools and Sunday schools and female Chartist organizations in Birmingham and Lancaster, as well as the Female Political Union, based out of Newcastle Upon Tyne (whose manifesto was published in the 2 February 1839 issue of *The Northern Star*) solidified women's involvement in the movement.<sup>8</sup> Chartism provided an open examination of *all* oppressed peoples, and thus, for women, notes Dorothy Thompson, "represented a challenge to orthodoxy in the area of women's rights as well as of the suffrage" (151).<sup>9</sup>

Like the poetry of the Chartist movement, working-class women's poetry also negotiates the "interplay between the aesthetic and the democratic" (Sanders, *Poetry of Chartism* 28). Sanders asserts that "Chartist poetry constitutes both a distinctive form of agency and a unique form of historical knowledge," which he terms the "Chartist Imaginary" (*Poetry of Chartism* 21-22). However, while he documents the realm of the Chartist Imaginary, which "both underpins the agency enjoyed by, and constitutes the unique form of historical knowledge embodied in Chartist poetry" (*Poetry of Chartism* 26), I have found no unifying working-class women's historical knowledge, but instead a multiplicity of women's voices.

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<sup>8</sup> The Glasgow *Chartist Circular* advocated women's rights, and "a general commitment to the inclusion of women in the suffrage and the improvement of women's education can be seen to have been accepted by most radicals" (D. Thompson, *The Chartists* 150). In his *Address to the Women of England*, John Watkins writes: "[s]o far from being excluded from taking part in politics, women ought to be allowed to vote; not wives—for they and their husbands are one, or ought to be as one—but maids and widows" (qtd. in D. Thompson, *The Chartists* 125). Furthermore, Thompson notes that "women [were] trusted supporters of the movement," and that they often continued fighting for the Chartist cause while their husbands were imprisoned (142). Women were an integral part of the Chartist movement; in his draft of the charter, William Lovett had originally wanted to extend the movement to female suffrage but thought it might slow progress of male suffrage and so removed it.

<sup>9</sup> E.P. Thompson writes, "The twenty years between 1815 and 1835 see also the first indications of independent trade union action among women workers" (454). John Wade, commenting upon a strike of 1,500 female card-setters in the West Riding in 1835, pointed out the dangers of female political activity: "Alarmists may view these indications of female independence as more menacing to established institutions than the 'education of the lower orders'" (qtd. in E.P. Thompson 454).

*The Literary Labours of Working-Class Women*

My dissertation is predicated upon a few key questions: how is poetry an appropriate mode through which working-class women can imagine socio-historic change? Moreover, why did working-class women in Victorian Britain, like many Chartist writers, choose to share this experience of change through poetry? But first, how does one define poetry? In 1835, Alexander Smith offered the following “distinction between poetry and prose.” He writes,

words of precisely the same grammatical and verbal import, nay, the *same words*, may be either prose or poetry, according as they are pronounced without, or with *feeling*; according as they are uttered, merely to inform or to express and communicate emotion. “The sun is set,” merely taken as stating a fact, and uttered with the enunciation, and the tone in which we communicate a fact, is just as truly prose, as “it is a quarter past nine o’clock.” “The sun is set,” uttered as an expression of the emotion which the contemplation of that event excites in a mind of sensibility, is poetry; and, simple as are the words, would, with exceptional propriety, find place in a poetical composition. (qtd. in Bristow, *The Victorian Poet* 45)

Smith relies on *tone* and *sensibility* to distinguish prose from poetry. The *Oxford English Dictionary* introduces metre into the equation, and states that the “expression of feelings and ideas [in poetry] is given intensity by the use of distinctive style and rhythm, [...] traditionally associated with explicit formal departure from the patterns of ordinary speech or prose, e.g. in the use of elevated diction, figurative language, and

syntactical reordering” (“poetry, n.2.a”).<sup>10</sup>

For working-class women, poetry provided an outlet for these “feelings and ideas,” a way to be heard in a world that was deaf to the lower orders. It also presented an alternative to conventional means of expression and uses of language, which (may) have already failed, especially in the context of political and social change. According to Florence Boos, working-class women’s poetry is characterised by both “expressive power” and “urgency,” each an effect of these women’s associations with many forms of “imaginative expression,” as well as “their desires to commemorate personal loss and grieve for the dead, their own children among them; and their need to reflect on larger moral or political dilemmas they found disturbing, even insoluble.” Most importantly, they wrote because “they had something to say” (“We Would Know Again the Fields” 328).

If, as Boos suggests, working-class women poets demonstrate an innate and pressing need to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings, the poets I discuss here are no exception. I am specifically interested in the ways in which these women express their *political* feelings and ideas through poetry. They write of both the universal and the individual human experience amidst great social upheaval. They also discuss wide-ranging subjects; for example, over the course of her three volumes of poetry, Mary Hutton: (1) vociferously protests the Poor Law Amendment Bill of 1834, (2) offers a heart-wrenching portrayal of the child sweep and the American slave, and

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<sup>10</sup> However, the distinction between poetry and prose fluctuated throughout the long nineteenth century, and the emergence of cross-genre literature complicates these definitions. See Margaret Stetz, especially her mention of William Blake and Christina Rossetti’s “genre-bending” texts (620). Stetz notes that in the 1890s, “the seemingly inflexible laws of genre began to give way” (619).



(3) challenges nineteenth-century gender conventions and marriage laws.<sup>11</sup> I will discuss the varied ways in which working-class women poets speak to the endemic problems of—and their personal encounters with—the cultural climate of nineteenth-century Britain.

Second, why did working-class women write poetry and not prose fiction? If critics such as Elaine Showalter take it as a given that middle-class women writers were “excluded by custom and education from achieving distinction in poetry, history, or drama,” and “defin[ed] their literary culture in the novel” (4), if as Nancy Armstrong hypothesizes, the novel articulated “common forms of social behaviour with the emotional values of women” (29), and finally, if prose was a safer option than poetry,<sup>12</sup> why did working-class women choose the latter in their literary endeavours? On a practical level, one could assume that poetry is a more pragmatic genre than prose given nineteenth-century working-class women’s domestic and employment responsibilities. Poetry is more conducive to compact composition (and periodical publication) because it generally contains a single thought rather than a more developed narrative. Also, labouring women would not have had the leisure to sit and write for hours on end, a claim substantiated by the fact that few working-class women in the nineteenth century published prose fiction.<sup>13</sup>

In its mobilization of gender, writing, and class, political writing constitutes an

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<sup>11</sup> See my discussion of Hutton in chapter four.

<sup>12</sup> In their introduction to *Shakespeare’s Sisters* (1979), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss Virginia Woolf’s belief that “novel writing is a useful (because lucrative) occupation,” and that it was seen as “less intellectually or spiritually valuable than verse-writing, of all possible literary occupations the one to which European culture has traditionally assigned the highest status” (xx). But as their collection essays shows, women wrote (and write) poetry, despite “patriarchal social strictures” (xv).

<sup>13</sup> Mary Hutton and “Marie” are exceptions, but their prose is still only short-story length.

agency unique to working-class women poets. Through language, poetry afforded both practical and imaginative possibilities: the promise of literacy and learning and a world beyond the drudgery of physical work—an imaginative kingdom that valorised a new kind of labour.<sup>14</sup> Poetry also offered the working-class woman poet an outlet for (figuratively) reshaping the world around her, and gave her control over literary labour in a way that she did not have control over industrial labour.<sup>15</sup> Sanders has argued that “the particular skills fostered by the writing of poetry may have played a vital role in the development of the Chartist movement” (*The Poetry of Chartism* 7). These same skills—literacy, control of both metre and subject matter, and an understanding of aesthetics—afforded the working-class woman poet a new vocabulary for envisioning the material world.

#### “Literary Labour Politics”

Many of the women in this study acknowledge their peculiarity as poets in Victorian society. As I suggest above, they often saw poetry as a way to raise their social standing. In “The Factory Poetess,” Ruth Wills<sup>16</sup> describes how books allowed her access to the class above:

Thrown by circumstances among uncongenial fellowships, it has been through the medium of books alone, and especially of books of poetry, that I have been able to cultivate the society of the wise and good, of the learned and refined.

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the latter, see chapters five, six, and seven.

<sup>15</sup> While she still may not have control over the publication of her poems, she had control over her literary production.

<sup>16</sup> Originally published in *The Working Man* (5 May 1866): 282-83. Wills had been employed in a hosiery factory since the age of 11. For a biographical sketch, see the introduction to Wills in Boos’s *Anthology* (219-23).

Shut out from the circle of taste and intellect by my lowly position, I am fain to think that I have enjoyed more than an equivalent in communing through their writings with the star-bright children of literature and song. (Boos, *Anthology* 234)

Wills sees poetry as a way to elevate her position in society and “commune” with the literary and social world. Indeed, working-class women poets seem cognisant of the influence of “canonical” literary traditions. There is evidence of this in their self-conscious literary gestures to poetry, such as in E.H.’s “On Joseph Rayner Stephens” and Ellen Johnston’s “An Address to Napier’s Dockyard.”<sup>17</sup>

For working-class women, poetry served as a cultural litmus test, articulating issues of class, work, and gender. But unlike their more canonical (and middle-class) contemporaries, who drew on “classical and historical literary forms,” working-class women poets developed a literary vocabulary that contained “an alternative register of allusions to folklore, ballads, regional features, historical events, and literary sources more familiar to their working-class readers” (Boos, *Anthology* 17). Those who had something to say about their life circumstances—and those of their working-class brothers and sisters—often did so through poetry. I have termed this articulation “literary labour politics.”<sup>18</sup> By “literary labour politics” I mean: (1) labour literature

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<sup>17</sup> For Saunderson see chapter three. For Johnston see chapter seven. Other “address” poems that I do not discuss in this study include Janet Hamilton’s “The Lowly Song of a Lowly Bard,” Fanny Forrester’s “The Lowly Bard,” Mary Hutton’s “The Sons of Song,” “The Poet,” and “To the Spirit of Poesy”; Milicent Langton’s “The Soul’s Desire,” Ruth Wills’s “The Poet’s Grave,” and Eliza Cook’s “The Poet’s Wreath.”

<sup>18</sup> See Nan Enstad. She discusses American working-class women in a later era, but her argument about working-class women’s political subjectivities is salient nonetheless. She writes of the 1909 Shirtwaist Strike, “existing ideals of what a political subject looked like obscured working ladies’ identities,” but that “[b]y occupying the arena of labor politics through a mass strike, [women] demanded a voice” (86).

(poetry *about* labour; for example, Fanny Forrester's "Strangers in the City"),<sup>19</sup> and (2) literary labour (poetry *as* labour). Sanders's "two discrete levels of [poetry's] political agency"—(a) the "discrete interventions in specific political debates," and (b) the "total qualitative transformation of consciousness wrought by poetry" (13)—roughly correspond to my differentiation between the working-class women poets' "literary labours." The first falls under the category of social reform literature, as it demands a fresh look at industrial working conditions. In order to illustrate how I read the latter, I turn to "Marie"'s "My Mission," an excerpt of which forms the epigraph for this introduction.

Through a fusion of organic and labour imagery, "Marie" oscillates between subversion and convention: of gender, of class, and of genre. She treads a line between humbly acknowledging her limitations and being the agent of her innate poetic gift. She first notes the "noble destinies" and "god-like deeds" of, presumably, the great poets (5-6). The iambic tetrameter form casts a certain tranquillity and symmetry over the poem. It shapes "Marie"'s denial of agency: she is "a pebble, gently cast / Into this ocean-tide" (25-26). To further (devalue) her power, she describes her "destiny" as "low" (16), concedes that she "may not sway the multitude" (1), and states that she is "content with these my powers" (58). However, she affords herself a subtle but potent role in the world, determining that "There is a 'mission' then for me, / Though humble, yet divine" (38-39). She positions herself as a subject of celestial will, declaring that "O'er common things and common ways / A holy halo sheds" (50-51).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See chapter six.

<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in "To the Spirit of Poesy," Mary Hutton asks: "Say, wilt thou condescend, / Spirit of Poesy, / To be my chosen friend" (1-3). She entreats poetry,

“Marie” explains that her power lies in her ability to “weave a hopeful song” (57).

These three words—“weave,” “hopeful,” and “song”—embody what I see as the “literary labours” of working-class women. The word “weave” conjures an image of the female factory poet (here “Marie”) who not only works the loom to weave cloth, but also deftly handles the warp and weft of verse. “Marie”’s poem offers a challenge to the critical understanding of the relationship between manual and literary labour. The metre of the phrase “weave a hopeful song” echoes the back and forth motion of the shuttle. Both types of weaving are irrevocably linked, and as I will show—for many working-class women poets—one labour is predicated on the other.<sup>21</sup> In the word “hopeful,” we have an indication that “Marie” sees poetry as a potentially positive force.<sup>22</sup> Thus hope, or “the capacity to imagine things other than the way they are, makes poetry an incarnation of the process of becoming” (Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism* 14). While not all of the working-class women poets I discuss write particularly “hopeful” poems,<sup>23</sup> it is hope, or the absence of hope, that defines their political poetry. Finally, the word “song” registers the long tradition of music in work and popular culture. If one reads much of working-class women’s poetry as a formal extension of oral and ballad traditions, then the influence of popular songs, ballads,

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Oh bear me on thy wings,  
Celestial maid so bright,  
That from deep living springs,  
I may drink those sweet bright things,  
That beauteous visions brings,  
From lands of love and light. (11-16)

<sup>21</sup> The conflation of physical labour and poetry is especially apparent in my discussion of the “factory girl” author of *Poetic Thoughts in Working Hours* (chapter five) and Ellen Johnston (chapter seven).

<sup>22</sup> In *The Poetry of Chartism*, Sanders discusses Cauldwell’s belief in the “utopian function” of poetry “—like all art, it offers a momentary glimpse of a better world” (*Poetry of Chartism* 14).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, my discussion of Forrester in chapter six.

and hymns on working-class women's poetry is readily apparent. Indeed, many of these poems have a hymnal quality about them; like "Marie"'s "My Mission," they highlight both the topical and formal influences of religion and song.<sup>24</sup>

My brief reading of "Marie"'s "My Mission" illustrates my approach to the poems in this dissertation. I will attend to both formal and thematic elements of the poems I discuss to show that the two cannot be treated separately. Throughout this study, I take into account the ways in which working-class women poets use "literary labour politics" to shape their poetry. I see labour as a type of praxis that lends itself to the production of working-class women's political poetics. I argue that working-class women poets use labour as a natural wellspring that justifies literary production.

*"Directing Progress": The Political Poetics of Working-Class Women Poets*

Until now, I have said little about the overtly political aspects of working-class women's poetry. The following section discusses my reasons for choosing my particular topic and traces the critical history of Victorian working-class women's political poetry. This dissertation, in some ways, begins where Donna Landry's *Muses of Resistance* (1990) ends. My research is in part an effort to disprove Landry's final assertion that "[b]y the end of the [eighteenth] century, the discourse of laboring-class women's verse seems to have played itself out, along with much of the radical democratic energy with which it may often have been allied" (273). I wish to show that there *are* nineteenth-century working-class women who wrote deliberately polemical

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<sup>24</sup> Boos writes, "[n]ew antiphons remind us from time to time that poetry began and flourished in songs, ballads, hymns, dirges, outcries of protest, and prayers of thanks" ("Poetics of the Working Classes" 103). For my discussion of the importance of song, see chapter six.

poems. Landry points to a gulf between 1800 and 1830, during which time working-class women published little literature that was inherently political.<sup>25</sup> She writes that in the Victorian period,

[t]here would be many radical transformations of sexual relations, capitalism, Chartism, Owenism, socialism, and trade unionism proposed by laboring women, and with mixed success, but no longer proposed between the covers of volumes of verse bearing the class-specific signatures of laboring women poets.<sup>26</sup> (280)

Landry asserts that the “newly prized category of working-class writing by 1821 is prose autobiography,” and suggests that the privileging of life-writing supersedes revolutionary verse (276).

While Landry declares that there are no indications of the existence of working-class women poets whose names appeared on the covers of volumes of political poetry after 1830, my research suggests that this is not the case. A perusal of the list of working-class poets collected at the Labouring-Class Writers Project (LCWP)<sup>27</sup> corroborates the existence of such poetry. I have bracketed my own study between the years 1830 and 1880 for the following reasons. First, the LCWP list shows that working-class women were also publishing poetry between 1800 and 1830, but as Landry correctly assumes, it was not inherently political. However, between 1830 and 1880, working-class women published political verse that engages with many of the

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<sup>25</sup> An exception is Jane Yeoman, a working-class woman who published her pamphlet, “Verses on Slavery,” in March of 1826. The pamphlet is housed at the Merseyside Museum in Liverpool. Clare Midgley was the first critic to mention to Yeoman (58).

<sup>26</sup> In her final chapter, she contends that Ann Candler and Elizabeth Bentley are the last of the political plebeian women poets, and discusses what she sees as each poet’s dejection (Candler) or conservatism (Bentley) (273-280).

<sup>27</sup> <http://human.ntu.ac.uk/research/labouringclasswriters/>

“transformations” Landry describes above, and draws on many of the same themes, rhetorical strategies, and literary forms as the women she discusses.<sup>28</sup> After 1880, the tenor of these poems shifts with the rise of the New Woman, and thus requires a new set of critical contexts beyond the scope of this project.

What was specifically *political* about working-class women’s poetry published between 1830 and 1880? As I will show in this dissertation, there are many similarities— in both form and content—between working-class women poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One of the defining characteristics of their poetry is a self-conscious attempt to “direct progress.” I borrow this phrase from Paula R. Bakscheider, who notes, like Boos, that working-class women developed their own specific poetic “vocabulary.” Bakscheider writes that

[s]ome critics have identified idioms common to [working-class women’s] poetry that “point to a broadly disseminated literary vocabulary that connects the history of feminine authorship to radical politics”—and radical politics always includes moral claims. Their poetry often evaluates and attempts to direct “progress.” (9)

Along with Bakscheider, two other critics provide useful discussions of the political aspects of working-class women’s poetry. As I note above, Landry also suggests that eighteenth-century working-class women’s writing was “a form of critical articulation and resistance to oppression”—a particular kind of oppression, I would suggest, that emerges as a result of industrial progress (*Muses* 280). Furthermore, Anne K. Mellor hypothesizes that the “literary tradition of the female poet is explicitly political” (82),

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<sup>28</sup> Anne Yearsley and Hannah More, Mary Collier, Mary Leapor, Elizabeth Hands, Elizabeth Bentley, Janet Little, and Phillis Wheatley.



and presents a number of conventions of this tradition.<sup>29</sup> According to Mellor, the female poet

(a) responds to specific political events; or (b) argues more broadly for wide-ranging social and political reform; or (c) attempts to initiate a social revolution, [...] a redefinition of gender that will ensure equal rights for women. In all these cases the female poet grounds her social analysis on a specific political or religious ideology, one which entitles her to take up the stance of moral judge of the events transpiring around her. (85-86)

Mellor provides Charlotte Smith's "The Emigrants," Hannah More's "Slavery," Helen Maria Williams's *Peru*, Anna Letitia Barbauld's "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven," and Lucy Aiken's *Epistles on Women* as representatives of the female poet tradition.

This dissertation works forward from the end of the eighteenth century and expands the critical understanding of the poetic subjects and forms of working-class women's poetry. I have identified a number of common political subjects with which Victorian working-class women poets engaged. These subjects include: European affairs of state (especially Poland), slavery, gender inequality, child labour, education, industrialism, and poverty. Many of the poets I discuss stand in a position of authority over their subjects as "moral judges" of the exploitation borne out of industrial capitalism. However, as Brian Maidment states in *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, "[p]oetry

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<sup>29</sup> While Mellor's delineation of the female poet is helpful for understanding the tradition of working-class women's political poetry, she also constructs a problematic binary between the female poet and the "poetess." The "poetess," Mellor argues, adopted "the mask of the improvisatrice," insisted on "the primacy of love and the domestic affections to a woman's happiness," and "engaged in extremely subtle rhetorical subversions of and resistance to, the representation of feminine subjectivity as entirely private and domestic" (82). For a more nuanced discussion of the figure of the "poetess," and a correspondingly comprehensive bibliography, see Susan Brown.

may offer release, or consolation, or even a kind of social mobility or localized fame, but it could not offer social resolution or political reform” (98). But Maidment also argues that

[p]oetry was generally regarded as by self-taught writers both as a personally redeeming force for the individual poet, offering consolation, self-expression, the possibility of fame (or, as was sometimes preferred, that of unjustified neglect), or social status, or forgetfulness of pressing material circumstances, *and* as an important social force, heightening moral and aesthetic awareness, spirituality, brotherhood, and love. (186)

He claims that many of the poems that deal with social issues are “pessimistic,” and concludes that poetry exposes but does not resolve social conflict (6).

I agree with Maidment that working-class women’s poetry is as much concerned with individual identity as it is with social reform. In fact, I would argue that this conjunction of the universal and individual is part of what makes their poetry political. Working-class women’s “politics” is fraught with issues of individual subjectivity.<sup>30</sup> These writers not only attempt to critique the broader social problems arising out of industrial progress, but they also continually negotiate their relationship to their own particular historical moment. This continual re-negotiation of subjectivity suggests that working-class women’s poetry is not merely reactive, but that it also actively reshapes the world it describes. My claim is supported by E. Warwick Slinn’s assertion that “[p]oetry reconstitutes or reshapes [...] reality in the very act of reiterating its norms; and the capacity of poetry for referential aberration,

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<sup>30</sup> By “subjectivity,” I mean the poet’s “individuality” or literary identity as it is “expressed” through her literary labours (“Subjectivity n.2.b.” *OED*).

pointing in both directions – both inside and outside itself – draws attention to this double action” (23).

### *Organization of this Project*

The resulting question is how, once situated within the political, Victorian working-class women articulate (express the complexities of) that situation through literary-historical themes, formal techniques, and genre. My analysis of the construction of working-class women’s poetic identities and their negotiation of politics is organized both chronologically and thematically. This study is broken into two roughly chronological sections: 1830-1850 and 1850-1880. These temporal markers serve as a basis for the major thematic divisions of my thesis, including the rise and climax of Chartism, and the development of a broader working-class politics that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

In the following chapters, I set up the literary, historical, and theoretical framework for this study. In Section One, “Working-Class Women Poets and Chartism: 1830-1850,” I begin with an examination of the political nature of the poetry written by women immediately before and during the Chartist era. In chapter three, “Working-Class Women in the Radical Periodical Press,” I discuss working-class women (E.H., F. Saunderson, and “Marie”) who published in Chartist, labour, and trade union journals between roughly 1830 and 1850. Chapter four, “Mary Hutton and the Development of a Working-Class Women’s Poetics,”<sup>31</sup> provides a sustained discussion of Hutton, the wife of a “pen-knife cutler” from Sheffield, who wrote

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<sup>31</sup> An article length version of this chapter will be appearing in the Spring 2011 issue of *Victorian Poetry*.

extensively on problems of poverty, industrialism, slavery, and social inequality. I show how gender complicates the political rubric of the working class during a period of intense social upheaval and attend to the ways in which Hutton's poetry registers the major themes of Chartism.

The second section of my dissertation, "Factory Girls and the City: 1850-1880," interrogates the politics of working-class women's poetry published after the dissolution of the Chartists in 1848.<sup>32</sup> I show how these poets engage with earlier working-class political rhetoric and how their poetics begins to articulate a distinctly female-centred political agenda. Chapter five, "Factory Girls and the Politics of Sympathy," examines two anonymous "factory girl" poets who challenge our critical understanding of the relationship between manual and literary labours. I argue that their poetry raises new issues related to working-class women's subjectivities and literary personae, and suggest that they write against the sympathetic depiction of factory women by middle-class authors. Despite the difficult conditions of factory life, these women show how "labour" is beneficial to their intellectual and moral development. This chapter will, for the first time, present to the critical community a sustained reading of *The Cotton Famine and the Lancashire Operatives. A Poem. By a Factory Girl* (1862).

Chapter six, "Fanny Forrester 'In the City': Irish Identity, Class Communities, and the Threat of the Urban Landscape," focuses on Forrester's rhetoric of industrialism, and will take into account her construction of female poetic communities, and her

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<sup>32</sup> Section two treats more poets because, as Boos notes, "Victorian working-class women began to publish poems in greater numbers in the 1860s, a full generation after their Chartist brothers" ("Nurs'd Up" 138).

argument for the place of music and song in industrial society, as well as her use of religion as an “opiate of the masses.”<sup>33</sup> I also examine her engagement with the discourse of nation, particularly in relation to poetic representations of Ireland and Irish immigrants in Manchester in the middle of the nineteenth century. In chapter seven, “‘I Cannot Speak Like Scientific Men’: The Forms of Ellen Johnston’s Poetic Subjectivities,” I will pay particular attention to the ways in which Johnston shapes a poetic identity through her complex relationship with gender and class, and ultimately argue that she uses the metaphor of *labour* (both maternal and literary) to negotiate her poetic identities.

Throughout this dissertation, I ask how British working-class women writers were essential in the development of a working-class poetic aesthetic and political agenda, and how their poetry participated in contemporary discourses of working-class life, imperialism, and the abolitionist movement. I will also suggest that even as this poetry increasingly engages with broad social issues, through both content and formal aspects, it also reflects the continuing importance of individuality and self-expression, as distinct from the prose of the period. Working-class women poets did not write in a particular linear political continuum, but instead their poetry, which is often both thematically and formally complex, exposes the complexities of social reform, personal relationships, national relationships, and questions of identity.

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<sup>33</sup> See Marx’s introduction to his “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right”: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people” (115).

CHAPTER TWO. THE THREADS OF POETIC (RE)FORM:  
LITERATURE, THEORY, AND HISTORY.

After unearthing a surprising number of Victorian working-class women's poems, I sought to discover why these voices have not yet been heard or analysed in literary criticism. While Chartist and eighteenth-century working-class women poets—Mary Collier, Ann Yearsley, Mary Leapor, Elizabeth Hands, Janet Little, and Phillis Wheatley—share a relatively large critical tradition, the analysis of nineteenth-century working-class women writers is curiously absent. As I noted in the previous chapter, no book-length study of Victorian working-class women poets has yet been published.<sup>34</sup>

While my archival research suggests that they participate in the political debates of the mid-nineteenth century, and expand our understanding of class and gender in the Victorian period, working-class women have been critically marginalized. I will begin this chapter by accounting for the dearth of working-class women's poetry in literary studies, and will then examine the critical history of two closely related subject-fields in literary scholarship, which provide the background for my own study: (1) nineteenth-century male working-class poets, and (2) eighteenth-century working-class female poets. Next, I will provide an overview of the tenets of nineteenth-century working-class literary criticism. I will conclude by situating this dissertation's key

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<sup>34</sup> Boos is currently working on one such project, entitled *The Mediated Muse: Working-Class Women Poets of Victorian Scotland*, which will examine Rural Women's Poetry, Janet Hamilton, Ellen Johnston, Jessie Russell, Lizzie Smith, Jeannie Paterson and Marion Bernstein. Sanders discusses E.H. in his introduction to *The Poetry of Chartism* (2009). Susan Zlotnick includes Fanny Forrester and Ellen Johnston in her book, *Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution (1998)*, and Bridget Keegan briefly discusses "Marie" in the final chapter of *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730-1837* (2008). A sparse number of dissertations have also appeared over the years (Alves, Meehan).

methodological assumptions and frameworks within these theoretical and historical contexts.

In Appendix B, I provide a small but important anthology of the poems that I discuss in this study. I wish to create—as a result of my substantial archival recovery work—a place for the literary production of working-class women in both the radical periodical press and in full volumes of poetry. This anthology is my challenge to the contemporary literary canon, which *still* privileges writers who are white, middle-class, and male, and serves as a supplement to Boos’s *Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Britain: An Anthology*, with few repetitions of individual poems. My archival research will allow critics to read working-class women poets alongside Chartist poets, as well as middle- and upper-class Victorian women writers who entered into the public political arena.<sup>35</sup>

That working-class women have, until the last ten years, been almost invisible in literary criticism is clear, but *why* is this the case? In the introduction to her recent *Anthology*, Boos points to the anxiety in the scholarly community about “the extent to which ‘literature’ as an imaginative construct is or should be independent of the social origins of those who created it” (17). She notes that “studies of working-class poetry—tenuously poised between social history and ‘cultural studies,’ popular practices and ‘canonical’ norms—provide a natural lightning rod for this ambivalence” (17).

Along with ambivalence, working-class poets have faced class-based prejudice, devaluation, or ignorance of their work. In his 1963 study of “Working-Class Poets and Poetry,” in *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850*, Louis James’s evaluative judgement

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<sup>35</sup> Some of these writers include Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Lady Morgan, Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Gaskell, Frances Trollope, and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna.

of working-class writers suggests a reason for their historical obfuscation—by distinctly feminizing the male working-class poets whom he deems “minor,” James suggests that working-class poets—like women writers—are unworthy of comprehensive scholarly research. Working-class women poets thus faced a double silence because of both their gender and their class. James argues that lower-class (male) poets wrote “typically in the minor key of Mrs. Hemans,” and that “[a]bove all they wrote about nature [...] as an escape from the realities of the towns” (172). James’s discussion of working-class nature poetry and radical verse includes *only* a handful of male poets (Elijah Ridings, John Critchely Prince, and Ebenezer Elliott) and generally disparages their work.<sup>36</sup> However, as this dissertation will show, working-class women wrote formally and thematically complex verse worthy of serious scholarly attention.

While male poets were the victims of evaluative criticism like James’s, it may also be the case that scholars ignored Victorian working-class women poets because they were unaware of their existence. Their poetry is often hidden among the crumbling pages of periodicals in local studies libraries. As a result, Owen Ashton and Stephen Roberts’s *The Victorian Working-Class Writer* (1999), for example, almost wholly ignores women writers.<sup>37</sup> Many of the women of the lower classes who did write were factory girls, domestic servants, and agricultural labourers; however, as I discovered during my recovery work in the archives of Manchester, it has long been assumed that these women were incapable of producing poetry. In 1929, Wanda Neff wrote in

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<sup>36</sup> He writes patronizingly of Richard Furness that he “appears to be unique in clinging obstinately to the model of Pope, perhaps because of his isolation in Derbyshire” (171). He claims that these poets are anxious to show that they had a “full poetic education,” and calls this desire “pretentious” (172).

<sup>37</sup> They claim that working-class women writers “were few in number and often remained quite obscure,” and provide only a brief mention of Ellen Johnston (3).



*Victorian Working Women* that in “examining the literature” of women writers “one discovers no mill girl turned author. There were no feminine counterparts [...] of Gerald Massey, a factory boy who became a poet. No woman close to the working life of the mills wrote about it” (86). Neff herself admits that she omits “[s]uch hopeless slaves as the hand-loom weavers and the immortally toiling agricultural labourers and domestic servants” (17), which seems a very convincing reason as to why she found no working-class women authors.

If working-class women poets were all but invisible to the scholarly community between 1950-1970, Chartist poetry *by comparison* benefited from anthologies and some (still inchoate) critical attention.<sup>38</sup> The English translation of the introduction to Y.V. Kovalev’s *An Anthology of Chartist Literature* (1956) incited the scholarly recognition of these poets as a vital part of the Victorian political (and poetical) landscape.<sup>39</sup> The study of the substantial literary corpus of working-class men’s writings in the last two decades has been particularly fruitful.<sup>40</sup> In her article, “The Study of Nineteenth Century British Working Class Poetry” (1971),<sup>41</sup> Martha Vicinus acknowledged the expansion of the canon and proposed that working-class writers “deserve serious attention both for themselves and for the insights they give into

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<sup>38</sup> But, as Sanders notes, the research on Chartist poetry has really only seen a “resurgence” in the past ten years (64).

<sup>39</sup> See Ulrike Schwab’s discussion in *The Poetry of the Chartist Movement* (1-13). Kovalev’s introduction to his *Anthology* was originally published in Russian (Moscow, 1956). It was translated into English and reprinted in *Victorian Poetry* in 1958. While working-class literature studies in English began relatively late, in communist Europe, scholars acknowledged their importance much earlier.

<sup>40</sup> For studies of Chartist and male working-class authors, see Michael Hancher, Stephanie Kuduk, Sally Ledger, Kelly J. Mays’s “Slaves in Heaven, Laborers in Hell: Chartist Poets’ Ambivalent Identification with the (Black) Slave” (2001), Ronald Paul, and Sanders. For a good overview of some of the current trends in the field, see Ruth Livesey.

<sup>41</sup> Expanded in Vicinus’s *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* (1974).

better known writers and movements” (548). Like many of her contemporaries, she highlights the fact that there are few extant copies of working-class poets’ work, and that the discovery of these writers lags behind the shift in the canon. She asks why a change in “social and economic conditions have not brought forth any major working class [sic] poet, and, perhaps more regrettably, have not preserved the good qualities of nineteenth-century working class [sic] poetry” (561). She argues that

[w]hen both sex and poetry can be so thoroughly socialized into existing mores, little that is radically new can be expected. The very ability of the English ruling class—in both politics and literature—to absorb and denature those aspiring from below, has led to an increasing loss of local and submerged cultures different from the dominant culture. (561)

It was 1987 before the existence of working-class women poets was finally acknowledged: Isobel Armstrong declared in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (1993) that “[c]ontrary to common understanding there were working-class women poets, and they are still being discovered” (322).<sup>42</sup>

Despite the recognition by Kovalev and Vicinus, it seems that critical studies of post-1830s working-class poetry did not truly flourish until after the publication of two significant anthologies: Peter Scheckner’s *Anthology of Chartist Poetry* (1989) and Brian Maidment’s *The Poorhouse Fugitives* (1987). Scheckner’s volume reprints much of the verse contained in Kovalev’s *Anthology*, and while it is a valuable resource for Chartist scholars, it contains few annotations and is filled predominantly with male

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<sup>42</sup> According to Armstrong, these women’s texts “tend to have survived because they supported conventional morals, such as the anonymous millgirl who wrote eloquently on the Preston lockout in 1862 but connected working-class well-being with temperance” (322).

authors—further suppressing the incidence of women in working-class literature. Maidment, who provides detailed headnotes, and includes a few female poets (Janet Hamilton, Fanny Forrester, and “Marie”), divides his anthology into five separate sections, thus highlighting the multifarious themes, sub-genres, and issues pertaining to working-class verse.<sup>43</sup> He provides “a complex commentary on how the British poetic tradition might be read—or rather re-read and re-interpreted—in relation to variant emergent senses of class identity” (13).

Maidment identifies his book as a collection of “*self-taught* artisan poets,” intentionally drawing on a “cultural” (rather than political, economic, or geographical) determinant (13). Of relevance to my study are his sections, “The City Observed, the City Repressed: Poems about Manchester” (150-60), which documents poets who “analyse [the city] as an economic and social system” (150), and “The Subject of Poetry” (186-205), in which he provides an indication of the poetic self-consciousness of working-class writers. Maidment’s text was a crucial turning point in the critical understanding of Victorian working-class poetry. He expands the limits of plebeian verse to include more than just Chartist poetry, and in doing so provides a rich source of study for scholars in the field. His work also hints at the possible (re)discovery of more working-class verse. My own research continues the expansion of the field initiated in Maidment’s study, and suggests that the recovery of working-class women is only in its nascent stages.

Nineteenth-century working-class literature (by men *and* women) has been

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<sup>43</sup> The sections are, respectively: “Chartists and Radicals,” “The Parnassians,” “Lowly Bards and Homely Rhymers,” “The Metropolitan Response to Self-Taught Writing,” “The Difficulties of Appearing in Print,” and “The Defense of the Dialect.” Each section contains a number of subsections relating to the larger theme.

marginalized. Like Boos, Ulrike Schwab accounts for the neglect of working-class writing by pointing to its liminal position between history and literature.<sup>44</sup> However, as critics come to terms with the relationship between history and literature, the study of working-class verse is being validated as a scholarly exercise, and new research provides an opportunity to include women poets' voices. With the publication of Sanders's *The Poetry of Chartism* (2009), this eponymous genre has finally received a careful and comprehensive critical analysis. Sanders illustrates the interplay between aesthetics and politics, and shows how the poetry of Chartism is crucial to our understanding of working-class mobilization in the mid-nineteenth century. He provides a comprehensive survey of scholarship about Chartist poets, and argues that traditional scholarship "has tended to concentrate on the work of a handful of 'Labour Laureates'" (66).

Sanders's survey is crucial to our understanding of working-class literature, although he says little about working-class women poets. Perhaps this is not surprising given Anne Janowitz's suggestion that part of the reason for the lack of critical conversation about female labouring-class poets is that Chartist poetry is itself a "masculine form," thus reducing its accessibility to women poets:

Within [the] formulation of a poetic tradition which identifies the voices of the people and those of the great poets writing in English, Chartist poetry in its first years is recognisably martial, impersonal, and, as Isobel Armstrong notes,

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<sup>44</sup> As Sanders also notes, "Chartist poetry has been considered of historical interest (and consequently of marginal importance) by literary scholars and regarded with suspicion by historians due to its status as literary text" (*Poetry of Chartism* 51).

masculinist, using the category of the man as the yardstick of political puissance and solidarity, and noticeably sparse on women poets. (151)

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, Boos has also observed that working-class women were “[g]enerally excluded from ‘working-men’s’ projects and organizations,” and thus they “were also not very likely to be found among Chartist and socialist ‘aristocrats of labor’” (“Political” 138).<sup>45</sup> In her article, “Class and Victorian Poetics,” she comments upon the ways in which working-class women’s verse “has been brushed aside as apolitical and sentimental versification,” but declares that “concrete grounding in oral traditions conferred timeliness and immediacy on their work, and graced their depictions of ‘unimportant’ people’s lives with the flashes of intensity, scepticism, and mordant populist humor” (4). And, unlike other scholars, she also allows for the possibility of latent political material in the writings of working-class women poets, noting that

[t]hese women did, however, attend to their own reformist and sometimes ‘radical’ muses. They defended separate sensibilities grounded in songs and spiritual traditions; in their experiences of (multiple) motherhood; and, most starkly, in the pain and endurance of prematurely severed family ties. (“Political” 138)

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<sup>45</sup> She argues that “[t]he reformist and egalitarian impulses that assimilated these traditions also estranged nineteenth-century working-class poetry later on from some of the paradigms that guided twentieth-century academic taste—l’art pour l’art, symbolism, imagism, modernism, ‘new criticism,’ structuralism, deconstruction, ‘post-modernism,’ and the like” (“Poetics of the Working Classes” 104).

Thus by recovering the long-silenced voices of working-class women's poetry, this dissertation aims to further develop a critical dialogue about the significance of gender within what has traditionally been presumed to be the era's masculinist poetics.

Like the (male) Chartist poets, eighteenth-century working-class writers have also received a substantial amount of attention in critical circles. What is perhaps surprising is that female poets have earned almost as much recognition as their male counterparts.<sup>46</sup> Donna Landry and Moira Ferguson have discussed the ways in which politics underpin eighteenth-century working-class women's verse. In her monograph, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class and Gender*, Ferguson examines the poetic "quartet" of Mary Collier, Mary Scott, Ann Yearsley, and Janet Little, concluding that these women poets refused "erasure," and "refuted eighteenth-century notions of laboring female artists as unfit candidates for a career in belles lettres" (111).

Landry's assertion that the "muses of resistance demand that a new, and feminist, literary history be written from below" (3), has invited further research. Her study of Mary Collier, Ann Yearsley, Mary Leapor, Elizabeth Hands, Janet Little, and Phillis Wheatley spans the years 1739-1796, and provides a glimpse into these women's lives and writings, broadening "our notions of plebian female consciousness" (1). In her book, *Women Peasant Poets in Eighteenth-Century England, Scotland, and Germany* (2003), Susanne Kord argues that the bourgeoisie suppressed working-class art as a means of asserting their cultural dominance. Her interrogation of "the

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<sup>46</sup> However, Robert Burns, Robert Bloomfield, John Clare, and Stephen Duck enjoy a particularly rich critical history. At the time of this writing, the MLA article database lists 247 articles in a search for Clare, 282 articles for Burns, as well as a handful of studies on Bloomfield and Duck. For some full formal analyses of these poets, see John Goodridge's pioneering study, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry*, and William J. Christmas.

processes by which judgements about literary quality are made” (6), paves the way for a discussion of the importance of recovering Victorian working-class women’s poetry.<sup>47</sup>

Considering the tremendous scholarly attention being given to expanding the canon to include both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century working-class writers, it is surprising that only Ashraf and Maidment provide (and very briefly) selections by women poets.<sup>48</sup> John Goodridge’s three volume *Nineteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, 1700-1900* (2005), includes a number of working-class women poets<sup>49</sup> and Boos’s *Anthology* (2008) has introduced readers to the names and histories of Isabella Chisholm, Elizabeth Duncan Campbell, Jane Stevenson, Lizzie Smith, Mary MacDonald McPherson, Janet Hamilton, “Marie,” Ellen Johnston, Ruth Wills, Fanny Forrester, Ethel Carnie, Eliza Cook, Mary Smith, Jessie Russell, Jeannie Paterson and Marion Bernstein. My own research benefits from the work of scholars named above,

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<sup>47</sup> Specifically in her attention to the importance of literary education, patronage, and the pastoral.

<sup>48</sup> There is no female representation in the remaining existing anthologies of specifically Chartist or working-class verse compiled by Kovalev, Scheckner, Haywood, or Maidment. With a few notable exceptions, the pages of available anthologies of Victorian poetry include very few, if any, working-class women poets. *Nineteenth-century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (1996), edited by Isobel Armstrong and Joseph Bristow with Cath Sharrock, includes selections by Charlotte Richardson, Mary Maria Colling, Eliza Cook, Louisa Horsfield, Marianne Farningham, Ellen Johnston, “A Factory Girl,” Ruth Wills, and Janet Hamilton. Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle reprint poems by Eliza Cook in *Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory* (1999); *The Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry and Poetics* (2000), edited by Valentine Cunningham, reprints some anonymous street ballads, as well as selections by Eliza Cook, Ellen Johnston, and Janet Hamilton. Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds’s *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology* (1995) includes selections by Eliza Cook and Ellen Johnston. However, there are no working-class women poets represented in Christopher Ricks’s *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* (1987), nor, surprisingly, in *Victorian Women Poets: A New Annotated Anthology* (2001), edited by Virginia Blain, or in Frances O’Gorman’s *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (2004). Furthermore, the *Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* (2000), edited by Joseph Bristow, contains no entry on working-class poets. Notably, Michael Sanders reprints the “Woman’s Page” from *The Pioneer* in Volume One of *Women and Radicalism* (2001; 167-202), but his three-volume set includes almost exclusively prose selections.

<sup>49</sup> Volume One: Ann Candler, Charlotte Caroline Richardson, Mary Bryan; Volume Two: Mary Maria Colling, Mary Hutton; Volume Three: Mary Smith, Louisa A. Horsfield, Ruth Wills, Janet Hamilton, Ellen Johnston, Fanny Forrester, Jessie Russell.

and this study contributes to the field of Victorian poetry in its specific examination of the politics of working-class women poets, and in its treatment of writers who have not yet been discussed in critical communities, including E.H., F. Saunderson, Mary Hutton, and the two anonymous “factory girl” poets (chapter five). Editors are finally realising the importance of including working-class women poets in their anthologies, and literary scholars continue the process of unearthing and analysing this poetry.

### *Uncovering the Politics Working-Class Women Poets*

How can we categorize and read working-class women’s *political* poetry? Boos describes “four interrelated ways in which one might read politically as well as aesthetically the poems of ten of these Victorian ‘humble rhymers’—self-taught and self-acknowledged proletarian nursemaids, embroiderers, factory workers, farm laborers, midwives, itinerant poets, and ballad writers.” Her four categories are:

- (1) “explicitly political works”;
- (2) “‘personal’ forms of assertion, defiance, and solidarity”;
- (3) “‘deeply embedded’ political verse”; and
- (4) “poems of oral protest”. (“Political”<sup>138</sup>)

The poems in my study fall into the first three of Boos’s categories.<sup>50</sup> The characteristics of the first, “explicitly political works,” include “attack[ing] slavery [and] espous[ing the] independence movements in Hungary, Poland, Italy, and Spain”

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<sup>50</sup> While I categorise the poetry here, I do not exclude the possibility for their works to fall into one or more of the above. The final category “poems of oral protest” could include Mary Hutton and the Lancashire “factory girl” of chapter five, but I suggest that both of these poets are better suited in one the prior three categories.



(139). I place E.H., F. Saunderson, and Mary Hutton in this first category.<sup>51</sup> Hutton's poetry is "explicitly political" because it tackles slavery, supports individual rights and freedoms on both a national and international scale, and challenges gender conventions. Boos defines the second type, "personal forms of assertion, defiance, and solidarity," as "[i]dealistic verse-tributes to the dignity of labour and expressions of pride in their poetic artistry" (142). I include "Marie," the "factory girls," and Ellen Johnston here. Each of these poets finds a way to infuse different types of *labour* into her poetry, whether it is physical, intellectual, or maternal labour. The third category, "deeply embedded' political verse," includes poetry that "*embodied* some of the psychological and institutional constraints under which they 'labored'" (145). In my study, Fanny Forrester is representative of this kind of "deeply embedded" poetics, and in the works I discuss here the oppressive forces of industrial capitalism are clearly visible.

While there are still only a handful of essays about Victorian working-class women writers, those who have chosen to study this growing literary corpus have predominantly read the verse in terms of gender politics,<sup>52</sup> with almost no attention to the interaction between the formal (literary) and political (thematic) characteristics. Margaret Forsyth, Judith Rosen, and Susan Zlotnick read working-class women's poetry in terms of gender. Forsyth allows for a political poetics, but differs from Boos

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<sup>51</sup> Ellen Johnston also writes about national and international issues, including a number of addresses to Garibaldi, but these poems are not my focus in this dissertation.

<sup>52</sup> Along with Boos, a second exception is Robinson, who has examined the political import of working-class women's verse in "Of 'Haymakers' and 'City Artisans': The Chartist Poetics of Eliza Cook's Songs of Labor." Robinson compares Cook's verse to the poetry of the Chartists, and concludes that "in certain instances her poems even exemplify the Chartist ideals to a greater extent than do the works of the male poets traditionally associated with the movement" (230). A comparison of Cook and Hutton's poetry, while outside the scope of this project, would likely prove fruitful.

in her examination of “the construction and contestation of class and gender identities.” She argues that “for working-class women poets, middle-class fears of female sexuality and the imagined excesses of lower-class, working women” compounded the anxiety of the “covert political threat posed by working-class writers” (*‘Too Boldly’* 19). Forsyth also argues that working-class women (Janet Hamilton, Ruth Wills, Millicent Langton, Marianne Farningham, and Ellen Johnston) were excluded from literary history, and that they constructed a “herstory” (260) that was populated by historical female figures.<sup>53</sup> My own research suggests that working-class women were more aware of each other than Forsyth supposes.

Other critics who have also considered working-class women’s poetry specifically in its relation to gender include Judith Rosen, who considers the “strategic affirmation” in Ellen Johnston’s “poetic personae” (207). Rosen aims to help critics to “define less monolithically the ideological force of such concepts as poetic authority, publicness, and female respectability that have been held so harmful to working women’s literary expression” (208). Susan Zlotnick also considers questions of gender; however, her argument for a “Janus-faced” reaction to industrialism in *Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution* (1998) is too reductive.<sup>54</sup> She claims that “working-class literature looks longingly to a mythic past of preindustrial stability and patriarchal harmony” (11), while female writers (such as Fanny Forrester and Ellen Johnston) “embraced the industrial present, either to celebrate it [...] or to critique

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<sup>53</sup> See her essay, “Looking for Grandmothers: Working-Class Women Poets and ‘Herstory,’” which I discuss in relation to Hutton in chapter four.

<sup>54</sup> See also her earlier article version, “‘A Thousand Times I’d be a Factory Girl’: Dialect, Domesticity, and Working-Class Women’s Poetry in Victorian Britain,” as well as her essay on Forrester, “Lowly Bards and Incomplete Lyres: Fanny Forrester and the Construction of a Working-Class Woman’s Poetic Identity.”

and repair it” (223). Zlotnick’s determinate reading of Forrester and Johnston fails to take into account working-class women’s multifaceted responses to industrialism, which I hope to illustrate in this study.

The critic to whom we owe the most debt in this field is Boos. Her provision of the “fragments” of Victorian working-class women’s political poetry offers a succinct way of categorizing the politics of working-class women poets.<sup>55</sup> Her multiple studies of Scottish women poets as well as her research on Fanny Forrester and “Marie,”<sup>56</sup> and most recently her *Anthology*, have revolutionized the way we think about Victorian working-class women poets and have shown us that they, like other writers, struggled to find a voice. My dissertation expands the field by adding new poets to the equation, and providing a *sustained* reading of the form and politics of working-class women’s poetry, and the ways in which “labour” shapes and informs their poetry. This project will examine working-class women’s poetics as both aesthetic products and as political engagements with key nineteenth-century issues.

There is some difficulty in a study such as this. With the absence of biographical and historical record of the lives of many of these working-class women, where does one begin? In my own research, I have discovered that there is an abundance of working-class women whose poetry has yet to be discussed in any detail, including: E.H., F. Saunderson, Mary Hutton, and two anonymous “factory girl” poets, whom I

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<sup>55</sup> See her article “‘Nurs’d up Amongst the Scenes I have Describ’d’: Political Resonances in the Poetry of Working-Class Women” (154).

<sup>56</sup> See “Cauld Engle-Cheek: Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Scotland”; “‘Oor Location’: Scotswomen Poets and the Transition From Rural to Urban Culture”; “The ‘Queen’ of the ‘Far-Famed Penny Post’: ‘the Factory Girl Poet’ and Her Audience”; “‘We Would Know Again the Fields’: The Rural Poetry of Elizabeth Campbell, Jane Stevenson, and Mary Macpherson”; and “The ‘Homely Muse’ in Her Diurnal Setting: The Periodical Poems of ‘Marie,’ Janet Hamilton, and Fanny Forrester.”

discuss in this study, as well as Sarah Parker Douglas (“The Irish Girl”), and Millicent Langton, among others, whose poetry warrants further research.<sup>57</sup> The women whom I discuss are crucial to scholars’ understanding of how nineteenth-century class and gender politics are filtered through poetry. In her *Anthology of Victorian working-class women poets*, Boos outlines one of the sad realities of this type of recuperative scholarly activity:

[o]ne cannot recuperate what no longer exists. The intimate contexts that have these writings life have vanished, and most of the documents that might clarify the lives and publication histories of working-class poets are irrevocably lost. Accidents—of friendship, of regional solidarity--preserved certain texts but consigned others to oblivion, and most manuscripts left uncompleted or unpublished at death were destroyed. (14)

It is difficult to estimate how many texts remain buried in the recesses of archives, but recent recovery attempts have brought forth a substantial number of working-class women poets. Boos also notes that she uncovered the volumes of “about three dozen volumes of poetry” in Glasgow’s Mitchell Library, a boon for literary scholars. The recent studies by Boos, Robinson, Forsyth, Rosen, and Zlotnick demonstrate the necessity of further inquiry into the field of working-class women’s poetry, and critical analysis expands with each new discovery.<sup>58</sup> In the effort to diversify the field of Victorian Poetry, scholars must take into consideration the importance of identifying

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<sup>57</sup> For a full list of the poets and poetry I collected during my time in Manchester, see Appendix A.

<sup>58</sup> See also Patricia Johnson and Susan Alves’s studies of Ethel Carnie. While Carnie published outside of the chronological limits of this study, her poetry is important in understanding the field of working-class women’s poetry.

and discussing new and (in this case) emerging poets of the period, which in turn may lead to critical reflection on why these voices have remained silent for so long.

### *Theoretical Approaches*

My particular critical approach and reading practice owes much to the traditions of Marxism, historicism, formalism, and feminism, especially notions of class conflict and class consciousness (Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, and E.P. Thompson), Althusser's formulation of "Ideology," Jameson's notion of the "political unconscious," Caroline Levine's "strategic formalism," Rancière's "politics of democratic emancipation," and Engels's articulations of class and gender stratification in the nineteenth century. In my discussion of how working-class women poets *themselves* understood the mobilizations of "class," I agree with E.P. Thompson's rejection of purely economic formations, and his understanding of class as a "relationship," and a "social and cultural formation, arising from processes which can only be studied as they work themselves out over a considerable historical period" (10-11).

The many currents of Marxism have at their core a legacy derived from the theories disseminated by Karl Marx's and Friederich Engels's attention to the ways in which social and economic forces shape the relations between "men" in a stratified society.<sup>59</sup> The opening lines of *The Communist Manifesto*, "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles," embodies the Marxist view of social conflict (Marx and Engels 79). In his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx asserts his belief that

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<sup>59</sup> However, Marx's contemporary Engels, whom I discuss later in this chapter, examined gender in relation to class in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884).

[i]n the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production.

The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

(159-60)

He expands the definition of social structure to include “legal, political, religious, aesthetic and philosophic—in short, ideological—forms” (160), but Raymond Williams has discussed the limitations of this definition.<sup>60</sup> Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall explain that Marx saw “social formation” as “the relations of production, or property relations between groups such as capitalists and wage-labourers, and the material forces of production, or means of production,” and historical change as a result of the conflict between “the forces and relations of production” (14-15). Hall and her co-authors suggest that Marxist historians emphasize first and foremost a turn to the “economic base” of a society as “ultimately determinant” (14-16).

While Marxist scholars examine the ways in which economics shape productive relations, literary critics most pressingly turn to the relationship between form and content. In *Criticism and Ideology*, Terry Eagleton faulted Raymond Williams for the “techniques of textual analysis” that he inherited from *Scrutiny* (38), and posited that

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<sup>60</sup> See Williams’s *Marxism and Literature* (75-77).

while the conditions of an author's life determine the *production* of the text, these conditions do not determine the *reading* of the text. More simply, labour may produce the text, but not explain it. As Eagleton writes, "[t]he literary text is not the 'expression' of ideology, nor is ideology the 'expression' of social class. The text, rather, is a certain *production* of ideology" (*Criticism* 64). Eagleton explains how Marx and Hegel both agree that "[f]orms are historically determined by the kind of 'content' they have to embody," and that the Marxist critical tradition builds on this belief (22).

In this dissertation, I wish to show that working-class women's poetry is symptomatic of social change, but that, through their verse, these poets also actively seek to reshape the era's governing ideologies. To understand ideology and the relationship between poetry and politics, I turn to Frederic Jameson, whose exhortation to "Always historicize!" forms the theoretical framework for this study (9). But first, insofar as working-class women's poetry involves the representation of material conditions and the literary treatment of those conditions, I derive my definition of "ideology" from Louis Althusser's concept of *interpellation*, whereby the human subject is always 'constituted' by predetermined structures. In Althusser's view, "[i]deology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162) through *interpellation*:

[t]hus ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects. [...] ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*. (175)

I agree with Althusser that historical and social formations (or *ideology*) provide many of the material conditions in which a text is produced.

In Althusser's definition of *interpellation*, the subject is always pre-constituted, and thus is denied agency. But working-class women poets were involved a process of re-constituting their subjectivities through control over their labours, and thus were also agents. As for their relationship to the texts that they create, I draw a more nuanced conception of the aesthetic text in relation to ideology from Jameson, whose emphasis on agency and historicism better accommodates my approach to working-class women poets:

ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions.

(79)

Thus an aesthetic act, such as poetry, provides such a "formal solution," and can be seen to create alternative realities in the face of those contradictions. Jameson asks how much agency or control we really have in the face of governing ideologies, reading this "unresolvable contradiction" as a precondition of narrative (79), and seeing the text "as a symbolic move in an essentially polemic and strategic ideological confrontation between the classes" (85). Most importantly, Jameson emphasizes the importance of history in a study of the literary, and asserts that critics must follow "the path of the subject, the historical origins of the things themselves and that more intangible historicity of the concepts and categories by which we attempt to



understand those things” (9). Although Jameson deals specifically with prose narratives, I agree with Sanders’s remark that Jameson’s claims for history and his theory of the “political unconsciousness” are particularly relevant to the study of working-class political poetry (*The Poetry of Chartism* 58). Thus working-class women poets wrote out of particular historical conditions, and the world they describe in their verse is representative of those conditions.

The poetic text, however, does not merely reflect material conditions and relations to modes of production, but also actively seeks to shape and change them.<sup>61</sup> Put another way, working-class women’s poetry may be understood through history as both a reflection and an alternate reconstruction of a constituted historical moment. Jameson argues that “[h]istory can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force” (Jameson 102). Sanders sees the individual Chartist poem as “being simultaneously an attempt to make meaning (its ideological/symbolic work) and to create agency (its aesthetic function)” within this historical moment (60). Like Chartist poetry, as working-class women’s poetry undertakes this ideological and symbolic work—an attempt to “make meaning,” or allow for a representation of social change—it simultaneously exposes dominant ideologies and existing social structures.

To further understand the relationship of history, and more specifically politics, to working-class women’s poetry, I turn to the French deconstructionist, Jacques Rancière. Rancière produces an image of politics that is useful for my study, given that I am arguing that working-class women poets were actively participating in

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<sup>61</sup> While it could be argued that prose does the same, poetry is more suited because it is the genre in which working-class women wrote.

political discourses particular to the Victorian age. While he speaks specifically of the French proletariat of the nineteenth century, Rancière's theories are applicable to the British labouring-class, especially his delineations of both *appropriation* and politics. Rancière proposes that nineteenth-century French working-class writers appropriated traditional literary forms for their own purposes and transformed literature from a political instrument of the ruling class into a means of "self-interpretation," which could be appropriated by anyone, even those who contested their liminal position and exclusion from public-decision making ("Politics of Literature" 22). Rancière defines politics thus: "[p]olitics exists when the figure of a specific subject is constituted, a supernumerary subject in relation to the calculated number of groups, places, and functions in a society" (*Aesthetics* 51). Essentially, Rancière argues that politics is a struggle for those who have no place in the dominant order, but who seek to find equal recognition, and that literature enters into this struggle because it creates the image of society that upholds those in power, who dictate what is seen and heard. This "politics of democratic emancipation" presupposes politics as relational. Rancière asks a central question: "from what position do we speak and in the name of what or whom?" (*Aesthetics* 2). The poets in my study write from a particular class position, and in the name of that class. Rancière's question will inform the theoretical perspective of my own study, in which I ask how working-class women's writing functions *in relation* to Victorian political discourse.

*Definitions of "Working Class": Decisions for Inclusion*

But how does one begin to study "working-class" women poets, when the definition of the term "working(-)class" is, like the texts of the women discussed in this study, so elusive? As Williams writes in *Keywords*, even the term "class" is an "obviously difficult word, both in its range of meanings and in its complexity in that particular meaning where it describes a social division" (60). In a study of "class" in nineteenth-century England, where does one begin to define the term if not with E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (a tome that, to many, remains the Ur-text of nineteenth-century labour studies)? Thompson provides this definition:

by class I understand a[n] historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. I emphasize that it is a[n] historical phenomenon. I do not see class as a 'structure,' nor even as a 'category,' but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships (8).

Thompson sees class as a community, and states that "class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs" (9). This definition is, for feminist scholars, problematic, given that it is a study of the relationships of "men." For the most part, Thompson's study overlooks women's role in class politics, stating that working-class women were "confined to giving moral support to the men, making banners and caps of liberty which were presented with ceremony at reform

demonstrations, passing resolutions and addresses, and swelling the numbers at meetings” (456).

In *Keywords*, Williams has defined “class” as either a “general term for any grouping,” or a “specific description of a social formation” (61). I take the latter definition as a starting point, and read “working class”<sup>62</sup> through a Marxist lens, that is, I read the “working-class” “in terms of economic relationships,” a social, political and cultural formation (67). Williams points out that the term “workman” emerged out of the social systems and social divisions of the 1790s (62), but was not solidified until 1818, when Robert Owen published his *Two Memorials on Behalf of the Working Classes*, using the term “working class,” in “the specific and unmistakable context of relations between ‘workmen,’ and ‘their employers’” (64). However, this definition still remains both reductive and problematic, as it continues to privilege a society built upon economics. Nor does it entirely account for competing social formations (gender, or race, for example).<sup>63</sup>

With sometimes-elusive definitions of “class” and “working class” in hand, how was I to decide which texts were definitively written by “working-class” women? In determining the texts to include in my project, how was I to demarcate “working

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<sup>62</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “working class” as the “grade or grades of society comprising those who are employed to work for wages in manual or industrial occupations” and “proletariat” as the “lowest class in society; the poor, the masses.” Yet neither of these definitions encompasses specifically what it meant to be “working class” in Victorian Britain.

<sup>63</sup> Marxist theorists posit a relationship between classes that is built on an economic base. For a further discussion of Marxism please see the theoretical introduction above. Sanders, Dave Hill, and Ted Hankin propose that “the inadequate theorisation of class within Marxism constitutes a fundamental intellectual weakness which it is vital that Marxism addresses [...] that sense of social class as simultaneously a category of analysis *and* a theoretical and political problem which is in process and never finally resolved” (107). They suggest a possible solution: “*What we need to recover is a sense of the complexity of a social class as a multi-dimensional category of analysis which seeks to negotiate the relationships between class as a category of: economic analysis, cultural analysis, individual identification, and political mobilisation*” (107).

class”? What if an author began as a member of one class, and was either raised or lowered by circumstance? Out of necessity, the scope of this project needs to be both wide enough to encompass a variety of professions within the “working class” and confined enough to discuss a group of women writers who could be examined as members of that class, and without the choice seeming arbitrary. Thus I have tried to work within a framework of analysis that includes those women whose social position necessitated some sort of *labour* (material or intellectual), and whose poetry fell within my framework of the “political.”<sup>64</sup>

### *A New Formalist Approach*

Literary formalism and political history are interdependent, and my archival research suggests that in order to understand working-class women’s poetry they *must* be read together. If Marxism seeks to explain the text by examining the ideologies that shaped particular historical conditions, then we can read “Formalism” as opposition to these ideologies.<sup>65</sup> Formalism analyses the inherent structures of a text, such as tropes and syntax, but at the insistence of Wellek and Warren this “intrinsic study of literature” occludes an historical reading of the text.<sup>66</sup> Formalism therefore seems a curious tradition from which to draw upon for my own study of working-class women’s poetry; however, a number of critics have recently offered an intriguing syncretism between Marxism and Formalism, which allows for an historical analysis of

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<sup>64</sup> See chapter one for both a further discussion of my choices, and for my definition of “political” as I use it in this dissertation.

<sup>65</sup> As Terry Eagleton points out, formalism also “betrays the [...] loss of historical meaning” (*Marxism and Literary Criticism* 31).

<sup>66</sup> “The Intrinsic Study of Literature” is the title of part four of their book, *Theory of Literature*.

literary and social forms.<sup>67</sup> Stephanie Kuduk has articulated the possibilities for linking form (poetry) and history (politics). She writes that

the outward movement of interdisciplinary and trans-generic scholarship is also an inward movement, a returning to the formal matters of Victorian poetry.

This return to interdisciplinarity—what Susan Wolfson calls the “formal charges” of poetry—helps us to see the poems we study in new ways, and to ask new sets of questions about them. (515)

Kuduk sees in Victorian poems “a record of how ideas about art—and also about art as a vehicle for ideas about politics, people, and society—percolated through the Victorian world” (516).

Reading “Marie”’s “My Mission” without attending to the biographical and historical contexts of the poem *might* still allow us to reach the conclusion that she participates in a type of “double-weaving,” but would ignore her occupation and also the broader implications of her verse. It would also foreclose the complicated and sometimes fraught interaction between the form of the poem and its historical subject, or the possibility for a poem not only to reflect the world around it but also to reshape it. To clarify, I turn to Caroline Levine’s “Strategic Formalism.” Levine draws

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<sup>67</sup> See also Susan Wolfson and Ellen Rooney for a critique of Formalism and a call for a renewal of the examination of form as part of a “politically aware historicism” (Levine 626). Recently, Stephen Cohen has used the term “historical formalism” for this style of critical analysis. See the introduction and chapter eight in *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*. While Cohen’s collection deals specifically with Shakespearean forms, the implications of historical formalism are applicable to my study:

enmeshed in a web of institutional and cultural as well as social and political histories, literary forms are overdetermined by their historical circumstances and thus multiple and variable in their results, neither consistently ideological nor inherently demystificatory but instead reacting unpredictably with each other and with other cultural discourses. The goal of a historical formalism is to explore the variety of these interactions, mutually implicating literature’s formal individuation and its historical situation in order to illuminate at once text, form, and history. (3)

on Jameson's argument that "historical or ideological subtext [...] is not immediately present as such, not some common-sense external reality," but "rather must itself always be (re)constructed after the fact" (Jameson 81; qtd. in Levine 625). She proposes that literary forms can be "socially and politically forceful," but that they also "participate in a destabilizing relation to social formations, often colliding with social hierarchies rather than reflecting or foreshadowing them" (626). Levine's hypothesis, that "social hierarchies and institutions can themselves be understood as *forms*," expands the relationship between form and content (626). She argues that, rather than reflecting social hierarchies, literary forms can either reinforce or undermine and destabilize them.<sup>68</sup>

If literary and social forms collide, they allow for ideological contradictions and "strategic politics." Rather than trying to pin down the specific *politics* of a particular writer at any given time, Levine indicates how the form of a poem may be *strategically political* in certain situations. Levine suggests that rather than asking whether or not a particular author is radical or conservative—such as some critics have with Elizabeth Barrett Browning<sup>69</sup>—"strategic formalism" attaches itself to questions of the efficacy of form in specific and varied situations. Correspondingly, she writes, "a strategic formalist would ask whether the specific formal tactics [the writer] uses might be

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<sup>68</sup> Levine differentiates between social and literary forms, and argues that if they can be defined as ways of imposing order, of shaping and structuring experience, the cultural critic can attend to conflicts and overlaps not just among race, class, and gender but also among forms of knowledge, forms of narrative, forms of subjectivity, forms of space, forms of circulation, forms of community, forms of worship, forms of administration, forms of intimacy, and forms of thought. (635)

<sup>69</sup> For an overview of this debate, see Levine (fn 15, 654).

particularly effective in political situations where powerful figures are failing to live up to professed principles of justice, fairness, equality and freedom” (647).<sup>70</sup>

### *Marxist-Feminist Critiques*

When we read working-class women’s poetry through a Marxist-Formalist lens, a poem can contain multiple meanings based on the interaction between competing forms as a result of their complexity and disunity. Working-class women did not write in a particular linear continuum (historical situation equals poem), but instead their poetry expressed the complexities of existing literary and social formations—genre, class, and gender. Consequently, an analysis of working-class women’s poetry must also take into consideration the ways in which Victorian definitions of “femininity” inform aesthetic output. Having situated my study within Marxist and Formalist approaches, I now turn to Victorian gender debates, specifically the “doctrine of separate spheres” and its relation to labour, which I will situate within the historical and present-day conversations about Marxist-Feminism.

Contemporary feminist critics still wrestle with the place of gender in Marxism, pinpointing the intersection of class and gender as the primary starting point for critical analysis. But if we traverse the currents of Marxist-Feminism, while also negotiating Formalist and Historical approaches, we come to understand that the

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<sup>70</sup> While socio-historical formations provide the material conditions in which a text is produced, that text does not merely reproduce these conditions. Rather, it also seeks to shape and change them, facilitating an exchange between material conditions and textual production. Thus the marriage of Marxism and Formalism allows for a particularly rich analysis of the poetry written by working-class women in the Victorian era. Levine challenges Marxist critics to “offer forms that could be put to strategic use for an effectively emancipatory radical politics” (647). The collision of social and literary forms, informed by the inherent change in political order, exposes potentially corrupt social formations, imbalances and faulty hierarchies. We can “understand the ways that literary forms have force in the social world and are capable of shaping political arrangements”; that is, we can read working-class women’s poetry as “political,” but under that rubric of “politics” exists a split between the subject (author) and the subject (topic) (Levine 626).



study of working-class women's poetry is no less complex than that of any other literary genre. In an early debate about Marxist-Feminism, Heidi Hartmann argues that "*Marxist categories, like capital itself, are sex-blind*" (11), and depicts Marxist-Feminism as an "unhappy marriage" (1).<sup>71</sup> Zillah Eisenstein contends that "the priorities of patriarchy are to keep the choices limited for women so that their role as mothers remains primary" (16). Eisenstein writes that patriarchy obviates women's control over their "sexuality, childrearing, mothering, loving, and laboring" (14). Hartmann and Eisenstein see patriarchy as the "fundamental source of inequality" (Connelly et al. 59-60). Cora Kaplan documents the split between feminist critics and socialist feminists, arguing that

Socialist feminism interrupted and intervened in a lively debate about class in Victorian Britain that extended across history and literature from the early 1960s through the mid 1980s, by insisting that gender as well as class was a crucial determinant of history and culture, and even more contentiously, when it was applied to the working class, that class was always internally gendered and unequal. [...] ("Fingersmith's Coda" 48)

She proposes a "socialist" feminism that can "come to grips with the relationship between female subjectivity and class identity—which deals with the unconscious process of subjective identity as, at the same time, structures through which class is lived and understood" ("Pandora's Box" 147). Kaplan sees class and gender analysis as transformative, arguing that in order to understand gender, critics must take into account both the psychic and the social, as well as class and race (149-153).

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<sup>71</sup> For a summary of the varying schools of Marxist-Feminism (and Feminist-Marxism) in the 1980s, see Hartmann.

Michèle Barrett furthers this hypothesis by bringing ideology into the equation, suggesting that while Althusser is correct to note that ideology “exists in (material) apparatuses and their practices,” this doesn’t mean that it is itself *material* (91). Like Kaplan, Barrett broadens the term “relations of production” to include gender, race, and differing forms of labour (manual, intellectual, etc.) (94). Both Kaplan and Barrett stress the importance of historicizing social formations, and they have found a productive way of analysing gender and class. They argue that the study of the dynamics between the two should view capitalism as a historically determined system of production that articulates and transforms gender and class respective to social and economic formations.

We must come to understand working-class women’s poetry holistically. This study seeks to find cohesion among Historicism, Formalism, Marxism, and Feminism as a way of understanding Victorian working-class women’s relation to their labour, and the types of agency operating in their poetry. In order to show how this quartet-approach can be useful, it is necessary to examine working-class women’s relation to (re)production.<sup>72</sup> As I noted above, the women I discuss in this study participate in three types of labour: manual (e.g. factory work), maternal (both as mothers and caretakers of the domestic sphere), and intellectual (writing poetry). While each of these poets exhibited their labours with varying degrees of transparency, we can gain a greater understanding of their political poetry by questioning the relationship between working-class women and their work.

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<sup>72</sup> See Hartmann (4).

Middle-class femininity limited women to specifically maternal or domestic labour, but some working-class women poets found a way to authorize their physical and intellectual labours by conflating the three types.<sup>73</sup> Critiques of industrialism often refer to *alienated labour*, in which “the worker is alienated from his tool, from his product, from his productive activity, and from his species-being as such, or in other words his fellow workers” (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 152). Working-class women who wrote poetry had at least some amount of control over their literary production. They used poetry to disseminate their social critiques, and their verse evinces multiple possibilities to represent and reshape history through literature—a type of Utopian impetus, as we see in the case of “Marie,” and the “factory girls” I discuss in chapter five. Jameson has discussed alienated labour in his book, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005), and while this groundbreaking book discusses contemporary science fiction novels, his description of what “non-alienated” labour might look like bears a striking similarity to ways in which working-class women used poetry as a vehicle for social change. In its most Utopian form, poetry offered the working-class women a type of “non-alienated labor”:

a control over the productive process, for example; a share of the product, a solidarity with fellow workers; and perhaps an innovative replacement of the static conception of property implied in the negative description by a new one organized around the experience of process and the categories of collectivity.

(Jameson, *Archaeologies* 152)

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<sup>73</sup> Ellen Johnston is a remarkable example. See chapter seven.

In chapter six, I offer this Utopian impetus at its most hopeless—Fanny Forrester’s poetry betrays the difficulties of superseding oppressive social formations. The working-class women’s relationship to her literary labours was one of her most powerful assets, and poetry offered a means of contesting the ideological forces—with varying degrees of success—that attempted to separate the worker from her work.

### *Working-Class Women Poets: Gender and Work*

There is no question that Victorian society operated on economic hierarchies and inequalities maintained by divisions of labour. Literature participated in both supporting and challenging the imbalance of power in Victorians’ lives, and working-class women’s poetry was no different.<sup>74</sup> By the time Mary Hutton was publishing in the 1830s, thousands of men and women who laboured in the factories lived in destitution and suffered from starvation. The working-class women who wrote specifically political poetry often did so to give a voice to the disenfranchised.

The society that working-class women critiqued in their poetry demanded strict divisions of class and gender. The mid-Victorian era saw shifting notions of gender roles in which Victorian women were subjected to the middle-class ideology of “separate spheres,” which defined and demarcated the bounds of (middle-class) femininity. In *Uneven Developments* (1998), Mary Poovey locates this shift in emerging human rights debates in which “virtue was depoliticized, moralized, and associated with the domestic sphere, which was being abstracted at the same time—both

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<sup>74</sup> Nancy Roberts has argued that “novels [...] teach us to explore the way that [...] structures of feeling serve to produce, replicate, and impose positions of power and gender” (3). It is clear from my research that working-class women’s poetry is no different.

rhetorically and, to a certain extent, materially—from the so-called public sphere of competition, self-interest, and economic aggression” (10). Poovey contends that middle-class women were “superintendents of the domestic sphere, [...] represented as protecting, and increasingly, incarnating virtue” (10).<sup>75</sup>

The changing codes of morality and the demarcation between the sexes ensured that wealth and power remained under upper-class control.<sup>76</sup> The prescribed societal and familial roles for both men and women, and the relations of power these roles engendered, most often placed men at the top of the hierarchy based on the assumption that they were intellectually and physically superior to women. As Susan Bordo notes,

the prevailing ideal of femininity was the delicate, affluent lady, unequipped for anything but the most sheltered domestic life, totally dependent on her prosperous husband, providing a peaceful and comfortable haven for him each day after his return from his labours in the public sphere. (157)

While Bordo invokes the ideas of public and private “spheres,” her depiction of the dichotomised middle-class world illuminates how the Victorian distinction between private and public asserted itself to ensure a structured family unit, which centred upon the maintenance of the home as a site of comfort, peace, and morality.

If women were to keep the home as moral, peaceful, and comfortable as possible, it was likely due to the ubiquitous belief in their innate subordination to men. Mrs.

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<sup>75</sup> Poovey argues that the Victorians perpetuated a “conceptualization of difference as a binary organization of sex,” but she also notes that ideologies of the mid-Victorian period were “both contested and always under construction” (6, 3).

<sup>76</sup> See Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*. Foucault argues that power plays a role in the reproduction and preservation of life, and that the regulation of the body, sex, and sexuality were central to this power.

Sarah Stickney Ellis held strongly to this conviction.<sup>77</sup> In *The Daughters of England*, Ellis instructs women in the areas of beauty, health, temper, love, and courtship, domestic care, Christian virtues, and the dangers of flirtation. She advocates “subordination” as the essential nature of womanhood, telling her readers, “[a]s women [...] the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men— inferior in intellectual power, in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength” (*Daughters* 6). Ellis argues that women are both physically and intellectually inferior to men. With that assumption, Ellis relegates women to their “proper” place in the home:

Can it be a subject of regret to any kind and feeling woman, that her sphere of action is one adapted to the exercise of the affections, where she may love, and trust, and hope, and serve, to the utmost of her wishes? Can it be a subject of regret that she is not called upon, so much as man, to calculate, to compete, to struggle, but rather to occupy a sphere in which the elements of discord cannot with propriety be admitted—in which beauty and order are expected to denote her presence, and where the exercise of benevolence is the duty she is most frequently called upon to perform. (*Daughters* 11)

For Ellis, it is indeed *not* a subject of regret that women were confined to the home; she states that women’s duty is the “exercise of benevolence,” and that women are not meant “to compete” or “to struggle.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ellis was the author of a number of widely read conduct books, *The Women of England* (1838), *The Daughters of England* (1842), *The Wives of England* (1843), and *The Mothers of England* (1843).

<sup>78</sup> There were those in the Victorian medical practices who found verity in the argument for woman’s essentialized nature, furthering gender inequity. Physiologist Thomas Laycock argued for the dual nature of women’s role in society: “The relations of woman are twofold; material and

Middle-class women's roles in the home, however, did not translate to female wage workers and their labour. Ellis's main audience were the women of the middle class—she believed that dressmakers were the “most pitiable class of human beings, whose pallid countenances, and often deformed and feeble frames, sufficiently attest the *unnatural* exertions by which they obtain their scanty bread” (*Daughters* 204-05; my italics). Her decision to use the word “unnatural” to describe seamstresses suggests a belief that women were not meant to work outside the home, a view perpetuated by Coventry Patmore<sup>79</sup> in an article entitled “The Social Position of Woman,” published in *North British Review* (February 1851). Patmore also essentialises women's “social” subordination on the basis of both strength and intellect.<sup>80</sup>

While Patmore and Ellis argued for women's subordination, Harriet Taylor Mill, the author of *Enfranchisement of Women* (1851), and John Stuart Mill, the author of *The Subjection of Women* (1861), carried the torch for the women's rights

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spiritual—corporeal and moral. By her corporeal nature she is the type and model of Beauty; by her spiritual, of Grace, by her moral, of Love. A perfect woman is indeed the most exalted of terrestrial creatures—physically, mentally, morally” (qtd. in Taylor and Shuttleworth 171).

<sup>79</sup> Coventry Patmore did much to disseminate the view of the Victorian middle-class woman as the “Angel in the House.” In his long poem of the same name, which was published in four parts (1854, 1856, 1860, 1862), Patmore continued his assertion that women are subordinate. He famously declares: “Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure” (Book I, 775-76), and describes women as submissive:

Her will's indomitably bent  
On mere submissiveness to him;  
To him she'll cleave, for him forsake  
Father's and mother's fond command!  
(Book II, 31-34)

<sup>80</sup> Patmore writes,

[t]he social subordination of woman to man is a law of nature: it is not a thing that can ever be reasonably called into question. That men have the strongest muscles no one doubts; and it must be almost equally manifest upon reflection, that women are quite as little fitted to become Miltons or Bacons, as to share the laurels with Van Amburgh or Ben Caunt. (276-77)

movement.<sup>81</sup> To many reformers and philosophers, such as Friedrich Engels, the institution of (upper- and middle-class) marriage was responsible for gender inequity, which could only be solved by a reworking of the divisions of labour. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Engels wrote his own critique of marriage in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884). He argues that the development of both private property and capitalism subordinates women in society, and that monogamous marriage was merely “undisguised prostitution” because of its basis in economics (138). He proposes that by marrying, the wife “does not let out her body on piecework as a wage worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery” (134). Engels sees a symbiotic relationship between class and gender, and found the solution of both class and gender oppression in the elimination of both.

Rhetorically figuring marriage in terms of class relations, Engels describes the husband as “bourgeois,” and the wife as “the proletariat.” He foresees a solution to gender and class inequality; to rectify inequity, he argues for the obliteration of oppressive social formations (capitalism), and theorizes that “[w]ith the transfer of the means of production into common ownership, the single family ceases to be the economic unit” (139). Engels thus suggests that if marriage is no longer part of an economic struggle, monogamy will solidify as a result of a sex-love relationship made of “mutual affection” rather than a power struggle (142). Furthermore, he argues that

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<sup>81</sup> A full discussion of Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill’s involvement in the women’s rights movement falls outside the scope of this chapter, but would further contextualize working-class women’s poetry in relation to nineteenth-century gender debates.



husbands had power over their wives because of the restrictions of employment placed on women.<sup>82</sup>

It is important to note, however, that there was a discrepancy in the “woman’s rights” movement between what counted as “rights” for working-class and middle-class women. While those of the lower classes were motivated to work by necessity, middle-class women sought employment as a means of gaining equality with their male counterparts. Patricia Johnson confirms that “Victorian ideas of what a woman’s role should be came into direct conflict with the experience of working-class women, highlighting contradictions that the Victorians were not prepared to confront” (*Hidden Hands* 19). As I will show in subsequent chapters, working-class women’s poetry underscores these contradictions, and illustrates the tension between working-class women’s different *labours*.

The nineteenth century also made working-class women (and men) victims of exploitation in their working environments. From 1800 and on, writes E.P. Thompson, [i]n the mills and in many mining areas these are the years of the employment of children (and of women underground); and large-scale enterprise, the factory-system with its new discipline, the mill communities—where the manufacturer not only made riches out of the labour of the ‘hands’ but could be *seen* to make riches in one generation. (217)

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<sup>82</sup> He writes that

the peculiar character of the supremacy of the husband over the wife in the modern family, the necessity of creating real social equality between them and the way to do it, will only be seen in the clear light of day when both possess a legally complete equality of rights. Then it will be plain that the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, and that this in turn demands that the characteristic of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society will be abolished. (137)

Unmarried women had few options for employment; the four professions most common to working-class women included “domestic service, factory work, street selling and manual labour, and prostitution” (Perkin 174). Many women found work in agriculture, or in domestic positions, employed as seamstresses, lace-makers, straw-plaiters, and servants. By the ages of 5 and 6 (and sometimes younger), many working-class girls were employed apace with their male counterparts as little doffers (changing bobbins on the ginnies), and trappers (opening trap doors in the mines) (Perkin 170-71). For many working-class women, marriage and work outside the home became the only feasible options for survival.

By the middle of the century, women’s work and education became a highly contested and debated subject as the undercurrents of feminism started to draw middle-class women into the public sphere.<sup>83</sup> Joan Perkin explains that

just when middle-class women were agitating for the right to work and enter the male-dominated professions in the late nineteenth century, and bemoaning the legal subordination and economic dependence of wives, many working-class women wished to withdraw from the labour market and stay at home, if their husbands could provide for them. (199)

Working-class women did not “fit” into the paradigm of the middle-class family; their employment necessitated a move away from the home in order to earn wages. Here, a marked shift between middle- and working-class women becomes apparent. Victorian

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<sup>83</sup> Particularly, middle-class writers and reformers took up the debate. For example, see Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh*, Angela Burdett-Coutts *Woman’s Mission*, Josephine Butler’s “The Education and Employment of Women,” Dinah Mullock Craik’s “A Woman’s Thoughts about Women” and “Female Professions,” Eliza Linton “What is Women’s Work?,” Harriet Martineau’s “Female Industry,” and John Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies*. For a modern critical account of the debates surrounding women, work, and education, see Meg Gomersall.

“ladies” were expected to be content with their domestic role. This model, however, did not apply to working-class women. They were often themselves responsible for the well-being of their household as both breadwinners and mothers.

In the years preceding the domination of the factories, work was mostly performed as a family affair, with every member of the family contributing to the finished product, whether blacksmithing, weaving, or food production. As industrial work became the dominant mode of production, family life shifted from rural agrarian to the urban industrial. Working-class families felt this shift more deeply than those in the social strata above, as the changing nature of work had a direct impact on family relations and gender roles. Katrina Honeyman explains that

[d]uring industrialisation, the family changed from a co-operative unit of production where all members contributed flexibly, if not equally, to the survival of the whole, to a structure in which individual functions were more rigidly and hierarchically applied. Adult males assumed positions of authority while women performed supportive, mainly domestic roles. (95)

However, working women also laboured outside the home, in addition to attending to their domestic roles. They were faced with the double burden of supporting their family externally through financial means, as well as performing domestic duties and providing moral guidance. Work carried over into the home such that a woman could work upwards of twelve to fifteen hours in the factory, only to return home to take care of the children. However, for many working-class families, especially in the 1830s

and 1840s, to rely upon the male as the sole breadwinner would result in starvation.<sup>84</sup> And yet women's wages were consistently below fifty percent of their male counterparts in the same occupation.<sup>85</sup> As Perkin notes "the married woman with children was even cheaper and more tractable, as she was in no position to demand better wages or treatment for fear of getting released" (191).

Despite the prevalence of women in industry, the pressure to maintain a safe and unified domestic space demarcated the bounds of "femininity." On 3 October 1846, the Mancunian *Ten Hours' Advocate and Journal of Literature and Art*<sup>86</sup> published an estimate of the number of women working in the factories of Bradford, UK. In forty-two mills, the *Advocate* lists 6,325 girls and women, with 279 under the age of thirteen, and 1,935 between thirteen and eighteen. In the *Advocate's* estimation, of all the females working in the mills, 1,128 were married, while 5,197 were unmarried. There is significance to the *Advocate's* publication of the numbers of married and unmarried

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<sup>84</sup> In 1798, handloom weaving was still considered a skilled trade, and weavers could expect 30s per week (Peter Gaskell 376). By 1831, however, power looms dominated the industry. Wages fell to 5s6d, and the price of bread was higher than ever (Peter Gaskell 376). In many cases, as the price of bread rose during the height of the Corn Laws, workers were earning a mere subsistence living. *The Pioneer* reported the deterioration of living standards in 1834, writing of the working class: "they can neither go on as things now are, nor yet stop; for at work they labour hard, and three quarters starve; and if they stop working, death...or the workhouse must be their fate" (qtd. in Taylor 90). Ruth Wills notes in her autobiographical sketch published in *The Working Man*, "when there was no work there was no food" (Boos, *Anthology* 232).

<sup>85</sup> Schwarzkopf writes, "[a]round 1840, when the cotton industry was hit by a severe crisis, the average weekly earnings of the male operatives amounted to only 88 percent of those of 1833, while the average female wage had merely gone down to 96.9 percent [...] These figures show that women's wages, seen as merely supplementary earnings, were so close to subsistence level that in a time of crisis there was not much leeway for diminution" (13). As Neff illustrates, "[i]n cotton in Lancashire the highest average wage for men at the age of greatest efficiency was 22s. 8 1/2d. as compared with 9s. 8 1/4d for women" (29). Martineau argued for pay equity in "Female Industry," which was published in the *Edinburgh Review* (1859).

<sup>86</sup> The *Ten Hours' Advocate and Journal of Literature and Art* ran from volume 1 (26 Sept 1846) to 38 (12 June 1847) at the price of 1d under the editorship of Philip Grant. The journal "agitate[d] for a ten-hour working day in factory employment, by peaceful persuasion" and "also instruct[ed] operative classes in the use of their leisure hours" (Warwick 545).

women; the editors felt that with factory work, the “natural” state of the family was being corrupted:

We learn indeed with pain, that nearly 2,000 married women are taken from their proper sphere in the family, and confined all day in the mill; and we shrink from contemplating the evils thereby inflicted upon their children primarily, and upon society ultimately. We also think, the fact that 8,000 young women are earning an independent livelihood affords some explanation of another painful phasis of society—viz., the early severance of the delicate tie which binds parents and children together. (“Female Factory Operatives” 12-13)

In using the term “sphere,” the article in the *Advocate* speaks to the pervasiveness of middle-class values. Vicinus’s central question in her study of working-class literature—why and how the English worker “came to accept industrial life as inevitable and to emulate many of the values and characteristics of the dominant middle-class”—seems relevant here (549). The *Advocate* locates the “evils” of Victorian society in the fact that a woman who worked in the factory was taken out of her role as family caregiver, thus severing the “delicate tie” between parents and children, a subject about which many working-class women poets chose to write.<sup>87</sup>

And while working-class women’s position in the family was under contestation, so too did their sexual mores bear scrutiny. Working-class women were commonly viewed as licentious and immoral, notes Anna Clark in her 1995 study, *The Struggle for the Breeches*. Clark devotes a chapter to working-class sexuality, entitled “Plebeian Sexual Morality, 1780-1820.” Clark argues that the working class weren’t necessarily

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<sup>87</sup> See especially F. Saunderson’s “Spring Reflections” (chapter three).

“immoral” (as charged by society), but that they had “an alternative plebeian morality” (43). Middle-class doctrine allowed women *only* marriage as the proper outlet for their sexuality (and in this, only procreative sex was acceptable). But Clark notes that working-class women could use sex as a means of survival:

[i]mpoverished needlewomen sought sexual partners who might help them fend off starvation. Shoemakers often cohabited with the women who did binding for them and could thus exploit them both sexually and economically. [...] Women whose low wages or unemployment forced them to engage in part-time sexual commerce did not consider themselves to be prostitutes. [...] Even if laboring women did not accept middle-class definitions of sexual morality, they lived in a society where magistrates, charity officials, clerics, and constables could punish them for deviating from bourgeois values. (50)<sup>88</sup>

Working-class women often tread a thin line between acceptable *bourgeois* values and survival. While society pressed down upon them to conform, working-class women, as Clark suggests, found subversive means of providing for themselves. Clark’s study shows in part how working-class women found ways to both transcend and subvert cultural norms of female sexuality, but despite this, they still lived in a culture that could “punish them” for deviation.

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<sup>88</sup> Clark’s description exposes a potential problem: she reduces women’s sexuality to an effect of economic pressures, essentially “naturalizing” chastity whereby they could be moral or immoral depending on their economic circumstances. There were, of course, other kinds of sexual freedom available to women. See, for example, Sharon Marcus’s discussion of female love and friendship. She describes how “[m]ost theories of sexuality insist on equating [the dynamics of Eroticism] with heterosexual or masculine desire [...] also define desire between women as the refusal or absence of the drives that putatively define heterosexuality or masculine desire”; however, she argues that “[d]esire for women was the crucible in which femininity was formed” (166). Marcus documents how “relationships between women [are] central femininity, marriage, and family life” (1). Martin Danahay has also explored the possibilities of other acceptable (and unacceptable) forms of personal relationships.

Perhaps it was in a contestation of the representation of working-class women as sexually deviant that so many working-class women (such as Janet Hamilton) chose to write about motherhood. As Boos has shown, Hamilton documented her love for her children in her poetry, creating for herself a maternal subjectivity (“Homely Muse” 266-67).<sup>89</sup> For working-class women writers (and especially Ellen Johnston), their self-portrayal as caring mothers, who invested their well-being in family ties, might do much to erase the stigma of the over-sexed mob, and their use of poetry as a marker of erudition (and perhaps even sophistication), allowed them to challenge gender norms and contradictions.

If, culturally, the Victorians sought to delineate and solidify notions of gender and sexuality, this battle was contested through the divisions of domestic labour. But while middle-class women were, by cultural prescription, to remain at home and thus within the narrowing moral framework of Victorian society, working-class women by definition already faced the problem of occupying a liminal position between public and private. The power relationships contested in the middle-class family social schematic were created no less by gender divisions than by labour divisions. When working-class women entered into the public economic realm as wage labourers, they entered it haunted by the pressures of conforming to strictures of gender to which they by definition did not conform.

Consequently, “politics,” “class,” “gender,” and “literary” forms can be read as constantly threatening to destabilize, disrupt, and derail each other. If we see “class”

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<sup>89</sup> Ellen Johnston also documented her love for her (illegitimate) daughter in the first edition of her *Autobiography* and in her poem, “A Mother’s Love.” Notably, in the second edition she kept the poem, but in her autobiography she removed the reference to the illegitimacy of her daughter.

and “gender” as operative social formations, we can begin to unravel how “women’s involvement in the emergent labour movement related to their experience and consciousness of themselves as women, as members not only of an exploited class, but also of an oppressed sex” (Taylor 89). Thus working-class women’s poetry will allow us to gain insight into how working-class women themselves understood endemic social hierarchies, and how their literary output *both* reflects and contradicts these formations.

### *“Separate Spheres” Revisited*

Recent critics, such as Levine, Monika Elbert, and Cathy Davidson have denatured the Victorian ideology of “separate spheres,” and pointed to the complications of the binary opposition between female and male, private and public. Levine argues that the “ideology of ‘separate spheres’ was less coherent, less binding, and less powerful than simple accounts of a strict gender divide had assumed” (627). Monika Elbert and Cathy Davidson have suggested that separate spheres are too reductive; Elbert believes “there is often no clear demarcation between the male/public realm and the female/private realm, and thus binary oppositions dissolve” (1). Elbert writes of the notion of “separate spheres”:

an essentialist, reductionist position is dangerous in coming to terms with the diverging experiences of different kinds of women. Ultimately, issues of gender seem not as divisive or pressing as those of race and class, and certainly it is absurd to consider gender as a category by itself—outside the attendant realms of race and class. (1-2)



But in her blanket declaration that issues of gender are not “as divisive or pressing as those of race and class,” Elbert reduces gender to a singular entity, rather than acknowledging that the divisions between working- and middle-class women are themselves insidiously divisive.<sup>90</sup>

Thus it seems that the time has come that critics must re-evaluate conceptions of gender as they materialised *in relation to class* in the Victorian period, and take into account the multifarious definitions of masculine and feminine. As I have shown, some Marxist critics see gender as an ideology,<sup>91</sup> and attempt to explain the “separate spheres” argument as a difference between dominant and subordinate classes; they see ideology as a “lived system of meanings and values” that were instantiated by the middle class, but contested by radicals (Williams 110).

Studying working-class women’s poetry allows for a new kind of dialogue about female (and feminine) labour. Working-class women lived under the shadow of Victorian marriage conventions and their concomitant restrictions on femininity. But while their middle-class counterparts were barred from working outside the domestic sphere, the economic situation of the working-class home required the wages of every family member. To varying degrees, each of the poets I discuss here write against the ideas of writers like Ellis and Patmore and challenge a society that excluded them from traditional categories of femininity. These poets invoke a type of “natural” labour, natural in the sense that they use of metaphors of nature or the pastoral (E.H.,

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<sup>90</sup> While critics like Elbert suggest that gender is not a “pressing” issue, Levine observes that we cannot throw out the “cultural distinction between masculinity and femininity” because then we would have to argue that women and men were as equals in the nineteenth century (628). Levine’s question: “What kind of power did the different discourses of gender wield in the period?” is an intriguing one.

<sup>91</sup> See above, as well as Levine’s overview of Marxism’s intersections with gender, from which I have drawn my own argument (628-29).

F. Saunderson, Fanny Forrester), and in their argument that labour itself is natural because they are working-class *and* women (the women of *The Pioneer*, “Marie,” the anonymous factory girls, Ellen Johnston).

A number of working-class women poets in this study chose to articulate their politics through the pastoral. In particular, F. Saunderson, Mary Hutton, and Fanny Forrester draw upon conventions of the pastoral, specifically contrasting the corruption of the city with the purity of agrarian life in order to highlight the problems they associate with modernity and industrialism. The pastoral register lends itself to the elegiac strain of lament for a lost time or place. As Armstrong notes, pastoral poetry is “a retreat,” but it always “presupposes the existing world, against which its conventions are measured” (226). Thus the logic of the pastoral draws upon “language of natural description” to register struggle (Armstrong 228). These poems place the moment of protest at the point at which industry supersedes the natural landscape. Sometimes their argument is subtle, as in the case of “Marie”’s “My Mission,” and in other cases they openly flout gender conventions, as we shall see with Ellen Johnston in chapter seven. Through their poetry, the working class women in this study weave their labours into the fabric of their lives.

**SECTION I: WORKING-CLASS WOMEN POETS AND CHARTISM: 1830-1850**

CHAPTER THREE. WORKING-CLASS WOMEN POETS IN THE RADICAL PERIODICAL PRESS.

What is to become of our songs, our mottoes, our hymns, our rhymes, and our apophthegms? Are all to be buried in one narrow, unhonoured grave, and are we to dig that grave ourselves? Are they to be sacrificed to a faction against whose tyranny they have so long struggled, and to destroy whose monopoly they were established? The infant will lisp “No!” the aged veteran will falter “Never!”—the factory girl will sing her note of freedom, the clog of the factory boy will beat time to the song of liberty.

“The Struggle.” *The Northern Star, and National Trades’ Journal*.  
9.434 (7 March 1846): 4.

In this chapter, I argue that through the nineteenth-century periodical press working-class women not only reflected working-class politics, but also actively participated in its creation. Within each of the journals I discuss, I trace the politics of working-class women’s poetry within the context of Chartism, and examine the potential of these poets to identify with a particular working-class poetic intertextuality. I argue that working-class women’s poetry engaged with nineteenth-century politics by employing many of the same literary strategies as the Chartists: the invocation of community and collective voices, religious and emancipatory rhetoric, and the deployment of differing poetic forms (e.g., pastoral poetry, medieval romance, polemical poetry), and that each of these poets participates in a type of *literary labour politics*.<sup>92</sup>

However, while the poems I discuss here share characteristics with Chartist poetry, to my present knowledge nowhere do these women explicitly define themselves as “Chartists.” Thus I wish to show instead the ways in which Chartism *informed*—and was informed by—their poetry, and argue that women played a central role in the mobilization of working-class politics in the 1830s and 1840s. This chapter will recognize the working-class women who were writing in the early radical press,

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<sup>92</sup> See Shwab, Kovalev, Robinson, and Sanders for discussions of the themes found in Chartist poetry.

specifically: the anonymous and pseudonymous women who were published in *The Pioneer, or Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union Magazine* (1833-1834), E.H. and F. Saunderson in *The Northern Star* (1837-1852), and Eliza Cook and "Marie" in *The Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor* (1850-1853), *Howitt's Journal (The People's Journal)* (1847-1851),<sup>93</sup> and *Eliza Cook's Journal* (1849-1854). For reasons of scope, my research here is limited solely to English periodicals.

My choices are intentional: each of these journals represents a particular nodal point in (1) working-class politics (they span the first half of the Victorian period and the three major Chartist petitions of 1838, 1842, and 1848), (2) their geographical locations, and (3) their editors. *The Pioneer* was the London-based organ of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union; *The Northern Star* was the herald of the Chartist movement,<sup>94</sup> and the most widely disseminated Chartist periodical; and (Mary) Howitt and Cook are rare examples of female editors, who thus provide insight into the construction of gender in the periodical press. Each of these journals serves as an index of the working-class mobilization that occurred in the 1830s and 1840s in some of the major urban centres in England, and they illuminate the ways in which working-class women created among themselves a politically charged literary community. Working-class women are crucial to our understanding of class politics as they were articulated and actively created in the periodical press of the early

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<sup>93</sup> *Howitt's Journal of Literature and Popular Progress* (later *The People's Journal*) was edited by William and Mary Howitt. It was advertised as "A Weekly Record of Facts and Opinions connected with General Interests and Popular Progress," and published "articles, poetry, book reviews, illustrations, notes on Mechanics' institutes, meetings of trade unions and co-operative organizations" (Warwick 214). *Eliza Cook's Journal* ran from 1849 until 1854, and the *Working Man's Friend* enjoyed a publication run of three years, from 5 January 1850 until 26 March 1853. See Warwick (214, 406).

<sup>94</sup> It began as *The Northern Star, and Leeds General Advertiser*, based out of Leeds, but it moved to London and was renamed *The Northern Star and National Trades Journal* in 1844.

nineteenth century. In this chapter, I will be drawing from material that for the most part is accessible only within the regional and national archives in Britain.<sup>95</sup>

The periodical press was a fundamental part of the growth of a working-class consciousness in the mid-Victorian period, and many Chartists believed that it was the pathway to enfranchisement. The sheer number of periodicals, including *The Northern Star*, *The Northern Liberator*, *The Red Republican (The Friend of the People)*, and *The Chartist Circular*, to name a few, speaks to the centrality of the press to the Chartist movement. Despite ongoing preservation attempts, many of these newspapers lie crumbling in library storage facilities. Given that the majority of nineteenth-century labour periodicals remain extant in only print-copy, recovery efforts can seem stymied before they begin. And if crumbling pages are not enough to dissuade even the most ardent scholar from recovery projects, the “class-based condescension and malign neglect [that] silenced” the voices of female working-class authors in the nineteenth century has further obscured female demotic verse (Boos, *Anthology* 14-15).

Fortunately, in my research in the local archives in Manchester, England—the People’s History Archive, the Manchester Central Library, and the Working-Class Movement Library—I discovered at least fifteen working-class women whose poetry appeared in radical and labour periodicals, many of whom editors identified explicitly by class and gender.

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<sup>95</sup> An exception is the excellent *Nineteenth-Century Serials* project, run by Birkbeck College, which provides a full digital collection of four nineteenth-century serials, including *The Northern Star*. See <http://www.ncse.ac.uk/index.html>.

*Critical Contexts: Poetry and the Periodical Press, 1830-1850*

The emergent critical acceptance of working-class women's poetry as a viable field of inquiry necessitates a further study of the poetry published by women in the radical periodical press between 1830 and 1850, especially since the Victorian press and its correlated critical methodologies have undergone radical redefinition in recent years. Lyn Pykett writes that those who study the Victorian periodical press "have persistently confronted the double problem of defining the object of study, and devising an appropriate methodological framework within which to conduct that study" (qtd. in Fraser, Johnston, and Green 15). Critics in the 1970s—such as Michael Wolff—saw the press as a register of attitudes, opinions and ideas (Pykett 6), but other critics have since agreed that nineteenth-century periodicals are not merely "reflective," but "can only be read and understood as part of that culture and society, and in the context of other knowledges about them" (Pykett 7). Indeed, as Pykett indicates, "[l]iterature and context can no longer be seen as separate or separable entities" (8). Thus we can read working-class women's poetry as both reflections—and agents in the creation—of working-class politics.

In recent years, working-class male poets of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, and especially the Chartists, have benefited from the recovery and critical projects of a number of scholars, and have found a more visible if yet tenuous presence in the pages of literary criticism. Critics note the changes in the radical periodical press from the late-eighteenth century to the mid-Victorian era, and locate political struggle within the pages of both the stamped and unstamped press. Scheckner argues that "[t]he Chartist press and its literature played a central role in

enabling working people to identify themselves as a class and in defining their political and cultural objectives” (25). Meanwhile, Haywood examines the shaping of popular literature from the 1790s to the time of stamp duty abolition. He neatly situates his argument within the larger critical context of the eighteenth-century construction of the public sphere, and works within a “metanarrative” of “the ongoing campaign for the radical political transformation of Britain” (4). Haywood sees the periodical press as a significant part of the development of radical culture, and suggests that it played an important role as a nexus of class politics.<sup>96</sup> In Paul Murphy’s examination of the “evolution” of attitudes towards working-class writing between 1816 and 1858 (5), he defines “a working-class periodical not simply as one read by members of the working class but one that self-consciously directs itself toward the working class and its interests” (22). Janowitz situates Chartism in its Romantic contexts, and argues like Haywood that the radical periodical press is of part of a larger political tradition.<sup>97</sup> Most recently, in *The Poetry of Chartism*, Sanders builds upon Haywood and Janowitz’s studies, and convincingly argues that the press was crucial to class politics.<sup>98</sup> His illuminating study of the aesthetics and agency of Chartist poetry, including his insightful examination of the editorial practices of *The Northern Star*, offers a new mode of literary analysis for critics of working-class literature—a mode that is useful for a closely related study such as my own.

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<sup>96</sup> He argues that the regulation of popular literature led to the creation of a number of literary subcultures, and discusses both the agency of texts and alternative traditions within the interchanges between popular and radical literature (the periodical press, series, and popular fiction).

<sup>97</sup> She claims that the literary corpus that emerged from Chartism “was built on the notion of a repressed ‘people’s’ national literary heritage, which Chartist poets and poetic theorists both excavated and invented” (143).

<sup>98</sup> See my discussion of Sanders’s *The Poetry of Chartism* in chapters one and two.



Poetry has served as proof of the articulacy and literacy of the Chartist movement, and has highlighted its nationalist underpinnings and its role as a catalyst for class cohesion. It stands to reason, then, that working-class women poets—who published in the same newspapers and journals as their male counterparts—are a part of this working-class literary community. Despite the research on the periodical press and Chartist poetry, there is still a significant gap in scholarship on working-class women’s poetry in this medium. Most recent studies have focused specifically on the incidence of middle-class women’s poetry in Victorian periodicals.<sup>99</sup> Few critics have examined the *politics* of working-class women in both Chartist and labour periodicals, despite the fact that, as Sanders asserts, poetry played “an active, primary role within the [Chartist] movement” (*Poetry of Chartism* 3). Three important exceptions should be noted. Boos examines the poetry of three working-class women poets in “The ‘Homely Muse’ in Her Diurnal Setting: The Periodical Poems of ‘Marie,’ Janet Hamilton, and Fanny Forrester,” Robinson discusses Eliza Cook’s political poetry in “Of ‘Haymakers’ and ‘City Artisans’: The Chartist Poetics of Eliza Cook’s Songs of Labor,” and Sanders, who contends that politics and poetry are inseparable, reprints the “Woman’s Page” from the *Pioneer* in volume one of *Women and Radicalism*; however, his four-volume set comprises mostly prose. He does, however, include the “Pioneera” poems, which I discuss in this chapter. I am indebted to the work of these scholars, and their research provides an important context for this chapter.

In part, the absence of scholarship on working-class women writers can be

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<sup>99</sup> Natalie Houston has argued for the importance of the poetry published in large-circulation general newspapers. She makes a case for a material study of periodicals. See also Linda K. Hughes and Andrew King.

attributed to the proliferation of poetry published in the press as either pseudonymous or anonymous; many working-class women poets published only a handful of poems in the periodical press. For scholars, it may be difficult (if not impossible) to distinguish the class or gender of the author. For the female working-class contributors to these journals, however, these “—nymous” publications may have been strategic. In her study of “journalistic anonymity” (2), Alexis Easley argues that for middle-class women, “[a]nonymous publication provided women with effective cover for exploring a variety of conventionally ‘masculine’ social issues. It also allowed them to evade essentialized notions of ‘feminine’ voice and identity” (1). Anonymity allowed working-class women—who were doubly silenced within class and gender hierarchies—to express their politics through publishing in the press. While Easley’s book focuses on the philanthropic efforts of middle-class writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell,<sup>100</sup> George Eliot, and Christina Rossetti, her argument crosses class boundaries. She observes that “the periodical press provided women with opportunities for self-advocacy that would lead to the development of an organized women’s movement in the late 1850s” (3). Given her conservative estimate that fifteen hundred women published in the periodical press in the 1830s and 1840s, how many of them were working-class women publishing under a pseudonym or with no name at all?

### *Working-Class Women’s Poetry in the Periodical Press*

What kind of reading practice is necessary to understand the gendered articulations of politics in a specific type of literature (the poetry published in the

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<sup>100</sup> Gaskell, for example, published in *Howitt’s Journal* under the pseudonym Cotton Mather Mills, Esq.

periodical press)? Pykett contends that we need to re-evaluate our methodological approach to the periodical press, and that we must view the “text as the object of a freshly constituted interdisciplinarity” (11). Like both Levine and Sanders, she emphasizes the inseparable connection between history and literature, context and close reading. In this chapter, I am discussing the interplay of literature, politics, and gender; therefore, it is important to understand the *interweaving* of each of these three elements in relation to working-class women’s poetry.

First, the nineteenth-century periodical press provides a fundamental case for the interplay between literature and politics given its quotidian and occasional nature. Laurel Brake writes that “[a]lthough journalism and literature may appear distinct today—each anxiously policing its borders against the other—in the nineteenth century they were nearly indissoluble in sections of the periodical press” (64). The term “literature” has been constituted and reconstituted in relation to those in power, but as yet, a stable definition remains elusive. In *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* (1999), Paul Keen examines the “meta-critical issue” of the term “literature” at the start of the Romantic period (3). He argues that the definition of the term has always been “political,” “a means of laying claim to important forms of symbolic capital, of legitimating or contesting social privileges by writing the myths of a national or regional community, or by naturalizing or protesting against changing relations of production” (2). Like Brake, he identifies an interrelation between the political and the literary, arguing that “[f]or reformers, for whom literature functioned as an ‘engine’ of

social progress by facilitating debate on all issues of public interest, the literary and political spheres were profoundly interrelated” (15).<sup>101</sup>

Second, how do *literary labour politics* factor into the poetry of working-class women in the early radical periodical press? In chapter two, I suggested that women who entered into the political sphere were seen as “unnatural.” Keen too points out that, in a piece by Leigh Hunt, women, “when they display a masculine spirit, rebel against not only the social but the *natural* order as well” (172-73; my italics). In my first chapter, I asserted that working-class women poets invoke a type of “naturalized” labour as a means of contesting normative ideologies such as Keen describes. The women I discuss in this chapter legitimize (or naturalize) their role in public politics through a complex system of labour metaphors. These include maternal or familial-community metaphors (the women of *The Pioneer*), physical and literary labours (E.H., Eliza Cook, “Marie”), and the use of natural and pastoral imagery as a means of critiquing oppressive forms of manual labour (F. Saunderson).

Finally, how does gender complicate our understanding of the political poetry published in early nineteenth-century periodicals? The periodical press itself is a site through which gender norms are contested. Fraser, Green and Johnston write that the press is “the medium that most readily articulates the unevennesses and reciprocities of evolving gender ideologies” because it “offers material realisation, generically and formally, of that dynamic and relational cultural process” (2). They further argue that gender affects cultural meaning because “it becomes the prime site of either critique of, or collusion with, the prevailing ideologies of the day,” and conclude that “the very

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<sup>101</sup> “Print culture,” writes Keen, “was being increasingly demonized as an inevitable prelude, rather than a healthy alternative, to violent insurrection” (170).

genre of the periodical in the nineteenth century was itself gendered, in ways that meant that the work of women for the press was largely obscured by the cultural identification of the ‘journalist’ as a signifier of masculinity” (5-6). If periodicals are gendered masculine, what does it mean for the women who participate in this form of cultural production? How did working-class women figure in the early radical periodical press and the construction of working-class politics? Were they fated, like Aurora Leigh, to be forever laced between labour and art, “being but poor [...] constrained for life, / To work with one hand for the booksellers / While working with the other for [themselves]” (Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* 3.302-04)?

#### *Working-Class Women’s Communities: The “Bondswomen” and “Pioneera” in The Pioneer*

James Morrison’s *Pioneer* ran from 7 September 1833 (vol. 1) to 5 July 1834 (vol. 44), and published articles, news, correspondence, and poetry, while amassing a substantial working-class readership (R. Harrison 414). The subscription lists of *The Pioneer* confirm that working-class women were not only reading the journal, but also actively subscribing to it.<sup>102</sup> *The Pioneer* provides a striking affirmation of the political activities of working-class women in the 1830s, which preceded and coincided with the activities of the Chartist movement.<sup>103</sup> In volume one of *Women and Radicalism*,

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<sup>102</sup> Many Chartist journals putatively disdained the practice of publishing female authors. For example, Ernest Jones and Feargus O’Connor’s *The Labourer* published only one poem by a woman, in volume three (1848) titled “The Wife,” by Jane (more than likely Jones’s own wife).

<sup>103</sup> While the Chartist movement itself did not crystallize until the official publication of the People’s Charter in 1838, stirrings of political unrest have been located after the passing of the great Reform Act of 1832. For more on the growth of the Chartist movement, see my discussion later in this chapter. See also Dorothy Thompson’s *The Chartists* (1984) for a more comprehensive discussion of the chronology and major events and figures of the movement.

Sanders notes that the *Pioneer* is an important historical document because it was “the second most widely-read working-class newspaper of the period, (closely following *The Poor Man’s Guardian*)’ with a circulation of 20,000-30,000 copies and a readership probably ten times as large as its circulation,” more precisely because “it gave both space and serious consideration to women’s issues” (11-12).

The subscription lists of *The Pioneer* included groups and individuals who identified themselves by their profession, and the fees paid suggest a substantial number of women subscribers.<sup>104</sup> This list provides evidence that working-class women were not only reading *The Pioneer* and entering into a substantially male-dominated political and public arena, but they were also forming *communities of reading* based around the journal. In the 25 January 1834 issue, for example, the subscription list includes the “few ladies’ shoemakers, Blackmore’s Head, Dorset-Place, Whitcombe St., Haymarket” (6d), the “Female Glass Cutters” (2s3d), the “No. 7 Division of the Western Ladies’ Shoemakers” (13s4d), and a single subscription “from a day school, by a young female” (2s). The lists for the 1 February 1834 issue included “[t]wo females, Great Portland St.” (1s3d), the “2nd subdivision of No. 7 Division” (10s 2d), “[t]hree female binders” (1s), “[l]adies’ shoemakers” (8s2d), and the “5th division Ladies’ Shoemakers” (£1 9s 5½d).<sup>105</sup>

On 26 April 1834 (no. 34), the journal began to run a “Woman’s Page” devoted to its female subscribers. This new section of the journal was a testament to the acceptance of its female readership, and was a crucial step towards helping radical

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<sup>104</sup> The subscription lists appeared on the inside pages of *The Pioneer*.

<sup>105</sup> Barbara Taylor highlights how *The Pioneer* took part in the efforts of The Society of Industrious Females “to win for themselves ‘a fair distribution of the products of our labour’ through the production of clothing which they sold at Owen’s Labour Exchange in Grays Inn Road” (88).

women find their collective political voice.<sup>106</sup> In her groundbreaking social history of the women in the Owenite movement, Barbara Taylor indicates that the publication of the “Woman’s Page” in *The Pioneer* engendered

a sudden, brief rush of words into the silence which surrounded the lives and consciousness of working-class women. The experience of motherhood, the desire for education, injustices in marriage and family life—all were aired in the ‘Women’s [sic] Page,’ often with timorous self-deprecation, but sometimes with the force of long-suppressed anger. (96-97)

She concludes, “there can be no doubt, then, that the ‘Page’ was the single most important platform for working-class feminist ideas in the 1830s” (97). The women who appeared in Morrison’s *Pioneer* publicly supported the emancipation of working-class females and zealously discussed issues of poverty and industrialism, the role of education in the emancipation of the lower classes, and the difficulty of navigating the domestic and political worlds.

As I will show, the anonymous and pseudonymous female authors of the *Pioneer* use both maternal and community metaphors to fashion their femininity and weave familial ties into the fabric of their politics. The female contributors to *The Pioneer* identify themselves through names of their profession or station (“A Mechanic’s Wife”), their political subjection (“A Bondswoman”), their location (“a female of Worcester”), or their relation to the journal (“Pioneera”). These pseudonymous titles place them within a contextual community, one that links people

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<sup>106</sup> It was originally titled “Page for the Ladies,” but the title was changed to “Women” [sic] “when it was pointed out that ‘Ladies’ was ‘too aristocratic’” (Taylor 96). See also Sanders’s *Women and Radicalism*.

not by their individual nature, but by their relation to others. By identifying with their profession, their location, or their relation to *The Pioneer*, all of the journal's contributors seem to choose *relational* pseudonyms with which to identify themselves. The "political" aspects of working-class women's contributions appear in their sense of community or identification with their class. If the women of *The Pioneer* identify with a particular class community, then they are tacitly accepting that community as part of their political agenda.

In my discussion of the women who write letters to *The Pioneer*, I illustrate how working-class women's communities (both literal and literary) are not a rejection of their position in the heterosexual binary, but are instead used a means to strengthen the normative family unit and situate working-class women within what we would consider to be a Victorian middle-class femininity. Sharon Marcus's revolutionary study of Victorian femininity, and of the relationships "between women," offers a new way of thinking about how women were situated and situated themselves in their particular class and gender communities.<sup>107</sup> By attending to Marcus's assertion that "Victorians were [...] able to see relationships between women as central to lives organized around men" (19), I will show how working-class women use female communities to interknit the feminine *and* the political. The women of *The Pioneer* express their belief in the union through a blend of familial relationships: mother to child, wife to husband, and, by extension, citizen to country.

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<sup>107</sup> In *Between Women*, she shows that (1) women's relationships are fundamental to Victorian heteronormative identity, (2) women's communities are not deviant, but are in fact a marker of the properly "feminine" middle-class woman, and (3) that the concept of the "social relationship" between women "is not reducible to sex, power or difference" (14).



In the 8 February 1834 edition of the journal, an article addressing “the Females of the Working Class,” written by a “Bondswoman,”<sup>108</sup> called for a collective effort to lobby for women’s rights and education. The “Bondswoman” writes,

[i]t is time the working females of England began to demand their long-suppressed rights. Let us, in the first place, endeavour to throw off the trammels that have so long enshackled our minds, and get knowledge, when all are making their way to the temple of truth and justice. Let not woman,—patient, suffering, long neglected woman,—stay behind on the road to improvement.

(191)

Sanders points out that the “Bondswoman” was the pseudonym of Frances Morrison, wife of James Morrison, noting that “[t]he extent of Frances’ involvement with the ‘Woman’s Page’ is unknown, although Ruth and Eddie Frow, citing changes to its tone and focus, have suggested that ‘...it is possible that Frances undertook to produce the page on her own account’” (*Women and Radicalism* 12). Barbara Taylor has also discussed Morrison’s role in socialist feminism, and I expand her discussion by situating Morrison within the context of working-class women and metaphors of “naturalisation.” Here, Morrison (the “Bondswoman”) speaks to the importance of educating women in the same manner as men. She argues that women are “denied the acquisition of truth,” and situates this denial politically when she states that “[m]en, in general, tremble at the idea of a reading wife, being taught to believe it an evil by designing tyrants. Woman’s rights, like man’s, have been withheld from motives purely political, by deep concerted plans of early oppressors” (191) Her demand for

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<sup>108</sup> The following letter is reprinted in Sanders’ *Women and Radicalism* (176-178). For a discussion of Morrison in relation to “Feminist Socialism,” see Barbara Taylor (75-82).

female equality is based on the belief that “tyrants” have designed their denial of rights—for education both intellectual and practical, for skilled training, for basic human subsistence—and she suggests that it is these “tyrants” who wish to keep the working class, regardless of gender, in a state of oppressive subservience. Here, then, knowledge becomes a motive for women’s foray into politics.

The “Bondswoman” places her unyielding trust in the union as a source of political emancipation and a “shield from oppression of every kind.” Later, her voice turns imperative, as she urges the working women of Birmingham, “Sisters, bondswomen, arise! and let us unite to gain our right. Let us unite and teach our oppressors, the employers, their duty. [...] [b]e slaves no longer, but unite and assert your just rights!” (191). She shapes her argument with a familiar emancipatory rhetoric, a tactic that the Chartists repeatedly deployed in their demand for universal suffrage.<sup>109</sup> But instead of the characteristically fraternal gestures of the Chartist movement, the “Bondswoman” specifically calls for a unification in sisterhood, by first speaking to the “working females of England,” and then more specifically to the working women of Birmingham. Her letter provides a very early indication that women were indeed supportive of unionization, and that they were conscious of the power female communities held in asserting women’s rights.

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<sup>109</sup> Schwab has suggested that Chartist texts “show a pronounced character of summoning, which manifests itself in their imperative forms. The latter are to be regarded as appeals, calls, directions, as signs of incitation, encouragement, imploring and affirmation, but not as commands,” and that these texts “can be seen as “community-founding or ritual instructions” (111). For an excellent discussion of “agency” in Chartist poetry, see Sanders’s “Poetic Agency: Metonymy and Metaphor in Chartist Poetry 1838-1852.” His new book *The Poetry of Chartism* deals specifically with poetic agency. For a more extended discussion of the use of the term “slavery” in Chartist verse, see chapter four in this study.

While the women contributors to the *Pioneer* supported unification based on “sisterhood,” they complicated their politics by interrogating nineteenth-century notions of female propriety and the divisions between public and private. The women whose words appeared in Morrison’s *Pioneer* used the metaphor of the family to legitimate women’s voices in the mobilization and articulation of class politics. They argued for class collectivity by expressing a belief in the strong ties among the people of the lower orders, bolstered by one “[f]emale of Worcester”’s firm assertion that “[i]t is evident that the bonds of love are much stronger among the working class of people than master tyrants are aware of” (22 February 1834, 212). The “female of Worcester” invokes a binary that crystallizes two separate communities: the working class and those who seek to oppress them. At the same time, by couching her political agenda within the rhetoric of love, she humanizes the working class and depicts them within middle-class gender ideologies.

On 11 January 1834, *The Pioneer* published a letter to the editor from a “Mechanic’s Wife in London,” who commended the formation of a Ladies’ Union “in every part of the United Kingdom.”<sup>110</sup> She argues that a female political community is necessary and she uses familial vocabulary to extol the benefits of such a union:

I am glad to find that you acknowledge that even females can do something, as well as men. For instance what would have become of Bible associations, missionary subscriptions, and many other noble institutions this country can boast of, if female interest had been withheld? Unions of females (more particularly married women) are, in my humble opinion, of the greatest

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<sup>110</sup> The formation of the Ladies’ Union was an event that was reported in *The Pioneer* on 26 October 1833. Sanders reprints this letter in *Women and Radicalism* (175).

importance to ourselves, our husbands, our children, and our posterity; they will be of vast importance to generations yet unborn, and to the world at large. I shall be glad to hear of a Ladies' Union in London, as I feel confident the beneficial results would soon be felt by every class of society, especially in that of which I am a member (namely, the vulgar mob), as it would tend greatly to the improvement and advantage of our too-often neglected families; [...] pride would, by degrees, begin to display itself; we should vie with each other in every stage of gradual improvement, until the vulgar mob [becomes] one general mass of civilized society. (152)

The "Mechanic's Wife" supports the unionization of (especially married) women, and suggests that political communities of women would be beneficial to both "husbands" and "children" and lead to a generalized "improvement" to family life. The word "union" holds a double meaning: it is both a "joining together" (as in a marriage) and a political association. The "Mechanic's Wife" exploits these conjoined meanings, and uses the metaphor of the family to expand the beneficiaries of women's "unions" across class and regional boundaries.

The progressive tenor of her letter points to an important ideological construction: the "family of the nation." This construction appears repeatedly in both the poetry of working-class women (as I will show in subsequent chapters), and in middle-class reform literature of the period. Indeed, Levine notes a similar metaphor in her discussion of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children." She reads the poem through three separate family metaphors: "the family-as-kin, the family of the nation, and the universal (Christian) family" (640). Levine argues that in "The Cry

of the Children,”

the logic of separate spheres seems powerful indeed, authorizing the woman poet—whose ‘proper’ realm involves the domestic affections—to argue that a loving domesticity must join with the large domesticity of the nation and the even larger demands of a universalizing Christian brotherhood to care for the children of England. (641)

The same method of analysis can be applied to the letter from the “Mechanic’s Wife.” She first suggests that female unions will prove beneficial at the level of the family, which has been “neglected,” then for “every class of society” in England (especially the “vulgar mob”), and finally for “the world at large.” The impetus of her letter is reformative, and she argues for the necessity of female political communities, or “Unions,” in order to uphold the family unit at the individual, national, and universal levels.

A similar letter appeared on 22 February 1834 (no. 25), again from “A London Mechanic’s Wife,” which is addressed to “the Bondswomen of Birmingham.”<sup>m</sup> Her letter likewise negotiates a space for women in the political realm through the image of the family. She writes,

[i]t has hitherto been considered almost treason for a woman to write or speak on what are deemed public subjects. These seven years have I exerted my powers (in my private sphere) to arouse my countrywomen to a sense of duty, and [I] am now determined to raise my voice in public to arouse them to seek equal rights, as I hope you will in the spirited town of Birmingham: and may you find many to

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<sup>m</sup> This letter is reprinted in volume one of Sanders’s *Women in Radicalism* (178).

strengthen your hands and encourage your noble spirit, and may we live to see the whole of our sex exert themselves for their own, their children's, and their country's emancipation from the cruel bondage of physical and mental taskmasters! (221)

The "London Mechanic's Wife"'s letter is significant because the description of the gradual improvement of society beginning with the family unit is articulated through a traditionally masculine tone. As Kieran Dolin has argued with regards to Caroline Norton's "transfigured gender," the adoption of a "masculine" persona invokes masculinity as a legitimating force (521). By directly addressing what she sees as the strictures that hold women to the "private sphere," the "London Mechanic's Wife" positions her answer to the call of "duty" as a legitimization of her entry into public politics. Her letter demonstrates a deft marriage of form and content; her diction, characterized by words both political and aristocratic ("treason," "duty," "noble spirit"), places her letter in the context of the public and political realm. Thus she appropriates rhetoric that was used by the men of her class and diction that would become crucial to the mobilization of both the Chartist and the abolitionist movements in Britain. Words and phrases that connote masculine force—words and phrases such as "arouse," "exert," "raise my voice," "spirited," "strengthen your hands" "noble spirit"—permeate the letter. The "London Mechanic's Wife" uses powerfully gendered diction to subvert those who would seek to accuse women of "treason" for speaking of "public subjects." Through her masculine language she transcends the limits of the "feminine" and enters into the public political arena. In both letters, reform begins at the level of the family and moves outwards to encompass people of

all classes in the nation. These letters establish a precedent: if in Victorian ideology, the woman sits at the centre of domestic space, then female communities (or “unions”) are crucial to the improvement of the nation. In other words, the women of *The Pioneer* use the simile of the “family as nation” as a part of their political agenda, providing a strikingly gendered interpretation of class politics.

While *The Pioneer* opened its pages to women with its creation of the “Woman’s Page,” and through its publication of a number of letters by working-class women in support of women’s rights, it also created a place for women’s poetic voices. Here we have an indication of the fact that radical editors published working-class women’s writing in their journals, and that journals like *The Pioneer* even *actively* encouraged the literary production of their female subscribers. In the 23 November 1833 issue, a pseudonymous poem appeared, which opened up an exchange between working-class women and men regarding a notice in the journal a week prior. Because of the pseudonymous author of the poem, it is another example of the indeterminacies of gender that surround working-class women, a topic I address in earlier chapters. Nonetheless, her poem provides an excellent example of the journal’s willingness to engage with women’s literary and political voices.

On 26 October 1833, James Morrison replied to the women readers of *The Pioneer*, and their call for the formation of the ladies’ union. The female-authored, “A Voice from Leicester to *The Pioneer*” by “Pioneera,” is a poetic rejoinder to Morrison’s “attempt to imagine the correspondence as a form of heterosexual romance” (Sanders, *Women and Radicalism* 13). This poem resembles a love letter, and its title plays upon the term “voice” as both an utterance and a specific political expression. Sanders notes

that Morrison uses language of a “heterosexual romance” to describe the correspondence between the journal and its female writers, and that he expected “tender epistles” from female contributors “[because there] is poetry in a woman’s pen” (qtd. in Sanders, *Women and Radicalism* 13). Sanders adds that “[a]lthough this tone is intended to encourage, to make the prospect of writing for publication less intimidating for working-class women, it also forces them to adopt an appropriate ‘feminine’ style” (13).

The female poet places herself within the tradition of romance and courtly convention—thus mirroring Morrison’s own letter—and she comments upon the legitimate space in which women can write without fear of censure. The “Pioneer” becomes a synecdoche for the journal’s male readership, while the “Pioneera” is representative of the whole of the journal’s female readership. Her poem questions the fidelity of men to women, and is interesting, writes Sanders, “because of the suspicious way in which it reacts to Morrison’s romantic rhetoric” (13). The poem begins within a convention of the woman questioning the sincerity of her lover: “Ah, Pioneer! I’ve often thought, and trembled / At that same thought, that you were not sincere” (1-2). After this initial use of the first-person pronoun, “Pioneera” switches to “our” and “we,” setting herself up as representative of her gender, and furthering the bonds of commonality and community between women. The “Pioneer” becomes the locus upon which the female poet points to the communities built within a readership, such as the one enjoyed by the journal:

You write as one who knew our degradation;

Who knew our helpless, hopeless, piteous, lot;



Who, by the power of kindly, soft persuasion,  
Could wipe away our mind's deep cancer-spot[.] (7-10)

The poet deploys the description of women as “helpless, hopeless,” and “piteous” in her efforts to question the fidelity of her male addressee, but also invokes the “power” of “kindly, soft persuasion,” mixing the diction of masculinity and femininity, and blurring the distinction between the two. The feminine adjectives, which seemingly wrench from women any sort of power, are juxtaposed with her subsequent imperative demand: “[g]ive women back what force has long wrench'd from her, / And placed on fickle chance, or man's false honour” (11-12).

The poem turns on a number of questions in which “Pioneera” asks her male supplicant if he is “earnest” and “sincere,” or whether he “hold[s] our intellect at nought?” (13, 16). She flatters his honour, calling him “bravest,” and then threatens him if he is disloyal: “If false, you heartless rogue, we curse your knavery; / If true, thy honied words relieve our slavery” (17-18). Line 18 suggests that the *Pioneer* has the power to “relieve” women from oppression. The final two stanzas further the romantic tenor of the poem. First, “Pioneera” states the predicted result of the “Pioneer”'s fidelity:

A thousand hearts will feel a pillow'd rest  
In your dear confidence, and hope will heal  
The many sorrows which have long oppress'd  
And held imprison'd woman's weal[.] (19-22)

Second, the poet asks for a token or gesture of sincerity, here not in the form of a ring (a symbol of marital and romantic fidelity), but instead in the form of a “skillful pen”

that would confirm that he (the journal) is indeed in support of women. She asks for “[o]ne faithful token from your skillful pen / That you are woman’s friend” (25-26). The “pen” of the male journalist or editor thus becomes the figurative marker of women’s emancipation.

“Pioneera” suggests that there is no worse knavery than the violence of intellectual oppression, and her poem gives voice (both utterance and political weight) to the true intellect of women, couched within terms of the romantic conventions of a love letter. The female poet indirectly supports women’s rights by implying that men have subjugated women by “force”; buried within the rhetoric of the poem is also a hint of violence, with the use of terms such as “force” and “knavery” as well as the more indirect phrase “will heal” and the word “weal.” In using these terms, “Pioneera” subtly plays upon the notion of slavery, linking the (metaphorical) violence of intellectual oppression to a type of bondage.

In the same issue, *The Pioneer* published a rather condescending answer to “Pioneera”’s poem that is curious in its use of metaphors. The “Pioneer”’s bathetic poetic response begins with a description of a “darksome dome” that “tops the region of [his] motely thought” (1-2), a darksome dome to which the “Pioneera” presumably has no access. The “Pioneer” admits a “fiery spirit” and “buoyant hope” (7-8), and assures the “Pioneera” that he has “no dark spot to harbour bland deceit” (9). His poem is also couched within the romantic conventions of a love letter:

’Tis not for thee, my sweet, nor human breast,  
To know the mystic movements of the brain;  
The busy thought that despots cannot wrest,

Nor gold, nor dread, nor penury enchain.

Good Pioneera, disabuse thy fear,

And doubt no more thy constant Pioneer. (19-24)

The poet is cavalier in his assertion that the “mystic movements of the brain” are beyond the scope of female knowledge, and his patronizing tone suggests a deeply inculcated belief in women’s intellectual inferiority. However, the journal, in its very publication of “Pioneera”’s poem, gives legitimacy to the public voice of women.

*E.H. and F. Saunderson: The Fabric of Chartism in Working-Class Women’s Poetry*

While Morrison’s *Pioneer* was one of, if not the, first journal of trade unions in Great Britain, it was Feargus O’Connor’s *The Northern Star* that witnessed the rise, climax, and fall of the Chartist movement.<sup>112</sup> As I suggested in chapter two, Chartism is central to our understanding of working-class women’s poetry in the radical periodical press because of the importance the Chartists placed on literature as part of their political agenda. In his book on *The Northern Star*’s poetry column, Sanders describes the journal as “one of the richest archives of nineteenth-century working-

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<sup>112</sup> In 1836, The London Working Men’s Association (LWMA) declared that they would direct their attentions towards procuring a cheap periodical press for the working class, believing that it was through the press that they could instigate political change. The British government had imposed newspaper taxes on the British press since 1712, and by 1815, stamp duties had been increased to levels that most certainly limited readership to only the highest income brackets. For the LWMA, access to the press meant one step closer to suffrage. Consistent campaigns to parliament led them to small victories, such as the 1836 Newspaper Act, which reduced taxes to 1d. per copy (Thompson, D. 40). It wasn’t until 8 May 1838 that the Chartists cemented their political agenda with the publication of “The People’s Charter,” which had been drafted by William Lovett earlier in the year. The Charter set out the six points that the Chartists believed would lead to equality for all Britain’s citizens: votes for all men, equal electoral districts, abolition of the requirement that MPs be property owners, payment for members of parliament, an annual general election, and the secret ballot. The People’s Charter was the beating heart of the Chartists’ politics, and at the hands of the Chartist leader, Feargus O’Connor, the Chartists were decidedly consistent in their support of the six points in the early part of the movement.

class writing” (*Poetry of Chartism* 70).<sup>113</sup> Throughout its multiple manifestations from 1837-1852, the journal ran a weekly poetry column, published accounts of Chartist activities across Britain, and was a vociferous supporter of the working class and the six-point Charter.<sup>114</sup> *The Northern Star* was also the journal that gave the strongest voice to female Chartists. On 23 June 1838, a female weaver, who called herself “a real democrat,” asserted women’s right “to have a vote in the legislation of her country” (3).<sup>115</sup> With a contributor’s list of over thirty women, including E.H., F. Saunderson, Eliza Cook, the abolitionist Frances Dana Gage, Ann Moss, Emily Varndell, Mrs. B.F. Foster, Maria Abdy, and Mary Howitt, *The Northern Star* boasted a diverse poetry column.<sup>116</sup>

Within *The Northern Star*, working-class women aligned themselves with the Chartist movement, their poetry taking up the emancipatory cry of the Chartists, and contributing to the political climate of the 1830s and 1840s. In my study of *The Northern Star*, I wish to introduce two new poets to the critical community: E.H. and

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<sup>113</sup> See chapter two for a discussion of Sanders’s book. For a comprehensive examination of the poetry published in *The Northern Star*, see Sanders’s “A Jackass Load of Poetry”: The Northern Star’s Poetry Column 1838–1852,” and chapter three of *The Poetry of Chartism* (69-86). I am indebted to Mike for his insight into *The Northern Star*, and for graciously sharing his research with me.

<sup>114</sup> Anne Janowitz has noted the wide dissemination of the journal. She writes of *The Northern Star*, “In 1839 the weekly circulation ran as high as 36,000 copies paid per week, and given an illiteracy rate of about one-third of the working class, the estimate is that each copy served between fifty and eighty readers/listeners in radical coffee houses, working-class taverns and reading rooms and working people’s clubs” (138).

<sup>115</sup> Schwarzkopf argues that this Glaswegian weaver “affirmed women’s right to vote, yet never pressed for the actual recognition of this right by the movement at large” (90).

<sup>116</sup> It also included reprints of poems that were sympathetic to the working-class cause by P.B. Shelley, Robert Southey, William Linton, and Robert Burns, and the journal’s tribute to poets, entitled “The Feast of the Poets,” contained extracts from Caroline Norton’s “The Child of the Islands,” F.M.S.’s “Woman’s Prayer,” as well as a poem by Mrs. James Gray entitled “The Use of Poets.”

F. Saunderson.<sup>117</sup> The editors of *The Northern Star* explicitly identify both women as working class: E.H. was a factory girl from Stalybridge, and F. Saunderson, a “female cottager.” Their poems provide evidence of a specifically gendered political verse, one that emerges and coalesces in the radical periodical press of the 1830s and 1840s. Their strategic use of diction and Chartist rhetoric presents women as a galvanizing force in the emancipation of the working class, and their poetry expands our understanding of literary labour politics. We know nothing of E.H., the factory girl from Stalybridge,<sup>118</sup> who published “On Joseph Rayner Stephens” in the poetry column of the 18 May 1839 issue of *The Northern Star*, and can only rely on her poetic self-representation. From her verse, we can glean fragments of her life. She was never formally educated, and her father was a preacher who could not support his family, so she was sent to work at a cotton mill when she was eight years old. The passage which suggests that she worked a textile mill makes reference to the loom:

I was sent to the mill at eight years of age,  
And for many a year I'd stand on a stage;  
When my limbs were all tir'd and my strength overcome,  
I'd often to lay myself down under the loom. (29-32)

The editors of *The Northern Star* provide an opening editorial comment about the poem: “[w]e insert the following Rhymes by a Factory Girl, as a proof of the shrewdness with which the uneducated can form opinions of such great truths as they are interested in when brought before them” (7). The above validation by the editors

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<sup>117</sup> At the time of writing, E.H. had not yet been discussed. A discussion of her poem, “On Joseph Rayner Stephens” is now included in the introduction to Sanders’s *The Poetry of Chartism* (18-21).

<sup>118</sup> Stalybridge is a factory town near Manchester, UK.

legitimizes the work of this working-class woman writer, providing the poem's readers with an authorial context.

In "On Joseph Rayner Stephens," E.H. fuses religion and reform, and indirectly supports political change through her praise of the reformer, Joseph Rayner Stephens (1805-1879).<sup>119</sup> E.H.'s association with Stephens illuminates working-class women's awareness of local people and events, but more importantly, their participation in the construction of Chartist counter-culture. Eileen Yeo notes that Stephens preached

sermons in which he called mill-owners murderers and swindlers and denounced the existing factory system as contrary to the word of God. The bourgeois membership deserted but the Stephensite Methodists grew quickly as a working-class denomination and by 1839 could boast ten preaching stations and thirty-one preachers in the Ashton circuit alone. (115)

E.H.'s poem, placed directly above an article entitled the "State of Political Feeling" on page seven of the journal, sits neatly within the political schematic of *The Northern Star*.<sup>120</sup>

It is notable that E.H.'s poem openly addresses Stephens. He was clearly a valued member of the reformist associations in the Lancashire factory districts, and E.H. may

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<sup>119</sup> Stephens, a Methodist minister in Manchester, was heavily involved in factory reform, and a supporter and friend of Richard Oastler (1789-1861). He vehemently opposed the 1834 Poor Law, and organized boycotts on shops whose owners did not support social reform. Stephens was a dissenter, and his support of the disestablishment of the church caused problems with the Wesleyan hierarchy, forcing him to resign in 1834. By 1836, Stephens was a leader of the factory reform movement and was later associated with the Chartist movement, though he rejected the label. He was well known in radical circles and his name appeared a number of times throughout the run of *The Northern Star*. (Lyon, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*).

<sup>120</sup> The journal announced in the 11 May 1839 (2.78.1) issue that E.H.'s poem would be published the subsequent week (4), and incidentally, in the same column, there is an announcement of a forthcoming sermon to be preached by "Mr. Stephens" on 12 May. Stephens was regularly discussed in *The Northern Star*.

well have strategically chosen Stephens as a part of her approach to the reformation of religion. Yeo has argued that, after it was discovered that two Anglican ministers were among the magistrates who ordered violence against the peaceful demonstrators of Peterloo in 1819, “many radical Christians [decided] to spell out a counter-Christianity, in an effort ‘to deliver the religion of Jesus Christ from the disgrace brought upon it’ and to retain credibility with the working class” (110).<sup>121</sup> Yeo observes how

[a] radical Christian sensibility was conspicuous in the embryonic phase of Chartism when *The Northern Star* newspaper started publication in late 1837 and early 1838. The fight against the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, which was being implemented in the north for the first time, occupied a central place on the agitational stage. This campaign was being conducted in religious terms by a group of preachers and ministers, including the Rev. Joseph Rayner Stephens, Anglican Parson Bull, and the Swedenborgian editor of the Northern Star, the Rev. William Hill, who denounced the act as contrary to the will of God. (111)

E.H.’s use of Stephens as the representative of a “pure” Chartist Christianity, speaks to the fact that working-class poets used real people and events in their art to further their political and religious agendas.

By invoking a well-known local figure, especially one whose name was already established in the pages of *The Northern Star*, E.H. stakes claim to her participation in Chartist discourse. By writing about Stephens, E.H. shows that she is a poet who can write about both the topical (Stephens) and the universal (religion). Thus when E.H.

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<sup>121</sup> See also Barbara Taylor’s discussion of the “religious revival” and socialism (122-25).

describes Stephens as the disciple of God, she fuses the local and the universal, using Stephens as a means for furthering the Chartist agenda:

For he takes God's holy word for his guide,  
And all other books he does lay aside;  
He tells us the truth, him we will obey,  
For (God and his People) they shall win the day. (9-12)

E.H. creates a semantic link between the referent (Stephens) and the words “his guide / [...] will obey” and “lay aside / [...] win the day.” While the reader attaches these phrases to “God,” she must by extension understand them in relation to Stephens. These careful pairings and cross-meanings occur throughout the poem, highlighting E.H.’s distinction between rich and poor, heathen and disciple. E.H. provides a direct contrast between Stephens, a “friend of the poor” (38)—whom she sees as God’s disciple who will lead the poor to salvation—and the mill owners and their families, who turn away from the “truth” of God’s word to create a worship that suits their style of living: “Religion, alas, I am sorry to say, / They change and turn it just their own way” (13-14).

E.H., like the female poets in *The Pioneer*, furthermore uses an emancipatory rhetoric, fusing reform and religion, which she constructs as two powerful antidotes that combine to eradicate working-class oppression. She asserts that the mill owners have “bound” the poor with “chains of oppression,” while “God in his Providence has us enlighten’d” (41, 43). She praises Stephens as a leader who provides moral guidance across class boundaries (for the poor and mill owners alike):<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Yeo notes of Stephens, “Not only did he preach that the Christian minister must be humble in



We long have been friendless, distress'd, and forlorn,  
But Stephens he has loudly blown the ram's horn;  
Those walls of oppression they shall surely fall,  
Though our tyrants are great, God is greater than all. (45-48)

The image of Stephens as a shepherd and leader is underscored by the powerful forward metre of the lines, and serves two important points: first, it sets up the working class as a community of "the people," and second, it suggests that Stephens has the authority to crumble the metaphorical walls of industry and capitalism and save the working class from the "tyrants." E.H. further extends the metaphor through a double representation of the "Gospel" in her description of Stephen's detractors:

A wolf in sheep's clothing says he will devour  
All that mention your name, if they are under his pow'r;  
But if that be his preaching, I can tell you, my friend,  
It is time for such preaching to come to an end. (49-52)

The rhetoric of this passage conjures images of the upper class as a false prophet who leads the people astray.<sup>123</sup> In keeping with the agenda of *The Northern Star*, E.H. uses strategic ambiguity and another cross pairing in line 56, in her invocation of the "Gospel" and the "Ten Hours' Bill." The poet's ardent call, "The Gospel, the Gospel, and the Ten Hours' Bill!" makes apparent this link between religion and reform (56). It is the "Gospel" of both Chartism and religion, here fused into a single, monolithic conception of a "pure" faith of the People's Charter and Christianity.

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personal ambition but fearless in prophecy ("to stand for ever as a moral breakwater against the swelling surge of pride and oppression"), he lived the part" (114).

<sup>123</sup> See Matthew 7:15-23 in the King James Version (1611): "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."

Along with her use of Chartist religious discourses, E.H. contributes to the literary convention of a “hunger for literacy” that is often present in working-class and slave narratives of the nineteenth century.<sup>124</sup> She provides a direct link to sustenance and education in her assertion that “If they had sent us to school, better rhyme could we make, / And I think it is time we had some of their cake” (27-28),<sup>125</sup> here associating education with the ability not only to write, but also to eat. As Sander writes in the introduction to *The Poetry of Chartism*, “E.H. protests her cultural deprivation as bitterly as any material deprivation” (1). And yet she problematizes this link when she examines the morality of the mill owners and their wives, and interrogates the education, clothing, and religion of the upper classes:

Their children, too, to school must be sent,  
Till all kinds of learning and music have learnt;  
Their wives must have veils, silk dresses, and cloaks,  
And some who support them can't get linsey coats.

I have searched the Bible, on purpose to find,  
If such things as these by God was design'd,  
But I never could find them recorded therein,

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<sup>124</sup> Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, for instance is preoccupied with food and hunger. Douglass tricks the neighbourhood children into teaching him how to read by trading food for words: “bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins [...] in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge” (32). Douglass also declares of Garrison's *Liberator*, “The paper became my meat and my drink” (74). See also David Vincent.

<sup>125</sup> Though I have not found a direct link, this passage, with its use of the word “cake” also suggests an identification with the French Revolution and the phrase “*Qu'ils mangent de la brioche*” or “let them eat cake.” Many scholars and critics have attributed these words to Marie Antoinette, who putatively spoke them upon hearing that the French peasantry was starving. For an interesting discussion of the importance of “cake,” see Sanders's introduction to *The Poetry of Chartism* (19).

And, therefore, I think it must be a great sin. (17-24)

In this passage, E.H. questions how the accomplishments of the upper classes can be more moral than the hard work of the poor. In chapter two, I argue that working-class women were often characterized as sexually deviant,<sup>126</sup> and as victims of their bodies' desires; in this poem, the body and mind divide is subverted by a factory worker who positions herself on the side of the mind and intellect, and the upper classes on the side of the body and desire. She gives a physical body to the upper classes in her descriptions of their clothing, contrasting their sinning bodies with her disembodied, spiritual attention to the Bible.

Finally, E.H. is also self-conscious about the rhetorical complexity of her poetry.<sup>127</sup> E.H.'s strategic and political use of poetic form strengthens her claim to both working-class status and intellectual output. In her assertion that education would most certainly lead to "better rhyme," she further complicates the notion of education and literacy by distinctly gendering notions of working-class writing:

We factory lasses have but little time,  
So I hope you will pardon my bad written rhyme.  
God bless him for striving to get us our rights,  
And I wish the world over were true Stephenites. (61-64)

In these lines, E.H. conflates religion, reform of working hours, and literacy, suggesting that the improvement of one aspect will positively affect all three. Her

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<sup>126</sup> Carol Groneman has noted that "working-class women [...] were perceived as inordinately lustful and as sexual opportunists" (350). See also chapter two in my study.

<sup>127</sup> Sanders has revealed how E.H.'s poem bears a resemblance, in sentiment at least, to Gerald Massey's claims in the preface to his *Voices of Freedom and Lyrics of Love* (1851), where Massey "simultaneously acknowledges and excuses his poetic shortcomings" (*Poetry of Chartism* 2).

poem seems to suggest that religious reform would lead to factory reform, and factory reform in turn would lead to improvement in education and standards of living.

E.H.'s "On Joseph Rayner Stephens" ends with the promise of better poems, and an optimistic hope that Stephens's word will emancipate the working classes and provide them with the ability to improve their writing: "[s]o I bid you good bye, till my verses I've mended" (68). Indeed, E.H.'s praise of Stephens is no simple laudatory verse, but a complex analysis of religion and factory reform in Lancashire in the late 1830s. When it is examined in relation to its publication in the foremost Chartist journal, the poem can be seen to participate in the Chartist demand for education and religious reformation. "On Joseph Rayner Stephens" provides a remarkable example of the ability of a working-class woman to infuse her poetry with politics in a way that validates her political stance in a public forum.

Like E.H., F. Saunderson, "a female cottager," also published "labour literature" in the foremost Chartist journal. While the title is innocuous, "Spring Reflections" is in fact a veiled political poem about poverty and the workhouse. Saunderson strategically employs the working-class woman's "gaze," and contrasts the pastoral vision of social harmony and the realistic depiction of the disharmonious industrial world. In other words, she "naturalizes" the female poet<sup>128</sup> by envisioning her within the pastoral, pre-industrial world, while the working-class male is trapped in industrial modernity. Early in the poem she uses "Spring" to represent the (here feminised) human connection with nature and life, and with peace and freedom. The first section of the

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<sup>128</sup> See chapter one, in which I discuss my theory of naturalization as well as Mellor's construction of the "female poet" who pushes for social and political reform through her engagement with specific political and historical moment.

poem is rife with pastoral diction: Saunderson invokes “Sol” (2) and “Flora” (7), and describes the “fruitful showers” (4), and “lovely bloom” (10), where “herds graze peacefully” beside the “gurgling streams” (12, 15). Saunderson rewrites the woman poet/ worker out of industrial victimization in order to pass judgment on the society that would subjugate its poor. She thus writes the working-class woman into a position of power, and suggests that women are the galvanizing force for working-class emancipation.<sup>129</sup>

Saunderson interweaves a Romantic ethos and Chartist ethic to create a poem that is bolstered and legitimised by earlier poetic traditions and that resonates with other working-class women’s poetry.<sup>130</sup> In its use of a binary between nature and industry, “Spring Reflections” closely resembles Wordsworth’s “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” in which the poet protests the workhouses, “whose dreary walls would be more kindly treated by the open air” (Landry, *Muses* 278). Saunderson writes that the poor man is condemned to “Bastile misery” (55), just as Wordsworth turns the factory into a prison:

Reverence the hope whose vital anxiousness

Gives the last human interest to his heart.

May never HOUSE, misnamed of INDUSTRY,

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<sup>129</sup> In his study of the literary pastoral and social realities, and “the ways in which the pastoral process of putting the complex into the simple and the resulting social ideas have been used in English literature” (22), William Empson contends that the pastoral allows “natural expression for a sense of social injustice” (16). He argues that “[s]o far as the person described is outside society because too poor for its benefits he is independent, as the artist claims to be, and can be a critic of society” (16).

<sup>130</sup> It can, for example, be read in contrast to Elizabeth Campbell’s “A Prison Cell,” which “recorded the mind-states of an imprisoned man” in first person narrative: “My head ached, I fainted and fell, / When they lock’d me up in a prison cell” (qtd. in Boos, “Rural Poetry” 333). Fanny Forrester especially depicted the connections between the working classes and nature. For a discussion of Forrester, see chapter five.

Make him a captive! – for that pent-up din,  
Those life-consuming sounds that clog the air,  
Be his the natural silence of old age! (177-82; qtd. in Landry, *Muses* 278).

Janowitz writes that “[l]andscape and consciousness are associated in the Wordsworthian poetic; land, poetry, and nationhood are continually identified in the nineteenth-century arguments of class consciousness” (152). She contends that Chartist poets appropriated

the landscape of personal meditation for the uses of the class, and such a poetic claim simultaneously reaches back before romantic landscape atemporality to the tradition of topographical poetry which used the visible remains of history in the landscape as a set of general moral markers. (152)

Thus the physical space of the prison, workhouse, or factory is also representative of the psychological state of the working-class individual when trapped within the concrete and steel of the industrial city.

If the Chartists drew on Romantic poetry, it makes sense that Saunderson’s binary between the pre- and post-industrial world would harmonize with the Chartist’s use of the same trope. In Ernest Jones’s “The Factory Town,”<sup>131</sup> for example, the workers lament their detachment from the “dewy grasses” and “breeze” of the rural landscape (45), which Jones contrasts with the factory’s “cold, grey wall and blackened tower” (4). Like E.H.’s “On Joseph Rayner Stephens,” Jones’s poem is class-inflected; in his poem, the working class “have God and nature still,” while the upper

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<sup>131</sup> Published in *The Labourer: A Monthly Magazine of Politics, Literature, and Poetry* 1 (1847). Reprinted in Schekner (175-79).

classes have naught but “Gold and Hell” (103-4). Jones presents an imagined future free from the imprisonment of the factory town, describing:

[...] how many a happy village  
    Shall be smiling o’er the plain.  
Amid the corn-field’s pleasant tillage,  
    And the orchard’s rich domain!  
While, with rotting roof and rafter,  
    Drops the factory, stone by stone. (109-14)

He contrasts the organic nature of the pastoral with the stone walls of the factory, envisioning the Charter as the force necessary to dismantle stone and regain the land.

In Saunderson’s poem, the shift from the pastoral to the industrial occurs in lines 17-22, when the poet turns away from her enjoyment of nature to reflect upon a man who has been torn away from the natural environment.<sup>132</sup> In this passage, we read a latent critique of a capitalist, urban society, which renders the working-class prisoner confined to a “dull hateful spot” (the workhouse) shut away from nature:

While thus my soul, entranced, surveys  
Creation’s beauties; and my gaze,  
And pleasure to my glowing heart,  
Think of him who ’neath the smart  
Of fell oppression sighs; immured

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<sup>132</sup> The turn from and the meditation on the prisoner precisely match the structure of “The Convict” from *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), in which the poet turns from nature to gaze upon a poor wretch: “I pause; and at length, through the glimmering grate, / That outcast of pity behold” (11-12). Thus Saunderson’s poem links back to Romantic Prison poetry, which was rooted in the reform movement of the 1790s. See Aileen Ward. Thank you to Judith Thompson for alerting me to this parallel.

In Bastile [*sic*] walls, by bars secured. (17-22)

She turns from her view of the natural world to the “walls” that imprison the poor man, and “Shut [him] from the sight of nature’s charms” (23).<sup>133</sup> By drawing a parallel to the “Bastile,” Saunderson invokes a well-defined literary trope.<sup>134</sup> She stands beyond the walls of imprisonment, and thinks upon the “needy wretch” (29),

Whom fell misfortune dooms to stretch,  
His weary limbs, and aching head,  
Upon the Union Workhouse bed;  
[...]  
Where prison walls and felon’s fare

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”:

These beauteous forms,  
Through a long absence, have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:  
But oft, in lonely rooms, and ’mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;  
And passing even into my purer mind,  
With tranquil restoration [...]. (22-30)

<sup>134</sup> According to Deborah Kennedy,

[n]othing symbolized “the crimes of old despotism” more than the Bastille, the most famous site of early revolutionary violence—and, triumph. The Bastille had long been a universal symbol of the arbitrary power of kings to imprison their subjects and had gripped the imagination of writers in England and around the world. (59-60)

Bradshaw and Ozment have also noted that workhouses were often called “Poor Law Bastilles” in the first part of the nineteenth century (510). Dickens referred to a section of Poor Law housing as the “Newgate” of the workhouse in “A Walk in a Workhouse” (Bradshaw and Ozment 514). Notable eighteenth-century poets also supported the French Revolution and downfall of the Bastille, demonstrating their political beliefs through their poetry. In Helen Maria Williams’s “The Bastille, A Vision” from *Julia, A Novel* (1790), she wrote a letter entitled “A Visit to the Bastille,” filled with wonderment at the symbolism of its ruins: “After having visited the Bastille, we may indeed be surprised that a nation so enlightened as the French submitted so long to the oppressions of their government. But we must cease to wonder that their indignant spirits at length shook off the galling yoke” (qtd. in Wu and Miall 95). In William Cowper’s “The Bastille” in Book Five of *The Task* (1785), notes Kennedy, “Cowper [...] elegantly exposed the Bastille’s legendary status in a passage from his long poem, *The Task*, which deplored its ‘cages of despair’ and claimed ‘There’s not an English heart that would not leap / To hear that ye were fall’n at last’ (60).



Are all that grinding wealth can spare,  
From its ill-gotten, endless, store  
For labour's sons, grown old and poor. (30-32, 39-42)

The diction in this passage contrasts with the description of the pastoral world of the poet: nature is set against the workhouse, the “weary limbs,” “anxious care,” and the “grinding wealth” that cannot provide for the people.

The poem turns upon the word “gaze” (18, 45) employing a specific narrative strategy that places the poet at the top of a hierarchical set of gender and class relations. The poem is split into two parts, with the turn occurring at line 21. The symmetry of the poem in the poet's use of couplets contrasts with her anaphoric use of the impersonal interrogative pronouns “When” at the beginning of lines 1, 5, 7, and 9, and “While” at the beginning of lines 11 and 17, and with the specificity of “Whose” (25), “Whom,” (30) and “Where” (39) in the second part of the poem. This creates a jarring effect that coincides with movement of the poem from the natural world in the “spring reflections” to the man “who 'neath the smart / Of fell oppression sighs; immured” (20-21). A conventionally Romantic hierarchy is set in place in which the poet writes in first person—she is an objective observer, and so, like Wordsworth or Coleridge, she can look out from nature's seat to the world below.<sup>135</sup> The pastoral tone

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<sup>135</sup> Critics of 18<sup>th</sup>-c. georgic and topographical verse focuses on the emphasis on the speaker's objective vision. See Ogden. For a poetic example, cf. Coleridge's “Fears in Solitude”:

I find myself upon the brow, and pause  
Startled ! And after lonely sojourning  
In such a quiet and surrounded nook,  
This burst of prospect, here the shadowy main,  
Dim tinted, there the mighty majesty  
Of that huge amphitheatre of rich  
And elmy fields, seems like society—  
Conversing with the mind, and giving it

of the first half of the poem is contingent upon the poet's ability to see nature with both her "soul" (17) and her "gaze" (18). The turn in the middle of the poem relies upon the assumption that the poor wretch of whom the poet speaks is unable to *see* things, both literally and metaphorically:

No tender wife, or daughter fair,  
To soothe his woes with anxious care;  
No children's smiles his heart to cheer;  
In vain for him, the opening year  
Spreads forth its charms: he *sees* them not;  
Confined to one dull hateful spot[.] (33-38; my italics)

Like the female contributors to *The Pioneer*, Saunderson draws on the metaphor of the family. She suggests that the working-class female presence is a necessary force that will help keep the working-class male from the confinement of the workhouse.

The prisoner's abjection lies in the conjoined lack of both domestic comfort and sight. He is imprisoned because he is positioned outside of nature, which in this poem has been depicted as a feminine, emotive space (it is the place where the poet sits and watches) she tells the reader, "I think of him, and many a tear, / (As o'er the beauties of the year, / I cast my gaze)" (43-45). This emphasis upon the gaze places the female working-class poet in a singular position of power: the reader must experience nature and the absence of nature through her poetic lens and position of authority.<sup>136</sup>

Like her contemporary E.H., Saunderson engages with topical subject matter by situating the poem in relation to the religious and social reformation of Britain. Her

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A livelier impulse and a dance of thought! (212-20)

<sup>136</sup> Saunderson is writing in a tradition of "re-vision." See Linkin.

poem contains an allusion that provides evidence that she had some sort of informal education, and almost certainly shows that she was reading *The Northern Star* at the time of her own poem's publication. In the final lines of "Spring Reflections", the poet hopes to inspire the British people

With patriotism's holy fire  
To hurl the *Cerberus* from his throne,  
And tear the unholy triple crown  
From off his brows; and so restore  
To every child, of British birth,  
The right, though poor to tread the earth  
In freedom; never more to be  
Consigned to Bastile misery. (48-55; my italics)

On page 2 of the 31 March 1838 issue, two months prior to the publication of Saunderson's poem, the editors of *The Northern Star* write that "[o]ne writer in a provincial journal, described the Poor Law Commission as a 'cruel Cerberus; a three-headed monster; a devil-king over the inmates of the national prison'" (2). Further down the page, they continue, "[w]e [...] claim the honour of having designated the Poor Law Commission as a 'cruel Cerberus;<sup>137</sup> a three-headed monster; a Devil-King!!'" (2).<sup>138</sup> Certainly the subject of the poem, the poor wretch in the French Bastille, is transferable to the English labourer in a workhouse. The invocation of Cerberus indicates how deeply the poet feels Britain has fallen, and by using this specific

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<sup>137</sup> By the late 1840s and early 1850s Cerberus becomes a general term for oppression for the Chartists, appearing in many of the articles published in *The Northern Star*.

<sup>138</sup> It could possibly allude to the papal tiara.

allusion, Saunderson writes within a Chartist context. The three-headed dog of the underworld, here indicated by his “triple crown,” not only references the New Poor Law, but also gestures to anti-Catholicism, and the possibility of the corruption of religion and the Christian trinity. The final lines of the poem imbue in the working classes a seemingly preternatural strength that will restore what Saunderson sees as their “right” to live upon the earth, “though poor.”

As a final thought on “Spring Reflections,” I want to mention the curious breakdown of metre in the poem’s conclusion. An extra line undermines the symmetry of the closed couplets: “From off his brows; and so restore” (51). That this line has no matching rhyme is strange indeed, but could we perhaps read it as a sign of the difficulty of emancipating the poor? Is it merely a printing error, or does this single line betray a tension in Saunderson’s otherwise carefully constructed poem? While I have no ready answer, it certainly leads one to think more carefully about formal matters in working-class verse.

Like E.H., Saunderson interrogates the role of the poet in society, and demonstrates a female working-class poet’s attempt to inspire her fellow men and women to seek their emancipation and return to nature, away from the confines of capitalist society. Her appeal to “patriotism” situates her words within a nationalist discourse in which the working class envision dutiful patriotism as a means of emancipation. In contrast to “On Joseph Rayner Stephens,” “Spring Reflections” draws upon the power of the female poet, rather than gestures to a male “saviour.” Here, Saunderson sees the working class as the makers of their own destiny, reliant upon

none, and responsible for their own liberty. Saunderson presents a specifically working-class women's subjectivity.

Unlike many of the journals that published the poetry of working-class women, *The Northern Star* chose to identify both the gender and class of these two writers, in an effort, perhaps, to give voice to the underrepresented (which was a goal of the journal from the start). These women stood (and stand) in the radical journals of the 1830s as models of working-class women's literary politics, and they are representatives of their class. In their poems, they reveal a strong sense of local people and events, literary and political discussions, and historical revolutions. Both E.H. and Saunderson challenge working-class oppression by gesturing towards positive models of class relations, arguing for religious reformation and the power of patriotism. We are fortunate that the editors of *The Northern Star* took the time to identify their gender and class.

*Eliza Cook: Chartism's Workers*

I have now introduced E.H. and F. Saunderson and placed them within their Chartist contexts, but I cannot discuss the threads of Chartism in working-class women's poetry without mentioning Eliza Cook. Her poetry established the *topoi* that many of her contemporaries (and successors) would treat in their own poetry. Cook was a contributor to numerous periodicals, including *The Northern Star*, *The Scottish Chartist Circular*, *The Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor*, as well as her own

journal and *Howitt's Journal*, among others.<sup>139</sup> She was a strong supporter of the rights of working people, an advocate of numerous social causes, and an early feminist. Boos has described her as “the most influential and widely read author, editor, and essayist” of the Victorian working-class women poets (*Anthology* 279). She is also the most widely discussed and anthologized working-class woman poet, and has benefited from the research of Sarah Hale, Susan Ozment, and Robinson, among others.<sup>140</sup> In part, her popularity and entry into recent scholarship may be due to the simple fact that we have more biographical information and poetic contributions for her than we do any other working-class woman poet discussed in this project.<sup>141</sup>

Cook also provides an example of the ambiguity of class in the nineteenth century. While she was able to support herself as writer, she was also a tinman's daughter, and her journal addressed working-class and gender issues. Much of Cook's poetry dealt with the nature of work. For the purposes of this study, Cook's class position illustrates how an analysis of working-class women's poetry must consider not only authors who worked as factory girls and servants, but also those women whose class position was contested. Unlike many of the working-class women who will be discussed throughout the course of this project, Cook actively sought and maintained a distinctive and prominent identity in a wide range of literary circles. Her

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<sup>139</sup> Some of her poems include “Stanzas” and “Our Common Land” in the *Scottish Chartist Circular* (No. 54 Oct 3, 1840, p.220), “Build not the Sand” in the *Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor* 2.51 (18 September 1852): 399, and the “Song of the Spirit of Poverty” in *The Northern Star* (17 February 1844).

<sup>140</sup> Robinson writes that “[w]hile she has been remembered primarily for her sentimental poems about her mother's death and for her campaign to erect a memorial to the poet Thomas Hood, Cook has been largely overlooked as an articulate and sensitive poet of working-class life” (229).

<sup>141</sup> Cook is one of the few working-class women poets to be included in both the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

journal catered to both middle- and working-class readers, as well as to young readers of all classes. She espoused a belief in the rights of men and women, and yet also in the status quo. Critics have also noted her role as a Unitarian in recent years.<sup>142</sup> Cook presents an interesting complication, and underscores the difficulty in studying the poetry of a particular class. Nevertheless, whether one considers her a member of the working class or the lower-middle class, a study of her poetry provides an entry into the study of other working-class women poets.<sup>143</sup> In this section, I argue that, in Cook's labour poems, she raises the esteem of work, and thus valorizes the labourer.

Cook provides the first example in this study of a woman who relied upon the benefaction of a male literary patron; Mary Hutton—in the next chapter—will serve as the second.<sup>144</sup> Cook's early poetry was published in the *Literary Gazette*, under the editorial eye of William Jerdan,<sup>145</sup> and she published her first volume of poetry, *Lays of*

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<sup>142</sup> See Gleadle.

<sup>143</sup> A number of poets in the 1830s and 1840s tread this boundary between working class and lower middle class. Ernest Jones, though a barrister and from affluent beginnings, has been considered one of the foremost Chartist poets. Thomas Cooper and William Linton both came from humble backgrounds, but were eventually able to support themselves by writing.

<sup>144</sup> In her *Anthology*, Boos argues that of the poems and poets whose names we can recover, almost all of them received some kind of support from an outside benefactor, usually male. She writes, “[b]ehind or beside every poor poet whose work has survived stood at least one [...] sympathetic editor or patron, and this was a blessing few aspiring poor writers could hope to enjoy” (15). Boos's hypothesis holds true for most of the women discussed in this dissertation, and certainly for the women who succeeded in publishing full volumes of poetry (Mary Hutton, Ellen Johnston).

<sup>145</sup> It is difficult to estimate the exact role that patrons such as Jerdan played in the literary lives of working-class women, but Cook's poem “To the Late William Jerdan” suggests that he was instrumental in her life as a writer: “Thou bad'st me *think* and *feel*; not dream / And 'look into my heart and write” (7-8). William Jerdan also patronized L.E.L., and “John Thelwall positioned himself in rivalry with Jerdan as a mentor to L.E.L., which in turn suggests a definite political dynamic in the relation between male patrons and female poets. Thelwall's values were much more consonant with those of working-class reformers, while Jerdan's were more bourgeois. This suggests an important chapter to the story of the raising of working class women's political consciousness, which hasn't been told. I know of no working class women that Thelwall patronized (unless actresses count as such and I suppose they do), but he was certainly very interested in raising women's political consciousness (and educating them), and he saw himself as a rival to Jerdan in this regard” (J. Thompson, Personal Correspondence, April 16, 2009).

*the Wild Harp* (1835), with the initials E.C. (Boos, *Anthology* 280). She also published eight subsequent volumes of poetry, as well as *Eliza Cook's Journal*, which began in 1849 and ran until 1854, when publication stopped due to Cook's increasing infirmity. She was never married; her belief in the degradation of women in marriage was a theme that ran throughout the publication run of her journal.

Cook's lyrics have been strongly identified with the poetry of the Chartist movement, and Robinson has shown how she serves as a model for a particularly political working-class women's subjectivity (230).<sup>146</sup> Cook's emphasis on the power and importance of "work" as an essential feature of working-class emancipation places her poetry within a political context that aligns itself with Chartism. Her poetry is informed by a gendered utterance in which she affords power to the working class, which is a power built upon the strength of solidarity.

Cook exists within the canon of women's literature as a figure on the margins. She is neither wholly working class, nor wholly middle class.<sup>147</sup> Cook was self-educated, and by the time of her death, "her name was a 'household word'" (Robinson 230, 232). She published her poems in the periodical press, and has a prolific

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<sup>146</sup> Solveig Robinson writes,

Cook's songs of labor express a radical vision of a fundamentally more democratic England, a vision that fuses an idealistic belief in the dignity of manual work with a pragmatic belief in the efficacy of self-improvement through cooperation and education. Both through her employment of simple and direct language and regular metres, and through her sympathetic depiction of the pains and pleasures of working-class life, Cook's lyrics share many of the distinguishing features of Chartist poetry. In fact, in certain instances her poems exemplify the Chartist ideals to a greater extent than do the works of the male poets traditionally associated with the movement. (229-30)

<sup>147</sup> Cook was both marginalized by her working-class contemporaries and disrespected in middle-class circles. Her poems drew condescension from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who wrote to Mary Russell Mitford regarding a scandal with Cook's newest literary patron: "[h]er poetry, so called, I cannot really admire—though of course she has a talent in the way of putting verses together, of a respectable kind" (EBB to Mary Russell Mitford, 16 August 1845; Letters 1983, 136). The same tone is found in the words of Christina Rossetti, who declared that her brother should call her "Eliza Cook" if he thought her verses bad (W.M. Rossetti 88).



publication record of full-volume works. And so her absence from Chartist scholarship, as Robinson has noted, is indeed curious (230).

Cook's most powerful poems were the verses that confronted modernity and industrialism, and attacked the secular and religious hypocrisies of the upper classes. As Robinson has argued, Cook's "poetry also reveals a significant and largely unnoticed political content, a politics dedicated to the project of 'levelling up'" (229). Her poem, "Song of the Workers," interrogates the nature of work and its role in labourers' lives. It is both a reconsideration of the benefits of labour,<sup>148</sup> and a critique of exploitative over-work. The poem was originally published in *Eliza Cook's Journal*, and later appeared in Cook's 1860 volume, *Poems*, under the same title.<sup>149</sup> Written for the Early Closing Movement,<sup>150</sup> "Song for the Workers" demonstrates Cook's belief in the value of work, and supports workers' rights to fair working hours and to earn their own wages.

The poem validates the working-man's right to "toil to win his living" (1), for "Work is not a task to spurn; / Poor is gold of others' giving, / To the silver that we earn" (2-4). Cook uses sixty-four lines of trochaic tetrameter to demand that work be recognized as a valued and important part of the nation. The forward momentum of the trochees advances the verse, mirroring the rhythm of work, and embodying the inextricability of poetic meter and physical labour, intellectual endeavours and "production." The poem asks that work be accepted under the sanction of God. The

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<sup>148</sup> Robinson asserts that the poem espouses Cook's "beliefs in dignity and inherent value of labor" (243).

<sup>149</sup> The poem has been anthologized in recent years (Cunningham 437-38, Leighton and Reynolds 189).

<sup>150</sup> The Early Closing Movement did for shopkeepers what the Ten Hours Movement did for factory workers: it sought to reduce the number of hours of work.

repetition of “Work on bravely, GOD’s own daughters, / Work on stanchly, GOD’s own sons” emphasises the repetitive nature of work; the imperative tone affords power to the female poet who so ardently supports the working class (17-18, 61-62).

In this poem, we see how Cook tried to use poetry as a vehicle for social change. Throughout the poem, she sets up a series of questions that interrogate the position of workers in society as “unceasing drudges” (21), “slaves” (27), and “soulless things” (34), who are “fatigued to loathing” (53). Implicit in these words is the critique of a life of manual labour in which workers are merely synecdochic hands. The verse calls for the working class to repeat the resounding “No” to the questions put forth by the poet, and thus the poem becomes a veritable rallying cry for the working people (57). The penultimate stanza answers the questions of the preceding stanzas, and establishes a contrast between the “Right” of the working people and the “canker spot” of a nation grown too commercialized:

No! for Right is up and asking  
Loudly for a fairer lot;  
And Commerce must not let her tasking  
Form a nation’s canker spot. (57-60)

It is only through work that the people can establish a strong and important position in society. Here, Cook portrays commercialization and capitalism as a pustule on the face of the nation, and this coupling, like E.H.’s conflation of the Gospel and the Ten Hours’ Bill and F. Saunderson’s invocation of Cerberus, draws a dark portrait of the

British nation as it stands in relation to modernity.<sup>151</sup> The final stanza reiterates the importance of the working classes' right to unexploitative work. The repetition of the imperative spondees of "Work on," suggest the ability of workers to carry on despite hardship; but, until they have "smoother waters," social reformers must stand up for them, and "Truth" must "fire her minute guns" (61-64). Couched in religious and nationalist rhetoric, work thus becomes part of the movement towards a utopian society, and anyone who questions the worker's essential right is committing a form of "treason" (47).

In "A Song for the Workers," Cook establishes her alignment with and support of the working classes, and her strong poetic voice legitimizes the work of the people. Cook's place in both middle- and working-class circles would have extended the readership of her journal substantially. "A Song to the Workers" is a poem that speaks both above to the middle class as a critique of capitalism, and below to the workers. As Robinson notes, "Cook's self-presentation as a poet of the people, her use of popular forms and employment of simple, direct language, and her championing of recurrent Chartist themes all reinforce the idea that her songs of labor were explicitly political works, intended as much to inform—and reform—as to delight" (230). However, nowhere in Cook's poem is the status quo questioned. Workers still must work; the only difference is whether or not they work under the yoke of "commerce." Cook carefully maneuvers between the "levelling up" of the worker (Robinson 229), and the maintenance of the status quo. Cook provides an indication of a positive

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<sup>151</sup> As Robinson notes, "Like other Chartist poetry, Cook's poems repeatedly show their class sympathies by sounding the belief that England's greatness derives not from the wealth of its landowners and industrialists, but from the health and strength of its laborers" (234).

model of class relations that problematically does not question their inherent hierarchies.

*“Marie”’s “Trees of Liberty”*

Like Cook, “Marie,” who is described in *The People’s Journal* as a factory dye-worker from Chorley, uses poetry to depict positive models of class relations and work; her poetry is imbued with hope and uplifting refrains.<sup>152</sup> She argues for the power of work as way to improve the lives of workers, but she also shows a belief in the rejuvenating potential of poetry itself. “Marie” had multiple patrons, including Cook, and William and Mary Howitt, without whom it is unlikely her poems would have made it into print. “Marie”’s first poem appeared in *The People’s Journal* in 1846, and Boos has noted that she went on to publish twenty-two more, which made her the journal’s “foremost working-class woman author” (“Homely Muse” 258). Susan Zlotnick writes of “Marie”’s poem “Labour,” that “what distinguishes [the poem] from working-class poetry written later in the century is the imagery Marie deploys to realize her vision of the better world that can be created through dint of hard work” (“Dialect” 17). The refrain, “Labour is the only worship / Any soul can bring,” echoes the theme of Cook’s “Song for the Workers.” Also, in the poem “Heroisms,” she validates working-class labour, characterising work as heroic and depicting it as more than just daily drudgery. “Marie” compares the “labourer” and his “spade and hoe” with the “warrior” and his “sword and shield” (17-18, 1-2).

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<sup>152</sup> Boos describes “Marie”’s poetry as representing “an ideal of poetry as *rhapsode*, an instrument to sustain visionary hopes and aspirations in the face of deprivation and impending death, and offer concomitant models of resignation, hopefulness, and self-respect as tokens of sustenance to her fellow workers” (“Homely Muse” 255).

One of “Marie”’s most interesting poems is “Trees of Liberty,” which appeared in the *Working Man’s Friend and Family Instructor* in 1852. “Trees of Liberty,” like Saunderson’s “Spring Reflections,” is written in iambic tetrameter, but here each stanza—with the exception of the first—is comprised of fourteen lines and the rhyme scheme of an English sonnet (abab cdcd efef ee). “Marie” is working within a tradition of Chartist liberty sonnets<sup>153</sup> as well as participating in the creation of an “organic” Chartist poetry, which interweaves “Chartism, nature, and British history” (Sanders *Poetry of Chartism* 142).<sup>154</sup> The simple tetrameter of the poem recalls the tradition of pastoral verse, and the alignment of pastoral with labour.

The subject matter also situates the poem within its political contexts. “Trees of Liberty” enacts a cultural rejuvenation of working-class emancipation through the metaphor of the tree. “Marie”’s use of the image of the “tree of liberty” links her poem to a larger history of social protest from the 1790s until the revolutions of 1848. Lynn Avery Hunt writes that during the French Revolution, “the liberty tree became a general symbol of adherence to the Revolution, and, by May 1792, 60,000 liberty trees had been planted all over France” (Hunt 59).<sup>155</sup> The image of the trees were also used during the European Revolutions of 1848. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for example, mentions the tree in Part II of *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851):

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<sup>153</sup> Cf. John Watkins’s “Sonnet” which opens by asking “Chartists! what strive ye for? for liberty!” (1). See chapter four in Sanders’s *The Poetry of Chartism*, “Insurrectionary Sonnets: The Ideological Afterlife of the Newport Uprising” (87-128).

<sup>154</sup> For an example of Chartist “organicist” poetry see John Sixty’s “O’Connor’s Demonstration,” which imagines “a post-Charter future defined by agricultural plenty, romantic love and freedom” (qtd. in Sanders *Poetry of Chartism* 142 ).

<sup>155</sup> In the 1790s, writes Hunt, “the first ‘trees’ were the maypoles planted by the peasants of Périgord during their insurrection against local lords in the winter of 1790. The insurrectionary poles often looked like gallows and were frequently hung with menacing slogans. Priests, notables, and national commissioners sent to inquire considered these maypoles ‘insulting witnesses,’ ‘symbols of revolt,’ and ‘monuments of insurrection.’” (59).

Nay, what we proved, we shouted—how we shouted,  
(Especially the boys did) boldly planting  
That tree of liberty, whose fruit is doubted,  
Because the roots are not of nature’s granting.  
A tree of good and evil!—none, without it,  
Grow gods!—alas, and, with it, men are wanting! (178-183)

In its nineteenth-century contexts, the “Tree of Liberty” was an important symbol for those seeking social reform. In her study of British labouring-class nature poetry, Bridget Keegan argues that “tree poetry reveals more consistent political positions than are generally legible in other labouring-class nature writing” (173). She provides a (brief) discussion of “Marie”’s “optimistic anthem” (189), noting that the tree is a “potent symbol of freedom” (189).<sup>156</sup>

By using this central metaphor of the tree and knowledge, “Marie” also establishes herself within the contexts of the Chartist movement. Indeed, as Janowitz notes, in the 1840s, Ernest Jones had “invoked” the “Tree of Liberty” as an “emblem for the Charter” (66). Jones describes the image thus: “Liberty is a tree of long growth in England. It was planted at Runnymede [...] and now it is beginning to bloom beneath the fostering of the Charter” (qtd. in Janowitz 66). The opening ten-line stanza of

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<sup>156</sup> Keegan provides an excerpt from Robert Pogue Harrison’s *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* to illuminate the dominance of the tree metaphor:

Human beings have by no means exploited the forest only materially; they have plundered its trees in order to forge their fundamental etymologies, symbols, analogies, structures of thought, emblems of identity, concepts of continuity, and notions of system. *From the family tree to the tree of knowledge, from the tree of life to the tree of memory, forests have provided and indispensable resource of symbolization in the cultural evolution of human kind.* (qtd. in Keegan *Nature Poetry* 172)

“Marie”’s “Trees of Liberty” describes the “wild, rejoicing throng / [that] plants its tree of Liberty” in lines three and four but takes a darker turn in line seven:

But soon they see, in blank despair,  
A canker eating at its root:  
Their Children’s seat will never be  
Beneath that Tree of Liberty! (7-10)

The “canker” described in line 8 is synonymous in this poem with the “Fear” (line 25), which the poet depicts as a barrier to liberty. Each stanza ends with the repetition of “Tree of Liberty,” as the poet’s words perform a circular movement from past to present to present to past, in which the people begin with a hope of liberty, and are subsequently crushed by “[d]ark slavish Fear [that] hath held the world / In close and dismal bondage long” (25-26).

“Marie” further extends the metaphor of the tree in her description of the “germs” of “goodness” that grow “weak” while “weeds of wickedness [wax] strong” (27-28). The metaphor of organicism that permeates the poem speaks to the ways in which form mirrors content in this particular poem; each sonnet moves towards an eventual exclamatory horticultural desire: “To *plant* such Trees of Liberty!” Hence the construction of working-class emancipation is organic, and oppression, “Fear” and “Ignorance,” are pesticides (25, 17). “Fear” and “Ignorance” stand in contrast to the “golden gates of radiant Love” (30) and “Knowledge” (16), which fertilize the emancipatory spirit within the people.

“Trees of Liberty” speaks to the importance of working-class education in another decidedly organic and Edenic image—“[p]our in bright Knowledge as a

stream, / Chase Ignorance throughout the land” (16-17).<sup>157</sup> In the final stanza, the appearance of “golden fruit” (39), which carries with it religious connotations of knowledge, catalyzes the poet’s conceit. The poet suggests that the golden fruit brings about liberty, and the “canker” on the root of the tree (8) is negated in line 41: “No canker eating at its root.” Indeed, the final stanza enacts a rebirth of liberty:

And all good spirits, though unseen,  
Will nurture it with blessed dew,  
Preserve its foliage evergreen,  
And train its form to Beauty true.  
Oh, quickly help, whoe’er ye be,  
To plant such Trees of Liberty! (47-52)

The unnamed helper of the poem is portrayed as the gardener who will sow the seeds of liberty and erase “Fear” and “Ignorance” from the minds of the people. As Sanders notes, “[t]he tropes of daybreak, light, and awakening recur throughout Chartist poetry, and are clearly intended to suggest the inevitability of Chartist victory by identifying Chartism as the culmination of a natural cycle and the restoration of a natural order” (“Agency” 114).

Paradoxically, though “Marie” invokes “good spirits,” she also enters into Chartist discourses and the rhetoric of freedom that suggests the people must bring about their own emancipation: “Thus shall we *earn* a jubilee” (23, my italics). Her emphasis on the people’s ability to bring about their own liberty catalyses a working-

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<sup>157</sup> Cf. William Blake: “[t]he tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature is Imagination itself.” (“[To] Rev<sup>d</sup> Dr. Trusler” 702).



class political ethos, and the word “earn” positions the poem within its capitalist context: it is an economic metaphor that repositions the working class within the economic structure of Victorian society. Thus the working class become able, within economic terms, to “earn” their living and their liberty. The word “earn” takes on an economic meaning that suggests just recompense for labour. “Marie”’s poetic voice becomes the voice of the people; her politics re-invigorate the working class into a community of people who will bring about social change.

### *Conclusion*

In the writings of the women who contributed to *The Pioneer*, as well as in the poems of E.H., F. Saunderson, Eliza Cook, and “Marie,” we see the political framework of a working-class women’s poetics, one which holds tightly to a sense of class community, and engages in dialogue with industrialism in an increasingly public forum. These poets employ the rhetoric of Chartism, working within their own particular visions of “emancipation,” and each one provides hope to the people that change is on the horizon. In the poems discussed above, I show how working-class women poets engage in a dialogue with contemporary people and events (“Pioneera,” E.H.), display a firm sense of regionalism and nationalism (Saunderson), hold strongly to the importance of women’s education and true religion (Saunderson, “Marie”), and promote the importance of work (“Marie,” Cook). They subtly appropriate dominant poetical forms and metres, often with powerful mastery. Sometimes, like E.H., they even use their *lack* of form as a political statement. An understanding of working-class women’s formal tactics is crucial to our understanding of these poems as part of a

larger poetic and cultural tradition. In their strategic use of the working-class woman poet's "gaze," and their use of Chartist themes and images, they raise the value of work, champion education as a means of liberty, and suggest an important role for the working-class women poet in the early radical periodical press. Indeed, these poems legitimate the presence of the working-class woman as the galvanizing force of reform and working-class emancipation.

It is well to remember, however, that this chapter provides only a preliminary examination of the working-class women of the periodical press, and is in no way comprehensive. Indeed, despite the less than ideal conditions for women writers, working-class women nonetheless could, and did, make their voices heard through the radical periodical press. In a field where many women who published did so either pseudonymously or anonymously, and with the endemic lack of personal biographies, how many of these working-women poets have we yet to discover?

CHAPTER FOUR. MARY HUTTON AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A WORKING-CLASS  
WOMEN'S POLITICAL POETICS.

The powers of song some way or other influence all human hearts;  
at least those that are in any way susceptible of tenderness,  
passion, and feeling; and the meanest and poorest poet  
that ever yet sung his rude untutored numbers,  
is surely entitled to some sort of esteem from his fellows.

- Mary Hutton, *Cottage Tales and Poems* (1842)

In the previous chapter, I argued that working-class women who were published in the periodical press of the first half of the nineteenth century exploit the power of poetic utterance to speak to the importance of working-class communities, link religious and educational reform, and explore Victorian gender dynamics. I show how working-class women poets engaged with nineteenth-century politics by employing many of the same literary strategies and forms as the Chartists. Mary Hutton, a contemporary of these women, is one poet who has been neglected until now in scholarship on working-class poetry, and her poetic corpus has yet to be discussed in any depth.<sup>158</sup> Hutton's three volumes—*Sheffield Manor and Other Poems* (1831), *The Happy Isle; and Other Poems* (1836), and *Cottage Tales and Poems* (1842)—span a period of intense working-class mobilization in Victorian Britain. This study of Hutton's poetical negotiations of politics and class seeks to initiate what is yet an inchoate critical discussion of working-class women's political poetry of the 1830s and 1840. In this chapter, I argue for Hutton's important role in the formation of a

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<sup>158</sup> Hutton's rediscovery was first recorded in Ian Haywood's *The Literature of Struggle: An Anthology of Chartist Fiction*, in which Haywood names Hutton the only "woman author of Chartist Fiction" (17). Recently, John Goodridge's *Nineteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets: 1800-1900*, collects five of Hutton's poems, and Patricia Johnson gives a passing nod to Hutton in her study of the development of Ethel Carnie's "Feminist Vision." Boos, whose work has reinvigorated the study of working-class verse—and has done much to illuminate the possible fields of inquiry contained within working-class women's writing—also mentions Hutton in "Class and Victorian Poetics."

working-class political discourse in Victorian poetry.

In order to understand the politics underpinning Mary Hutton's poetry, we must attend to the ways in which her poems are a type of "labour literature";<sup>159</sup> they participate in the political discourses of the early 1830s—namely, issues surrounding poverty and the new Poor Law, slavery, the Polish uprising, and her negotiations of gender politics. More specifically, I examine Hutton's poetry through its relationship to Chartism. Hutton is involved in "directing progress," a phrase I borrow from Backscheider.<sup>160</sup> To the list of "Chartist" women poets discussed by Sanders and Robinson, I add Mary Hutton, along with F. Saunderson and "Marie."<sup>161</sup>

Hutton's poems on the Poor Law, industrialism, and Poland align strikingly with the poetry of the Chartist movement in both her appropriations of images of slavery and her use of discourses on human rights and freedom; however, I contend that her politics are less radical than those published by male Chartist poets. Hutton is situated historically and politically between a tradition of eighteenth-century working-class women writers and the poetry of the Chartist movement, and in this chapter I discuss how her poetry parallels and diverges from these two traditions.<sup>162</sup> With three volumes of poetry, she is among the most prolific working-class women writers of the 1830s; indeed, Hutton has few contemporaries of the same class and gender with whom she

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<sup>159</sup> See my discussion of "Literary Labour Politics" in chapter two.

<sup>160</sup> I discuss Backscheider's use of "directing progress" in chapter two.

<sup>161</sup> See chapters two and three for an overview of Robinson's analysis of Eliza Cook's "Chartist Poetics." In *The Poetry of Chartism*, Sanders also identifies two female poets of Chartism, E.H.—whom I discuss in chapter two—and B.T. (1-2, 67-68).

<sup>162</sup> See Landry for a "materialist feminist" discussion of the poetic language, audience and assumptions of Elizabeth Bentley, Ann Candler, Mary Collier, Elizabeth Hands, Mary Leapor, Phillis Wheatley, Ann Yearsley (11).

may be compared.<sup>163</sup>

### *Hutton's Literary Patronage*

I will first account for the preservation of Hutton's poetry, as the power of her political verse is crucial to our understanding of nineteenth-century working-class politics. Like many of her working and middle-class contemporaries, Hutton's literary career developed out of her relationship with a male patron. Isobel Armstrong has argued that our "lack of knowledge of working-class women poets" lies in the publication history of their poetry, as middle-class women writers were often "hosted by men into the literary world through editions of their work" (322). Armstrong proposes that most working-class women poets did not have a middle-class male writer to introduce them into literary circles. However, as this study will show, most working-class women poets relied on a male patron to help them publish their poetry.

Two contemporary middle-class male sources supply what little we know about Hutton's life and work. The first is William Cartright Newsam's *The Poets of Yorkshire: Comprising Sketches of the Lives, and Specimens of the Writings of those 'Children of Song' who have been Natives of, or otherwise connected with the County of York, and* the second is the preface to Hutton's first work, *Sheffield Manor and Other Poems*, written by John Holland. Holland was instrumental in the publication of Hutton's

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<sup>163</sup> There were, of course, other working-class women poets publishing at this time, but my research suggests that none of them so directly addressed the Poor Law as Hutton did. Of note are Mary Bryan (1780-1838), who published her *Sonnets and Metrical Tales* in 1815, and Mary Maria Colling (1805-53) of Tavistock, who was another working-class woman writer publishing in the 1830s. Colling's volume, *Fables and other Pieces in Verse* (1831) is comprised of a series of Aesop-style fables in verse. These two examples serve as only a small sample of the number of working-class women poets who were indeed publishing at the beginning of the nineteenth century. For a full list, consult John Goodridge's *Biographical & Bibliographical Database of British and Irish Labouring-Class Poets 1700-1900*. <http://human.ntu.ac.uk/research/labouringclasswriters>.

poetry. Apart from Newsam and Holland, however, the only written evidence left of her mostly uncelebrated life is a smattering of publication notices and her entry in the 1851 England census.<sup>164</sup>

It may be the case that Hutton's work was preserved out of the strong sense of regionalism in the nineteenth century.<sup>165</sup> Her inclusion in Newsam's anthology speaks to the pride associated with many northern regions of England. Newsam describes Hutton as a "worthy and ingenious woman, whose poetry and poverty have repeatedly excited in her behalf the sympathies of the inhabitants of Sheffield" (224). In his two-page summary of Hutton's life, we are allowed a small glimpse into the world of a female worker-poet and, in turn, into a conspectus of the hardships faced by such poets in the nineteenth century. According to Newsam, Mary Hutton (née Taylor) was born in Wakefield, England, on 10 July 1794. She was one of the six children of William Taylor, who worked as a servant of Lord Cathcart, and Mary Parry, a Roman Catholic who was the governess-nurse for the family of Lord Howe. When her family moved to London, Mary's delicate health forced her to remain in Wakefield. She moved to Sheffield some years later, and there met Michael Hutton, a pen-knife cutler nearly twenty-five years her elder, who had two children from a previous marriage. After a

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<sup>164</sup> The publication of *Sheffield Manor* is mentioned in a section labelled "In the Press" in *The Monthly Review* No 2, February 1831 (324). Henry Schroder writes of Hutton in *The Annals of Yorkshire from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (370). Hutton is listed in John P. Anderson's 1881 *The Book of British Topography* (327) and in Robert Arnold Aubin's *Topographical Poetry in XVII-century England* (MLA, 1936). In the 1851 England census entry, Hutton (age 59 and by then widowed) was a self-described "Poetess." It is unlikely that other women of her class in Sheffield could (or would) describe themselves with that term. I am indebted to Malcolm Chase for directing me to this census entry. The only other working-class woman to use the term is Ellen Johnston, "the Factory Girl," who described herself as a "professional poetess" in the 1871 census (Klaus, "New Light" 431).

<sup>165</sup> This is almost certainly true in the case of Fanny Forrester, the much-celebrated poet of *Ben Brierley's Journal*, who inspired her many readers in Lancashire to write tribute poems.

“very brief courtship,” they married in Sheffield (224). We know very little about Mary’s life after her marriage to Michael Hutton,<sup>166</sup> but what we do know centres on the difficulties faced by working-class families in the 1830s.

For Hutton, it seems writing was both a necessary means of pecuniary support and an attempt to raise herself above a life of poverty and illness. In 1830, she wrote a letter to Holland, the author of *Flowers from Sheffield Park* (1827), appealing to him to publish a collection of her poems. Newsam provides a lengthy description of Hutton’s circumstances, describing how the

vicissitudes of suffering and misery, which, owing mainly to a want of employment and encreasing [*sic*] infirmity on [her husband’s] part, and the struggle between an oversensitive temperament and laudable self-respect on hers, became ultimately insupportable, and induced Mary Hutton, in 1830, to address a letter explanatory of her circumstances, accompanied by a mass of manuscript poetry, to Mr. Holland, who had never previously heard the name, and whom she had previously never seen. Mr. Holland, after some enquiries into her case, immediately opened a subscription list, revised, and published a small volume of the verses, under the title of *Sheffield Manor and other Poems*, accompanied by such a statement of her case as appeared desirable under the

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<sup>166</sup> In my recent research, I discovered that there is a Michael Hutton included in the Hallamshire List of Apprentices and Freemen who appears to have been apprenticed to his father. He became a Freeman in 1791. As an apprenticeship was usually 7 years, starting on or very near the 14th birthday. If we take these dates as accurate, we can make an assumption that this Michael was 21 in 1791, giving him a birth date of 1770. There is a marriage for a Michael Hutton to a Sarah Leadbeater at The Parish Church, Sheffield (now the Cathedral), on 5 Feb 1797, which could be Michael’s suspected first marriage and would be around the right time. There is also a Michael Hutton, address Green Lane, listed in the burial register at St. Paul’s (9 Dec 1846, age 76). I cannot confirm these speculations at this time; however, my preliminary research does give us an ostensible picture of Michael Hutton’s life. Thank you to Ann Halford for helping unearth this information, and for providing me with facsimiles.

circumstances. (224-25)

Before she wrote to Holland, Hutton—who published her first poems in the *Sheffield Iris*—had already applied to Mr. Montgomery,<sup>167</sup> a local publisher, who had told her he would publish her volume if she could find subscribers. In her letter to Holland, Hutton wrote “[b]ut, alas! Sir, I could not procure subscribers. Poor, friendless, and unknown, very few would patronize me” (*Sheffield* vi).<sup>168</sup> Holland writes in the preface to *Sheffield Manor* that he was intrigued by the ardour of Hutton’s letter and that he decided to meet her in person. He found that she was living in Butcher’s Buildings, Norris-Field, “the wife of a penknife cutler, whose lot, it seems, had constituted no exception to the occasional want of employment and paucity of income, so common with many of his class. A son (not residing with them) and a daughter—the children of a former wife, composed the family” (viii-ix). Holland was so intrigued by Hutton, that he agreed to help her publish her first collection.

Even with Holland’s help Hutton would need to portray herself as morally immaculate, and would have to display the proper feminine values that the Victorian era required of its women in order to procure subscribers for her first collection of poems. Margaret Forsyth has noted the importance of reputation for the female author, and especially for the working-class woman. As I noted in chapter two, working-class women occupied a liminal position in Victorian society; as a general rule, unlike their middle-class counterparts, they were not constructed as figures of

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<sup>167</sup> Most likely James Montgomery, the former editor of the *Sheffield Iris*. See my discussion of Montgomery later in this chapter.

<sup>168</sup> By the publication of Hutton’s third volume of poetry, *Cottage Tales and Poems*, she had obviously found subscribers. On the list were such notables as “Her Majesty the Queen Dowager,” “James Montgomery, Esq.,” and “William and Mary Howitt” (*Cottage Tales* xii).



proper Victorian femininity.

Working-class women were subject to the tinge of impropriety in their working lives, and further, in their writing.<sup>169</sup> While middle-class women were expected to uphold morality and were confined to the private sphere, working-class women were—by very definition of their class—necessarily part of the public sphere. As a result, these women were often represented as dangerous and sexually deviant. Forsyth writes, “ultimately, working-class women who aspired to be taken seriously had to find ways in which their ‘female respectability’ could be proved to a morally circumspect audience of sponsors, publishers, editors and readers” (“Too Boldly” 27). Thus to have the support of a reputable author such as John Holland would have imbued Hutton with the respectability she so desperately needed to be “taken seriously.” Hutton’s insistence that there should be no suspicion of her morals, words that were reprinted in Holland’s preface, serves to highlight her adherence to the mandates of “female respectability.” She told Holland, “I may safely aver, that though often in want of bread, I would not for the universe write any thing that would be the least repugnant to morals, virtue, or religion” (vii).

Both Newsam and Holland define Hutton and her poetry through this vocabulary of respectability. In the preface to *Sheffield Manor*, Holland describes Hutton’s poems as consisting, “for the most part, of allusions, in a style of easy and pleasing versification, and generally correct in sentiment, to scenery and subjects with which the present writer has long been familiar” (viii). He held the “belief that the verses that had been indited [*sic*] under [Hutton’s] roof were rather flowers that had

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<sup>169</sup> See my discussion of Victorian working-class women and sexual morality in the section entitled “Working-Class Women Poets: Gender and Work” in chapter two.

sprung indigenously over the grave of deeply buried thoughts, than the productions of a mind voluntarily cultivated for the sake of its market value” (ix). Yet Holland’s unobtrusive editorial principles regarding Hutton’s poetry speak to his belief that Hutton’s poems were beyond moral reproach and worth reading in their original form. Holland makes note of the “metrical irregularities” of her verse, but he endorses her poems in his very desire to “present them to the reader with as few alterations as might be compatible with the design of their actual writer: in the two larger pieces, comprising six hundred lines, these alterations may amount to a score of words” (xi).

#### *Hutton and Class Politics*

Despite Holland’s assertion in the preface to *Sheffield Manor* that Hutton’s poems were mere “flowers” and correct in sentiment, many of the poems published in both her first volume and her subsequent editions took a definitively political stance. The woman described by Holland as possessing a “poetic temperament” seems to have had a strong political temperament as well (ix). Hutton’s preface to *Cottage Tales and Poems* illustrates how swiftly politics and the public sphere of work could enter a Victorian working-class household. Hutton found herself in the unfortunate position of protecting an infirm husband from Sick Clubs that had promised respite but withheld monetary aid when it was required.

By critiquing her own class as vociferously as she does the middle class, Hutton resists monolithic definitions of class. Hutton reports that her husband, who was “subjected to sickness and infirmities,” never received the promised pecuniary support

when he required it,<sup>170</sup> and in the preface, Hutton's description of the mistreatment of her husband broadens into an exhortation to the working class:

Before we applied to the parish for my husband, we had parted with every article we possessed in the world, in the delusive hope that something or another would turn up in our favour; for whilst people possess any thing to make a shilling of they cannot absolutely die for want in a land of plenty. To young men, I would say in a warning voice, never trust your money to the precariousness and caprices of sick clubs; whilst you are in health and strength your contributions will be always welcome [...] but when old age and sickness, and infirmities overtake you, no matter how good a member you have been [...] you will then, upon some pretext or another, be thrown out, for impudence, ignorance, and injustice generally prevail: my husband's case, I am sorry to say, is not a solitary one; I would it were. (*Cottage Tales* iv)

The fact that Hutton's preface speaks of Sick Clubs that abandoned her husband illustrates the necessity she felt in entering the political arena. She relied upon her husband to provide for their family as she was too ill, being, she says, "confined to my bed for several weeks together" (v). Her discussion of the Sick Clubs also speaks to the necessary involvement of working-class women in politics, as their well-being was threatened as much as their husbands'. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that each of Hutton's post-1832 volumes contain a number of poems devoted to the cause of the

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<sup>170</sup> Hutton writes,

[d]uring his afflictions he has never received half pay, consequently when the club refused to pay half pay, he was under the necessity of applying to the parish; he had no alternative, although, during the long period of fifty three years, he had paid his hard earned money to save himself from the humiliation. Upon this pretext, he was most infamously and unjustly excluded, and there is no redress, at least not in Sheffield. (Hutton, *Cottage Tales*, iii-iv.)

underprivileged classes. While Hutton was, as she states, “under the painful necessity of soliciting subscribers herself” (*Cottage Tales* v), it was her very entry into the public sphere that could potentially bring in enough money to support her family. While Hutton critiqued working-class societies for their failure to protect labourers, she also attacked government legislators. Her poetry perpetuates both a tradition of middle-class and Chartist reform literature. We can read her Poor Law poems alongside the middle-class factory reform literature of the early 1830s.<sup>171</sup>

### *Hutton and her Contemporaries*

In her preface to *Cottage Tales*, Hutton writes that “[b]ooks were my greatest treasures, and all that came in my way I read with avidity” (viii). Hutton was following the publications of her female middle-class contemporaries, and she notably identified with at least two female poetic predecessors: Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Mary Howitt.<sup>172</sup> By invoking Landon and Howitt, Hutton draws upon the tradition of the “female poet”’s argument for political reform.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Beginning with Harriet Martineau’s “A Manchester Strike” in 1832, factory reform fiction coalesced into a collection of writings that we now label the “Condition of England” novels. These include Frances Trollope’s *Michael Armstrong* (1840), Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna’s *Helen Fleetwood* (1841), Elizabeth Stone’s *William Langshawe, the Cotton Lord* (1842), Benjamin Disraeli’s *Sibyl* (1845), Charles Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* (1850), Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848) and her later novel *North and South* (1854), Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* (1854), Charlotte Bronte’s *Shirley* (1849), and George Eliot’s *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866).

<sup>172</sup> The preface to *Cottage Tales* includes a letter from Howitt that praises Hutton’s “To Mrs. Mary Howitt.” Howitt tells Hutton “[i]f you are devoted to literature, my best wishes for your success are with you, and wheresoever I meet your name, it will always be with a grateful sentiment on my part” (vii). Howitt was of course involved in the reform movement as the editor of *Howitt’s Journal* (*The People’s Journal*) (1847-1851). See chapter three.

<sup>173</sup> Anne Mellor distinguishes between the “poetess” and “female poet.” See my discussion in chapter one.

Hutton felt an affinity to Landon,<sup>174</sup> and she was clearly aware of her particular class position and circumstance as a working-class writer. In her Preface to *Cottage Tales*, she describes how she views her poetic production as different from poets such as L.E.L. She writes,

I have never had any leisure to make the most of delightful thoughts, or improve pleasing ideas. I cannot say with the beautiful, and highly gifted, and ever to be lamented L.E.L. 'Oh, pray, don't speak for me just now, for I have such a delightful thought in my head, and I must not be disturbed.' Oh, no, neither in childhood, nor my mature years, could I be so indulged; I have always been most painfully prevented by circumstances. (iii)

Hutton, of course, misses the irony of her subject of comparison. Although arguably middle class, Landon had to write for living.<sup>175</sup> Of all of the poets with whom Hutton could have identified and compared herself, it is notable that she chose Landon given that Landon's own economic circumstances were unstable.<sup>176</sup>

#### *Political Poetics: Hutton's Poor Law Poems*

Hutton may have identified with poets such as Landon and Howitt, but her Poor

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<sup>174</sup> Landon wrote her protest poem, "The Factory" in 1835, four years after Hutton's *Sheffield Manor* collection. See my discussion of Landon's "The Factory" (1835) and Norton's *A Voice from the Factories* (1836) in chapter five. Caroline Sheridan Norton is another contemporary of Hutton's and her anonymously published *A Voice from the Factories* (1836) attacked the legislation that condemned children to factory work and encouraged the abolition of child labour.

<sup>175</sup> See Stephenson.

<sup>176</sup> In her article "Receiving the Legend, Rethinking the Writer: Letitia Landon and the Poetess Tradition," Tricia Lootens acknowledges the "literary legend of L.E.L." (243), arguing that in reading Landon as a mere tragic figure, we risk obfuscating the complexities of Landon's own writing. Lootens provides a new way of reading Landon arguing that she "did more than write or enact poetic femininity (243), and that "[b]y reading Landon as English first, rather than as feminine we may establish new relationships between her work and that of other women poets" (245).

Law poems follow most closely the poetic formations of Chartism—a movement that is assumed to be almost devoid of female authors. The Chartists relied upon the articulation of their class anxieties through literature as a main conduit for their political polemics, but this male-dominated political mobilization did little for the position of women within society. As I noted in chapter two, most social historians articulate working-class politics as a masculine enterprise; they see class politics within the Marxist construction of the productive relations of *men*. This masculinist ideology has been deeply entrenched into the very history of the working classes.<sup>177</sup>

The poems in which Hutton discusses the divisions between the rich and the poor are her most political, and the ones most definitively aligned with what would become significant elements of the Chartist agenda. Following the Reform Act of 1832, the Parliamentary Poor Law Amendment Bill of 1834 made life increasingly difficult for working-class families trying their hardest to get by; it was under this atmosphere that Hutton wrote “On the Poor Laws’ Amendment Bill” in her volume, *The Happy Isle*. The poem attacks the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Bill, which changed the nature of outdoor relief, and consigned England’s poor to the workhouses when they could no longer support themselves.<sup>178</sup> However, Hutton was also cautious in her politics, and conservative in her tacit acceptance of class hierarchies. The poems in her volumes engage with the large issues of the day by politicizing both gender and class, but they

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<sup>177</sup> Sanders observes how legislative change altered gender relations:

[i]n the world governed by the New Poor Law, poverty threatened familial and individual integrity (and thus identity) in a way which struck at the core of working-class masculinity. The husband and father unable to provide for his wife and children lost the key co-ordinates of his identity: the complexity of his being (worker, husband, father) reduced to that of ‘pauper.’ (*The Poetry of Chartism* 162)

<sup>178</sup> For a more extended discussion on the Poor Law, see Lees, especially parts one and two.

also carefully tread the line between political revolution and legislative change.

“On the Poor Laws’ Amendment Bill” is written in heroic couplets, and is thus an appropriation of neoclassical versification for a contemporary critique of poverty.

Bridget Keegan notes that both male and female working-class poets were influenced by the neoclassicists such as Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, who also famously critiqued poverty in “A Modest Proposal” (xvi). Stephen Duck, Mary Collier, Anne Yearsley, Elizabeth Hands, and Mary Leapor, among others, all appropriated heroic couplets to discuss a variety of subjects related to working-class life.<sup>179</sup> Could Mary Hutton’s use of the closed-couplet form similarly suggest that there is a tension between her need to critique social problems and stay within the bounds of poetic normativity, or is it an attempt on her part to display her literary education? Is it both? Could she be nodding not only to Pope, but also to her labouring-class poetic predecessors?

The poem begins with an allusion to the master of the heroic couplet, Alexander Pope; the first two lines replicate the lines in book seven of Pope’s translation of *The*

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<sup>179</sup> Some specific examples include “The Thresher’s Labour” (1730, 1736) by Duck, and “The Woman’s Labour” (1739) by Collier, Yearsley’s “The Captive Linnet” (1796), and “Soliloquy” (1796), and Hands’s “Written, Originally Extempore, on Seeing a mad Heifer Run through the Village Where the Author Lives” (1789), and Mary Leapor’s *Crumble-Hall* (1751). For a discussion of Duck and Collier, see Peggy Thompson, and Van Hagen. Thompson argues that “Collier is more consistently successful than Duck in maintaining control of the couplet and that she thus refutes the implication of Duck’s struggles, that the heroic couplet is ideologically limited in the kinds of values and ideas it can convey” (510). In their introduction to a special issue of *Criticism* Landry and Christmas write that Van Hagen shows that Stephen Duck’s poem “not only stretched and refashioned the heroic couplet in boldly innovative ways, but also established a new genre, neither pastoral, georgic, counter-pastoral, nor plebeian georgic, but something distinctly new” (413). Linda Zionkowski discusses a possible reason for Duck’s use of heroic couplets. For more on Yearsley, see Cairnie. In *The Muses of Resistance* Donna Landry asserts that in “The Woman’s Labour,” “Collier makes the couplet form seem flexible and accommodating, not constraining. She also argues that Leapor’s *Crumble Hall* “shows off Leapor’s abilities as a comic and satiric writer on an ambitious scale; it represents a significant transformation of the genre of the country-house poem,” and that “Leapor’s imitation of Pope’s style in the service of quite different values is particularly concentrated and effective” (107, 110).

*Odyssey of Homer* which reads, “Oh! pity human woe, / ’Tis what the happy to the unhappy owe.”<sup>180</sup> The missing iambs in the first two lines break free of Hutton’s (and Pope’s) careful control of the poem’s symmetrical, self-contained couplets, and sit uneasily within the strict pentameter scansion of the rest of the poem. I would suggest that the metrically discordant opening lines mimic the disharmonious subjection of the poor under the New Poor Law, and that the following heroic couplets mirror Hutton’s desire to impose order on both her poetry and on society.

Thematically, like Saunderson’s “Spring Reflections,” Hutton’s poem finds its mode of expression through the pastoral, presenting an idyllic rural past as a contrast to urban modernity.<sup>181</sup> Isobel Armstrong notes that for poets, the pastoral held both conservative and radical significance, stating that “landscape poetry” could both “provide [the poet] with the continuity and anchorage of an object, external world of tradition and rural simplicity,” but that it was also “truly democratic because the writer was free to construct his own associations and cultural meaning from the external world, free from conservative associations and independent of oppressive conventions” (222). Male Chartist poets relied on the representation of nature as a means of social commentary, and the “landscape is charged with economic and political significance in a way which recalls the older tradition of topographical

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<sup>180</sup> Pope’s translation reads,  
—“Oh! pity human woe,  
’Tis what the happy to the unhappy owe.  
A wretched exile to his country send,  
Long worn with griefs, and long without a friend  
So may the gods your better days increase,  
And all your joys descend on all your race;  
So reign for ever on your country’s breast,  
Your people blessing, by your people bless’d!” (198-205)

<sup>181</sup> For an excellent summary of the difference in critical opinions as to what *exactly* constitutes the “pastoral,” see Alpers. I take my own definition from Alpers’s essay.



poetry” (Sanders, *Poetry of Chartism* 59). Chartist poets used upon the pastoral to further their political agenda, and their pathologization of the industrial city was a means by which they criticized modernity.

In her use of the pastoral, Hutton was not unlike her contemporaries, especially Ebenezer Elliott, “The Corn Law Rhymer.”<sup>182</sup> In fact, it is very likely that Hutton was a friend of Elliott and his family. There are two entries for “Ebenezer Elliott” as well as an entry for “Mrs. Elliott” on the subscription page of *Cottage Tales*. In *The Happy Isle*, she published a poem entitled “Lines Addressed to Mrs. Elliott,” in which she comforted Elliott’s wife, Francis (Fanny), after the loss of two of their children, William and Fanny. *Cottage Tales and Poems* is also inscribed to “Mrs. Ebenezer Elliott,” and the opening poem, “To Mrs. E—T” speaks of the departure of a kind friend.

In his poem, “Preston Mills,” Elliott depicts the human labourers through a natural metaphor: “the rose” (line 9). By linking the workers to the rural landscape, Elliott’s poem performs a doubling that chronicles the way in which factory work contaminates both the natural landscape (here signified by the rose), and by extension, the human labourer: “from the lips the rose had fled, / Like ‘death-in-life’ they smiled” (9-10). The mill becomes a tomb, the death place of the workers, and the tone of the poem is one of lament, rendering Elliott’s pastoral elegiac. Thus in “Preston

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<sup>182</sup> The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* notes that “Elliott’s place ‘may be best epitomized in his relation with James Montgomery’ (Reiman xi). Montgomery (1771–1854), another major literary figure in Sheffield, admired Elliott’s passion for political reform, and his genuine interest in the well-being of individuals. Elliott, in turn, expressed fondness for Montgomery by dedicating to him his epic poem ‘Spirits & Men’, as a sign of his ‘presumption and despair.’” (Leonard, *ODNB Online*). Notably, Montgomery (1771–1854) took over the *Sheffield Register* as editor in 1794, relaunching the journal under the new name the *Sheffield Iris*. The *Iris* was the journal in which Hutton published her first poems. Montgomery is listed on the subscription list of *Cottage Tales* for 2 copies (*Cottage Tales and Poems* xii).

Mills,” the roses turn “pale” (28), the “wild birds sadly sung” (30), and the mill becomes a “dungeon” full of “gloom” (33), a “living tomb” (35).

Elliott’s use of the pastoral renders the factory a tomb, and Hutton’s “On the Poor Laws’ Amendment Bill” also invokes the dead. Hutton begins with a tribute to the “mighty bards of yore,” and we see an elegiac lament for a past when the rift between rich and poor was mitigated by the proper paradigm of human relations: “When kings and princes help’d the lowly poor, / When ladies spun, and nobles till’d the land; / To feed the poor [...]” (3-6). The opening six lines of the poem form the vantage point from which Hutton’s poet-speaker compares the endemic impoverishment of Britain’s proletariat in the 1830s to the relative comfort of the recent past. Lines 7 and 11 begin with “But,” and this anaphora marks the extended contrast between earlier feudal relations and the state of “these degenerate days” (7). This first section of the poem forms a scathing attack on legislation that starves the English poor, and the poet places blame on the “legislators” and the “great” (33, 40) who allow the poor by “boasted laws decreed / To writhe with endless pain and misery” (12-13).

Hutton envisions the past as a world that is congenial to the working class, a view that she holds through the poem to the final stanza where the poet speaker advocates a return to feudal world: “In feudal times blest was the peasant’s lot / Then plenty smiled upon his humble cot” (64-65). While Hutton’s poem predates Carlyle’s *Past and Present* (1843), these words anticipate the Chartist poets’ invocation of an idealised past.<sup>183</sup> Her use of medievalism also disproves Zlotnick’s hypothesis that only

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<sup>183</sup> The idealization of the past and its concomitant “myth of plenty” spoke strongly to both working

male Chartist writers “longed for an idealised (and often medievalized) past” (“Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution” 1).

Hutton’s lines evoke nostalgia for a simpler time registered through the pastoral; Hutton constructs the feudal world as one in which the worker was not alienated from production, but instead worked the land and never felt the pangs of starvation. Hutton’s dominant pastoral image depicts the corruption of the natural world as a result of human sin.<sup>184</sup> It may be the case that Hutton’s post-lapsarian worldview was strongly informed by her Catholic upbringing.<sup>185</sup> Her reliance upon the pastoral as a means of social criticism mirrors the Chartists and the influence of Romantic political poetry.<sup>186</sup>

Hutton argues that the root of society’s corruption lies in the lack of philanthropic virtue in the higher classes, whose transgressions have metaphorically desiccated nature: “the fair sacred streams of charity / Are now for ever and for ever

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and middle-class writers in the Victorian period and emerged in industrial literature as a direct rejection of modernity. Cf. William James Linton “Dirge of the Nations”:

Oh Faith! Why hast thou fled  
Out of the land of Milton? [...]  
Let us curse God and die! since we inherit  
Nothing of English valour. (96-100)

and Jones’s “War, Love and Liberty” in which he castigates “Mammon’s *modern* curse” (2; my italics). Sanders notes that “generally, Chartism is considered to have leaned to the ‘old’ rather than the ‘new’ at least until the emergence of an embryonic ‘social-democratic’ analysis in the period after 1848” (144).

<sup>184</sup> For a further discussion of “working-class pastoral” see Isobel Armstrong’s *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*.

<sup>185</sup> Newsam argues that Hutton’s “occasional attendance...at her mother’s place of worship, imparted, as it was likely to do, a deeper tone of feeling to her susceptible mind” (*Poets of Yorkshire* 224). He suggests that Hutton’s mother had a strong influence in her formative years.

<sup>186</sup> Chartist poets also drew heavily on Shelley, Burns and Southey. In Kingsley’s *Alton Locke*, for example, Alton specifically names each of these authors as “political” poets. (Sanders 113). The Chartist reading list was wide and varied. In Sanders’s comprehensive list of the poetry published in *The Northern Star*, he cites an issue in which the journal reprinted extracts from; Shakespeare, *Henry V* and *Henry VI, Part Two*, Milton, *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*, Thomson, *The Wreck Of States, Nobility, The Patriot*, and *Despotism*, Churchill, *Independence*. See also Tetreault.

dried / By human avarice—and human pride” (14-16). In her invocation of a dried-up stream, Hutton gestures towards both her metaphorical representation of the “streams of charity” of the poem, in which philanthropy has failed to thrive, *and* to the drying up of the valuable resource needed to grow grain.

Sanders observes that “Chartist poetry had represented economic exploitation through images of the loss of vital fluids, both literally as ‘sweat’ and metaphorically through the ‘leech-like’ vampirism of capital, as in A.W.’s poem ‘To The Sons of Toil’” (*Poetry of Chartism* 152). Thus the dried-up stream is connected to the working classes’ “cries for bread” (22), and the “babes with dying moan” whose parents “implore” the aid of charity (23-24). These lines recall the tradition of political pastoral, and Hutton’s “dried up streams” echo Milton’s “Lycidas,” a pastoral elegy that attacks the corruption of the clergy. Milton’s “hungry sheep look up, and are not fed, / But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw, / Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread” (125-27); his entreaty, “Return, Alpheus, the dread voice is past, / That shrunk thy streams” (132-33) recall Hutton’s image of the desiccated landscape.

### *The Working-Class Woman Poet-Prophet*

Hutton’s use of tone echoes eighteenth-century political pastoral poetry, suggesting not only a link to a female poetic tradition but also that her imagery and tone echo the aesthetic concerns of romantic poetry. “On the Poor Laws’ Amendment Bill” positions the poet as a visionary-sage, one who does not directly engage in the world around her, but whose omniscience authorizes her dire warning for the British people. Her tone is influenced by both the Chartists and Romantic female political

poets, especially Barbauld, who writes with a similarly prophetic tone in her poem “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven.” In *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, Barbara Taylor offers the opinion that the mood created by Millenarianism, that is the belief in the Second Coming of Christ, affected “many radicals for whom the apocryphal rhetoric of the prophets reinforced their own sense of social crisis and their intense yearning for a new order of things” (158). Boos has noted the prevalence of “Blakean-Wordsworthian visions and millenarian hopes” in the political poetry of working-class women writers, and Hutton is no exception (“Political” 154).

The authoritative, visionary-sage lyrical persona I have described above, likewise dominated Chartist verse in the 1840s,<sup>187</sup> and her apocalyptic rhetoric immediately aligns Hutton with the poetry of the Chartist movement.<sup>188</sup> Through her use of iambic pentameter, the poet imposes metrical control over her words, which mirrors the imperative tone of her anaphora. Thus Hutton’s anaphoric “Enough” serves as a prime example: “*Enough* of hatred and ill-will abounds; / *Enough* of party malice and of strife” (41-42; my italics). The striking final image of the poem is that of the earth swallowing up the poor to relieve them of their misery: “Oh! open wide your jaws, ye friendly graves, / And end the crying wrong of British slaves!” (38-39). Hutton envisions the earth opening its wide maw to engulf the British people as a merciful

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<sup>187</sup> See especially William James Linton’s “The Dirge of the Nations” for an example of this particular tone in Chartist poetry: “O Tyrant-trampled! Synonym / Of baffled Hope! thine eyes are dim / With ceaseless tears” (67-69)

<sup>188</sup> Isobel Armstrong writes that Gerald Massey “moved to a poetry thematising the illusory dream of the future and the reassuring memory of the rural past” (196). See also Michael Sanders’s discussion of the relation of apocalyptic imagery to Chartist agency in *The Poetry of Chartism* (19, 212, 360-61). Sanders contends that “Messianism’s ‘restorative’ and ‘apocalyptic’ forms structurally resemble two key trends within late Chartism” (385).

act, an image that recurs in Chartist poetry.<sup>189</sup>

Hutton's poem is also thematically and formally similar to Hannah More's *Slavery* and Barbauld's "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven," poems that More and Barbauld masterfully inscribed in heroic couplets. There are also indications that Hutton read "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven." In line 10, Hutton uses the words "want and woe," a phrase that appears on line 318 of Barbauld's poem. Hutton is also using the same genre as Barbauld, the apocalyptic vision that makes both of their poems so powerful. The first two lines of "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven" read, "Still the loud death drum, thundering from afar, / O'er the vext nation pours the storm of war" (1-2).<sup>190</sup> In the same tone, Hutton's poet-speaker cries, "Oh! What appalling sights afflict mine eyes, / What woes on woes—what crimes on crimes arise" (46-47).<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Cf. Massey "To crowned blood-suckers they would bind us slaves, / We would be free, or sleep in glorious graves" (57-58). This passage also bears resemblance to Isaiah 45:8:

You heavens above, rain down righteousness;  
let the clouds shower it down.  
Let the earth open wide,  
let salvation spring up,  
let righteousness grow with it;  
I, the LORD, have created it.

<sup>190</sup> Maggie Favretti writes that "[for] Barbauld the death drum for English liberty had been beating since 1790, when the most recent attempt to repeal the Corporation and Test Act had failed, an event which perpetuated the denial of full civic participation to Dissenters and other non-conformists" (102). Hutton echoes this vision of destruction in lines 38-39.

<sup>191</sup> Hutton uses a similar sage-prophet tone in "On the New Poor Law Bill," published immediately following "On the Poor Laws' Amendment Bill" in *The Happy Isle*. While poem is less formally consistent in its meter, the prophetic poetic tone carries through, as the poet-speaker paints an ominous vision of the present: "Yes, the dark hour of vengeance is now near at hand / As the Poor Law Bill is now the law of the land" (25-6). If "On the Poor Laws' Amendment Bill," presents a dark picture of the life of the British poor in the 1830s, it does so with less vehemence than "On the New Poor Law Bill."

*Rhetorical Contexts: Slavery*

There is a second theme in “On the Poor Laws’ Amendment Bill” that resonates with Chartist and eighteenth-century working-class women’s poetry: slavery. Hutton’s use of the term “British slaves” (39) places her poem within a larger context of Chartist poetry; the motif of slavery similarly recurs in the poetry published by male Chartist poets in the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>192</sup> Hutton actively locates herself within the discourse of slavery in way that suggests she is not writing from the margins as much as entering the discussion on the very terms that threaten to exclude her. Hutton borrows her rhetorical context from this familiar trope—one that had been used throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries<sup>193</sup>—but she is arguably one of the first Victorian working-class woman poets to write her particular class perspective into the political discourse of slavery. As Catherine Gallagher has noted, the slavery metaphor worked

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<sup>192</sup> Kelly Mays has pointed out that of the two hundred and thirteen poems in Peter Sheckner’s *Anthology of Chartist Poetry*, at least ninety-four include “some version of the word ‘slave’” (139). Mays notes that “if the goal of Chartist poetry is to encourage readers and auditors to see themselves as a community united by their experience of an oppression ultimately rooted in political disenfranchisement, then the term commonly used to describe both the community and the oppression they suffered is ‘slavery’” (139). However, Sanders challenges the strictly “abstract” use of slavery, suggesting that “[i]n describing the British labourer as a ‘slave’, Chartists were drawing attention to the fact that the labourer was denied both political and economic rights” (94). Sanders has also observed the prevalence of the theme of “resistance to slavery” in *The Northern Star*, noting that the Chartists connected economic and political oppression (*Poetry of Chartism* 93). See, for example, his discussion of Jonathan Lefevre’s *The Enslaved* (113-114).

<sup>193</sup> This trope had its roots in an entire discourse of abolition. Richard Oastler’s letter to the *Leeds Mercury* entitled “Slavery in Yorkshire” (September 29, 1830) used the term “slaves” to describe the children who worked in the Bradford factories. Addressing child factory workers, Oastler writes “Poor infants! ye are compelled to work as long as the necessity of your needy parents may require, or the cold-blooded avarice of your worse than barbarian masters *may demand!* Ye live in the boasted land of freedom, and *feel* and mourn that *ye are Slaves*, and slaves without the only comfort which the Negro has. He knows it is his sordid mercenary master’s INTEREST that he should *live*, be *strong* and *healthy*. Not so with you” (Bradshaw and Ozment 391). Eliza Cook also used the trope of slavery in her poetry. In “Our Father!” for example, Cook describes the “White, helpless slaves whom Christians bind, / Sad children of the poor” (lines 3-4). In “The Cry of the Oppressed,” Henrietta Tindal conflates “plantation and stifling mill” workers under the single term “Slaves” (line 2). See chapter five for a further discussion of Tindal’s poem, and for the usage of the term “slavery” in social reform literature.

within Victorian working-class political discourse to “create a rhetorical context” in which the “preoccupation with the question of human liberty” came to the forefront in many working-class texts (12). To use Gallagher’s term, this “rhetoric of freedom” informed the context for working-class liberation, and Chartists drew heavily on the image of the British working class as slaves, while also supporting the abolition of the slave trade in America.

Living in Sheffield, Hutton was also at the cultural centre of female anti-slavery activities in Britain during the 1830s, and the subscription list for *Cottage Tales and Poems* provides insight into her connection with the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Association—arguably the hub of the ladies’ anti-slavery movement in Britain. While I have been unable to discover whether Hutton herself was a member of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society, it is likely that she at least had some acquaintance with its abolitionist agenda.<sup>194</sup> Certainly, her poetry suggests her political and social affinity with the cause. Clare Midgley has done much to illuminate women’s crucial role in British abolitionism in her book *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns 1780-1870*. Midgley notes both the important financial contributions and moral influence that women brought to the abolitionist movement.<sup>195</sup> Elizabeth Heyrick’s campaign for

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<sup>194</sup> There are a “Miss Rawson” and a “Mrs. Rawson” listed on the subscription list of *Cottage Tales*, which may give some indication that Mary Anne Rawson, the head of the Sheffield Anti-Slavery Society, knew of Hutton or vice versa (*Cottage Tales* xii).

<sup>195</sup> Women in the society performed “house-to-house canvasses” and actively supported the abstention from West Indian sugar (61). Midgley documents the links between radical abolitionism and “the assertion of female independence” by examining the events in Sheffield during a campaign that was against apprenticeship.<sup>195</sup> She writes:

[i]n Sheffield in 1838 female support for immediate full emancipation was thus linked to a radical nonconformist outlook and to the willingness to seek mass public support and to act independently of male guidance; while male support for gradualism was linked to conservative High Church politics, to a reluctance to seek working-class support, and to a horror at insubordinate female behaviour. (117)



abolition in 1824 had wide support by 1830. Midgely documents at least seventy-three “ladies’ associations” between 1825 and 1833 including the one in Sheffield. The membership of ladies’ societies was primarily, but not exclusively, middle-class. Middle-class women enlisted working-class women as signatories for petitions and as participants in the sugar boycott (84). Midgely also notes that of the 100, 000 women who signed the Wesleyan Methodist anti-slavery petitions in 1833, “62.7 percent came from artisanal families” (84).

Notably, in her attempt to comment on the degree of inhumanity in the conditions for British workers, Hutton effectively conflates slavery with labour in an analogy that was not uncommon in British rhetoric on labour at the time. Hutton consistently uses the term “slave” in her poetry to denote both African (American) slaves and British labourers. For example, she published “The Slave,” in her collection *Sheffield Manor and other Poems* (1831), which narrates the cruel and inhumane treatment of a black slave whose sister dies at the hands of white men. While the poem purports to support the cause of the black slave, it becomes problematic in its resolution: the slave is promised succour only in the afterlife, and death is depicted as the *only* viable escape from the horrors of slavery. Indeed, there are inherent ambivalences in the metaphor of slavery, and its appropriation becomes problematic when the writer suggests that the black slave is better off than the white.<sup>196</sup> If the term is a generalized “metaphor for oppression,” as Mays argues, then identification with

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Thus Midgely concludes that the “attitude of male abolitionists in Sheffield towards independent anti-slavery action by women has much in common with the views expressed by the author of a pamphlet attacking female anti-slavery petitioning as a threat to the social order” (118).

<sup>196</sup> As Mays notes, it both creates a community of workers, and pits the black slave against the white (141).

the black slave complicates the rhetorical use of freedom and liberty in working-class poetry.

In Hutton's work, it seems her Poor Law and anti-slavery poems do indeed fit into the rubric of writing "slavery" into a generalized metaphor for oppression: we can read Hutton's poetry alongside the Chartist verse of the period in order to illustrate this point. In M.K.'s poem, "We May, We Will, We Must, We Shall Be Free,"<sup>197</sup> the poet writes within the rhetorical context of freedom to depict the British proletariat as slaves who must be liberated:

Arise! arise! by freedom's pole star led,  
March nobly onward till with success crown'd  
You reap the comforts which your deeds have gain'd,  
And cease to struggle as do slaves enchain'd. (34-37)

Similarly, in C. Westray's "The Voice of Freedom,"<sup>198</sup> the poet writes of "British slaves who dare be free, / Our Tyrant's pealing death-dirge sing" (16-17). In "A Call to the People': Partisan Poetics and the International Aesthetic in Chartist Verse, 1830-1860," I note that in A.M.P.'s "The Land of Freedom" (1840), the author examines the dichotomy between the black and white slave, and interrogates the terms "freedom" and "slavery" while suggesting that working-class slavery is far worse than that of African American slaves. A.M.P.'s poem narrates the journey of the African slave (Mohab) to England. Mohab, who is "Light-hearted and glad, though a slave" because he "could eat" (1-3), beholds "England's white cliffs at last," and discovers quite a

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<sup>197</sup> *The Northern Star*, 3 December 1842.

<sup>198</sup> *The Northern Star*, 5 November 1842.

different meaning of the word “freedom” (14):

And he saw a huge poor-house, “By Liberals plann’d,  
And a man with sunk eyes and parch’d tongue,  
On whom famine had laid her cold withering hand;  
A poor starving wretch in a plentiful land. (46-49)

Mohab moves from innocence to knowledge with his realization that England, the “home of wealth, freedom, and bravery,” is less free than his native Africa. With this realization, Mohab declares, “I thank the great God of my fathers that I / Am a child of the regions of slavery” (59-60). A.M.P. uses rhetorical irony to illuminate two different kinds of slavery, and suggests that the oppression of the white proletariat in Britain is the worse of the two because it is slavery under the guise of freedom.

While A.M.P.’s poem appeared congruently with working-class mobilization in the form of the Chartist movement, Hutton’s use of an identical rhetorical construction predates the Chartist examples above by no less than five years. The first two lines of the second stanza of “On the Poor Laws’ Amendment Bill” suggest the irony of impoverishment in a world of “plethoric plenty”:<sup>199</sup>

Yet these are prosperous days, and we are free!  
We are not now enchain’d in slavery  
If these are prosperous days—return again;  
Ye golden days of plenty, war, and pain,  
When men were sold at their proud lord’s command,

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<sup>199</sup> See Carlyle’s *Past and Present* (5). Carlyle’s prose stylings captured through alliteration the whole of an era in the span of a sentence. In his polemic against industrialism he writes: “[i]n the midst of plethoric plenty, the people perish; with gold walls, and full barns, no man feels himself safe or satisfied.”

As part and parcel of their master's land,  
'Twere *better far* to live a tyrant's slave,  
Than pine through want into an early grave. (56-63; my italics)

Hutton applies the slavery-image to the British proletariat, and her further desire to return to a feudal past, where the people live happily as the slaves of tyrants, opens to interpretation the questionable appropriation of slavery as a metaphor for the oppression of the working classes.

Like her poems specifically addressing the New Poor Law, the untitled poem contained within Hutton's only prose fiction piece, "The Poor Man's Wrongs," serves as a striking artefact of Chartist Anti-Poor Law propaganda. The story attacks not the New Poor Law, but the Reform Bill of 1832, and the legislature that makes the working class into "slaves." In a self-reflexive gesture, Hutton suggests that there is no place for a "poor rhymers" in such a society (188). She describes the protagonist, Albert Freeland, as "an honest man and a Christian," who "daily saw around him hundreds of starving labourers and mechanics, honest, worthy, and respectable men, blasted in prospects and broken in spirits" (186). In this parable of philanthropy and reform, Freeland (whose name, arguably, connotes the focus of the story) and his son discover a poor wretch "drenched with rain and benumbed with cold" (186), whom they invite into their home.

The story locates the woes of the poor as a specifically *English* problem and suggests that the reformation of politics will necessarily mean a reformation in religion as well. For, much like E.H., in her apotheosis of Joseph Rayner Stephens, the vast majority of Hutton's readers would have been working class, if not outright

Chartists, and would have understood the figurative link between economic and religious oppression, and the need for social reformation. The subject matter of the tale reflects this fact in its careful construction of a dialogue between Albert (the middle-class caregiver) and the old man. Their discussion centres upon the woes of a nation that has pushed its poor to the edges of society, and paints a picture of English society that precariously places its fate in the hands of a false god (capitalism). Hutton again uses the metaphor of slavery in the poem written by the old “rhymster.” He asks,

Why must I die—neglected in the cold?  
Cause England’s poor have long been bought and sold!  
White slaves, in fact, and falsely named the free—  
Why, men of England, suffer such to be? (lines 29-32)

In her use of the term “White slaves,” Hutton once more solidifies the connection between economic oppression and slavery (the concept of a “white” slavery in capitalism) and the metaphor of slavery. The old man, however, is not the only one to use the term “slavery.” Hutton subtly rewrites the tale of working-class woes, and the reformative impulse appears in the dialogue of both the poor old man *and* Albert, the “honest man” and a Christian. Albert states,

I once entertained some hopes from the Reform Bill,—at least, I thought that the condition of the labouring classes might be ameliorated by that measure,—but the Reform Bill has made the condition of the labouring population ten times worse than it was before; for now the non-electors are the slaves of the ten-pounders. (189)

Alluding to the ten-pound freeholders who were granted the vote by the Reform Act

of 1832, Freeland falls into a familiar rhetorical territory. Albert's words portray a sense of the crushed hopes and feeling of betrayal that the Reform Bill engendered in the working classes.

### *Rhetorical Contexts: Child Labour*

Hutton's reformist leanings and specific use of slavery metaphors appeared not only in her poems and tales about the New Poor Law, but also in her treatment of child labour; her poetry participated in the campaign to abolish the practice of sending young sweeps up chimneys. Her poem "On a Poor Little Sweep" suggests the inherent "slavery" in a profession that the eponymous hero of *Oliver Twist* would fear so vehemently.<sup>200</sup> There were numerous stories of young sweeps who were found in flues, asphyxiated by the fumes.<sup>201</sup> In her invocation of the figure of the chimney sweep, Hutton aligns herself with a much larger reformist movement, a campaign that was, Tim Fulford argues, influenced by Count Rumford's search for a new heating technology for houses, which would render the need for sweeps obsolete. As Fulford notes in "Britain's Little Black Boys and the Technologies of Benevolence,"

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<sup>200</sup> Oliver certainly had a reason to fear becoming indentured to a Master sweep. Tim Fulford notes that "Master sweeps bought five-year-olds, the thinner the better, from workhouses, orphanages and destitute widows. Having paid a few shillings to apprentice them, they sent them round the streets by night, crying their trade. They forced the boys up chimneys till their bleeding sores hardened into calluses. Soon, legs and pelvis became deformed. Often, ingrained soot led to cancer of the scrotum or the mouth. Some boys fell to their deaths from damaged chimney pots. Others were suffocated or burnt alive" (233). In Robert Blincoe's memoir, he recounts that he was intensely disappointed that he was not chosen to be a sweep when he was a child (Simmons 101). While he was no doubt fortunate to have escaped that fate, it is unlikely that his time at Lowdam mill was much better than the life he could have expected as a chimney-boy.

<sup>201</sup> Fulford notes that Jonas Hanway's *A Sentimental History of Chimney Sweepers, in London and Westminster, Shewing the Necessity of Putting them under Regulations to Prevent the Grossest Inhumanity to the Climbing Boys* (1785) was the first text advocating the abolition of climbing boys (241). See also James Montgomery's *The Chimney Sweeper's Friend* (24).

The powerless and frozen climbing boy [...] became a rhetorical figure of great force. Lacking a public voice himself, he gave doctors, reformers, philanthropists and poets voices to articulate the deepest underlying fears of a nation that was exploiting people at home and abroad in its pursuit of wealth and comfort. He, like the black slaves to whom he was compared, also opened a route towards social reform. He acquired social agency—at least as a symbol—by bringing into focus the social evils of the manufacturing and commercial system that produced him. He highlighted the corruption of many of the Britons that benefited from that system—local officials, rentier aristocrats, slave traders, factory owners. On the image of London’s cold and stunted little black boys was founded a campaign to end child labour and poverty [...]. (231)

Encoded within the metaphor of slavery—an image that carried so much impact that it would continue to resonate across the years<sup>202</sup>—was a push for reform on all fronts. Fulford has shown how Rumford’s campaign for a better heating system paved the way for writers such as William Blake, James Montgomery, Samuel Roberts (and Hutton)<sup>203</sup> to write an anti-oppression narrative that centred on the child sweep. This narrative

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<sup>202</sup> In Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “The Cry of the Children,” she argues that factory children fare worse than black slaves:

They know the grief of man, without its wisdom;  
They sink in man’s despair, without its calm;  
Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,  
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm [...] (141-44)

Frances Trollope uses a similar rhetorical argument in *Michael Armstrong*. She writes: “[t]housands of children pine away their unnoted, miserable lives, in labour and destitution, *incomparably more severe*, than any ever produced by negro slavery” (186). For a further discussion of “The Cry of the Children,” see chapter five.

<sup>203</sup> William Blake’s “The Chimney Sweeper” in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789-1793), Montgomery’s “The Climbing Boy’s Soliloquies” in *The Poetical Works of Rogers, Campbell, J. Montgomery, Lamb and Kirke White* (Philadelphia, 1831) and Samuel Roberts’s “The Song of the Poor Little Sweep” in *Yorkshire Tales and Poems* (London, 1839).

would “hopefully repeat the trick of making readers so guilty that they would demand abolition” (249).

Hutton’s “On a Poor Little Sweep” pens with sweeping excoriation the hypocrisy of the British nation, which calls itself free but enslaves its children. She may have been drawing on Samuel Roberts’s explicit link between black slavery and climbing boys, in which he declares that “the poor African negro is kidnapped and sold, but it is by strangers, or by foes. These children are kidnapped and sold, and that by their own countrymen, and by their own parents” (qtd. in Fulford 248). Like Roberts, Hutton draws a comparison between the recently abolished slave trade and the continued subjugation of the climbing boys:

Britons, all so brave and free,  
Who deeply feel for misery;  
Ye who abhor black slavery,  
    With its sad galling chains;—  
Ye, who deeply sympathize,  
With human wrongs and agonies;—  
Ye who have both hearts and eyes,  
    Behold yon child of pains;—  
Yon shivering, wretched, helpless child,  
On whom contentment never smil’d;  
Compelled to brave the winter wild,  
    And wander through the snow. (1-12)

Hutton’s use of terms that connote human misery: “galling chains,” “agonies,” “pains,”



“shivering, wretched,” “helpless,” and “compelled,” portrays the child sweep as a slave.

The lines above also highlight an important recurring element in the chimney sweep poems of the 1830s: winter and snow.<sup>204</sup> In his *Advice to Mothers*, William Buchanan wrote of the hard life of the child sweep, describing him thus: “[h]alf naked in the most bitter cold, he creeps along the streets by break of day, the ice cutting through his feet, his legs bent, and his body twisted” (70). Line 12 of Hutton’s poem describes the child sweep wandering “through the snow.” In Montgomery’s “The Dream,” his child sweep laments: “The snow—I never saw such snow— / Raged like the sea all round” (13-14; qtd. in Fulford 251). Fulford suggests that throughout “The Dream” Montgomery “plays light against dark, [and] hot against cold” (252). Hutton similarly contrasts the cold of winter with the heat of summer, describing the chimney sweep as a “Poor shivering thing, with frozen feet, / Accustom’d long to brave and meet, / Stern winter’s cold and summer’s heat” (25-27).

Unlike Montgomery, however, Hutton uses a narrative voice that permeates her poem. The tone of the sage from Hutton’s Poor Law poems carries into her indictment of child labour as the poet-speaker condemns the hypocrisy of a nation that forces its children into a life of “pains” and wretchedness, of perpetual starvation, and of cold. The poet laments, “Humanity is surely lost, / To see that infant tempest tost” and, just as in the poems that I discuss which use pastoral conventions, nature here mirrors the inner landscape of the life of a child sweep (17-18).

While the poet narrates the first four stanzas of the poem the subsequent shift in perspective to allow the child sweep to describe his entry into commodity exchange

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<sup>204</sup> In Roberts’s “Song of the Poor Little Sweep,” Roberts describes the “snow drifts,” and how the sweep is “shivering with cold” (2, 6).

and the violence inflicted on him. The narrative of his indenture makes use of terms that enter him into the discourses of commodity and consumption: “My wicked father basely sold / Me to an iron man for gold” (33-34). Hutton thus emphasises the inherent hypocrisy of a society that objectifies children through capitalism and turns them into mere objects of monetary exchange. Hutton also engages with the problem of child abuse, a troubling reality for factory children and “climbing boys” in the 1830s and 1840s. As the sweep tells the reader, “when I venture to complain , / [...] Or stop, ere chimney top I gain, / I’m goaded on with blows” (37-40).

Hutton addresses a very real and prevalent problem in the nineteenth century, yet this poem appears in a collection published *after* the 1840 Chimney Sweep Act, which forbade the indenture of any child under sixteen as a sweep and protected those under the age of twenty-one from being sent up a flue. Hutton was writing to a profession that was beginning to change in nature and demographic, and so we can read “On a Poor Little Sweep” as a vehicle for commenting on the necessities of legislative change. Yet the “Epilogue” of the poem suggests that Hutton was writing the poem *before* the passing of the act. In it, Hutton acknowledges the changing nature of the sweeping profession and commends philanthropists of the higher class for their efforts to improve conditions. She writes of child sweeps,

[t]his cruel, and unchristian calling, which has long been a disgrace to humanity, and a stigma on the nation, will soon disappear by Act of Parliament. It is only surprising that it has existed so long, in a country famed for its humanity and philanthropy. How beautiful it is to see such readiness on the part of the higher orders to ameliorate the condition of the lower; those who do all in their power

to leave the world better than they found it, well fulfill the purposes for which they were created, and I know of no pleasure which brings such peace within, as the reflection that you have done your best to relieve the miseries of suffering humanity. Heavenly, sweet, and serene, must be the death-bed of a truly Christian philanthropist. (*Cottage Tales* 93)

As in her exhortation in the preface to *Cottage Tales*, Hutton speaks openly of public and political issues. Neither her poetry nor her prose is confined to the spaces of domestic life: her authorial voice spans professions, and echoes across the nation. She both commends philanthropic efforts, and condemns the dehumanization of the British people.

#### *Hutton's Nationalism and Internationalism*

While Hutton wrote vociferously about the national problems of poverty in the 1830s in England, she also wrote poems that championed the philanthropic efforts of the upper classes and highly praised England for its charity. She wrote "Benefit of the Poor of the Town of Sheffield" as a commendatory verse on the Queen's Bays who had, it seems, performed at the Sheffield Theatre to raise funds for the artisanal poor of Sheffield. Here we see the complexity of Hutton's political personality begin to unfold as this poem stands in counterpoint to her Poor Law and anti-slavery verses.

Unlike the previous poems I have discussed, which condemn Britain for its hypocrisy, this thirty-six-line poem conflates regional philanthropic efforts with a strong sense of national patriotism. The poet begins by describing the joy she feels at witnessing the event:

My heart is full to overflowing,  
Thus to see my country's brave,  
Their talent, wit, and aid bestowing,  
Our starving artizans [sic] to save. (1-4)

The “country’s brave” here do not save Britain from other invading nations, but instead from its own corruption. The dried-up stream has been replaced by the “overflowing” joy of the poet, and the images of darkness have been replaced by the “bright and glorious trait” of the “soldier marching forth / To save the sinews of the state” (19-21). Hutton portrays the nation as a human whose population serves as the muscles or “sinews” that make it function. The imagery of light and life continues to the final lines, in which the philanthropy of the soldiers becomes the panacea for Britain’s problems: “May health and happiness attend / Our country’s gallant brave defenders,” who begin by “Lighting again the dying embers— / Of brightening hope, long prostrate laid, / Beneath starvation’s withering shade” (31-36).

While I have argued for Hutton’s ostensibly national poetic lens and engagement with the “Condition of England” Question, she also writes poems that look outward to engage directly with events occurring beyond England’s boundaries. In her two later volumes, Hutton published poems that became decidedly international in their outlook. A number of these poems deal with the Polish democratic movement—I have termed them her “Polish uprising” poems.<sup>205</sup> In *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Hutton is described as

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<sup>205</sup> These include “A Prayer for Poland,” “Poland,” “Polish Wanderers,” “The Polish Prisoner” and “Poland’s Friend” in *The Happy Isle*, and “Polish Song” and “The Occupation of Cracow” in *Cottage Tales*.

loyal and pious, and a great friend to the Polish cause and the Polish exiles, to whom, in one shape or another, she has dedicated at least a dozen of pieces [...] This may not be the very best of poetry, yet it is not without its uses; and we are glad to know that, besides a Montgomery and an Elliott, Sheffield has one, and perhaps many Mary Huttons. (335)

Hutton was strong in her support of the Polish people and their armed rebellion against Russian rule in November 1830.<sup>206</sup> In “Polish Song,” Hutton extends the “rhetoric of freedom” to the Polish people and their quest for democracy. The simple meter of the poem belies its import; the three lines of iambic trimeter with a fourth stanza of two-feet that opens with a trochee is almost metronomic in its meter, and reverberates with the feeling of an unstoppable forward moving march:

No Pole can live a slave;  
To British shore they come;  
Britons, behold the brave  
Without a home. (1-4)

The forward movement edges towards “liberty” for the Polish people, as the opening stanza brings international political turmoil onto British soil. Here, we see another use of the term “slave,” this time applied to the Polish people who immigrate to Britain to escape Russian rule.

Yet another aspect of Hutton’s poetry that resonates with the Chartist movement is her negotiation of international politics. “Liberty,” “Equality,” and “Fraternity” were the watchwords of revolutionaries across Europe from the 1790s to

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<sup>206</sup> For a brief discussion of the Polish Uprising, see Megan Dixon’s “Repositioning Pushkin and the Poems of the Polish Uprising” in *Polish Encounters, Russian Identity* (49-50).

the culmination of 1848. Hutton situates her discussion of Poland within this rhetorical context by aligning English working-class liberty with the analogous Polish desire for democracy and freedom from Russian tyranny. Hutton's poem, "On the Occupation of Cracow," furthers the international alliance between England and Poland, asking that the "Friends of Freedom"—that is, the English—stand and help the Polish people who "with galling chains be bound, / To bitter slavery" (1, 11-12). The final line of the poem speaks not to the Polish people, but to Hutton's own countrymen, while she declares:

Let Englishmen now make a stand,  
And break the tyrant's withering brand,  
And teach him we can yet command,  
At mercy's righteous call. (37-40)

Like her Chartist successors, Hutton forges a bond between the oppressed by calling upon the men of England to forward the progress of freedom. For example, her poem resembles Ernest Jones' "The Marsellaise," which appeared in *The Labourer: A Monthly Magazine of Politics, Literature, and Poetry* in 1848.<sup>207</sup> Jones constructs a community of liberty that sweeps across the world:

Fight with us Freedom—at thy voice  
Victory hails our strong career  
Till stricken tyrants dying hear,

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<sup>207</sup> 1848 was a crucial year for Chartists and revolutionaries across Europe. The French Second Republic, whose motto was, famously, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, came into power during the 1848 revolutions in France, and held power until Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte formed the Second Empire. The Chartists adopted the motto as their own. See Price and Stearn. Stearn notes that in Marseilles, workers and artisans formed political clubs in support of the Republic (84).

The liberated world rejoice! (70-74)

But Hutton's engagement with Poland's democratic movement predates the internationalism of the later Chartist movement, and George Julian Harney's Society of Fraternal Democrats.<sup>208</sup> While Hutton's gender makes her an unlikely case for the poetic commitment to international politics, it was a commitment that did align her with her Chartist contemporaries. Her internationalist outlook speaks to working-class women's knowledge of events outside their own country, and her political stance shows strong resemblances to the politics of the Chartist movement.

*Political Poetics and Gender: "The Fate of Eva"*

While I have argued that Hutton's gender is not merely incidental to her poetic representations of the exploitation of individual working-class people in England, and the oppression of the Polish by Russia, none of the poems I have yet discussed enters into dialogue with the competing social formation of gender. In her highly polemic "The Fate of Eva," Hutton uses an episode from ancient British history to castigate the marriage of Strongbow, Earl of Pembroke, to his second wife, the lady Eva, daughter of Dermot, King of Leinster, whilst "dead bodies of the murdered citizens were lying unburied in the streets." In this poem, Hutton politicizes gender by placing Eva's marriage in contrast to the events at Waterford on St. Bartholomew's Eve (22).<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> On 22 September 1844, the "internationally-minded" Harney, the interminable revolutionary, founded the Society of Fraternal Democrats who were which was arguably the spearhead of the Chartist internationalist movement. The slogan, "All Men Are Brethren" was printed in twelve languages on the membership cards. It also looks back to the 1790s "citizens of the world" among whom were notable women poets like H.M. Williams.

<sup>209</sup> The poem is based upon the marriage of Richard (Strongbow) fitz Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Pembroke and Lord of Leinster and Eve MacMurchada. Before Henry II took the throne, in

“The Fate of Eva” is an example of a more oblique engagement with politics than some of Hutton’s other poetry and, I would argue, that the historical displacement facilitates the gender radicalism of the poem. Hutton fuses the politics of gender and nation, drawing on the long past history of Ireland. Ireland, of course, had a long-standing history fraught with issues of land ownership and had felt the crush of famine well before England’s own aptly termed “hungry forties.” Through Hutton’s historical displacement, we see a latent critique of modern capitalist relations, in which Hutton denigrates the upper classes for their frivolity and indulgence while the poor of England starve and suffer, and presents a vivid picture of Britain’s gender hierarchies. In “Eva,” Hutton interweaves issues of land ownership, working-class politics, and women’s rights. Gender and class collide in the figurative language that Hutton uses to describe Eva’s commodification, oppression by her husband, and subsequent suicide.

“Eva” opens with Hutton’s characteristic irony: the “chain of gold” (10), which Strongbow places around the eponymous heroine’s neck represents the metaphorical imprisonment of both the “chain” and of commodification. The “gold” is

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December 1154, Richard’s father, Gilbert Earl of Pembroke died, and Strongbow was granted the lands and titles of Pembroke. However, after the coronation the king did not recognize these titles. In 1168, Dermot MacMurchada, “the dethroned king of Leinster” had been granted permission by Henry II to recruit knights for his battle to regain his own title (Moore 246). He offered Strongbow his daughter Eve, land in Ireland, and the title lordship of Leinster after Dermot’s death. In 1170, Strongbow arrived in Ireland to meet Dermot and his company of twelve hundred men, two-hundred of whom were knights. They attacked at Waterford on St. Bartholomew’s Eve (28 August, 1170). The following day, Eve MacMurchada and Strongbow were wed. While the dates are incongruous, Hutton may have drawn from Thomas Moore’s *History of Ireland* (1835-1846), for Hutton’s preface to the poem closely resembles Moore’s, which reads, “The still reeking horrors, therefore, of the sacked and ruined city were made to give place to a scene of nuptial festivity; and the marriage of Strongbow with the Princess Eva, according to the promise pledged to that lord at Bristol, was, in haste and confusion, celebrated” (254). It is from Moore’s account that I have made my own summary.



representative of her entry into patriarchal economy. But Eva refuses her object position, and her anaphoric questioning of her oppression voices her desire to be a subject: “And must I wear *thy robes so fine?* / *And must I wear thy chain of gold?* / *And must I be a wife of thine?*” (13-15; my italics). These interrogatives suggest that Eva is fully aware of her status as a commodified object. She tells the reader, “By my father I am sold” (17),<sup>210</sup> and laments:

That on this dark and bloody day,  
I should be made a woful [*sic*] bride,  
To suit thine and my fathers pride;  
When my poor murder’d countrymen,  
Impeded all the way? (19-23)

Further, Eva recognizes the subjugation of her “murdered countrymen,” who lie dead in the streets on her wedding day.

The poem plays commodity against love and men against women, rendering greed and pride a male sin, which oppresses the “heart” for “gold.” Hutton’s narrative voice intercedes at brief moments to declaim Eva’s inner feeling: “Her heart despis’d the part he play’d; / His wretched country he had sold, / For his daughters [*sic*] hand, and English gold” (47-49). Indeed, the dual voices of Hutton and Eva magnify the female voice as a site of resistance against oppression. Both Hutton and her heroine speak against the commodification of women.

The dominant motif running through the poem is that of blood: the spilled blood of innocents on the streets, and the blood both literally and figuratively drained

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<sup>210</sup> Like the chimney sweep discussed above, who tells the reader: “[m]y wicked father basely sold / Me to an iron man for gold” (33-4), Eva is also under the control of an ambitious and greedy father.

from Eva as she becomes a sacrifice to human greed. Eva narrates the gruesome affect of her marriage:

The groaning streets are deeply dy'd,  
And deeply stained with freeman's gore.  
My maidens fair the feast outspread,  
For blood will stain my bridal bed. (52-55)

The narrator continues:

The marriage rites were scarcely o'er,  
E'er the alter ran with human gore,  
And the fair bride was fainting led  
Over the corpses of the dead;  
Nor love nor honey-moon could be,  
Amongst such blood and misery. (56-61)

I quote this passage at some length to fully show how Hutton conflates the blood of Eva's countrymen with the figurative representation of the loss of her virginity. This conflation implies the supposition that the same society causes both the literal death of "free[men]" and Eva's final entry into the economy that makes her a wife (by sexual consummation). Love is thus trumped by greed, and Eva's starving countrymen pay their tithes in blood. The final poignant moment in the poem—Eva's suicide—creates a desperate image of the current state of the nation. With its link to a historical moment full of violence, "Eva" can be placed with the poems Forsyth describes in "Looking for Grandmothers." Forsyth observes that Ruth Wills, Millicent Langton, and Janet Hamilton all write poems that

look to the heroines of history, exposing ways in which women are enmeshed in, and are victims of, familial, political, and religious power structures, paying the ultimate price for 'transgression'. Paradoxically, it is their obedience, rather than deliberate transgression, which leaves them open to exploitation and betrayal.

(262)

Hutton appropriates historical events to discuss the commodification of gender; "Eva" is a masterful conflation of national and gender politics. She can be read alongside any of the women discussed in Ferguson's *Eighteenth Century Women Poets*, for she, too "displays allied concerns about class and gender" and is part of "an emerging gendered tradition of working-class poets committed to new formulations of patriotism and national identity, raising significant issues of class and gender as part of that identity" (3, 5). She is also a "female poet," to use Mellor's term, who engages with specific political and historical moments while simultaneously pushing for social and political reform.

Situated as she is between two influential and radical literary traditions of eighteenth-century working-class women poets (such as Barbauld and More) and Chartism, Hutton challenges ideologies of both class and gender through her "labour literature." Her continual appropriation of the terms and images contained within the dichotomized *topoi* of slavery and liberty sets her poetry alongside the discourses of both abolitionism and industrialism and, by extension, align her with the poetic representations of the working class as constructed by the Chartist poets in the 1830s and 1840s. We can read Hutton as a Chartist poet who blended a commitment to justice, with quasi-religious notions of the poet's prophetic role. Her choice of simple

diction and political subject matter recalls A.M.P. and Ernest Jones, and speaks to her self-identification as a poet *for* and *of* the working classes. Further, these linguistic and imagistic appropriations not only situate her poetry in the dominant discourses of the day, but also create a place for the working-class woman writer within the literary political realm. Thus she advocates social change, but never actively threatens to destabilize middle-class ideologies. By directly engaging in the controversies concerning the New Poor Law and international politics, Hutton treats subjects that critics have associated most often with male writers of the period. In "Eva," Hutton politicizes gender through a gruesome vision of England's past and suggests that the same society that trammels its poor subjugates women as well. Hutton is perhaps the first of the Victorian working-class women poets to engage actively with politics in such a multiplicity of ways. As Hutton's poetry has shown, working-class women poets can and did write about and within the dominant political discourses of the mid-nineteenth century.

**SECTION 2: FACTORY GIRLS & THE CITY: 1850-1880**

## CHAPTER FIVE. FACTORY GIRLS AND THE POLITICS OF SYMPATHY.

The operatives in our factories are intelligent; exceedingly so. We have the testimony of a bookseller in Troy, that the operatives in Ida Mills are the largest class of readers he has, according to their numbers. We have often wondered at their amount of knowledge, considering the hours which they have to devote to labour. This testimony is flattering to them; and the literary works of the girls at the Lowell Factories speak volumes for them also, not because of their condition, but *because they rise above it.*

- *Mechanics' Mirror* (Albany, N.Y.),  
reprinted in *Voice of Industry*,  
November 27, 1846 (qtd. in Foner vi; my italics)

While the epigraph of this chapter is taken from the American-based *Mechanics' Mirror*, the description of the female mill workers in Lowell, Massachusetts could just as easily be a description of the female factory worker poets whom I discuss in the pages that follow. In this second section of my study, I analyse the poetry of two anonymous "factory girls" (this chapter), Fanny Forrester (chapter six), and Ellen Johnston (chapter seven). All four poets resemble the Lowell mill girls in two important ways, namely (1) in their literary inclinations, and (2) in their attempt to use literature to "rise above" the quotidian reality of factory life. In this chapter, I will take up the subject of labour once more and re-examine the sympathetic depiction of the factory worker in nineteenth-century social reform literature; in doing so, I will introduce two "factory girl" poets who challenge the middle-class portrayal of the working-class woman. In their poems, the "factory girl" poets defy sympathetic representation and figuratively "rise above" physical work through their literary labours.<sup>211</sup> The main questions addressed in this chapter are: (1) how do middle-class

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<sup>211</sup> In her doctoral dissertation, Susan Alves has discussed "The Politics of Reading American and British Female Factory Workers' Poetry." While the scope of this project will not allow a detailed analysis of the relationship between British and American "factory girls," the recovery of the factory poets whom I discuss here necessitate a further comparison in a future project. See my conclusion

writers represent female factory workers? (2) how do the factory girls represent themselves? and (3) how can the factory workers' active rejection of middle-class sympathy be read as a political manoeuvre?

As I have shown thus far in my study, working-class women writers offered a variety of responses and potential solutions to the poverty and inequality brought about by industrial capitalism: the female contributors to the *Pioneer* put their trust in the trade union as a way to ameliorate their living conditions, E.H. argues for religious and educational reform, Saunderson clings to the pastoral, and Hutton uses a metaphor of slavery to critique social problems. Landry writes that after 1821 working-class women's verse was constrained by "an autobiographical mode that bespoke resignation to disenfranchisement, the rendering of oneself as an *object of sympathy* rather than as a participant in the shaping of public discourse and political opinion" (*Muses* 277; my italics). But, as I will show, this generalization is problematic; I insist that there were working-class women poets after 1830 who, in their poetry, actively rejected sympathetic objectification.

In the 1840s and 1850s, women were the largest demographic to work in the factories across the United Kingdom. Women were employed in factories in all types of activities:

[t]hey beat cotton by hand. In the carding room they were back-frame, bobbin-frame and drawing tenters. They were twist-winders and stretchers.

They were throstle spinners, and before they were entirely replaced by men who could watch two mules and repair their machines, they were also mule spinners.

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to this dissertation.

They worked at the power-loom in the weaving sheds. In the silk factories women were employed in every part of the industry, even acting as overlookers in one mill. In worsted and woollen mills young girls were spinners as well as weavers. (Neff 24)

The 16 April 1847 House of Commons's "Return of Total Number of Persons employed in Cotton, Woollen, Worsted, Flax, and Silk Factories in the United Kingdom," identified a total of 257, 794 women working in factories across England.<sup>212</sup> From 1819 onward, the Factory Acts sought to improve working conditions for factory labourers.<sup>213</sup> Working-class women sat at the heart of the heated debate on factory labour that grew out of Michael Sadler's 1832 House of Commons Committee on the Labour of Children in Factories. Both middle- and working-class writers took up the call for reform, and especially a reduction in working hours. Opponents and proponents of the factory debates published a plethora of tracts, pamphlets,

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<sup>212</sup> This is compared to 197, 248 men. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the largest demographic of women were in the thirteen to eighteen, and eighteen plus age groups (80, 791 and 157, 708 women respectively, compared to 54, 878 and 120, 201 men in those age groups). In the under-thirteen age group, males outnumbered females 22,169 to 19, 295. In Scotland, over half of factory workers were female (46, 777 compared to 20, 466 men). In Ireland, the number of women factory workers also outnumbered the men, 14, 812 to 7779 (Horner and Howell 294).

<sup>213</sup> The 1825 Factory Act limited the hours of work to twelve on weekdays and nine on Saturday for anyone under the age of sixteen. By 1831, the age was extended to eighteen, and night labour was prohibited for anyone under the age of twenty-one. The Factory Act of 1833 proscribed the work of children under nine in textile mills. For children nine to twelve, it also limited the number of hours per week to forty-nine. The 1833 Act also introduced factory inspectors for the first time. The reports of these inspectors (1835-55) questioned the working conditions in the factories, and sparked the major debates. The Act of 1847, or Ten Hour Act, was the factory legislation most ardently sought after by middle- and working- class reformers. The agitations, led by abolitionist Richard Oastler through his "Yorkshire Slavery" letters to the *Leeds Mercury*<sup>213</sup> and Michael Sadler and his House of Commons committee, succeeded in reducing the number of hours that women and children could work to 10 per a day (Hutchins 33). The change in factory legislation continued throughout the century with the acts of 1853, 1864, 1867, 1874, 1876, 1878, and 1891. But the period of 1829-1844 saw the "most violent and bitter controversy over the Factory Acts, which was intensified by the simultaneous struggle over the repeal of the Corn Laws" (Hutchins 87). See B.L. Hutchins and Amy Harrison.



parliamentary papers, and novels; factory workers and their lives were cast into the limelight.<sup>214</sup>

### *Theories of Sympathy*

One of the most significant current dialogues in Victorian literary criticism is how sympathy manifests in the novel. More specifically, critics debate the reciprocal relationship between the (middle-class) sympathizer and the (working-class) object of pity.<sup>215</sup> While the definition and mobilization of the term “sympathy” has been long debated, I will use Audrey Jaffe’s nuanced and insightful discussion of “specular sympathy” as the cornerstone of this chapter. In *Scenes of Sympathy* (2000), Jaffe examines novels written between 1843 and 1890, and argues that specularity is inseparable from sympathy.<sup>216</sup> She draws on Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), in which he “depicts sympathy not as a direct response to a sufferer but rather as a response to a sufferer’s representation in a spectator’s mind” (Jaffe 4). Thus, writes Jaffe,

sympathy in Victorian fiction is inseparable from issues of visuality and

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<sup>214</sup> Reprinted in Appendix F of Simmons’s *Factory Lives*. Lord Ashley, the era’s strongest opponent of the pitiable working conditions in the factories, refused office in 1841 over issues arising from parliament’s stance on the condition of factory workers. The debate over factory labour created a division between those who sought to improve working conditions and those who sought monetary gain. Samuel Kydd in his *History of the Factory Movement* (1857) placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the “capitalists.” He writes, “[t]o what, then, could those long imprisoning and destructive hours of labour be attributed?” His answer: “[n]ot to high taxation, that was moderate—not to an immense debt, there was none. To nothing but to the tyranny and domination of the capitalists” (17-18).

<sup>215</sup> Nancy Roberts writes that sympathy in the novel engenders “a disquieting combination of distress on behalf of the other along with a sense of self-satisfaction based on our own good fortune and *on our capacity to feel*” (9; my italics). Roberts provides the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of “sympathy”—“sharing the feelings of another, esp. in sorrow or trouble”—noting the importance of the two final words to our understanding of the term (qtd. in Roberts 8).

<sup>216</sup> See pp. 2-3 in her introduction.

representation because it is inextricable from the middle-class subject's status as spectator and from the social figures to whose visible presence the Victorian middle classes felt it necessary to formulate a response. Victorian representations of sympathy are [...] specular, crucially involving the way capitalist social relations transform subjects into spectators of and objects for one another. (8)

Jaffe also theorizes how, in the act of looking, the middle-class observer reflects on her own subjectivity (8-9). Specularity becomes the very thing that engenders sympathy: without observing the downtrodden individual, the middle-class subject has no need to reflect, and therefore no need to question her subjectivity. Such an argument solidifies the "traditional rhetorical connection between the sight of suffering and pity" (Van Sant 45).<sup>217</sup>

The relationship between the person who watches and the person who is being watched is also a class-inflected relationship. The gaze acts as a vehicle of social power, and through the descriptive power of the middle-class author, the working-class individual enters into a visual economy whereby the bodies on display are

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<sup>217</sup> More documents this phenomenon in her anonymously published *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* (1788):

I am far from intending to depreciate this humane and exquisitely tender sentiment, which the beneficent Author of our nature gave us, as a stimulus to remove the distresses of others, in order to get rid of our own uneasiness. I would only observe, that where not strengthened by superior motives, it is a casual and precarious instrument of good, and ceases to operate, except in the immediate presence, and within the audible cry of misery. This sort of feeling forgets that any calamity exists which is out of its own sight; and though it would empty its purse for such an occasional object as rouses transient sensibility, yet it seldom makes any stated provision for miseries, which are not the less real because they do not obtrude upon the sight, and awaken the tenderness of immediate sympathy. This is a mechanical charity, which requires springs and wheels to set it a going; whereas, real Christian charity does not wait to be acted upon by impressions and impulses. (56-57)

available for consumption. To bolster this theory, I turn to Foucault, who in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* argues that surveillance has a direct correlation with state apparatus and state power.<sup>218</sup> Foucault asks, “[i]s it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” (228). Factory “overlookers,” armed with instruments of corporal punishment, roamed the mills and kept a watchful eye on the workers. In this way, the factory operated under the same principle of the Panopticon, which was “to induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). The working-class women poets I discuss here reject the sympathetic gaze that turns them into objects and, through their literary labours, they regain their own power over their subjectivity—that is to say their individuality—and consequently (as Jaffe would say), their ability to question (and describe) their own subjectivity.

#### *“Social Problem” Fiction and the Politics of Sympathy*

The novels that appeared out of the factory debates provided some of the most prominent literary critiques of class relations, and tended to treat the working-class characters with condescension, disgust, or sympathy. These novels have been dubbed the “industrial novels,” a sub-genre that began with Harriet Martineau’s novella “A

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<sup>218</sup> In discussing “sympathy,” a number of critics draw on Foucault’s theories. Roberts is interested in both Lacanian and Foucauldian interpretations of how, to use Foucault’s words, “human beings are made subjects” (qtd. in Roberts 10). Amit Rai argues that sympathy “was a specific form of sociality that facilitated the elaboration of various power relations” (xiii). Jaffe uses Foucault’s theories to illustrate how the “capitalist subject is also a speculative one” (3 n.4)

Manchester Strike” (1832), and ended, arguably, with George Eliot’s *Felix Holt* (1866).<sup>219</sup>

The first serious discussions and analyses of these texts emerged during the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>220</sup> And while a number of critics have since examined the representations of working-class women *within* the industrial novels, as yet, little work has been done on how working-class women were represented and represented themselves in the poetry of the mid-Victorian era.<sup>221</sup> Working-class writers were situated beside the industrial novelists and middle-class reformers. Until now, the recesses of history have silenced their voices, and critics have lamented an absence of working-class women’s writing *about* factory life.<sup>222</sup>

The authors of the Victorian “social problem novel”—who were most often middle-class women—also represent the female (and child) worker as an object of sympathy.<sup>223</sup> But middle-class writers had difficulty representing life in the factories;

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<sup>219</sup> Zlotnick reads *Felix Holt* as a “postindustrial novel” and argues that Eliot “re-presents the industrial revolution as a past historical event and conveniently ‘forgets’ the central role gender played in early discourses” (225).

<sup>220</sup> For information on the representation of the working-classes in Victorian fiction, see P.J Keating and Sheila M. Smith. For other studies on the industrial novel, see Patrick Brantlinger, Joseph Kestner, and Catherine Gallagher. For a discussion of the female protagonists of the novels, see Ruth Bernard Yeazell. Most recently, Suzanne Daly has examined the ways in which nineteenth-century domestic and industrial novels highlight and suppress different aspects of Britain’s involvement in the Indian cotton trade.

<sup>221</sup> For a discussion of the representations of working-class women in the novels, see Dorice Williams Elliott, Maura Ives, Patricia Johnson, and Carolyn Lesjak (especially chapter one: “‘How Deep Might be the Romance’: Representing Work and the Working Class in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*”). See also Catherine Barnes Stevenson.

<sup>222</sup> As Zlotnick confirms in *Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution*, “women were silenced by their class’s adherence to the discourse of domesticity, which made it difficult for them to write of their own experiences as women who worked” (273-74). Also see Rosen’s introduction to her article on Ellen Johnston.

<sup>223</sup> Melissa Shaub writes that

Gaskell’s more positive view of sympathy as a means of checking the excesses of the upper classes changing one’s views of homelessness or of the Hands—is certainly the dominant mode of industrial fiction. Scenes of suffering, with which the reader is meant to sympathize, abound in factory novels. Description of the physical misery of working class characters is a standard means by which such authors produce a desire for political reform. (15)

She has recently complicated the reciprocity of sympathy in *Mary Barton*, arguing that “sympathy

as Neff asserts in “The Literary Treatment of the Textile Worker,”

the factory girl was of all working-women the most remote from the experience of both authors and reading public. The mill was a world in itself, and so it has remained. To understand it, one must learn its mysteries in childhood. When Dickens tried to write of Manchester in *Hard Times*, he made a dismal failure. Then, too, the life of the mill girl lacked almost all of the romantic elements beloved by novelists. She was not beautiful. Her hard labour from childhood had marred any natural endowments of grace and feminine charm. She was surrounded by noise and dirt, and could not escape being dirty herself [...] The mill girl smoked, drank, swore, and had the adventures in sex the Victorians reserved for men, and cheerfully slaved to support the almost inevitable babies [...] The factory girl lacked all the qualifications for the ideal heroine. (85-86)

While we locate working-class women and children at the centre of the debates surrounding factory labour, industrial fiction situated women workers in a position of ambivalence, often unable to resolve their class and gender positions. Thus even in the literature that was meant to ease the relationship between the classes, the middle-class literature of the era remained obscured by political agendas and cultural ideologies. Dorice Williams Elliott, for example, argues that novelists could only resolve social problems by sending their working-class heroines to the colonies,

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flows just as frequently from the workers to the masters. This sort of sympathy contains an entirely different danger—that it will paralyze victims by making them morally unable to take action against their own victimization. Gaskell deploys sympathy in exactly this way, using it as a tool to discipline both the workers in her novels and the workers who read her novels” (15). See Betensky, Cora Kaplan’s “‘Like a Housemaid’s Fancies’: The Representation of Working-Class Women in Nineteenth-Century Writing,” Retan, and Deborah Kaplan.

moving them to another country, or killing them off.<sup>224</sup> In the later industrial novels, there are often too-easy reconciliations of workers and industrialism; for example, there is the convenient marrying of Fanny Fletcher, “a specimen of female tenderness and pity” to the eponymous protagonist of Frances Trollope’s *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (292);<sup>225</sup> the providential death of Helen in Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna’s *Helen Fleetwood*;<sup>226</sup> and the death-bed reconciliation between Carson and Barton in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton*.<sup>227</sup>

The literary characterization of the working-class woman often resulted in a problematic mix of sympathy and condescension. In Martineau’s “A Manchester Strike,” Allen’s wife Mary and daughter Martha are subject to pathos and condescension. Martineau seeks to demonstrate how the factory town engenders a pollution of domestic space. Her representation suggests that she felt that work outside the home removed women from their proper role as caregivers and moral centres of the household.<sup>228</sup> Martineau casts Mary’s seemingly innocent act of selling clothes for food—“trying to persuade herself that she was only doing a mother’s duty in providing her children with bread”—as proof that women did not belong in a world

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<sup>224</sup> Johnson, who has discussed the “woman worker’s threat to Victorian ideologies of gender and class,” notes that the factory girl disappeared from industrial fiction after *Helen Fleetwood* (12). She writes that the authors of these texts “either kill [female factory workers] off or mutilate them, revealing the power of domestic ideology and the ways in which working-class women continue to disrupt its compromises” (12).

<sup>225</sup> Elliott notes that “Mary Brotherton, despite her extensive knowledge of factory conditions, fails to effect any changes in the factory system itself, and *Michael Armstrong* ends with her retreat from industrial England to an almost-classless mini-society in Germany” (387).

<sup>226</sup> *Helen Fleetwood* at times moves into the realm of Christian allegory. Helen’s deformity and death depicts children as the victims of capitalism to be consumed, their labour was involuntary, and they had no time or energy for education. Yet the Green’s move to Manchester and its “murdering mills” often feels more a vehicle for Tonna’s religious agenda than an indictment of the factory system (86).

<sup>227</sup> See Williams Elliott’s discussion of these “sympathetic” novelistic endings (382-83).

<sup>228</sup> See my discussion of women and work in chapter two.

that chastised them for performing their motherly “duty” (205). Martineau illustrates how industry has corrupted not only working men, but working women too:

all the men who were prone to drink now spent hour after hour at the alehouse, and many a woman now for the first time took to her “drop of comfort” at home. Many a man who had hitherto been a helper to his wife and tender to his children, began to slam the door behind him, after having beaten or shaken the little ones all round, and spoken rough words to their trembling mother. While she, dashing away her tears, looked for something to do, and found one thing that she would wash if she had fuel and soap, and another that she would mend if she had material and cotton. (203)

Both Mary’s “tears” and the description of domestic violence render her sympathetic. Martineau uses her female characters to argue *against* women’s involvement in class politics.

But in novels that often dealt with the exigencies of factory life, few provided descriptions of the factory itself. One of the most important contributing factors, as Neff suggests, is the difficulty in representing female factory workers because of their supposedly dangerous sexuality.<sup>229</sup> Drawing on the work of Cora Kaplan, and her notion of the “associative symbolism of the poor,” Helen Merrick also argues that in the city, the working class often developed a reputation for depravity, and thus they “were deemed agents of moral and physical pollution requiring differentiation and segregation, both materially and ideologically, from the ‘respectable’ classes” (34).

Similarly in *Uneven Developments*, Poovey delineates the three figures that

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<sup>229</sup> See my discussion of working-class women and sexuality in chapter two.

“symbolized working women for the early and mid-Victorian public”—the governess, the needlewoman, and the factory girl. She writes that “both of the working-class members of this trio were specifically linked by middle-class male commentators to the danger of unregulated female sexuality” (131).<sup>230</sup> A fourth figure that symbolized the working-class woman was the servant.<sup>231</sup> Elliott writes that within the middle-class moral code, female authors could represent *servants* but not factory workers, because servants were a part of their social schematic and factory workers “were unfamiliar and vaguely, if not overtly, threatening” (379).

Female factory workers existed in the liminal spaces of Victorian femininity; they were neither “angels in the house,” nor “fallen women.”<sup>232</sup> Their occupation subverted middle-class gender conventions, and thus, as Forsyth notes in “Too Boldly for a Woman,”

the very existence of the employed working-class woman poet ran counter to a bourgeois ideology of “separate spheres,” exposing not only deep seated anxieties

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<sup>230</sup> In *Hidden Hands: Working-Class Women and Victorian Problem Fiction*, Patricia E. Johnson identifies the 1842 Children’s Employment Commission Blue-Book as a “moment of crisis in the representation of working-class women” (19). Like Poovey, she suggests that the female factory labourer was no longer a “safe” subject, and thus she was replaced by more “properly ‘feminine’ figures” such as the seamstress, domestic servant, and working-class child (28). Ernest Jones, for example, wrote *Woman’s Wrongs* (1851) [the title of which pays tribute to both Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798)], and Charlotte Tonna’s *Woman’s Wrongs* (1843-4), in order to

to lift the veil from before the Wrongs of Woman – to show her what she suffers at her own home-hearth – how society receives her – what society does for her – where society leaves her. To show it, not merely in one class or order – but upward, downward, through all the social grades. (1)

And yet even Jones’s four stories—“The Working Man’s Wife,” “The Young Milliner,” “The Girl with the Red Hands,” and “The Lady of Title”—discuss seamstresses instead of factory workers.

<sup>231</sup> Bruce Robbins has argued that Victorian authors “reinscribe and rejuvenate the conventions of the literary servant,” which “produc[ed] effects incongruous with its social position and moments of vision incongruous with literary functionality” (xi).

<sup>232</sup> An examination of the many critiques and examinations of the “Angel in the House” and “Fallen Woman” discourses falls outside the scope of this chapter. For some of the recent critical discussions see Hughes, Leighton, Logan, Mitchell, Morse, and Roston.



about the political challenge of proletarian poetry and prose, but also the potentially deviant nature of female, working-class sexuality. The factory girl, in particular, became the site of these often contradictory discourses of femininity. (19)<sup>233</sup>

Thus arose a problem: the middle-class (woman) writer could not represent the factory girl because of the threat she posed, which was problematic in novels purporting to deal with factory labour.<sup>234</sup>

As happens so often in the industrial novels, the narrative begins and ends at the factory gates. These novels participate in an economy of visibility, which is manifested through a specific “vision” of the woman worker who cannot be represented within the confines of the factory walls. The factual accounts of the horrors of factory labour were best left in the Blue Books, clearly too gruesome to adorn the pages of “proper” middle-class fiction.<sup>235</sup> These novels, then, participate in the creation of a social hierarchy that threatened to elide the factory girl from the pages of the very literature that sought to ameliorate her working conditions. However, Jaffe argues that “visual representation [is] necessary for the production of individual sympathy” (29). So how

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<sup>233</sup> For a fuller discussion of separate spheres and the doctrine of work, see chapter two of this study.

<sup>234</sup> Elliott continues to explain why the factory worker was a particularly fraught figure in Victorian fiction:

Most middle-class people, even many family members of factory owners, had never been inside a factory and had probably never seen a factory worker, except at a distance. In the “hungry forties,” [...] most people were simply unaware of factory conditions and the lives of factory workers, even though protective factory legislation had already been debated and passed in Parliament. (379)

<sup>235</sup> For example, Patricia Ingham notes that the view inside the factory was “[p]resent in the manuscript of [Dickens’s] *Hard Times* but deleted by the serialised version in *Household Words*. In the serialised version, Dickens excised a reference to Rachael seeing her young sister’s arm torn off by unfenced machinery in the mill. Industrial accidents of this kind were a matter of Blue Book descriptions” (83).

do industrial novels represent the working class? When the author directs the reader's gaze to adult factory workers, the result is almost always that the factory is invisible except insofar as those outside it see the flow of bodies through its gates.<sup>236</sup> Adult factory workers are only visible when they are outside the factory and so not working.

The effect is that working-class characters are recognized as objects of sympathy in their domestic spaces rather than in their places of employment. Ignorant of the inner-workings of the factory, a middle-class audience would be much more likely to understand and identify with, as well as be horrified by, the dehumanizing effects of factory work if these effects were described in relation to the home. For example, in Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, we have the famous description of Wilson and Barton's experience of the abject poverty of the Davenport family on Berry Street as proof that "[m]achines is th' ruin of the poor folk" (130):

Never was the old Edinburgh cry of "Gardez l'eau" more necessary than in this street. As they passed, women from their doors tossed household slops of every description into the gutter; they ran into the next pool, which over-flowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes were the stepping-stones, on which the passer-by, who cared in the least for cleanliness, took care not to put his foot [...] You went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. It was very dark inside. The window-panes were many of them broken and stuffed with rags, which was reason enough for the dusky light [...] the smell was fetid as to almost knock the two men down. (97-98)

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<sup>236</sup> In Martineau's "A Manchester Strike," the tale begins with a description of the "several hundred work-people, men, girls, and boys, [who] poured out from the gates of a factory which stood on the banks of the Medlock, near Manchester" (139).

In order to depict working-class life sympathetically, middle-class authors (and their audience) are necessarily spectators; however, to reduce the threat posed by deviant sexuality, the threat of *contagion*, the industrial novelists represent the factory worker in familiar and domestic terms—they describe the living conditions of the factory workers, thus remaining a safe distance from the inside of the factory. Gaskell's was one of the first literary descriptions of the abhorrent conditions of the slums of Manchester. Yet even her faithful depictions of life in the country's largest per capita factory district obscure the factory worker, privileging the romance plot and master-worker reconciliations.

In her desire to see *inside* the factory, Mary Brotherton, the heroine of *Michael Armstrong*, encapsulates the fraught relationship between representation and sympathy. Mary Brotherton wishes to see inside the mill, in order to expose the “truth” of things (20). But this is a dangerous truth. Carol Betensky argues that

[t]he idealized middle-class woman plays a special role within the field of power encoded in the pursuit of social knowledge. A zealously guarded repository of ignorance in her domestic cocoon and a “natural” font of compassion outside of it, she is kept always at a remove from what she should do, according to the logic that figures her (66).

Thus when middle-class women writers choose to depict the inner world of the factory, they almost always turn to the testimony and portrayal of child (rather than adult) factory workers. One of the major themes of *Michael Armstrong* is the

testimony or witness of factory life.<sup>237</sup> Trollope provides descriptions of the life at Deep Valley Mill, a name indicative of the intentional obfuscation of its goings-on. Betensky observes, “as if the secrecy of Deep Valley Mills were not sufficiently established, Trollope moves with obsessive insistence from description to speculation” (66). Michael’s first entry into the mill provides a turning point in the novelistic representation of the factory:

[t]he moment at which Michael Armstrong entered the cotton mill at Deep Valley, was a critical one. The summer had been more than commonly sultry, and a large order had kept all hands very sharply at work. Even at dead of night the machinery never stopped, and when one set of fainting children were dragged from the mules another set were dragged from the reeking beds they were about to occupy, in order to take their places. The ventilation throughout the whole fabric was exceedingly imperfect; the heat, particularly in the rooms immediately beneath the roof, frightfully intense[.] (212)

The moment Michael stands at the threshold of the mill is a “critical” boundary, both literally and figuratively. In an effort to evoke sympathy, Trollope also treats the endemic exhaustion and violence to which young apprentices were subject. The children, who are

wretched equivalent[s] for health and joy, are compelled, whenever our boasted trade flows briskly, to stand to their work for just as many hours as the

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<sup>237</sup> Betensky examines the production of knowledge, or the development of “moral capital” in *Michael Armstrong* (63). She asks whether, “[g]iven the relative knowingness she imputes to her readers, what is the function of Trollope’s determination to open their eyes (“to draw the attention of her countrymen,” as she puts it in her introduction to the novel) “to the fearful evils inherent in the Factory System, as carried out in our manufacturing towns?” (62). Also see Joseph Kestner’s discussion of the novel (51-54).

application of the overlooker's strap, or billy-roller, can keep them on their legs.

Innumerable instances are on record of children falling from excess of weariness on the machinery, and being called to life by its lacerating their flesh. (206)

The text depicts the children on explicitly specular terms, indicating they "were crippled in the legs, and nearly all *exhibited* the frightful *spectacle* of young features pinched by famine" (186; my italics). Their bodies are physically marked by the cruelty of factory employment: they are the objects of pity upon which the middle-class audience is asked to gaze sympathetically.

Like Trollope, in *Helen Fleetwood*, Charlotte Tonna used children as a literary device for representing the inside of the factory.<sup>238</sup> Mary Green's description of being a piecer in a textile mill provides a further example:

[m]ove, move, everything moves. The frames are always going, and the little reels twirl round as fast as ever they can; and the pulleys, and chains [...] are all moving; and the cotton moves so fast it is hard to piece it quick enough; and there is a great dust, and such a noise of whirr, whirr, whirr, that at first I did not know whether I was not standing on my head. (111)

Notably, the child's body is displaced by the machinery, which dominates the description of the scene. Child labour seemed a less dangerous subject when couched in sentimentalized descriptions, and novelists represented them as innocent and pre-gendered, absent from the economy of sexuality that enveloped the woman worker.

Thus both Trollope and Tonna delved into the Blue Book descriptions, safely narrating

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<sup>238</sup> Tonna was well-known for her religious tracts, poems, stories and novels, and was the editor of the *Christian Lady's Magazine*. As well as *Helen Fleetwood*, Tonna wrote *The Perils of the Nation: An Appeal to the Legislature, the Clergy, and the Higher and Middle Classes*, which she published anonymously in 1843 (Bradshaw and Ozment 434).

them through the eyes of their child protagonists.<sup>239</sup>

### *Middle- and Upper-Class Poets and the Paradigm of Sympathy*

In order to understand how working-class women themselves participated in the ideological representations of the factory and the factory worker, it is important to examine how women poets who were *not* working-class wrote within a sympathetic paradigm and located the impetus for reform in the creation of pathos.<sup>240</sup> L.E.L., Caroline Norton, Henrietta Tindal, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning each turned their poetic vision to the problems of factory labour. Like their novel-writing counterparts, middle- and upper-class women poets create sympathy for the labourer as they try to effect social change. Like the industrial novelists, these poets create sympathy for the labourer as they try to effect social change. For these poets, *objectification*, rather than *identification*, was necessary to keep the threat of contamination at bay while simultaneously depicting human suffering.

L.E.L.'s poem "The Factory," published in her volume *Fugitive Pieces* (1835), is consistent in its sympathetic treatment of the child factory worker. L.E.L. essentialises childhood innocence and freedom, claiming that England will be cursed as long as children labour in the mills. L.E.L. argues that factory work takes from the child her childhood: "That child has no childish days, / No careless play, no frolics wild, / No

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<sup>239</sup> For more critical discussions on *Michael Armstrong* and *Helen Fleetwood*, see Fryckstedt, Kovacevic and Kanner, and Krueger.

<sup>240</sup> Nor was the paradigm of sympathy unique to female or middle-class authors. John Critchley Prince (1808-1866) was a reed-maker who became "one of the best known of the Lancashire working-men poets" (Frau 57). His poem "The Factory Child" depicts the child worker as "[a]nother victim to the thousands slain / Within the mighty slaughter-house of gain" (3-4). This selection is taken from "The Death of the Factory Child," which appeared in *The Fleet Papers*, published by Richard Oastler on 17 July 1841.

words of prayer and praise!” (74-76). The power of the spondees in line 92 carries forth the poet’s warning: “There is a curse on thee!” She locates the detrimental effects of factory work in the factory’s ability to mar childhood innocence. The diction highlights the poet’s participation in an economy of visibility that seeks to describe the factory not through *witness* but through *effect*. The factory produces a “shade,” a “funeral shroud,” a “cloud,” “smoke,” “a shadow” that “shuts out the cheerful day” (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9). She connects these words, making them a “type and sign” of the moral (and visual) obfuscation of the factory city (6). The factory is a death shroud, which “makes of many an English home / One long and living tomb” (83-84). In the final lines of the poem, L.E.L. addresses the country that renders its children slaves:

Oh, England! though thy tribute waves  
Proclaim thee great and free,  
While those small children pine like slaves,  
There is a curse on thee! (89-92)

The poem creates pathos through its description of “the infant cries” of the factory children “who pine like slaves.” Like Mary Hutton, L.E.L. invokes the word “slave,” thus linking working-class children to black slaves, while carefully negotiating social protest by remaining a safe distance from the inside of the factory.

Unlike L.E.L. Caroline Sheridan Norton, granddaughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, describes the horrors of the factory from within. Norton anonymously published “A Voice from the Factories: In Serious Verse” in 1836.<sup>241</sup> She took up the cry

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<sup>241</sup> Norton writes in her dedication to Lord Ashley,  
I publish it *anonymously*, because I have no right to expect that my personal  
opinion would carry more weight with it than that of any other individual [...] I desire,

for factory reform, and dedicated the poem to Lord Ashley, a vociferous opponent of the factory system. Norton, who was notorious for her disastrous marriage to George Norton in 1827, would become a well-known campaigner and supporter of social change.<sup>242</sup> Also in 1836, Norton was publicly charged with committing adultery with the Prime Minister Lord Melbourne and while the trial went in the Prime Minister's favour, her public reputation was virtually destroyed. K.D. Reynolds argues that Norton's "A Voice from the Factories" was "focused on the plight of working-class children, whose desperate lives were portrayed in realistic detail and contrasted with the callous greed of the factory owners and upper classes" (paragraph 6). Norton is careful to authorize her literary treatment of child labour as a form of eyewitness testimony. She relies on her position as an observer, and further legitimizes her critique of child labour in her assertion that she used Blue Book, and therefore factual, descriptions. She states, "I have strictly adhered to the printed Reports; to that which I believe to be the melancholy truth; and that which I have, in some instances, myself had an opportunity of witnessing" (446-47). As Dolin notes, "[t]he poem therefore presents a view from Westminster rather than 'a voice' from the underclass" (515).

"A Voice from the Factories" creates sympathy through both sound and sight for the "Poor Little FACTORY SLAVES." The poet laments the "cries" of working-class children, "Those little vagrants doomed so soon to weep—" (64, 70), and the "sounds

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therefore, only to *join* my voice to that of wiser and better men, in behalf of those who suffer; and if the matter of my work be imperfect, allowance will, I trust, be made for its imperfection, since it pretends to so little. (446)

<sup>242</sup> For a discussion of Norton's involvement with the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, see chapter three in Poovey's *Uneven Developments* (51-88). Poovey notes that "in acknowledging the fact of marital unhappiness, they inevitably exposed the limitations of the domestic ideal. More specifically, in publicizing the economic underpinnings of many marital disputes, the parliamentary debates threatened to reveal the artificiality of separate spheres, which was the foundation for the middle class's image of itself and its economic consolidation" (52).



of wailing grief and painful blows” that can be heard from the factory (415). Norton directs the reader’s sympathy outward, first asserting that “Ever a toiling *child* doth make us sad,” and then expands her vision to encompass “that less favoured race— THE CHILDREN OF THE POOR” (73, 279). She calls for “CHANGE” that “should be by generous hearts begun” (245), and asks the reader,

Where is the heart so cold that does not thrill

With a vexatious *sympathy*, to see

That child prepare to play its part, and still

With simulated airs of gaiety

Rise to the dangerous rope, and bend the supple knee? (23-27; my italics)

The poem’s narrator acts as a conduit through which to paint a “painful picture” of the suffering of the children who “toil in torture” (378). Her testimony is focalized, directing the reader to observe the violence inflicted on the body of the factory child:

[..] his little head in silence hung;

His limbs cramped up; his body weakly bent;

Toiling obedient, till long hours so spent

Produce Exhaustion’s slumber, dull and deep.

The Watcher’s stroke, –bold–sudden–violent,–

Urges him from that lethargy of sleep,

And bids him wake to Life, –to labour and to weep! (426-32)

Norton depicts a day-in-the-life of a boy who works in the factory. In her examination of the “politics of childhood” in Barrett Browning’s poetry, Beverley Taylor asserts that

the poet “uses children to strike emotional chords in service to social reform” (414).<sup>243</sup> The choice illustrates, as Taylor, Elliott, and Johnson argue, that an adult female factory worker may be too controversial and thus Norton relies on the figure of an innocent child to solicit sympathy. Her poem attempts to show the necessity of reform; however, she does not call for an entire social revolution. Like Eliza Cook, Norton’s poem writes an argument “Not against Toil, but Toil’s Excess” (186). The reader is meant to bear witness to the child’s sufferings, to feel compassion for the violence inflicted upon him, and then in light of this vision, to mobilize reform in a fight for “JUSTICE,” “Mercy,” and a recuperation of “Christian” sympathy (500, 505, 514).<sup>244</sup>

The tearful pleas of the children in Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “The Cry of the Children” (1843) are also meant to evoke pathos, but here sympathy is engendered more specifically through sound rather than sight. Written before the Ten Hours Act of 1847, “The Cry of the Children” is addressed to the speaker’s “brothers”—the middle-class reformers who would have the power to change legislation (1). The poem is driven by a powerful authorial voice that exhorts her “brothers” to see and hear the children who are being exploited. The poem highlights Barrett Browning’s concern with the inequities of the economic system, and her anxiety that this same system

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<sup>243</sup> See Beverly Taylor’s analysis of the poem in *Victorian Poetry*.

<sup>244</sup> In her doctoral dissertation, Mary-Catherine Harrison discusses the use of “Sentimental Realism” (vii). She examines social problem literature, and argues that by “[i]ntegrating characteristic elements of sentimentalism and realism, the texts they produced were predicated on the assumption that narratives can change the attitudes and beliefs of individual readers and the social and political policies of a nation” (vi). Norton’s descriptions of the factory child use this type of “sentimental realism.”

exploits the innocent; “The Cry of the Children” affords political utterance to a normally silent group.<sup>245</sup>

Stanza eight is particularly interesting for its similarities to Mary Green’s description of the mill, which I quoted earlier. As in the industrial novels, the role of *witness* is given to the children themselves and their cries can only come from their position *inside* the factory walls. The children tell their tragic tale, all the while imprisoned by the constantly moving machinery:

“For all day the wheels are droning, turning;  
Their wind comes in our faces,  
Till our hearts turn, our heads with pulses burning,  
And the walls turn in their places:  
Turns the sky in the high window, blank and reeling,  
Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,  
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling:  
All are turning, all the day, and *we* with all.  
And all day the iron wheels are droning,  
And sometimes *we* could pray,  
‘Oh ye wheels’ (breaking out in a mad moaning),  
‘Stop! be silent for to-day!’” (77-88)

In Tonna, the machines “whirr,” in Barrett Browning they “turn.”<sup>246</sup> In “The Cry of the

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<sup>245</sup> E.B.B. was drawing on the “Blue Book” reports published by R.L. Horne, and as Catherine Robson notes, the poem “created a popular sensation and was held to be instrumental in preparing the climate of opinion for the passage of the Factory Act of 1844” (66).

<sup>246</sup> See also the poet “Aurora,” who published in the *Yorkshire Factory Times*. Her poem “In the Mill” (see Appendix B) uses the same imagery to create a sense of dizziness and disorientation:

Children,” the incessant motion of the machines extends to the children’s surroundings. The world itself is merged into the turning machine, and the poet portrays the children as they pray for release. The sky, the light, the black flies—all turn in time to the relentless movement of the factory machinery. Herbert Tucker describes the passage thus:

[v]entriloquized as from the belly of the industrial beast, these verses can not only wring a sentimental heart but turn a queasy stomach. Metrically enhanced sensory derangement makes a hallucinatory presence of those “black flies,” even as the “long light” engrosses lengths of space and time at once. (91)

The turning of the implacable “iron wheels” traps the children within the factory; they can only glance at the outside world through “high window[s]” before being pulled back into the rotation of the machinery. The triple anaphora of lines 77, 84, and 85 (“all”), and 81-83 (“turn[s]”) carries the reader further into Barrett Browning’s “turn” of phrase. The rhymes in this stanza—“turning,” “burning,” “reeling,” “ceiling,” “droning,” and “moaning”—convey the deafening, disorienting gyration within the mill, and are part of Barrett Browning’s attempt to inspire sympathy in the reader (or observer). Tucker writes that this poem demonstrates a “precociously laboring, mechanically driven, metronomically merciless prosody” (88).<sup>247</sup>

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Round run the wheels from morn till night,  
The rattling, whizzing wheels  
Round fly the belts—a dizzy sight—  
The jaded weaver reels;  
Swift shuttles fly from box to box,  
Swift flies the weft along,  
The tappets thump with cracking knocks,  
Slow moves the cloth along. (1-8)

<sup>247</sup> Levine suggests that formal unity may create its own kind of imprisonment” (646). In Tucker’s response, he reads this “imprisonment”

When the machines do stop, the result is a silence so deep that it renders the “Cry” a “curse”: “the child’s sob in the silence curses deeper / Than the strong man in his wrath” (159-60). Like L.E.L., Barrett Browning curses a nation that exploits its children; however, this poem provides a dual curse—the “cry” comes from both the children and the poet. In both form and content, the poem portrays a sense of unmitigated violence with its strong “[m]etrically enhanced sensory derangement.” The power of Barrett Browning’s poem lies in her ability to use this threat to encourage identification with the child labourer, and thus to feel sympathy for the children’s horror at the interminable rotations of the factory wheels.

While formally less complex than “The Cry of the Children,” Henrietta Tindal’s “The Cry of the Oppressed” (1852) offers a similar appeal to reader pathos.<sup>248</sup> As Jaffe writes, specularity is intertwined with sympathy, and Tindal urges her addressees to gaze upon those who suffer. Mary-Catherine Harrison argues that Tindal is concerned with working-class suffering even though her sympathetic gaze encompasses any and all who feel the yoke of oppression. Harrison notes that Tindal also uses the term “slave” in association with “millworkers and paupers” (194). She writes,

[a]lternating between the past and present tense, [Tindal] illuminates the similarities between slavery, serfdom, and “modern” English poverty. The connection between African slavery is most evident; Tindal uses the terms [*sic*] slaves to refer both to inmates of “plantation[s]” and “stifling mill[s],” and she

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[i]n Barrett Browning’s confinement of significant feeling within a register of pain that is exclusively produced by, and thus remains captive to, the exigencies of the industrial system—a phenomenon of victimization whose formal sign is the way the poem’s expressions of bodily feeling and humanizing consciousness depend throughout on the iron regimen of its metrical drive (91)

<sup>248</sup> See Maynard.

follows a stanza in which she describes slaves whose “lives were sold...For a trader’s gain” (13) with one about souls “pent within / The narrow street and the valley dim” (17-18). By associating slaves with millworkers and paupers, she associates too the English economic system with the institution of slavery, a rhetorical move that holds her wealthy audience (“Ye...who live at ease”) responsible for oppression comparable to the slave trade. (194)

Tindal criticizes the upper classes for their lack of sympathy, and retells the tale of suffering in order to redirect their gaze:

Ye lack emotions who live at ease  
In bright warm chambers of prosp’rous life;  
Ye tales of terror and sorrow please—  
Look out around ye, they’re rife, aye,—rife,  
  
As berries in autumn, as leaves in May,  
Seek! ye will find in the neighbouring street  
Tragedies acted before the day,  
That stir the heart to a quicker beat,  
And draw the tear from its deepest seat. (45-53)

Tindal addresses those “who live at ease” and berates them for their lack of “emotions.” By urging her addressees to “Look out around ye,” and “Seek,” Tindal calls their attention to the “Tragedies acted” that will “stir the heart.” This sympathy in turn will engender change; thus *observing* the daily “[t]ragedies” is the first step towards reform.

However, middle-class women writers in the 1830s and 1840s were not the only class of writers to turn factory children (and chimney sweeps) into “object[s] of sympathy.”<sup>249</sup> Put simply, specular sympathy, which often relied on the observation of a suffering child, was written into all classes of social reform literature. For example, Mary Hutton (chapter four) also turns her gaze upon the horrors of child labour in an appeal to the emotions in “On a Poor Little Sweep.” She urges those “who have both hearts and eyes” to “behold yon child of pains” (7-8). The conflation of “hearts and eyes” similarly situates her poem within an economy of visibility. Fanny Forrester (chapter six) also depicts Mary in “Strangers in the City” as a sympathetic figure. Forrester describes the effect of factory work on poor Mary’s frame, but like the industrial novelists does not discuss the factory itself.<sup>250</sup> Ellen Johnston, whom I discuss in chapter seven, never describes her work inside the factory, and the only indication that she disliked her employment is fleeting. She states that she “spent the last two years of young life’s sweet liberty” before she was to begin work as a power-loom weaver, and notes that her stepfather took her to the mill because he “could not bear to see [her] longer basking in the sunshine of freedom” (Simmons 306-07). As I will show, Johnston’s poetry offers laudatory depictions of life as a factory girl (at least at first glance).

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<sup>249</sup> I am borrowing Jaffe’s term (44).

<sup>250</sup> See chapter six for my discussion of Forrester. For alternate representations see also R. Taylor’s *The Factory Child in her Homely Garb: Dedicated to the Female Factory Workers of Lancashire and Yorkshire* (1865); Janet Hamilton’s “Lay of the Tambour Frame”; and “Aurora”’s “In the Mill” (see Appendix B for Aurora’s poem). These poems can also be read as a contrast to Louisa Horsfield (1830-65) and Ruth Wills (fl. 1861-8) who don’t write about the factory, but instead discuss Christian didacticism and nature poetry. Philip Davis and Johnathan Bate describe Horsfield as a “factory worker,” in volume eight of *The Oxford English literary history. Vol. 8: The Victorians* (23).

*Factory Girls and the Politics of Sympathy*

In this section of my chapter, I wish to show how the “factory girls”<sup>251</sup> write from a unique position as witnesses; however, instead of depicting themselves within the framework of sympathy, their representations of industrial life provide a new type of political poetics that seeks to erase the female factory worker’s body from view in order to show her agency through an attention to her literary labours. The two “factory girl” poets discussed in this chapter do not present themselves sympathetically, but rather weave together the threads of their labours, often privileging intellectual power over physical embodiment.<sup>252</sup> We can compare these factory poets with working-class women poets who laboured in other professions, such as Mary Collier, who describes her low station and lack of education in “The Woman’s Labour”; she declares “No learning was ever bestow’d on me / My Life was always spent in Drudgery” (7-8). Collier relies on an argument of physical work, locating the results of her labour in her hands:

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. (184-87)

Collier’s attention to bleeding hands places the working-class woman’s body within the visual economy of sympathy.

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<sup>251</sup> Among our list of “factory girl” poets, we can name E.H., “Marie,” Fanny Forrester, and Ellen Johnston, who are discussed in this study, along with Ruth Wills, Louisa Horsfield, and Ethel Carnie. Boos’s *Anthology* provides selections from “Marie” (185-95), Ellen Johnston (195-219), Ruth Wills (219-37), Fanny Forrester (237-52), and Ethel Carnie (252-78).

<sup>252</sup> Cf. E.H.’s “On Joseph Rayner Stephens” in chapter three, especially my discussion of lines 27-28 and 16-24.



However, neither of the two “factory girls” whom I discuss here depicts her work in relation to her body. The collection *Poetic Thoughts in Working Hours by a Factory Girl* (1853) provides us with an instance of at least one female factory worker whose poetic persona repudiated the paradigm of sympathy. This factory girl’s poems, which are mostly tributes to the abundance of nature, the ties of friendship and family, and the comfort of home, also display the ability to transcend work and give precedence to literary creativity. Her poems show an optimism driven by a strong belief in the power of intellectual labour. By contrast, in “The Cotton Fame and the Lancashire Operatives” (1862), the second “factory girl” poet works within a religious paradigm to support reform, demonstrates her knowledge of national and transnational events, and, while moving in and out of the sympathetic representation of others, she simultaneously attempts to transcend her own physical labour. Each of these poets also shows complete control over her poetic form in yet another demonstration of her intellectual capacity.

In *Poetic Thoughts in Working Hours*, both “Brighter Hours will Come”<sup>253</sup> and “Lines, Suggested by the Remark of a Friend in a Letter, that to Think on the Past is not Progress” carry a strong undercurrent of optimism and hopeful prospects. The former poem takes a view of the future as a “motto for our youth” (1):

When disappointments cloud our joy,  
And past enjoyments fail,  
It bids us every power employ,  
The future time to hail. (5-8)

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<sup>253</sup> Cf. Jeannie Graham Paterson’s “A Brighter Dawn” (Boos 329-30).

The poet suggests that even if the present day is filled with “disappointments” (5), the future most certainly holds “brighter hours” (9). She contrasts the words “fade” (2) “shade” (4), and “cloud” (5) with “brighter hours we view” (9), an image that depicts a grey sky clearing and an indication that the future will bring “light” (12). The latter poem encourages the reader to “review” the past and use it as a guide for the future. The lively metre carries the poem forward and embodies a sense of optimism in its musicality:

To think on the past when dangers are near,  
With no one to help us, and no one to cheer,  
May brighten our hope, and fresh courage impart,  
When we fain would go forward, yet dare not to start. (9-12)

The poet reminds us that the “past in the future can ne’er be forgot” (20). Looking back provides a path for the future, and the idea of shared suffering motivates community action to change the present.<sup>254</sup> The “factory girl” suggests that the past is an important part of future progress because of its influence on future deeds. She asks “Yet who can forget [the past] while onward they go?” (18). Her idea of the potential for good emerging out of the past transcends class and gestures towards change on a great scale. There is nothing about this poem that suggests that one should pity those who have encountered “shades of adversity,” for both “adversity” and “pleasure” stem

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<sup>254</sup> Consider, for example, French philosopher Ernest Renan, who explains this positive view of the past in “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” (“What is a Nation”). While the “factory girl” does not specifically address “the nation” in her poem, her use of we suggests a collective impetus. Renan writes,

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. (19)

from the same source (5). Both are necessary for the progress of “Prosperity,” which the poet aligns with light and “sunshine” (6). The “factory girl” ends with a moral, stating that whether “befriended or not / The past in the future can ne’er be forgot” (20), thus pointing to the inextricability of past and present.

### *The “factory girl”: Natural and Literary Labours*

But the “factory girl”’s most interesting poems are those that deal specifically with types of labour. Her poem “Up and Be Doing,” for example, internalizes the Victorian (bourgeois) doctrine of work and suggests a possible, but nonetheless problematic, outcome of dedicated, working-class labour. The “gospel of work” was, as Peter Gay notes, regulated by the middle class who stood by Virgil’s aphorism: “*Labor omnia vincit improbus*” (“Persistent labour conquers all”) (Gay 192). Gay outlines the Victorian doctrine of work, stating that

for middle-class ideologists, the ideal of work embraced more than just steady application. An ethical imperative, it embraced much that Victorian bourgeois valued [...] It implied [...] a dedication to self-discipline, a wholesome commitment to family, and an alert sense of duty. Work purified the soul.

(192)<sup>255</sup>

But no one espoused a faith in work more vociferously than Thomas Carlyle in *Past and Present*. Carlyle warns against the consequences of an “idle aristocracy”<sup>256</sup> and

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<sup>255</sup> For an interesting discussion on some of the *problematic* aspects of the doctrine of work for the bourgeoisie, see Gay (191-220). See also Breton, who argues that “the work ethic of the rising capitalist class, generally speaking, was concocted only to motivate factory-workers, [and] mitigate guilt for the profits low wages generate” (5).

<sup>256</sup> See *Past and Present* (175-82).

champions the phrase “Know thy Work and Do It” (197). Most notably, he links labour with nature, believing that “there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in Work. [...] Work [...] is in communication with Nature; the real desire to get Work done will itself lead one more and more to truth, to Nature’s appointments and regulations, which are truth” (197).

In “Up and Be Doing,” the “factory girl,” ironically, invokes this “bourgeois” ideology to lift the working class out of their “lowest condition” and away from a sympathetic gaze (2). As I have already suggested, working-class women poets use this naturalization of work as an argument and justification for their literary labours, but here is an indication of where this naturalization becomes problematic because it reinscribes cultural norms. The “factory girl” draws upon the doctrine of work to produce a labour that is not alienated from the labourer, but that has a purpose and direct link to an outcome that will “heighten” the “condition” of the worker (2). In doing so, however, she does not question whether or not the working class should work, but rather finds a solution in the *direction* of their work towards a specific teleology.

Instead of depicting manual labour in a way that asks for the readers’ pity, the “factory girl” suggests that work is the force through which the working class can find a source of power. The first lines of “Up and Be Doing” encourage the working class to use work as a means of raising oneself up:

Up and Be doing! all that you can,  
To heighten the lowest condition of man,  
There’s plenty of work for the head or the hand,

At home or abroad, on the sea, or the land. (1-4)

Despite the rampant unemployment rates of the era, this poem suggests that work is available to all, if only one knows where to look—there is work for everyone, “what’er it may be” (7). The “factory girl” depicts work as a means of freeing the “captive,” feeding the “hungry,” and aiding the “weak and the helpless” (9, 10, 15).

Problematically, she also seems to imply that the working class *must* find work, even if it means going “abroad,” and thus the poem buys into emigration as a possible solution for unemployment in Britain.

As in “Brighter Hours will Come,” “Up and Be Doing” tropes the natural rhythms of the break of day and conflates the movement from darkness to light (the night to the morning) with a movement from falsity to truth. The repeated lines, “Up and Be Doing,” echo a common radical trope that interknits the break of day with the arrival of social transformation.<sup>257</sup> “Up and Be Doing” becomes a rallying cry that seeks to inspire the working class from the “lowest condition” to “truth and [...] right” (25). As the new day breaks, the poet exhorts her readers to *work* towards a society that embraces its “duty” (8, 32). But here again she does not question the working-class obligation to labour. The chorus of the thirty-six-line poem creates a sense of urgency; its cry of “no longer delay” anchors the penultimate line of each stanza. The poem displays symmetry in work, which we see in the rhyming couplets and in the opening line of “Up and Be Doing,” as well as in the two final lines of each stanza: “Then up

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<sup>257</sup> The literary trope of breaking dawn is also a powerful image for the Chartist poets, and in what Sanders terms the “poetry of defeat,” poets note the absence of light instead of its presence (191). See also William Drennan’s “Wake” from *Fugitive Pieces in Verse and Prose* (1815):

Conquer Fortune—persevere—  
Lo! it breaks—the morning clear!  
The chearful cock awakes the skies;  
The day is come—Arise, arise! (49-52)

and be doing! no longer delay, / The morn it is breaking—it soon will be day.”<sup>258</sup>

“Up and Be Doing” looks towards a future that will unify workers into a powerful force that will raise up the working class:

Up and be doing! for truth and for right,  
And aid in each system advancing the light  
That will raise the degraded and elevate still,  
Mankind, in the various stations they fill. (25-28)

The metrical urgency of “advancing the light” accelerates the whirlwind of change: from night to day, dark to light, low to high, degradation to elevation, and stagnation to movement. In this poem, the opening trochees and the staccato metre effect an urgent forward (or upward) movement, and the feminine ending creates a metrical enjambment that results in a feeling of continuous motion. Like “Marie,” the “factory girl” draws on a natural image to underscore her optimism. She frames work as generative, suggesting that it is a means of achieving social change; this depiction stands in contrast to a sympathetic depiction of the worker. However, the poet also unquestioningly determines the “various stations” of the Victorian social strata, and in

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<sup>258</sup> Sanders discusses Elisa Lee Follen’s “To The Martyrs Of Freedom,” in which she declares “Still trust, all ye who are oppressed! / Though hope no ray of light may shed” (191-92). He notes that this brand of

negative affirmation is indicative of a newly complex sense of the historical process and of the role of individuals and generations within it. It is also accompanied by a reconfiguration of the movement’s political temporality, as the idea of the future increasingly comes to dominate both past and present in the Chartist imaginary. (192)

Thus the “factory girl’s” poem, “[...] To Think on the Past is Not Progress” also participates in this new “temporality”—each of her poems looks forward to a better time. See also P.B. Templeton’s “To The ‘Dear Little Dead’” (*Northern Star*, 19/1/39, p.7):

Dark was the dawn of your earthly morning;  
Hidden your sun, and cloudy your sky!  
No bright solar rays your horizon adorning;  
You lived, but ’twas only to breathe and die! (qtd. in Sanders 228)

doing so reinscribes bourgeois ideologies. Her use of the doctrine of work, then, while attempting to raise up the working class seems, like Eliza Cook, to find a balance in labour that does not in fact provide a strong impetus for social revolution.

*Poetic Thoughts* also suggests that the factory worker need not be pitied. The “factory girl” embraces her employment because the monotonous movement of her physical body allows for the freedom of her mind. Her poem, “To a Friend who came to the Factory” demonstrates the “factory girl”’s commitment to her work. Notably, the working-class subject of the poem—the “factory girl”—co-opts the middle-class gaze to watch those who would watch her. She rewrites the representation of the suffering factory worker; no longer an object of sympathy, she depicts herself as an intellectual individual. This poem also offers a contrast to Anne Candler’s “Reflections on My Own Situation,” in which Candler describes not the drudgery of the factory, but the degradation of the workhouse. Candler also uses sight as a means to position herself within the space of the workhouse. While the poem invites those who read it to gaze upon Candler, she also watches those who are less fortunate:

I gaze on numbers in distress,  
Compare their state with mine:  
Can I reflect, and not confess  
A providence divine? (25-28)

She also invites the divine gaze: “Look down, O God! in me behold / How helpless mortals are” (81-82).

In “To a Friend,” the poet speaks to a friend who visited her at the factory, and, in seeing her work, pitied her. The first lines acknowledge the operation of specular

sympathy in the representation of the female factory worker:

Few were thy words, yet I saw in thy look  
A feeling of pity arose,  
Didst thou think that the hours of my labour were long  
And tedious the time as it goes? (1-4)

In the first line, the “factory girl” watches her friend watching her, thus turning the gaze upon the watcher (her friend). She rejects the offered pity and offers a counter image: “Unknown, to another, the pleasure I find, / While I am at work in the mill” (5-6). The poet states she enjoys her employment—not for the work itself, but for the intellectual freedom it affords.<sup>259</sup> The author writes that she can “think, notwithstanding the noise that is here, / As though [she] were never so still” (7-8). In contrast to Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s turning machines that trap the children, the incessant movement and sound of the power looms in the “factory girl”’s workplace are unnoticed; the poet rises above the noise of the machinery of the factory and literary labour supersedes her manual labour. Her verse is also not the constrained prosody of iambic pentameter, but a rhythm of “the people,” which encourages musicality (and by extension, art).

The poet finds her “muse” within the walls of the factory (13). The monotony of work affords an intellectual splitting in which the poet’s body remains in the mill,

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<sup>259</sup> C.f. “Pleasures of Factory Life” *The Lowell Offering* Sarah G. Bagely, Series I, 1840:  
Pleasures there are, even in factory life; and we have many, known only to those of like employment. [...] There all the powers of the mind are made active by our animating exercise; and having but one kind of labor to perform, we not give all our thoughts to that, but leave them measurably free for reflection on other matters. [...] In the mill we see displays of the wonderful power of the mind. Who can closely examine all movements of the complicated, curious machinery, and not be led to the reflection, that the mind is boundless, and is destined to rise higher and still higher; and that it can accomplish almost any thing on which it fixes its attention! (Eisler 63-64)



leaving her mind unfettered: “While my hands are employed, there’s amusement for me / To think on the power of the steam” (9-10). There is a demarcation between the employment of “hands” (the synecdochic representation of the worker, as we see in Collier and Forrester), and the mind, which allows her to “think.” In body she works, while “in spirit” her mind travels across continents. Thus the poet suggests that factory work does not impede creative inspiration:

Then indeed, I’m not weary of time as it goes,  
Nor wish for some other employ,  
While thus with my work, I am twining my thoughts,  
The time passes speedily by. (37-41)

The factory girl writes that work does not make her “weary”; instead, it actually accelerates her time, and her use of the word “twining” recalls “Marie”’s “My Mission” and suggests an even stronger link between physical labour in the textile mill and the intellectual labour of writing poetry.<sup>260</sup> Thus the poet reassures her friend (and the reader, too), that not *all* factory work is necessarily intellectually confining. These poems (“Brighter Hours Will Come,” “To Think on the Past is not Progress,” “We are Serving Each Other,” “Up and Be Doing,” and “To a Friend Who Came to the Factory”) might be dismissed as rhetorically simple, but there is import in their effortless metre and optimistic outlook. They provide examples of at least one working-class woman’s belief in the ability to simultaneously perform manual and literary labour to the detriment of neither.

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<sup>260</sup> See my discussion in chapter one of “Marie”’s “My Mission” for another example of “textile” imagery.

*The Cotton Famine and the Lancashire Operatives*

Unlike *Poetic Thoughts in Working Hours*, the “The Cotton Famine and the Lancashire Operatives. A Poem”<sup>261</sup> (1862), by another “factory girl,” attempts to address the need for reform on a regional, national and international scale. Unlike her counterpart, this author *does* write within a sympathetic discourse; the difference is that she attempts to redirect the gaze from the textile worker to the American slave and, like F. Saunderson, the working-class man. This shift in focalization relies upon a number of prior literary forms and themes, but as I wish to show, the poem’s subject matter challenges its formal unity. The poem supports the abolitionist cause and suggests that the elimination of slavery is the first step towards religious reformation on a grand scale. Similarly to the poems of the first “factory girl,” this poem does not overturn class hierarchies nor seek to redefine the representation of the working class. Instead, the poem takes as its subject the unnatural, economic causes of poverty and degradation in Preston.<sup>262</sup> Ultimately, I argue that a reading of “The Cotton Famine and the Lancashire Operatives” provides a new way of understand working-class women’s poetry in relation to women’s abolitionist and political poetry in the long nineteenth century.

The author’s treatment of the major themes of the poem—slavery, poverty, political unrest—appears to rely on two contemporary sources: Hannah More’s “The Black Slave Trade,” also known as “Slavery” (17), and Barbauld’s “Eighteen Hundred

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<sup>261</sup> The editor states that the poem

was written by the Authoress for private perusal, and not for the public eye. At the request of some of the persons actively engaged in relieving the suffering working classes of Preston, the Authoress has been induced to allow the poem to be printed, on the understanding that the proceeds should be applied to the relief of her fellow-operatives. (1)

<sup>262</sup> Preston, UK is a mill town near Manchester.

and Eleven” (1812).<sup>263</sup> “The Cotton Famine” begins by setting up a religious framework that closely follows More’s own apostrophe to her Muse. The “Factory Girl” states that by writing this poem she is “obedient to command” (1). She opens with a question that calls attention to her class and her authority as a poet. She “lift[s] down the sacred harp with trembling hand” (2), and then asks “For how shall *I* presume, with hands profane, / To touch its chords to my poor humble strain?” (3-4). The juxtaposition of “sacred” and “profane” points to the divinity of God and the “lowly” status of the working-class woman poet. It also adds a religious element; with the use of “the sacred harp” (2), which is the traditional instrument of the poet-prophet,<sup>264</sup> she seeks to legitimize her work through a sense of religious duty that is performed through the profane hands of a working-class woman. More’s poem offers a similar depiction of the female poet’s muse:

Though not to me, Sweet Bard, thy pow’rs belong,  
 The cause I plead shall sanctify my song.  
 The Muse awakes no artificial fire,  
 For Truth rejects what Fancy would inspire:  
 Here Art would weave her gayest flow’rs in vain,  
 The bright invention Nature would disdain. (63-68)

The “Factory Girl” writes that she “*must* sing” (5; my italics). She appeals to a sense of obligation rather than a desire. More also argues that it is the subject itself that necessitates the writing of the poem. Her verse is not “artificial” but the “Truth”; the

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<sup>263</sup> See Penny Bradshaw, Favretti, William Levine, Scheuermann, and Wallace.

<sup>264</sup> See Psalm 147:7: “Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God.”

“cause” will “sanctify” her song. Both More and the “Factory Girl” rely on a sense of duty and responsibility to legitimize their poems; More draws on “the cause” to “sanctify” her song, and the “factory girl” is “obedient to command.” More specifically they use *external* justification to authorize their poems, and suggest that the message justifies the messenger.

The “factory girl” also draws attention to her hands—twice in the span of two lines. But unlike Collier’s bleeding hands, or Fanny Forrester’s dying heroine whose hands, I will argue, become the site of national contestation,<sup>265</sup> the “factory girl”’s “profane” hands play the “sacred harp.” As in the case of the “factory girl” whom I discuss above, this poet’s hands represent a poetic labour and not the physical labour of the textile worker. In contrast to the reduction of the working-class individual to a synecdochic disembodied “hand,” her hands are a marker of her intellectual output.

Following the opening lines, the poet provides a series of questions that attempt to pin down the cause of the Lancashire operatives’ famine, and weaves into her lines the political controversy that is entwined in the manufacture of cotton. First, she acknowledges that her subject is not a happy one: “I sing, alas, of poverty and woe; / Then let the strain be solemn, sad, and slow” (9-10). The long vowels and spondaic substitution in the words “I sing” effectively slow down the line to match the import of her words. She finds the problems of starvation and poverty not in the natural causation of drought, nor in the lack of sunlight, but in “war, aye, civil war, the worst / By which this suffering earth has yet been curst—” (21-22). She adds “civil” and “worst” to “war” to create a precise definition of her subject, and employs repetition and

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<sup>265</sup> See my discussion of Forrester’s “Strangers in the City” in chapter six.

emphasis on the word “war” to heighten the importance of the lines. She also expands her use of “hand” to encompass the soldier and the violence of war.

In “Slavery,” More asks, “While Britain basks in thy full blaze of light, / Why lies sad Afric quench’d in total night?” (19-20). The antithesis of the two lines places Britain in opposition to Africa. The “Factory Girl” also draws a comparison between the two and finds an incipient subtext in the link between British workers and American slaves who are identified “Afric’s children” (51):<sup>266</sup>

The ports, from whence with other lands they trade,  
Are watch’d and guarded by a strong blockade  
To hinder commerce; hence it is that we  
Lack cotton to employ our industry;  
And cotton failing, causes work to fail,  
And labour is the poor man’s capital.  
To be deprived of labour is to be  
Plunged in the depths of want and poverty[.] (29-36)

The *polyptoton* of “fail” underscores how deep is the “failing” of the anaphoric “cotton,” while she matches “trade” and “commerce” with “industry” and “capital,” building the monetary terms to link them with “employ,” “labour” and “work.” The poet then asks, “But can it be that free-born Britons have / Depended on the labour of the slave?” (37-38). She locates the relationship between America and Britain in “cotton” and declares that it is “Stain’d with the blood of the slaves,” and that it tightens the “galling chains of hateful slavery” (42, 44). Further schemes of repetition

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<sup>266</sup> See also my discussion on Henrietta Tindal earlier in this chapter.

demonstrate the inextricability of the slave “trade” with cotton, the textile mills, and “want and poverty” (29, 36).<sup>267</sup>

The poet thus acknowledges that the labour of the British worker depends on the American slave. She argues that the trade embargo has caused “work to fail” and as “labour is the poor man’s capital,” when no employment is to be had the working class faces “want and poverty” (36). This connection also allows the poet to espouse a political statement in which she can move from a national to international vision and back, declaring that Britons must “No more let slave-grown cotton crowd the mart, / Britons with slavery should have no part” (59-60). But she also suggests that the stoppage of trade will have a positive effect because, “The war which brings us sad distress,” results in a positive outcome: “Britons, forced against their own desire, / Now seek elsewhere the cotton they require” (53-54). The “factory girl” espouses the belief that while “war” causes “distress” it is also the impetus for social change. The poet writes that war is a necessary evil in order to stop the cotton trade that is responsible for slavery. She writes, “From seeming evil still producing good” (50). Her use of this latter phrase recalls Barbauld’s “An Address To The Opposers [sic] of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts London.” Barbauld was an “admired essayist,” and in her writing she addressed “ethics, esthetics, education, even political economy” (McCarthy and Kraft 12). In her “Address to the Opposers,” Barbauld writes of the power of virtue in the search for peace, “Till Wars shall cease, and *Slavery* [shall] be no more” (281). She places her faith in God:

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<sup>267</sup> Hutton uses the phrase “want and woe” in line 10 of her poem, “On the Poor Laws Amendment Bill.” I have suggested that she may have borrowed this phrase from Barbauld’s “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” (318).

we fix our foot with undoubting confidence, sure that all events are in the  
hands of him, who from seeming evil

. . . . is still educing good;

And better thence again, and better still,

In infinite progression. (281)

Here, Barbauld is drawing on two literary sources. The first quotation is from Pope's *Windsor Forest* (1713)<sup>268</sup> and the second is from James Thomson's "A Hymn to the Supreme Being" (1746).<sup>269</sup> By quoting this line, the "factory girl" demonstrates the power of her memory. The poet also echoes Barbauld's belief in virtue and peace. Her poem thus participates in an intertextual poetic discussion about the nature of social change.

The "Factory Girl" directly addresses the American people, challenging their declaration of freedom, and exposing it as hypocrisy: "And you, ye boasting friends of liberty, / If you love freedom, set the captives free" (61-62). The poet situates her political stance within a religious framework. She sees this hypocrisy as evidence that America has turned "heathen," despite its missionary attempts (68), and argues that it can

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<sup>268</sup> Pope, *Windsor Forest* (1713):

Oh stretch thy Reign, fair *Peace!* from Shore to Shore,  
Till Conquest cease, and Slav'ry be no more;  
Till the freed *Indians* in their native groves  
Reap their own Fruits, and woo their Sable Loves,  
*Peru* once more a Race of Kings behold,  
And other *Mexico's* be roof'd with Gold. (405-10)

<sup>269</sup> James Thompson, "A Hymn to the Supreme Being" (1746):

Where Universal Love [smiles not] around,  
Sustaining all yon orbs and all their sons;  
From seeming evil still educing good,  
And better thence again, and better still,  
In infinite progression. (299-304)

no more assume the sacred name  
Of followers of the meek and lowly lamb;  
For this is His command, that you should do  
To others as you'd have them do to you.<sup>270</sup> (63-66)

The civil war section of the poem seeks to expose religious and social hypocrisy. Both the slave and the worker suffer under this hypocrisy as victims of “hateful slavery” (44).

At line 81 there is a jarring shift as the poet narrows her gaze from the transnational to the local and simultaneously from slavery to religion. Now she turns from Britain and America to her “native town” of Preston and seeks a cause for poverty and degradation at the regional level (82). The religious tenor of the poem grows stronger in the latter section and the poem turns from abolition to the “temperance movement”.<sup>271</sup> She depicts herself as a missionary as she attempts to teach proper religion to the British, Americans, and the inhabitants of Preston. In the second half of her poem the poet’s gaze shifts from the slave to the working-class man in her Preston:

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<sup>270</sup> See Luke 6:31: “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”

<sup>271</sup> Boyd Hilton writes that

concerns about the safety of drinking water had led to a surge in the consumption of whisky, gin, and wine. This in turn prompted Parliament to deregulate the beer and cider trades in the hope of promoting them as manly alternative beverages. [...] As a result, more than 24,000 beer shops opened in the course of six months. [...] This “beer binge” in turn provoked a rash of organizations against the demon drink, the most prominent being the British and Foreign Temperance Society (1831), which was especially popular in Lancashire (where almost 2 percent of the population enrolled) and Cornwall. [...] Quakers and Evangelicals were prominent in the campaign, their women especially so, while religious and moral exhortation far outweighed any secular arguments in favour of sobriety. (577)

The Scottish working-class poet, Janet Hamilton, was also a supporter of the temperance movement. For a discussion of the Temperance Movement in relation to working-class radicalism, see Tholfson (229-240).



But while for others woes I may repine,  
My native town! I must remember thine,  
For dark vicissitude has frown'd on thee;  
Thine are the woes of want and poverty. (81-84)

Her verse also becomes a vehicle for the “temperance movement”; she asks her readers, “how much misery may yet be traced / To drunkenness [sic], improvidence, and waste?” (85-86). She argues that drunkenness “wastes more lives, and works more ruin far / Than famine, pestilence, or even war” (89-90). The poet illustrates the capacity of alcohol to turn the life of the drunkard’s wife into “bitterest gall” (100). She constructs drunkenness in terms of religion and argues that drunkenness occurs because of a *lack* of religion. She argues that “they most worthy far of sympathy / Are those who strive to hide their poverty” (137-38), and suggests that sympathy should be given not to those who *appear* to need it (as we see in the industrial novels and social problem poetry), but to those who are “Respectable and clean in outward show” (139). Here she subverts the middle-class sympathetic gaze by suggesting that the object of sympathy should not appear sympathetic. In reframing the sympathetic gaze, the “factory girl” sews together religion and emotion. She provides an example of Richard—“an honest Christian man, but poor”—to make her point, using conventional morality to intensify sympathy (142).

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the poem is the way in which the factory girl author writes black slaves and working-class men into a discourse of “sympathy” (137). While positioning herself outside of this rubric, she casts herself as an instrument of God. The poem challenges readers to re-examine the role of the

factory girl as a poet in other ways as well. She declares,

Were I, like patriotic Samson, strong  
To shake this mighty edifice of wrong;  
Oh! if these feeble hands could only clasp  
Its giant pillars with a Samson's grasp,  
I'd rid my country of its direst woe,  
E'en though I perished in the overthrow. (111-16)

It is fitting that she invokes Samson, the final judge of Israel and the attendant to civil war. By aligning herself with Samson's strong masculine presence, the poet notes that if she "were" Sampson, she could do more to life the people from their poverty. She acknowledges her female poetic persona in her statement "Were I," and thus implicitly critiques women's passive role in society. In a final reference to her "hands," she asserts that they are "feeble"—strong enough, it seems, to play the "sacred harp," but too weak to instigate revolutionary change. The concluding reconciliatory gesture of the poem concedes an inability to engender revolution and turns instead to religion. Like E.H., Hutton, and Forrester, the poet looks to religion, but here she specifically invokes the temperance movement. The implication is that if the working class ceased to drink, they could receive the blessings of God. The final lines illustrate the poem's moral: "Yet will I joy in my salvations, Lord; / Yet I will trust in his unfailing word" (189-90). The hymnal qualities of these lines recall the "sacred harp,"<sup>272</sup> and enact what Bridget Keegan calls a "versification of scripture" ("Labouring Class Religious Poetry" 485). In the final lines, three distinct voices come together. The first voice is that of

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<sup>272</sup> Cf. 1 Samuel 16:23: "Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him."

Richard, the second is that of the poet, and the third is God's "unfailing word."

These two poems by two separate women who identify themselves as factory girls address issues of work, slavery, and poverty. They demonstrate new dimensions of factory literature that until now have not been discussed by modern critics. By a careful examination of these poetic negotiations of politics, we may ask whether these narratives of affirmation conform to middle-class views of the working class, or if they subtly subvert them. The working-class poets discussed here attempt to write themselves out of the discourse of sympathy in which the female factory worker was so often placed by middle-class industrial novelists.

But is "factory girl," for these women, an ideological stance or an arbitrary label? What about the symbolic register of the "factory girl"? At least, in the case of these two nineteenth-century factory girl poets, they seemed anxious to link themselves to their class communities in an attempt to (1) represent work as something to be transcended in order to find the intellectual space for reflection, and (2) provide a prophetic voice that resonates with God's words and seeks to set the nation back on its path to salvation. These two poems open new and exciting questions about factory women's writing and demonstrate how working-class women attempted to construct their identities within discourses of poverty and work. Despite the gruelling conditions of a life of factory labour, the two poets discussed here present their work as beneficial to their intellectual and moral development, and depict (literary) labour as an overall means of advancement in life. Through their poems, they stand as models for their working peers for what can be done in their condition: either affirm a life of work, or seek to reform it.

CHAPTER SIX. FANNY FORRESTER “IN THE CITY”: IRISH IDENTITY, CLASS COMMUNITIES,  
AND THE THREAT OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE.

Toil, toil to-day, and toil again tomorrow:  
Some weave their warp to reach a pauper grave!  
Nought of romance doth gild their common sorrow;  
Yet ne'er were heroines more strong, more brave[.]

- Fanny Forrester, “The Lowly Bard” (1873)

In the previous chapter, I introduced two anonymous “factory girls” who engage with issues of industrialism and poverty in their poems. I suggested that despite the difficult conditions of factory employment, these “factory girls” transcended manual labour to the benefit of their intellectual and moral development. By contrast, Fanny Forrester,<sup>273</sup> a Pendleton dye-worker, constructs a very different and complex vision of the nineteenth-century urban environment, and is ultimately unable to reach such transcendence. Zlotnick has argued that there is no “working-class female tradition” against the “male rejection of modernity” (*Industrial* 169). She claims that “Forrester insists on the innate domesticity and femininity all women share, and she laments her tragic position as a woman worker for whom the domestic ideal is inaccessible” (*Industrial* 174). Yet I would argue that Forrester’s poetry is far more complex and political in its presentation of the female worker than a simple lamentation of her

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<sup>273</sup> Not to be confused with the nineteenth-century American essayist Emily C. Judson (who also used the pseudonym “Fanny Forrester”), Fanny Forrester published over eighty poems over a period of eight years in the Mancunian publication, *Ben Brierley’s Journal*.<sup>273</sup> Between 1874 and 1882, as Boos has discovered, twenty-nine of Forrester’s “new or reprinted verses” also appeared in *The Home Journal*, *The Quiver*, *Ben Brierley’s Seaside Annual* and *The Nation* (*Anthology* 237). Fanny Forrester was the daughter of Irish immigrants, and her brother was a Fenian activist. When the family immigrated to Manchester, Ellen worked as a seamstress to support her children. She fell into ill health in the 1870s, and after an unsuccessful attempt at procuring monetary support from the Royal Literary Fund, turned to her daughters for physical and emotional support until she died in 1883. Fanny and her sister Mary worked in factories, and three of Ellen’s children—Fanny, Mary and Arthur—were poets in their own right. See Boos (237-41).

“tragic” position would imply. Forrester confronts and ultimately rejects modernity;<sup>274</sup> she demonizes the cultural landscape of industrialism and the city, and only *as a result* portrays the working class sympathetically.

This chapter is divided into two separate but closely interrelated sections. The first outlines the formation of a literary community as a result of Forrester’s poetic correspondence with a number of poets in *Ben Brierley’s Journal*. The second traces Forrester’s literary depiction of what happens when the threads of human relationships are cut, and wage workers are left to the mercy of the industrial city. My reading will focus on Forrester’s *labour literature*, that is, her poems that tackle issues of industrialism and poverty; however, along with (1) showing the importance of poetic communities, I will also take into account (2) her argument for the place of music and song in industrial society, (3) her use of religion as a palliative for the working classes, and (4) her engagement with the discourse of nation, particularly in relation to Ireland and Irish immigrants in Manchester in the middle of the nineteenth century. I read a number of Forrester’s poems as complex engagements with the urban industrial landscape, and show that her verse contains intricate and often contradictory responses to the city; these poems seem to reveal a complicated tension among poetic form, gender discourses, and representations of the city. I hope to show that Forrester’s literary labour politics evinces a less optimistic response to life in the industrial city than either “Marie” (chapter three) or the “factory girls” (chapter

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<sup>274</sup> Zlotnick is speaking specifically of “industrial modernity” (*Women, Writing, and the Industrial Revolution* 2).

five).<sup>275</sup> Through the entangled themes of her verse—communities, music, religion, and nation—Forrester constructs the city as a place of isolation and death, and in her poems—especially the “Lowly Bard” and the “Strangers in the City” triptych, which I discuss below—the political is tied to the regional and the national, placing Manchester at the centre of urban (dis)ease. For Forrester, more than any other woman in this study, manual labour supersedes literary labour, and her poetry dramatizes how the voice of the poet is ultimately drowned out by the din of factory machinery.

Critically, Forrester has benefitted from the work of Goodridge, Boos, Maidment, Zlotnick, and Forsyth.<sup>276</sup> Boos includes selections of Forrester’s poetry in her *Anthology*, and places her poetry in the category of “deeply embedded [political] verse” (145) in her discussion of the political poetry of working-class women.<sup>277</sup> Maidment places Forrester in the “Parnassian” section of his *Poorhouse Fugitives*, within the sub-section “Poems about Manchester.”<sup>278</sup> Forsyth and Zlotnick (as I noted above) have each provided insight into Forrester’s engagement with Victorian femininity. Forsyth examines how Forrester’s works “conform to, or subvert,

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<sup>275</sup> Boos has indicated that many of Forrester’s poems are “[s]et-pieces of urban alienation” (*Anthology* 239).

<sup>276</sup> Goodridge provides a detailed headnote in his anthology of working-class poets, and reprints Forrester’s “Strangers in the City,” “In the Workhouse—A Deserter’s Story,” “The Lowly Bard,” “Song: ‘Bring Me a Sweet White Rose,’” and “A Mother’s Letter” (175-191).

<sup>277</sup> See “Nurs’d Up Amongst the Scenes I Have Describ’d: Political Resonances in the Poetry of Working-Class Women.” I discuss Boos’s four categories of political poems in chapter two of this study, in the section entitled, “Uncovering the Politics Working-Class Women Poets.”

<sup>278</sup> The “Parnassian self-taught poets” states Maidment, “endeavour [...] to step beyond the cultural constraints of working-class life” and participate in mimetic interpretations of middle-class writers’ verse, while “complicating the ideological relationships between self-taught writers and the dominant literary tradition” (Maidment 100). In these poets he finds

a desperate quest for an individual sense of coherence and purpose among the earliest and most spectacular casualties of urban industrialism, differing from the Romantics not so much in aim or kind but rather in the more precise location of their alienation in the industrial experience of Manchester, Sheffield, or Leeds. (99)

nineteenth-century codes of femininity” (“Too Boldly” 19), while Zlotnick argues for Forrester’s “female expressivity,” stating that the poet “acquiesces to bourgeois standards of femininity throughout her work” (“Lowly Bard” 19). While both critics have examined Forrester’s poetry within a “cultural script of domesticity” (Zlotnick *Industrial Revolution* 12), little has been written about the complex folds of her poetic engagement with working-class communities, music, religion, and nation, and the relationship of these themes to her corpus of “labour literature,” that is to say, her most overtly political poetry. To read Forrester only through the register of gender is to miss the complex and contradictory relationship between literary form and material reality in her verse.

### *Working-Class Poetic Communities*

Fanny Forrester, along with contemporaries Ellen Johnston and Janet Hamilton, is one of the most widely discussed working-class women poets to date, and her poetry could fit into a number of categories of this larger study. For example, Forrester could be included as a member of the “factory girls” of the previous chapter, as well as in a chapter on the mid-Victorian periodical press. She is a working-class woman poet who did not publish a collection of her poems, but instead developed a strong following through her presence in the periodical press. Forrester’s poetry inspired poetic correspondents in *Ben Brierley’s Journal*, which point to the importance of community in her verse.<sup>279</sup> Contemporary critics have often assumed that, unlike

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<sup>279</sup> In recent years, critics have given much attention to the importance of female poetic communities and coteries. In developing poetic communities, working-class women poets follow a tradition “[f]rom Katherine Philips’s royalist ‘Society of Friendship’ to Finch’s retreat to the

their middle-class “sisters,” working-class women poets were unaware of their female contemporaries.<sup>280</sup> But as we will see in the poetic communities formed around Fanny Forrester, the formation of strong poetic ties among poets in the periodical press challenges our understanding of the ways in which working-class women were situated in their particular regional and class communities; it seems that they were not as isolated as Forsyth proposes.

In the pages of *Ben Brierley’s Journal* in the later 1870s, Forrester corresponded with a number of poets, including Anna E. Fennel, M. Harriet Smith, “Sabina,” and John Lawton Owen, and these poetic apostrophes created a community of writers characterized by the ties of friendship and family.<sup>281</sup> On 23 January 1875, Forrester published a poem entitled “My Poor Black Sheep,” to which Fennel<sup>282</sup> responded with a poem entitled, “The Wanderer’s Return: In Answer to Miss Forrester’s ‘My Poor Black Sheep.’” In “My Poor Black Sheep,” which is both an indictment of the city and a testament to a mother’s love, the speaker’s emotional range moves from sadness to anger to love in a lament of the loss of her son to the vicissitudes of the city. Fennel’s response, narrated by the son, brings the boy back to his family: “I see my poor

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landscape with a female friend who shares her political sympathies in ‘Petition for an Absolute Retreat.’” (Barash ??) See also Kelly, Stone and Thompson, and Wright. “‘All the Fire-Side Circle’: Irish Women Writers and the Sheridan-Lefanu Coterie.”

<sup>280</sup> In “Looking for Grandmothers: Working-Class Women Poets and ‘herstory,’” Forsyth considers how women in the nineteenth century were marginalized by both their class and their gender status, suggesting that these women were “oblivious of the work of both their female contemporaries in the nineteenth century and their literary predecessors” (259). Forsyth argues that working-class women wrote about historical characters in the absence of contemporary models, and notes that working-class women poets engaged “with the personal narratives of their own communities and the social and political exploitation of women in history” (268).

<sup>281</sup> Boos’s overview of Forrester’s poetry in “The ‘Homely Muse’ in Her Diurnal Setting: The Periodical Poems of ‘Marie,’ Janet Hamilton, and Fanny Forrester” includes a mention of Sabina and Owen (272-73).

<sup>282</sup> I have not yet been able to discover anything about Fennel. She is not listed in John Goodridge’s list at the Labouring-Class Writers Project: <<http://human.ntu.ac.uk/research/labouringclasswriters/DatabaseOfWriters.htm>>.



mother, and sadly I mourn, / For I know she still prays for her truant's return" (9-10).

On the purely narrative level, the poem uses a metaphorical construction of "family-as-kin,"<sup>283</sup> and Fennell's response provides narrative and familial closure to "My Poor Black Sheep." Fennell's effort to provide closure to "My Poor Black Sheep" suggests an active involvement between author and reader in *Ben Brierley's Journal*, and implies a poetic relationship between two women that simultaneously embraces the domestic ideal and the nuclear family. Both poets also couch their poems in religious rhetoric, using the paradigm of faith to illuminate a binary between city and country. The negative depiction of city and the positive portrayal of the country is a binary that is characteristic of much of Forrester's political verse.<sup>284</sup> Just as E.H. (chapter three) draws upon a "radical Christian sensibility" that suggests religion has been corrupted by the industrial world (Yeo 111), Forrester and Fennell depict the city as a place of sin and the country as the site of maternal love and God's kindness: the young boy is a "lost sheep" until he returns home (Fennell 34). In "My Poor Black Sheep," the mother wills her son to come back, "Away from the town, and its haunts of sin— / Away from the glare and the ceaseless din—" (65-66), and promises forgiveness if he will only return to her.

The poets place their faith in the nuclear family, which is associated with a domestic, and thus virtuous space. The caring mother who wills her son back to her is

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<sup>283</sup> I am using Caroline Levine's term (640).

<sup>284</sup> Williams writes of the symbolism of the terms "city" and "country" that [o]n the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times. (1)

the moral centre of the poems. Fennell responds to Forrester's portrayal of the "wandering son" by suggesting that he can only be saved by the pastoral landscape, which is here feminized by its association with his mother:

But while scorned by the world, ever ready to blame,  
The mother's love triumphs, and still is the same.

Oh, does she yet call me from dark haunts of sin,  
And the turmoil of vice which the wicked live in?  
From the great evil city to the pure country air,  
From scoffing and jeering to love and to care? (15-20)

Fennell not only sends the lost "black sheep" away from the city in a poetic recuperation of family ties, but also brings him back into the safety of the nuclear family. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, on the meta-narrative level, the two female poets converse, and "The Wanderer's Return" indicates a willingness on Fennell's part to join with another woman in the creation of a poetic story, a story that centres around the strength of human relationships. In Fennell's poem, the formation of a poetic community relies upon both feminized relationships (between women, mother and son, the landscape and femininity) and the moral whole of the nuclear family.

Fennell is not the only one to use the rhetoric of the family to indicate a bond between poets. In another instance of poetic address, the anonymous C.H.B. wrote a "Sonnet: To Fanny Forrester" (9 November 1878). In C.H.B.'s sonnet, the poet addresses Forrester as a "sweet singer," and questions why "melancholy" so often

tinges her verse. The ambiguously gendered speaker tells Forrester “thou art too young / To be so sad” (10-11). Forrester’s response, “The Voice of Friendship” (21 November 1878), is inscribed to C.H.B., her “poet friend” (25). Here, Forrester does not address C.H.B. directly; however, “The Voice of Friendship” highlights Forrester’s dependence upon friendship as a means of poetic inspiration: “Be glad, my lyre, for thou hast heard / The voice of friendship, kind and true” (41-42).

In the following poetic apostrophes by M. Harriet Smith and “Sabina,” the bond between poets is built on the tradition of female communities, trust, and love, which is then mirrored by the form of each poem. While neither of these poems explicitly reference Sappho, they draw on the social and aesthetic function of the Sapphic myth as a legitimizing force.<sup>285</sup> M. Harriet Smith’s “To Fanny Forrester” appeared in *Ben Brierley’s Journal* on 30 January 1875.<sup>286</sup> Metrically and thematically, Smith’s poem closely resembles John Donne’s “Sappho to Philaenis,” in which he appropriates the female voice—a technique Elizabeth Harvey terms a “phenomenon of transvestite ventriloquism” (1).<sup>287</sup> I chose Donne’s poem for my discussion both because of its overtly homoerotic content, and because Sappho was a power figure in nineteenth-century poetry.<sup>288</sup> Smith’s poem is not nearly as sinister as Donne’s, and it lacks what

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<sup>285</sup> Susan S. Lanser uses the term “*sapphic*” to denote a new formation of the erotic that exists “beyond explicit sexual acts or even overtly enunciated sexual wishes to encompass desires and penchants that give primacy—even momentary primacy—to same-sex bonds through words and practices amenable to an erotic rendering” (260).

<sup>286</sup> The poem is listed as being composed on January 22nd, 1875, *before* the publication of “My Poor Black Sheep.” M. Harriet Smith is the author of *Irene Floss and other Poems* (1878).

<sup>287</sup> Harvey theorises how poems written by male authors but “voiced by female characters” either “seems to erase the gender of the authorial voice or to thematise the transvestism of this process” (1).

<sup>288</sup> Yopie Prins observes that Sappho was “[c]elebrated as a feminine ideal in nineteenth-century encyclopedias of exemplary women, female biographies, and other treatises on the “genius” of woman, Sappho becomes the emblem of Victorian womanhood.” She writes that Sappho was a

Harvey calls the “intertextual violence” of “Sappho to Philaenis” (119), but it does seem that the tone is inherently “*sapphic*”—to borrow Lanser’s term—and it contains many of the same formal techniques that Donne uses to strategically direct the reader’s gaze.

While Donne uses sight to direct the readers’ attention, Smith uses sight and *sound*, and the poem becomes a replacement for physical contact between authors. Donne exploits the female voice as a way to satisfy his own need to be a voyeur and also as a way to display his rhetorical genius and use of recursion.<sup>289</sup> Sappho looks in the mirror at herself, searching for Philaenis, and “Donne watches Sappho watching [...] herself” (Harvey 132). Donne’s rhyming couplets imitate the duality of the mirror reflection into which Sappho is gazing. Smith’s tercets echo the way in which the two poets are imagined as looking at and reading each other. The rhymes produce a likeness in both sight and sound, which points to an emerging community of female authorship:<sup>290</sup>

Thus I to thee—unknown to sight or speech,  
Yet scarce a stranger, since my verses reach  
Thy gaze, as thine my own, each known to each—

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muse for many women poets in the late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries used Sappho as a muse; among them Mary Robinson (*Sappho and Phaon*), Felicia Hemans (“The Last Song of Sappho”), L.E.L. (“Sappho” and “Sappho’s Song”), and later Caroline Norton (“The Picture of Sappho”), and Christina Rossetti (“Sappho”) (184). See also McGann and Rainbolt.

<sup>289</sup> Harvey explains it thus: “just as voyeurism is the wish to see without being seen, a mastery and form of possession of the object through the gaze, so is the ventriloquistic appropriation of the feminine voice a mastery of the other” (132).

<sup>290</sup> The idea of writing as a substitute for the author’s presence goes back to Plato’s *Phaedrus*, but a full discussion of this trope falls outside the scope of this project. A further discussion of working-class women’s use of poetic substitution and the relation of their verse to Renaissance poets (Donne, Milton, Shakespeare), warrants further investigation in a future project. Thanks to Julia Wright for drawing my attention to these connections.

The sincere tribute of a song would bring,  
Whose strains my heart's good wishes to thee wing,  
That thou mayst live undying songs to sing. (7-12)

Smith's stanzas effect a slippage between the women so that two seemingly become one. The chiasmus and parallelism of the lines stitch the poets together and the enjambment in lines 8 and 9 suggests that there is continuity between the authors that extends its "reach" both in verse and in friendship. *Epanalepsis* and assonance ensure that Forrester is not a "stranger" to Smith; "each known to each" is a description transmitted through the vowel sounds in "thy" and "thine my" as well "own" and "known" and the doubling of "each," furthering the harmony between the two. Paired with the word "undying," the quadruple *polyptoton*—"song" "strains" and "songs" "sing"—also ensures a continuation, this time of the poets' song (both Forrester's and Smith's). Smith ends with a personal touch:

I wish thee well, in personal life, and art,  
And ask thee to accept these thoughts which start  
In blessings from my lips, the echo of my heart. (22-24)

The *zeugma* in line 22 and the parallelism of line 24 link the two poets, and with the final allusion to Smith's "heart," the word "lips" performs a dual function—it at once serves as the means through which Smith articulates her panegyric (her voice), and gestures towards the ultimate bond in the discourse of sympathy: the perfect union of a kiss.

We find a reverberation of poetic schemes and sentiments in the exchanges between Forrester and another poet, who styled herself "Sabina." As in Smith's

panegyric, “Sabina”’s “To Fanny Forrester”<sup>291</sup> provides an example of how *sapphic* verse could be used to articulate friendship among women in the periodical press. “Sabina” frames her address to Forrester with amorous imagery:

I wonder who plucks the lilac’s first flower?  
I can see it now, it hangs over the bower  
Where Fanny and I—’twas only last year—  
Sat breathing our vows, her warm tresses near—  
So near—so fond, yet I clasped her nearer,  
And kissed her and told her to me she was dearer  
Than aught in the world beside. (9-15)

Unlike Smith, who merely gestures towards a kiss, “Sabina” depicts an overtly physical bond between the two poets, and describes her affection in terms that connote courtship: the “lilac,”<sup>292</sup> “the bower,” “the vow,” and the “kiss.” Here, “Sabina”’s *polyptoton* brings Forrester “near” and “nearer” and, by extension, “dearer.” In the description that “Sabina” gives of Forrester’s “tresses,” there are connotations of a romantic relationship; the erotic undertones in Sabina’s verse are undeniable. “Sabina” calls Forrester her “lover,” suggesting a bond between the poets that lifted off the pages of the journal (17). However, Marcus would argue, their same-sex relationship would not overstep the bounds of Victorian femininity.<sup>293</sup> Both Smith and “Sabina” incorporate aspects of romance and sentimentality in their poems to Forrester. These

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<sup>291</sup> It appears that Fanny Forrester and “Sabina” sustained a poetic correspondence. For example, Forrester published at least one poem addressed “To Sabina” (October 16, 1875: 339).

<sup>292</sup> The lilac signifies the early stages of love.

<sup>293</sup> In *Between Women*, Marcus argues that women’s communities and female relationships were markers of properly “feminine” middle-class women, and notes the longevity of the “[c]lose relationships between women that began when both were single” that “often survived marriage and maternity” (14, 32). See my discussion of Marcus in chapter three.

poets participate in the formation of a poetic community that was based upon the bonds of female friendship and love in the tradition of Sappho and “sapphic” verse, thus legitimating their female poetic community.

To complicate my argument about the gendering of poetic communities in *Ben Brierley’s Journal*, I offer John Lawton Owen’s “Epistle to Fanny Forrester” (1876), a poem that creates an intertextual community of poets from every strand of society.<sup>294</sup> Owen was a well-known contributor to *The People’s Journal* and the author of “Lyrics from a Country Lane” (1873) and *Railroad Romances* (London, 1897). It is not surprising that Owen knew Forrester by name. In the “Homely Muse,” Boos notes that “Fanny Forrester and John Lawton Owen effectively became the Journal’s ‘house’-poets in the early to mid-70s” (269). In his “Epistle,” Owen echoes the metrical tradition of Lord Alfred Tennyson’s “Locksley Hall” (1842), Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” (1844), and Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven” (1845). His 141-line panegyric addresses Forrester, his “gifted sister-singer” (1) and speaks to the immortalizing power of poetry through rhymes that recall the female artist in Tennyson’s “The Lady of Shalott” (1832). Owen writes tells Forrester that

[...] with reverence all but holy, I would raise those poets lowly  
In their own esteem and others, who can chant a living strain—  
In a way that wins fame slowly,—but is not forgotten wholly  
By their sympathizing brothers, who will sing it o’er again. (17-20)

In lines 17 and 19, Owen reiterates Tennyson’s words “holy,” “lowly,” “slowly,” and “wholly” (145-48) from “The Lady of Shallot” (1832)—a fitting *mimesis* given the subject

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<sup>294</sup> Boos reports that Brierley published Owen’s poem as a way of publicizing Forrester (“Homely Muse” 44).

matter of Tennyson's poem.<sup>295</sup> Thus the content *and* the form of his lines speak to the power of reiteration within a family community, where the stories are passed down through generations and the bonds of poetry are strengthened because the oral tradition will carry on the tune. Owen speaks of "the bardic brotherhood," yet the "brotherhood" is gender ambiguous; he includes Forrester within a poetic family (54). Like M. Harriet Smith, Owen uses poetry as a way of constructing both a literal and literary acquaintance between authors. He writes to Forrester,

I may happen never meet thee, never be the one to greet thee  
With my presence as a token of my friendship and regard;  
But my memory shall greet thee, for upon its throne I'll seat thee,  
And its vows shall rest unbroken with the fealty of the bard. (69-72)

Owen describes poetic "fealty" that is built on the power of song and verse. By including Forrester within the "bardic brotherhood," and asserting that "round thee, my sister-singer, shall my last long lyric linger" (121), Owen essentially guarantees Forrester's place within the poetic community established by Brierley's journal. Furthermore Owen is yet another male patron who supported a female working-class writer.<sup>296</sup> With the support of an established writer, Owen, and her editor, Brierley, Forrester found her place, and her legitimacy in that place, in the pages of *Ben Brierley's Journal*. The female poet legitimates her place within this community in keeping with Victorian standards of femininity; she is safely both a friend and a sister. For Forrester, this poetic community legitimates her place as a working-class woman

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<sup>295</sup> And poignant. Like the "Lady," Forrester is fated to die at the hands of industrialism.

<sup>296</sup> See my discussion of the relationship between "Marie," Eliza Cook (chapter three), and Mary Hutton (chapter four) and their respective literary patrons.



and as a poet.

In each of the poems discussed above, the dominant themes that run throughout are the family and the love that forms the bonds necessary to create a community of writers. This poetic community links poets through the diction of sensibility,<sup>297</sup> and inspires the poets to write, giving authenticity to the voices of the many. The poems by Fennel, C.H.B., Smith, and “Sabina” are evidence of the beginnings of a community of women writers centred on a woman from the working class. Indeed, these epistle poems challenge our understanding of the ways in which Forrester (and perhaps other working-class women) were situated within their particular regional and class communities. These writers collectively demonstrate an awareness of a poetic community. The question remains as to why Forrester wrote addresses to Sabina and C.H.B., but not to other poets. What was special about her relationship to these two in particular?

### *Music, Religion, and the City*

For a woman who was seemingly gifted at creating poetic communities, Forrester wrote a surprising number of poems that deal with isolation and death. Perhaps this explains why she only addresses two poets in the pages of the journal; the alienation engendered by a life of factory work seems prohibitive to the formation of human connections. Perhaps in their epistle poems her admirers are trying to provide a community of poets who discursively remedy her solitude through the circulation of texts? If this is the case, then through the periodical press, these writers are

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<sup>297</sup> See chapter five.

participating in the revision of urban isolation, a revision that places poetry at the centre of human interaction.

Forrester's "city" poems—"In the City," "Little Singers," "The Lowly Bard," and "Strangers in the City"—participate in a tradition of literature that addresses and attempts to change the social problems in England during the Victorian era.<sup>298</sup> In many respects, these poems bear a resemblance to the work of another Mancunian artist: Elizabeth Gaskell. Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) predates Forrester's poems; however, we can see traces of Aunt Esther in Forrester's "Magdalen" and the woman in "In the City," and hints of the sense of loss that pervade the "Strangers" and the "Bard" in Alice Wilson, Job Leigh, and John Barton. Like Gaskell, Forrester is writing about Manchester—the heart of industrialism in Victorian Britain. But where Gaskell's work was careful to end in a conciliatory manner, rekindling relationships between classes and resolidifying human connections (*Mary Barton, North and South*), Forrester's poetry provides no such simple ending. Her verse is entangled in scenes of desolation and deprivation.<sup>299</sup> John Goodridge writes that in her poetry "Forrester attempts to represent an alienated and impoverished underclass, often people driven into the city by economic hardship or misfortune" (176).

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<sup>298</sup> Boos has written that Forrester has provided us with "some of the more probing poetic portrayals [...] of the consciousness of a Victorian industrial worker by one of their own" (*Anthology* 243).

<sup>299</sup> Boos writes that Forrester's "work embraced painful flashbacks and a few curious gender-ambiguities and quasi-homoerotic interludes, and her poetic personae included poor orphans, handicapped children, dying soldiers, elderly parents, struggling Irish immigrants, 'fallen' or abandoned women, and unwed mothers. Many seem exhausted, and most have suffered wrenching dislocations—from country to city, Ireland to the midland slums, hopeful youth to exhausted middle age, and life to death," and her poems grappled with "complex passions of cruel exhaustion and irretrievable loss" ("Political" 146-147).

Forrester was no stranger to hardship and misfortune<sup>300</sup> and her political poems address industrial problems such as poverty and overwork. As we will see, the many characters in her poems who have been destroyed by the city can find “consolation” *only* in the pastoral settings that they conjure through memory, or, tragically, in the afterlife. When it comes to the Victorian city, critics agree that the burgeoning industrial setting in which many poets wrote inspired varied and numerous responses to urban life.<sup>301</sup> As Maidment argues, “there are relatively few poems which describe the industrial city, and even fewer which analyse it as an economic or social system” (150), but of these Fanny Forrester is especially important.<sup>302</sup>

I would like to turn now to the specific ways in which the politics of Forrester’s poetry ties her representation of the isolation and degradation of the working classes to music and song. As we will see in a number of Forrester’s poems, including her “Song: Oh to be a Country Lass” and “Little Singers” (and, later in this chapter, in my discussion of “Strangers in the City” and “The Lowly Bard”), Forrester links music to the pastoral, and uses the vocal quality and strength of song as a barometer of the

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<sup>300</sup> In Brierley’s brief biography of her life, which appeared in 23 January 1875, he writes that “the cradle of her muse has been in the nursery of toil and vicissitude,” and that her “studies of human life and character have been confined to the experiences of the mill and the dye-house [...] how beautifully she writes of the things she aspires to behold, and of the conditions of life which her poetic instincts tell her must exist somewhere” (37).

<sup>301</sup> In the *History of England*, Thomas Macaulay wrote of the Victorian city that it was “no longer regarded by the wealthiest traders with that attachment which every man naturally feels for his home. It is no longer associated in their minds with domestic affections and endearments. The fireside, the nursery, the social table, the quiet bed are not there. Lombard Street and Threadneedle Street are merely places where men toil and accumulate” (1: 307–08). Boos has examined Scottish working-class women poets’ reaction to changing lifestyles in “‘Oor Location’: Scotswomen Poets and the Transition from Rural to Urban Culture.”

<sup>302</sup> Maidment allows that that in Forrester’s poetry there is an “implicit conflict between poetry and the city, [which finds] resolutions largely by appeal to religious or pastoral metaphors of consolation” (151).

state of the working class in the city. I would also like to suggest that by using music in this way, Forrester draws upon already established *topoi* of music and song as they help to create female communities which, in turn, allows Forrester to join a larger tradition of female writers.<sup>303</sup> I see music in Forrester's poetry as the political register of her poetry. Music does not suggest a mere "passive endurance" in the women she describes, but rather at times provides a radical view of modernity.

In Forrester's "Song: Oh to be a Country Lass," the city-dwelling speaker laments her living conditions, and wishes she could be a "country lass" (1). The poem builds on the duality of a single song: the song of the poet, and the song of nature. The first is indicated by the title of the poem, and the second by the speaker's description of the country, and of the "lilies" in the "merry wood" that are "singing" (25-26). Nature is implicitly tied to the "country" and all of the characteristics of life therein, and is a contrast to the dirt and din of industrial space. Forrester's song conflates the desire for harmony and the peace brought about by a bucolic life. In the city, the speaker is bound by "custom" and "sorrow" (7, 30), while in the country she could be "Thoughtless, blithe, and simple, / [...] a gay and careless rover" (2, 6). The ballad form of the poem rhythmically sways with the blithe and simple life of the country girl; Forrester makes music an intrinsic part of rural life. The speaker's sense of identity is tied into her particular location. Throughout the poem she longs for a life that is far from the city's "busy streets / Of dingy courts and alleys" (17-18). This sense of longing pervades her song—she desires to be someone, and *somewhere*, she is not.

Like the second "factory girl" poet of chapter five with her "sacred harp,"

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<sup>303</sup> Boos has noted the use of traditional songs of work in the poetry of the working classes (*Anthology* 38-39).

Forrester suggests that the country is a place of music and divinity, and by extension, the city lacks music and thus divinity. This is an expansion of Forrester's use of the city-country binary I noted earlier in this chapter. The speaker of the poem argues that the experience of nature would bring her closer to God, and therefore further from the industrial city:

Could I but crown this aching brow  
With buttercups and daisies,  
The soul that yearns so vainly now  
Would sing its Maker's praises. (13-16)

This conflation reinforces the religious tone of the poem, and indeed, throughout much of her poetry, like E.H., F. Saunderson, Forrester links nature to God, and industrialism to the absence of God (as in, for instance, "My Poor Black Sheep"). This link is much like Wordsworth's "The World is Too Much with Us" in which he laments "Getting and spending," and declares that "we lay waste our powers; / Little we see in Nature that is ours" (2-3). Compare, for example, lines 8 to 10 in Wordsworth's famous sonnet:

For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn[.]<sup>304</sup> (8-10)

Forrester's verse draws on much of the same imagery, including the ways in which she links nature to music and god. Wordsworth describes the disharmony of industrialism, much as Forrester does in her own works. The words "country lass" also

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<sup>304</sup> See Tim Fulford's discussion in *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (177).

take on multiple layers of meaning. The country embodies music, God, and all that is precious to the poet. The speaker's longing "to be a country lass" is thus tied to her desire to experience God in the landscape.

When religion does make its appearance in the city, it is connected to the redemption of city dwellers who have fallen out of synchrony with the natural world, and who can escape the city and rejoin their rightful family communities only in death. Religion provides a restorative power, but it is only in death that the worker can comfort, away from the pall of the industrial landscape. In Forrester's "In the City," for example, the protagonist is a "lonely" fallen woman who "flaunts about the noisy town," while her "Hollow cheeks are flushed with wine" (17, 1, 9). By the end of the poem, the narrator assures the reader that

Christ shall guide those wandering feet  
From sinful streets and alleys,  
O'er breezy hills and pastures sweet,  
Through smiling country valleys.  
Repentant prayers and broken sighs  
With grateful tears shall mingle—  
And she shall close her dying eyes  
Beside her mother's ingle. (73-80)

In the final conciliatory moment of the poem, the fallen woman turns to her mother to die "on [her] bosom" (82). As I showed in Saunderson's "Spring Reflections" (see chapter three), rural space is characterised as feminine, and is implicitly a safe haven that offers warmth and comfort.

Similarly, in the melodramatic poem “Little Singers” Forrester links music to religion and suggests that both exist *outside* the industrial landscape, unable to survive within the confines of urban space.<sup>305</sup> The two children portrayed in the poem, Tom and Mary, are the epitome of innocence, existing in a pre-lapsarian state; they are singing, but the pall of the city muffles the joy of their song:

It rose above the noisy street,  
A song of mirth and gladness—  
Two childish voices, fresh and sweet,  
Yet full of woe and sadness[.] (1-4)

The impurity and dangers of the city mar Tom and Mary’s innocence; both their bodies and voices reflect the degradation that the industrial landscape inflicts upon them. The narrator tells us that they are wearing “scant and dripping rags,” that they have “blue and trembling fingers” and that “they were so weary!” (59, 60, 62). And yet “On, on, with wounded feet they strayed, / Through dark and sinful places” (41-42). Mary cannot sing because she is “so faint and hungry” (24). Faced with the imminence of her brother’s death, she prays that they can die together:

That piteous, heart-wrung, broken prayer,  
Rose from the sinful city—  
And angel voices filled the air—  
And Christ, in loving pity,  
Came down to where the children lay;  
And wound His arms around them;

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<sup>305</sup> Boos writes that the children’s “literary identities dramatized the cumulative emotional and intellectual toll of many deprivations” (“Homely Muse” 271).

And bore the unsullied souls away,

From the poor clay that bound them. (104-112)

In this passage, we see another example of the way in which religion serves as both a palliative and opiate for the poor who suffer in the city. For these children, represented as “unsullied,” the figure of Christ bears them away from the “hunger, cold and sorrow” that inevitably kills them (110, 115). Forrester represents these children as singers whose death stops their song. Because of the inherent musicality of the poem, the symmetry contained within the tetrameter-trimeter pair ultimately shapes the poem’s moral. It is the song that has the potential to bring about change, or to provide solace. What I am suggesting here is that although Forrester describes the desolation and death of her protagonists, the soothingly predictable and naturally musical metre offers a synchronous mitigation of the dangers of industrialism. The poem offers a conventional ending: while there is an absence of God in the city itself, once dead, the children can find consolation in the warm embrace of heaven, just as the poet can find *some* comfort in her verse.

Like Hutton, Forrester depicts the afterlife as a haven safe from poverty and despair. But how successful the poet is in protecting herself from the horrors of industrialism? The city, as we will see in the poems discussed below, is a place that silences even the strongest of human voices. In destroying song, the city, by extension, also destroys human and artistic (poetic) power. The “angel voices filled the air,” while the little children now lie dead and cold, and others gaze upon the “want” that had left “grim traces / Of blighted hope, and dark despair” (118-19). There are two ways of reading the final lines of this poem. Because Forrester describes the children as having



“angel faces,” it is possible that they will thus become the “angel voices” and will regain the power that produced their songs. If this is the case, then like Hutton Forrester is relying upon the afterlife as the *only* safe haven from poverty and despair. Forrester draws upon music and song as a means of creating communities and as a defence against modernity, and links music to both the pastoral and the religious. However, if we place the emphasis not on the last line, but instead on the two lines above, do “blighted hope” and “dark despair” prevail, and silence their song forever?

*“Strangers in the City”: Irish Immigrants and the Urban Experience*

I turn now to Forrester’s first published poem, “Strangers in the City,” which appeared in three separate parts in Brierley’s journal: “Homeless in the City” (March 1870), “Toiling in the City” (April 1870) and “Dying in the City” (May 1870). In this poetic triptych, Forrester depicts Ireland as the place of (figurative) wealth, human community, and nature, while she characterizes the city (presumably Manchester) with its paucity of song and the din of factory machinery as a place of poverty, isolation, and death. I would like to further complicate Forrester’s use of music by examining how she conceptualizes Irish working-class identity in her poetic characters. In his study of the “ambiguities of identity” among Irish immigrants in mid-Victorian Manchester, Mervyn Busteed has noted that “such ambiguities are most starkly presented to immigrant minorities who must make their way in strange and often hostile host societies” (628). Busteed examines the broadside ballads that emerged out of Manchester during the 1840s, and convincingly argues that the nation can be viewed as a “social construction,” which can be “reconstructed” as a result of

provocation in a “time of crisis” (628). The continual “othering” and “decentring” of Irish nationality occurred throughout the nineteenth century; English writers often constructed the Irish national identity as one that connoted drunkenness, poverty, and immorality.<sup>306</sup> Busted argues that “[n]ationalist songs, both words and music, have a variety of uses, playing a key role in preserving, articulating, creating, and rousing a sense of national identity in both majority and minority national groups” (642). While he examines only “national songs,” I hope to show how Forrester’s use of a generalized conception of song in “Strangers in the City” creates a binary that takes on nationalist undertones.

Notably, Forrester is one of few female working-class poets that Goodridge treats in his discussion of the “rhetorical strategies” of working-class verse.<sup>307</sup> Goodridge describes “Strangers in the City” as a “sequence” that “documents the arrival, homelessness, and lack of resources, severe working, and living conditions and consequent premature death of Mary, a ‘timid fawn’ exiled from [Ireland], her native land, along with her mother, following a brutal land eviction that has either claimed the lives of her father and sister or at least split the family” (532). In the first part of the poem, “Homeless in the City,” the two Irish immigrants know no one and have no home. The mother tells us that she has already lost her son and daughter, and Mary is “all that’s left” to her (56). Goodridge has suggested of the poem that it has the

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<sup>306</sup> However, as Busted notes,

[a]ttitudes towards the Irish illustrate the fact that social constructions are neither immortal nor internally coherent. The perception that they were congenitally and unpredictably violent and dangerous is somewhat at variance with the equally long lived notion that they were good-humoured, cheery, and prone to behave in a somewhat ridiculously illogical and comic fashion. (635)

<sup>307</sup> For Goodridge’s discussion of Forrester, see “Some Rhetorical Strategies in Later Nineteenth-Century Laboring-Class Poetry” (532-33)

“potential to convey the drama of social and individual crisis,” but because it is cast in terms of sentimental melodrama, it may not evince a very serious response because it seems “emotionally overladen” to the modern reader (532).

Forrester writes through a lens of nostalgia for her own native Ireland,<sup>308</sup> and portrays the English city as a place of (dis)ease and degradation for the working class. The poem is also an exploration of the loss of human ties to nature through industrialism, and of the loss of Irish immigrants’ ties to their homeland. Forrester make a political gesture in her poetic attention to the constructions of Irish identity, and depicts the land as something which is desired but cannot be had. The poem’s complexity lies in its careful negotiation of national and social politics and in its creation of an Irish working-class community that refutes the too-common presentation of their countrymen as “central agents of working-class distress, dirt, and disorder” (Corbett 83). The word “Homeless” in the first section of the poem highlights the sense of loss that permeates the triptych. This is not a loss of merely the physical space of the “house,” but also of the figurative safety and ties to the Irish “homeland.”<sup>309</sup>

During and after the Great Famine (1845-1852), the influx of Irish people to England was enormous. In the 1840s, Friedrich Engels estimated the number of Irish poor in Manchester at around 40, 000, and the numbers grew exponentially in subsequent years. However, Engels, like many of his contemporaries (including

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<sup>308</sup> For more on the theories of nostalgia in Irish literature, see Arrowsmith.

<sup>309</sup> John Goodridge points out the contrast between Mary’s “sweet and saintly” demeanor and the implicitly unsweet and unsaintly world she is cast into; between the factory full of noisy, dangerous, belt-driven machinery and the ‘quiet glen’ she remembers; and again between the factory’s noise and the ‘birds’ sweet song’ of rural Ireland, which is cast as a lost Eden. (“Rhetorical” 532)

Carlyle), felt strongly about the problems created by Irish immigration.<sup>310</sup> In his chapter on the Irish in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels describes them in this way:

They are uncouth, improvident, and addicted to drink. They introduce their brutal behaviour into a section of English society by no means noted for civilized habits or moral principles [...] These Irish workers pay only fourpence passage-money to get to England and they are often packed like cattle on the deck of the steamboat. The worst accommodation is good enough for them; they take no trouble with regard to their clothes which hang in tatters; they go barefoot. (104)

Engels also quotes Carlyle in this section. In *Chartism*, Carlyle writes that “the uncivilized Irishman, not by his strength, but by the opposite of strength, drives out the Saxon native, takes possession in his room. There abides he, in his squalor and unreason, in his falsity and drunken violence, as the ready-made nucleus of degradation and disorder” (qtd. in Engels 105). Carlyle represents the Irish as the “nucleus” of degradation, and this disapprobation of the working-class Irish was unfortunately not uncommon.

Forrester writes against these representations in “Strangers in the City.” As Corbett suggests, “Irish immigration to England also operates discursively as a crucial element in defining and delimiting the contours of Englishness itself” (82). As Julie Dugger observes, the very definitions of national identity had come into play in issues of race and class, and English-Irish relations; for Carlyle, at least, these “figured as a

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<sup>310</sup> For more information on Irish immigration to Manchester in the nineteenth century, see Swift, and Busted, Hodgson and Kennedy.

conflict between two white racial groups—a battle between Saxons and Celts” (462).<sup>31</sup> Forrester, as an Irish immigrant herself, makes it her task to use the theme of immigration in her poem to shift perceptions about England and Ireland. While her poem does not directly address the starvation of the Irish during the 1840s, in many ways, can be seen as a “famine text.”<sup>32</sup> Christopher Morash defines a famine text as “a document whose ‘social energies’ are generated by ‘memories’ of the Famine. These ‘memories’ are, in turn, compounded of the collective beliefs, practices, and modes of enunciation available for appropriation in nineteenth-century Ireland” (6). Both “memory” and nostalgia within Forrester’s poem relocate famine, depicting England as an urban environment that acts as catalyst for the demise of the working class.

“Strangers in the City” is a poem fraught with issues of land ownership and Irish history as they emerged in the 1870s in Britain.<sup>33</sup> Forrester rewrites the memory of Ireland; no longer a place of destitution and hunger, the country becomes a pastoral Eden. Within this framework Forrester can provide redefinitions of England and Ireland that reverse the picture of the Irish working class that was so fervently painted by Engels, Carlyle, and their contemporaries. Irish immigrants are thus linked to the land and soil of their country. In Seamus Deane’s “The Production of Cultural Space in Irish Writing,” in a section on “Land and Soil,” Deane refines the terms “land” and “soil” in the context of the post-famine period, stating that that soil “is what land becomes when it is ideologically constructed as a natal source, that element out of

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<sup>31</sup> For more on Carlyle and his relationship to “Young Ireland,” see Dugger’s “Black Ireland’s Race: Thomas Carlyle and the Young Ireland Movement.”

<sup>32</sup> See Morash for a discussion as the “famine as literary text” (4).

<sup>33</sup> John Goodridge writes that this poem is “Fanny Forrester’s own response to the crisis engulfing nineteenth-century Ireland” (“Rhetorical” 532).

which the Irish originate and to which their past generations have returned” (126).<sup>34</sup>

The capacity of this land to hold a political charge allows the Irish to contest and rewrite the historical representations of Ireland into a position of relative power and stability. Forrester’s repudiation of British industrialism aligns itself with emergent post-famine ideologies in which “Ireland was seen, and increasingly saw itself, as a characteristically ‘romantic’ culture, thereby indicating its difference with an England that was increasingly seen, and increasingly saw itself, as an urban, ‘mechanical,’ or utilitarian, culture” (Deane 119-20). Furthermore, as Deane has noted, “Irish writers of the post-Famine generation and beyond rewrote the opposition to landlordism and to British rule as a characteristically national repudiation of modernity” (130).

In “Homeless in the City,” the first section of the long narrative poem, Mary and her mother turn to Ireland as a source of life. Like E.H. in “On Joseph Rayner Stephens,” Forrester envisions a split between the physical (embodied) and the intellectual (spiritual) conceptions of self. The poem, written in present tense, effects a perpetual now, in which the city continually destroys its inhabitants. The first stanza situates mother and daughter within the city, but tells the reader that the two women are trapped within the confines of urban space in body *only*, not in mind:

They are strangers in the city, and their thoughts are far away,

Where the little brooks are singing through the valleys all the day.

O! their hearts are in the meadows, though they tread the miry street,

And the pretty dewy blossoms never kiss their weary feat. (1-4)

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<sup>34</sup> Deane further positions the Famine as the locus for politics; he writes that “[i]t was the Famine that overdetermined the once-traditional distinction between land and soil and gave to it a new political charge” (Deane 128).

Mary and her mother's thoughts hark back to the natural paradise of their native Ireland, while their bodies remain in the "miry" street of the English industrial city. The "brooks" themselves "are singing," a metaphor which links the pastoral idealisation of Ireland to music and song.

The women's physical state is marred by their proximity to industrialism; while their spiritual and emotional state remains situated firmly within a specifically Irish pastoral world, they are shut away from the polluting effects of the city. Mary's clothing indicates her proximity to the dehumanizing effects of industrialism in a strikingly Engelsian description: her "garments hang in tatters, and her dainty feet are bare" (13). However, Forrester describes her using religious language: "But her soul is robed in whiteness, like a lily pure and fair" (14). The rhyming of "bare" in line 13 with "fair" in line 14 establishes a further contrast between the city and the country; "bare" denotes desolation, while "fair" denotes beauty. Furthermore, Forrester links Mary with nature, but also more importantly with moral virtue; she describes her soul as a "lily pure," and then through further similes she translates Mary's physical aspects into symbols of an idealized Irish (and by extension virtuous) natural world:

Like streaming cloudlets gathering round the silver moon at night,

Half concealing, wave the tresses o'er her brow so smooth and white.

O! her eyes are like the ocean, and her soft and waving smile,

Like the bright and fleeting sunshine of her own dear native isle. (9-12)

Forrester directly links Mary's hair to the "moon," her eyes to the "ocean" and her smile to the "sunshine" of Ireland ("her [...] own dear native isle") in a trio of natural phenomena that represent Ireland as a pastoral haven, safe from the pall of the city.

However, the poet also notes the sunshine of Mary's native home is "bright and fleeting"; her happiness is merely temporary.

While Forrester thus depicts England as an isolated industrial hell, she also represents Ireland as the "home" that is defined by its human (and specifically female) ties of friendship and a sense of community. Forrester speaks of a land of mirth and music: "Twas to cheer our drooping spirits that the neighbours laughed and sang, / While the blythe tones of the fiddle through the empty cabin rang" (37-38). The music symbolizes the strength of the human bond; the song grows weaker as Mary and her mother move farther away from Ireland: "But the merry strain grew fainter, and they could not stop their tears" (39). Like Cook in her "Song to the Workers," Forrester uses song to highlight human isolation. In doing so, she acknowledges the oral traditions of working-class verse, which so vociferously collected strength through the power of many voices singing together.<sup>35</sup> However, Forrester creates a working-class collectivity that is specifically Irish. The "kindly" woman who gives shelter to Mary represents the community in their homeland (67). The woman shelters them, writes Forrester, "For she knows that they are wanderers from our own sweet sunny Isle" (68). Forrester uses "our" rather than "their" to place herself within this national community in a clearly autobiographical gesture. By situating herself within the nationalist contexts of the poem, Forrester also enters into this community.

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<sup>35</sup> Leith Davis calls into question Simms' "colonial nationalism," that is, seeing "the Anglo-Irish promotion of the music of the native Irish [...] as part of the creation of an identity distinct from England" (28), instead placing them in their complicated commercial contexts. Davis argues that Irish songs that are associated with Anglo-Irish promotion "assert an Irish identity, but they link that identity both to the culture of consumption and to the consumption of culture in England" (28). For other another view see Thuente. See also Hancher and the discussion of working-class women poets' use of song in Boos's *Anthology* (38-41).



In the final four stanzas of “Homeless in the City,” Forrester expresses the physical and intellectual split between Ireland and England, extending it to her depiction of child labour. She shows that industrialism steals away childhood innocence, and replaces it with “toil”:<sup>316</sup>

They can only dream of fountains, and in fancy climb the hill,

For they toil from dawn till sunset in the noisy, dusty mill.

[...]

O! how often in the factory, while the engine shrieks and screams,

Do they fancy they are listening to the prattling of the streams. (79-80, 83-84)

The “factory girls” of the previous chapter psychologically transcended work in order to find their poetic inspiration; similarly, in Forrester’s poem Ireland can exist only in the *minds* of the working-class immigrants of Manchester. Thus Ireland is figured as the Edenic paradise that is exploited by English progress. Memory and “fancy” exist as the sole link to the homeland of the displaced Irish workers. Forrester represents Ireland as the site of a working-class community; although their physical bodies may be trapped in the city, Ireland’s hold on her children cannot be loosened:

Yes, thy children, dear old Erin! may be scatter’d o’er the earth,

But they never rest contented from the land that gave them birth:

They may toil within the city, but their hearts are far away

Where the little brooks are singing through the valleys all the way. (85-88)

The Irish characters’ discomfort at their deracination from their origins mirrors that of the working classes when they are removed from nature. Forrester represents Ireland

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<sup>316</sup> Cf. “Little Singers.”

as a site of bucolic peace and merry song, a striking contrast to the urban space into which her characters have been thrown.

In part two, "Toiling in the City," Forrester once again uses music as the barometer for the enervating effects of the city, and she links the weakening of song with the loss of human ties to nature. Forrester contrasts "the birds' sweet song" of Ireland, with the "engine's deafening sound" of Manchester's mills (8-9), and she sets up numerous physical contrasts between Ireland and England: Ireland is a site of "tranquil bliss," England a "den so foul as this" (33-34). Forrester also uses the seasons rhetorically, contrasting the perpetual spring of the remembered homeland with the bitter Mancunian winter (2). In this section, Mary is yet untouched by the pall of the city: "the winsome, blue-eyed Mary is the gentle maiden still— / A lovely mountain blossom in a gloomy city mill" (3-4). But the sinister effects of industrialism seep in through sound.

The physical and intellectual divide that is so prevalent in the first part of the poem begins to collapse into the single location of the city, recalling the (now weakened) palliative effect of Mary's "sweet memories" of Ireland (15): "[...] poor Mary's eyes grow brighter when she sees the broad blue sky, / For her weary soul is longing for the gloom and smoke to fly" (27-28). Both Mary's eyes and her soul, her body and mind respectively, are now trapped in the urban landscape, evidenced by the statement that Mary's soul is "weary." The recollective power of Ireland begins to fade, as the narrator tells us that Mary's "lips are smiling, but her heart is sore and sad" (40). The passage also holds a religious connotation. Mary's *soul* is no longer safe in the utopia of Ireland; the demoralizing effects of the city threaten her both physically

and intellectually. That her heart is now “sore and sad” points to the shift in her emotional state and the fact that she succumbs to the city. The diction of incessant movement highlights the inevitable forward progression towards Mary’s destruction: “Will they never cease their grinding!’ oft the wondering maiden cries, / As the straps go whirling round her, then go whizzing past her eyes” (11-12).<sup>317</sup>

Mary’s body registers her class as her hands become the site of national contestation. Her mother laments “[t]hat the hands that plucked the wild-flower by the sparkling little rill, / Should be drawn and cramped with working in the close and grimy mill” (35-36). Mary’s “hands”<sup>318</sup> refer to both the synecdochic workers and to her working-class status. Yet her mother’s words solidify the regenerative potential of memory, placing nostalgic longing in Mary’s hands: “your fingers idly wander, as if toying with the flowers / Oh, what charms are in the memory of that land so far away, / Where the little brooks are singing through the valleys all the day” (50-52). Music once more factors into the collective memory of “that land so far away,” but Forrester has already indicated that the music (of the birds, and, we can infer, the brooks) is drowned out by the noise of the city, a clear foreshadowing of Mary’s demise.

In part three, “Dying in the City,” Mary succumbs to a delirious fit, in which she has been transported to her native Ireland through the power of nostalgic recollection. She recalls the “golden meadows, where the little children play,” lamenting “how I wish that I was there!” (5, 8). Mary’s memory further serves to contrast the pastoral beauty of Ireland with the dirt and smoke of industrialised England.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> See my discussion of Elizabeth Barrett’s “The Cry of the Children” in chapter five.

<sup>318</sup> Cf. the “factory girls” in chapter five.

<sup>319</sup> Cf. Gaskell’s description of Alice Wilson nearing her death in *Mary Barton*:

Thus the thoughts of home's sweet pleasures crowd the maiden's throbbing  
brain;

From her lips flow broken snatches of some well-remembered strain.

She is dying in the city, 'mid the noise, the smoke, and gloom;

Still she sees her native valleys, robed in autumn's richest bloom. (14-16)

The narrator describes Ireland as a place of music and laughter, filled with bird songs (the "lark" and the "sparrows"), and as a land of fertility and regeneration of almost supernatural beauty with its "fairy bowers" (11-12, 18). However, the destructive power of the city eventually robs Mary of her memories. The narrator writes, "But the hills are slowly sinking, and her eyes are growing dim, / And fainter, oh! still fainter, sounds that old, old evening hymn" (43-44). The din of the city drowns out the music of Mary's native Ireland, and her vision—here both her literal sight and her mind's eye—slowly grows "dim."<sup>320</sup> The "tender mountain blossom" cannot be saved from the "lonesome stranger's grave" (51-52).

Mary dies as a result of her geographic displacement; she is "dying in the city, 'mid the noise, the smoke, and gloom" (15). In a reversal of the historical migration

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To be sure, Alice spoke, and sang during her waking moments, like the child she deemed herself; but so happily with the dearly-loved ones around her, with the scent of the heather, and the song of the wild bird hovering in her imagination—with old scraps of ballads, or snatches of primitive versions of the Psalms (such as are sung in country churches half draped over with ivy, and where the running brook, or the murmuring wind among the trees makes fit accompaniment to the chorus of human voices uttering praise and thanks-giving to their God)—that the speech and the song gave comfort and good cheer to the listener's heart [...] Alice looked perfectly quiet and happy in her slumber, and her face seemed to have become much more youthful during her painless approach of death. (340-41)

<sup>320</sup> See G. Sheridan Nussey in "Happy Land," "The rose from the cheeks of thy maidens hath vanish'd! / They wither like lillies – as lovely and pale!" Work is represented as "damaging to working-class women's health, thereby making Chartist poetry consistent with one of the key ideological themes in the discussions over working-class women's labour" (Sanders, *Poetry of Chartism* 163).

pattern, in which Irish families emigrated to England with the hope of escaping starvation, Mary's move from Ireland to England is in fact responsible for her death. The final lines, spoken by Mary's mother, draw the reader's eye to the contrast between city and country, England and Ireland:

They will lay you in the city, where the wild-flowers never spring,  
They will lay you in the city, where the wild-birds never sing;  
They will lay you, oh, my darling! in the darkness, lying low  
Where the mountain-breeze you loved so well, can never, never blow[.]

(53-56)

The anaphora of "They will lay you in the city" emphasizes the finality of Mary's death. Forrester's *polyptoton* of "lay" also strips Mary of her agency. In Ireland she could "love," but now she is merely an immovable object to be acted upon. Thus Forrester repositions Ireland as an Edenic centre of light, music and beauty, community, and human interaction, and marginalises England, recasting it as a place of "darkness," noise, dirt and isolation, which renders its inhabitants "strangers."

"Strangers in the City" speaks to the regenerative possibilities of Ireland set against the pallor of English urban industrialism. In this poem, Forrester rewrites the famine-tale by depicting England, not Ireland, as the place of starvation and suffering. I would argue that this is both a literary and ideological gesture.<sup>321</sup> Forrester participates in this redefinition, infusing Ireland with the power of nature.

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<sup>321</sup> Seamus Deane writes,

the physical landscape of Ireland is regularly redefined throughout the nineteenth century—administratively, cartographically, politically, culturally, economically, constitutionally—by competing groups, all of which seek to make it conform to a paradigm in terms of which it can successfully be represented as a specific place, indeed, but also as a locus for various forms of ideological investment. (Deane 119)

However, the ending is also ambivalent in its politics. The poem turns inward to the mother's anguish in the final lines. That the mother is the final image, rather than the Irish homeland, is an indication that that even the promise of Ireland is crushed under the weight of the city and its dehumanizing, destructive effects. Forrester's reliance upon the conventional "death-bed scene" could be merely dismissed as emotional hyperbole, but through her creation of pathos, Forrester participates in a literary tradition that relied on reader sympathy to tell her tale of post-famine Irish immigrants and their plight.<sup>322</sup> As Brian Maidment has noted, "[p]oetry is never a transparent or unmediated statement of political belief" (100). But it certainly seems that Forrester is commenting upon, and lamenting, the fate of the Irish impoverished classes in the English city: to be homeless, to toil, and to die.

*"The Lowly Bard"*

As an extension of the city-country divide that we find in "Strangers in the City," Forrester's "The Lowly Bard" imagines a situation in which poetic inspiration is enervated by the urban landscape—a landscape in which the poet-hero cannot survive. The poem turns upon a series of contrasts and revisions of the pastoral world

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<sup>322</sup> The end of "Dying in the City" follows a literary convention of the death-bed scene. For example, see Helen's death in Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *Helen Fleetwood*: "A bright fire and a good-sized candle threw their mingled light upon her bent and emaciated but still graceful figure; and the total absence of colour from her cheek, when the hectic of pleasure faded, the apparent enlargement of the sparkling eye, and the swell of the pallid lip, all opened to him at one glance a page in her history that shewed how nearly the brief tale was ended" (422). Tonna's description of Helen is intended to produce reader sympathy: "Helen did not die in the mill: but her last seizure took place there [...] Short, but severe, were her sufferings; and in a few days a rough shell enclosed her wasted remains, which were laid beside those of Sarah Wright" (444). Jeremiah John Callanan also used a death-bed scene in his "Lines, On the Death of an amiable and highly talented Young Man, who fell a victim to fever in the West Indies." In his poem, the man who dies has, like Mary, been ripped from his "own native Isle" (26). See chapter eight "Passing On: Death" in Herbert Tucker's *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* (111-12).

of music and laughter, drawing attention to the polluting influence of the city, portraying the industrial landscape as a place of dis(ease) and disharmony. Unlike the “poet” poems of “Marie,” and “Hutton,” Forrester’s bard is not to be celebrated, but pitied. Of the poetic apostrophes that I note in chapter one, only Forrester’s poem depicts a poet who is gradually stripped of his ability because of his location in the city.<sup>323</sup>

The bard is representative of the artist in society, his music representative of artistic output: the poet “mourns the incompleteness of his lyre” because the song itself is never completed before his death (8). The lyre is incomplete because the Bard only ever *tunes* it (indicated by the repetition of “He tunes his lyre” at the beginning of stanza one, two, six eight and ten); never in the poem does he succeed in producing a full melody. The implication here is that the city does not allow full poetic output. The artist can make only vague attempts at the creation of art when he is in the urban landscape.

The first indication in this poem that art is desecrated by the city occurs at the level of sound. The music of the lyre—like the music of the children in “Little Singers,” and of Ireland in “Strangers in the City”—is drowned out by “busy wheels” that are “grinding” (9), and an “engine” that “booms like angry thunder” (19). The Bard “tunes his lyre,” “where busy wheels are grinding,” “in sickly court and alley” (41), and in “the garret lonely,” locations that are indicative of the isolation of the urban space Forrester describes (57). The poem, which is written in roughly iambic pentameter,

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<sup>323</sup> While a comparison of working-class women’s “poetic apostrophe” poems, including those written by Hutton, “Marie,” Hamilton, and Langton, unfortunately falls outside the scope of this study, their connections warrant further careful analysis at a future date.

carries a jolting cadence: the first, third, fifth, and seventh line of each eight line stanza has a feminine ending—for example, in the final lines of the first stanza, when Forrester describes the poet “Who tells the world in many a mournful number / He mourns the incompleteness of his lyre” (7-8). This final syllable in lines one, three, five, and seven throws off the metrical symmetry of the iambic pentameter, abab cdcd efef rhyme scheme, mirroring the “incompleteness” of the Bard’s song (8).

Stanza four stands as a microcosm for the way the poem functions as a whole; the lines parallel the forward motion of the poem, in which the heroically brave but powerless working-class artist rushes forward to the (inevitable) destruction of his art. This stanza is particularly important because it registers working-class women’s unceasing drudgery through the use of labour metaphors:

Toil, toil to-day, and toil again tomorrow:

Some weave their warp to reach a pauper grave!

Nought of romance doth gild their *common* sorrow;

Yet ne’er were heroines more strong, more brave[.] (25-28)

Unlike “Marie,” who weaves the warp of hopeful poetry, these women manufacture their demise. Each line in the stanza is carefully balanced. The triple repetition of the word “toil” at the beginning of the stanza multiplies the effect of the monotonous work of industry. The second line of the stanza combines the “weave” and the “warp” of textile manufacture, setting the rhythm of these two actions into a cause-and-effect relationship with the “pauper grave” (26). The third line of the stanza contrasts the world of “romance” with the sorrow of the “common” people, and the rhyming of “brave” and “grave” highlights the inevitability of death for the brave but powerless



female factory worker. Forrester's choice of the word "gild" links the carefully placed verb with romance and the common people through a distinctly monetary metaphor.

Forrester's poem turns on a series of conjunctions that contrast the elevated pastoral world with the common people. She depicts the city as a place of sickness, and positions the Bard at the centre of that sickness. He is the fulcrum—situated between life and death—and he is the isolated figure who stands between the pastoral and the urban. He represents both hope and loss, and his presence interlaces the living and the dead, through both images of the people around him and his music. In stanza three, for example, the children who "fling their treasures at the rhymester's feet" are replaced by the "Spindle and bobbin" of the factory (16, 21), and the image of the "grasses" is replaced by the "dusty mill" (15, 12). The factory girls who are aligned with the pastoral because they are "like frail flowers o'er stagnant waters droop," effect a conflation of the (metaphorical) death of the female workers and the literal death of the Bard in the infertile and barren industrial world (15, 24). Zlotnick suggests that

[a]lthough Forrester wishes to make heroines out of mill hands, she knows that they are not conventionally heroic, and the tension between the poetic language of Victorian femininity and the prosaic reality of her female operatives threatens the poem's intelligibility. (*Industrial* 214)

Furthermore, while she attempts to "make heroines out of mill girls," Forrester only succeeds in making them into sympathetic creatures.

The nostalgia for the pastoral runs throughout the poem and is invoked in Forrester's descriptions of working-class women.<sup>324</sup> The seamstress, whose "crystal

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<sup>324</sup> Zlotnick links the "politics of nostalgia" to the "ideology of domesticity" (192).

tears are dripping / O'er the dead bouquet on her window sill—" (49-50), "tenderly" recalls the "perfume" of the flowers that now lie dead (53, 54). In this description, Forrester conjoins the seamstress's "hallowed tears" with the "withered leaves" of the bouquet, both of which are "falling" (55). She further associates the seamstress with flowers in the final line of this stanza, with the use of the word "fade," a word connotative of a withering flower *and* a loss of human power (56). So, if the Bard is representative of the artist, and his music of art, then the seamstress is representative of nature, and her flowers of the natural world. The artist, art, nature, and the natural world are each rendered ineffectual, fading away within the landscape of the city.

Forrester finds only one cure for the effects of the city: death and the subsequent peace enjoyed in the afterlife. She apotheosises the Bard, lifting him up as a hero of the working class. And yet as a hero of the pastoral world, he cannot survive in the city; he is "a hero that lies still and dead" (72). The final lines of the poem remove the poet from the isolation of the city; the final tuning of his lyre takes place in a "humble chapel" (73). While the Bard's physical body lies dead, he is apotheosized—his lyre receives "benedictions" from "angel forms" (75-76), and God grants him an "*eternal crown*" in the final lines of the poem (80). The end of the poem fades into a process of religious transformation that removes the artist from the enervating effects of industrialism and grants the power of art to live on. Thus the poem is political in its depiction of industrialism's destruction of art. Forrester's social critique lies in her sympathetic portrayal of the dehumanizing effects of industrialism, which destroy the

female worker, and the male poet.<sup>325</sup>

### *Conclusion*

There is evidence to suggest that Forrester's life was not particularly happy and that she wove this unhappiness into her poetry.<sup>326</sup> In her application to the Royal Literary Fund, Fanny's mother, Ellen, wrote of her daughter's latter years: "[s]he now writes only long melancholy poems that the magazines won't have" (qtd. in Boos, *Anthology* 239). The obituary printed in the *Manchester City Times*<sup>327</sup> after Forrester's death in 1889 supports this belief: "[h]er life was not a happy one—a constant fight with poverty and sorrow; such a hard fight, that I am sure she was not sorry to give it up. Her death was sad and sudden" (243). In "Mother, I Come," we see how Forrester's own sense of loss coalesces and is shaped. Boos has noted the "pervasive sense of failed hopes and disappointed poetic ambitions" that tinges Forrester's verse (*Anthology* 242). "Mother, I Come" follows the female poet's growth from innocence to experience, and displays her sense of the world as a dark and dreary place.<sup>328</sup> The speaker simultaneously invites both her mother and the reader to gaze upon her broken figure:

Look at me now, all travel-stained and weary,

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<sup>325</sup> In analysing this poem, I have not taken into account the gendering of Forrester's bard, but this is indeed an important aspect of the poem, and should be more carefully considered in another study.

<sup>326</sup> Maidment observes that throughout Forrester's verse there is a "sense of the poet as an angry, lonely, and solitary figure, oppressed by the moral and social failings of a wicked world, and haunted by the fear that poetry was not enough of a counterdemanding influence" (98).

<sup>327</sup> Boos is the first critic to draw our attention to this obituary, which she quotes in her *Anthology* 243).

<sup>328</sup> Boos suggests that we can read this poem within the "bleak eloquence of autobiographical utterance" (*Anthology* 243).

Shadows of anguish round my dying eyes;  
I sought the world, and found it cold and dreary;  
E'en youth seems vanished—I have grown so wise. (5-8)

The poet describes herself as “worn out and sorrow-laden— / The dews of death on [her] dishevelled hair—,” and she tells her mother (and her readership, presumably), that “I sought for fame, and found it base and hollow! / I sought for wealth, and found it nought but dross!” (17-18, 21-22). Like many of Forrester’s poems, “Mother, I Come,” depicts individual isolation. In the final stanza, the poet states, “In all this desert world no friend have I— / All, all are gone! and I am yearning only / To lay my head upon thy breast and die” (34-36). However, she finds final solace with her mother, who figures in the poem as the final consolation. Thus Forrester once again invokes feminine sympathy as the only palliative for the careworn and weary.

Forrester’s strengths as a writer lie in the poetic community that formed around her in *Ben Brierley’s Journal*, her argument for the place of music and song in industrial society, her use of religion as a palliative for the working classes, and her engagement with the discourse of nation, particularly in relation to poetic representations of Ireland and Irish immigrants in Manchester in the middle of the nineteenth century. Through each of these branches of her verse (communities, music, religion and nation), Forrester ties the political to the regional and the national, placing Manchester at the centre of urban dis(ease). Formally, Forrester works within the ballad tradition to strengthen the politics of her poetry. Her pastoral and religious metaphors prove to be the *only* way to reconcile the worker to the industrial landscape; these tropes do not have the power necessary to lift Forrester out

of her own historical moment. The tension between poetic subjectivity and social problems is immediately apparent in her poetry. Forrester's literary labours indicate the ways in which a working-class woman could write herself into nineteenth-century political discourses through poetry, and her verse remains a poignant example of a working-class woman's heartfelt unease at inhabiting a modern industrial city.

CHAPTER SEVEN. "I CANNOT SPEAK LIKE SCIENTIFIC MEN": THE FORMS OF ELLEN  
JOHNSTON'S POETIC SUBJECTIVITIES.

I cannot speak like scientific men  
Whom literature gives colour to their pen,  
Who clothe their genius in that golden robe  
Wrought by learning, and not by nature's God.

- Ellen Johnston, "An Address to Napiers' Dockyard" (1867)

Throughout this study, I argue that working-class women poets are involved in an interweaving of various metaphors of labour and that they use them to legitimize their role in public politics. Such metaphors include the use of natural and pastoral imagery as a means of critiquing oppressive forms of manual labour (F. Saunderson, Mary Hutton, Fanny Forrester), as well as the "natural" intertwining of physical, intellectual, and literary labours (E.H., Eliza Cook, "Marie," the "factory girls," the women of *The Pioneer*, Fanny Forrester). In this chapter I turn to Ellen Johnston, whose poetry shows that working-class poetic identities are not monolithic, and that they can exist simultaneously and in contradiction with each other. Johnston actively constructs oppositional subjectivities through her autobiography and poetry: one that is permeated by a melancholy sense of longing for a better life, and one that embraces factory work in an attempt to transcend this melancholy. Ellen Johnston's literary subjectivities seek to find a place for a working-class woman in a world of strict gender and class mores. The mechanism through which she attempts to address her status as a fallen woman, then, is interlaced with her desire to produce poetry and with the

realities of her life as a factory girl;<sup>329</sup> thus, her “labours” are threefold: maternal, physical, and literary.

In this chapter I will pay particular attention to the ways in which Johnston shapes a poetic identity through her complex relationship with gender and class, and argue that her poetry is “dialogic,” to use Bakhtin’s term. My reading of Johnston’s subjectivities follows what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson call the “second wave” autobiography critics, who see “[l]ife narrative [...] as a process through which a narrator struggles to shape an ‘identity’ out of an amorphous experience of subjectivity” (Smith 125). This reading provides a productive way to tease out the complex narrative of Johnston’s life, an identity that shifts with the generic change from her prose autobiography to the poetic speakers in her (ostensibly autobiographical) “Address” poems: “An Address to Nature on its Cruelty” and “An Address to Napier’s Dockyard.”

Johnston found a way to publish despite the barriers that often made it difficult for working-class authors to appear in print. She first began publishing in the Glasgow *Penny Post*, and later published a collection of poems, the *Autobiography, Poems and Songs of Ellen Johnston* (1867). In his full-length “bio-critical” study of Johnston, Klaus notes that “most of [Johnston’s] working-class sisters never crossed the threshold from

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<sup>329</sup> Johnston (1835–1874?) is the only working-class woman poet who is known to have worked her entire life in a factory (Boos, Anthology 195). She was born in Glasgow, and worked in the cotton-mill industry as a power-loom weaver for over twenty-three years. Both of her editions begin with an autobiographical sketch; we learn that Johnston was born at the Muir Wynd, Hamilton, Lanarkshire, the only daughter of James Johnston, a stonemason, and Mary Bilsland, the daughter of a Glasgow dyer. When she was around seven months old, her father emigrated to America, and apparently died a year later. Ellen’s mother re-married, and they moved to a house near Cross Keys Tavern in Glasgow. See Boos’s Anthology (196).

periodical to book publication” (20).<sup>330</sup> Perhaps the variable that played most to her favour in this regard was the financial support she earned from a literary admirer. Like Hutton, who flourished under the editorial guidance of John Holland, and Forrester, who found a place in *Ben Brierley’s Journal*, Johnston also relied upon a literary patron. Without the help of Alexander Campbell (the editor of the *Penny Post*, a former joiner, and a staunch Owenite), Johnston may never have published at all. Boos writes that “[w]orking class women poets needed the most rudimentary forms of patronage even more than their brothers did” (25). She describes how Campbell ensured that “[e]very reader of the *Penny Post* was reminded that the pioneering appearance of Johnston’s *Poems* would be a triumph for this hero of their own class and a ‘gifted daughter of toil’” (201).

#### *Plurality, Politics, Personae, and Poetry*

In chapter five, I discussed how writers and society at large saw the female factory worker as an aberrant female figure, and showed how two “factory girl” poets resisted these representations through a singular identity that placed literary labour over manual labour. By contrast, Johnston creates *multiple* subjectivities within the term “The Factory Girl,” in an attempt to resist Victorian monolithic delineations of class, genre, and gender. Her poetic (and personal) power derives not from any one identity, but instead her ability to construct numerous literary subjectivities that do

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<sup>330</sup> Boos has recovered a substantial number of collections of working-class women’s poetry (see Appendix A), but most working-class women poets at the very least began their poetic careers through publication in the periodical press. The discussion of book versus periodical publication is a productive one, but unfortunately does not fall within the scope of this study. It is, nonetheless, another facet of working-class poetry that begs further research and critical attention.



not neatly fit within any one category. As Pam Morris observes, the dialogic quality of literature also produces “the capacity to challenge the dominant voice or voices” (31).<sup>331</sup> I am arguing that Johnston, in other words, uses this plurality as a means of social and political protest.

I have asserted throughout this study that the working-class woman poet weaves literature and labour together such that the labourer (poet) cannot be separated from the products of her labour (poetry). Just as we cannot separate working-class politics and poetry, we cannot read Johnston’s autobiography or poetry in isolation. Johnston’s *Autobiography, Poems and Songs* is a multi-generic text; it is neither simply an autobiography nor a poetry collection; the collection is inherently hybrid, and, thus, inherently political in both form and content. Her use of such a hybrid form challenges categorization. The ambivalences, fissures, and various forms of doubleness in her identities manifest themselves more directly in her prose autobiography, and thus the autobiography section is critical to understanding the complex subjectivities at play in the poetry.

### *Johnston, Politics, and Gender*

Johnston’s prose autobiography in fact engages with gender discourses and Victorian notions of femininity, but through a method of strategic displacement. This is most clearly evidenced in her “factory poems,” which negotiate a particular identity

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<sup>331</sup> Bakhtin theorizes how meaning is shaped by a “multiplicity of social voices” in relation to the novel (263). The relevance of the semantics of the “dialogic” to working-class women’s poetry becomes quite clear when we analyse Ellen Johnston’s literary output when we read together the multi-generic and multi-voiced forms of her autobiography and poetry. Morris provides a useful summary of Bakhtin’s theories in chapter two of her monograph, *The Realist Novel* (31).

based around both her class and profession. Critical commentary is split on how to locate Johnston within already established social categories. Boos, for example, has situated Johnston within a tradition of working-class women writers who were “firmly reformist, class-identified, and concerned with the special heroisms and problems of working women” (“Cauld Engle-Cheek” 53).<sup>332</sup> Similarly to Boos, Rosen picks up on Johnston’s plurality, writing that “Johnston claimed the right to voice both private emotion and social critique,” and suggests that reading Johnston’s poetry “will help critics to define less monolithically the ideological force of such concepts as poetic authority, publicness, and female respectability that have been held so harmful to working women’s literary expression” (208). Rosen reads a “strategic affirmation” in Johnston’s work, and argues that Johnston “creates poetic personae that negotiate the often conflicting demands of her gender, her class, and her craft” (207-08). By examining her “double position as a representative voice and distinctive talent” (219), Rosen proposes that

[b]y constituting herself as a heroine, Johnston lays claim to an imaginative life unfettered by class or gender constraints, even as she remains pointedly

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<sup>332</sup> In her article “Cauld Engle-Cheek: Working-Class Women Poets in Victorian Scotland,” Boos also places Jessie Russell and Janet Hamilton within this tradition. She argues that working-class Scottish women poets desired to “contribute something persuasive and emotionally compelling to common traditions of national poetry, literary self-improvement, and social solidarity of all sorts, in appallingly bitter times” (“Cauld Engle-Cheek” 54). Notably, in “Nurs’d Up Amongst the Scenes I Have Describ’d: Political Resonances in the Poetry of Working-Class Women,” Boos categorizes Johnston’s poetry under “Explicitly Political Works” (140-41). In an earlier essay, she writes that Johnston’s “reflections and poems expressed a strong sense of integrity and pride in her ability to adapt to difficult circumstances,” and notes that her poems “also created and took explicit pride in an individual poetic persona, who enjoyed her roles as epistolary friend and subject of romance, and celebrated her poetic impulses and audience” (60). Boos concludes that “Johnston was above all defensively and defiantly conscious that her publications were remarkable simply by virtue of their existence” (“Cauld Engle-Cheek” 60). Boos notes that she has located roughly three-dozen Scottish working-class poets who published at least one full volume of poetry (55). See Susanne Kord for the pre-history of this Victorian phenomenon.

conscious of her position as a working-class woman and the limitations that position imposes. (213)

Boos and Rosen allow for multiple poetic “roles” and the possibility of multiple “poetic personae.” In contrast, Susan Zlotnick reads Johnston in relation to Forrester, and contends that Johnston “glories in her identity as an outcast from the world of Victorian domesticity, a fallen woman who panegyricizes her status as a single mother and takes delight in her life in the mills” (174). Zlotnick firmly states that the ideology of separate spheres barred women from participating publicly in written self-expression.

I do not think that Johnston solely “glories in her identity as an outcast,” as Zlotnick suggests. Rather, I aim to show that this last reading, while productive, attends to merely one side of her “Janus-faced” poetry. To be more specific, I will build upon Rosen’s assertion that Johnston’s “imaginative life” was “unfettered” by either class or gender.<sup>333</sup> I want to suggest that Johnston’s poetry breaks the boundaries of these crystallized “separate” spheres, and that her poetic self-expression negotiates conflicting representations of gender.

In reading Johnston’s text as an autobiography, I wish to follow Regenia Gagnier’s methodology; she “tak[es] language as realist, not in the sense of metaphysical realism, direct isomorphism with reality [...] but realist in the sense of projecting objectively real articulations of power in particular communities” (“Literary Standard” 266). Gagnier argues that “[l]ike reading itself, writing is a function of specific and community interactions” (“Literary Standard” 266), and that “gender

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<sup>333</sup> See chapter five for a discussion of the two “factory girl” poets who use poetry to transcend their factory labours.

operates as a cultural narrative” in autobiographies (“Literary Standard” 269). And indeed, many of these “interactions” occur in childhood and become the foundation of adult identity.<sup>334</sup> At the very beginning of her *Autobiography*, Johnston tells her reader,

whatever my actions may have been, whether good, bad, or indifferent,—they were the results of instincts derived from the Creator, through the medium of my parents, and the character formed from me by the unavoidable influence of the TIME and COUNTRY of my BIRTH, and also by the varied conditions of life impressing themselves on my highly susceptible and sympathetic natures—physical, intellectual, and moral. (Simmons 303)

Her text is an autobiographical *bildungsroman*; however, Johnston also exudes self-confidence, and conveys a strong sense of her “proper place” in society as a poet of the people.<sup>335</sup>

Johnston presents herself as someone whose “social experience” is unique—physically, intellectually, and morally. She writes, “[i]t is the favour and fame of the poetic gift bestowed on me by nature’s God that has brought on me the envy of the ignorant, for the enlightened classes of both sexes of factory workers love and admire me for my humble poetic effusions” (Simmons 314). She observes how the poems she published in the *Penny Post* “seemed to cast a mystic spell over many of [her] readers whose numerous letters reached me from various districts, highly applauding my contributions, and offering me their sympathy, friendship, and love” (Simmons 314).

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<sup>334</sup> See Vincent, for example, who writes that many working-class male “autobiographers’ treatment of their own childhood was conditioned by a general acceptance of the Wordsworthian view of the impact of childhood on the formation of adult personality” (44).

<sup>335</sup> Vincent maintains that “autobiographies can be seen as projecting a pencil light into the darkness of the unspoken memories of men and women whose lives were conditioned by the same social experience” (7).

### *Autobiographical Identities*

Johnston's is arguably the most famous female working-class autobiography; however, nineteenth-century working-class women's life-writing is still in the process of being recovered and studied.<sup>336</sup> In her autobiography, Johnston develops the persona who would come to be known as "the Factory Girl" by expounding on a life of hardship and sadness, filtering them through gothic tropes that are associated with eighteenth-century sensibility.<sup>337</sup> But like the "factory girls" of chapter five, she also writes herself out of a purely sympathetic depiction through a carefully constructed literary identity and her legitimization of maternal (productive) labour.<sup>338</sup> Johnston's autobiography speaks of loss and sadness, and many of her poems continue in this register. However, a number of her poems forgo this sense of longing to treat issues of poetic inspiration, indicating a "revealing, highly fraught site of Victorian working-class women's expression" (Rosen 207). I wish to show that Johnston uses the same metaphors to authorize her poetry as she does to carve out a space for herself in Victorian middle-class domestic space in her autobiography.

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<sup>336</sup> To explain why other writers in this genre have been difficult to bring to the fore, Vincent asserts that there is an "absence among women of the self-confidence required to undertake the unusual act of writing an autobiography, and in particular from the increasing exclusion of women from most forms of the working[-] class organizations" (8). Of the one hundred and forty-two autobiographies Vincent catalogues (2), a sparse few are female-authored. Johnston is not even included in the list. Vincent does include Catherine Horne, a cotton weaver, Janet Bathgate, a domestic servant, Mrs Burrows, a Fen child worker, Elspeth Clark, a 97 year old widow, Lucy Luck, straw plait-worker, and Mary Smith, a servant and later a teacher (8). Kelly Mays's 2008 article, "Domestic Spaces, Readerly Acts: Reading(,) Gender, and *Class in Working-Class Autobiography*," discusses a number of working-class women autobiographers including Janet Hamilton, Marianne Farningham [Hearn], and Elizabeth Andrews.

<sup>337</sup> I discuss sensibility and sympathy in detail in chapter five.

<sup>338</sup> Rosen has noted her autobiographical "subjectivity" is "produced almost exclusively in the literary" (213).

Johnston uses her self-proclaimed title, “The Factory Girl,” self-consciously, and suggests that she has a natural talent for writing. In his discussion of the “Rhetorical Strategies” of labouring-class poets, Goodridge draws attention to the fact that “[o]n her title page [Johnston] is billed as ‘The Factory Girl’—the capital letters and definite article suggesting that she is both claiming unique title to the soubriquet and using her occupation as a badge of poetic integrity” (543). Johnston also suggests that her literary gifts enabled her auto-didacticism; she tells her readers, “I was a self-taught scholar, gifted with a considerable amount of natural knowledge for one of my years, for I had only been nine months at school when I could read the English language and Scottish dialect with almost any classic scholar” (307). Here, Johnston subverts the common notion of a “classic,” or leading, scholar—instead of reading standard (upper-class) texts in Greek and Latin, she reads (working-class) texts in English and Scottish. This subversion gives further weight to her position as a poet of the “people,” and thus she depicts a particularly class-conscious type of self-learning; she eschews the languages of the upper classes in favour of popular texts.

Secondly, she tells her readers that she is a being “formed by nature for romance and mystery,” and that “[b]efore thirteen years of age I had read many of Sir Walter Scott’s novels and fancied I was a heroine of the modern style” (Simmons 307). Her choice of Scottish dialect<sup>339</sup> participates in a rewriting of “classic” learning to include Scott and Burns, the two biggest influences on her literary identity and poetic output.<sup>340</sup> Simmons notes that Johnston’s “sketch” of her life is “[t]horoughly

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<sup>339</sup> But not Scots Gaelic, notably.

<sup>340</sup> Andrew Hook writes that “Scottish literary romanticism, with its roots firmly in the eighteenth century produced those images, which, for better or worse, continue to provide Scotland with a

dependent on the interpenetration of fact and fiction,” and that she “cannot even begin to imagine her own experience, either in the living or the telling of it, unless she uses the terms offered her by the romantic novels of Elizabeth Helme and Sir Walter Scott” (33). We can see the influence of Scott when we compare his description of Flora in *Waverley*:

She was highly accomplished, and had acquired those elegant manners to be expected from one who, in early youth, had been the companion of a princess; yet she had not learned to substitute the gloss of politeness for the reality of feeling. When settled in the lonely regions of Glennaquoich, she found that her resources in French, English, and Italian literature, were likely to be few and interrupted; and, in order to full up her vacant time, she bestowed a part of it upon the music and poetical traditions of the Highlanders, and began to really feel that pleasure in the pursuit, which her brother, whose perceptions of literary merit were more blunt, rather affected for the sake of popularity than actually experienced [...]. While almost a girl, she had undergone the most complete change of scene, from gaiety and splendour to absolute solitude and comparative poverty. (Scott 101-02)

The parallels are clear: Johnston tells her reader that she “had a flow of poetic language and powerful voice” (Simmons 307). She also shares the fall from the “joyous

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meaning and identity for the outside world. [...] Romantic images of Scotland, and the mythology they helped to create, that is, began life as necessary fictions: imaginative attempts to order and interpret historical realities” (307). See also Lunan.

hours” of her childhood to solitude and poverty (Simmons 306), which in her case results from her apprenticeship as a power-loom weaver.<sup>341</sup>

While Neff has argued that for middle-class writers, “[t]he factory girl lacked all the qualifications for the ideal heroine” (86),<sup>342</sup> Johnston consciously depicts herself as the protagonist of a romantic novel. In the opening of her text, she declares “[y]es, gentle reader, I have suffered trials and wrongs that have but rarely fallen to the lot of woman. Mine were not the common trials of every day life, but like those strange romantic ordeals attributed to the imaginary heroines of ‘Inglewood Forest’” (Simmons 305): a likely reference to Elizabeth Helme’s *The Farmer of Inglewood Forest* (1796) and one that she removed in the second edition of her *Autobiography*.<sup>343</sup> She also aligns herself with Rasselas, Samuel Johnson’s anti-hero, telling her readers,

[I]ike Rassellas [*sic*], there was a dark history engraven on the tablet of my heart. Yes, dear reader, a dark shadow, as a pall, enshrouded my soul, shutting out life’s gay sunshine from my bosom—a shadow which has haunted me like a vampire, but at least for the present must remain the mystery of my life. (Simmons 306)

The use of gothic tropes to express her identity—her “dark history,” her soul is “enshrouded” in “mystery,” her “haunted” flight from a vampyric “shadow”—dispels the image of her happy childhood.<sup>344</sup> We can categorize Johnston’s work in a number

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<sup>341</sup> Flora’s brother, Fergus, describes her as “an eminent translator of Highland poetry” (Scott 102). See also Flora’s discussion with Waverley regarding Celtic poetry (103-04). Gagnier has also suggested that Johnston’s autobiography is “melodramatically modelled on Walter Scott” (*Subjectivities* 53).

<sup>342</sup> See my discussion in chapter five on the representation of the female factory worker in middle-class literature.

<sup>343</sup> Simmons notes that she may have removed this allusion because it openly references sexuality (305).

<sup>344</sup> Diane Long Hoeveler argues that it was Ann Radcliffe who created the “potent, primal versions of the female gothic,” a conventional narrative in which “a persecuted heroine trapped in a



of ways, recognizing here her engagement with the tradition Diane Hoeveler calls “victim feminism,” or “gothic feminism,” that is, “the contemporary antifeminist notion that women earn their superior social and moral rights in society by positioning themselves as innocent victims of a corrupt tyrant and an oppressive patriarchal society” (2).

Given the subversive nature of the feminine gothic, both in terms of the political approach Hoeveler notes and in terms of its aesthetic hybridity as a genre (being at once lyric in nature while adopting prose form), we must ask: What are the effects of Johnston’s renegotiation of her gendered subjectivity through the gothic? The tyrant patriarch in Johnston’s narrative is her stepfather, whom she describes as her “tormentor” (Simmons 307). She writes that she was about ten or eleven when her stepfather took her to the factory to learn the skills of a power-loom weaver because he “could not bear to see [her] longer basking in the sunshine of freedom” (Simmons 307). But it is her use of the word “vampire” that seems to suggest a sexual threat<sup>345</sup> on top of a social and financial one.<sup>346</sup> I follow Hoeveler in her suggestion that female

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crumbling castle diffused with manic oedipal anxieties and assaulted by the forces of socioeconomic power [...] run amok” (1). Hoeveler asserts that “white, bourgeois women writers have not simply been passive victims of male-created constructions but rather have constructed themselves as victims in their own literature” (4).

<sup>345</sup> See Heller.

<sup>346</sup> Boos notes that Johnston uses “carefully guarded terms” to describe what I would argue was most likely sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather (*Anthology* 196). Johnston writes, “no language can paint the sufferings which I afterwards endured from my tormentor” and tells her audience that she even attempted suicide in order to escape him (Simmons 307). Given the inherent sexuality in the gothic, it seems only fitting that Johnston would use this literary mode to discuss that which could not be discussed. Hoeveler’s argument would seem to support this reading; she argues that

[t]he valorization of the private, extrapolitical aspects of the female gothic novel suggests that women writers conspired with their culture to position women securely within the home, propping up the edifice of the patriarchal family and insuring its continuance through the fetishization of virginity and marital chastity. But at the same time (melo)dramatic and hyperbolic eruptions continue to be depicted in these fictions—wanton sexuality, adultery,

gothicists' "work chart[s] in increasingly graphic detail the shift from status and class based on blood claims to the superior form of class—the regulation, control, and professionalization of one's sexuality, one's body" (21). Could Johnston, then, be consciously (or unconsciously) illuminating the tension between bourgeois normativity and working-class sexual aberration? Does her use of the gothic suggest that she identifies with a particularly middle-class subjectivity, and that she places herself within a bourgeois feminine sphere that is threatened by overt male sexuality? Zlotnick writes that Johnston's poetry "painfully reveals the essentially fictional nature of the working-class domestic ideal"; I suggest that Johnston was attempting to create a new ideal that both clung to middle-class femininity and actively sought to reshape it (222).

While Johnston uses the gothic literary mode to cast herself as a heroine, she also uses it to describe herself in a diction of romantic sensibility.<sup>347</sup> Through Johnston's autobiography, we learn that her young-adult life was filled with pain and misery, and that she was clearly unhappy. She speaks of at least one suicide attempt (308), and hints towards molestation and abuse by her stepfather, telling readers: "I had run away five times from my tormentor" (309). She also writes that she was betrayed by her "heart's first love" (309).

Each of these incidents is a formative influence on the adult Johnston, and this sense of herself as a "sympathetic" creature is a direct result of those informing factors.

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murder, and mayhem—all of which figure a political import that is subversive or ambivalent at the very least. (5)

<sup>347</sup> Grace Kehler traces the role of the gothic in Victorian reform treatises, stating that figures in the literary genre typically show themselves to be receptive to external stimuli and expressive of the impact left on them by culture and nature. Not to be confused with mere passivity, the emotional and physical susceptibility of figures in the gothic also attests to the inherently relational quality of identity. (437)

Kehler argues that the gothic “achieves its unsettling effects by highlighting both the vulnerability of the self to the world and the obstreperousness of the sensations at work in the individual” (Kehler 437). Johnston uses the “sensations” to actively create “emotive” literary identities that are saturated by a melancholy sense of love, longing, and loss.<sup>348</sup> She uses a diction of sensibility in her self-descriptions, telling her readers, “I am naturally of a warm-hearted and affectionate disposition, always willing, to the extent of my power, to serve my fellow creatures,” and that “[a]ll my wrongs have been suffered in silence and wept over in secret” (313). She uses this same sentimental diction in her description of the death of her dog “Dainty Davie [...] for whose loss I deeply mourned, and for three successive nights wept myself asleep, for ‘Dainty Davie’ was the pride of my heart, for I could not live without something to love, and I loved before I knew the name of the nature or feeling which swelled my bosom” (305).<sup>349</sup> So many of the poems in her volume deal explicitly with the loss of friends or her perfidious lover.<sup>350</sup> That Johnston felt a dreadful sense of loss early in her life becomes quickly apparent in her expression of that loss in both the autobiography and her poetry.

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<sup>348</sup> Cf. my discussion in chapter six of Forrester’s use of similar diction.

<sup>349</sup> By naming her dog “Dainty Davie,” a reference to Burns’ 1793 “Dainty Davie,” Johnston is gesturing to Burns as a poetic forefather, in another clear reference to herself as a romantic heroine straight out of Scottish literary tradition. As Lunan observes, radical and working-class poets, “[a]s ‘outsiders’ to the literary establishment, [...] sought to endorse their poetic credentials by an intertextual use of Burns. In this sense, Burns instils the poetry with his literary authority. But more important that this, their invocation of the Burnsian oeuvre allowed for an ideological allegiance with the values that Burns, as icon, is understood to represent” (19).

<sup>350</sup> They are too numerous to include here, but some of the most permeated with this sense of longing are “An Appeal,” “Farewell,” “The Broken Heart,” and “Lines to a Lovely Youth, A Boatbuilder Leaving the Town.” While these are not necessarily autobiographical, they are written in first person and thus serve as examples of Johnston’s literary persona.

Johnston uses this emotional diction specifically in her autobiography to describe other aspects of her life. In the first edition of the *Autobiography*, she writes of the daughter she bore in adolescence, Mary Achenvole. The father was a fellow factory-poet who promised marriage but left the country instead. A number of her poems recount the tale of his betrayal. She also explicitly references that Mary was borne out of wedlock, but registers her description of in sentimental terms, drawing on the middle-class idealization of motherhood. Affirming that the emotional fervour with which she loves her daughter outweighs Mary's illegitimate birth, she writes,

I was *falsely* accused by those who knew me as a fallen woman, while I was as innocent of the charge as an unborn babe. [...] I did not [...] feel inclined to die when I could no longer conceal what the world falsely calls a woman's shame. No, on the other hand, I never loved life more dearly and longed for the hour when I would have something to love me [...] I felt as if I could begin all my past sorrows again if Heaven would only spare me my lovely babe to cheer my bleeding heart, for I never felt bound to the earth till then. (Simmons 310; my italics).

Thus, as Clark has suggested was the case with many working-class women, Johnston seems to have opened for herself an alternative sexual morality, in which bearing a child out of wedlock was not a morally reprehensible act.<sup>351</sup> However, by the second edition of the *Autobiography* in 1869, Johnston excised the information about her

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<sup>351</sup> Even this description of the birth of her daughter follows the format of Wollstonecraftian fiction in the 1790s, for example *Secresy; or, the Ruin on the Rock* (1795), as well as a number of eighteenth century novels including Frances Sheridan's *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Biddulph* (1761), in which the eponymous heroine helps her overbearingly moral mother to conceal the pregnancy of a young woman so that she can re-enter society after her child is born. Thank you to Julia Wright for suggesting this connection.

daughter, no longer presenting herself as a “fallen woman” (Simmons 310). Johnston’s censorship no doubt was an attempt to avoid losing subscribers; her more virtuous second-edition self no longer transcended gender proprieties.<sup>352</sup> Between the two editions of her autobiography, Johnston offers multiple self-representations; the first edition depicts a woman who is much more comfortable in eschewing conventions, or re-writing them, the latter betrays an autobiographical suppression, and the necessity to conform in order to procure subscribers.

Johnston creates a literary identity that relies upon romantic and gothic convention, as well as a strong class-consciousness and a forceful poetic presence. Her identification as the “Factory Girl” reveals a connection between the author and her working-class readership. While her self-representation is not without its tensions—and I would even argue that it is in fact fraught with a need identify with Victorian gender conventions—she attempts to fit her identity as a working-class “heroine” into a framework of middle-class morality that enables a “fallen woman” to find redemption in her “warm-hearted and affectionate” characteristics. Such tension is not uncommon, and we can even view it as a mode of communicating the desire to be a part of a defined cultural community, even while experiencing it laterally, or only through self-definition in one’s writing.<sup>353</sup> Perhaps most significantly, Johnston’s

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<sup>352</sup> Simmons writes, “[t]he clear bowdlerization of the 1869 text cannot be attributed with any certainty to any one collaborator in its production: responsibility for it might rest with any number of individuals alone or in combination—the author, the publisher, or perhaps even Johnston’s various sponsors and mentors, including those mentioned at the end of the ‘Autobiography,’ the Rev. George Gilfillan and Alexander Campbell” (85).

<sup>353</sup> Gagnier also examines a number of working-class autobiographies, and suggests that [w]hat is common to these texts is the conscious desire on the part of the writers to write their lives according to middle-class narratives and the unconscious distance between those narratives—especially of financial success, familialism, and romance—and the facts of their

autobiography displays a tension between her need to conform to such ideals and the need to stitch together a new morality that accepts non-conformant sexuality.

Put simply, Johnston's prose depiction of her life collides with and complicates her poetic literary identity, and one must first read her autobiography in order to understand the machinations of her multiple subjectivities. Rosen suggests, "[r]ather than condemn Johnston's embrace of orthodox texts as a failure or a falsification, we might consider what avenues it opens for study: see it, perhaps, as an act that works to lay bare both the appeal of the concepts the texts convey and the illusion of their universality" (213). The lacing together of Johnston's autobiographical and poetic identities demonstrates how the working-class woman poet can use her physical labours to justify her literary labours.

#### *Poetic Identities: Authorial Anxiety and the Woman Writer*

Johnston's conflation of her illegitimate child with her poetic labours suggests a link between poetry and sexuality, and invites queries into the nature of her subjectivity. Elizabeth A. Petrino writes that "women were encouraged to be publicly silent and blamed for publishing, almost as if they had broken sexual mores" (Petrino 37). Given the intimate connection between writing and sexuality, is Johnston attempting to write within a middle-class moral context while "labouring" (both as a mother and an author) outside of the confines of Victorian propriety? I would argue that her poetry exposes the tension between these two class-based moral poles.

As I will show in my reading of the poems below, Johnston's "factory-poet"

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existence, especially economic determinism, nonfamilialism, aborted romance, and noncompanionate marriage. ("Literary Standard" 273)

poems present—both formally and thematically—a counter-image to the melancholy in her autobiography, and create an identity that celebrates factory work as a means of transcending the hardships of life.<sup>354</sup> In its representation of manifold “labouring” subjectivities, Johnston’s poetry closely resembles what Isobel Armstrong has termed the “double poem.”<sup>355</sup> Armstrong’s discussion of the “double poem” in her book *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* provides a way of using Bakhtin’s theory of the “dialogic” to articulate opposing poetic subjectivities.<sup>356</sup> The “double-poem,” writes Armstrong, “draws attention to the epistemology which governs the construction of the self and its relationships and to the cultural conditions in which those relationships are made” (13). She contends that the Victorian “double-poem” is “political,” observing the difficulties of “representation”:

[t]he historicized consciousness is also a deeply politicised consciousness, political in the sense that the displacement of the aesthetic realm into secondariness forces the poet to conceptualise him- or herself as external to and over and against what comes to be seen as life. A crisis of representation both engenders and is engendered by this act of division. (6)

The double-poem offers a helpful framework through which to analyse working-class women’s poetry as a type of political literature.<sup>357</sup> Johnston, more than any other poet discussed in this dissertation, necessitates a study of the multiple-voices of the

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<sup>354</sup> Cf. The “factory girls” whom I discuss in chapter five.

<sup>355</sup> Armstrong notes that the “double poem” is particularly apparent in dramatic monologues (13-14).

<sup>356</sup> She notes that “Bakhtin denied poetry the dialogic form on the grounds that it was irreducibly monologic, the product of a single, unified and non-conflictual poetic voice,” and observes that there are “difficulties in assimilating Victorian poetry to a dialogic model, although this is a step in the right direction” (14).

<sup>357</sup> Sanders also nods to Armstrong’s idea of the “double-poem” in his discussion of Chartist poetry (31-32), arguing that “the double poem offers a potential solution to the perennial challenge of finding the historical significance of a given literary form” (32).

“factory girl” poet because of the ways in which her literary output exposes the tension between gender, writing, and class politics.

Both the multi-generic form of Johnston’s *Autobiography* and the tension between her poetic selves are political because they point to a “crisis of representation,” to use Armstrong’s term.<sup>358</sup> This “crisis” is based on Johnston’s self-representation as a working-class woman and as a poet, a literary heroine and “The Factory Girl.” The hybrid subjectivities created through her use of interwoven literary modes leads us to ask whether her prose autobiography provides a more “accurate” representation of her life than her poetry? Or, is it her poetry that allows us to more fully understand and tease out the nuances in her autobiography?

*Literary Labours: “An Address to Nature on its Cruelty”*

Johnston’s poem, “An Address to Nature on Its Cruelty,” provides an excellent example of the ways in which her poetry expresses authorial anxiety and a “crisis of representation,” or the attempt to reconfigure the poet’s subjectivity. A closer analysis of her “double-poem” illuminates the construction of her subjectivities and her relationships to the cultural institutions in which she labours. Johnston’s apprehension may stem from the fact that she is a “woman writer in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are [...] both overtly and covertly patriarchal” (Gilbert and Gubar 45-46). Gilbert and Gubar note the importance of “the

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<sup>358</sup> Armstrong shows that the Victorian poet attempts to “renegotiate a content to every relationship between self and the world” in a “simultaneously personal and cultural project [that] carries the poet into new genres and new exploration of language” (7). In her brief discussion of Johnston, she observes that the poet’s “work discloses the difficulties of discovering a language in which to address both a total community and a ‘literary’ audience” (323).



psychology of literary history”—a study of “the tensions and anxieties, hostilities and inadequacies writers feel when they confront not only the achievements of their predecessors but the traditions of genre, style, and metaphor that they inherit from such ‘forefathers’” (46).

Authorial anxiety is a common element in women’s writing, and is deeply rooted in the female poetic tradition. Whether intentionally or not, Johnston participated in the discussion of the difficulties of being acknowledged as a female poet, which was compounded by her class-inflected reception anxieties.<sup>359</sup> To illustrate this point, I turn to Backscheider, who begins the final chapter of *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* with a quotation from Catherine Trotter Cockburn’s *Verses, occasion’d by the Busts in the Queen’s Hermitage* (1737). The quoted text neatly illustrates the female author’s anxiety:

[...] those restraints which have our sex confin’d,  
While partial custom checks the soaring mind.  
Learning deny’d us, we at random tread  
Unbeaten paths, that late to knowledge lead;  
By secret steps break thro’ th’ obstructed way,  
Nor dare acquirements gain’d by stealth display.  
If some advent’rous genius rare arise,  
Who on exalted themes here talent tries,  
She fears to give the work (tho’ prais’d) a name,

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<sup>359</sup> Zlotnick writes that “Johnston’s awareness of the fact that part of her celebrity—at least among her ‘betters’—derived from her class status rather than her poetic skills prompted her to write this poem” (“A Thousand Times” 22).

And flies not more from infamy than fame. (qtd. in Backscheider 376)

These lines, notes Backscheider, “capture almost all of the barriers women themselves felt, and most of them were conventions before and after Cockburn wrote them” (376). Johnston, like her poetic foremothers, was “confin’d” beneath social ideologies that barricaded femininity within the private domain, and that denied women access to learning. Her poetry offers a sharp critique of such ideologies.

Consequently, two of the major points of critique in “An Address to Nature on Its Cruelty” point to these tension and anxieties: (1) the female worker-writer’s anxieties about authorship, and (2) the relationship between women’s *natural* poetic talent, and male poets’ learning. As I will show in the two poems I discuss here, Johnston clearly pits her own female, working-class genius against the leading middle-class (and working-class) male writers of her day. She is acutely aware of her position as a female writer of the working class, and at first her speaker seems quite similar to the literary “heroine” of her autobiography.

Metrically, the poem illuminates the fraught “nature” of female poetic talent, and the paradoxical relationship between agency and anxiety. “An Address to Nature” reveals a controlled use of metre that simultaneously manifests is manifested in her apparent authorial anxiety. Comprised of seventy lines of iambic tetrameter couplets, the metre is regular for the majority of the poem, but shifts when Johnston ventriloquises the voices of those who would criticise her: “Well, I think the little boaster / Is nothing but a fair imposter” (15-16). If we place an accent on the “Is” of line 16, then trochees, pyrrhics, and spondees outweigh the regular cadence of her iambic verse. The same metrical shift occurs in line 19, when “Such wit and words quite out-

furl” the carefully inscribed four-footed lines, and again when others accuse her plagiarism: “Of borrowed lines or yet quotation” (36). In the spondaic feet of the last two accusatory lines—“Who dares to say”—Johnston tightens her formal and tonal control over the poem. The jarring metre that accompanies the words of her detractors suggests Johnston’s intention to portray the dissonance of their words amid her poetic harmony; she depicts her critics as ill-spoken and unpoetic. The breakdown of metre, like the words of her critics, *denatures* her cynics’ own writing; consequently, form becomes a mimetic representation of the conflicting nature of class and gender ideologies that haunted working-class women, and thus while these lines illustrate Johnston’s poetic talent, or authorial *agency* they also reveal her authorial *anxiety*.<sup>360</sup>

Such anxiety becomes apparent in her literalization of the size discrepancy between the “high” status of canonical male writers with the “low” status of the working-class woman writer. In “An Address to Nature,” she writes “I am so small I cannot shine / Amidst the great that read my rhyme” (3-4), and like E.H. she humbly speaks of her poems as “simple” (53). Furthermore, she positions herself as antithetical to “learned critics” (11), suggesting that many see her as a “fair imposter” (16). She further states that she is

So small and thin I must confess,  
Well may they dare the words to use.  
Can such a vase distil Love’s muse;

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<sup>360</sup> This may also be a form of “Writing Back,” to borrow a term from postcolonial theory. Johnston is both working class and a woman, and thus she is subject to a double form of literary oppression. Middle-class writers (Dickens and Gaskell especially) depicted the coarse dialect of the working-class in *Hard Times* and *Mary Barton*. Johnston may be intentionally turning language back on her critics. For an example of the phenomenon of “writing back” see chapter six in Jackaman. Postcolonial theory may be yet another way to read working-class women’s poetry, and warrants further study in a future project. Thanks to Julia Wright for alerting me to this connection.

Well may they ask dare I profess

The talent of an authoress? (38-42)

By rhyming “confess,” “profess,” and “authoress,” Johnston strengthens the power and legitimacy of her verse. By assigning strong verbs to the noun “authoress,” Johnston subtly grants authorial power to the female author. To be a confessor, or a professor, first assumes that the speaker has a right to speak. Her use of both the word “talent” and “muse” also link with “authoress” and further suggest her natural inclination toward poetry, despite being “small and thin.” Goodridge writes that

[i]f this seems unusually self-lacerating, the emphasis on being “small” should alert us to the fact that what is going on here is actually a very familiar literary strategy, one often employed by poets of humble origin. In the eighteenth century Mary Leapor had frequently and wittily berated herself for her supposed lack of physical and literary height. (544)

Similarly to the eponymous heroine of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Johnston draws attention to her smallness to prove that this trait has been placed upon her, rather than being self-ascribed.

Just as Johnston is “accused” of being an outcast from middle-class domestic space, she also suggests that the literary world makes no room for her. In her autobiography, as I show above, she places herself within the literary world when she writes of the influence of Scott and Burns’s on her own writing. When she further posits a dichotomy between her writing and her diminutive stature, she shifts the gaze of the poem to place herself in a position of authority:<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> See my discussion of F. Saunderson’s use of the gaze in chapter three.

When men of genius pass me by,  
I am so small they can't descry  
One little mark or single trace  
Of Burns' science in my face. (5-8)

She solidifies her subjectivity through a simple mention of Burns and a more subtle power shift engendered by her language. Lunan observes that Burns “is a signifier for any Scottish writer seeking to encode the oppositional values of oral, popular, traditional Scots within a dominant culture overwritten by imperial British print capitalism” (19). Her slip from object to subject, passive to active, (from *being seen by* to *seeing* the men of science) and her juxtaposition of the delicate, fragile poet with the mighty Burns seem here to be symptomatic of her authorial anxiety, but may also simultaneously allow her to regain control over her own poetic output because she (figuratively) stands beside him.<sup>362</sup>

Johnston invokes contemporary discourses of gender and physiognomy, and in her acknowledgement of Burns, the peasant poet, she also nods to a working-class poetic tradition.<sup>363</sup> Johnston's slippery poetic subjectivities point to parallel between

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<sup>362</sup> This passage echoes Marie's “My Mission,” which I discuss in the introduction, and Johnston's attention to size and the shift in subjectivity also seems to resonate with another working-class women poet Jessie Russell, whose “Preface” to *The Blinkin' O' the Fire and Other Poems* (1877) calls attention to size differences:

I know not aught of learned themes,  
Nor of the world of wealth and power;  
My little world at home redeems  
The voidness of a leisure hour. (17-20)

<sup>363</sup> It would be interesting to also read these lines in combination with her allusions to Scott in her autobiography, through which Johnston claims a national authority—she is intentionally invoking a *Scottish* literary tradition. To bolster my hypothesis, I turn to Lunan, who references Caroline McCracken-Flesher's assertion that “Scott stood as a general equivalent for Scottish literary culture. The evanescent yet all present ‘Author of Waverley’ served as the transcendent Sign by which others determined their relative success or worth” (qtd. in Lunan 26).

her autobiography and her “autobiographical” poem, and an important issue when reading autobiographies. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe, “the writer becomes, in the act of writing, both the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance and contemplation” (1). Just as Johnston writes herself as a “literary heroine” in her autobiography, her self-referential poetry ensures her objectivity: by necessity Johnston would have needed to invite the gaze of the public eye for economic reasons; her success as a poet relied upon her ability to please her readers.

Like “Marie,” Johnston *naturalizes* her literary labours: she argues that her poetry stems from a *natural* wellspring: it originates in the natural world rather than formal education. She begins her poem with an apostrophe to nature (the legitimizing force of her poetic inspiration). Through her apostrophe, she personifies “Nature” as a way to authorize her own writing, as we see in the final lines of the poem:

Yet nature between you and I,  
Beneath the universal sky,  
Who dares to say I have bereft  
Another genius of their gift. (67-70)

The confrontational and interrogatory tone and use of “Who dares” in the final couplet turns the poem back upon the reader in a rhetorical gesture inviting an awareness of a new poetic order that would accept the female author.

*Literary Labours: "An Address to Napier's Dockyard"*

A number of Johnston's "factory poems" work within a type of "doubleness" that highlights the multiplicity of the working-class woman poets' identity, and the slippage between public and private engendered by her literary labours. Her poem, "An Address to Napier's Dockyard," negotiates her reputation and identity as "The Factory Girl," and shows a strong sense of class and professional identification. We see hints of her professional consciousness toward the end of her autobiography, when she writes that in a moment of despair, she was reminded (providentially) of a poem she had written entitled "An Address to Napier's Dockyard." She then forwarded the poem to Robert Napier, the chief shipbuilder and engineer, and the eponymous addressee. Zlotnick, Boos, and Rosen have each identified this poem specifically as one of the defining poems of Johnston's poetic *oeuvre*. It was also likely one of the defining poems in her professional life: it offered her the first step towards financial independence: it earned praise from Napier, who offered Johnston a sum of money to start a small business.

In "An Address to Napier's Dockyard," Johnston highlights her working-class status, and privileges her auto-didacticism over the formal education of men of "learning" and science. In the opening fourteen lines, Johnston sets up the nature of her "address" by hailing the "prince of public works—mechanic arts" (1).<sup>364</sup> She tells her readers,

I cannot speak like scientific men

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<sup>364</sup> This line may be a nod to the Mechanic's institutes that were prevalent throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, and which originated in Anderson in Glasgow, Scotland in the early 1800s. Mechanics' Institutes provided education for tradesmen (mechanics) who had no formal schooling. See Longstreth Thompson, especially pp. 411-18, and Allan, especially pp. 68.

Whom literature gives colour to their pen,  
Who clothe their genius in that golden robe<sup>365</sup>  
Wrought by learning, and not by nature's God.  
Those gilded abstracts of high inspiration  
Quoted out to gain man's admiration.  
Give me origin—such I hold at bay  
Who steal from authors of a bygone day;  
Pampering pages with records unnumber'd  
Robb'd from men who hath for centuries slumber'd. (5-14)

In her assertion that she “cannot speak like scientific men,” Johnston carefully critiques them for stealing “from authors of a bygone day” while she writes from a place of “origin.”<sup>366</sup> Her imperfect rhyme of “robe” and “God” amongst the perfect couplets of the previous lines stands out as an indication that the men who “clothe their genius” in a robe, are in some way unnatural in their writing. Unlike Johnston, who describes herself as a “natural” poet, they cannot be in tune (or in this case in rhyme) with God.

Johnston draws from a common trope that emerged out of the romantic period, and coalesced in Coleridge and Wordsworth's theory of “organic” poetry. This theory sees poetry growing directly from the individual poet who is inspired by God in nature.<sup>367</sup> Consequently, Johnston's prosody is also naturalized in that it harmonizes

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<sup>365</sup> A Possible reference to Zeus's golden robe.

<sup>366</sup> Line 8 could be a subtle allusion to Pope's *Essay on Man* (1732-34), which would suggest her affinity with one of the great men of science, and would be a deft trick of gaining control over her own literary heritage given her use of heroic couplets.

<sup>367</sup> For more on organic theories of poetry, see Christensen, Lee Rust Brown, and Ricks.



with an organicist theory of poetry.<sup>368</sup> Both of her “Address” poems betray an anxiety of authorship and offer a unified whole, reclaiming female working-class poetic agency. Johnston strategically employs smooth and rough diction and metre to create a disjunction between the poetics of “origin” (which grows spontaneously from the nature) and “scientific men” (who by inference meticulously calculate their poetry, in keeping with the scientific method). She suggests that the latter is merely superficial—symbolized by the easily divested “golden robe.”

Johnston also naturalizes her poetic labour by linking it with her physical labour as a factory worker. Put another way, she authorizes her literary labour through her “natural” status as a manual labourer. As I noted above, Johnston places her auto-didacticism above the learning of “scientific men.” By doing so she constructs an identity that is tied to her profession, thus complicating the organicism of her poetry through its contrast between the inorganic (concrete) world of the factory and the organic (vegetative) world of nature. The dockyard serves as an attempted replacement and transcendence of the gendered identity that Johnston created in her autobiography—a juxtaposition that is characteristic, I would argue, of Johnston’s “factory poems.” She suggests that her poetry has power in its invocation of work, and she depicts a notably gendered relationship between the poet and the factory:

Nay, nay, dear Work, to thee I’ll only speak!

Like what I am—a woman frail and weak.

My self-taught learning may have power to move,

For it is drawn from truth and heartfelt love,

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<sup>368</sup> For more on “organic” poetry, see my discussion on “Marie”’s “Trees of Liberty” in chapter three.

Free from flattery and from language vain,  
The sproutings of a love-sick woman's strain  
Whose hopes are centered now within thy walls. (15-21)

Johnston tells her reader to look beneath the surfaces of things to find a “universal” truth, just as she does through the “double” labour of poetry and millwork. By invoking such terms as “love-sick,” and “frail and weak,” Johnston first situates herself within a discourse of femininity, but then her apostrophe coheres in an organic metaphor that lifts her out of the confines of Victorian femininity and authorizes her verse:

Dear Work, you know not what a gorgeous sight  
Thou art to me when wandering forth each night;  
Inhaling the breeze of summer's flow'ry scene,  
Musing on nature's lovely mantle green;  
When all is still and silent as the grave,  
When golden moonbeams kiss the silver wave  
That rolleth gently o'er sweet Clutha's breast  
That gorgeous stream where commerce never rests. (29-36)

Johnston conflates the place of work with the place of love; the woman who finds “hope” in Napier's walls, also “Gaze[s] intently on each secret spot” where she and her lover met, “anxious” to know when he stood there last (26-27).

In “An Address to Napier's Dockyard,” gender and class arguably come together in one space and one subject even as they are directed at different activities—love and work, domesticity and employment. The organic imagery operates through *parathesis*;

the factory acts as the locus of poetic inspiration, a meaning that emerges through the juxtaposition of the concrete walls of the factory and the “flow’ry scene” of “nature’s lovely mantle green.” Paradoxically, the organicism of the “sproutings” of her literary and physical labour originates from within the factory. The emotional register also shifts as her melancholy is replaced by an identification with “hope,” which can be found within the “walls” of Napier’s dockyard. Her famous assertion also seems to bolster this conclusion. The juxtaposition of mechanical and organic diction coalesces to turn the factory into a powerful source of poetic inspiration:

I would not leave thee, dear beloved place,  
A crown, a sceptre, or a throne to grace;  
To be a queen—the nation’s flag unfurl—  
A thousand times I’d be a factory girl!  
To live near thee, and hear thy anvils clink,  
And with thy sons that hard-won pleasure drink.  
That joy that springs from wealth of daily toil,  
Than be a queen sprung forth from royal soil. (89-96)

Here we can read, perhaps, the only overtly political critique in the poem. By rhyming “daily toil” with “royal soil,” she seems to insinuate that the upper classes do not work and therefore cannot understand the joys of employment. Johnston speaks of the “hard-won pleasure” of work and seems to imply that one that can transcend a melancholy life through “daily toil.” The hard syllables and spondaic metre in lines 93 and 94 contrast with the softer iambic motion of lines 95 and 96; this section of the poem metrically reflects the rhythms of manual (and poetic) labour—represented

through a powerful prosody—which in turn provides a strong contrast with the idle upper classes and the “scientific men” who are represented iambically as “wrought by learning” and not by “nature’s God” (8).

Johnston’s repetition of the words “Oft I have” points to Smith and Watson’s belief that we can read autobiography as “a set of ever shifting self-referential practices that engage the past in order to reflect on identity in the present” (4). This phrase reflects a nostalgic feeling for the landscape of Napier’s dockyard (44, 49). In the first, “Oft I have watched,” she self-identifies with the dockyard in a gesture towards “hope,” but in the second, “Oft I have wept,” she slips back into an identity characterised by sadness and longing. Later in the poem, she reiterates her “weakness” as a woman, but uses her female frailty strategically: “And thinkest thou this prayer will not avail, / Because ’twas breathed by woman weak and frail?” (77-78). By asserting in the next line that “God listens to the weak as well’s the strong” (79), Johnston returns to her argument of origin, linking the word “weak” with the familiar argument that “the meek shall inherit the earth.”<sup>369</sup> Johnston justifies the working-class author’s place in the world by using the word “weak” to reinforce her belief in the “natural” gift of poetic inspiration, and solidify her relationship with God. She draws on both of these natural metaphors to legitimize her poetic labour.

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<sup>369</sup> Cf. Ecclesiastes 2:24: “There is nothing better for people than to eat and drink, and to find enjoyment in their work. I also perceived that this ability to find enjoyment comes from God [...]” and Matthew 5:5: “Blessed are the meek, / for they shall inherit the earth.”

*“The Linnet in the Linn”*

Johnston is best known for her poetic celebration of her life as “The Factory Girl”; and yet, while she asserted that she found “joy” in the “wealth of daily toil,” there are indications that she saw also herself as a “victim” of “factory life” (qtd. in Boos, *Anthology* 202). It behooved her to positively portray Napier’s dockyard; Napier himself gave her money for writing the poem. But there are also flickers of dissatisfaction with her life as “The Factory Girl.” In her autobiography, she states that hopes that her poetry will “help to relieve [her] from the incessant toils of a factory life” (315). But her optimistic persona—the speaker who finds hope in factory life—stands in contrast to her poem, “The Factory Girl’s Reply to ‘Lines by Edith’” (*Autobiography* 157), in which she describes a life “Mid factory din, its dust and gloom” into which she was forced:

like the linnet in the linn  
That’s caught and caged in prison air,  
They forced me midst the factory’s din  
To chase my fairy phantoms there. (2, 25-28)

Consequently, another of Johnston’s poetic personae emerges, one that stands in direct contrast to the self she puts forth in “An Address to Napier’s Dockyard.” By lamenting her work in the factory, she complicates the discursive authority we find in her “Address” poems. Unsurprisingly, her later poem reflects a lifetime of factory toil, and the speaker no longer espouses a carefree celebration of manual labour. In Klaus’s illuminating note on Johnston, he states that he discovered Johnston’s application for poor relief on 6 April 1870 to the Barony Parish of Glasgow. He writes, “clearly the

hope that she could live on the proceeds of the [2nd edition], or that the £50 received from the Royal Bounty plus another £5 from Queen Victoria in 1868 would remove the spectre of destitution, had come to nothing" ("New Light" 430).<sup>370</sup> Furthermore, on 12 April 1873, the *Penny Post* printed a note that told its readers, "[w]e are sad to learn that our old contributor, Ellen Johnston, has been very ill and is in very distressing circumstances" ("New Light" 431). Johnston's last few years seem to have been spent in destitution, and it is very likely that she is the "Helen" Johnston who died in the Barony Poorhouse on 20 April 1874 ("New Light" 430).

In light of her true material circumstances, Johnston adds another dimension to her autobiography with her reply to "Edith." The complexity of her poetic identity points to the politics of representation in her literary output. While her inconspicuous death suggests that she never succeeded in her attempts to create a new place for working-class women *inside* the bounds of Victorian propriety, she tried nonetheless, and even enjoyed a relative amount of fame during her lifetime. Her use of the metaphor of *labour* (both maternal and literary) underlines the complex intertwining of gender, authorship, and class in her poetry. This "Factory Girl"'s poetic power renders her anything but the "linnet in the linn"; the control with which she weaves together the many strands of her literary output prove that she had the power to direct her own literary loom.

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<sup>370</sup> The inspector's form states, "Applies for relief being ill and off work since September last. She supported herself during that time by pawning her clothes and jewellery and her means are now exhausted" (Klaus "New Light" 430).

## CHAPTER EIGHT. CONCLUSION.

“We have had two hundred years to discover a discourse of and strategies for reading male poets. They belong to a debate, a dialectic; we know how to think about politics, epistemology, power, and language, in productive ways that [...] make these poets *mean* for us. A hermeneutics has evolved. Not so with the female poets. We are discovering who they are, but there are few ways of talking about them” (Isobel Armstrong, “Gush of the Feminine” 15; qtd. in Backscheider 27).

### *The Future of Victorian Working-Class Women’s Literary Labours*

In my study of working-class women’s *literary labour politics*, I have reached the following conclusions: working-class women (1) entered into contemporary debates on race, class, and gender, and (2) displayed a range of reactions to the increasingly industrial urban landscape of the Victorian city. Through their poetry, working-class women engaged with specific types of *labour*—labour literature or literary labours—as a means of thematically and formally engaging with the social problems of the mid-nineteenth century. The working-class women of Victorian Britain presented varying responses to the changes wrought by industrialism. While some crafted their literary labours in order to escape the drudgery of work, others, like Fanny Forrester, were unable to do so. The weave and the warp of their powerful, emotive, passionate, melancholy, and formally controlled verse allowed working-class women poets an avenue for intellectual expression; these poets challenged preconceived notions of class by their very existence.

In chapter three, I showed how the working-class women of the periodical press used a number of methods in an attempt to ameliorate their working conditions. The women of *The Pioneer* sought to create a nation that was constructed as a family and argued that communities of women would enable the nation to realize its true power—just as a mothers guide their children into maturity. By their invocation of the

Ladies' Union, the mechanics' wives and bondswomen of *The Pioneer* formed a literary community that was centralized within the periodical press. These early female trade unions would eventually develop into the suffragist movement at the turn of the century.

The first factory girl I discuss in this study, E.H., writes within the contexts of Chartism by invoking religious reform. She critiques the hypocrisy of the people of the "Christian" upper class who should be merciful, kind, and giving, but who instead starve the poor. E.H. is also interested in the ways that education might help the working-class woman poet lift herself out of her lowly condition. She is confident that she could make "better rhymes" if she were given the opportunity to learn. She also invokes the figure of Joseph Rayner Stephens, a staunch supporter of the Chartist movement. She represents Reverend Stephens as the disciple of God who will lead the people to their salvation.

While E.H. looks to a male saviour, F. Saunderson suggests that the female poet has a literary and social power of her own. From her pastoral haven, Saunderson gazes down upon the poor working (male) wretch. "Spring Reflections" pushes for social reform by portraying the plight of the working-class man. Unlike E.H. or Saunderson, Eliza Cook treads the careful line of class propriety and does not seek to overturn hierarchies that are already in place; she argues that the problem is not work but *overwork*. Finally, "Marie" offers revolutionary verse that urges the people of the working class to stand up for their liberty. "Marie" uses organic imagery to "naturalize" workers' rights. While all of these women support social reform, they do not describe the post-revolutionary world—they only discuss what might be done to get there.



Their poetic teleology is primarily utopian. They use specific imagery to represent the nation as a family where factory girls are educated and trees of liberty offer the promise of social revolution. Most of the women whom I discuss in chapter three are involved in the creation of “labour literature”—with the exception of E.H., who openly discusses her literary labours and suggests how they might help her rise out of her own poor situation.

In chapter four I turn to Mary Hutton, who has never been discussed at length in critical communities, and yet who is one of the most important working-class figures to come out of this study. My preliminary research provides evidence that she moved in the many circles of reform and abolitionism in Sheffield in the 1830s. She almost certainly was a friend of Ebenezer Eliott and his family, she wrote poetry that was clearly inspired by James Montgomery and Samuel Roberts, and she was in all probability involved with—or at the very least knowledgeable about—the Sheffield anti-slavery movement. The fact that there are so many well-known names on her subscription list suggests her intimate connection with the political community around her. Her poetry is wide ranging in its political subjects. Her labour literature deals with the dark side of legislative change (the “Poor Laws’ Amendment Bill”), slavery, and gender inequality (Eva). Hutton is also an interesting figure because she was so clearly well read. My next project will be to journey to Sheffield and see if I can piece together her life. For example, just before finishing this study, I discovered the likely marriage date of Michael Hutton and his first wife, as well as his death in the parish register. I am confident that further research will unearth many untold stories about this powerfully political poet.

The factory girls of chapter five use their poetry to write against the sympathetic portrayal of the working class such as we find in the industrial novels of the 1830s and 1840s. The author of *In Working Hours* celebrates her life throughout her small volume of poetry. Notably, she transcends the monotony of factory work and pours her heart into her literary labours. While I have shown that her poetry does little to break free of cultural norms, I also maintain that it speaks to the inseparability of different kinds of labours—physical and intellectual—and how one kind of work may complement or aid the other. The second factory girl redirects the gaze from the textile worker to the American slave and then to the working class people in her own town of Preston. Through her literary labours she also seeks to reconfigure the sympathetic gaze.

In chapter six, I showed how Fanny Forrester provides a contrast to the “factory girls” of the previous chapter and suggested that she offers a much darker portrayal of the city. I argued that in the poems in which she deals specifically with poverty and industrialism, Forrester is unable to lift herself out of the constraints of her life as a factory worker. Her characters are trapped within the industrial landscape and they can only find solace in death. One of the most interesting aspects of Forrester’s poetry is her attention to music, which she invokes as a contrast to industrialism. But, ultimately, her songs are silenced; melancholy, sadness, and isolation pervade her labour literature.

Ellen Johnston is a fitting character with which to end the study because of the ways in which she neatly interweaves different kinds of labours. She is similar to the first factory girl of chapter five—her poems seem to celebrate her work and suggest

that factory work begets literary production. But Johnston also participates in a third kind of labour: maternal labour. Through a combination of her autobiography and her poetry, she seeks to show that maternal and literary (re)production are inseparable and intertwined. Johnston applies exactly the same methods for justifying her illegitimate daughter as she does her writing; she tries to find a place for both in the middle-class world. Johnston presents us with an example of a working-class woman poet whose identity shifts depending on the poems we read and the ways in which we read them. Her slippery subjectivity suggests a complexity to her poetry that belies her working-class status.

More research on working-class women poets will allow for new discoveries about working-class women's literary labours. And while I have shown that these poets wrote political poetry, they also discussed family, children, love, nature, beauty, and animals, as well as a variety of other subjects. Their poetry is often formally complex, and it deserves to be studied not only in and of itself but also because of its relationship to other era and literary genres. For example, Ruth Wills writes of *Paradise Lost*,

I think I was about fourteen when a lady, now, alas! no more, lent me Milton's "Paradise Lost," which I had long desired to see. The reading of it was to me the opening up of a mine of rich treasure; it was the discovery of a new world—a world of beauty and brightness of which I had before no idea. [...] It would seem as if heart, and mind, and soul were aroused all at once, and all things in earth and sky wore a new aspect, and spoke to me with a new voice. When I read Milton's matchless poem my whole soul responded to its unearthly music.

I was enraptured, and could scarcely sleep at night for the echoes of the wondrous melody. Thenceforward I live in a world of my own, illumined by a 'light that never was on sea or shore.' Life was never to be joyless again—.

(Boos, *Anthology* 233)

Given Wills's effusive praise of *Paradise Lost*, what can working-class women poets tell us about the ways in which they read or were inspired by canonical texts?

Furthermore, at the beginning of chapter five, I suggested that the female factory poets in Britain are not unlike their American contemporaries in Lowell, Massachusetts. More research needs to be done into the ways in which their poetry intersects and combines. What connections will we see? For example, did American working-class women know of their poetry-writing sisters? The Lowell offering was hugely popular in nineteenth-century America, and the mass of articles and books about the Lowell Mill Girls shows that scholars of British working-class women poets still have much work to do.

The more we uncover about the women who laboured invisibly in Britain—in factories, in the home, as seamstresses, or in any other labouring profession—the more we will understand the ways in which working-class women's poetry is woven into the fabric of nineteenth-century literature. Their poetry is crucial to our understanding of poetry, social reform movements, and gender issues in the nineteenth century. In this study, I have only discussed a small number of poems and poets. While we may never fully know the contexts or material conditions in which these women worked, what can we discover about Milicent Langton or Sarah Douglass, for example? How can a study of Jessie Russell contribute to the discussion

of women's rights in the latter half of the nineteenth century? What about the women who published after the chronological endpoint of my study, such as the women involved in the 1888 London Matchgirl's Strike, or the poet "Aurora," whose identity remains a mystery still? These women clearly had a desire to speak and tell about their lives. They deserve to be read and studied, and the stories they tell in their verse may yet help us learn something about our own inner desires to be heard.

## APPENDIX A: SELECTED LIST OF RESEARCH MATERIALS

This list consists of poems that I collected in the following archives in the UK: The Working Class Movements Library (Salford), The People's History Museum and Archive (Manchester), The Manchester Central Library, and The British Library.<sup>371</sup>

Poems marked with a checkmark (✓) are discussed in this dissertation.

### Poems Published in the Periodical Press

#### **Aurora**

✓ "In the Mill." *Yorkshire Factory Times* (14 August, 1896): 2.

#### **E.H. (A Factory Girl of Stalybridge)**

✓ "On Joseph Rayner Stephens." *The Northern Star* (18 May 1839): 7.

#### **Forrester, Fanny<sup>372</sup>**

"At the Gate." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (4 March 1876): 87.

"At Sea." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (27 March 1875): 107-108.

"Bring Me a Sweet White Rose." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (6 October 1877): 314.

"Caroline." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (3 November 1877): 348.

"Christmas Chimes." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (28 December 1878): 415.

"Come, Little Brother." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (2 September 1876): 291.

"Come, My Darling." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (30 September 1876): 327.

"Deformed." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (25 September 1875): 315-316.

"Earth's Noblest Queen." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (24 August 1878): 342-343.

"Forsaken." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (25 March 1876): 107.

✓ "In the City." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (18 May 1878): 15.

"In Darkness." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (24 June 1876): 212.

✓ "In the Workhouse—A Deserter's Story." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (November 1872):  
121-2.

"A Group of Singers." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (11 August 1877): 252.

"A Lancashire Story." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (3 March 1877): 66-67.

"The Lark and the Cripple Boy." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (April 1872): 48.

"Lines Inscribed to—." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (6 March 1875): 81.

✓ "Little Singers." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (11 December 1875): 403.

✓ "The Lowly Bard." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (November 1873): 265.

"A Love Song to my Wife." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (29 July 1876): 252.

"Magdalen—A Tale of Christmas Eve." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (December 1871): 297-  
298.

"Morning." *Ben Brierley's Journal* (24 July 1875): 242-243.

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<sup>371</sup> This is by no means a complete list of the poems published by these poets, but it meant as a reference for both this study, and as an indication of the number of poems published by working-class women.

<sup>372</sup> For a complete list of Fanny Forrester's poems, see Boos's "Homely Muse" (282-85).

- ✓ “Mother, I Come.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (2 June 1877): 171.  
 “A Mother’s Letter.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (30 November 1878): 379.  
 “Our Three Pictures.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (June 1872): 61.  
 “Parted For Ever.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (February 1871): 184.  
 “Parting Words.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (13 February 1875): 63-64.  
 “The Poet to his Love.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (15 May 1875): 162-163.  
 “Poor Little Madge.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (19 May 1877): 155.  
 “The Recent Sad Calamity at Ayr.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (1 July 1876): 220.  
 “Robin and Matty.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (12 January 1878): 11.  
 “Sad Memories.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (January 1872): 1.  
 “The Sailor Boy’s Return.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (6 July 1878): 215.  
 “She is Not Dead (Inscribed to Mrs. Brierley).” (26 June 1875): 212.  
 “The Sisters.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (27 May 1876): 178-179.  
 “Song: Baby is Dead.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (24 August 1878): 271.  
 “Song—Good Night, Aileen! Good Night!” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (28 August 1875):  
 288.  
 “Song of the Returning Emigrants.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (August 1872): 90.  
 ✓ “Song: Oh to be a Country Lass!” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (August 11, 1877): 252.  
 “Spring in the Alley.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (14 April 1877): 114.  
 “Springtide Wooing.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (8 April 1876): 127.  
 ✓ “Strangers in the City”:  
   ✓ “Homeless in the City.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (March 1870): 42.  
   ✓ “Toiling in the City.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (April 1870): 58-59.  
   ✓ “Dying in the City.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (May 1870): 66.  
 “A Summer Evening.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (23 June 1877): 197.  
 “Sweet Dawn of Peace.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (27 July 1878): 238.  
 “To ‘Sabina.’” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (16 October 1875): 339.  
 “The Village Flirt.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (6 November 1875): 364.  
 ✓ “The Voice of Friendship (inscribed to C.H.B).” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (21 December  
 1878): 407.  
 “When Thou Art Far Away.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (23 March 1878): 91.  
 “Youth and Summer.” *Ben Brierley’s Journal* (27 November 1875): 388.

“Marie”<sup>373</sup>

- “Childish Fancies.” *Eliza Cook’s Journal*, No. 101 (5 April 1851): 368.  
 “Crucified Spirits.” *The People’s Journal*, No. 97: (1848) 260-261.  
 “Each to Each.” *Eliza Cook’s Journal*, No. 77 (19 October 1850): 409.  
 “Encouragement.” *The People’s Journal*, No. 46 (31 October 1846): 280.  
 “I Love Thee.” *Eliza Cook’s Journal*, No. 66 (8 Aug 1850): 217.  
 “Light! More Light!” *Howitt’s Journal* No. 31 (1 Aug 1846): 64-65.  
 “Look for the Flowers.” *The People’s Journal* 4 (1848): 336.  
 ✓ “My Mission.” *Eliza Cook’s Journal* No. 53 (4 May 1850): 16.  
 ✓ “Trees of Liberty.” *Working Man’s Friend and Family Instructor* 2.35 (29 May  
 1852): 142.

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<sup>373</sup> For a complete list see Boos’s “Homely Muse” (281-82).

“We Can Wait.” *Eliza Cook’s Journal*, No. 90 (Jan 18, 1851): 192.

**“Pioneera”**

✓ “A Voice from Leicester to the Pioneer by Pioneera.” *The Pioneer; or, Grand National Consolidated Trades’ Union Magazine*. No. 12 (23 November 1833): 96.

✓ [Response ‘The Pioneer to Pioneera’ p. 104]

**Saunderson, F. (A Female Cottager)**

✓ “Spring Reflections.” *Northern Star* (19 May 1838): 7.

Full Collections<sup>374</sup>

**A Factory Girl. Poetic Thoughts in Working Hours by a Factory Girl. Derby: Richard Keene, 1853.**

✓ To A Friend who came to the Factory (1)

✓ Up and be Doing (3)

The Old Soldier and his Son (5)

✓ Brighter Hours will Come (7)

Call me Lizzie (8)

To a Snowdrop (11)

✓ Lines, suggested by the Remark of a Friend, &c. (13)

The Old Church Yard (14)

Let us tell them in Kindness (18)

The Absent Ones (19)

Broken Friendship, or the First Falsehood (20)

Lines addressed to a Friend (22)

Our own Fireside (24)

Be Patient (26)

Where is My Home? (27)

There’s Pleasure in Helping (29)

The Stranger (31)

The Rose without a Thorn (34)

Footsteps (35)

The Little Ones (36)

The Parting Gift (37)

The Midnight Hour (39)

Early Days (41)

The Nosegay.—Recollections of Childhood (45)

The Old Mansion.—From the Recollections of Childhood (48)

Old Friends (50)

The Blind Old Man’s Address to a Young Girl (52)

Lines on a Letter (54)

The Daughter’s Promise (55)

The White Violet (61)

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<sup>374</sup> Beginning page numbers are enclosed in parentheses.



To my Brother, on the 16<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of his Birthday (62)  
 I Sigh for other Days (64)  
 My Thoughts will Return (65)  
 Lines on a Lock of my Mother's Hair (67)  
 Memory (69)  
 Where are they who used to be? (70)  
 The Friends of other Days (72)  
 The Recognition (73)  
 Lines, written on Hearing the Remark, &c. (75)  
 The Parting Hour (77)  
 The Bride (78)  
 Wild Flowers (80)  
 Lines (81)  
 When shall we Meet Again? (84)  
 How shall we Meet Again? (85)  
 Hope (88)  
 Fear Not (89)  
 Impossible (90)  
 Haytime (91)  
 The Child's Mistake (92)  
 Lines on the Death of a Canary (93)  
 In the Hour at Eventide (96)  
 Friendship (98)  
 Bear and Forbear (99)  
 Opinion (100)  
 Little Acts (102)  
 ✓ We are Serving each Other (105)  
 Lines to my Sister (107)

**Hutton, Mary. *Sheffield Manor and Other Poems*. Ed. John Holland. Sheffield: Blackwell, 1831.**

Sheffield Manor (13)  
 The Prospect from Sheffield Manor Hill (30)  
 ✓ The Slave (39)  
 The Mother of the Crusaders (49)  
 A Woman's Feelings on First Becoming a Mother (62)  
 Fancy's Vision of a Deceased Friend (64)  
 Verses Written Upon a Bed of Sickness (67)  
 Friendship (71)  
 On a Beautiful Baby, Who Died Very Suddenly, May 29, 1829 (73)  
 A Morning Walk (74)  
 The Spanish Guerilla's [sic] Song (75)  
 The Wanderer's Return (78)  
 The Orphan Boy (80)  
 Filial Love (83)  
 A Vision of Hope (85)

Sonnet (87)  
Sonnet—Past Scenes (88)  
The Farewell (89)  
Lines Composed in Sheffield Churchyard (91)  
Hope (94)  
Grey Lock (95)

**Hutton, Mary. *The Happy Isle and Other Poems*. London: J. Limbird, 1836.**

The Happy Isle (13)  
On the Cholera Pestilence (18)  
The Contrite Sinner's Prayer (21)  
The Three Visions, or Religion, Justice, and Liberty (23)  
Siberia (25)  
On Reading Childe Harolde (26)  
To the Memory of the Late Illustrious Stranger, Rammohun Roy (35)  
A Prayer for Poland (37)  
Poland (39)  
The Snow (40)  
A Morning Walk (41)  
A Scene Under the New Poor Law Bill (42)  
December (44)  
A Vision of Hope (46)  
Polish Wanderers (48)  
Lines (50-51)  
The Polish Prisoner (52)  
On Hearing a Little Boy Express a Wish to Take a Ride Upon an Eagle (65)  
The Mother of the Crusaders (69)  
Lines Addressed to Mrs. Elliott (80)  
The Affectionate Husband's Farewell (82)  
On the Lamented Death of Lord Milton (81)  
✓ On the Poor Laws' Amendment Bill (84)  
On the New Poor Law Bill (87)  
The Sons of Song (89)  
To the Memory of James Hogg (91)  
On the Loss of the Amphitrite, Convict Ship (98)  
The Factory Girl and Her Father (109)  
Mustapha (113)  
The Exile's Prayer (121)  
On Seeing a Portrait of Queen Adelaide (121)  
Joselina (123)  
Poland's Friend (124)  
Lines Suggested on a Public Meeting for the Relief of the Poor (125)  
Lines On seeing a Magdalen which had been drawn by a Young Lady (127)  
Schrynechi (129)  
The New Poor Law Bill (131)

**Hutton, Mary. *Cottage Tales and Poems*. London, 1842.**

- To Mrs. E T (17)  
Visit to Mr. Edward Smith's Exhibition Rooms (18)  
✓ Polish Song (20)  
To the Memory of the late Doctor Younge, M.D (21)  
✓ The Fate of Eva (22)  
✓ Occupation of Cracow (25)  
The Widow; founded on fact (26)  
The British Admiral; founded on fact (28)  
The Poet (37)  
Widow Dale and her Blind Daughter (38)  
✓ On the Queen's Bays performing at the Theatre, for the Benefit of the Poor of the Town (42)  
On the Death of a Lovely Boy (43)  
On the Loss of the President . . . (44)  
On the Derbyshire Moors (45)  
The Friends (46)  
To the Memory of Mrs. B (53)  
On Reading a Letter in Frazer's Magazine (54)  
On the late Awful Event at Masbro' ... (56)  
To the Memory of a Lady (57)  
On the Birth of the Prince (58)  
On Reading a few Chapters in the Bible (60)  
The Delights and Miseries of Winter (61)  
The Complaint of a Lady (62)  
The Blessings of a Poor Man's Home (63)  
✓ To the Spirit of Poesy (64)  
An Invitation to some Dear Children (65)  
On Sir Walter Scott's Rebecca (66)  
On the Memory of our late Monarch . . . (67)  
The Beauties of May (68)  
On the Marriage of the Queen (69)  
The Old English Gentleman (70)  
On the King of Prussia's Visit to Newgate (72)  
The late King and Queen of Prussia (73)  
On the Rev. Edwin Elliott's leaving Cockermonth . . . (75)  
On John Clare (76)  
On some Beautiful Ruins (77)  
Lines wrote in the Old Park Wood (79)  
On the Queen's Preservation (80)  
The Poets (80)  
On Mr. Wm. Howitt's Fairies (83)  
On giving Liberty to a Robinet (84)  
On New Year's Day, 1841 (85)  
Lines under Affliction (85)  
To the Memory of L.E.L (86)

A Sabbath in May (87)  
On the Birth of the Princess Royal .. ; (88)  
To Mrs. Mary Howitt (89)  
✓ On a Poor Little Sweep (91)  
Blue Bells ,. . . (93)  
On the Queen's Second Escape (96)  
The Missionaries' Song (96)  
On Madame Lavalette (98)  
Agatha Thornton (102)

**Johnston, Ellen. *Autobiography, Poems and Songs of Ellen Johnston, The Factory Girl*. Glasgow: William Love, 1867.**

✓ An Address to Napier's Dockyard (9)  
My Mother (13)  
A Brother Poet (13)  
Lines on the Death of a Beloved Child (13)  
The Maniac of the Green Wood (15)  
Kennedy's Dear Mill (19)  
Childhood's Flowers: The Cowan and the Buttercup (21)  
Morning: A Recitation (23)  
The Factory Exile (25)  
The Absent Husband (27)  
Welcome, Garibaldi (28)  
Mourning for Garibaldi (29)  
The Parting (30)  
The Workman for Ever (32)  
The Lost Lover (33)  
The Suicide (34)  
Love Outwitted (36)  
The Happy Man (38)  
The Rifleman's Melody (40)  
Love and War (42)  
A Mother's Love (44)  
To my Aunt Phemie (45)  
An Appeal (47)  
Lovely Johnie White (48)  
Farewell (50)  
Lines to a Lovely Youth (51)  
Lines: Most Respectfully Dedicated to Mr and Mrs Brown (52)  
The Broken Heart: A Tale (54)  
On the Loss of the Dalhousie (57)  
The Summer's Away (58)  
The Drunkard's Wife (59)  
Address to the High Church of Glasgow on the Rash Judgement of Man (61)  
Lines to a Young Gentleman of Surpassing Beauty (62)  
The Marriage Morning (63)

Lines on Miss Margaret Dorward for Sending her Carte de Visite and Bouquet of  
 Flowers to the Authoress (65)  
 Lines Most Respectfully Dedicated to James Kennedy, Esq., of Bedford Street Weaving  
 Factory, Belfast (66)  
 The Husband's Lament (68)  
 The Exile of Poland (69)  
 Epitaph (70)  
 The Lay of a Scottish Girl (71)  
 The Ruined Heiress (73)  
 The Wrongs of Mary Queen of Scots (74)  
 The Forsaken Maiden (76)  
 The Baxter Statue (77)  
 The Working Man (79)  
 My Cousin Bill (80)  
 Perjury's Victim (81)  
 Lines on Behalf of the Boatbuilders and Boilermakers of Great Britain and Ireland  
 (83)  
 Lines to Mr James Dorward, Power-Loom Foreman, Chapelshade Works, Dundee (86)  
 Your Wee Neebour Nell (88)  
 Lines to a Sick Friend (89)  
 The Drygate Brae, or Wee Mary's First Love (90)  
 An Address to Kelvin Water (91)  
 The Factory Girl's Farewell (93)  
 The Lost Purse (96)  
 Address to the Factory Messrs. J. & W. I. Scott & Co. (97)  
 The Last Sark (100)  
 Lines Most Respectfully Dedicated to Mr James Dorward (101)  
 The Opening of the Baxter Park (102)  
 Lines in Memory of Mary Watson Parker (104)  
 Galbraith's Trip (106)  
 Tennants' Excursion (109)  
 Lines to R. H. P., Parkhead (113)  
 Lines to G. D. Russell, St Ninian's, Stirling (115)  
 Lines to G.D. Russell, Late of St Ninian's, Sterling (116)  
 Lines to R.H.P., Parkhead in Acknowledgement of his New-Year's Gift (118)  
 The Factory Girl's Address to her Muse (119)  
 Lines to Mr Colin Steel (121)  
 The Sha'maker's Wife (123)  
 The British Lion (124)  
 Auld Dunville (125)  
 O Come awa', Jamie (127)  
 Nelly's Lament for the Pirnhouse Cat (128)  
 A Satire on a Pretended Friend (130)  
 Mrs Cooper (132)  
 Wee Poet Nell (133)  
 The Peacock (134)

The Fourpence Piece (135)  
Lines to Mr Alexander Campbell (136)  
Lines to the Memory of a Beloved Wife (138)  
An Address to my Brother Bards (139)  
✓ An Address to Nature on its Cruelty (141)  
The Trip o' Blochairn (143)

“Poetic Addresses and Responses”

A Farewell Address, written before leaving for Queensland (145)  
Lines Respectfully Dedicated by various Contributors (146-54, 161, 167, 171, 175, 176, 179)  
The Maid o' Dundee (152)  
Lines to Mr. B. Smith, Glasgow (155)  
Lines by Edith to the Factory Girl (156)  
The Factory Girl's Reply to 'Lines by Edith' (157)  
Edith's Reply to the Factory Girl (159)  
The Factory Girl's Reply to Edith (163)  
The Factory Girl's Reply to David Morrison, Caldervale, Airdrie (165)  
Lines to the Factory Girl, by a Glasgow Lassie (168)  
The Factory Girl's Reply to 'A Glasgow Lassie' (169)  
Lines to Mr. G. D. Russell, Queensland, accompanied with a Carte de Visite of 'The  
Factory Girl' (172)  
To Scotia's Hard-Toiling Girl (177)  
To the Poet (180)  
Lines to Edith, with G.D. Russell's and the Factory Girl's Cartes (182)  
Lines by Edith, on Receiving the Cartes of Mr. Russell and the Factory Girl (185)  
Lines to Mr. Daniel Syme, Lanark (187)  
Lines to Ellen, the Factory Girl (189)  
Lines to Isabel from the Factory Girl (190)  
Lines to Mr. David Morrison, Caldervale (193)

“Songs”

The Lad of Burnbank Mill (196)  
Broken Vows (197)  
Bogle and I (197)  
We've Parted (199)  
My Childhood's Hours (200)  
The Young Man's Darling (201)  
A Voice from the Mountains (202)  
O! Scotland, My Country (203)  
A Song of War (205)  
My Maggie (207)  
The Miller Lad (207)  
The Nicht I Married Tom (208)  
The Thistle Hall (209)  
Lord Raglan's Address to the Allied Armies (211)  
The Lass o' the Glen (213)

Francis Best (214)  
The Lasses o' Dundee (215)  
My Bonnie Donald Kay (216)  
Kennedy's Factory for Ever (217)  
Lintfield, the Boast of Green Erin (219)  
The Weekly News in the Morning (221)  
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Wanted, A Man (224)  
Song (226)

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The Maid Dundee to her Slumbering Muse” (227)  
Welcome and Appeal for the Maid of Dundee (230)

*See Also: Johnston, Ellen. Autobiography, Poems and Songs of Ellen Johnston. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*

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APPENDIX B: SELECTED POEMS

“MARIE”  
MY MISSION

They speak in stately, sounding words,  
    About our “mission” here,  
And while they speak, my quivering lids,  
    Can scarce retain the tear.  
They talk of noble destinies, 5  
    Of grand and god-like deeds;  
Such souls must surely bear the flowers,  
    Mine only beareth weeds!

I am not called to distant scenes  
    To sacrifice my life, 10  
To preach the gospel-words of peace  
    To savages in strife.  
I am not called to prison cells  
    To soothe the souls of woe;  
No Howard mission is for me, 15  
    My destiny is low.

God knows all hero-acts and thoughts  
    Find echoes in my heart,  
And with a steady fervency  
    I too would do my part; 20  
But 'tis not given me to write  
    Upon the world my name,  
Or send up to its giddy height  
    The glory of my fame.

I am a pebble, gently cast 25  
    Into this ocean-tide;  
The wavelets, as they circle past,  
    Seem neither deep nor wide;  
Yet calm and noiseless ride they on  
    Far out unto the sea, 30  
And are assuredly a force  
    In Life's Infinity.

There is a “mission” then for me,  
    Though humble, yet divine;  
A faint, soft light may stream from me, 35  
    Though not a star to shine.  
What work lies nearest to my hand

That may I nobly do;  
And midst our homely, household band,  
Be simple, loving, true. 45

Beside my hearth, and at my door,  
Kind words may sweetly fall;  
And he is sure not very poor  
Who gladly blesseth all!  
O'er common things and common ways 50  
A holy halo sheds:  
For all unknown, the gentle tone  
A merry sunlight spreads!

I may not sway the multitude  
With witchery, wild and strong; 55  
But here, amidst my solitude,  
I weave a hopeful song.  
I am content with these my powers,  
With these my lowly deeds,  
Rememb'ring, He who formed the flowers 60  
Hath also made the weeds!<sup>376</sup>

*Eliza Cook's Journal* No. 53 (4 May 1850): 16.

“PIONEERA”  
A VOICE FROM LEICESTER TO THE PIONEER

Ah, Pioneer! I've often thought, and trembled  
At that same thought, that you were not sincere;  
I felt afraid, love, that your heart dissembled,  
When you wrote that address—it was the fear  
That thou wert toying with our gentlest feeling, 5  
And wounding our lone grief instead of healing.

You write as one who knew our degradation;  
Who knew our helpless, hopeless, piteous, lot;  
Who, by the power of kindly, soft persuasion,  
Could wipe away our mind's deep cancer-spot; 10  
Give women back what force has long wrench'd from her,  
And placed on fickle chance, or man's false honour.

Art thou in earnest, gallant Pioneer?  
Is all thou sayest the fruit of thy pure thought?  
Come tell me, bravest, art thou quite sincere, 15

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<sup>376</sup> The original is signed “Manchester Inspector.”

Or dost thou hold our intellect at nought?  
If false, you heartless rogue, we curse your knavery;  
If true, thy honied words relieve our slavery.

A thousand hearts will feel a pillow'd rest  
In your dear confidence, and hope will heal 20  
The many sorrows which have long oppress'd  
And held imprison'd woman's weal;  
Long-buried hope will gladly re-appear,  
And breathe its thanks to thee, good Pioneer.

One faithful token from your skillful pen 25  
That you are woman's friend; and evermore  
The galling yoke and harsh deceit of men  
Will lose the terror which it had before.  
Till then we know not truly, loving scribe,  
If 'tis thine aim to comfort or to gibe. 30

*The Pioneer* (23 November 1833): 96.

#### THE PIONEER TO PIONEERA

Ah, Pioneera! could the darksome dome,  
Which tops the region of my motely thought,  
For once permit thy melting eye to roam  
Thro' every chequer'd trace which time has wrought  
Could thy fair hand but lift it from its place, 5  
Thou would'st not, Pioneera, think me base!

The fiery spirit which resists all wrong;  
The buoyant hope which flutters after right;  
The moist abode of Pity, and the throng  
Of deep imaginings engulf'd in night— 10  
These, 'neath that cupola may find a seat,  
But no dark spot to harbour bland deceit.

Thou askest, love, if I be woman's friend—  
And wishest, in thine innocence, to know:—  
Ah, let thy sad misgivings have an end! 15  
I am no mocker of a woman's wo.  
Thou wouldst not doubt the ardour of my love,  
If thy impassion'd eye could see it move.

'Tis not for thee, my sweet, nor human breast,  
To know the mystic movements of the brain; 20  
The busy thought that despots cannot wrest,

Nor gold, nor dread, nor penury enchain.  
Good Pioneera, disabuse thy fear,  
And doubt no more thy constant Pioneer.

*The Pioneer* (23 November 1833): 104.

E.H., "A FACTORY GIRL OF STALYBRIDGE"  
ON JOSEPH RAYNER STEPHENS

At Dukinfield Green a man does reside  
That preaches against superstition and pride;  
The millowners hate him and ministers too,  
Because he informs us what we ought to do.

He preaches the gospel and Ten Hours' Bill; 5  
They would have him down if they had their will,  
We must have our living, say they to the poor,  
But till they preach like Stephens we'll pay them no more.

For he takes God's holy word for his guide,  
And all other books he does lay aside; 10  
He tells us the truth, him we will obey,  
For (God and his People) they shall win the day.

Religion, alas, I am sorry to say,  
They change and turn it just their own way;  
They all have good livings, they preach as they will, 15  
And, alas, we must keep them, and work in the mill.

Their children, too, to school must be sent,  
Till all kinds of learning and music have learnt;  
Their wives must have veils, silk dresses, and cloaks,  
And some who support them can't get linsey coats. 20

I have searched the Bible, on purpose to find,  
If such things as these by God was design'd,  
But I never could find them recorded therein,  
And, therefore, I think it must be a great sin.

My father, a preacher he was it is true, 25  
But he had to work, and his children too;  
If they had sent us to school, better rhyme could we make,  
And I think it is time we had some of their cake.

I was sent to the mill at eight years of age,  
And for many a year I'd stand on a stage; 30

When my limbs were all tir'd and my strength overcome,  
I'd often to lay myself down under the loom.

But then in those days no Stephens we knew,  
And since he has told us what we are to do,  
Let us do as he bids us, then we'll get our rights, 35  
And I wish in my heart there were more Stephenites.

Of Stephens 'tis said, and it's not very new,  
He's a friend of the poor, I believe that its true;  
For he tells us our faults (and the millowners too,)  
But they cannot stand it, no, that will not do. 40

Long time they have bound us with chains of oppression,  
So long that we durst not think of discretion,  
But God in his Providence has us enlighten'd,  
And bless'd be his name our prospects are brighten'd.

We long have been friendless, distress'd, and forlorn, 45  
But Stephens he has loudly blown the ram's horn;  
Those walls of oppression they shall surely fall,  
Though our tyrants are great, God is greater than all.

A wolf in sheep's clothing says he will devour  
All that mention your name, if they are under his pow'r; 50  
But if that be his preaching, I can tell you, my friend,  
It is time for such preaching to come to an end.

They have call'd you a devil, and they are religious,  
But I think they've no more than the crows or the midges;  
But you shall preach the truth, and your cry shall be still, 55  
The Gospel, the Gospel, and the Ten Hours' Bill!

But let us all strive to walk in God's ways,  
And from day to day our Saviour to praise.  
Let us search the Bible and know the Lord's will,  
And walk in the smile of his countenance still. 60

We factory lasses have but little time,  
So I hope you will pardon my bad written rhyme.  
God bless him for striving to get us our rights,  
And I wish the world over were true Stephenites.

A Stephenite I am from the ground of my heart, 65  
And I hope from the same I shall never depart.  
May God spare your life till the tyrants are ended,

So I bid you good bye, till my verses I've mended.

*The Northern Star* (18 May 1839): 7.

F. SAUNDERSON, "A FEMALE COTTAGER"  
SPRING REFLECTIONS

When frost and snow shall all subside,  
And Sol's bright orb the clouds divide,  
And dreary winter cease to frown,  
And fruitful showers come cheering down;  
When songsters mount, on downy wing, 5  
Sweetly their maker's praise to sing;  
When Flora decks the lawns with pride,  
And lambkins frisk on every side;  
When the rich blade of corn appears,  
And lovely bloom, the fruit tree bears, 10  
While flocks sport round the mountain's brow  
And herds graze peacefully below,  
The hills resound on every side,  
With notes of joy: respondent glide  
The gurgling streams, with even pace; 15  
Reflecting nature's beauteous face:  
While thus my soul, entranced, surveys  
Creation's beauties; and my gaze,  
And pleasure to my glowing heart,  
Think of him who 'neath the smart 20  
Of fell oppression sighs; immured  
In Bastile [sic] walls, by bars secured;  
Shut from the sight of nature's charms;  
Barred from affection's kindly arms;  
Whose soothing powers would fain engage 25  
In tender efforts to assuage  
His griefs; and sweetly to beguile  
The hour of sorrow with its smile.  
I think on him; the needy wretch  
Whom fell misfortune dooms to stretch, 30  
His weary limbs, and aching head,  
Upon the Union Workhouse bed;  
No tender wife, or daughter fair,  
To soothe his woes with anxious care;  
No children's smiles his heart to cheer; 35  
In vain for him, the opening year  
Spreads forth its charms: he sees them not;  
Confined to one dull hateful spot,  
Where prison walls and felon's fare

Are all that grinding wealth can spare, 40  
 From its ill-gotten, endless, store  
 For labour's sons, grown old and poor.  
 I think of him, and many a tear,  
 (As o'er the beauties of the year,  
 I cast my gaze,) rolls down my cheek 45  
 And then with vigour fresh I seek,  
 My honest countrymen, to inspire  
 With patriotism's holy fire  
 To hurl the Cerberus from his throne,  
 And tear the unholy triple crown 50  
 From off his brows; and so restore  
 To every child, of British birth,  
 The right, though poor to tread the earth  
 In freedom; never more to be  
 Consigned to Bastile [sic] misery. 55

*The Northern Star* (19 May 1838): 7.

ELIZA COOK  
 SONG FOR THE WORKERS  
 (WRITTEN FOR THE EARLY CLOSING MOVEMENT.)

LET Man toil to win his living,  
     Work is not a task to spurn;  
 Poor is gold of others' giving,  
     To the silver that we earn.

Let Man proudly take his station 5  
     At the smithy, loom, or plough;  
 The richest crown-pearls in a nation  
     Hang from Labour's reeking brow.

Though her hand grows hard with duty,  
     Filling up the common Fate; 10  
 Let fair Woman's cheek of beauty  
     Never blush to own its state.

Let fond Woman's heart of feeling  
     Never be ashamed to spread  
 Industry and honest dealing, 15  
     As a barter for her bread.

Work on bravely, GOD'S own daughters!  
     Work on stanchly, GOD'S own sons!  
 But when Life has too rough waters,

Truth must fire her minute guns.	20
Shall ye be unceasing drudges? Shall the cry upon your lips Never make your selfish judges Less severe with golden whips?	
Shall the mercy that we cherish, As old England's primest boast, See no slaves but those who perish On a far and foreign coast?	25
When we reckon hives of money, Own'd by Luxury and Ease, Is it just to grasp the honey While Oppression chokes the bees?	30
Is it just the poor and lowly Should be held as soulless things? Have they not a claim as holy As rich men, to angels' wings?	35
Shall we burthen Boyhood's muscle? Shall the young Girl mope and lean, Till we hear the dead leaves rustle On a tree that should be green?	40
Shall we bar the brain from thinking Of aught else than work and woe? Shall we keep parch'd lips from drinking Where refreshing waters flow?	
Shall we strive to shut out Reason, Knowledge, Liberty, and Health? Shall all Spirit-light be treason To the despot King of Wealth?	45
Shall we stint with niggard measure, Human joy and human rest? Leave no profit—give no pleasure, To the toiler's human breast?	50
Shall our Men, fatigued to loathing, Plod on sickly, worn, and bow'd ? Shall our Maidens sew fine clothing, Dreaming of their own white shroud?	55



No! for Right is up and asking  
Loudly for a fairer lot;  
And Commerce must not let her tasking  
Form a nation's canker spot. 60

Work on bravely, GOD'S own daughters!  
Work on stanchly, GOD'S own sons!  
But till ye have smoother waters,  
Let Truth fire her minute guns!

*Poems By Eliza Cook. New ed. London:  
Warne & Routledge, 1860. 477-78.*

“MARIE”  
TREES OF LIBERTY

With snatches of triumphant song,  
And loud huzzas of jubilee,  
Proceeds the wild, rejoicing throng,  
And plants its tree of Liberty!  
Awhile, the People's tender care, 5  
Protects its softly budding shoot,  
But soon they see, in blank despair,  
A canker eating at its root:  
Their Children's seat will never be  
Beneath that Tree of Liberty! 10

With hymns of hope within our heart,  
With deep and earnest souls of prayer  
Let us begin our needful part,  
But not with shouts upon the air;  
With gentle, steady-moving hand, 15  
Pour in bright Knowledge as a stream,  
Chase Ignorance throughout the land,  
Efface her dim debasing dream;  
Tear off the chains with which she binds,  
And open wide her fetid den; 20  
Upraise our timid, crouching hinds,  
And make them into free-born Men!  
Thus shall we earn a jubilee,—  
Thus plant our Tree of Liberty.

Dark slavish Fear hath held the world 25  
In close and dismal bondage long,  
Till germs of goodness have grown weak,

And weeds of wickedness waxed strong.  
 Oh, raise up high the great flood-gates,  
 The golden gates of radiant Love, 30  
 And teach men to discard old hates,  
 And in new ways of Peace to move  
 One act of love is better worth  
 Than thousand servile deeds of fear,—  
 Fear, dwarfing men to coward slaves, 35  
 While noble Love doth free men rear!—  
 Thus, thus, with earnest hope would we  
 Uptrain our Tree of Liberty!

And, in due season, golden fruit  
 Will hang upon its branches fair; 40  
 No canker eating at its root,  
 No drooping leaves upon it there;  
 The Despot's hand in vain may try  
 To move it from its olden place,—  
 'Twill, calm, withstand his evil eye, 45  
 Or, sweetly laugh into his face!  
 And all good spirits, though unseen,  
 Will nurture it with blessed dew,  
 Preserve its foliage evergreen,  
 And train its form to Beauty true. 50  
 Oh, quickly help, whoe'er ye be,  
 To plant such Trees of Liberty!

*Working Man's Friend and Family Instructor* 2.35 (29 May 1852): 142.

MARY HUTTON  
 ON THE POOR LAWS' AMENDMENT BILL

— “Oh! pity human woe,  
 'Tis what the happy to the unhappy owe.”  
 So sang the mighty bards in days of yore,  
 When kings and princes help'd the lowly poor,  
 When ladies spun, and nobles till'd the land; 5  
 To feed the poor, was then high heaven's command;  
 But is it so, in these degenerate days,  
 When Christian temples ring with prayer and praise,  
 And from the lips of Christian pastors flow,  
 Fair truths that teach, to feel for want and woe? 10  
 But now no more, these pleasing truths we read,  
 The poor, are by our boasted laws decreed,  
 To writhe with endless pain and misery;  
 For the fair sacred streams of charity

Are now for ever and for ever dried 15  
 By human avarice—and human pride.  
 Fair charity, celestial maid, ascend  
 To heaven thy home—no more on man attend.  
 No more thy humanising influence shed,  
 Cover no more the poor unshelter'd head, 20  
 Though famine rages with infernal stride,  
 Though cries for bread are heard, both far and wide,  
 Though young and old, and babes with dying moan,  
 Implore thy aid—even should all nature groan,  
 Hear not, sweet maid, the universal cry, 25  
 Our rulers say, that half the poor must die.  
 The population is by far too dense,  
 So preach our high and mighty men of SENSE;  
 It must be thinn'd, and how can this be done,  
 But starving half the poor beneath the sun? 30  
 Little, alas! the ancient law supplied,  
 Why of that little are we now denied?  
 Ye legislators, why should you withhold,  
 That sorry pittance from the poor and old?  
 Convicts for crime, ye warmly clothe and feed, 35  
 But that poor honest wretch who stands in need,  
 With haggard looks, in vain assistance craves;  
 Oh! open wide your jaws, ye friendly graves,  
 And end the crying wrong of British slaves!  
 Ye great, why would you wider make our wounds, 40  
 Enough of hatred and ill-will abounds;  
 Enough of party malice and of strife,  
 With burning woes—our bleeding country's rife—  
 And soon 'twill be beyond your boasted power,  
 Commotion's turbid sails to bend or lower. 45  
 Oh! what appalling sights afflict mine eyes,  
 What woes on woes—what crimes on crimes arise,  
 Thefts, murders, direful fires, and pale disease,  
 And wild and long continued blasphemies;  
 Horrid heart-burnings, imprecations deep, 50  
 Curses enough, to rouse the dead from sleep.  
 Now more intense the wild confusion swells,  
 Till phrenzied man against his God rebels;  
 Stern vengeance stalking round the land is seen,  
 An universal carnage fills the scene. 55

Yet these are prosperous days, and we are free!  
 We are not now enchain'd in slavery;  
 If these are prosperous days—return again,  
 Ye golden days of plenty, war, and pain,

When men were sold at their proud lord's command, 60  
 As part and parcel of their master's land.  
 'Twere better far to live a tyrant's slave,  
 Than pine through want into an early grave.  
 In feudal times blest was the peasant's lot,  
 Then plenty smiled upon his humble cot; 65  
 He knew no throbs of agonizing pain,  
 No ghastly want with all its frightful train:  
 No wife's deep woe, no children's cries for bread,  
 Rived his sad heart with apprehensive dread.  
 No want of work, no pale consuming care, 70  
 Goaded him on to deeds of dark despair;  
 If bounteous heaven but crown'd his life with health;  
 He envied not the pamper'd sons of wealth;  
 For then his industry was sure to bring  
 The blessings of a fair and smiling spring. 75  
 How different now in these enlighten'd times,  
 Impell'd by want, onward he flies to crimes  
 Which once he view'd with horror and dismay,  
 Now desperation leads and points the way.  
 A felon's doom for him has now no fears, 80  
 He cares not for the laws, nor them reveres;  
 And oh! may heaven's compassionating King,  
 Who knows and numbers every secret spring  
 That guides and actuates his human heart,  
 Within his heavenly mansions grant him part. 85

*The Happy Isle and Other Poems.* London: J. Limbird., 1836. 84-87.

MARY HUTTON  
THE SLAVE

BENEATH a scorching Indian sky,  
     Where Afric's sons are bought and sold;  
 Where every fond endearing tie  
     Is sacrificed for paltry gold:—

Where kind compassion never dwelt, 5  
     With gentle, mild, dissolving eye;  
 Where never, never, scarce was felt  
     The pure, the sympathetic sigh:—

Where chain'd upon the dark sea shore  
     The wretched captive trembling stands; 10  
 From home, and friends, and country, tore  
     By cruel slavery's iron hands:—





Of some fair plaintain [*sic*] tree;  
And there at eve, we fondly play'd  
With frolic, fun, and glee.

“And oft we pierced the glassy wave,  
And bathed us in the deep; 90  
Nor ever fear'd a watery grave,  
For storms were lock'd in sleep.

“And oft within the cocoa grove,  
We spent the live long day  
In holy, sweet, fraternal love, 95  
In innocence and play.

“Our father gazed with looks of bliss,  
For oh! he loved us well;  
And as he gave to each a kiss,  
With grief his heart would swell. 100

“For our departed mother dear  
Had long been gone to rest;  
And oft our father's starting tear,  
Proclaim'd his anguish'd breast.

“But we were then too young to know 105  
A tender mother's worth,  
Yet when we saw our father's woe,  
It sadden'd all our mirth.

“At length, a cruel reckless band,  
Who knew no god but gold, 110  
Tore us from our dear native land,  
And to the vampires sold.

“We wrung our hands in deep despair,—  
My sister clung to me:  
And then she tore her beauteous hair, 115  
In wild calamity!

“She cried—'oh! let us take one kiss  
Of our respected sire;  
If ye e'er felt paternal bliss,  
Oh! grant us this fond desire!'— 120

“But oh! they heeded not our tears,  
Nor yet our heartfelt pains;

And then, as if to' [sic] augment our fears,  
They bound us fast in chains.

"And then they bore us o'er the sea, 125  
And us to tyrants sold,  
To drag out life in slavery,  
For cursed, cruel gold.

"My sister's tears, her anguish'd woes,  
Were crimes in her fell tyrant's eye: 130  
Her piteous looks, heart-rending throes,  
But urged him to more cruelty.

"At length our master's callous heart,  
Who heaven, and earth, and hell defied,  
Lash'd her, till with envenom'd smart, 135  
The poor—poor trembling victim died.

"—My dearest sister! yes, I'll come—  
I'll throw me in the briny wave—  
I'll join thee in the silent tomb—  
The deep salt sea shall be my grave!" 140

"Dear, wretched sufferer," now I cried,  
"Thy painful life thou must not end;  
For thee thy God and Saviour died;  
He is the sorrowing captive's friend.

"Oh! put thy trust in heaven above, 145  
Let not thy grief-worn soul despair;  
Thy God can all thy woes remove,  
And soothe and heal thy burning care."

I now to his delighted heart,  
The holy Christian faith unfurl'd; 150  
I told him of his Saviour's smart,  
To save a sinful guilty world.

And now the sorrowing captive cries,  
In humble, sweet, and plaintive strains,-  
"For me my blessed Saviour died, 155  
For me He felt those woes and pains:

"For me his precious blood He shed,  
My sinful, guilty soul to save;  
For me He bow'd his heavenly head,



To raise me from the yawning grave. 160

“Did white man’s God, then, die for me,—  
 That great, eternal Fount of Love?  
 Expired He on the sacred tree,  
 To place me in bright realms above?

“Just now, dear Sir, I heard you say, 165  
 My Saviour died for me;  
 —Lord! wash my sinful stains away,  
 That I may live with Thee!

“That I may heavenly bliss obtain  
 In Paradise above; 170  
 That I may rest from all my pain,  
 And praise the God I love.

“There, I shall Isidora meet,  
 And clasp her to my breast;  
 And, kneeling, at our Saviour’s feet, 175  
 Eternally be blest!”

“—Thy ransom I will now obtain—  
 Thou shalt thy aged father see:  
 Thou shalt alleviate his pain—  
 This moment, I will set thee free.” 180

What tears of joy roll’d down his face!  
 His faltering tongue refused to speak;  
 He clasp’d me in a close embrace;  
 I thought his beating heart would break!

*Sheffield Manor and Other Poems.* Sheffield: Blackwell, 1831. 39-48.

MARY HUTTON  
 ON A POOR LITTLE SWEEP

Britons, all so brave and free,  
 Who deeply feel for misery;  
 Ye who abhor black slavery,  
 With its sad galling chains;—  
 Ye, who deeply sympathize, 5  
 With human wrongs and agonies;—  
 Ye who have both hearts and eyes,  
 Behold yon child of pains;—

Yon shivering, wretched, helpless child,  
On whom contentment never smil'd; 10  
Compell'd to brave the winter wild,  
    And wander through the snow.  
Whose early cry of sweep; ho, sweep,  
Would make a pitying angel weep;  
How tremulous, how shrill, how deep, 15  
    That plaintive voice of woe.

Humanity is surely lost,  
To see that infant tempest tost,  
Dragging his tender frame through frost,  
    That adults scarce can bear. 20  
Cripp'd in heart, and mind, and limb,  
His weary eyes both sore and dim,  
That should with joyful pleasures swim,  
    But which he must not share.

Poor shivering thing, with frozen feet, 25  
Accustom'd long to brave and meet,  
Stern winter's cold and summer's heat,  
    Pray tell me how it came,  
That thou was put to trade so fell,  
Which must have had its rise from hell; 30  
No pen can all thy sufferings tell,  
    Nor tongue thy wrongs proclaim.

My wicked father basely sold  
Me to an iron man for gold,  
Whose heart is cruel, stern, and cold; 35  
    He cares not for my woes:  
For when I venture to complain,  
Or issue forth a sigh in pain,  
Or stop, ere chimney top I gain,  
    I'm goaded on with blows. 40

Yet there is one who reigns above,  
Whose name is everlasting love,  
Who can my injuries remove,  
    And heal me of my pain;  
And when I to my cold bed creep, 45  
Before I lose my wrongs in sleep,  
To him I'll humbly pray and weep—  
    He'll hear a sweep complain.

Go to thy nightly straw, poor boy,

Thy every hour and thought employ, 50  
 That Heaven will thy trade destroy,  
     And raise up friends for thee;  
 Who will redeem thee from the thrall,  
 Of thy unchristian, cruel call,  
 And screen thee with the sacred pall, 55  
     Of sweet humanity.

This cruel, and unchristian calling, which has long been a disgrace to humanity, and a stigma on the nation, will soon disappear by Act of Parliament. It is only surprising that it has existed so long, in a country famed for its humanity and philanthropy. How beautiful it is to see such readiness on the part of the higher orders to ameliorate the condition of the lower; those who do all in their power to leave the world better than they found it, well fulfil the purposes for which they were created, and I know of no pleasure which brings such peace within, as the reflection that you have done your best to relieve the miseries of suffering humanity. Heavenly, sweet, and serene, must be the death-bed of the truly Christian Philanthropist.

*Cottage Tales and Poems.* London, 1842. 91-93.

MARY HUTTON  
 ON THE QUEEN'S BAYS PERFORMING AT THE THEATRE,  
 FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE POOR OF THE TOWN

My heart is full to overflowing,  
 Thus to see my country's brave,  
 Their talent, wit, and aid bestowing,  
 Our starving artizans [*sic*] to save.  
 'Tis heaven-like when the noble mind 5  
 Exerts itself to benefit mankind.

Soldiers well can understand  
 Our sufferings, and most feelingly  
 Join both head, and heart, and hand,  
 To alleviate our misery. 10  
 Spirit of charity, may thy sweet presence  
 Fill every breast with thy ambrosial essence.

When powerful, generous love prevails,  
 And pity thrills each noble mind;  
 To stem the cold and sickening gales, 15  
 Which body, soul, and vigour bind.  
 Low in the dust, when men in their despair

Dare scarcely look to heaven for heavenly care;

Oh, 'tis a bright and glorious trait,  
To see the soldier marching forth, 20  
To save the sinews of the state,  
And raise the sufferers from the earth.  
Kindness cheers and elevates all hearts,  
And o'er the mind and soul a heavenly balm imparts.

There is a spirit stirring power— 25  
An influence holy and divine,  
That teaches men in perils hour,  
To meet together, and combine  
For works of charity and love,  
And such are blest by heaven above. 30

May health and happiness attend  
Our country's gallant brave defenders,  
Who nobly thus the poor befriend;  
Lighting again the dying embers—  
Of brightening hope, long prostrate laid, 35  
Beneath starvation's withering shade.

*Cottage Tales and Poems.* London, 1842. 42-43.

MARY HUTTON  
"POLISH SONG"

No Pole can live a slave;  
To British shores they come;  
Britons, behold the brave  
    Without a home.

Their homes are all in flame, 5  
By a treacherous horde;  
Poland shall have a name;  
    Gird on the sword.

Each ardent heart aspires  
To set his country free, 10  
And burns with holy fires,  
    For Liberty.

Where are the great and brave,  
In manhood's hardy prime;  
They seek a nameless grave, 15  
    In a foreign clime.

Oblivion ne'er shall spread  
O'er Poles the funeral pall;  
Brave warriors yet shall tread  
    Each lonely Hall. 20

Rise, Poland's Star,  
Long in the wane;  
Friends from afar  
    Shall meet again.

*Cottage Tales and Poems.* London, 1842. 20-21.

MARY HUTTON  
"ON THE OCCUPATION OF CRACOW"

Let Friends of Freedom now arise,  
Avenge the crying injuries,  
The burning wrongs and agonies,  
    That on the Poles await.

The base atrocious deed is done; 5  
The three protecting Powers they come,  
To desolate each Polish home,  
    The brave to exterminate.

Patriots, who have shelter found,  
On ancient Cracow's hallow'd ground, 10  
Must now with galling chains be bound.  
    To bitter slavery.

The truly brave, the great and good,  
Who have their country's wrongs withstood,  
And often fought in dust and blood, 15  
    For life and liberty,

Must now succumb to tyrant pride;  
The flimsy veil is thrown aside,  
And God and Nature's law defi'd,  
    By the strong arm of Power. 20

Britons, arise, for mercy's sake;  
Briton's [sic], arise, and vengeance take;  
Your own sweet homes are now at stake—  
    You yet may see the hour

When Russian craft may lay us low, 25  
And cause us pain, distress, and woe;  
Our country's glories overthrow—  
    For this, alas, may come.

Should England sit supinely still,  
And not resist the tyrant's will, 30  
Her cup of woes he yet may fill,  
    And meet her Poland's doom.

Should Britain's rulers now forbear,  
She may the fate of Poland share;  
For wily Russia's lordly heir, 35  
    May be the lord of all.

Let Englishmen now make a stand,  
And break the tyrant's withering brand,  
And teach him we can yet command,  
    At mercy's righteous call. 40

*Cottage Tales and Poems.* London, 1842. 25-26.

MARY HUTTON  
"EVA"

The marriage of Strongbow, Earl of Pembroke, and the lady Eva, daughter of Dermot, King of Leinster, was celebrated whilst the dead bodies of the murdered citizens were lying unburied to the streets. Waterford had been besieged by Strongbow, and all its wretched inhabitants; ah, even including helpless women and innocent children, were put to the sword, without mercy or remorse. Dermot was a cruel, ferocious wretch; he had sent his son and two other noble youths, as hostages to Roderick O'Connor, reigning King of Ireland, who must have been equally as cruel as Dermot, for when he could not succeed in bringing back Dermot to his allegiance, he put the three innocent youths to death.

Lovely Eva, thou shalt wear  
Rich costly robes and diamonds fine,  
That so thy bearing may appear  
More seeming to thy royal line.  
Though costly robes and jewels rare, 5  
Can ne'er improve thy beauty bright,  
Thou art so exquisitely fair,  
Thou fills each heart with sweet delight.

Beauteous princess, let me place  
 This chain of gold on thy neck of grace, 10  
 Thus Pembroke's Earl gallantly said,  
 As he knelt before the lovely maid.  
 And must I wear thy robes so fine?  
 And must I wear thy chain of gold?  
 And must I be a wife of thine? 15  
 Thy heart, proud Earl, is stern and cold,  
 But by my father I am sold.  
 Oh is it well, Earl Pembroke, say,  
 That on this dark, this bloody day,  
 I should be made a woful [*sic*] bride, 20  
 To suit thine and my fathers pride;  
 When my poor murder'd countrymen,  
 Impeded all the way?  
 Christians, I despise the name;  
 I feel so indignant with shame; 25  
 For as we rode through bog and fen,  
 Oh, God, it was a sickening sight,  
 To see a deadly cruel blight,  
 Brought on by savage men.  
 The tears then rush'd to Eva's eyes, 30  
 De Clare he gaz'd with fix'd surprise;  
 Eve had always been so mild,  
 As passive as a simple child;  
 Timid and gentle as a dove,  
 Her ardent heart was form'd for love; 35  
 Compliantly she had obey'd  
 Her sire in every worldly thing,  
 And bow'd to every word he said;  
 He was her father and her king;  
 To him she ow'd the tide of life, 40  
 Her angel mother was his wife;  
 Oh could that sainted mother see  
 From her blest home beyond the skies,  
 Her child in her extremity,  
 She would forbid the sacrifice; 45  
 But though King Dermot she obey'd,  
 Her heart despis'd the part he play'd;  
 His wretched country he had sold,  
 For his daughters [*sic*] hand, and English gold.  
 Lead on, my lord, fair Eva cried, 50  
 For ne'er was maid so wed before,  
 The groaning streets are deeply dy'd,  
 And deeply stained with freeman's gore.  
 My maidens fair the feast outspread,

For blood will stain my bridal bed; 55  
 The marriage rites were scarcely o'er,  
 E'er the altar ran with human gore,  
 And the fair bride was fainting led  
 Over the corpses of the dead;  
 Nor love nor honey-moon could be, 60  
 Amongst such blood and misery;  
 Days, weeks, and mouths thus passed away,  
 And desolation [*sic*] and dismay  
 Reign'd through the land, and hundreds died  
 Of hunger, in their manhood's pride. 65  
 Oh welcome is the silent grave,  
 For all sleep sweetly there;  
 The tyrant and the weary slave,  
 An equal blessing share.  
 Dry up thy tears, my dear Kathleen, 70  
 Weep not my maidens bright,  
 I fain would leave this painful scene,  
 Why start with such affright;  
 My hands and feet are icy cold,  
 My brain is all on fire; 75  
 Accursed is the traitor's gold,  
 And cruel is my sire.  
 Our sunlit isle has suffered long,  
 From savage Danish hordes,  
 And now the mighty and the strong, 80  
 Give way to Saxon lords.  
 Oh would our Irish Kings agree,  
 In hand and heart and mind,  
 Then each invading enemy,  
 Like chaff before the wind, 85  
 Would fly, and by united strength,  
 God would give us peace at length.  
 And now a wandering harper came,  
 In divers colours clad;  
 He bow'd before the royal dame, 90  
 But his heart was sore and sad.  
 His harp was strung to tones of woe,  
 His piercing doleful notes were low,  
 So low you scarce could hear a word,  
 Yet the dark import fair Eva heard: 95  
 And then she rais'd her lovely eyes,  
 T'wards the pure and pitying skies;  
 She clasp'd her hands, she gasp'd for breath,  
 Oh sing not of my brother's death;  
 Alas I fear'd this bloody day, 100



When Connor dear was sent away;  
 Alas I fear'd I never more  
 Should see that face I so adore.  
 Her large blue eyes, so meekly mild,  
 Were flashing now, most fierce and wild; 105  
 And there she sat as made of stone,  
 That lovely lady bright;  
 She shed no tear, she gave no moan,  
 For a dark and fearful blight  
 Came o'er her mind, and pain'd her head,— 110  
 "Would I were with my brother, dead."  
 There is a woe for words too deep,  
 That falls on the heart as silently  
 As a sudden, dark, eternal sleep.  
 And as awful and as thrillingly; 115  
 Yet when the storms of life are o'er,  
 The persecuted weep no more.  
 That lady gave nor scream nor start,  
 But she flashed on the Earl a piercing look,  
 Which pain'd his proud ambitious heart, 120  
 For scorn from her he ill could brook.  
 Oh, blame me not, my bride, my own,  
 He said most soothingly;  
 I would have given old Ireland's crown,  
 Had it belonged to me, 125  
 To have sav'd thy brother's dear, dear life;  
 Oh, blame me not, my beauteous wife.  
 Ah, woe is me, the Princess said,  
 Would I were by his side;  
 I would that I had ne'er been made 130  
 A sad and mournful bride;  
 Oh come not near,—oh come not near,  
 'Tis piteous to behold;  
 A lady fair lies in her bier,  
 She has joined her brother bold. 135

*Cottage Tales and Poems.* London, 1842. 22-25.

"A FACTORY GIRL"  
 BRIGHTER HOURS WILL COME

It is a motto for our youth,  
 When youthful visions fade,  
 When falsehood mingles with the truth,  
 Our future hopes to shade.

When disappointments cloud our joy, 5  
And past enjoyments fail,  
It bids us every power employ,  
The future time to hail.

That when the brighter hours we view,  
With clouds past overhead, 10  
Their shades will leave a lovelier hue  
Than light alone would shed.

*Poetic Thoughts in Working Hours*  
by A Factory Girl. Derby: Richard Keene, 1853. 7.

“A FACTORY GIRL”

LINES, SUGGESTED BY THE REMARK OF A FRIEND IN A LETTER, THAT TO THINK ON THE PAST IS  
NOT PROGRESS

To think on the past is not progress 'tis true,  
Yet oft 'twill our courage and patience rene [sic],  
When the last ray of hope is fading away,  
And we fear to go forward, yet dare not to stay.

When the shades of adversity hide from our view, 5  
Prosperity's sunshine, and friends we thought true;  
Reviewing the past, we seek to disdain  
A thought of regret for a treasure so vain.

To think on the past when dangers are near,  
With no one to help us, and no one to cheer, 10  
May brighten our hope, and fresh courage impart,  
When we fain would go forward, yet dare not to start.

When the friends who were faithful in sunshine and shade  
With feelings of kindness to lend us their aid,  
Depart from the pleasures and sorrows of earth, 15  
Reviewing the past, will tell of their worth.

Though, to think on the past, is not progress we know,  
Yet who can forget it, while onward they go?  
In sunshine or shade, befriended or not,  
The past in the future can ne'er be forgot. 20

*Poetic Thoughts in Working Hours*  
by A Factory Girl. Derby: Richard Keene, 1853. 13-14.

“A FACTORY GIRL”

UP AND BE DOING

Up and be doing! all that you can,  
To heighten the lowest condition of man,  
There's plenty of work for the head or the hand,  
At home, or abroad, on the sea, or the land.  
Then up and be doing! no longer delay, 5  
The morn it is breaking—it soon will be day.

Up and be doing! whate'er it may be,  
Duty or wisdom may point out to thee;  
The captive is hoping he soon may be freed,  
The hungry are crying for some one to feed. 10  
Then up and be doing! no longer delay,  
The morn it is breaking—it soon will be day.

Up and be doing! for one and for all,  
Great is thy mission, great is thy call,  
The weak and the helpless are asking thy aid, 15  
The vicious are seeking still more to degrade.  
Then up and be doing! no longer delay,  
The morn it is breaking—it soon will be day.

Up and be doing! with energy filled,  
Lands waste are lying, that wait to be tilled, 20  
Gold unrefined is buried in dross,  
Unknown, for the public to value its loss.  
Then up and be doing! no longer delay,  
The morn it is breaking—it soon will be day.

Up and be doing! for truth and for right, 25  
And aid in each system advancing the light  
That will raise the degraded and elevate still,  
Mankind, in the various stations they fill.  
Then up and be doing! no longer delay,  
The morn it is breaking—it soon will be day. 30

Up and be doing! thy friends will unite,  
To sanction what duty may bring to thy sight,  
And sweet the reward when thy labour is done,  
By duty and wisdom thus freely begun.  
Then up and be doing! no longer delay, 35  
The morn it is breaking—it soon will be day.

*Poetic Thoughts in Working Hours*  
by A Factory Girl. Derby: Richard Keene, 1853. 3-5.

“A FACTORY GIRL”  
TO A FRIEND WHO CAME TO THE FACTORY

Few were thy words, yet I saw in thy look  
A feeling of pity arose,  
Didst thou think that the hours of my labour were long  
And tedious the time as it goes?

Unknown, to another, the pleasure I find, 5  
While I am at work in the mill,  
I can think, notwithstanding the noise that is here,  
As though I were never so still.

While my hands are employed, there's amusement for me  
To think on the power of the steam, 10  
That pow'r so gigantic, so quickly subdued,  
By uses so simple and mean.

I muse on the wheels as they quickly go round,  
Admiring the genius of art;  
The metal, so useless a short time before, 15  
Now actively taking its part.

In spirit I go to the Foreigner's shore,  
And there I enquiringly view  
The produce of silk; there is pleasure for me,  
A pleasure for ever anew. 20

Returning again to my own native land,  
And the part I so recently left,  
There's something still charms me again and again,  
Ere twilight in darkness has slept.

Through the window you saw that was near to my side, 25  
The sun in his glory I see;  
When the hours of my labour are near to a close,  
What sight can so beautiful be?

Retiring, bright colours appear to my sight;  
What artist can picture the same? 30  
Each eve there's another I view with delight,  
I view and re-view it again.

And I know there are hearts that will welcome me home,  
When the bell rings the time to depart,

When the rest are forgotten, this thought will then give 35  
An impulse of joy to my heart.

Then indeed, I'm not weary of time as it goes,  
Nor wish for some other employ,  
While thus with my work, I am twining my thoughts,  
The time passes speedily by. 40

*Poetic Thoughts in Working Hours*  
by *A Factory Girl*. Derby: Richard Keene, 1853. 1-3.

“AURORA”  
IN THE MILL

Round run the wheels from morn till night,  
The rattling, whizzing wheels  
Round fly the belts—a dizzy sight—  
The jaded weaver reels;  
Swift shuttles fly from box to box, 5  
Swift flies the weft along,  
The tappets thump with cracking knocks,  
Slow moves the cloth along.

At breakfast time the engine stops,  
And all is hushed and still, 10  
Except where some remain behind  
To breakfast in the mill.  
The breakfast done, round fly again  
The rattling, whizzing wheels;  
Aye, grinding out both heart and brain, 15  
The master never feels.

Round fly the wheels, the belts and drums,  
With dreary, dreadful sound,  
Until the time at mid-day comes  
That brings the meal time round; 20  
Then home the various workers go,  
With hurrying, skurrying [*sic*] steps,  
Glad to escape an hour or so  
From pieces, warps, and skeps.

The dinner past, then back once more 25  
To finish out the day;  
Glad when the tedious task is o'er  
And toil gives place to play.  
From day to day, from week to week,

The whizzing wheels must run,  
Until at last cold Death does speak,  
And Life's stained piece is done.

30

*Yorkshire Factory Times* (14 August, 1896): 2.

THE COTTON FAMINE  
AND  
THE LANCASHIRE OPERATIVES

A POEM.

BY A FACTORY GIRL.

Proceeds to be applied in aid of the Preston Relief Fund.

*The following Poem was written for a manuscript magazine, the contributors to which are the female teachers of a Sunday School, in Preston. The Authoress had previously written an essay in verse, and was urged to write a second. This composition was written by the Authoress for private perusal, and not for the public eye. At the request of some persons actively engaged in relieving the suffering working classes of Preston, the Authoress has been induced to allow the Poem to be printed, on the understanding that the proceeds should be applied to the relief of her fellow-operatives.*

I once again, obedient to command,  
Lift down the sacred harp with trembling hand;  
For how shall I presume, with hands profane,  
To touch its chords to my poor humble strain?  
Yet, must I sing, but not as last I sang, 5  
Mid circling friends, where guileless laughter rang;  
I sing not now of happy Christmas time,  
The simple story and the merry rhyme—  
I sing, alas, of poverty and woe;  
Then let the strain be solemn, sad, and slow; 10  
But, whence this doleful change you may demand,  
Say, has there been a famine in the land?  
Have verdure-giving showers been denied  
Till, parched with thirst, the tender corn has died?  
Or as the sun his genial rays withheld 15  
Till blights have marr'd the labour of the field?  
Ah! no, for duly answering to his hope,  
The grateful farmer reaps th' abundant crop;  
No famine spreads its desolations here,  
But smiling plenty crown'd the closing year— 20

The cause is war, aye, civil war, the worst  
 By which this suffering earth has yet been curst—  
 War, dreadful at the best, but doubly so,  
 When friends and brethren on each other draw  
 The cruel sword, and, with relentless hand, 25  
 Spread death and terror through their native land;  
 Filled with unholy zeal they madly try  
 Each other's goods to injure and destroy.  
 The ports, from whence with other lands they trade,  
 Are watch'd and guarded by a strong blockade 30  
 To hinder commerce; hence it is that we  
 Lack cotton to employ our industry;  
 And cotton failing, causes work to fail,  
 And labour is the poor man's capital.  
 To be deprived of labour is to be 35  
 Plunged in the depths of want and poverty;  
 But can it be that free-born Britons have  
 Depended on the labour of the slave?  
 Yes! So supplies of cotton were insured,  
 They cared but little how they were procured; 40  
 So they had cotton, cared not tho' it were  
 Stain'd with the blood of slaves, nor did they care,  
 Tho', on the hands that pick'd it, there should be  
 The galling chains of hateful slavery.  
 But God, the God of mercy, power, and love, 45  
 Tho' nations raged, He calmly sits above  
 The madd'ning whirl, and from his throne surveys  
 Contentious man o'erruling all his ways –  
 Controlling every strange vicissitude  
 "From seeming evil still producing good;" 50  
 And Afric's children yet may have to bless  
 The war which brings to us such sad distress;  
 For Britons, forced against their own desire,  
 Now seek elsewhere the cotton they require.  
 In Afric's plains, where mighty Niger flows 55  
 Through boundless field, the plant spontaneous grows:  
 Thousands of untrod acres there abound,  
 Th' ungathered pods lie withering on the ground.  
 No more let slave-grown cotton crowd the mart,  
 Britons with slavery should have no part; 60  
 And you, ye boasting friends of liberty,  
 If you love freedom, set the captives free;  
 Or else no more assume the sacred name  
 Of followers of the meek and lowly lamb;  
 For this is His command, that you should do 65  
 To others as you'd have them do to you.

You send your gospel messengers abroad  
 To tell the heathen that there is a God;  
 While to the heathen, at your very door,  
 You scorn His precepts and deny His power. 70  
 You send your sons across the trackless main  
 To preach on India's coasts a Saviour slain;  
 While in yon vessel bound for Cuba's isle  
 Groan Afric's wretched sons—the slaver's spoil.  
 Wipe from your nation's page the shameful stains; 75  
 Loose from the captive's hands the galling chains,  
 Else will they break them, and the clanking sound  
 Of broken fetters falling to the ground—  
 Which tells the freedom of this injured race—  
 Will shake your nation to its lowest base. 80  
 But while for others woes I may repine,  
 My native town! I must remember thine,  
 For dark vicissitude has frown'd on thee;  
 Thine are the woes of want and poverty.  
 But how much misery may yet be traced 85  
 To drunkenness, improvidence, and waste;  
 First drunkenness,—the greatest ill of all,  
 Compar'd with this the rest are only small,—  
 This wastes more lives, and works more ruin far  
 Than famine, pestilence, or even war. 90  
 In our poor town—poor in more ways than one—  
 'Tis said that in the year so lately gone  
 One hundred thousand pounds were spent in drink.  
 A hundred thousand pounds. Ah! only think,  
 A hundred thousand pounds all spent for what? 95  
 What has it purchased for the wretched sot?  
 His ruined health, his poverty and shame;  
 E'en his own children blush to own his name.  
 What has it purchased for the drunkard's wife?  
 Turning to bitterest gall her cup of life— 100  
 Her life, which once with hope was bright and fair,  
 Now chang'd to hopeless woe and dark despair.  
 And worst of all, for him, what has it bought,  
 Whose mis-spent life meets with an end unsought,  
 Who, with his sins unwept for, unforgiven, 105  
 "Reels staggering drunk up to the bar of heaven;"  
 The soul recoils and shudders but to think  
 At what a fearful cost these purchase drink.  
 Oh! if a Samson's strength were only mine,  
 Who slew his country's foe, the Philistine; 110  
 Were I, like patriotic Samson, strong  
 To shake this mighty edifice of wrong;



Oh! if these feeble hands could only clasp  
 Its giant pillars with a Samson's grasp,  
 I'd rid my country of its direst woe, 115  
 E'en though I perished in the overthrow.  
 Yet there are many others who, although  
 The drunkard's baser crimes they never know,  
 Yet, when prosperity and plenty reign,  
 No thought have they to save superfluous gain; 120  
 Their motto is, "be merry while you may,  
 Eat, drink, leave trouble to another day";  
 Whate'er their earnings, be they great or small,  
 It matters not, they're sure to spend them all.  
 But ah! in sickness, or adversity, 125  
 How unprepar'd and how distress'd are they;  
 Soon forced on their more prudent friends to fall,  
 Or e'en to take the pauper's wretched dole.  
 Ye thoughtless ones, let past misdeeds suffice;  
 Henceforth give heed unto the heavenly voice 130  
 Which points you to the ant to learn of her—  
 To think of winter time while skies are fair;  
 And if for earthly things you care or not,  
 Let not your soul's best interest be forgot,  
 Lest life's brief summer be for ever past, 135  
 And you in anguish cry, "not sav'd at last."  
 But they most worthy far of sympathy  
 Are those who strive to hide their poverty;  
 Respectable and clean in outward show,  
 Their inward wants and trials few may know. 140  
 Take Richard's case, a type of many more;  
 Richard's an honest Christian man, but poor;  
 His wife to keep, besides three children small,  
 Yet for six months he's had no work at all;  
 His little stock, squeezed from his weekly store, 145  
 How soon 'tis gone! Where shall he look for more?  
 His household goods—long cherish'd, dearly priz'd—  
 Are one by one brought forth and sacrificed;  
 An ancient clock, in polish'd oaken case—  
 A single finger decorates the face; 150  
 It was his grandsire's clock, a family treasure,  
 And his own mother priz'd it beyond measure;  
 "And must," he asks himself with darken'd brow,  
 "Preserv'd so long, and must I lose thee now?"  
 Yes; for his children, gathering round his feet, 155  
 Are clam'rous grown for food, and they must eat;  
 His books though few—the choicest and the best—  
 His Bible sav'd, he parts with all the rest;

While dread of future evil turns him pale  
 When all his earthly refuges shall fail. 160  
 Poor faithless one, lift up thy drooping head,  
 A gracious Father hath insured thy bread;  
 And sooner shall the stones beneath thy feet  
 Be chang'd by Him to bread, that thou may'st eat;  
 As soon the gates of Heaven shall open wide, 165  
 And pour down manna till thou are supplied;  
 As thou and thine in pining want shall live  
 And lack the food which He hath power to give.  
 The cattle on a thousand hills that graze,  
 And beasts that roam the forest's dreary maze; 170  
 The gold and silver buried in the hills,  
 Where torrents roll—where flow the gentle rills;  
 The finny tribes that in the ocean swim,  
 All, all, are His, for all were made by Him;  
 And you, ye wing'd inhabitants of air, 175  
 E'en you are objects of His heavenly care;  
 "And if He cares for these, ye faithless, say  
 "Are ye not better, dearer far than they?"  
 For faith and patience Richard humbly pleads,  
 Then takes the sacred book and thus he reads— 180  
 Seek first the kingdom of thy God—seek Heaven,  
 And all things needful shall be surely given;  
 Then upward casts his faith illumin'd eyes  
 In thankful confidence, and thus he cries—  
 Although the barren fig-tree blossom not; 185  
 Though vines should fail, and olive branches rot;  
 Though earthly comforts are not mine to boast;  
 Though earthly treasures be for ever lost,  
 Yet will I joy in my salvations, Lord;  
 Yet will I trust in His unfailing word. 190

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FANNY FORRESTER  
OH TO BE A COUNTRY LASS!

Oh to be a country lass,  
Thoughtless, blithe, and simple,  
Tripping o'er the verdant grass,  
In rustic gown and wimple!  
Evermore I long to be 5  
A gay and careless rover,  
Unbound by custom, proud and free,  
Like bees among the clover.

Could I but seek the cool retreat  
Where reeds and rushes quiver, 10  
Could I but bare these weary feet  
And bathe them in the river,  
Could I but crown this aching brow  
With buttercups and daisies,  
The soul that yearns so vainly now 15  
Would sing its Maker's praises.

For I am tired of busy streets,  
Of dingy courts and alleys,  
My spirit thirsts for summer sweets,  
For pleasant country valleys. 20  
Would I could climb some dear green hill!  
Ah, poor heart wildly beating!  
Cease, cease thy idle dreams until  
I hear the lambkins bleating.

When lilies on their slender stems 25  
In merry wood are singing,  
When morning dew in liquid gems  
To bud and leaf is clinging.  
Could I but rove beneath the trees,  
Nor care nor sorrow knowing, 30  
How soon the blessed country breeze  
Would set these pale cheeks glowing.

Could I but rest a little while  
Where russet leaves are falling,  
In tender rapture would I smile 35  
To hear the cuckoos calling;  
Or slumber through the drowsy hours,  
The sunlight o'er me streaming,  
The kisses of the playful flowers

To wake me from my dreaming. 40

When through wild blossoms sweet and fair  
The evening breeze is straying,  
I fain would kneel a moment where  
The golden corn is swaying;  
Where, in the gloaming weird and dim, 45  
'Twould seem no irksome duty  
To lift the grateful heart to Him  
Who fills the world with beauty.

*Ben Brierley's Journal (August 11, 1877): 252.*

FANNY FORRESTER  
IN THE CITY

She flaunts about lie noisy town,  
And seeks the vilest places,  
The while the angry sun glares down  
Upon her silks and laces—  
A wretched woman, steeped in shame, 5  
Few look on her with pity,  
For, like some evil curse, her name  
Is whispered through the city.

Her hollow cheeks are flushed with wine,  
And through her perfumed tresses 10  
Bright gems, like gleaming serpents, twine—  
A mother's pure caresses  
May never soothe that aching brow  
When racked with pain and sorrow—  
But Satan sings "Be happy now! 15  
What care we for the morrow?"

In lonely hours she yearns to feel  
A sister's holy kisses;  
She clasps her hands in vain appeal—  
Into her ear he hisses 20  
"Come, revel in the sinful throng!  
For there is no returning,  
Come, drown thy woe in wine and song,  
And cease this idle yearning!"

Few, few, may mark the burning tear 25  
That from her eye-lid gushes,  
When, half in madness, half in fear,

Back to the crowd she rushes;  
As, forcing down the wild regret,  
That haunts her bosom ever, 30  
She wails, "My wretched soul, forget  
That thou art lost for ever!"

Through sounds that seem to rise from hell,  
Half sad, and half appealing,  
At eve the holy vesper bell, 35  
Like angel's voice, comes stealing;  
But ere the stars begin to shine,  
Her heart, with anguish riven,  
Cries out, "Alas, such sins as mine  
Can never be forgiven!" 40

And white-souled girls, that smiling tread  
The sacred paths of duty,  
Shrink, half in wonder, half in dread,  
Before her fading beauty.  
She marks each brow, like virgin snow, 45  
With sudden crimson shaded,  
And wonders if they blush to know  
A sister so degraded.

How often in the hush of night  
She hears home-voices calling! 50  
While o'er her face, so worn and white,  
The moon's sad beams are falling.  
The shadows of the waving trees  
Around her feet are lying,  
And oh, the blessed country breeze 55  
Through hawthorn boughs is sighing!

Delightful sounds, that evermore  
Are stealing through her dreaming!  
While through *one* open cottage door  
Two loving eyes are beaming. 60  
Ah, dear white cot! ah, straggl'ing lane,  
So silent, grey, and dreary!  
Ah, patient eyes that watch in vain,  
Yet never seem to weary!

Pure, changeless love, through grief and shame 65  
In perfect glory shining,  
For ever round one shadowed name  
Hope's fairest garlands twining!

Ere long a voice shall whisper near,  
While golden bees are humming— 70  
“Oh, mother dear! oh, mother dear!  
Your weary child is coming.”

For Christ shall guide those wandering feet  
From sinful streets and alleys,  
O'er breezy hills and pastures sweet, 75  
Through smiling country valleys  
Repentant prayers and broken sighs  
With grateful tears shall mingle—  
And she shall close her dying eyes  
Beside her mother's ingle. 80

Restored through Christ, how sweet to die,  
Fond mother, on thy bosom!  
That after death her dust may lie  
Beneath the hawthorn's blossom!  
So bring to Him thy load of cares, 85  
His mercy faileth never;  
He will reward thy faithful prayers,  
Blest be His love for ever!

*Ben Brierley's Journal (18 May 1878): 15.*

FANNY FORRESTER  
LITTLE SINGERS

It rose above the noisy street,  
A song of mirth and gladness—  
Two childish voices, fresh and sweet,  
Yet full of woe and sadness,  
Mingled together in the strain— 5  
Two tiny shivering creatures,  
That warbled in the pelting rain  
With pinched and haggard features.

Their tender limbs, so frail, so slight,  
Showed through their scanty dresses; 10  
And, Oh! the rain, with cruel spite  
Had drenched their yellow tresses!  
Yet, when the treble died away  
The tenor voice grew bolder;  
And now and then one tired head lay 15  
Upon the other's shoulder.

“Oh Tom!” the little maiden cried,  
“I am so tired of singing.”  
He pressed her tiny hand and sighed,  
But still his voice kept ringing. 20  
“Look, Tom, my feet are bruised and sore—  
Oh, say you are not angry!  
For brother, I can sing no more,  
I am so faint and hungry!”

And when she raised her drowned blue eyes 25  
He held her close, and shivered,  
Then looked toward the leaden skies,  
And, though his white lip quivered,  
He sang his little song of joy,  
Such pleasant memories waking, 30  
That they who heard the gallant boy  
Ne'er dreamt his heart was breaking.

He called the people to rejoice;  
Yet, while they paused to listen,  
A tremor shook that brave young voice, 35  
And something bright did glisten  
Upon the cheek that even then  
With burning shame was glowing;  
For he could hear unfeeling men  
Their drunken jests bestowing. 40

On, on, with wounded feet they strayed.  
Through dark and sinful places,  
Until the sickly lamplight played  
Upon their wistful faces—  
Till eyes not half so tired as theirs 45  
Were blinking round the ingle,  
And children in the evening prayers  
Their lisping tones did mingle.

Yea, till the hour when mothers bend  
To watch their sleeping treasures, 50  
When tender words and kisses blend  
With dreams of childish pleasures—  
And loving arms more closely fold  
Around those rosy blossoms,  
All fearful lest the piercing cold 55  
Should chill their dimpled bosoms;

Nigh fainting on the reeking flags

Two wretched city singers  
Wrung out their scant and dripping rags  
With blue and trembling fingers; 60  
Then sat them down to rest awhile,  
For Oh, they were so weary!  
And they had journeyed many a mile,  
And life was, Oh, so dreary!

They crouched together, hand in hand, 65  
A thousand slights recalling—  
They told of mansions proud and grand,  
And still the rain kept falling!  
It trickled down each frowning wall,  
And, like a wicked fairy, 70  
It beat upon the tattered shawl  
That covered little Mary.

And half in earnest, half in jest,  
She asked it not to pelt her!  
Then creeping to the ragged breast 75  
That was her only shelter,  
She watched its pranks—poor foolish child!  
She fancied it was playing—  
So at the cruel monster smiled  
That her young life was slaying. 80

Still, still, she watched the pelting rain  
With arch coquettish glances—  
For ah! her little childish brain fancies.  
She started from her resting place,  
For a faint voice was crying 85  
Close to her pretty smiling face—  
“Oh Mary, I am dying.”

She clasped her hands, and held her breath—  
Poor child, she was so frightened!  
And even in the pangs of death, 90  
His arm around her tightened.  
“Nay, sister, do not tremble so!  
Just bend your face and kiss me;  
And tell me, dear, before I go,  
That you at least will miss me.” 95

Around his neck her arms she threw,  
He whispered, “have I ever  
Been harsh, or cold, or cross to you?”



She answered, "never, never!"  
And then they thought of sullen skies, 100  
And cruel wintry weather—  
And prayed with dim appealing eyes  
That they might die together—

That piteous, heart-wrung, broken prayer,  
Rose from the sinful city— 105  
And angel voices filled the air—  
And Christ, in loving pity,  
Came down to where the children lay;  
And wound His arms around them;  
And bore the unsullied souls away, 110  
From the poor clay that bound them.

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All pale and lovely, side by side,  
They found them on the morrow,  
And people knew that they had died  
Of hunger, cold, and sorrow! 115  
For oh, their limbs were bare,  
And want had left grim traces  
Of blighted hope, and dark despair,  
Upon their angel faces!

*Ben Brierley's Journal* (11 December 1875): 403.

FANNY FORRESTER  
STRANGERS IN THE CITY

I. Homeless in the City

They are strangers in the city, and their thoughts a far away,  
Where the little brooks are singing through the valleys all the day.  
O! their hearts are in the meadows, though they tread the miry street,  
And the pretty dewy blossoms never kiss their weary feet.

Some with pitying eyes are gazing on the maiden's slender form, 5  
As she closer draws her scanty cloak to shield her from the storm;  
Like a timid fawn she nestles closer to her mother's side,  
Shyly shrinking in the shadow from the vulgar gaze to hide.

Like streaming cloudlets gathering round the silver moon at night,

Half concealing, wave the tresses o'er her brow so smooth and white. 10  
O! her eyes are like the ocean, and her soft and waving smile,  
Like the bright and fleeting sunshine of her own dear native Isle.

See, her garments hang in tatters, and her dainty feet are bare;  
But her soul is robed in whiteness, like a lily pure and fair.  
'Tis a feeble voice that whispers, as the crowds go hurrying by, 15  
'See, they all are hastening homewards, mother dear, but you and I!'

'Home! how sweet it sounds, my Mary! O! it warms my frozen heart,  
Absent faces gather round me—hush, my darling! do not start!  
O! I see the dear, dear faces in the turf-fire's cheerful light,  
While perhaps like us they wander, seeking shelter for the night. 20

From our happy little cabin sure we never thought to roam;  
But the sheriffs came, my darling! and they drove us from our home.  
How my Brian choked his anger when he heard them laugh and shout,  
As each little treasured relic that we prized they tossed about!

You remember how I pleaded; but they could not, would not feel; 25  
And they even took the cradle, and your Grannie's broken wheel.  
Then I knelt to them, my Mary, and I pleaded on my knees—  
They are broken—they are worthless—you will surely leave us these.

But they only laughed the louder—O! their taunts were hard to bear  
When they found the darkened corner where I hid my Nelly's chair. 30  
When I saw the faded cushion where our little one had sat—  
O! told them of the darling—but they would not leave e'en that.

Then I called in all the neighbours, who had gathered round the door,  
And poor Brian took the fiddle in his trembling hands once more.  
O! our hearts, my love, were breaking, though we joined the dancers then: 35  
Ah! we knew our feet would never beat that dear old floor again.

'Twas to cheer our drooping spirits that the neighbours laughed and sang,  
While the blythe [*sic*] tones of the fiddle through the empty cabin rang;  
But the merry strain grew fainter, and they could not stop their tears—  
We had sung and danced together—O! so many, many years! 40

They had always sought our cabin at the peaceful close of day,  
And with music, wit, and laughter passed the happy hours away.  
'Twas no wonder, then, dear Mary, as old mem'ries round them crept,  
That their mirth was all forgotten, and like children there they wept.

How my darlings clung around me, when the moment came to part: 45  
Like a tender stricken blossom, Katey hung upon my heart;

And my Brian's lips seemed frozen as he kissed me o'er and o'er—  
O! my heart, my heart is breaking!—and I cannot tell you more.'

'Hush, dear mother—hush, dear mother!' now the weeping maiden cries,  
As she marks the burning anguish in those old and feeble eyes. 50  
Sure you know our heavenly Father watches o'er them day and night;  
For the poor, forlorn, and wretched still are precious in his sight.'

Now the mother slightly pauses, with her hand across her brow—  
'O! my darling, where is Brian?—where is dark-eyed Katey now?  
May the holy Virgin guide them wherever they may be! 55  
Come closer to me, Mary—you are all that's left to me.'

By the gaily-lighted windows see the wanderers hurry past.  
Till they stand upon the threshold of a cottage door at last.  
'Will they pity us, dear mother!' Mary whispers soft and low:  
'O! perhaps they'll say the workhouse is the fittest place to go.' 60

Worn and weary, faint and hungry, cold and wretched, there they stand,  
On the door like pattering rain-drops taps the little trembling hand.  
Now the rustling of a garment—and the door is opened wide,  
While a flood of light comes streaming from the pleasant fire inside.

And the voice that breaks the silence makes the lonely exiles start, 65  
O! it steals like by-gone music to each crushed and weary heart;  
And she kindly bids them enter, with a bright and genial smile,  
'For she knows that they are wanderers from our own sweet sunny Isle.

'Come, our roof shall be your shelter from the darkness and the storm:  
You are welcome as the sunshine to our hearth so snug and warm. 70  
I will fasten all the windows, and I'll firmly bolt the door,  
Then will eat our little supper while the night winds shrink and roar.'

As they step across the threshold, what a pleasant sight they see!  
'Tis a father and his children—all are clustered round his knee.  
O! no doubt a tender longing fills each little listener's breast: 75  
He is telling them a story of the green and glorious West.

See how eagerly they listen to the witching tale he tells,  
Of the proud old ruined castles, and the fairy-haunted dells;  
They can only dream of fountains, and in fancy climb the hill,  
For they toil from dawn till sunset in the noisy, dusty mill. 80

How their hearts would bound with gladness could they wander through the brake,  
Or watch the summer sunshine dancing o'er the crystal lake.

O! how often in the factory, while the engine shrieks and screams,  
Do they fancy they are listening to the prattling of the streams.

Yes, thy children, dear old Erin! may be scatter'd o'er the earth, 85  
But they never rest contented from the land that gave them birth:  
They may toil within the city, but their hearts are far away  
Where the little brooks are singing through the valleys all the way.

*Ben Brierley's Journal* (March 1870): 42.

## *II. Toiling in the City*

Four long years of toil and hardship o'er the exiles' heads have past,  
Since they have wandered, lone and homeless, in the winter's chilling blast;  
And the winsome, blue-eyed Mary is the gentle maiden still—  
A lovely mountain blossom in a gloomy city mill.

O'er her work, from morn till evening, bends her sweet and saintly face,<sup>5</sup>  
But her busy hands oft tremble, and the tears each other chase;  
For she thinks of pleasant rambles through the quiet lonely glen,  
And she wonders will she ever hear the birds' sweet song again.

She is weary, oh so weary! of the engine's deafening sound;  
Though her head is dazed and aching, still the mighty wheels go round.<sup>10</sup>  
'Will they never cease their grinding!' oft the wondering maiden cries,  
As the straps go whirling round her, then go whizzing past her eyes.

Swiftly fly her little fingers, though she often longs to rest,  
When that burning pain is gnawing in her pure and gentle breast.  
Still she cries, 'Oh, go, sweet memories! or my heart will surely break, <sup>15</sup>  
And I must look gay and happy, mother darling, for your sake.

Could you know how I am pining for the balmy summer breeze,  
And to hear the birds' gay twittering in the branches of the trees,  
You would clasp your arms around me, oh poor mother! well I know,  
And never to the Factory would you let your Mary go. 20

So I'll work away right bravely, and I never will complain;  
For to tell you of my sorrow, sure, could only give you pain.  
Then I'll kiss your wrinkled forehead, and I'll whisper in your ear,  
I am happy in the city—very happy, mother dear.'

There—at last the bell is ringing, and the moaning wheels are still, 25  
Hoary men and little children now are pouring from the mill;

And poor Mary's eyes grow brighter when she sees the broad blue sky,  
For her weary soul is longing for the gloom and smoke to fly.

When she sees her dingy lodgings, lo! a cabin gleaming white,  
And young Donal, Kate, and Brian, slowly rise before her sight; 30  
There she sees the little chapel, and the valley, and the dell,  
And she thinks she hears the chiming of the mellow vesper bell.

'Ah! we little thought,' she murmurs, 'in those scenes of tranquil bliss,  
That we ever could be driven to a den so foul as this;  
That the hands that plucked the wild-flower by the sparkling little rill, 35  
Should be drawn and cramped with working in the close and grimy mill.'

Watch her count her scanty wages, turn each shilling o'er and o'er—  
'See, dear mother, each day finds us happier, richer than before.'  
Is her cabin-home forgotten, that she looks so proud and glad?  
Ah, no! her lips are smiling, but her *heart* is sore and sad. 40

Still the mother only waileth, 'Oh, the day is dark and long!  
For I miss my Brian's laughter, and my Katey's pleasant song;  
And how oft, when sitting lonely, do I see the bobbins fly,  
And I fancy, oh my Mary! I can hear your weary sigh.

Don't I know, my gentle Mary, while your arms around me twine, 45  
That your own poor heart is heavy, though you try to lighten mine?  
Oh, my winsome love! how wasted, and how pale your cheeks have grown!  
Yet how sweet, how kind, and soothing is your gentle voice, my own!

How your dear eyes shine, my darling, when you talk of sunny bowers,  
While your fingers idly wander, as if toying with the flowers! 50  
Oh, what charms are in the memory of that land so far away,  
Where the little brooks are singing through the valleys all the day.'

*Ben Brierley's Journal* (April 1870): 58-59.

### *III. Dying in the City*

'Tis a glorious autumn evening, and the day's hard toil is done:  
'Will you draw the curtains, mother? Let me see the setting sun.  
Raise the window, raise the window! Oh! I feel so faint and weak;  
But the fresh breeze from the mountains soon will cool my burning cheek.

Let me see the golden meadows, where the little children play; 5  
Let me watch their rosy faces as they toss the fragrant hay.  
See, they twine the scarlet poppies in their dark and clustering hair:  
As I watch them, oh, my mother, how I wish that I was there!

Now they ramble where the heather sinks beneath their lightsome tread,  
And the shining crimson berries hang, like tassels, overhead; 10  
Where the lark, in notes so thrilling, to the laughing brooklet sings,  
And the sparrows in the hedges chirp and flap their dusky wings.

Thus the thoughts of home's sweet pleasures crowd the maiden's throbbing brain;  
From her lips flow broken snatches of some well-remembered strain.  
She is dying in the city, 'mid the noise, the smoke, and gloom; 15  
Still she sees her native valleys, robed in autumn's richest bloom.

Flower of Fancy deck the pillow where the dying maiden lies;  
Flashing fountains bubble round her, fairy bowers before her rise;  
Cottage home and ruined castle, lake and valley, hill and stream;  
While the voices of her childhood float around her, like a dream. 20

'Who is that,' she faintly murmurs, 'leaning o'er the garden gate,  
With the sunshine on her tresses? Ah! I see, I see you Kate!  
She is waiting for young Connor. Mother dear, you needn't smile.  
Don't I see the dashing fellow leaping o'er the broken stile?

They are going! God be with them! Ha! another form I see, 25  
Lightly bounding o'er the mountain, like the wild deer, proud and free.  
'Tis my Donal! 'Tis my Donal! He is coming, mother dear!  
Let me hide among the brambles—he will never find me here!

Now the dying girl is laughing, like a merry, thoughtless child;  
But her fevered brain is whirling, and her hollow eyes look wild; 30  
And her wasted cheeks are glowing, while her poor heart faster beats.  
As she tries to 'hide from Donal' 'neath the thin and scanty sheets.

'He is looking in the bushes—let him search them through, and then  
I will hasten round the chapel, and I'll meet him in the glen.  
When he knows that I am near him, won't his face with pleasure glow? 35  
Hark! he calls me! Don't you hear him? Mother, darling, let me go!

'Hush, avourneen! lie you quiet; let me bathe your burning brow;  
They are only shadows, Mary, that are hovering round you now.  
Hush, avourneen! hush, avourneen! sure I hear no voice at all;  
Sure I only see the chimneys and the dingy passage wall.' 40

Still the dying girl is dreaming of the scenes she loves the best,  
With her thin hands meekly folded, like a snowdrift, o'er her breast;  
But the hills are slowly sinking, and her eyes are growing dim,  
And fainter, oh! still fainter, sounds that old, old evening hymn.

'God be with you, Kate and Brian! Heaven!' she sobs and gasps for breath; 45  
'Donal!'—Ah! her head has fallen, and her lips are sealed in death.  
One tender smile at parting, and a little weary sigh,  
And her last fond prayer is finished in her home beyond the sky.

'Tis a broken voice that murmurs as the day begins to break,  
'Oh, my darling! oh, my darling! will you never, never wake? 50  
Sure I knelt both night and morning, and I prayed that God would save  
My tender mountain blossom from the lonesome stranger's grave.

They will lay you in the city, where the wild-flowers never spring,  
They will lay you in the city, where the wild-birds never sing,  
They will lay you, oh, my darling! in the darkness, lying low, 55  
Where the mountain-breeze you loved so well can never, never blow;  
And the anguish of my broken heart no other heart can know.'

*Ben Brierley's Journal (May 1870): 66.*

FANNY FORRESTER  
THE LOWLY BARD

He tunes his lyre within his lowly dwelling,  
    He sings of hopes all rosy-hued, but vain  
And, while the thrilling melody is swelling,  
    His soul is burning for a loftier strain.  
Ye mighty dead, that haunt the poet's slumber, 5  
    His efforts cheer, his feeble muse inspire,  
Who tells the world in many a mournful number  
    He mourns the incompleteness of his lyre.

He tunes his lyre where busy wheels are grinding,  
    And flying straps are never, never still; 10  
Where rigid toil the buoyant limb is binding  
    That fain would wander from the dusty mill.  
He hears the carol of the country maiden—  
    Oh, welcome fancy! real-like and sweet!  
The children bound, with trailing grasses laden, 15  
    And fling their treasures at the rhymester's feet!

And while their eyes grow round with baby wonder  
    His toil-stained fingers 'mongst their tresses stray;  
But, lo! The engine booms like angry thunder,  
    And frights the sympathetic band away! 20  
Spindle and bobbin fill their vacant places,  
    And o'er great looms slight figures lowly stoop,  
And weary shadows cross the girlish faces

That like frail flowers o'er stagnant waters droop.

Toil, toil to-day, and toil again tomorrow: 25  
     Some weave their warp to reach a pauper grave!  
 Nought of romance doth gild their *common* sorrow;  
     Yet ne'er were heroines more strong, more brave,  
 Poor common herd! they never dream of glory!  
     *This* is their work—to *live* is its reward. 30  
 Ah! when they end their sad but common story.  
     Will the great God such *common souls regard!*

Yes, yes, however menial be the duty,  
     He deems it noble, if 'tis nobly done;  
 The lowliest soul contains the highest beauty, 35  
     In its resemblance to that humble one  
 Who came, not where the kings of earth assembled  
     To pay their homage to the Royal Child,  
 But where the lowliest bent the knee and trembled  
     As the blest Babe His sweet approval smiled. 40

He tunes His lyre in sickly court and alley,  
     Where the caged lark, though captive, boldly sings,  
 As if, above some pleasant country valley,  
     He bore the sunbeams on his buoyant wings:  
 The seamstress hears, and lo! her weary fingers, 45  
     'Mid front and wristband, white and listless lie;  
 And though her glance upon the gusset lingers,  
     No thought of scanty wage nor toil is nigh.

Long e'er she knows her crystal tears are dripping  
     O'er the dead bouquet on her window sill— 50  
 Her loving lips amidst the grasses dipping,  
     To show, though faded, they are precious still—  
 Her grateful heart is tenderly recalling  
     The sweet, sweet longing that their perfume made;  
 And hallowed tears, with withered leaves, are falling: 55  
     She mourns their blight, even while herself doth fade.

He tunes his lyre within the garret lonely,  
     Where kindly priest in muffled whisper speaks  
 (Where weary, weary eyes are watching only  
     The hectic flush upon the hollow cheeks 60  
 Of him who raves of labour long neglected,  
     O! children starving and reproaching him).  
 Oh, God! hath he their piteous prayers rejected?  
     The flush dies out, his haggard eyes grow dim.



'Mine, only mine, to toil for and to cherish! 65  
     Lay your cool hand, sweet Mary, on my brow!  
 Child, plead no more, they must not, shall not perish!  
     There, do not hold me—I am stronger now!  
 I've much to do, and precious time is fleeting.'  
     The priest bends lower o'er the ragged bed— 70  
 Nor banner waves, nor muffled drum is beating;  
     Yet, 'tis a hero that lies still and dead.

He tunes his lyre, in humble chapel kneeling,  
     And every note contains some pure desire—  
 Yea, angel forms, through floating incense stealing, 75  
     Seem breathless benedictions on his lyre.  
 The great may flaunt their pampered bards above him,  
     But when *their* laurels shall be sere and brown,  
 Kind heaven will grant, because the lowliest love him,  
     To the poor rhymester an *eternal crown*. 80

*Ben Brierley's Journal* (November 1873): 265.

FANNY FORRESTER  
MOTHER, I COME

Mother, I come! bowed down and broken-hearted,  
     Like a bird long exiled from its parent nest;  
 Ages of woe it seems since I departed  
     From the warm shelter of thy faithful breast.  
 Look at me now, all travel-stained and weary, 5  
     Shadows of anguish round my dying eyes;  
 I sought the world, and found it cold and dreary;  
     E'en youth seems vanished—I have grown so wise.

Mother, I come! thy dear name faintly calling,  
     Before I mingle with the silent dead, 10  
 And thick and fast thy sacred tears are falling  
     On my clasped hands, and on my grief-bowed head.  
 I raise mine eyes, and see the dear grey tresses,  
     Braided so smoothly o'er thy careworn brow,  
 And once again thy wrinkled hand caresses 15  
     The tearful face that owns no beauty now!

Mother, I come! worn out and sorrow-laden—  
     The dews of death on my dishevelled hair—  
 Jaded and worn—not like the thoughtless maiden

That rushed so blindly from thy tender care! 20  
I sought for fame, and found it base and hollow!  
I sought for wealth, and found it nought but dross!  
I lost them both—how blindly did I follow  
Wither they went, deploring for their loss.

Mother, I come! all humble and dejected, 25  
Footsore with climbing up the hill of fame;  
Long did I toil—my efforts were rejected!  
My dreams of glory brought but grief and blame!  
Mother, I come! that thy dear voice may praise me,  
Turning to thee with new-born hope and trust— 30  
Mother, I wait for thy fond hand to raise me!  
Thy once proud child, now trampled in the dust.

Mother, I come! for oh, I am so lonely!  
In all this desert world no friend have I—  
All, all are gone! and I am yearning only 35  
To lay my head upon thy breast and die.  
Die, where thy gentle eyes may last behold me!  
Die, where my grateful tears with thine may blend!  
Die, where thy loving arms may last enfold me!  
Here, on thy heart, my last, my dearest friend! 40

*Ben Brierley's Journal (2 June 1877): 171.*

ELLEN JOHNSTON  
AN ADDRESS TO NATURE ON ITS CRUELTY

O NATURE, thou to me was cruel,  
That made me up so small a jewel;  
I am so small I cannot shine  
Amidst the great that read my rhyme.  
When men of genius pass me by, 5  
I am so small they can't descry  
One little mark or single trace  
Of Burns' science in my face.  
Those publications that I sold,  
Some typed in blue and some on gold, 10  
Learned critics who have seen them  
Says origin dwells within them;  
But when myself perchance they see,  
They laugh and say, "O it is she?"  
Well, I think the little boaster 15  
Is nothing but a fair imposter;  
She looks so poor-like and so small,

She's next unto a nought-at-all;  
 Such wit and words quite out-furl  
 The learning of 'A Factory Girl.'" 20  
 At first they do my name exalt,  
 And with my works find little fault;  
 But when upon myself they gaze,  
 They say some other claims the praise.  
 O Nature, had'st thou taken time 25  
 And made me up somewhat sublime,  
 With handsome form and pretty face,  
 And eyes of language—smiles of grace;  
 With snowy brow and ringlets fair,  
 A beauty quite beyond compare; 30  
 Winning the charms of fortune's smile.  
 Still dressed in grandeur all the while;  
 Then those who see me would believe  
 I never tried for to deceive  
 By bringing out a publication 35  
 Of borrowed lines or yet quotation.  
 But those who see me in this dress,  
 So small and thin I must confess,  
 Well may they dare the words to use.  
 Can such a vase distil Love's muse; 40  
 Well may they ask dare I profess  
 The talent of an authoress?  
 Oh who could deem to gaze on me,  
 That e'er I mused on land or sea,  
 That I have sat in shady bower 45  
 Musing on thy fairest flower;  
 That I have sought the silvery stream  
 At midnight hour, calm and serene,  
 When skies of diamond sparkling flame  
 Shed pearly tears of heartsick shame; 50  
 To see me bound in hardship's blight,  
 Whilst man did rob me of my right,  
 And critics read my simple rhyme  
 And dared to say it was not mine?  
 Imperfect though my lays may be, 55  
 Still they belong to none but me.  
 My blighted breast is their abode,  
 They were placed there by nature's God;  
 And though my years are spent in pain,  
 Still seeking fortune's smiles in vain, 60  
 Still sighing youth's sweet years away,  
 Changing life's light into clay;  
 Hard toiling for my daily bread

With burning heart and aching head.  
 A vision of delusion's dream, 65  
 Hastening downward death's dark stream;  
 Yet nature between you and I,  
 Beneath the universal sky,  
 Who dares to say I have bereft  
 Another genius of their gift. 70

*Autobiography, Poems and Songs of Ellen Johnston,  
 The Factory Girl. Glasgow: William Love, 1867. 141-43.*

ELLEN JOHNSTON  
 AN ADDRESS TO NAPIER'S DOCKYARD  
 (LANCEFIELD, ANDERSTON.)

HAIL! prince of public works-mechanic arts—  
 For men of genius and for noble hearts;  
 Honour and fame, peace, power, and merit,  
 Men well fill'd with philanthropic spirit.  
 I cannot speak like scientific men 5  
 Whom literature gives colour to their pen,  
 Who clothe their genius in that golden robe  
 Wrought by learning, and not by nature's God.  
 Those gilded abstracts of high inspiration  
 Quoted out to gain man's admiration. 10  
 Give me origin—such I hold at bay  
 Who steal from authors of a bygone day;  
 Pampering pages with records unnumber'd  
 Robb'd from men who hath for centuries slumber'd.  
 Nay, nay, dear Work, to thee I'll only speak! 15  
 Like what I am—a woman frail and weak.  
 My self-taught learning may have power to move,  
 For it is drawn from truth and heartfelt love,  
 Free from flattery and from language vain,  
 The sproutings of a love-sick woman's strain 20  
 Whose hopes are centered now within thy walls.  
 One of thy noble sons my heart enthrals!  
 No marvel then I love to breathe thy name,  
 It cheers my heart and fans a secret flame;  
 No marvel then I oft walk round thy dock, 25  
 Gazing intently on each secret spot,  
 Anxious to know when last my love stood there  
 That o'er it I might breathe a fervent prayer.  
 Dear Work, you know not what a gorgeous sight  
 Thou art to me when wandering forth each night; 30

Inhaling the breeze of summer's flow'ry scene,  
 Musing on nature's lovely mantle green;  
 When all is still and silent as the grave,  
 When golden moonbeams kiss the silver wave  
 That rolleth gently o'er sweet Clutha's breast 35  
 That gorgeous stream where commerce never rests;  
 Upon whose banks I've oft distill'd the dews  
 Of fervent love, and pour'd on thee my muse,  
 That prince of rivers that joins the mighty sea  
 That's borne so many brave ships built by thee; 40  
 And will, I hope, yet bear a thousand more  
 With wealth and tidings to our Scottish shore.  
 Who would not love that stream, old Scotland's Clyde?  
 Oft have I watch'd its waters gently glide  
 Like infant angels o'er fair Shandon's beach, 45  
 Where thy dear master's princely mansion stretch  
 Its Gothic towers beneath the sun's bright rays—  
 The ancient emblem of departed days.  
 Oft have I wept in its surrounding woods  
 Where Gareloch gently rolls her silvery floods, 50  
 And sweetly echoes back o'er hill and plain  
 The monarch organ's sweet and deep-toned strain,  
 That fell like heavenly music on mine ears,  
 And filled my soul with thought of brighter spheres.  
 And I have seen that gorgeous window glass 55  
 Filled with the heroes on great mount Parnass—  
 Shakspeare, Milton, honoured Newton too,  
 Burns, Scott, and Goldsmith—Britain's authors true—  
 And many more brave and distinguished men,  
 Whose works for centuries yet will wear a gem. 60  
 Thy master's library contain a store  
 Num'rous as sands on Shandon's lovely shore.  
 And who could dream I've wandered in those halls  
 Long ere the painters' hands adorned their walls;  
 That I have knelt and prayed within that place 65  
 Long ere the workman set with taste and grace  
 The rich enamelled China diamonds neat,  
 Which oft have kissed thy honoured master's feet.  
 This was my prayer—that he might live to see  
 His offspring's offspring all reach maturity. 70  
 This was my prayer—that his brave sons might be  
 The emblem of himself, noble and free,  
 And useful members through life's fleeting dream,  
 As their dear father many years has been.  
 That his gay mansion of such stately grace 75  
 May shield for centuries his own kindred race.

And thinkest thou this prayer will not avail,  
 Because 'twas breathed by woman weak and frail?  
 God listens to the weak as well's the strong,  
 And he may yet thy master's life prolong 80  
 To be a very aged honoured man;  
 Whose name and fame hath sailed to every land  
 Yet still thy dusty walls give joy to me  
 More pure than all the treasures of the sea.  
 Oh! what were all its wealth heaped mountains high 85  
 Could I no more thy towering dock descry?  
 If hills and mountains, oceans dark and blue,  
 Between us rolled to hide thee from my view.  
 I would not leave thee, dear beloved place,  
 A crown, a sceptre, or a throne to grace; 90  
 To be a queen—the nation's flag unfurl—  
 A thousand times I'd be a Factory Girl!  
 To live near thee, and thy anvils clink,  
 And with thy sons that hard-won pleasure drink.  
 That joy that springs from wealth of daily toil, 95  
 Than be a queen sprung forth from royal soil.  
 Farewell, dear Work, the twilight hour is past,  
 Dark Luna's curtain o'er thy walls is cast;  
 Heaven's vaults distil their crystal dews,  
 Queen Venus waits to hail my midnight muse. 100  
 Farewell! Remember my best wish shall be  
 Thy master's welfare and success in thee.

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