BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: RISE OF THE WORKING-CLASS INTELLECTUAL FROM EARLY-EIGHTEENTH- TO MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

By

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BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: RISE OF THE WORKING-CLASS INTELLECTUAL FROM EARLY-EIGHTEENTH- TO MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

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My dissertation, “Between Two Worlds: Rise of the Working-Class Intellectual from Early-Eighteenth- to Mid-Nineteenth-Century England,” investigates how the working-class intellectual emerged alongside and in response to the development of middle-class self-understanding. I argue that middle-class anti-authoritarian rhetoric seeps into a working-class context and enables the formation of the working-class intellectual. The relocation of middle-class discourse within the worker’s world triggers a process of identity-formation in which both classes define themselves by inscribing universalist idioms of “liberty” and “natural rights” in mutually critical ways. The working-class intellectual dramatizes this interaction between two agonistic interpretive worlds by generating a narrative of liminalities.
The first chapter focuses on the contradictory consciousness of the thresher poet Stephen Duck and the possibilities of articulating a working-class experience against the paternalism of agrarian capitalism of the early eighteenth century. I examine Duck’s poetry as the site of contestation of hegemonies where the pastoral form of the poem both contains power relationships by naturalizing them into the cycle of nature and ruptures the borrowed form by infusing it with the subliminal energy of work-place experiences.

Next, I explore a variant notion of the intellectual in the life and writings of John Thelwall, Radical, orator, lecturer and poet who, by deploying Jacobin ideals of liberty and justice in the 1790s, is able to gather the rebellious crowd into working-class organizations such as the London Corresponding Society. I invoke Thelwall’s legacy of undaunted activism and critical intuition in the face of governmental repression to reexamine the private despair of the Romantic intellectuals.

William Cobbett follows in the Jacobin tradition of Thelwall and Paine by transfiguring the rural topos of England into a dystopia of Enclosures and taxation, and thus severely undermines a nationalist agenda that sought to identify Englishness with an idyllic countryside. The complexities of Cobbett’s ideological stance revise the notion of the “organic” intellectual in a situation where a displaced aristocrat is able to formulate a sympathetic alliance with the deracinated labourer and stimulate a plebeian tradition of dissent.

Finally, Friedrich Engels inaugurates the entry into modernity, where the intellectual is faced with the task of organizing an industrialized Manchester into a revolutionary vanguard of Socialism.
Ebenezer Elliot, the Chartist poet, raised a question in the 1830s that, apart from signifying a new definition of working-class identity, also called for a reformulation of its self-representations: “Poetry is impassioned truth; and why should we not utter it in the shape that touches our condition most closely--the political?”¹ My project attempts to trace the political and cultural history underlying that double question, by placing it in the context of the “making” of English working-class identity from early-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century. I use the idea of “making” as E. P. Thompson does, implying a sense of process.² The story traces a history moving from early conceptions of the working-class intellectual, or what Antonio Gramsci would call the “rural-type” of intellectual,³ to the class-consciousness implicit in Thomas Cooper’s Chartist manifesto “To the Young Men of the Working Classes” (1850):

[it is] a matter of the highest necessity, that you all join hands and head to create a literature of your own. Your own prose, your own poetry . . . would put you all the more fully in possession of each other’s thoughts and

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¹ Quoted in Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974) 94.


thus give you a higher respect for each other, and a clearer perception of what you can do when united.4

This project attempts a pre-history of Chartism, by tracing the contestation of political and cultural hegemonies that culminate in the critical self-consciousness of Elliot and Cooper. What I trace out are two different strands of the narrative. The first focuses on the growth of the intellectual from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century as fulfilling Gramsci’s dialectic: “If one’s own individuality is the ensemble of [social] relations, to create one’s personality means to acquire consciousness of them and to modify one’s own personality means to modify the ensemble of these relations” (335). The changing personality of the working-class intellectual is traced as a movement from the thresher-poet Stephen Duck, who along with Mary Collier the washer-woman poetess, succumbs to the cultural hegemony of taste dictated by mid-eighteenth century; to John Thelwall, the poet-leader who deploys a countertheatre of poor within a repressive regime of anti-Jacobinism in the 1790s; to William Cobbett, whose politics of nostalgia imparts him with an understanding of the “totality” of relations in capitalist society in the early decades of the Victorian age; to, finally, Friedrich Engels, who, in 1844, begins to articulate his radical critique of capitalist society in terms of revolutionary praxis.

The second narrative thread is a more negative one that traces the change in the “popular morality” of folk-culture. E. P. Thompson views this plebeian consciousness as a traditional site of resistance to the hegemony of a paternalism, embodied in folk songs and satirical ballads such as “Brave Dudley Boys”:

We bin marchin’ up and deown
Wo boys, wo
Fur to pull the housen deown
And its O the brave Doodley boys
Wo boys, Wo
It bin the brave Doodley boys, Wo!
Some goten sticks, some gotten steavs
Wo boys, Wo
Fur beat all rogues and kne-avs.

While intellectual production may seek to negotiate one’s location within power structures, there is also the other agent of praxis, the crowd, which deploys a vigorous, self-activating culture of the people seen in the figures of the “brave Doodley boys,” who threaten to “pull the housen deown” and “beat up all rogues and kne-avs.” Derived from the shared experience of labor, folk culture’s “rough music” and rude cacophony constitute a threat to official descriptions of reality. In this context, the dialectic from Duck to Engels can also be seen as the pre-history of modernity, where a rebellious plebeian culture is made to go through a process of “rationalization” instituted through the process of wage-labor (which initiated a shift from task-orientation to timed labor), finally to emerge as the crowd of alienated monads in the industrial landscape of the nineteenth century. I suggest that the growth of the intellectual is paralleled by the effacement of the revolutionary crowd of popular morality. It is this double legacy—the growth of the intellectual accompanied by the loss of a revolutionary crowd—that is concretized in the experience of modernity.

My chapters will trace out this movement through some key figures. First, I investigate the role of working-class intellectuals and intellectuals within the working

class against the backdrop of a plebeian culture and its “practical activity.” The idea of the “organic” intellectual is of central importance here. Gramsci defines the organic intellectual as someone who, sharing the common experience of a class, is able to organize its members towards the construction of a new society. Second, my study also deals with some of the problems surrounding the construction of the space of a new society. Intellectual production (like all production) cannot be dissociated from the production of space. For Henri Lefebvre--and this is crucial to our discussion of radical praxis--the resurrection of “lived” experience in all its complexities is central to any revolutionary agenda. It is perhaps in this sense that William Cobbett’s “spatial practice,” which locates the disaster of the capitalism in the starving body of the worker as well as rural depopulation, is as radical a critique (if not more) as Engels’ excavation of the spatial “archaeology” of Manchester. But it is also important to insist on theorizing such experience. This is the historical contribution of John Thelwall, which distinguishes him from the Romantic poets: the orientation towards political economy which prompted Thelwall to evaluate his pronouncements in the contexts of “lived” space is as important as the “authentic” articulation of despair following the failure of the French revolution, that made Wordsworth a poet.

While this investigation of the trajectory of the working-class intellectual ties Duck/Collier, Thelwall, Cobbett, and Engels together in one unified narrative, my critical frameworks borrow from a variety of disciplines and methods in order to emphasize

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various aspects of intellectual production. The narrative of intellectual biography, that helps us to place the intellectual production of Duck and others within a “totality” of relations—personal and political—is common to all five figures. What I attempt to do is to provide a view from the micro-social level of experience, by tracing out the intricacies of the liminal positions occupied by these intellectuals. Gramsci’s conception of the “man-in-the-mass” allows us to project a dual context in which to evaluate plebeian intellectual production of the eighteenth century. According to Gramsci, there are two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness) from which action may spring: “one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed” (Gramsci 331). Therefore, while we may understand the workings of hegemony in Duck’s and Collier’s poetry as the limitations of the pastoral or georgic form itself that the poet was obliged to borrow in order to win preferment, it is important to stress the other aspect of his experience, that of shared oppression in wage-labor, which not only strives to break through and critique the form itself, but finds an objective context in the agrarian agitations of the eighteenth century. Similarly, Thelwall’s position between the opposite worlds of Godwin and “rough clowns,” or Cobbett’s contrary narratives of revolution and reform, and Engels’ ambivalent responses to the city are not only texts of an intellectual’s dilemma of synthesizing a stable position in a fluid world, but also provide a space for examining the intimacy between personal dilemmas and larger social/historical responses to change.
Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of dialogism is also central to all the figures. First, his narrative theory of the novel provides a useful model of subalternity for examining anti-authoritarian voices that have been neglected by both histories, theirs and ours. Collier's critique of Duck's genre of misogyny, Thelwall's infusing of the experience of labour into a synchronic discourse of rights and liberties, Cobbett's preference for corporeality against the "scientific" discourse of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus, and Engels' foregrounding of the worker's hovel in a prosperous Manchester—all follow the novel's impious method of heteroglossia and demystification. But the significance of these novel narratives is further enhanced when the works of Duck and others are placed within the novel's historical context of the origin and crystallization of middle-class identity, as examined by Ian Watt and Michael McKeon. Our investigation of the working-class intellectual in England in this reading runs parallel to a process of middle class identity-formation. In this context, the notion of liminality operates within a structure of middle-class hegemony and its epistemology that our heroes attempt to challenge.

But my purpose here is not to simply describe a few counterhegemonic moments in the history of middle-class identity formation. The question of the formation of working-class discourse and its changing shape over the course of a hundred years leads us to an interesting problematic that lies at the heart of this investigation: the pre-history

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of Chartism is in many ways its post-history. The question I ultimately wish to ask in showing the limitations and triumphs of a discourse that is generated by belonging to two opposed worlds is whether the movement I describe may indeed reflect Georg Lukacs’ verdict of “the sense become conscious, of the historical role of class.” In problematizing the position of the intellectual I also problematize the morphology of working-class identity-formation within the cultural sphere and consequently interrogate the idea of the working class as a fundamental category. In this version of events, the growth of the intellectual within a counterhegemonic trajectory from the early eighteenth-century counter-georgic type to the mid-nineteenth-century orientation towards political economy, when placed alongside the formation what Habermas has identified as the “bourgeois public sphere,” rather than indicating a crystallization of a class-identity outside of civil society, occupies a critical function within it. This idea is central to the notion of a the intellectual who is caught “between two worlds.” When I compare Duck’s and Collier’s novelization of the pastoral with the paradigm-shift indicated by the rise of the novel as a vehicle of middle-class imaginings, I notice that their cultural critique is unable to effect a radical break with aristocratic traditions in order to initiate a new kind of discourse for the working classes. In the absence of a radical epistemology, Duck and Collier ultimately end up with an incomplete articulation of what it means to be excluded from political, economic and cultural spheres. On the other hand, the rise of the novel within the middle-

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class value-systems of Richardson and Fielding indicates the arrival of a new method and paradigm of understanding one’s location within social structures. This dilemma of working-class radical discourse is heightened in the 1790s milieu, where there is an attempt to enter the bourgeois public sphere and its “republic of letters.” The question I would like to raise in this context is whether the dressing-up of working classes in terms of bourgeois ideals of civil society and polite discourse constitutes an assertion of their separate class-identities, even as the “other” and therefore the marker of the limits of bourgeois public sphere. Instead, in their attempt to be identified within democratic conceptualizations, do the working classes not perform the critical task of uplifting an emergent discourse of individualism into a dominant one that would help Bentham to forge his theory of rational egoism? I will use Andrew McCann’s words to highlight the problem as a profound ambivalence about whether or not integration into a dominant public sphere and, beyond this, whether it is sufficient to offer multiple or counterhegemonic public spheres, oriented to engagement with the political and social institutions of the dominant public sphere, as a viable way of conducting oppositional politics. The problem is this: if the imagined community of the bourgeois public sphere is the medium in which bourgeois class hegemony is secured and normalized, it is also characterized by fundamental mystifications at the level of social and economic relations. The worker, for example, can only be integrated into the public to the extent to which he becomes a privatized property owner, which means the reification of his or her own body in the form of wage-labour. In this way the naturalization of the bourgeois monad can compel the assimilation of other groups into a form of sociability that clearly alienates them from their own class interests, which reside in a transformation of the structures of ownership, rather than mere assimilation into them.  

11 Andrew McCann, Cultural Politics in the 1790s (New York: St. Martin, 1999) 19.
In the early-nineteenth-century phase this question is formulated against the backdrop of two versions of the culture sphere. First, there is the increasingly aesthetic version of the bourgeois public sphere in the writings of the Romantics, whose function, as McCann following Marcuse points out, is “to affirm values that cannot be articulated in social life more generally, and . . . affirm the prevailing mode of production by bracketing these ideals within the space of culture” (7). On the other hand, Chartism’s rejection of aesthetics in favour of a purely political kind of discourse becomes an extreme reaction to the earlier dilemma of Duck and Collier, and a direct outcome of the proletarianization of the bourgeois public sphere. But Chartism’s rejection of the personal for the political does not constitute an escape, for it replicates a bourgeois epistemology of compartmentalization, described as Negt and Kluge as follows:

The ‘dictatorship of the bourgeoisie’ articulates itself in compartmentalizations, the forms of the public sphere. Whereas the bourgeois revolution initially makes a thoroughgoing attempt to overcome the limits of the capitalist mode of production, the forms—for instance, the forced separation of powers, the division between public and private, between politics and production, between everyday language and authentic social expression, between education, science, and art on the one hand and the interests and expressions of the masses on the other—prevent even the mere expressions of social criticism, of a counterpublic sphere, and of the emancipation of the majority of the population. There is no chance that the experiences and interests of the proletariat, in the broadest sense, will be able to organize themselves amid this splitting of all the interrelated qualitative elements of experience and social practice.\(^\text{12}\)

My analysis of Cobbett’s writings shows his attempt to resist this compartmentalization, where Cobbett uses, what I call, a “physical” style of discourse to restore the inter-

connectedness of cause and effect in the poverty-ridden rural landscape of England. He is able to critique a purely aesthetic view of the countryside by foregrounding its politico-economic devastation, and, at the same time, resist a narrowly ratiocinative gaze by his rhetoric of intimacy and familiarity with the poverty-stricken worker. But Cobbett displays a fundamental contradiction in employing a civic-humanist rhetoric to inscribe his prescriptions of change. His deployment of a nostalgia for a feudal mythos in order to counter the mystifications of the bourgeois public sphere remains profoundly inadequate to the task of formulating a new social order for the working classes. Engels takes up this task in the industrial landscape of Manchester and allows us to examine the same question of identity-formation in a different way. Horkheimer and Adorno’s description of the “culture industry” extends the implications of Engels’ analysis of the capitalist landscape of Manchester. Horkheimer and Adorno show us how the bourgeois public sphere, with the advance of capitalism, reincarnates itself as a “culture industry” whose hold over its subjects is made complete by its colonization of space:

... culture now impresses the stamp on everything. ... Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system. The decorative industrial management buildings and exhibition centers in authoritarian countries are much the same as anywhere else. The huge gleaming towers that shoot up everywhere are outward signs of the ingenious planning of international concerns, toward which the unleashed entrepreneurial system (whose monuments are a mass of gloomy houses and business premises in grimy, spiritless cities) was already hastening. ... Yet the city housing projects designed to perpetuate the individual as a supposedly independent unit in a small hygiene dwelling make him all the more subservient to his adversary—the absolute power of capitalism. Because the inhabitants, as producers and as consumers, are drawn into the center in search of work and pleasure, all the living units crystallize into well-organized complexes.
The striking unity of microcosm and macrocosm presents men with a model of their culture: the false identity of the general and the particular.\textsuperscript{13}

In understanding how Engels replicates bourgeois epistemologies in his machinery of thought, even while attempting to create a separate “socialist” space for the working classes we have come full circle in describing our task as intellectuals for the working classes.

One outcome of the destabilization of working-class lexicon goes to the heart of methodology. In some ways the idea of generic change or stasis has to do with the question of what approach to adopt towards the narrative of change. McKeon’s discussion of the “absorptive” and “retentive” approaches in the discussion of the rise of the middle class is central to our discussion of the location of the working-class intellectual:

At what point, by what standards, and with what classificatory consequences should apparent categorical change be understood as such? Should social mobility be taken to alter the group identity of those undergoing movement and to swell the ranks of the group toward which movement is directed, or do the socially mobile bring their former group identity with them to their new locale? (160)

By focusing upon the absence of self-generated discourse of the “working class” I do not mean to suggest that history lost its significance for us. Something did happen in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, something that also created the working classes in a particular kind of way, out of which Chartism and Trade Unionism arose and took a hostile place within bourgeois society. But unless, as Lefebvre says, the working class’s method of “appropriation” of space becomes a method of “domination” and later, a self-

controlled production" of it, we cannot quite escape the merely interstitial location of the working classes within a hegemonic culture.

Marx has already described the problem for us when telling us about the characteristics of a proletariat as

the formation of a class with radical chains, a class in civil society that is not of civil society, a class that is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society having a universal character because of its universal suffering and claiming no particular right because no particular wrong but unqualified wrong is perpetrated on it; a sphere that can claim no traditional title but only a human title; a sphere that does not stand partially opposed to the consequences, but totally opposed to the premises of the . . . political system, a sphere, finally, that cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society, thereby emancipating them, a sphere, in short, that is the complete loss of humanity and can only redeem itself through the total redemption of humanity. This dissolution of society existing as a particular class is the proletariat.14

Only in Marx’s utopian aspiration that if the working classes become aware of what they should not be, they will consequently arrive at an understanding of what they should be, can we even begin to talk about an equitable society. This is the version of Marx that I would like to resurrect for this study, in this clear recognition of the immensity of the problem faced by the working-class intellectual. Negt and Kluge point out that Marx’s vision of change did not privilege the space of politics for culture, as the Chartists did. There is a sense of a polyphonic, yet integrated universe in Marx’s vision that shows his deep engagement with and a full recognition of the problem I have attempted to highlight.

According to Negt and Kluge,

Marx describes social wealth . . . as the many-sided unfolding of the energies of the human species: sociality--cooperation--freedom--awareness--universality--wealth of needs and subjective human sensuality. Each of these human modes of expression requires a public sphere for its development; each represents an essential component of the proletarian public sphere. (83)

But is it possible to resolve this issue by reference to the cultural sphere alone? It is important to remember that the bourgeois public sphere did not come into being in a smooth and secure way. The middle-class breach of a cultural model and the process of solidification of its epistemology worked in tandem with a larger political and economic control. My point is also that we cannot construct the tragedy of the inadequacy of working-class discourse without reference to extra-cultural dimensions of repression. Is it not possible to say that if the various moments of challenge and subversion voiced in working-class writings had somehow (if only for the sake of speculation) been supported by a larger political and economic ascendancy, it could have generated an authentic working-class discourse? I look to the rise of the “polite and commercial” people in the eighteenth century and their cultural formation of the novel as evidence of this claim. In the absence of a larger level of domination, working-class discourses will remain defensive rather than offensive. The interventions into the cultural sphere have to be doubled by a political/economic sphere of attack. The cultural sphere acts as an index of the failures of the larger context and at the same time participates in interpelling its subjects into the cultural/countercultural hegemonies. But if we recognize the fact that what E. P. Thompson calls “popular mentalities of subordination” (Customs 34) are always a contested zone, this study rescues itself from insignificance by showing the way in which the bourgeois public sphere came into being by active suppression of the “true
needs” of the lower classes. In some ways what is important in the case of Thelwall is not that he appropriated middle-class discourse and the limitations of that appropriation, but that it became an “appropriation” only in the way in which it generated a hostile reaction among the middle classes. And anyone who wants to challenge the compulsion of “true needs” has to find a way out of the worst kind of bourgeois inhumanity.

To return back to the question of methodological framework. While my chosen figures together form a fluid constellation of the possibilities and limits of defiance within particular historical moments, each ideologue is also examined within his/her own sphere in different ways. In the case of Duck and Collier, I examine the dialogism implicit in their poetry by examining the novelization of the pastoral and georgic genres. Thelwall and the collective space of the London Corresponding Society provide vantage points for entering a larger field of ideological debate surrounding the cataclysm of the French Revolution and its effects upon the working classes and the developing discourse of the bourgeois public sphere. Cobbett’s narrative style of heteroglossia and his penchant for the physical method allow us to examine the connections between radical praxis and radical rhetoric. Finally, Engels, who is placed within an ethos of modernity, delineates the dilemmas of a “spatial practice” that is positioned within an Enlightenment-capitalist structure of perception while attempting to subvert it. By deploying elements of novelistic discourse within historical events and by foregrounding the idea of liminality as a limited formula of historical processes, I challenge the sense of despair that arises from the cul-de-sacs of postmodern aporias and the rigidity of formulaic prescriptions of change.
CHAPTER 2
“SKIMMERS AND LADLES AND SUCH TRUMPERY”: PLEBEIAN POETRY IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Literary development has not yet gone beyond the novel of disillusionment, and the most recent literature reveals no possibility of creating another type that would be essentially new; what we have now is an eclectic, epigonic imitation of earlier types, whose apparent productive force is confined to the formally inessential areas of lyricism and psychology.¹

Overview

The early decades of the eighteenth century have rarely interested scholars investigating the “making” of the English working class. Whatever studies there are have tended to highlight only one kind of working-class presence witnessed in popular contentions and rural riots and risings. This rather narrow treatment of the theme of class-conflict in early-eighteenth-century England, when placed against the ample discussion of working-class radicalism in the post-French Revolution context, suggests a developing structure of working-class identity in eighteenth-century England. In such a reading the early-eighteenth-century years signify a rudimentary stage where the worker, though marking his presence through collective, hostile action, appears incapable of articulating his frustrations within the cultural sphere in any significant way. The sporadic incidents of rioting and unrest, though serving as an opinion poll, have little or nothing to do with the creation of a well-developed, or even a gradually unfolding, notion of class identity.

Only at the end of the eighteenth century do we see a transition from isolated rebellions to organizational protest, from "customary consciousness" to class awareness, dramatized in the world of letters as a critical reinterpretation of a civic discourse by self-taught lower-class artisans. This unmistakable arrival of the working man into the privileged world of "manuscript-assumed authority" is doubly reinforced by the proliferation of anti-Jacobin pamphlets as well as the many repressive measures passed by the government in the 1790s, both of which sought to curb working-class expression, as we will see in the next chapter.

But what about the working-class writings of the early eighteenth century? How should we approach the rare and scarcely-investigated locutions of threshers and washerwomen in the absence of a working-class signifying economy? This question becomes even more important when examined against the larger socio-economic context of the early eighteenth century. This was time when the effects of the Enclosure movement, which began in mid-seventeenth century, started becoming visible. E. P. Thompson has identified early-eighteenth-century England with "the erosion of half-free forms of labour, the decline of living-in, the final extinction of labour services and the advance of free, mobile, wage-labour." These changes also initiated a process of reformulation of class-identities whose full effect would be visible in an industrial context a century later. In the initial stages of this process, the breakdown of a feudal ethos gave rise to a situation where the master, who "wished devoutly to have the best of both the old world and the


new, without the disadvantage of either... clung to the image of the labourer as an un
free man, a ‘servant’: a servant in husbandry, in the workshop, in the house.” The inscrib
ing of the wage-labour within a feudal conception may conflict with the “servant’s” experi
ence as a “free agent,” but feudal vocabulary performed an important function within a middle-class morality system. The formulation of the “Industry vs. Idleness” paradigm when dealing with the unfettered and fractious servants was based upon a conviction that the free or masterless man was a vagabond, “to be disciplined, whipped and compelled to work” (Thompson 36).

But before we examine these issues in the working-class writings of the eighteenth century, it is important to note another aspect of the change initiated by the Enclosure movement. Bridget Hill’s seminal book *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* draws our attention to two other important changes that are pertinent to our discussion of eighteenth-century working-class poetry. First, the agrarian revolution gave rise to a sense of class-distance by creating a gentry of rich farmers who, prospering from changed economic conditions, began to identify with middle-class aspirations to gentility. Labour and leisure now functioned as two antagonistic determinants of class-identity that segregated those who could live off their land from those who had to live off their labour. As we will examine later, it is this experience of social mobility that heralded a revival of the georgic genre in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries by which the ideologues of the Agricultural Revolution could

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construct the ideal of the individualist gentleman-turned-farmer (and the farmer-turned-gentleman) in the figure of a plowman, who is justly rewarded for his effort.

Concurrently, as smallholders were squeezed out by Enclosure and higher rents, their families became indistinguishable from those of farm labourers dependent on wage labour. This second trend of downward mobility leads to Hill’s investigation of a new emphasis upon sexual division among the working classes of the eighteenth century. While Nancy Armstrong has analyzed the gendering of middle-class identity as the central plot of the eighteenth-century novel, Hill examines a similar gender-division in the working-class community of the eighteenth century, as the outcome of the agricultural revolution that brought about wage labour and mechanization of agriculture. Decline in husbandry due to availability of technology and cheap wage-labour displaced women from a domestic topos and forced them to work alongside men in the traditionally male domain of field labour. Donna Landry points out that “by the end of the eighteenth century, women had become much more extensively employed in service that in earlier periods, while male servants were being drawn from a distinctly lower social class than formerly. . . . For women, especially, the shift in service from the category of servants in husbandry, who might serve only in youth before marrying and setting up their own households, to the category of lifelong domestic servants, was crucial.” Here is a brief


description of the kind of underpaid labour we are talking about, narrated by one Mary Rendalls, the wife of an Exeter farm labourer:

I got up early as half-past two, three, four, or five to get the cows in, feed them, and look after the pigs. I then had breakfast, and afterwards went into the fields. In the fields I used to drive the plough, pick stones, weed, pull turnips, when snow was lying about, sow corn, dig potatoes, hoe turnips, and reap. I did everything that boys did.7

The resultant combative spirit between working men and women who were both vying for the meager rewards of wage labour was exacerbated within a middle-class culture that was beginning to synthesize a feminine ideal by placing the woman within a domestic(ated) environment and making her subservient to male authority. Hill points out that a parallel case of gender division in a working-class topos, while arising out of economic deprivation follows a similar strain of manufacturing male superiority.

According to Hill, "it is possible that the physical strength needed to wield the scythe was exaggerated in the interests of those anxious to exclude women from the better-paid and most prestigious of agricultural tasks" (Women 59).

How did these changes, especially the experience of a new class-formation, a kind of proletarianization, enter the consciousness of the working classes of eighteenth century? This question is very similar to the one raised by E. P. Thompson while examining the idea of class-consciousness in the eighteenth century: "What were the institutions, in the eighteenth century, which enabled the rulers to obtain, directly or indirectly, a control over the whole life of the labourer, as opposed to the purchase,

seriatim, of his labor power?” (Thompson 36). I approach these issues through an examination of the dialogic interactions between three literary voices. *The Woman's Labour*, a poem by Mary Collier published in 1739, in response to Stephen Duck’s *The Thresher's Labour*, which was published in 1730, allows us to understand the ways in which gender and genre inform the self-apprehensions of the working classes. Anna Barbauld’s “Washing-Day” provides a contrapuntal site for analyzing upper-class mediation between writing and labour.

The main theme I trace in the poetry of Stephen Duck and Mary Collier, that of the possibility of articulating protest within a borrowed form, has been touched upon by the poet laureate Robert Southey in his evaluation of the “lives and works of the uneducated poets” in a republican-turned-Chartist milieu of the 1830s. According to Southey,

[a] process, indeed, is observable, both in the verses of Woodhouse and Stephen Duck, which might be looked for, as almost inevitable: they began by expressing their own thoughts and feelings, in their own language; all of which, owing to their stations in life, had a certain charm of freshness as well as truth; but that attraction passes away when they begin to form their style upon some approved model, and they begin to produce just such verses as any person, with a metrical ear, may be taught to make a receipt. 

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While I follow Southey into an inquiry of the limitations and achievements of these poets, I also attempt something new in my analysis. Not only do I traverse the well-trodden path of literary patronage and its hegemonic effects upon the poetry of Duck and Collier, but, by mapping working-class self-expression against a parallel trajectory of middle-class identity-formation in the novelistic discourse of the eighteenth century, I want to pave the way for a fresh look at the entire corpus of working-class discourse that originates from Duck in the eighteenth century. What I ponder through this juxtaposition is the idea that while the subaltern status of the working-class “intellectuals” (if one may use this word to describe the complex locus of the working-class writer in the eighteenth century) is able to generate a provocative discourse that challenges certain elite cultural forms such as the pastoral and the georgic, these critical texts are unable to push their dissatisfactions into the creation of a self-ruling literary/cultural tradition of their own. Against their method of “negative dialectics”\(^{11}\) I place the phenomenon of the rise of the novel described recently as the emergence of a “new species . . . in the eighteenth century when a Protestant, capitalistic, imperial, insecure, restless, bold, and self-conscious culture found itself confronting a constrictive, authoritarian, hierarchical, and too-neatly-sorted past.” \(^{12}\)

This comparative analysis between two cultural forms raises some interesting questions about the shape of working-class self-expression from early eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth and beyond. Even though the georgic and the novel share, in the words of

\(^{11}\) I borrow Theodor Adorno’s concept of “negative dialectics” that he defines as the “self-consciousness of the objective context of delusion; it does not mean to have escaped from that context. Its objective is goal is to break out from within.” *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury, 1973) 406.

Mikhail Bakhtin, a common “zone of maximal contact with the present,”¹³ where a demystification of pastoral idealizations of the worker’s lot is homologous with the novel’s irreverent attitude towards an “epic” world of “fathers, of beginnings and peak times” (Bakhtin 15), I argue that the working class poet’s appropriation of the georgic remains encoded within the dictates of a patronage economy. Bakhtin’s concept of “novelization,” the critical method by which anti-authoritarian discourse is able to challenge cultural hegemony, has a central significance in my analysis. Bakhtin has described the novel as a “plastic” form that is “ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review” (Bakhtin 39). “Novelization,” a technique that “implies the liberation [of genres] from all that serves as a brake on their unique development, from all that would change them . . . into some sort of stylization of forms” (Bakhtin 39) is clearly the most valuable formula for understanding the formation of class identities. The working-class poets, Duck and Collier, are able to introduce the realities of their subaltern status only by “novelizing” stylized representations of labour. But are they able to convert their appropriations into a discourse of dominance, in the way in which the eighteenth-century novel was able to sever itself from earlier conventions and institute a new lineage of discursive practices? The novel’s strategy of a three-dimensional emphasis upon the authority of the enlightened individual against the strict hierarchies of aristocracy and the non-lisible amorphousness of the “lower orders” functions as a vehicle of middle-class imaginings. A flourishing “print culture” comes together with an epistemology of “realism” in order to forge the anti-authoritarian discourse of the middle

classes and to reconstruct society on the parity of “common humanity.” Roger Chartier highlights the key elements of this new social order based upon a notion of a “Republic of Letters” that forms the critical matrix of the novel, where the

the lettered and the learned [were united] through correspondence and through print. . . . Founded on the free engagement of the will, on equality among its interlocutors, and on the absolutely disinterested exercise of the intellect, the Republic of Letters . . . provided a model and a support for free public examination of questions regarding religion and legislation.¹⁴

Habermas has followed the implications of this gesture of defiance into the formation of the “bourgeois public sphere” which reaches its fruition in the later half of the nineteenth century with the crystallization of a Victorian society founded on the tenets of economic individualism and free market.¹⁵

In transplanting the writings of working-class poets such as Stephen Duck, Mary Collier, Mary Leapor and Ann Yearsley from the customary analytical context of Pope’s and Swift’s “Augustan” satire into a parallel, yet disparate, eighteenth-century trajectory


¹⁵ Jurgen Habermas’s concept of the “bourgeois public sphere” is defined by him as follows: “First, they preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether. The parity on whose basis alone the authority of the better argument could assert itself against that of social hierarchy . . . [was] the parity of ‘common humanity’. . . . Laws of the market were suspended as were the laws of the state. . . . Secondly, discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned. . . . The private people for whom the cultural product became available as a commodity profaned it inasmuch as they had to determine its meaning on their own (by way of rational communication with one another), verbalise it, and thus state explicitly what precisely in its implicitness for so long could assert its authority. . . . Thirdly, the same process that converted culture into a commodity . . . established the public as in principle inclusive.” *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry Into A Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989) 36-38. A detailed discussion of this concept follows in the next chapter on Thelwall.
of the English novel I wish to highlight the significance of the idea of a "literature of their own" for the working classes. My approach towards working-class discourse points to a shocking realization that between the breaking-up of a feudal society and its conventional discourse, and the emergence of a middle-class ethos in the world of the novel, the working classes did not generate their own discourses of identity-formation. In that sense the emergence of class-consciousness through the creative appropriation of the secular space of the novel towards the end of the eighteenth century and in the early decades of the nineteenth century, in spite of its subversive significance within the crystallization process of bourgeois society, remains enclosed within the economy of middle-class epistemologies. To take this discovery a step further, we might even say that the history of working-class self-expression has (always-already) been an interstitial one, where Stephen Duck’s borrowing of the georgic and anti-pastoral forms for voicing his dissatisfactions in the fluid world of the early eighteenth century is complemented by the displaced artisan’s borrowing of novelistic discourse in order to articulate his realities in the modern world. Gustav Klaus briefly touches upon this dilemma when tracing the poetry of labouring people from the early eighteenth century to the Romantic age. While remarking upon the progression of working-class self-expression from the conventional poetry of Duck and others in 1730s to the lyrical, subjective writings of Yearsley’s generation of poets in the 1770s, Klaus notices that once again, the plebeian poets were merely following tendencies which had been initiated by the forerunners of the Romantics. The impression therefore remains that even though they were opposed to certain elements of established poetic theory, they were still rooted in it. And that is why
their works do not represent a completely autonomous current within the development of the national literature.\textsuperscript{16}

But the interesting dimensions of Klaus's reflective model are obfuscated by a somewhat enigmatic assertion that "these differences [between plebeian and dominant poetry] were primarily of content and message; they cannot be shown to exist, and ought not to be sought, on the level of formal composition and technique" (Klaus 20). What I intend here is precisely what Klaus has forbidden us to do: to use the idea of form, of the differences between the varying capacities of the georgic and the novel in order to suggest one way of looking at the insufficiencies of these poets. The discussion of working-class identity through the medium of genre becomes important when placed against the traditional analytic method of historians such as E. P. Thompson and his circle who see the possibility of a working-class lexicon only in the republican terrain of the 1790s. My focus upon the destabilization of generic categories in the early eighteenth century and the formation of working-class identity within that milieu not only provides a prehistory for what was to follow in the 1790s (and thus pushes the question of the "making" of the English working classes back a few decades), but also functions as the prototype for the failed revolutions of the late eighteenth century, as we shall see.

In contrasting the achievements of the novel with the limitations of working-class discourse, I do not mean to disengage the novel from its hegemonic role in the eighteenth century, nor do I want to suggest that the working-class poetry of Duck and Collier is somehow less important than, say, the self-conscious Chartist discourse of the nineteenth

\textsuperscript{16} Gustav Klaus, \textit{The Literature of Labour: Two Hundred Years of Working-Class Writing} (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985) 20.
century. What I want to stress is that the putative limitations of Duck’s georgic mode are by no means a simple case where an unschooled, lower-class poet succumbs to a cultural hegemony that forces him to subsume his inharmonious experiences under a happy ending. Also, my point is not that Duck and Collier should have “chosen” the novel form in order to break away from the signifying economy of the patronage system. In placing the limitations of the “subscription” patronage of these poets against the growing mass-readership of the novel I also want to counter Klaus’ suggestion that these aspiring intellectuals made an active “choice” to use poetry rather than the novel by suggesting that there are far too many loose ends surrounding the idea of “choice” for farm-hands and washerwomen. The pattern of their literary fame shows that it is heavily dependent upon the benevolence of the local clergyman or some other interested patron who then purges their writings of errors, and solicits a small subscription audience from his superiors. Carey McIntosh points out a double problem with the quest for an authentic working-class lexicon in the early eighteenth century. According to him, “we cannot assume that any text purporting to derive from lower-class speakers has not been tidied up and corrected by the transcriber.”17 The other, more important, problem is that of popular taste. Not only were majority of the working-class audiences illiterate, something that poses a problem for the intellectual who wishes to write for his labouring brethren, but the popular diet of reading for the working classes (or rather, the lower middle class) points to an appetite for chivalric discourse and conventional idioms of the romance

McIntosh points out that even if we were to follow the examples of working-class forays into novelistic discourse, we run into an overarching problem of authenticity:

For example, look at *London Spy* (1698), a popular (fictitious) tour guide to the sights and sounds of the London underworld by Ned Ward, a tavern-keeper of lower class origins. . . . But the first three sentences of *The London Spy* make rambunctious allusion to Diogenes, Socrates, Aristotle, Virgil, and Descartes. The book falls squarely within a family of Renaissance genres grouped by Frank Chandler as “anatomies of rougery” . . . There is no doubt that Ward was trying to appeal to a popular readership . . . but the language of *The London Spy* derives more from literary than authentic lower-class sources. . . . There are similar difficulties in texts written about lower-class people—literary servants and hostlers and thieves are just as likely to be imitated from earlier works of literature as from flesh and blood. Rowdy servants . . . rascals of prose fictions and popular biography and travel books in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth are based on their predecessors in earlier literary texts, not so far as known in reality. (McIntosh 14-15)

The problems of evaluating working-class writings in the early eighteenth century lead us to an interesting double bind: on the one hand, in the absence of a working-class readership, these poets (and urban novelists such as Ward) were forced to turn their attention towards the only available reading audience, that of the upper classes. Duck’s fascination with Milton and Seneca is as much a result of this want of a reading audience within his own community, as it is a symptom of desire for acquiring “taste.” While Chartism is able to break away from this problem by incorporating local languages of the worker in its writings and therefore challenge the cultural hegemony of taste, we must not forget that the Chartist were writing for a larger working-class readership made available to them through the Sunday School movement of the eighteenth century. The early-eighteenth-century cultural milieu that forced the working-class intellectual to rescind his colloquial idioms as a precondition for success with middle-class readers also ensured
that he occupies a liminal position between both, middle-class and working-class worlds. The lure of social mobility that literary success held out to these overstressed workers makes it hard for us to dissociate these writers from an unequivocal aspiration for "place" and preferment. It is possible to say that these writers were happy to convert their experience of manual labour into a commodity for middle-class readers for securing a life of leisure.

But having problematized the notion of a "pure" working-class lexicon, there is still a lot to be gained in examining Duck and Collier as spokespersons for the working classes. The significance of their contributions may be gauged by placing them within two other contexts. Within an "external" trajectory of the changing identity of working-class self-representation in the eighteenth century, Duck and Collier mark an early, inchoate moment in the creation of the working-class intellectual and his/her tortured entry into a cultural sphere from which they had hitherto been excluded. Secondly, their subversive manipulation of the conventional, albeit unpopular, georgic mode is significant when placed against its seventeenth-century accent upon "improvement." In the poetry of Duck and Collier the georgic loses its purely ameliorative message and becomes a vehicle for the more unhappy experience of wage labour set against the backdrop of agrarian capitalism. A brief history of the georgic allows us to understand the significance of Duck's usage of it. If we follow Anthony Low's investigation of a "georgic revolution"\textsuperscript{18} in late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century England, it becomes apparent that the georgic has far less in common with its more celebrated

counterpart, the pastoral genre, and is much more comparable with the novel. Not only
does the georgic share the same formative moments as the novel, but it also replicates the
novel’s unofficial status within aristocratic culture. The georgic, as it moves from the
Renaissance to Augustan culture, undergoes a metamorphosis that is most evident in the
contrast between the representation of “labour” in the writings of Ben Jonson, a brick-
layer’s son who worked his way into courtly circles by the same patient industry that
Duck displays as a thresher. But where the latter is able to introduce his views on labour
within a culture that has begun to use it as a “rational abstraction” (to borrow McKeon’s
use of Marx\(^1^9\)), Jonson, according to Low,
seems to have felt a profound ambivalence about the value of labor. It was,
essentially, labor that made him what he was; it was continuing labor that
enabled him to remain what he was and to produce great poetry; yet it was
also labor that subjected him to ridicule and that set him apart from those
aristocrats whose way of life he so obviously admired and with whom he
was anxious to consort on terms of equality. (110)

Like the novel, the georgic is revived in the late seventeenth century for the purpose of
articulating the rising middle class’s value-system built around work and improvement, an
ethical system that both contributed to and rose out of the socio-economic fabric of
England following the civil war. Low’s summary of the society that ushered in the
“Agricultural Revolution” reveals the flip-side of Bacon’s ameliorative rhetoric of
nationalism and prosperity:

> . . . as feudal England was slowly and painfully transformed into a nation-
state, the way to agricultural progress and general prosperity lay directly
through social injustice and widespread rural suffering. Although the
process took at least two centuries . . . the decade that seems decisively to
have tipped the balance from a basically feudal to a basically modern

\(^1^9\) Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns
Hopkins University Press, 1987). McKeon’s use of Marx’s categories is discussed
towards the end of the chapter.
system of land use was that of the 1650s. Expropriations, forced and voluntary sales, enclosures, and the expulsion of tenants so greatly accelerated as a result of the Civil War that the economic pressures practically forced land- and rent-holders to increase the efficiency of their operations in order to survive. Forests were cut down, fields were plowed up, rents were doubled and doubled again, and out of this chaos emerged the New Husbandry and the Augustan Age. (124)

It is against a value-system that used the georgic as a cultural trope to idealize agricultural production, and concomitantly, the productive labour of the individualist farmer, that we must measure the sharp note of complaint that Duck voices in his treatment of labour. Whereas georgic poets such as John Worlidge stressed the idea of “Reward for's Industry and Pains,” and while Cowley praised the “Original and Primitive Nobility” of working on land against courtly intrigues, Duck inaugurates an unheard-of perspective, that of the labourer, in his use of the georgic. He brings to it what only he can, as a member of the labouring class, by novelizing the capitalist-georgic and inscribing the “master” as an authoritarian figure, rather than as the noble farmer who bears the plough in the interests of his country. Rather than the “monologic” perspective of the gentleman farmer, Duck introduces a sense of clash between two people, the wage-labourer and the capitalist-master, and thus relativizes the representation of rural labour. Similarly, the experience of time is also double, in which the real time (and conditions) of labour stand out against the convention of cyclical time of the seasons. But doubtless Duck felt compelled to follow the strictures of his mentor Addison, who was largely responsible for reviving the georgic in the eighteenth century. Duck's misrepresentation of women, the most serious error in his version of the georgic may be seen as the outcome

Both these poets are discussed in Low 126-31, 149-54.
of Addison’s attempt to formalize the georgic, as “the science of Husbandry put into a pleasing Dress, and set off with all the Beauties and Embellishment of Poetry.” 21

**Duck and the Georgic Mode**

Before we proceed to examine the significance of these interventions for the working-class, let us turn to Duck’s famous poem *The Thresher’s Labour*. Stephen Duck, who lived from 1705-1756, began his career as a farmhand in Wiltshire. *The Thresher’s Labour*, a poem published in 1730, which led him to acquire the patronage of Queen Caroline, conflates a variety of conventions for describing the experience of labour in an agrarian-capitalist topos. The poem is important for a number of reasons. First, it marks a cultural shift in the configuration of the working-class, from the situation of being “represented” in elite discourse to a position of being (provisionally) in control of their representation. The inclusion of a first-hand experience of work-place realities also creates a space for challenging traditional representations of the lower class in either satiric or pathetic modes. 22 The idea of an authentic voice of labour that appropriates a conventional mode for the purpose of injecting it with the reality of everyday experiences throws open the possibility of a “novelization” of the closed-off “epic” mode. My analysis of the poem will focus on the way in which Duck responds to this possibility of novelization. There are two contrapuntal elements in the poem. First, there is the reality of the thresher’s labour and his exclusion from the polite society of his readers. Second,


there is the desire to codify and incorporate this experience into an available mode of expression, without yielding to its purely formal focus. The simultaneous presence of both these elements—social exclusion from power structures and the literary expression of that experience within a borrowed form—generates the subpolitical dynamic of the poem.

The opening of the poem marks a double move: first the dedication to Rev. Mr. Stanley places the poem within a continuing tradition of patronal discourse in which the note of complaint though strong, is made subservient to the authority of the patron/muse:

Those endless Toils, which always grow anew,
And the poor Thresher's destined to pursue:
Even these, with Pleasure, can the Muse rehearse,
When you and Gratitude demand her Verse. (ll. 9-12)

This harmonious sensibility is soon disrupted by shifting the reader to a topos of labour and material realities, where an unimpassioned farmer, mindful of his profits, exhorts the workers to strip and show their strength in the field. The description of threshing that follows is replete with classical allusions, with the mention of Cyclops's hammer, Vulcans, Thetis, and Aetna. But that distancing convention does not displace the unsentimental description of the harshness of labour:

In briny streams our sweat descends apace,
Drops from our locks, or trickles down our face.
No intermission in our works we know;
The noisy threshall must forever go. . . . (ll. 42-45)

The immediate question that Duck raises from this down-to-earth depiction of rural labour is an interesting one. The working-class poet may not only celebrate his excluded status as vantage point from which to reveal the ideological function of elite forms, but may arrive at a realization that the inability of elite genres to adequately
encompass working-class realities can be tied up with a larger coercive structure. While depicting the realities of labour Duck asks,

Can we, like shepherds, tell a merry tale:  
The voice is lost, drowned by the noisy flail.  
But we may think.--Alas! what pleasing thing  
Here to the mind can dull fancy bring?  
The eye beholds no pleasant object here:  
No cheerful sound diverts the list'ning ear.  
The shepherd well may tune his voice to sing,  
Inspired by all the beauties of the spring:  
No fountains murmur here, no lambkins play,  
No linnets warble, and no fields look gay;  
'Tis all a dull and melancholy scene,  
Fit only to provoke the Muse’s Spleen. (ll. 50-61)

The allusion to the traditional pastoral figure of the peaceful and harmonious shepherd contrasts sharply with his own lived reality as a wage labourer. The desire to express his own situation within the pastoral convention fails, as it only provokes the “Muse’s Spleen.” Here is an example of the much-desired opportunity for novelization, where the worker could develop the contrast between the pastoral and georgic modes to indicate the disparities between the worlds of leisure and labour. The difference between the pastoral and the georgic genres is in some ways a cultural equivalent of a class-divided society, where as Anthony Low points out, “[a]n English gentleman might readily imagine himself sitting on a hillside at his ease, dressed in shepherd’s garb, playing on his pipes or making love to the local shepherdess, but ordinarily he was unlikely to imagine himself as a plowman” (22). But the idea of a critical response to the pastoral is complicated by the legacy of the georgic mode in English culture: not only has the georgic often positioned itself as a realistic/serious counterpart to the idyllic bent of the pastoral, but even its note
of complaint has been codified (albeit as form inferior to the pastoral and the epic) within a narrow but consistent georgic tradition.

Having dismissed off the pastoral in favour of the georgic, Duck goes on to describe the effects of hard labour upon the worker:

When sooty Pease we thresh, you scarce can know 
Our native Colour, as from Work we go: 
The Sweat, the Dust, and suffocating Smoak, 
Make us so much like *Ethiopians* look, 
We scare our Wives, when Ev’ning brings us home; 
And frightened Infants think the Bugbear come. (ll. 62-67)

The significance of this description lies in the way in which the work place is shown to intrude upon the domestic sphere, an intervention that collapses the possibility of a space where the worker may regenerate himself, a georgic trope that later develops into the atomistic experience of modern life in the industrial-capitalist landscape of the nineteenth century. From a demystification of the homecoming trope Duck moves on to describe another aspect of the capitalist landscape, where the unrelenting threshall leads up to the output-oriented “threatening landlord” whose quest for profit is presented for the first time from the perspective of the labourers:

The Threshall yields but to the Master’s Curse: 
He counts the Bushels, counts how much a day, 
Then Swears we’ve idled half our Time away: 
“Why look ye, Rogues? D’ye think this will do? 
Your Neighbours thresh as much again as you.” (ll. 71-75)

E. P. Thompson points out the significance of the changing concept of time as one way to discern the effects of the rhetoric of “improvement” that sanctioned the Enclosure
movement. The contrast between a clock-based time-conscious approach towards work (that we are all too familiar with in the modern landscape) and a pre-modern reliance on the cycle of seasons is captured in the poem in a complex way. Labour is subject to a clock-time strictly monitored by the capitalist master, and seasons are relegated to a purely conventional status in the poem, where they perform the function of deflating Duck's protest, as we shall see later.

But the master's coercive gestures do not go entirely disregarded. There is a brief eruption of class-hostility in the poem, but it is also, paradoxically, the moment of its loss. On being called "rogues" by the master the poet says:

Now in our hands we wish our noisy tools,
To drown the hated names of rogues and fools;
But wanting those, we just like schoolboys look,
When the angry master views the blotted book.
They cry their ink was faulty, and their pen:
We, 'The Corn threshes bad, 'twas cut too green.' (ll. 76-81)

The wish to use "noisy tools" against the tyrannical master indicates the possibility of a revolutionary praxis, but one which is still "wanting." Even while this moment may be read as revolutionary within a social context where wage labour was dissolving feudal bonds, it also refers back to the common perception of the working-class collective in the eighteenth century as a mob given to mindless and sporadic violence. What is further interesting is the schooling of that anger into a submission to the figure of authority implicit in the figure of the master. James Mill would applaud this subservience of the worker to the paternal authority of the upper classes towards the end of the century, while

23 Look at Thompson's chapter, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism" in Custom in Common for a detailed discussion of this aspect of wage labour.
attempting to forge a new kind of bond between capitalist landlord and his workers.\textsuperscript{24} We may even read this episode as an isomorph of Duck's limited intervention into elite culture, where the georgic form allows him to represent the worker's perspective to a certain degree, but finally enforces the happy ending required by the genre. In the poem the desire for revenge is subsumed under a comparison of the workers with schoolboys who guiltily accept their master's tyranny as righteous and sanctioned. At a larger level, this shift from revenge to obedience is indicative of the complexity of class-consciousness in the eighteenth-century context. Thompson points out that "[t]here is a sense in which rulers and crowd needed each other, watched each other, performed theatre and countertheatre to each other's auditorium, moderated each other's political behavior. . . . [O]ne notes the swiftness of the crowd's change in mood, from passivity to mutiny to cowed obedience" (Thompson 64).

It is interesting to note that the thresher's tools are referred to as "weapons," a georgic trope that continues the revolutionary metaphor within a hostile context of master-worker confrontation. But again, the site of violence is transmuted onto the field, the only sanctioned space for the lower classes, where they sublimate their dissatisfactions in a cathartic way:

\textsuperscript{24} Mill advocated that the "disciplinarian capitalist," "should be in loco parentis to the poor, guiding and restraining them like children. Of spontaneous action on their part there should be no need. They should be called upon for nothing but to do their day's work, and to be moral and religious. . . . Their superiors . . . should do all that is necessary to ensure their being, in return for labour and attachment, properly fed, clothed, housed, spiritually edified and innocently amused." Quoted in \textit{Class and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century England, 1815-1850}, ed. Patricia Hollis (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1973) 364. I discuss this in greater detail in the next chapter.
On our right Shoulder hangs the crooked Blade,
The Weapon destin’d to uncloath the Mead:

And now the Field design’ed are Strength to try
Appears, and meets at last our longing eye

With rapid force our well-whet Blades we drive,
Strain every nerve, and blow for blow we give. (ll. 106-117)

Not only is the revolutionary impulse transferred to the fields, and exploitative structures to the benevolent processes of nature, but there is a further imposition of distance between workers and their context of oppression. Duck introduces another georgic trope in his poem whereby the activity of labouring in the fields is made comparable with a conquest:

For once set in, where-e’er our blows we deal,
There’s no resisting of the Well-Whet Steel,
But here or there, where-e’er our Course we bend,
Sure Desolation does our Steps attend.
Thus when Arabia’s sons, in hopes of prey,
To some more fertile Country take their way,

So many pleasing objects meet the sight,
The ravish’d eye could willing gaze till Night,
But long ere then, where-e’er their Troops have past,
Those pleasant Prospects lie a gloomy Waste. (ll. 226-237)

The thresher who is himself a victim of a hierarchical structure imagines himself to be the conqueror who has the ability to “prey” on others. The individualist orientation of the georigc, where the farmer sets out to tame the land by dint of his physical prowess and national fervour, contrasts sharply with the inglorious realities of underpaid wage-labour to reveal the dilemma of a poet working with a borrowed form. The idea of conquest also functions as a nationalist subplot of the georigc, where the farmer takes up his “weapons,” the plough and the thshall, in order to increase the bounty of England.
The metaphor of conquest takes on a further role of demarcating the role of the active male against a feminized topos. John Goodridge has noted the sexual metaphors in Duck’s description of harvesting in the poem, implicit in the image of unclothing the field, the “longing eye” and the “willing gaze” etc. The sexualization of the landscape becomes even more poignant when Duck goes on to contrast the seriousness of the male worker with the indiscipline of labouring women:

Our Master comes, and at his Heels a Throng
Of prattling Females, arm’d with Rake and Prong;
Prepar’d whilst he is here, to make his Hay;
Or, if he turns his Back, prepar’d to play:
But here, or gone, sure of this Comfort still;
Here’s Company, so they may chat their Fill. (ll. 162-67)

Against the serious and silent world of labour that men inhabit under the gaze of the “master,” women’s presence is marked by a desire to “chat their fill:”

And were their Hands as active as their Tongues,
How nimbly then would move their Rakes and Prongs? (ll. 168-69)

While the male threshers are engaged in productive work, the females are portrayed as indulging in meaningless talk:

All talk at once, but seeming all to fear
That all they speak so well, the rest wont hear
By quick degrees so high their notes they strain,
Their Standers-by can naught distinguish plain.
So loud their Speech, and so confus’d their Noise,
Scarce puzzled Echo can return a voice;
Yet spite of this, they bravely all go on,
Each scorns to be, or seems to be, outdone. (ll. 176-183)

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As in much patriarchal discourse, here we see the desire to deny speech and the possibility of meaningful communication to women, where all their talk is but “confus’d Noise.” It may be suggested that this denial of meaningful discourse to women represents a defensive response to his own silencing, an envy of a communicative aptitude that is not available to him, as seen in the complete absence of any evidence of speech between men in the poem. This is where the rupture between the demands of the georgic mode and the reality of labour become most obvious. As a conventional trope the georgic constructs a male ideal of a “happy husbandsman” by valorizing the plough and the arable field, and to meet this expectation of the georgic Duck seems willing to exclude the women of his class from any seriousness of purpose. Duck’s failure to recognise the common exploitation between the men and women of his class and his tacit affirmation of male superiority are very significant. The privileging of a divisive patriarchy-conferred identity over the shared experience of a class-identity functions as a mode of containment by limiting the possibility of collective lament and praxis. The critical contributions of Mary Collier are significant here. While castigating Duck’s images of working women, Collier sagaciously brings us back to the question of form by suggesting that it is the inadequacies of the genre that compel the poet to unthinkingly disregard the harsh conditions of women’s lives. The formal demands of the trope become evident when placed against another representation of women in the previous stanza. In keeping with the “homecoming” trope of the georgic, Duck presents the image of an expectant wife who eagerly watches out for her husband’s return:
Homewards we move, but spent so much with Toil,
We slowly walk, and rest at ev’ry Stile.
Our good expecting Wives, who think we stay,
Got to the Door, soon eye us in the Way.
Then from the Pot the Dumplin’s catch’d in haste,
And homely by its Side the Bacon plac’d. (ll. 150-5)

Duck is able to represent women in a (relatively) positive light only by restoring them
within a conventional (and increasingly unavailable) topos of domesticity. But this image
may be considered sympathetic only when measured against the other, clearly misogynist,
image of “prattling females.” It would take Collier’s rebuttal to show how even the
convention of domestic idyll hides the reality of women’s labour in the homestead, by
explaining to the reader how the dumpling and bacon get to Duck’s plate.

In the final analysis, for Duck it is not so much the exploitative system that
determines his joys and sorrows, as much as impersonal nature, where the sun saps the
energy and enthusiasm of the workers:

Thus in the Morn a Courser I have seen,
With headlong Fury scour the level Green,
Or mount the Hills, if Hills are in his way,
As if no labour could his fire allay.
Till the Meridian Sun with Sultry Heat
And piercing Beams hath bath’d his sides in Sweat. (II. 126-131)

Duck’s poem ends with a resigned approach to the cycle of labour that connects up with a
larger regenerative process of nature:

Thus, as the Year’s revolving Course goes round,
No Respite from our Labour can be found:
Like Sisyphus, our Work is never done;
Continually rolls back the restless Stone.
New-growing Labours still succeed the past;
And growing always new, must always last. (ll. 286-291)
But this discourse of surrender takes on a different kind of ramification when viewed from the vantage point of the worker’s exclusion from a world of leisure that his patrons and readers presumably enjoy. The full significance of the idea of Sisyphian labour is revealed when measured against the cultural economy of a society that devised various ideological discourses to confine the worker within a topos of relentless labour, as may be seen from the various hostile responses to Duck’s social mobility. While Duck is able to challenge the political and cultural exclusion of the working class by utilizing the georgic space of complaint, he does not aim, or is unable, to unify his intervention into a consistent critique of the system that had conferred Sisyphian labour upon him. This ambiguous gesture imparts an unfinished quality to his poem, also articulated in his double image of the master. On the one hand the master is clearly indicative of the coercive system of capitalist production:

The Morning past, we sweat beneath the Sun;
And but uneasily our Work goes on.
Before us we perplexing Thistles find,
And Corn blown adverse with the russling Wind.
Behind our Master waits; and if he spies
One charitable Ear, he grudging cries,
“Ye scatter half your Wages o’er the Land.”
Then scrapes the Stubble with his greedy Hand. (ll. 238-245)

An unrelenting nature is matched by an equally ruthless master whose reference to wages and economic realities destroys the trans-political celebration of rural labour in the georgic. Duck reinforces the idea of an economic disparity by gently exhorting the leisured class of readers to appreciate the thresher’s toil that brings food to their table. In a capitalist countryside wage labour brings about a situation where the worlds of consumer (leisure) and the producer (labour) are rendered discontinuous from each other:
Let those who feast at ease on dainty Fare,
Pity the Reapers, who their Feasts prepare. (ll. 246-7)

But Duck also gives us another, more positive image after the harvesting is over, when
the farmer eases production-relations with his workers, and, “joyful at the pleasing Sight
[of a harvested field],”

Invites us all to feast with him at Night.
A table plentifully spread we find,
And jugs of humming Ale, to cheer the Mind;
Which he, too gen’rous, pushes round so fast,
We think no Toils to come, nor mind the past.
But the next Morning soon reveals the Cheat,
When the same Toils we must again repeat;
To the same Barns must back again return,
To labour there for Room for next Year’s Corn. [277-285]

While the images of plentiful spread and “jugs of humming Ale” abate the tension of
underpaid labour to some extent, especially when compared with Collier’s more negative
image of an unrelenting mistress, working within a georgic trope of “reward,” Duck
makes them function in a subversive, rather than an affirmative, way. The workingman’s
reward for his labours proves to be a “cheat,” and one fabricated by an exploitative social
order, where the worker is made to forget the relentlessness and ruthlessness of wage
labour. But the force of this realization is deflated by the reference to the cycle of nature
that gets replicated in the cycle of labour. As if fearful for the implications of “complaint”
in a violent agricultural landscape where the activities of threshing and harvesting have
been the flashpoints of mob rioting, Duck withdraws his critique into an apolitical sphere
of nature.

It is clear that Duck has performed an important, though inadequate, intervention
into the representation of rural labour. From a hind-sight perspective the poem may leave
us with a sense of dissatisfaction, but it is instructive to note Duck’s contributions to the larger discourse of working-class identity. Duck becomes a focal point of clash between class-ideologies by his very presence within a privileged cultural space, a dialogic effect (as Southey notes) his writings generally failed to generate. Before reaching the crisis-point of the 1790s, where downwardly-mobile artisans joined hands with the working classes under the rubric of the London Corresponding Society, the working classes were acknowledged only for their “physical” presence as anonymous elements of the riotous mob. If the traditional form of self-expression of the working classes has been in the a-cultural sphere of popular action so far, then Duck and the poets he inspired mark an important transition from the physical to the cultural sphere, from the action-oriented self-expression to an intellectual one, a process that achieves a certain degree of stability in Chartist discourse a hundred years later. But this shift could not be effected without rough passages in the personal lives of the protagonists of this unfolding drama, as can be seen from the sparse details of Duck’s life. As one of the earliest students to benefit from the charity-school system, Duck’s poetic predilections rendered him as a freak within his own community. Even his wife thought “that her Husband dealt with the Devil, and was going mad because he did nothing all day but talk to himself, and tell his Fingers.”

26 His literary endeavours indicate a subplot of exclusion from the larger community. When he went out to work in the fields he would take a Spectator with him. By dint of harder work than his

companions he would gain a half-hour’s leisure in which he would “sit down all over Sweat and Heat, without regarding his own Health,” 27 and read his Spectator.

The personal tribulations of poets such as Duck who took the first hesitant steps into the forbidden zone of elite culture is further reinforced by the degree of hostility that his generation of working-class poets were greeted with by the doyens of “taste.” The polite reader in his/her response to the plebeian poets reveals the degree of class-hostility. If the worker’s acceptance into the cultural scene removed him from the un-intellectual and destructive activity of the amorphous mob, it reconfined him within the defining space of middle-class work ethic that never let him forget where he came from. This type of class-hostility took a double form in the early eighteenth century. Even if Duck’s admirers venerated him as an “unlettered genius,” it was in terms that elevated him as a freak of nature worthy of careful observation. Examining this prototypical response to working-class poets in the eighteenth century, Landry points out that “beyond a statement of their authenticity as plebeian writers, and sometimes a few facts about their families and employment, their works are made to stand by themselves--the curious productions of a ‘natural genius,’ a working-class prodigy, but not the self-examination of an autobiographical subject whose ‘lived experience’ in itself can be considered worthy of public textualization” (Landry 37). Morag Shiach observes that polite interest in this poetry in the eighteenth century lay in the extent to which it could “support particular theories about the relations between nature and poetic writing, rather than in any desire to

27 Quoted in Unwin 51.
re-evaluate the cultural and social role of the peasantry.”

This may be evidenced in the attitude of Duck’s patron, Dr. Joseph Spence, a professor of poetry at Oxford, whose sympathy for Duck’s poetic endeavours led him to market Duck as a curious laboratory specimen. While projecting Duck as a natural prodigy, Spence asks that Duck be rewarded for his role of an ‘other’ who has the special privilege of validating middle-class culture: “Stephen read [Paradise Lost] over twice or thrice with a Dictionary, before he could understand the Language of it thoroughly. . . . Indeed it seems plain to me, that he has got English just as we get Latin.”

Spence further emphasizes that “the Pains [Duck] has taken for the Pleasure of improving himself, are incredible,” and that he had successfully schooled himself in the literary norms of English society. Duck’s response to a poetry-reading session is offered as evidence:

[Duck] trembled as I read the Ghost’s Speech [in Julius Ceasar] . . . As I was reading to him, I observ’d that his Countenance chang’d often in the most moving Parts: His Eye was quick and busy all the time . . . . I never saw Applause, or the shifting of proper Passions, appear so strongly in any Face as in his.”

The idea of an experiment, not an unlikely proposition in a Baconian society, is further reinforced by Dr. Alured Clarke, who undertook the task of supervising Duck’s belated education. Rayner Unwin highlights the main points of Clarke’s unwholesome diet of Augustan taste that Duck was fed with:

The works of Swift and Montaigne were to be denied to him, but he should read Burnet’s *Theory of the Earth* and Ray’s *Wisdom of God in the

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29 Quoted in Unwin 51.

30 Quoted in Unwin 61.
Creation. He was to learn Latin, get Pope's *Essay on Criticism* by heart, and Dr. Clarke only allowed him to read Shakespeare in its entirety "being very well satisfied that Stephen will suck the flowers, and leave all the puns and low conceits behind him." It was a rigorous course in civilizing according to neo-classical tenets, and one from which neither the thresher nor the poet recovered. (53)

While Duck's admirers sought to configure him as a case-study for emphasizing the importance of "improvement" and perseverance, other ideologues such as Hannah More, the patron of Ann Yearsley, the milkwoman-turned-poetess, stressed the dangers of allowing the working classes into the cultural sphere.³¹ While placing Duck's poetic endeavours within an ongoing "industry vs. idleness" debate of the middle classes, the *Grub Street Journal* in 1731 passes the following judgment upon the weaver John Banks, who was inspired by Duck's success:

> The poor Weaver has been tempted to neglect his business, by Stephen Duck's good fortune . . . the best way to encourage the weaver would be . . . to wear the manufactures of Great Britain; and the most suitable encouragement to the thresher would be to give him a small farm in the country; laying both under an absolute restraint never more to write a line of verse.³²

Here we detect a middle-class fear of social mobility whereby a working-class spokesman may not only aspire towards the comfortable "place" of his superiors and thus demystify the class-character of paternalism, but may also challenge his age-old duty of burdensome labour. Samuel Johnson's comment on the shoemaker-poet Woodhouse displays a similar

³¹ Hannah More's comment on Duck in her letter to Elizabeth Montagu reflects the fear of social mobility by which the working classes might begin to consider themselves at par with her superiors: "I am utterly against taking her out of station. Stephen was an excellent Bard as a Thrasher, but as the Court Poet, and Rival of Pope, detestable." Quoted in Landry 16.

³² Quoted in Klaus 16.
refusal to allow the working man to escape his significatory role as a worker: “They had better furnish the man with good implements for his trade, than raise subscriptions for his poems. . . . He may make an excellent shoemaker, but can never make a good poet.”

Thus the entry of the working class into the cultural sphere not only marks its first step into a discursive terrain of identity-formation, but also generates a space whereby the middle classes are forced to clearly demarcate the limits of their “revolutionary” character. The position of the “middle” then points to a double-edged discourse of hostility, directed against the aristocratic order as well as the lower classes. The evaluative formula of “idleness” vs. “industry” that gathered force through the eighteenth century shows that these poets’ limited success with their readers did not spring from their status as intellectuals for the working classes who furthered the cause of their brethren, but depended only upon their ability to cleverly imitate the prescribed models of poetic expression determined by the middle-class “taste.”

But there is a significance that we may accord Duck that supersedes his tenuous position within cultural hegemony. Duck clearly represents an important moment in the history of working-class literature, in the way in which he triggers off a whole generation of plebeian poetry. Robert Tatersal’s volume of poetry, *The Bricklayer’s Miscellany*, positions itself within this new cultural topos of 1734 and argues for an inclusion of the bricklayer’s unglamorous profession within tasteful discourse:

> And Why not *Bricklayers* exercise their Quill,  
> Whose Art surmounts a Country Thresher’s still:  
> A *Flail*, a *Trowel*, Weapons very good,  
> If fitly us’d and rightly understood;  
> But close engag’d, beware the *useless Flail*

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33 Quoted in Klaus 16.
The Trowel then can terribly prevail:
If Threshers, Millers, entertain the Muse,
Why may not Bricklayers too their Subjects chuse?\textsuperscript{34}

Tatersal has a double purpose in mentioning Duck as his formative influence. While he takes Duck’s legacy of labour poetry to a more subaltern level by crossing over from the georgic field to the world of the unrenowned bricklayer, he also positions himself as an adversary to the successful Duck. This is an important moment, I think, for it hints at the possibilities of a separate tradition of working-class writings that does not just occupy a defensive position by vying for upper-class attention. Rather, Tatersal responds to Duck as a fellow-labourer-turned-poet, and becomes a radically different reader of Duck’s poetry by engaging in a dialogic remaking and expansion of working-class self-expression, in a manner that corresponds to the dialogic relationship between Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. But Tatersal’s critical energy comes from the experience of class-difference: not only does the brick-layer occupy a lower rung in the social ladder than the thresher (who can at least draw from the georgic mode particularly suited to his activity), but Tatersal is keenly aware that Duck has now ascended to the upper echelons of society, and is therefore a fit subject for criticism.\textsuperscript{35} This idea is further strengthened by John Frizzle, a miller from Ireland who was quite unequivocal in mocking Duck in \textit{The Gentleman’s Magazine} in 1733, where he addresses Duck in the following way:

\textsuperscript{34} Quoted in Klaus 4-5. Klaus highlights Tatersal’s ambitions to rise above his station in life well.

\textsuperscript{35} Klaus suggests that “to Duck, who was meanwhile settling down to life at Court and anxiously trying to live up to the expectations of his patrons, those following his example and seeking his favour must have been more of an embarrassment than anything else” (5).
O *Stephen, Stephen* if thy gentler Ear
Can yet a rustick Verse unruffled hear,
Receive these Lines, but look for not much Skill,
Nor yet for Smoothness, from a Water-Mill.
I near the Hopper stand with dusty Coat,
And, if my Mouth be open, dusty Throat.
The Stones, the Wheels, the Water make a Din,
Hogs grunt without, or squeeks a Rat within
To mediate sweet Verse is this a Place?

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And can I write? ah! make my Case your own,
A Miller Poet let a thrasher own. 36

**Collier and Genre**

Not only did Duck father a generation of hostile sons, but his poem *The Thresher's Labour* has generated what Donna Landry has called a working-class

“protofeminist” discourse in Collier’s repudiation of Duck, a theme we will turn to next. Mary Collier’s poem *The Woman’s Labour* (1739) responds to Duck’s representation in interesting ways. Starting with the immediate matter of Duck’s misogynist portrayal of working women, Collier ascends to a metacritical perspective that highlights the limitations of the georgic mode. What allows Collier to arrive at that critical judgment is her vantage point as a working woman, who is burdened by the triple labour of working in the field, working within a domestic space, and child-bearing. Collier takes the georgic’s orientation towards rural labour to a different level by asking for the inclusion of women’s experiences within it. The inability of the georgic to contain the theme of women’s labour and its uncritical “embellishment” of women in images that work to emphasize masculine prowess leads her to make an important conclusion: Duck’s poem

36 Quoted in Klaus 5.
is useful for the working-class reader not because it adequately represents work-place realities, but more because it is able to provide a lesson about true and false ways of writing. The significance of Collier’s criticism of Duck lies in her saying that Duck misrepresents reality in order to conform to the georgic, through which approach she is able to point out the way hegemony works: through form. By highlighting the limitations of a form that cannot adequately contain the female working-class experience Collier implicitly demands a new form, one that will do justice not only to the experiences of working class men but also women. But is she herself able to circumvent the demands of taste and inaugurate a new poetic form for the working classes? Let us turn to the poem for the answer.

The advertisement for the first edition of *The Woman’s Labour* premises Duck’s meteoric rise into polite society as the starting point of Collier’s literary endeavours:

    Tho’ she pretends not to the genius of Mr. Duck, nor hopes to be taken Notice of by the Great, yet her friends are of Opinion that the Novelty of a Washer Woman’s turning poetess, will procure her some Readers.

As with Tatersal there is a double quality to Collier’s invocation of Duck: on the one hand it shows an awareness of the terms of cultural hegemony where workers are acknowledged only as far as they can provide a novelty experience. At the same time, this tacit realization participates in the literary market by advertising Collier’s capacity to fulfill the need for novelty and thus deflates a possible critique of it.

But the poem itself is more critical and intense in its tone of complaint. From the very start *The Woman’s Labour* assumes the vantage point of a subaltern voice that critiques Duck’s social mobility. Collier’s exclusion from polite society allows her to
project herself as the real “savage” muse who can give voice to the realities of labour,
since she has been herself excluded from both, economic and social justice:

Immortal Bard! thou Fav’rite of the Nine!
Enrich’d by Peers, advanc’d by Caroline!
Deign to look down on One that’s poor and low,
Remembering you yourself was lately so;
Accept these Lines: Alas! what can you have
From her, who ever was, and’s still a Slave? [1-6]

Rather than dedicating her poem to a patron, Collier addresses her predecessor Duck as
the intended reader and invokes a hostile relationship with him, that contrasts sharply
with the humbleness of Duck’s opening address. Collier then moves from talking about
her singular plight to include all of womankind—a move from the personal to the social—a
move that is significantly absent in Duck’s amorphous “we” while describing the
thresher:

No learning ever was bestow’d on me;
My Life was always spent in Drudgery:
And not alone; alas! with Grief I find,
It is the Portion of poor Woman-kind. (ll. 7-10)

Next follows a comparison of the present state of women with a mythical time
when there was “[t]hat happy state our Sex at first enjoy’d.” Landry views Collier’s
reference to an idealized past as a gesture of “radical defamiliarization” that sought to
critique Duck’s disrespect for women by reminding him of the courtly trope of female
adulation:

When Men used their utmost care and toil,
Then Recompense was but a Female Smile;
When they by Arts or Arms were rendered great,
They laid their Trophies at a Woman’s Feet.
They, in those days, unto our Sex did bring
Their Hearts, their All, a free-will Offering;
And as from us their Being they derive,
But my reading of Collier’s deployment of “female smile” is slightly different. While attacking Duck’s patriarchal subordination of women in a situation where women were being forced to resort to the harsh conditions of wage labour, Collier resorts to a conventional trope of female control expressed in the court poetry. In doing so, not only does she break away from what she has been implicitly arguing for—the possibility of forming a community of class and gender-conscious women—but has also weakened the effect of her later critique of Duck with reference to the hegemonic effect of genres. Further, the relocation of women’s identity within a non-labouring and passive sphere of exaltation as a desirable topos becomes affirmative rather than critical of the middle-class drive towards the ideal of a domesticated woman. Collier, in an attempt to redress women’s inferior status, resorts to the mythological history of the Fall instead of a more immediate material history of an artificial separation of work arenas and the valorization of male labour, both of which form a contextual rationale of Duck’s poem. Also, the rather absurd idea of a washer-woman as a recipient of male “homage” shows an uncritical acceptance of received forms. The absurdity of this juxtaposition has been highlighted by Cervantes in his contrary personas of Dulcinea and Aldonza. Here Collier unwittingly replicates Duck’s situation where elite literary tropes overdetermine the site of her own textual production.

Nevertheless, Collier’s reply to Duck serves two important functions. Not only does she refute patriarchal condescension and its inaccurate account of women’s labour, she also raises a protofeminist voice against the casual disregard of the labour involved in
running a household and other traditionally female domains, which lesson has a continuing relevance even in our “postmodern” lives. Collier’s criticism of Duck’s *The Thresher’s Labour*, which describes the year-round labour of threshers in a capitalist countryside, is with regard to his representation of women as “prattling females” who gossip like sparrows, waste time and have only a marginal role in labour. Her charge against Duck is that of historical inaccuracy--not only does Duck fail to mention women’s contribution to the process of harvesting, he also charges them with inefficiency. As John Goodridge (42) points out, Collier critiques Duck by pointing out a particular kind of misogyny, in his using the trope of prattling women as a convenient poetic device, despite its inapplicability to the situation:

And you, great Duck, upon whose happy brow
The Muses seem to fix their garland now,
In your late poem did boldly declare
Alcides’ Labours cant with yours compare,

And let our hapless sex in silence lie
Forgotten, and in dark oblivion die;
But on our abject State you throw your scorn,
And women wrong, your verses to adorn. (ll. 31-42)

In other words, Duck is accused of sacrificing the cause of women to adorn an elite art form.

Continuing her investigation of Duck’s misrepresentation of women, Collier allows us to view Duck’s obsession with industry as an outcome of the experience of wage labour where a new sensibility of “time thrift” was imposed upon social and domestic life, as an ethical measure against “idleness.” Duck’s censure of women workers echoes a middle-class ideology of work-discipline expressed in tracts such as
Rev. J. Clayton’s *Friendly Advice to the Poor* (1755) which decreed that “[i]f the sluggard hides his hands in his bosom, rather than applies them to work; if he spends Time in sauntering, impairs his Constitution by Laziness, and dulls his spirit by Indolence,” then he can expect only poverty as his reward. Duck’s awareness of the master’s omnipresent gaze prefigures a process of assimilation of the working-class into identities imposed by capitalist masters on later generations of workers and unions. Measured against Duck’s submission to bourgeois work-culture, Collier’s valorizing of talk between women as “the only Privilege our sex enjoy,” may be read as a desire to resist the imposition of time-consciousness. Talking during work hours becomes a pre-capitalist activity of self-assertion, with the least demarcation between work and life. There is no great sense of conflict between labour and “passing the time of the day.” The idea of talking also hints at the possibilities of a community of women workers, rather than the silent and solitary conquests of Duck’s workers. Collier is thus able to critique Duck’s working-class misogyny, where sexual discrimination is enacted upon the field and textual violence done to impertinent, noisy women who do not respect the master’s gaze. Interestingly, while the scythe becomes “the weapon destin’d to unclothe the Field,” when faced by the master’s authority, “the threshall yields but to the Master’s Curse.”

But once again Collier’s attempt at self-valorization ends up articulating contrary messages. While she had earlier tried to uplift the image of women by reminding Duck

37 E. P. Thompson suggests this when he says that “the first generation of factory workers were taught by their masters the importance of time; the second generation formed their short-time committees in the ten-hour movement; the third generation struck for overtime or time-and-a-half. They had accepted the categories of their employers and learned to fight back within them” (*Customs* 390).
about the golden age of women’s exalted status, now she refers to a more mundane topos of rural labour to do so:

You of hay-making speak a Word or two,  
As if our Sex but little Work could do:  
This makes the honest Farmer smiling say,  
He’l seek for Women still to make his Hay;  
For if his Back be turn’d, their Work they mind  
As well as Men, as far as he can find. (ll. 43-48)

In order to redress her grievances against Duck, Collier resorts to the figure of authority, the honest and smiling farmer, as a source of validation. So, to articulate a gender-position here Collier suspends her criticism of class-exploitation. The exaltation of women’s work in Collier lacks the critical outlook that Duck interweaves into his depiction of labour. Interestingly, her poem does project a strong critique of class-hierarchies a bit later, but aimed at the ruthless and unsmiling mistress this time.

Collier’s dialogic confrontation with male labour is continued by shifting the scene to the domestic topos and suggesting that the trope of homecoming offers no relief for labouring women. Where Duck’ labour ends as soon as he heads home, Collier extends the trope of labour into the aestheticized domain of the worker’s cottage and thus demystifies it:

When Ev’ning does approach, we homeward hie,  
And our domestic Toils incessant ply:  
Against you coming Home prepare to get  
Our Work all done, our House in order set;  
Bacon and Dumpling in the Pot we boil,  
Our Beds we make, our Swine we feed the while;  
Then wait at Door to see you coming Home,  

Our Children dress and feed, their Cloaths we mend;  
And in the Field our daily Task renew,  
Soon as the rising Sun has dry’d the Dew. (ll. 75-86)
While Duck is able to go home to dumpling and bacon, Collier emphasizes the incessant “domestic toils” involved in preparing for the arrival of the husband. She trivializes the troubles of male labourers by providing an example of a situation where women who do not even have time to assess the damaging effects of their working conditions:

Those mighty Troubles which perplex your Mind,
(Thistles before, and Females come behind)
Would vanish soon, and quickly disappear,
Were you, like us, encumber’d with Care. [123-6]

While Duck’s poem tends more towards a conciliation with the master, Collier’s by contrast remains largely critical of the upper classes. One of the most vivid descriptions in the poem is of the labours of a washer-woman, the very incorporation of which not only reclaims what Hill has classified as “ignored, unrecorded and invisible” tasks into a public space, but also novelizes the poetic form by its everyday realities. This section of the poem provides a relentless focus on the dehumanization of labour, where women work on until

Not only Sweat but Blood runs trickling down
Our wrists and fingers; still our Work demands
The constant action of our labouring Hands. (ll. 190-2)

In contrast with Duck’s “well pleased” and “joyful” master, who provides a “plentifull table” and “jugs of humming beer,” the mistress in Collier’s poem appears only in her role of a supervisor:

Then comes our Mistress to us without fail,
And in her Hand, perhaps, a Mug of Ale
To cheer our Hearts, and also to inform
Herself, what Work is done that very Morn;
Lays her Commands upon us, that we mind
Her Linen well, nor leave the Dirt behind.
Not this alone, but also to take care
We don’t her Cambricks or her Ruffles tear,
And these most strictly does of us require:
To save her Soap, and be sparing of Fire;
 Tells us her Charge is great, nay, furthermore,
 Her Cloaths are fewer than the time before. (ll. 170-186)

There is no hint of deference here as Collier demystifies the mistress's gaze. This extract becomes more poignant in its critique when contrasted with the household conditions of the washer women themselves, especially with regard to the expenditure of soap and fuel that the Mistress fears so much. According to Hill, as soap became a highly taxed commodity, many of the poor households in rural England were forced to cut down on soap, and in some cases, to resort to the use of urine as a cleansing liquid, often for washing their bodies. Similarly, because of the scarcity of wood many were obliged to use other means of heating, as seen in Portland, where a visitor observed “an old woman hobbling after our horses in hopes of a little fuel from their excrement.”

In light of these facts, it may be asserted that Collier’s representation of the upper classes is governed by one realization alone: the conversion of social relations into production relations made possible by the “abstractness” of wage-labour.

The relentless descriptions of women’s labour also challenge Duck’s attitude of resigned happiness, which allows him to tune his labour to the cycle of nature and affords him moments of respite:

We wish the happy season may be fair,
And joyful, long to breathe in opener Air.
This change of Labour seems to give much Ease;
With thoughts of happiness our Joy’s complete.
There’s always Bitter mingles with the Sweet. (ll. 92-97)

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38 Quoted in Hill 113.
In Collier’s case, there is no such relief in the realization that

After all our Toil and Labour past,
Sixpence or Eightpence pays us off at last.
For all our Pains, no Prospect can we see
Attend us, but Old Age and Poverty. (ll. 203-6)

Such a self-evaluation comes very close to Marx’s description of the desanctificatory effect of wage labour associated with the bourgeois ethos where “man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind.”39 The last lines of the poem reinforce this idea by presenting an image of “industrious bees”:

So the industrious Bees do hourly strive
To bring their Loads of Honey to the Hive;
Their sordid Owners always reap the Gains
And poorly recompense their Toil and Pains. (ll. 248-251)

Unlike Duck who focuses upon the relentlessness of labour in his closing lines, Collier prefers to highlight the exploitative bent of a larger system that profits by the incessant labour of the threshers and washing-women. The usage of the conventional georgic trope of the “industrious bee” is significant as it participates in a different version of the georgic that was critical of the idea of reward. McRae traces the altered signification of the idea of the industrious bee in a capitalist landscape:

In the sixteenth century, Whitney embraced a meditation on the beehive as an opportunity to celebrate the operation of a patron’s estate. . . . The movement towards values of individualism, however, shifts attention away from the interests of a landlord directing the labours of others, and toward those of the industrious workers themselves. . . . [T]he seventeenth century brought widespread agreement that it was the accumulation of individual labours and energies that determined the bees’ prosperity. The analogy emphasized the protection and rational organization of labour and property; those ‘laborious in an honest way,’ as Wither proclaims, must be allowed to reap the requisite reward for their labours. (222)

Collier’s usage of the image of an industrious bee responds to this anxiety of the lack of reward in a profit-oriented ethos, where labour is not only ceaseless, but rewards are few. She deploys the bee metaphor for a dual effect: she utilizes the logic of individual rewards that is implicit in the georgic poetry and laments that she has been denied those compensation, and she also criticizes the capitalist society’s pocketing of the profits of hard labour of the working classes.

Collier’s demystification of labour has a continuing relevance over and beyond her confrontation with Duck. The importance of her contribution may be emphasized by placing her poem against the treatment of washer-woman by Anna Barbauld, an upper middle-class writer at the turn of the century, who was well acquainted with Hannah More and Elizabeth Montagu of the “bluestocking” circle. Her poem, entitled “Washing-Day,” proclaims a novelization of “clear high-sounding phrase, language of gods,” by invoking the ‘domestic Muse” and the labours of washing day. But the attempt at incorporating extraliterary material of everyday life, gives way to a conventional representation of the lower classes as pastoral figures as seen in the following lines:

Come then, domestic Muse,
In slipshod measure loosely prattling on
Of farm or orchard, pleasant curds and cream,
Or drowning flies, or shoe lost in the mire... (ll. 3-6)

The poem goes on to talk about the labours of washing day, where

Ere the first grey streak of dawn,
The red-armed washers come and chase repose.
Nor pleasant smile, nor quaint device of mirth,
E’er visited that day... (ll. 13-16)

The facelessness of the “red armed washers” is what is clarified by Collier’s inner look at the real conditions of these workers, that disrupts the affable tone of Barbauld’s poem,
and dialogically converts literary discourse into an ideological performance. Collier's washer women do more than “chase repose”:

When to the house we come where we should go,
How to get in, alas! we do not know:
The Maid quite tir’d with Work the day before,
O’ercome with sleep; we standing at the door,
Oppress’d with cold, and often call in vain,
Ere to our Work we can Admittance gain.

The poetic intent behind Barbauld’s description of the washing day is to light-heartedly describe the hectic and unsentimental labours of washing as an example of the “petty miseries of life” that married women suffer “beneath the yoke of wedlock.” The narrative records the event through eyes of a child and thus conveniently postpones questions of participation in an oppressive social hierarchy. The “sad disasters” of the washing day such as the threat of rain, the soiling of clothes, etc., replace the personal disasters of the lives of the washer-women, for many of whom charring was the last resort against starvation. It is clear that Barbauld’s controlling standpoint is that of the housewife, described in the image of her mother “urging despatch,” a portrayal which Collier has successfully reinstated within an ideological context of production relations. In Barbauld, the washer women appear as disembodied hands, prefiguring an assembly line-like motion:

Briskly the work went on,
All hands employed to wash, to rinse, to wring,
To fold, and starch, and clap, and iron, and plait. (ll. 75-77)

Predictably enough, the question pondered over is “Why washings were,” rather than who the washer woman were.
The task of evaluating Collier’s contribution to plebeian history has to take into account the continuing relevance of the dialogic aspect of her work, which challenges both gender oppressions within class identities and class oppressions within gender identities. But, notwithstanding the narrow space of creative self-expression, and in spite of her failure to translate the material conditions of her existence into a purely proletarian identity, where she would have nothing to lose but “skimmers and ladles and such trumpery,” which “make complete her slavery,” Collier’s contribution lies in articulating an emergent working-class consciousness with an emergent feminist critique of the misogynist tendencies embedded in that consciousness. She employs an elite poetic form and novelizes it with descriptions of true rustic experiences, by which she confronts Duck’s epic world of “fathers” and Barbauld’s amiable domesticity. Collier’s use of labour as a means of criticizing both gender and class, and for creating a space for working-class women in her reader’s mind is radically different from the other proto-feminist writings of her age. If we contrast Collier’s type of female-appreciation with, say, Mary Wollstonecraft’s method of feminism, the differences in the logic and shape of working-class feminism become immediately apparent. Mary Wollstonecraft occupies a critical position within a republic of letters, in which readers are exhorted to extend the idea of liberty and reason to include women. As a logical outcome of a female readership, the reference point of such a feminist approach is the egalitarianism implicit in the rhetoric of “common humanity.” The critiques of Wollstonecraft proceed from this sense of disparity that lies at the heart of the middle-class society. Collier follows a parallel but disparate trajectory. Her critique comes from the “levelling” principle of labour and not
education. Her demands (though they are not voiced clearly) therefore are not organized along the lines of intellectual fulfillment as they were for Wollstonecraft, but seek to redress women on the logic of a new social order based upon the primacy of labour, where the one who labours should ideally get an equal status as another who labours as much.

While Duck and Collier may have, in the final analysis, succumbed to eighteenth-century models of "taste," they leave an important legacy of working-class writing for the next generation of poets. The poets that follow in their tradition show a remarkable awareness of the problem of capturing the realities of their life within conventional forms. The literary battles of John Lucas, Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, etc., not only criticize the patronage system but also reveal a new anxiety regarding poetic form. Rather than occupying the role of a subplot the problems of form and authority form the very material for poetry. These poets take their roles of "unlettered geniuses" to a literal dimension where in a poem entitled "On Genius Improved" Yearsley recommends to an "unlettered Poet" that he should ignore all these rules and regulations and give free vent to his inspiration and creative urge, that he can specially command from his perspective of an "untaught Mind."

**Inconclusions: The Novel**

Yearsley voices an awareness of the working class's location on the margins of civil society and suggests that intellectuals use that vantage point to criticize the dominant culture as well to generate a self-affirming working-class discourse. Is this perhaps the solution to the problem that I raised in the beginning of the chapter, that of the possibility
of a working-class lexicon that somehow escapes the signifying practices of the dominant culture? Yearsley position is significant when examined in light of another approach to the issue of working-class protest. Marx’s emphasis upon the “dissolution” of civil society when describing the correct formula for the proletarian revolution perhaps stems from a desire to escape the frustration of a reflective ontology. As we have discussed before, in order to elude the signifying practices of bourgeois discourse, the proletariat has somehow to become “a class in civil society that is not of civil society, a class that is the dissolution of all classes.”

The importance of Marx’s rather utopian aspiration lies in his hope that an ontology of *dialectics* would allow this break out of forms of bourgeois society. Marx’s valorization of dissent as the working class’s escape route from the aporias of defensive discourses and inherited (albeit reinterpreted) self-expressions grows out of this confidence. What is interesting is the way in which such a dialectical approach positions itself within the outermost reaches of an “interpreted” world, where even while Marx laments an “objective context of delusion” he seeks to emancipate working-class identity through a formulation of what it is *not*, which critical consciousness, in combination with political and economic interventions, would crystallize into a new identity.

The rise of the English novel provides an interesting space in which to discuss the issue of class-formation, in light of the idea that the growth of the middle classes out of a feudal setup into an antagonistic position within its ethos was complemented by the

solidification of the novel into a form of writing that was able to break away from
conventional genres. If one may inscribe the novel as a successful paradigm-shift in the
perception and articulation of human identities, and in that sense a “living” example of
the birthing of a class, it is important to note that the novel’s formal break is achieved
only through a diachronic and critical engagement with the context of its own production.
Such a perspective also ties up the various findings of recent theorists of the novel that
trace its origins to journalistic discourses or romances or histories into a larger and an
indisputable phenomenon of a paradigmatic shift in the textual practices of the early
eighteenth century. Michael McKeon’s analysis emphasizes this double aspect of the
novel’s origin, where the novel, though continuous with certain discourses from the past,
nevertheless signals a significant rupture as a fallout of an altered socio-economic
context, where

the gradual discrediting of aristocratic honor, the resolution of its tacit
unity into the problematic relation of rank and virtue, birth and worth, was
accompanied by the accelerated mobilization of social, intellectual, legal,
and institutional fictions whose increasingly ostentatious use signaled their
incapacity to serve the ideological ends for which they were designed.
Some of these fictions became outmoded; others were transmuted, through
their own acceleration, into servants of other ideologies. . . . [T]he novel
emerged in early modern England as a new literary fiction designed to
engage the social and ethical problems the established literary fictions
could no longer mediate—which is to say, both represent and conceal—with
conviction. (133)

The significance of McKeon’s method lies in his stimulating use of Marx’s
analytical tools. The categories of “simple” and “rational” abstractions introduce another
important aspect to our discussion of the diachronic and synchronic interplay in the rise of
the novel. The ascendancy of the idiom of the novel as a “rational abstraction” in the
eighteenth century not only indicates a level of qualitative transformation where earlier terminology becomes insufficient for explaining modern life, but more importantly, as a "simple abstraction" the novel also reveals the historical complexity underlying its origin.\(^{41}\) And it is precisely this double aspect of novelistic discourse that Bakhtin takes to another level in his examination of the generic instability of the novel, where the novel not only parodies the extrahistorical world of the epic, but in that process generates a form that is also method and invents the "rational abstraction" of "history" by inventing a way of talking about history. Bakhtin's resonance with McKeon (and through him, Marx) is apparent here:

The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process. The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is, after all, the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it. . . . In the process of becoming the dominant genre, the novel sparks the renovation of all genres, it infects them with its spirit of process and inconclusiveness. It draws them ineluctably into its orbit precisely because

\(^{41}\) McKeon gives us an example of the interplay between "rational" and "simple abstractions" in the ascendency of the concept of labour in Adam Smith's discussion of it. Smith can use the term "labour" in an abstract way "by virtue of a material development sufficiently advanced to permit the formulation of abstract concepts that comprehend both the rudimentary and advanced states." I draw upon his interesting discussion of Marx's category of "production" as both a "simple" as well as "rational" abstraction, to indicate the historical complexity that underlies the vocabulary of the bourgeois public sphere. The idea of a self-conscious crystallization (or, the stability of conceptual categories) of "liberty" and "principle," ideals that display a semantic indeterminacy with respect to their own prehistories, has a parallel with Marx's dual mode of description, described by McKeon as follows: "Marx uses both terms [simple and rational abstraction] with a gentle irony, for it has turned out that there is nothing very "rational" about the rational abstraction, whereas the "simplicity" of the simple abstraction conceals a considerable historical complexity. Yet it is not entirely misleading to see in the latter category nothing but the former category employed now with a self-conscious recognition of the complex determinacy of its own abstraction" (17).
this orbit coincides with the basic direction of the development of literature as a whole. (7)

As a genre that arises out of a peculiar combination of circumstances, where a middle-class epistemology shapes the form of the novel, and, concomitantly, the novel shapes the identity of an emergent “polite and commercial people,” what is fascinating is the way in which the novel reinvents its themes and modes through a process of “innovative self-destruction.”42 If we follow Bakhtin’s laudatory view of the novel as that odd phenomenon by which the Western world has irrevocably entered a hostile world, then it is possible to say that the novel and its method of relativization made it possible for the working classes to understand and objectify themselves within its ethos. Perhaps we should be looking at working class self-expression, not in the tasteful poetry of Duck and Collier, but rather in the working class response to Pamela, where “in the village of Slough the novel was read in installments as they appeared by the blacksmith to the villagers gathered round his forge, and when he came to the triumphant issue of Pamela’s adventures by lawful marriage, they were so overjoyed that they rushed out and celebrated the event with a merry peal on the church bells.”43 The novel’s orientation towards an “active understanding” has given rise to the preconditions whereby the working classes

42 Marshall Berman’s term by which he characterizes the self-destructive character of capitalism: “The more furiously bourgeois society agitates its members to grow or die, the more likely they will be to outgrow it itself, the more furiously they will eventually turn on it as a drag on their growth, the more implacably they will fight it in the name of new life it has forced them to seek. Thus capitalism will be melted by the heat of its own incandescent energies.” All That is Solid Melts Into Air: the Experience of Modernity (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) 97. The novel’s constantly fluctuating form is peculiarly suited to this larger aspect of capitalism.

can invent a separate identity through a critical reinterpretation of a polysemic universe.

Again, Bakhtin’s ebullient description of this relativization-process points to the critical role of the novel in unsettling the semiotic field for the battle of class-hostility:

As a result of the work done by . . . stratifying forces in language, there are no “neutral” words and forms--words and forms that belong to “no one;” language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (293)

But the question we cannot escape from is whether the invention of a separate identity, specifically a variety of class identity, through novelistic discourse constitutes a successful breaking away from middle-class epistemologies. Have the working-classes been somehow set on the right path of achieving their true selves, or is the working-class identity itself a derivative of bourgeois discourse? While Duck and Collier make important breaches into conventional forms but ultimately negotiate their identities within a borrowed form, and while Ann Yearsley ruptures the form by rendering it inadequate, can these critical gestures be equated with the novel’s slow but complete break with the past? Further, what are the achievements of the working-class novel, whose interventions made possible by the novel’s method of “innovative self-destruction” and from that perspective occupy a neoteric critical role within the drama of the developing identity of bourgeois society. Or are working-class novels not novels, but something else, a form for which we don’t have a name? In a similar way, is Duck’s poem a georgic or a form of
intervention that has no name, and has not assumed the important status of a "rational abstraction" then as well as now?

The reason that these questions are relevant even today is because we are still caught in what Henri Lefebvre has identified as the domination-appropriation dilemma.\(^\text{44}\) It is possible to explain the critical interventions of Duck and Collier in the eighteenth century and the working-class discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as attempts to appropriate a hegemonic discourse, a defensive position that has not yet worked out (rather, cannot work out) its future possibilities. For Lefebvre this is a significant failure, because mere appropriation of the spaces and discourses of an oppressive system does not constitute an escape from it, as may be witnessed in the "failed" revolutions of history. The more important task (in fact the only real task) of the working class (in whatever form, place or time) is that of domination, an offensive approach (such as that effected by the middle classes over a course of three hundred years) that would at once and then only signal the real breakdown of the hegemonic order. The question, of course, is how do we break out of an ethos that gives us an image of ourselves? What would the novel be like after the revolution? Is there a revolutionary novel? Georg Lukacs tells us what a truly revolutionary novel (which would not be a novel at all) would have to overcome and how it would transform the known world:

If ever this world should come into being as something natural and simply experienced, as the only true reality, a new complete totality could be built out of all its substances and relationships. It would be world to which our divided reality would be a mere backdrop, a world which would have outstripped our dual world of social reality by as much as we have outstripped the world of nature. But art can never be the agent of such a

transformation: the great epic is a form bound to the historical moment, and any attempt to depict the utopian as existent can only end in destroying the form, not in creating reality. The novel is the form of the epoch of absolute sinfulness, as Fichte said, and it must remain the dominant form so long as the world is ruled by the same stars. (152)
CHAPTER 3
FROM THE COFFEE-HOUSE TO THE ALE-HOUSE: JOHN THELWALL’S
TRANSFORMATION OF THE POPULAR SPHERE

Can principles, which are the sun of the intellectual universe, be changed in their nature or their course by the vile actions of a few ruffians? Prove to me, by dispassionate argument, that the principles of the French Revolution are false and pernicious, and I will relinquish them at once. . . . But while my reason tells me that they are consonant in themselves with truth and justice, it is not calling them French principles . . . it is not calling me Jacobin . . . it is not talking of the “ignorant flippancy” of a man whom the learned solidity of colleges and consistories have never been able to answer . . . shall compel me to relinquish these important truths:—no; not though it could be proved that the crimes of Marat and Robespierre surpassed the savage wickedness of the fiend Zuwarrow, and the ferocity of Croats and Hulans.¹

London Corresponding Society and Bourgeois Public Sphere

In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere Habermas investigates the origins of “public sphere” as the fallout of an infrastructural transition from a “traditional” society organized around feudal hierarchies, to an emerging bourgeois ethos defined by individual autonomy and confidence in man’s rational capacities.² The “bourgeois public sphere,” a “child of the eighteenth century” (Habermas xviii), signified


a radical break from earlier epistemologies in its vocabulary of "liberty" and "principle," "simple" and "rational" abstractions that were universalist in ambit and appeal. Some of the key elements that describe this socio-intellectual phenomenon, where emergent bourgeois interests conducted a critique of the state-based authority of the "ancien regime" are described by Habermas in the following way:

First, they preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether. The parity on whose basis alone the authority of the better argument could assert itself against that of social hierarchy . . . [was] the parity of "common humanity." . . . Laws of the market were suspended as were the laws of the state. . . . Secondly, discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned . . . The private people for whom the cultural product became available as a commodity profaned it inasmuch as they had to determine its meaning on their own (by way of rational communication with one another), verbalise it, and thus state explicitly what precisely in its implicitness for so long could assert its authority . . . Thirdly, the same process that converted culture into a commodity . . . established the public as in principle inclusive. (Habermas 36-38)

The groundwork for this paradigmatic restructuring had been laid in the early years of the eighteenth century where a bourgeois ethos came to define itself, according to Jon Klancher, as a "society of the text." In this social formation, the instruments of public journals and whiggish clubs performed "two-fold function[s] [of] cement[ing] an audience of divergent social ranks as equal interlocutors, and galvaniz[ing] a new audience previously unrepresented in the universe of public discourse" (Klancher 24). Journals such as The Gentleman's Magazine, Monthly Magazine, and The Spectator, to

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name a few, constructed ideals of liberty around the figure of the “independent Whig” defined in 1751 by “Cato” as an anti-authoritarian ideologue, who scorns all implicit faith in the State, as well as the Church. The Authority of Names is nothing to him; he judges all men by their Actions and Behaviour, and hates a Knave of his own Party, as much as he despises a Fool of another. He consents not that any Man or Body of Men, shall do what they please. He claims a right of examining all public Measures and, if they deserve it, of censuring them. As he never saw much Power possessed without some Abuse, he takes upon him to watch those who have it; and to acquit or expose them according as they apply it to the good of their country, or their crooked Purposes.4

In a manner similar to Marx’s analysis of “bourgeois revolutions”5 of the eighteenth century, Habermas contextualizes the emergence of the public sphere within its appropriate topos of free-market economy. The latter’s demand for autonomy from the strictures of state regulation that finds its full expression in Bentham’s laissez faire principle bears a striking resemblance to the public sphere’s demand for liberty of thought and expression. The concept of freedom in Bentham is as anti-authoritarian as before, but is redefined as the “liberty of every individual to dispose of his time and his labour in the way and on the terms which he may judge most conducive to his interests,” an argument used against the introduction of minimum wage bill in 1811.6 Drawing upon Bentham’s convergence of rationalism and self-interest in the nineteenth-century context of


industrial capitalism, Habermas excavates the idiom of “autonomy” and “justice” to link them with commodity-based ideals of the free-market:

The society solely governed by the laws of the free market presented itself not only as a sphere free from domination but as one free from any kind of coercion; the economic power of each commodity owner was conceived quantitatively to be of an order precluding it from having an influence upon the price mechanism, and thus from ever providing direct power over other owners of commodities. . . . Delimited jurisdictional areas and observance of legal formalism were therefore criteria of the bourgeois constitutional state; a “rational” administration and an “independent” judiciary were its organizational conditions. The law itself, by which the executive and the judiciary had to abide, was to be equally binding for everyone; in principle, no one was to enjoy a dispensation or privilege. In this respect the laws of the state were like those of the market. . . . (80)

While Habermas’ analysis links the origins of public sphere in early eighteenth-century England with the rise of bourgeois society, what it does not dwell on adequately is the significance of the tenets of “principles” and “reason” for a parallel process of crystallization of the working-classes, that too must be traced back to the eighteenth century. The language of metacriticism that was initiated by the “society of the text” and reformulated by Thomas Paine in the wake of Edmund Burke’s criticism of the French Revolution, trickles down into the artisanal discourse of the 1790s, which responded to rationalism’s universalist appeal by including within its locus a class of men

whose practice it is to go to a public house from the workshops after the labour of the day, to have their supper, and then regale themselves with a pint or pot of beer, and smoak thier pipes, and convers about the news of the day—the hardness of the times—the dearness of provisions, and of every necessary and comfort in life & c. which directs thier conversation a little farther by inquiring into the cause of all those calamities of which they complain. . . .

This chapter traces out the adventures of the universalist vocabulary of bourgeois public sphere as it enters into its other arena and reformulates working-class identity. In that instance of reformulation, synchronically-regulated ideals are made to go through an enervating process of novelization, whereby concepts of “liberty” and “equality” mature into the possibility of, to use Marx’s words, “that revolutionary boldness which flings at its adversary the defiant phrase: I am nothing and I should be everything.”

I will examine the formation of working-class consciousness in England in the aftermath of the French Revolution, by looking at the examples of the London Corresponding Society (LCS), the first organization that made an attempt to reformulate working-class identity along ideals of “principle” and “virtue”; and its most prominent leader, “Citizen” John Thelwall, orator and poet, whose median position between intellectual and proletarian worlds dramatizes the triumphs and limits of a discourse based upon “sentiments of humanity” and “pure emanations of expanded benevolence” (Tribune 85). LCS’s role within working-class history has be understood from a variety of contexts that I may divide into two broad, interrelated categories. First, LCS’s contribution has to be located within an internal process of structural transformation of a rebellious “pre-industrial crowd,” where a defiant public sphere and the jargon of universal rights are employed for urging an inchoate labouring class towards class-

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consciousness. To understand this trajectory we will draw upon the forms and formulas of pre-LCS eighteenth-century popular radicalism, as well as varieties of English Jacobinism at the turn of the century. Equally important is LCS’s function of critical engagement within an external terrain of middle-class hegemony, which was reformulating the working classes into a disciplined and submissive proletariat suitable for large-scale manufacture. Here we will chart out the shifting discourse of the bourgeois public sphere that, under pressure, was forced to reformulate its rhetorical strategies to include the worker within its rubric of rationalism. In this second context, Thelwall’s query—“do corporate bodies alone partake of the nature and privileges of human beings? And are the rest of the people only chattels and lumber?” (Tribune 56)—marks the decisive arrival of universalist rhetoric into the process of paradigmatic restructuration of working-class identity.

This event whereby a “pre-industrial” mob goes through a radical process of identity-formation to begin a formulation of itself within bourgeois categories is also significant for the wide-ranging effect it had upon the identity of the working-class intellectual. A whole range of ideologies, from Francis Place’s Benthamite rhetoric to Thomas Spence’s ultra-radical discourse, find their originary moments in this altered perception of the self within community, emerging out of the realization that “I am not a solitary individual. I stand not upon a world where I behold no inhabitant but myself. I am but a part—a little, little member of the great animal of human society—a papillary nerve upon one of the extremities!” (Tribune 102). For Thelwall at least, the London Corresponding Society was to be a concrete manifestation of this new form of collective
identity, whose instruments of “reason” and “virtue” were designed to combat both the “Gothic Feudal system”¹⁰ represented by aristocracy and the ignorance of “lower orders.”

¹⁰ The term is from Joseph Priestley’s “An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the Riots in Birmingham” (Birmingham, printed by J. Thompson, 1791). It is important to stress the role of the Dissenters in the subject of working-class radicalism. Even before Paine’s cataclysmic Rights of Man, the “rational Dissenters” had laid the foundation for a subversive enquiry into political matters, and they were the first ones to welcome the French Revolution in England as the triumph of reason over arbitrary authority. The language of prophecy in Priestley looks forward to Marx’s and Engels’ teleological narrative:

As to the French Revolution, the defence and commemoration of which has been imputed to myself and others as so great a crime, you will soon see it in a different light. The enormous expenses of all modern European governments have opened the eyes of men to the nature and uses of government in general; and in consequence of this, the whole of the Gothic Feudal system, embracing matters both of a civil and ecclesiastical nature, is beginning to shake its foundation. This will necessarily produce a convulsion that will be felt in every state in Europe. All the nations must ultimately be benefited by it, though they may suffer by the temporary shock. But be assured that those countries will suffer the least in which great revolutions will be prevented by temperate and seasonable reforms. Then we, [dissenters] who have suffered by the fury of a misguided populace (who have committed their lawless devastations in the name of the church and the King) shall be considered martyrs of your liberties . . .” (xiii).

Since this chapter will not be looking at the Dissenters in detail, I use Albert Goodwin’s analysis of their legacy to summarize their contributions to eighteenth-century radicalism:

Adequately endowed by their own denominational trust funds, ably staffed by tutors and ministers of wide culture and diversified scientific attainments, and closely connected with Scottish universities, several of these [Dissenting] academies . . . had devoted themselves not only to the training of Dissenting ministers, but had also attracted an elite of the aristocratic or professional laity, by offering their pupils a wide general education in modern subjects. Designed in this respect to provide for the needs of those who would later occupy responsible positions in commerce or administration, as well as for the practical education of the landed gentry, their curricula included the study of science, English literature and belles lettres, modern languages, history, political theory and economics. . . these institutions trained the remarkable generation of distinguished
A pamphlet published in 1795, written “expressly for the Members of the London Corresponding Society,” cautions the readers against the two extremities of tyranny and slavery that the democratic subject must abjure. Where the former obstructed the march of reason and benevolence under the sway of arbitrary authority, the latter signified the danger of “pristine ignorance” becoming a tool of political faction. In the formulation of this new identity, questions of rights and liberties of the “free-born Briton” were severed from determinations of property and class, and relocated within a transcultural notion of virtue. In this process, the LCS paradoxically accentuated and muffled class distinctions. In a world based upon “principle,” the worker could place himself at par with the aristocrat (which was a novel suggestion) but could do so only if he reformulated his identify within industry and education.

One outcome of this semantic crossing-over of class boundaries is the creation of liminalities, where a vocabulary that radicalizes the lower classes also conspires to configure them as bourgeois subjects (as may be seen in the different examples of John Thelwall and Francis Place). But, rather than viewing the LCS from the narrow confines of structural inadequacies, it is important to insist on another trajectory of stunted growth, resulting not so much from opposite pulls of bourgeois and proletarian identities, as from theologians, scholars and scientists, headed by Dr. Joseph Priestley and Dr. Richard Price, collectively known as Rational Dissenters, who paved the way for modern Unitarianism and won the contemporary repute of being the fomenters of modern English radicalism. (The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979] 69-70.)

Edward Henry Iliff, “A Summary of the Duties of Citizenship! Written expressly for the Members of the London Corresponding Society; including Observations on the Contemptuous Neglect of the Secretary of State, with regard to their late Address to the King!” (n.p., 1795).
the ruthless repression of a burgeoning discourse of an idiom of working-class political economy that arose from a dialectical interplay between a Paineite metacritical stance and the deracinating experience of class-exploitation. The novel rewriting of Paine’s “first principles” from the point of view of the worker’s disadvantageous position in a property-centered and profit-oriented system not only critiques the “natural law ideology” of the eighteenth-century disciplinarian capitalist, but also extends its scope to censure the dehumanizing premises of the laissez-faire economy. Thelwall, the main proponent of this line of thought emerging from the flotsam and jetsam of the turbulent 1790s, concludes the results of his rational enquiry by evoking a new form of “social contract.” While carrying Paine’s demystification of property to its logical conclusion, Thelwall, even in the face of French “failure” and English despotism, is able to articulate a type of radicalism that transcends the traditional terrain of ethics, and enters the habitus of property-relations:

Let us not deceive ourselves!--Property is nothing but human labour. The most inestimable of all property is the sweat of the poor man’s brow:--the property from which all other is derived, and without which grandeur must starve in the midst of supposed abundance. And shall they who possess this inestimable property be told that they have no rights, because they have nothing to defend? Shall those who toil for our subsistence, and bleed for our protection, be excluded from all importance in the scale of

12 Hearn uses this term to differentiate the hegemonic premises of the late eighteenth-century ideologues such as John Stuart Mill from the nineteenth-century ones of Bentham. According to Hearn, “While a concept of natural law existed as early as Aristotle, the modern development of natural law doctrine . . . [was] based on the assumption that values are immanent in reality--that is, in the nature of things--the doctrine of natural law allows normative prescriptions for social actions to be deduced from nature. These normative prescriptions carry a moral imperative which obligates all men to act or refrain from acting in particular ways. Thus, from natural law can be deduced a set of natural rights and duties which nature has accorded man. On the basis of these rights and duties, furthermore, it is possible to establish what is, by nature, just” (39).
humanity, because they have so toiled and bled? No: man and not
moveables is the object of just legislation. All, therefore ought to be
consulted where all are concerned: for what less than the whole ought to
decide the fate of the whole. . . . (Tribune 43)

It is important to note that only by repressing both, the ideologues who were struggling
towards this new idiom of political economy and the audiences that thronged to hear
them, that the principle of *laissez-faire* could make its appearance in the nineteenth
century. But before proceeding further it is important to understand the larger backdrop of
the working-class crowd of the eighteenth century that was reshaped and organized by the
London Corresponding Society and Thelwall. I will proceed by highlighting the complex
position of the LCS within key contexts of the changing shape of the working-class crowd
and the developing discourse of middle-class identity-formation, and then proceed to
locate the effect of those formative influences in Thelwall’s political and literary
endeavours.

**Changing the Face of the English Crowd**

George Rude has shed light on the structure of pre-industrial radicalism in
eighteenth-century England by examining the contrary aims that characterized the ‘mob’
and its spontaneous praxis of violence. His reading is constructed around a double move
where politics and hunger are intricately interwoven into “customary consciousness”

13. “Customary consciousness,” E. P. Thompson’s term for describing the making of the
English working classes, is an important category for this study. Against a strictly
structural (Althusserian) model, Thompson explains that
the conservative [plebeian] culture of the plebs as often as not resists, in
the name of custom, those economic rationalizations and innovations
(such as enclosure, work-discipline, unregulated “free” markets in grain)
which rulers, dealers, or employers seek to impose. Innovation is more
evident at the top of society than below, but since this innovation is not
some normless and neutral technological/sociological process
the crowd that sought to redress economic and political inequalities by perpetrating violence on property. The significance of Rude’s analysis lies in the way in which motives of hunger, prices and wages rescue the crowd from its traditional image as an insignificant tool in the hands of political factions that galvanized the mob around the narrow ambitions of politicians such as John Wilkes or Lord George Gordon. Rude highlights the fact that radicalism of the crowd also took shape around the ideals of “free-born Briton” and “natural rights,” which suggests a veneer of political consciousness and self-affirmation against the spontaneity of a merely “consumer conscious” crowd, whose violence served, at best, as a “public opinion poll.”

The episode of “Wilkes and Liberty” riots displays this complex converging of circumstances that propelled the crowd towards sporadic acts of violence. While connecting the riots of 1768-69 with concurrent industrial disputes of weavers and coal-heavers, Rude examines the Wilkes affair from multiple registers that coalesced in the persona of Wilkes, whose appeal to the “meanest

(“modernization,” “rationalization”) but is the innovation of capitalist process, it is most often experienced by the plebs in the form of exploitation, of the expropriation of customary use-rights, or the violent disruption of valued patterns of work and leisure. Hence the plebeian culture is rebellious, but rebellious in defense of custom. . . . But when people search for legitimations for protest, they often turn back to the paternalist regulations of a more authoritarian society, and select from among these those parts most calculated to defend their present interests. (Customs in Common [London: Merlin Press, c1991] 9-10)

14 Ian Gilmour points out that mob rioting performed the function of a “public opinion poll” in the absence of any other kind of forum to inform the authorities about public reactions to particular laws and bills. Riot, Risings and Revolution: Governance and Violence in Eighteenth-Century England (London: Pimlico, 1993) 337. It is interesting to see the way in which the idea of “public opinion poll” undergoes a change with the LCS.
mechanic, the poorest peasant and day labourer”¹⁵ was compounded by a large middle-
class interest in his political career. The composition of the mob was not limited to the
lower classes but also included “gentlemen” and “well-dressed persons” (Rude 262). Not
only the fact that Wilkes drew “support from a substantial section of the merchants and
property owners in the City of London . . . and financial support and sympathy . . . [from]
prosperous citizens in London, Westminster and Southwark,” (Rude 257-58), but also,
more importantly, the nature of his relationship with his plebeian following, reveals the
gap of class experience between the leader and the working-class crowd. “Do you
suppose,” Wilkes is said to have asked his opponent, while watching the cheering throngs
on the hustings, “that there are more fools or rogues in that assembly?”¹⁶ While Wilkes’
distance from his constituency of mechanics and labourers casts a shadow of duplicity
upon his function as leader that is further confirmed by his active role in the suppression
of mobs during Gordon riots in 1780, it is important to note the phenomenon of political
consciousness that it brought about. Rude places the contradictory elements of “Wilkes
and Liberty!” in a trajectory where the event “marks an important stage in the political
education of the ‘middling’ and common people of Britain; yet it marked but the early
beginnings of a radical movement with a stable popular base . . . [which] revived and
bore richer fruits in the 1790s . . .” (267). The rallying of masses around the symbol of

¹⁵ Wilkes’s reference to the working classes is quoted in E. P. Thompson’s Making of the
English Working Class (New York: Pantheon) 83. Hereafter referred to as “Making” in
the text.

¹⁶ Mentioned in Making 70.
"No. 45" captures this idea of a dialectical process. At one level "No. 45" functioned as a signifier of the power of lower orders. Marking up of private spaces of authority and exclusion—both, at the level of the body politic/city and the body—points to the way in which "No. 45" operated within a "sub-political" tradition of "customary consciousness," outside of its immediate context of politicking and journalism. In that process the slogan of "No. 45" (along with "No Popery!" and "Church and King!") became a tool for exacting social revenge, as seen from this experience of Justice Richard Capel, who was sent to disperse the mob at Bermondsey Street:

Accordingly he went to the said House with an Officer and a Body of Light Guards, and found there a great number of Persons assembled in a riotous manner. He then and there exhorted them to disperse and told them the Danger of their Behaviour. Then one John Percival took him by the collar and said 'Damn you, I'll mark you;' and accordingly he did mark him with large figures No. 45 on the cape of his great coat. (Rude 236)

On the other hand, the adoption of "No. 45" as a tool of self-expression marks the initiation of a "mob that can read" into the public sphere of debates about "Revolution principles" that a later generation of leaders would mobilize in a different way.

The French Revolution and Thomas Paine's response to it in his Rights of Man are two important factors that inaugurated a process whereby the two agons of economic necessity and political consciousness were conjoined into an organizational form of protest. But before we turn to the issue of morphological changes in popular protest, it

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17. "No. 45" referred to North Briton's 45th issue of April 1763 in which Wilkes had implied that "if George III was he not a liar was the puppet of lying ministers." Quoted in Gilmour 305.

18. No commentary on the topic of English working-class radicalism can disregard the importance of Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man written as a response to Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France. Paine’s declaration—"I contend for the rights of the living and against their being willed away, and controuled, and contracted for, by the
is important to understand the formula and style of mob action of the eighteenth century. One line of mob activity spans from the seventeenth to mid-nineteenth century as a method of "rough justice" based upon a system of "moral economy," the best examples of which can be found in food riots. These riots, based upon the issue of prices rather than wages, temporarily reversed the economic space of market, where the mob regulated and controlled prices according to their needs and capacities. This line of action frequently ended in looting and destruction, but there are enough examples of the contrary to consider the paradoxical idea of "self-discipline" of the mob in the food riots. As E. P. Thompson reports, these riots

culminated in the enforced sale of provisions at the customary or popular price... the proceeds being given to the owners... [S]ometimes the "mob" controlled the market-place for several days, waiting for prices to come down; sometimes actions were preceded by hand-written... handbills; sometimes the women controlled the market-place, while parties of men intercepted grain on the roads, at the docks, on the rivers; very often the signal for the action was given by a man or woman carrying a loaf aloft, decorated with black ribbon, and inscribed with some slogan. (Making 65)

What this fascinating example of collective praxis reveals, apart from the self-control of the mob that appropriated and regulated economic space, is its structure of perception where problems and solutions were seen as local/contextual rather than universal/structural. The narrow objective of obtaining immediate economic redress temporarily restructured power relations within the community, where bread both initiated and controlled mob action, but, remarkably, it also ensured that the redistribution of common goods was extended also to the owner who was not held individually culpable

manuscript-assumed authority of the dead"--points to a new paradigm of self-conception that also underscores the rise of the English novel in the eighteenth century.
for his role in the market. As a result, mob action rarely led to life-threatening events or large-scale destruction, a fact that was willfully forgotten in the post-French Revolution hysteria against mass gatherings. It is indeed an irony that the post-French-Revolution “infidel societies” that sought to reformulate the mob along ideals of “principle” and “reason” failed to locate their pre-history in the above image of the crowd whose singularity of focus is homologous to the notion of a collective organized around rational objectives. Instead, the artisanal discourse of “manly courage” and “prospective virtue” espoused by the LCS preferred to align itself within a part-philosophical and part-parliamentary tradition, while uncritically absorbing the conventional image of the crowd as vengeful and irrational. Further, the Reform movement’s definition of the “free-born Briton” as a literate male with voting rights also discounted the active role of women in popular praxis. Images of plebeian women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries differ radically from the carefully-constructed feminine ideals of the middle classes codified within Jane Austen’s formula between sense and sensibility. Rioting side by side with men, women were equal participants in the countertheatre of the poor, as may be seen from these examples reported by Ian Gilmour:

In Carlisle women seized grain from houses and shops and then formed a committee to regulate its selling price. . . . In Liverpool they bit the local constable and pulled his hair, and in Ashton they seized the vicar who was trying to stop the riot. . . . In 1740 . . . a crowd of women in Dover who objected to the export of corn where prices were high, ‘rose in a tumultuous manner,’ cut the sacks, and took away the grain that some farmers were bringing to the ports for shipping. They followed this up by ‘pelting the teams and their drivers with stones for three miles out of town.’ (231)
One interesting feature that differentiates the mobs rioting for food from the mob that organized itself around quasi-political ideals of "liberty" is the latter's conception of leadership. Against the collective domain of committees, political riots display two different models of leadership, as can be seen from this representation of a London mob as comprising of parades of itinerant bands, marching (or running) through Shoreditch, the City of London, Westminster or Southwark, gathering fresh forces on the way. . . . Frequently they were 'captained' by men whose personality, speech, dress or momentary assumption of authority marked them out as leaders: such 'captains,' sometimes described by eyewitnesses as 'carrying a drawn sword' or 'riding on a horse,' were Tom the Barber . . . William Pateman, a journeyman wheelwright . . . and Thomas Taplin, a coach-master. . . . They may, too, have passed on to their followers the slogans of the day, whose chanting in unison both terrified 'respectable' onlookers and served so effectively to rally supporters--such slogans as 'Down with the Irish!' (1736), 'Wilkes and Liberty!' (1768) and 'No Popery!' (1780). It is also frequently alleged by eyewitnesses that these 'captains' carried 'lists' of houses that had to 'come down,' or whose windows were due to be smashed--as they often were. . . . [A] common feature was the picking out of the houses of selected victims, whose property might be partly destroyed--or 'pulled down'--in the traditional manner. . . . (Rude 295)

It is clear that the mob organized itself around a parliamentary turf of gentlemen such as John Wilkes, whose iconic appeal may be located in a blend of principle and personality. But, interestingly, while representing the cause of the gentleman, the mob placed itself under a temporal leadership of a Thomas Taplin or a William Pateman, who spontaneously emerged from the crowd for the practical task of directing it towards some immediate objective, and disappeared into it upon its completion. Where the gentleman initiated some abstract cause ("Liberty," "No Popery!," "Church and King!"), the 'captain' was responsible for giving it the concrete shape of destruction of property.
London Corresponding Society and Its Leaders

It is this legacy of disjointed leadership that the post-French-Revolution LCS leader sought to repudiate in his self-conscious dissociation from earlier models of the gentleman or the mob-leader. Where earlier forms of leadership had split into the politician’s and the strategist’s roles, the new leader sought to unite these twin operations within himself. The rise of “infidel societies” in the 1790s is already one indication of a new approach towards the idea of change, inspired in part by France and its successful organization of a revolution. What the French example did was to radicalize pre-existing group-formations in England and align the Jacobin identity along three separate mutually-related lines that differed from each other in form and function. W. H. Reid’s pamphlet of 1800, *The Rise and Dissolution of the Infidel Societies in the Metropolis*, highlights the main aspects of each of those types: first, “the mainly artisan proponents of French Jacobin-republicanism” such as Thomas Hardy and John Thelwall who were linked with the London Corresponding Society; second, “overlapping groups of infidels, or political freethinkers, dedicated to moral and intellectual subversion,” whose examples are rationalists such as William Godwin and his followers; and third, “an ‘auxiliary’ force of lower-class religious enthusiasts with a similar passion to overthrow the established order,” represented by Thomas Spence, Thomas Evans, and their subaltern circle of friends.¹⁹ According to Reid, “all three groups converged in popular debating clubs—some of an intellectual rationalist disposition, others of a more convivial type which met in alehouses to voice a melange of blasphemy, millenarianism and sedition, and to plot

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insurrection in secret” (McCalman 1). Each of these groups forms a critical matrix in which to evaluate both earlier types of radical activity and their own particular departures from it. The radical views of the second category of ideologues, who aligned themselves within Godwin’s intellectual circle that included Cambridge-educated Wordsworth and Coleridge, veered between extremes of anarchic subversion during the heydays of the French Revolution, and an equally rabid conservatism in the aftermath of Terror and oppression by Pitt. While Godwin radicalized philosophy, philosophized Paine, and extended the legacy of the Unitarian dissenters such as Joseph Priestley and Richard Price into its “rational” conclusion of skepticism and atheism, his intervention was based upon a rejection of collective praxis. While displacing Paine’s this-worldly analysis of taxes and poverty, Godwin reformulated the agenda of change to reflect transcendental concepts of reason and benevolence, that dissociated politics from the world of “tumult and violence,” and advocated an “uncontrolled exercise of private judgment” as a solution. Where Paine criticized reformist gradualism by highlighting the necessity of structural change, Godwin’s analysis proceeded from a rejection of institutional change.


21 Paine, who preferred structural change to the gradualist model adopted by reform societies, also preferred the public openness of the French National Convention over the cabalistic tendency of reform societies. Paine’s Letter Addressed to the Addressers shows his stance on the method of reform: “I consider the reform of Parliament, by an application to Parliament . . . to be a worn-out, hackneyed subject, about which the nation is tired . . . The right, and the exercise of that right, appertains to the nation only, and the proper means is by a national convention, elected for the purpose by all the people.” Quoted in E. P. Thompson, The Romantics: England in a Revolutionary Age (New York: New Press, 1997) 91. Interestingly, Paine found the LCS more germane to his revolutionary aspirations and had agreed to write the opening address for the LCS, but did not have the time to do so.
itself, while advocating an implicit faith in piecemeal lessons of reason. Rather than enrolling himself in working-class organizations such as the LCS, Godwin started his own “Philomathean Society” (a group formation that resembles the salons of France), whose “brothers” met to discuss the idea of reform in terms of rational enquiry. What is interesting here is that while the philosophe-type exhibited contempt for the political ambitions of the “gentleman” leader of the mob, they replicated the latter’s structure of perception. Where a Wilkes or a Gordon legitimized his manipulation of the crowd by representing the populace as ignorant and passive, Godwin’s rational disdain for the “alliance of marshalled numbers” renders the lower classes as victims of passion and delusion, and therefore as unfit citizens for his republic of letters. The expulsion of working classes from “high” debates on reason and virtue corresponds with a similar trend within salon culture on the eve of the French Revolution. Roger Chartier has highlighted this tendency of the philosophes in his analysis of the cultural origins of the French Revolution where “Marmontel opposed ‘the opinion of men of letters’ and ‘the opinion of the multitude;’ d’Alembert spoke of ‘the truly enlightened public’ and ‘the blind and nosy multitude;’ [and] Condorcet . . . set ‘the opinion of enlightened people which precedes public opinion and ends up by dictating to it’ against ‘the popular

22 Godwin’s caution regarding political associations’ “tendency to disorder and tumult” is voiced thus: “Nothing is more notorious than the ease with which the conviviality of a crowded feast may degenerate into the degradations of a riot . . . There is nothing more barbarous, bloodthirsty and unfeeling than the triumph of a mob. It should be remembered that the members of such associations are ever employed in cultivating a sentiment peculiarly hostile to political justice, antipathy to individuals; not a benevolent love for equality, but a bitter and personal detestation of their oppressors” (Godwin 288).
These ideologues may be associated with a legacy of liminalities for their role in a “partial, merely political revolution,” in which, according to Marx, “a determinate class undertakes from its particular situation the universal emancipation of society . . . but only on the condition that the whole society shares its situation; for example, that it has or can obtain money and education” (“Critique” 43). It is the incomplete nature of their rational inquiry that converts these philosophic radicals into spokesmen of the bourgeois public sphere. Bentham’s inheritance of Godwin is the logical outcome of the latter’s disdain for collective consciousness, that emphasized “the tranquil exchange of sentiments that takes place between two persons” (Godwin 286). Not only did Godwin allow himself to be used as a legitimating voice for clamping down popular movements of resistance initiated by the LCS, but his critique of benevolence and virtue led to the Malthusian rejection of the tradition of poor relief systems, and later metamorphosed into Bentham’s utilitarian conception of society.

Reid’s third category of infidel societies, on the other hand, represents the adventures of a leadership that is more organically linked with the working-class community, a type that is reminiscent of the mob leader. If the structure of radicalism in the 1790s assumed a hierarchy of high-radicalism (educated intellectuals with a comfortable lifestyle), middle (self-taught artisans agitating for their rights), and subaltern (working-class men, untutored and on the fringes of society), then the pattern of repression wreaked upon these “Jacobins” follows an inverse trajectory. Godwin’s dissociation from organized protest allowed his escape from a sustained and crippling repression.

kind of oppression conducted by spies and treason trials, faced by someone like Thelwall, who had to debate his way out of imprisonment and transportation. But the most violent subjugation was reserved for the lowest rung of radical leaders, the ultra-Jacobins who understood the French Revolution not so much as the march of reason as much as an effective overthrow of a despotic system by sansculottes such as themselves. This line of leadership extends from Thomas Spence, the radical printer and writer, whose theory and methodology followed a different trajectory than those of the other LCS leaders, to the underground leaders of the United Irishmen and the naval mutiny at Nore. Spence, by and large, was able to circumvent government attention by disseminating his ideas in multiple locales (rather than the focused spatial architectonic of the pulpit/tribune followed by the LCS) and in a variety of forms such as coins, pamphlets, broadsides, etc. (as against the phonocentric method of speeches and lectures of the LCS leaders). But Spence’s more lowly companions met with a worse fate. Revolutionaries such as Father O’ Coigly, the Irish priest-turned-insurrectionary, and Colonel Despard of the United Englishmen, who followed in the earlier tradition of direct and immediate praxis, were sent to the scaffold for their attempts to instigate a radical mob against the government. These leaders whose legacy extends from Luddism to Chartism, all the way up to Trade Unionism, help us place the other two types in a critical context. The social ethos of these insurrectionary leaders, who operated within an underground world of blackmailers and extortionists, was marked by “fractured work patterns and restless quests for alternative employment,” which were compounded by the “loss of sweets of domestic happiness” (McCalman 45). Their status as a kind of lumpenproletariat on the fringes of civil society separates them
not only from the intellectual pursuits of Godwinian radicals, but also from the
democratic aspirations of respectable artisans such as Thomas Hardy and Thelwall. What
is most remarkable about the lives and deaths of these men is their sense of un-belonging
that places them within the ambit of a revolutionary proletariat, and its status as

a class in civil society that is not of civil society, a class that is the
dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society having a universal character
because of its universal suffering and claiming no particular right because
no particular wrong but unqualified wrong is perpetrated on it; a sphere
that can claim no traditional title but only a human title; a sphere that does
not stand partially opposed to the consequences, but totally opposed to the
premises of the . . . political system . . . in short, that is the complete loss
of humanity and can only redeem itself through the total redemption of
humanity. ("Critique" 36)

The failure of these ultra-radicals is significant. Apart from appreciating the damaging
effects of a viciously repressive regime conducted by the government, we can also
examine the defeat of their revolutionary desires as the fate of an imperfect proletariat
that has to find "its spiritual weapons in philosophy" ("Critique" 36) before it can take on
a historical role. In this context the London Corresponding Society becomes an important
site as a "junction point" (Making 21) between the two disparate traditions of purely
intellectual/theoretical and purely pragmatic configurations of change.

As a post-French-Revolution organization, the LCS performed a dual task of re-
organization. First, it proletarianized earlier reform groups such as the Society for the
Supporters of the Bill of Rights (founded in 1769 as an offshoot of the Wilkes agitation)
and the Society for Constitutional Information (inspired by American pamphleteers such
as Major John Cartwright and Dr. John Jebb), which was comprised of enlightened
Dissenters and middle-class men with property and education, who agitated for an
“economic reform” (by which they meant lower taxation and cheap government). Thomas Hardy, the founder of the LCS, while acknowledging his indebtedness to “small tracts and pamphlets written by those really great men,” adds a significant third question to the traditional debates surrounding reform: “Have we who are Treadsmen -- Shopkeepers and mechanicks any right to seek to obtain a parliamentary reform?” (Hardy 6). LCS’s focus on this important question, which was debated for five nights in succession and finally resolved through a process of consensus, is an indicator of an important aspect of its radicalism. In this version of events the LCS’s extension of an antagonistic public sphere into a working-class topos results in a re-definition of the working class within a middle-class rationalist discourse. The danger of this discourse is inherent in the leaders’ repeated emphasis on the difference between “passion” with “reason” (a Godwinian thrust) where the “Ignoran[t] and Barbari[c] crowd that acted under the influence of turbulent passions” had to be prepared for the dawn of “principle, glorious principle, eternal, immutable principle” (Tribune 316) and its attendant values of “Truth,” “Virtue,” and “Liberty.” Thus, while redefining the ideals of annual parliaments and universal suffrage to include “[a] class of Men who deserve better treatment than they generally meet with from those who are fed, and cloathed, and inriched by thier labour, industry, or ingenuity” (Hardy 8), the LCS also initiated the “journey treadsmen of all denominations” into a method of radicalism based on education and improvement. Thelwall dramatizes this twin function of the LCS in the dilemma of the working-class intellectual who has to invent a method whereby contrary messages of resistance and temperance are made equally attractive to the audience:
I wish I knew how to give you a *Spartan determination of soul*, together with the benevolence and philanthropy with which a few speculative philosophers of the present day have endeavoured to inspire mankind. I would make you as hard as rocks, against the assaults of corruption, prejudice and oppression . . . But, at the same time I would fill your souls with a deflation of every thing like violence, rancour, and cruelty. O that I could make you feel the true determination of generous valour, and that you might be as wise and benevolent as you were determined and resolute! (*Tribune* 151)

Though this contrary rhetoric becomes more pronounced in later years under the onslaught of Jacobin repression, its ambivalence may be directly connected with the origins of the LCS within bourgeois public sphere. On the face of it, the three main characteristics identified by Habermas as the elements of bourgeois public sphere—egalitarianism in membership, the culture of debate and discussion, and a principle of inclusiveness—are central to the self-conceptions of the LCS, which in its formative moments saw itself as an extension of existing reform societies, whose object was the dissemination of information and the gathering of “public opinion” for the creation of a responsible electorate. While rejecting themselves from a *sansculotte* identity in a resolution on 6 June 1793, by declaring that “[r]epublicanism forms no part of this Society’s principles,” the LCS saw itself more in the role of “corresponding . . . to collect the opinion and sense of the nation” (*Selections* 71). This central function was to be enhanced by the task of dispelling the “gross ignorance and prejudice of the bulk of the nation and instill into . . . minds [of the lower classes] by means of press a sense of their own rights as freemen, and of their duty to themselves, and their posterity, as good citizens, and hereditary guardians of the liberties transmitted to them by their forefathers” (Hardy 6-7).
Seen in this context the discourse that celebrated the “emancipation and happiness of the human race”\(^{24}\) appears to occupy a place within a trajectory of embourgeoisement whose originary moments were inaugurated by a coffee-house culture that interpellated men with property and virtue into a middle-class identity. Thelwall’s critical method towards reconfiguring the working classes displays the same delinking of identity-formation from archaic, hegemonic ways of seeing, only to confine him within a middle-class discourse of moral determinations:

> Who is this man? What is his country? His class? His condition? To what sect or society does he belong? are the enquiries we are constantly making --not what are his merits, his capacities or his virtues? \(^{25}\)

At the same time, working within a working class context, and in the imagination of men without property or influence, it is easy to see how this discourse could become a grave challenge of both arisocratic and bourgeois class-systems. This is where it becomes important to emphasize LCS’s spirit of subversion, rather than submission, in which a vantage point of “scientific enquiry” is able to combine with the eloquence of universalist language to inaugurate a new cognitive structure.

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\(^{24}\) Thelwall’s words quoted in a pamphlet, “ACCOUNT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF THE CORRESPONDING SOCIETY, held in a field near Copehagen-HOUSE, Monday, October 26, 1795; including the substance of the speeches of Citizens Binns, Thelwall, Jones, Hodgson, &c. with the Address to the Nation, and the Remonstrance to the King” (n.p., 1795) 7. Hereafter referred to as “October Speech.”

Middle Class and Its Other

But before examining the achievements of Thelwall’s “bold and manly spirit of general investigation” (Tribune 87), it is useful to look at earlier representations of the lower classes. The relationship between the coffee-house publicist and the plebeian worker was organized around an ethic of benevolent paternalism whose best explication can be found in James Mill’s version of the natural law ideology. In answer to Thelwall’s question—“Ought not [the country’s] wealth, grandeur, and prosperity, to have enabled the labourer who procured them, at least to eat as well, drink as well, cloath as well, lay on as good a bed, and be sheltered by as good a roof as formerly?” (Tribune 148) Mill advocated that the “disciplinarian capitalist,”

should be in loco parentis to the poor, guiding and restraining them like children. Of spontaneous action on their part there should be no need. They should be called upon for nothing but to do their day’s work, and to be moral and religious. . . . Their superiors . . . should do all that is necessary to ensure their being, in return for labour and attachment, properly fed, clothed, housed, spiritually edified and innocently amused.26

What is interesting is that the recommendation of “trustful insouciance” worked within an economic context of configuring the crowd into labouring counterparts of capitalist production. A brief look at some eighteenth-century middle-class approaches to the problem of popular protest highlights this underlying motive clearly. The demand for annexing a “House of Correction” with Poor Houses for the “Suppression of these idle daring wicked Poor, (who are most troublesome and dangerous to a State) as well as the

Employment and Maintenance of all other Poor,” voiced by Thomas Alcock in 1753, by 1772 transforms itself into the project of generating a stable base of labouring population suitable for industry. Religion acts as a tool for censuring the depravity of the mob, as well as an apolitical corrective of configuring the working classes in the image of the middle class. Reacting, no doubt, to the excesses of “Wilkes and Liberty” riots, Jonas Hanway, Esq., while advocating religion through the “habit of sober discipline” in “reading and thinking” to mechanicks and apprentices, suggests that

[i]f the infant parish poor were sent to remoter parts of the country, than is now practiced . . . the children preserved might become the more beneficial to the community: The price which is now paid for nursing them, would certainly make it the interest of nurses, in the country, to preserve them. . . . In such case the advantage might be considerable; for all foundlings, illegitimates, orphans, or others not demanded by their parents, might in due time be placed out to husbandry and manufactory, on the spot where they are bred: and this would be attended with another happy consequence; for the children of the poor of these cities, not depending on parish charity, might then fill up the vacant offices in the drudgery of life, in these great cities. . . . (Hanway 19)

Further, this process of disciplining the mob would become effective only if it is operative at an institutional level, where “parish officers [are to be] vested with the power to encourage industry, in order to prevent parishioners from becoming paupers,

[following which] they might keep them out of the paths which lead so directly to the gallows” (Hanway 42). Importantly, while the worker has to be acculturated into a middle-


28 Jonas Hanway, Esq., “Observations on the Causes of the Dissoluteness which reigns among the lower classes of the people; the propensity of some to larceny: and the danger of gaming, concubinage, and an excessive fondness for amusement in high life, &c. . . . in three letters to a governor of Bridewell” (London: n.p., 1772) 15.
class ethos, his purely functional role of labouring takes precedence over all other matters. Hanway advocates that the female prisoners be taught to read, but since “this would require too much time and labour . . . all such as can sew, knit, or spin, should be employed in this cleanly manner, whilst they remain in custody” (60-61). Not only the rebellious crowd, but even their topoi must be made subservient to the values of industry and deference, by converting alehouses (that functioned as urban centers of rebellion) into Sunday Schools. In 1787 “Clericus” makes a suggestion to the coffee-house readers trained by Addison and Steele that

it is worth while that millions be saved certainly from temporal, and probably from endless ruin: if it is worth while, I say, to contribute to the preventing these dire evils,—not only gin shops, night-cellars, and all such engines of debauchery, should be utterly abolished, but the number of our ale-houses throughout the kingdom should be abridged, and the irregularities of such as are suffered, should be carefully restrained. For it is fact, beyond all doubt, that public-houses, unrestrained, are a great source of the above specified mischiefs to thousands and ten thousands in lower life. 29

Set against the middle-class drive towards shaping a class of disciplined and submissive workers, it can be seen that the role of LCS in a history of working-class radicalism comes not only from its position as a “junction point” in the formation of class consciousness between earlier models of spontaneity and the later models of organized activity. What is equally important and interesting is its role within a culture that rebelled against the metonymy of the State and aristocracy, only in order to institutionalize its own regime organized around work-ethic and profits. In this context the LCS becomes a

29 [Pseudonym] Clericus, “A Principal Cause of the Miseries of the Poor, and of their Great expence to the Public Shewn: in hopes of getting these evils in some measure obviated, and so rendering the poor more happy in themselves, and less burdensome to the community,” (London: n.p., 1787) 18.
“junction point” that reflects the transactional process of history, in the way in which it positions itself within the bourgeois legacy of debate and reason, but only to radicalize it with the subliminal energy of working-class experience. The demands of “liberty” and “equality” are voiced not only against the prevailing parliamentary system (and its feudal functioning that Paine attacks so effectively), but also as a consolidation of a labouring identity within the alehouse rather than the coffee-house. LCS’s aims of education and improvement, and the rhetoric of reason and benevolence, though bearing a resemblance with bourgeois discourse, nevertheless points to a process of novelization of it. Bakhtin’s perceptive understanding of the spoken or written word as a site of clash between ideologies is central in our configuration of the LCS. Following Bakhtin, we may suggest that the LCS’s demand for a republic of virtue does not so much represent a semantic gap between bourgeois rhetoric and proletarian identity, as much as a site of contestation, redefinition, and recognition of the discontinuities between the two. When we celebrate the awakening of class identities in the nineteenth century, we have to trace it back to its civic origins in the “bourgeois revolutions” of the eighteenth century, and the role of the LCS in initiating a process of “active understanding, one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new meanings.”\textsuperscript{30} As we will see later, it is only from this kind of a dialectical engagement that Thelwall is able to formulate the beginnings of a labour theory of value, which nineteenth-century radicalism then adopts as its defining trait.

The central feature that marks the LCS as a departure from the earlier forms of radicalism, its self-consciousness, must be seen from twin perspectives, then, as the desire to repudiate earlier forms of leadership of both the gentleman and the mob, as well as reformulate the working class along the lines of its parent organization, the Society for Constitutional Information, but as a proletarian version of it. But it also meant a different paradigm for the masses to aspire to, as may be seen in Thelwall’s oft-repeated disengagement of politics from violence. Godwin and Paine provide a metacritical language for voicing this new project:

This is the sort of energy I wish the human character to display; this is the sort of argument I wish to enforce—the energy of the mind, not the energies of the dagger—the logic of assassination. You must show that it is principles, not men you contend for; that you are indifferent to the name of a Pitt or a Fox; that you scorn alike all party distinctions, and all party prejudices; that you venerate nothing but the virtuous principle of liberty, and are attached to no man any farther than as he may be the organ of this principle—the instrument by which its energies may operate for the public good. (Tribune 73)

The LCS leaders express a clear disavowal of any long-term connections with men of position, especially if they were involved in active politics. Hardy’s objection to a proposal for appointing Lord Daer as chairman is “upon this ground that it would still appear to be a party business and might prevent the people exerting themselves in their own cause and depend implicitly (as formerly) upon the mere ipse dixit of some Noble Man or great Man without the least trouble of examining themselves . . .” (Hardy 8). He further recalls that the LCS was “so scrupulous about the admission of any of those of the higher ranks that when any of them offered to pay more than we usually demanded on the admission of a new member We would not recieve it but told them that we had money
sufficient for all necessary purposes Viz. for printing, postage of Letters, and stationary” (8). The disengagement of leadership from status is further reflected in the position occupied by the eminent intellectual-cum-politician Rev. John Horne Tooke, who was incarcerated and tried for treason along with Thelwall and Hardy in 1794. Unlike Wilkes, Horne Tooke’s role was more that of a mentor, whose contribution was proofreading and embellishing the Society’s pamphlets and notices. Rather than representing the interests of a Wilkes or a Tooke, the LCS aimed at reflecting a process of immanence, a moment of “becoming” where the idea and its concrete possibilities came together, in the optimistic realization that “Liberty is not an ideal entity, a Utopian chimera, existing in imagination only; ’tis as easily defined as a triangle or a circle” (Iliff 25). Not only were popular ideals of “liberty” and “rights” to be divested of their purely symbolic function and made realistic, but also the populace had to be converted into a “class-for-itself,” an agency that represented its own welfare, rather than that of a faction. In a letter to Hardy, William Skirving, one of the Scottish leaders who was transported for fourteen years to Botany Bay for his role in the National Convention of Edinburgh, announces that novel sense of self-consolidation: “[W]e are the People themselves, and we are the first to shew that the People can both judge and resolve, if undirected by Faction, with both Wisdom and Moderation” (Selections xxi). The French Revolution signified the success of such an intellectual course of action based upon principle and knowledge, because of which “[the masses] did not blindly follow a few particular leaders, to whom they were attached: they were themselves the revolutionary principle; and they created the leaders who afterwards conducted them to the objects they had in view” (Tribune 308).
The shift from a spontaneous praxis of the crowd to an informed agitation based on the “virtuous principle of liberty” (*Tribune* 73) also inaugurated a new structure of relationship between members of a collective. The LCS organized itself around an ideal of democracy that was also reflected in the everyday affairs of the Society. A proposal was raised in August 1793 for the abolition of all titles in favour of adopting “citizen” as a mode of address within the LCS. The adoption of the “citizen” identity meant a dissolution of hierarchical structures within the Society, where the same individual could occupy two opposite roles between two successive meetings:

In each of the divisions it was agreed to appoint a Chairman every meeting night, by acclamation or a Show of hands--on the next meeting night the Chairman was to descend to become door keeper in rotation. It was not deemed any degradation to the man who filled that high and elevated Station of *president*, to stoop to take upon him the *lowest office* in Society, *door-keeper*, when it was for the express purpose of promoting, and securing happiness, order, and Tranquillity in the Society. (Hardy 9)

Class-distinctions were also erased in the democratic process whereby “[e]very three Months new Officers were elected by ballot or the old ones rechosen if they found it convenient--There was a uniform rule by which all Members were admitted high and low rich and poor” (Hardy 9). In all this, the LCS, as a gatherer of “public opinion,” replicates the egalitarianism that is the founding principle of bourgeois society where self-interest is made to co-exist with common weal, with the submission of both to the rule of common law. But the radical function of the LCS becomes more evident when it enters into an active public sphere--a sphere of “popular opinion” that was associated with the mob, outside the parvenu of middle-classes--rather than being sequestered within merely intellectual domain of “public opinion” and the republic of letters. The importance of
mass rallies and public meetings organized by the LCS becomes clear from Jon Klancher’s analysis of the “making of the English reading audiences.” Klancher points out that while “[e]ighteenth-century journals had organized English audiences by forming the reading habit . . . after 1790 that habit became the scene of a cultural struggle demanding a new mental map of the complex public and its textual desires, a new way to organize audiences according to their ideological dispositions” (20). In contrast with the mass-writer’s public,

the radical audience was a focused gathering. Between the eighteenth-century “crowd” and the radical writer’s “audience” intervened another collective form, that of radical “meeting,” whether the formal meetings of London Corresponding Society in 1792, the Hampden Clubs of 1817, or the open-air meetings attended by thousands of artisans. (Klancher 20)

It is in the dialogic interaction between the speaker and his audience that we might locate the impact of the LCS, where the opening up of republican discourse into the sphere of popular opinion gives it “an orientation towards an answer” (Bakhtin 280). Not only does the forum of public speaking indicate a formal shift from the salon tradition of the SCI (whose members were men with property and education) and the Philomathean Society (with its purely intellectual orientation), but it also allows a redefinition of republican ideals through an interactive process. Thelwall indicates the necessity of such an “unrestrained intercourse with a bold, resolute, bustling, and disputatious race of men” in order to counter the “solitary abstraction” of a purely philosophic practice. The true meaning of liberty was to be located in an “[active] energy of mind . . . [which] must be fought among ‘thronged and promiscuous audiences,’ ‘in theatres and halls of
This process of redefinition starts with the idea of public address. Hardy's account of LCS's first open-air meeting reveals the heteroglossic reception of "liberty" and its apostle, Paine:

That being the first General Meeting of the Society that was held in the open air it caused a great stir in London . . . many curious and laughable observations were made by the bystanders some saying that "Tom Paine was come to plant the tree of liberty" and other that the French Jacobines were come--and others that the London Corresponding Society were met to lower the price of provisions--God bless them says some of the women and poor working people--success to them said others . . . (Selections 87)

The response of the onlookers, their "curious and laughable observations," while problematizing the monologic discourse of LCS that universalized man as an "intellectual being" (Tribune 70), also marks the entry of that discourse into an uncircumscribed and dialectical field of mutual redefinition. Rather than articulating an active and immediate program of redress (such as reducing the price of provisions), or one that referred to a low-brow comprehensions (Paine planting the tree of liberty), the LCS burst into the domain of "customary consciousness" with the aim of restructuring both shape and substance of radicalism. Even the weekly meetings of the LCS in predominantly working-class areas such as Spitalfields and Bethnal Green display a sense of multivocality, where, as Joseph Goulding complained, "[a]lmost everybody Speaks, and there is always a very great noise, till the Delegate gets up--People generally grow very outrageous and wont wait, then the Delegate gets up and tries to soften them . . ." (Selections 14). The spatial arrangement of this form of radicalism was designed to reflect a predilection towards

rational thought rather than spontaneous action. The field was organized around a focal point of the tribune erected a few feet above the ground level, from where the citizen-leader would exhort the masses to exercise their rational faculties. Working-class topoi such as Copenhagen Fields and alehouses were converted into sites of resistance where thousands of people gathered to hear the “seditious” rhetoric of artisanal leaders, and often to witness repressive actions of the government first hand.32

It was this spectacle of a working-class organized around a steady and committed leadership that alarmed contemporaries. Predictably, most invectives against the LCS took on a pointed quality of class-hatred, as can be seen from the example of “The Decline and Fall, Death, Dissection, and Funeral Procession of his Contemptible Lowness The London Corresponding Society,” published after the passing of the Convention Bill in 1795 that outlawed the LCS. While Thelwall and Jones are described as “men snatched from the lowest regions of life,” LCS, personified as “His Contemptible Lowness,” along

32 In one of the meetings in 1797 LCS leaders Ferguson, Tuckey and Galloway were arrested after the magistrate read out the Riot Act. Interestingly, the report on this event in two different newspapers The Times (anti-Jacobin) and The Morning Chronicle (pro-Jacobin) shows the deep involvement of the Press in fashioning popular opinion. While The Times reported that “The meeting consequently broke up, and the wise interference and timely activity of the Magistracy completely succeeded in preserving the maintenance of the public peace, and in preventing the mischiefs that were likely to have arisen from an assembly whose political sentiments would, if unrestricted, lead to the most dangerous innovations, and the subversion of every civil and religious blessing,” The Morning Chronicle focused upon the violence of the authorities by emphasizing that “When they left the office [after arrest and bail] [the leaders] were drawn to their homes by the populace. Mr. Ferguson received a hurt in the eye by the Constable who took him into custody having struck him with is staff.” LCS’s official report too focused upon the self-discipline of the audience: “We are at a loss justly to delineate the cool and collected Courage, with which the People acted on that Day (in despite of ministerial threats, and military parade) we feel ourselves incapable of doing them that justice which their conduct merits; though we admire their courage, we cannot less respect their strict observance of Peace and good Order.” Place Collection (London: British Library).
with his “tattered crew of ragamuffins,” emerges from vulgar topoi to threaten the “valuable, sober . . . and respectable part of the nation:”

Every porter-house in and about this great metropolis was nightly and daily infested with some of the agents of His Contemptible Lowness, who were paid by general subscription to preach up Sedition, Conspiracy, and Rebellion . . . Lecture rooms were hired in various parts of the metropolis . . . and these rooms were resorted to by what might truly be called all the blackguards in London—a motley crew of pick-pockets, seditionists, modern reformers, house-breakers, and revolutionists. Here some itinerant field-brawler dealt out his ideas of Government, much in the same manner as a methodistical enthusiast does his conceptions of the Scripture, each equally blind to the beauty of that composition which their ignorance endeavours to dissect.  

The Hogarthian masses that follow the funeral are driven by the need for gin and are too poor to even afford a two-pence pamphlet on reform. As a finale, Horne Tooke, while addressing the crowds in the “fields of sedition” near Copenhagen-House, reveals that his “conduct has been at variance with . . . real principles” (39).

Not only slums, but, more threateningly, places of authority such as the court-houses became battle-grounds for public opinion, where self-taught artisans such as Hardy, and William Hone, successfully used rhetorical strategies to persuade juries.

33. “The Decline and Fall, Death, Dissection, and Funeral Procession of His Contemptible Lowness The London Corresponding Society, who took his departure from this world on the 18th day of December 1795. Correct copies of all the solemn dirges, hymns, anthems, chorusses and psalms, sung and chaunted at the Dissection and in the Funeral procession as it moved from Palace-Yard to Copenhagen-House. To which is added the funeral oration delivered on this melancholy occasion By the Reverend John Horne Tooke, Priest and Esquire, Chaplain, Counsel and principal Politician to His Contemptible Lowness. The whole concluding with the epitaph, from the Pen of his Grace Citizen Duke of Bedford. Dedicated to the Right Hon. Charles James Fox. By the author of “The Funeral of Mrs. Regency,” (London: n.p., 1796) 4.

34. Marcus Wood points out that [Hone’s] trials should . . . be seen . . . as a part of a host of experimental publications which came out between 1816 and 1822. The court room came to provide radical publicists with a core structure around which to
towards acquittal. Thelwall’s refusal to defer to Pitt’s authority, upon whose questioning he turned his back and “began to contemplate a drawing in water colours,” and fourteen-year-old Henry Eaton’s “upbraiding” of Pitt for “having taxed the people to an enormous extent”; both point to a new structure of radicalism. Apart from functioning as a space for a new self-definition for working-class intellectuals who dramatized their trials as the victory of reason over arbitrary authority, during such moments the court rooms also became public property in a real sense, inhabited by a working-class crowd that thronged to celebrate acquittals. Even prisons became sites of resistance. Thelwall recollects that the “solitude of the Tower” (a prison reserved for the most high-profile cases) rather than breaking his resolve, provided “leisure for the investigation of abstract and difficult propositions,” an investigation that finally resolved him towards a committed radical career. The topos of the prison also functioned to strengthen Thelwall’s bonds with fellow-prisoners, Tooke and Hardy, who shared his experience of incarceration:

From the bars and grates of our windows, at the still hour of midnight, the moon scattering her silver rays over the still surface of the river . . . affording us a feeble light, suited to the solemnity of the scene . . . Finding

arrange publishing activities, and Hone was particularly aware of the different types of parody which surrounded the trial . . . [R]adical publication focusing on trials came to include the exhaustive reprinting of each day’s events in journals and newspapers, the production of print caricatures featuring the major combatants and events leading up to the final appearance in court, and concoction of street ballads, songs and pamphlet squibs. On top of this the text of the trials themselves, often in a carefully worked-up form, was brought out before public interest in the events had cooled.” (Radical Satire and Print Culture, 1790-1822 [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994] 99).

35 Quoted in Making 19.

36 Mrs. Thelwall, Life of Thelwall by His Widow, vol. 1 (London: John Macrone, St. James’s Square, 1837) 124. Hereafter referred to as “Life.”
ourselves in this situation, we began to unbosom ourselves with the freedom of men, who, having nothing to conceal, had nothing to fear from what might be overheard. We saw, indeed, that the minions of power thirsted for our blood, and it was impossible to know what arts they were practicing to ensure our death. (*Life* 187)

As with courts, the masses who waited outside the prisons for a glimpse of their canonized leaders reinforced the subversion of spaces of authority, as can be seen in *Times*'s report of Watson's acquittal in 1817:

> On Tower-hill, between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, a crowd began to assemble in order to see Mr. Watson return. . . . In the meantime they were consoled with a view of Thistlewood, who was walking on the leads of that part of the fortress in which he was confined, attended by a yeoman of the guard. He remained in sight for an hour or two, and when the moment arrived at which it became necessary for him to retire, he bowed repeatedly to the populace . . . [A]t a quarter before eight, the waving of handkerchiefs from the windows of the houses at the end of Tower-street most remote from the hill, indicated the approach of something more than had previously been seen. In a few seconds, the coach that had conveyed Mr. Watson to Westminster was perceived to be on its return, unaccompanied by the usual escort. Two or three hundred boys ran before it, shrieking out, "Watson's acquitted!" About half as many men and women, of the lowest description, came with the carriage . . . waving their hats, handkerchiefs, and bonnets and echoing in coarser tones the cry of the boys who had preceded them. A second carriage followed close upon the former, and as it was found Mr. Watson was in neither of the two, a shout was at length set up by the multitude which lasted several minutes.37

Such public approbation suggests a sense of harmony between the leaders who rose from within the working classes (albeit from the more genteel sections of it), and the mob who in identifying them as their representatives appear to have displaced the earlier model of "moral consciousness" with an organic one. The leaders were quick to represent the en-masse support as the outcome of the LCS's academic objectives. Hardy took comfort in

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37 Place Collection, Reel 36 (London: British Library).
the idea that “[m]any who came [to the open-air meetings] to ridicule and abuse went away converted and afterwards joined the society and became zealous promoters of the cause” (Selections 87). Similarly, Thelwall’s rather exaggerated account stressed the effect of his lectures upon “the poor, deluded people at the east end of town, who, in their starving misery, thronged to buy, at the butcher’s shops, the garbage and offal which was usually thrown away to the dogs, would turn indignantly away, and, after cursing the wicked administration which had reduced them to such wretchedness, accuse Thelwall of preventing them, by his pacific doctrines, from redressing their grievances” (Life 390).

And yet the outside, plebeian world of popular opinion did not quite resemble the ethos of the self-taught artisan. The tribune, an elevated domain from which the leaders addressed the crowds, signified a spatial distance that functioned as a concentrated point of attention for the masses, while generating an iconic exaltation of the leaders. The gap between the leader and the audience was further enhanced by a metonymic conversion of messenger into message, a trope that carries on well into the nineteenth-century radicalism of “gentlemen leaders.”

An advertisement for the publication of the Treason Trials of 1794 in The Morning Chronicle reveals the hagiographic temptation of radical martyrdom for these men of humble origins, in the intertwining of personalities and principles:

[T]omorrow will be published and embellished with a portrait, price 3d. per sheet; printed in full octavo page, with a small type, on a fine Wove paper, THE FIRST PART of the TRIAL for HIGH TREASON. Containing . . . HARDY’S trial, with an elegant portrait, engraved form an original drawing . . . The succeeding trials will be published daily, with every attention to accuracy and expedition, and are intended to be a full

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38 Look at “Demagogues and Martyrs” in Making for an analysis of this aspect of leadership in the nineteenth century.
account of all the proceedings on the Trials for High Treason, from first to last, and offered at as low a price as possible, printed as above, and embellished with Portraits of HARDY, HORNE TOOVE, HOLCROFT, THELWALL, and others.39

Principles of liberty were objectified and disseminated through symbols and emblems, whose visual effects point to a unique form of protest where earlier techniques of working-class resistance were combined with abstract ideals of republican discourse. One sympathetic observer records the elements of this new pattern of protest organized by the Sheffield Constitutional Society (that worked alongside the LCS) to mark the return of two of its members who refused to implicate LCS leaders during the treason trials of 1794:

After welcoming them with acclamations of heart-felt joy, by repeated huzzahs, they prevailed with them to quit their common carriage, and conducted them to a public-house by the road-side, where, after passing an hour in mutual congratulations and welcome, and to arrange the order of the procession, the word was given, and the glorious sight began. In a few seconds the darkness of the night was illumined by the bright blaze of upwards of 200 flambeaus and torches, and the order of procession began as follows: first--A beautiful silk flag, on which was inscribed in large letters--THE LIBERTY OF THE PRESS. Secondly--Large square transparent lanthorns, with the names of several Independent Juries, who have acquitted the several Prisoners in the late trials, inscribed on them. These were followed by upwards of one hundred flambeaus, and then came the coach with Camaged and Hill in it, drawn, not by horses, but by an immense crowd of the Swinish Multitude in regular order. On each side and behind the coach great numbers of flambeaus, on the top of the coach was an emblematical transparent painting, supported by two patriotic twine behind which were two large flambeaus. In the front of the painting was a figure of the Goddess of Liberty. In her right hand she held a medallion of THOMAS ERSKINE resting on an altar, on the base of which was inscribed this motto REFORMATION TO THE WORLD. The background represented the SUN, rising with redoubled splendour out of a dark cloud; emblematical of the People rising from the black shades of ignorance, superstition and oppression. On the upper part of the painting was inscribed in large capitals--TO THE MEMORY OF THOMAS

39 Place Collection, Reel 28 (London: British Library).
ERSKINE,--VICARY GIBBS, THE INDEPENDENT JURIES, ON THE LATE TRIALS, AND THOSE FIRM AND HONEST WITNESSES FOR THE CROWN. . . . The procession thus arranged, moved slowly through all the principal streets, which were greatly crowded, as well as the windows and tops of the houses, amidst the joyful shouts of thousands, and the roaring of cannon, which at particular stated intervals rended the air and pierced even to the skies. . . .

The procession's key elements of visuality and visibility highlight a new kind of dilemma of method. While universalist ideals of the Reform movement constructed the audience as intellectual beings, their collective, diachronic manifestation was forced to adopt a mode of representation continuous from the past.

Though the new spectacle of the crowd appears inadequate from the point of view of agency, it was effective enough to alarm the "respectable" part of the nation that did not react favourably to the replacement of a mob running through streets demanding the reduction of prices with a loaf of bread aloft a stick by the more threatening shape of a disciplined mob that organized itself around long-term ideals. While the "citizens" did create and canonize their heroes in this process, the new countertheatre of the poor that appropriated the streets indicated a new quality persistence by adapting its protest within non-disruptive, disciplined forms. It was to combat this intellectual orientation of working-class radicalism that the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers was set up in November 1794 with the assistance of the Pitt government, which declaimed against

those men who in the form of sober reasoning, with the appearance of dispassionate inquiry, and in the language of temperate patriotism, endeavour to undermine those principles of subordination which at once form and secure the national happiness. These men are far more dangerous . . . because they make their approaches in the seducing form of publick

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40 Place Collection, Reel 28 (London: British Library).
virtue; their associations are made without tumult, and their addresses to the people recommend moderation; and contain, for the purpose of disguising their intentions, some maxims of sound political doctrine. . . . Their publick resolutions, which are disseminated by newspapers, hand-bills, and pamphlets through every part of the kingdom, are always formed upon certain general principles and abstract propositions, of which some may be true, and others have a specious appearance . . .

The Reevesite Association organized its censure of the LCS around two lines. One path of criticism, continuous from the past, responded to the trope of symbolic representation and rituals of canonization by configuring the mob as a passive tool in the hands of ambitious men of "weak heads, of bad hearts, or of desperate fortunes." But the relocation of public sphere within subaltern topoi produced a corresponding effect whereby middle-class hegemony was compelled to adopt a discourse that, while continuing a paternalist strain, had to include the lower classes within a rational identity conferred upon it by the LCS. The worker was now accepted as a reasoning animal, but the locus of reason was shifted to a "common sense" perspective that used a "scientific" method of facts and numbers to argue for the viability of social hierarchies. In contrast with an earlier coffee-house discourse that addressed itself to the middle classes, the new flurry of pamphleteering that conducted a dialogic battle with pro-Jacobin ideologies, sought to influence the working classes through a direct form of address. This discourse centered around familiar figures of authority such as "country curate" and "parish clerk," or quotidian personas, such as the "poor man's friend" and "Thomas Bull," whose

41. "A Word in Season to the Traders and Manufacturers of Great Britain Association," Printed by the Association for preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers (Sold by J. Sewell, 1792) 12. Materials from the publications of the Association will be referred to as "Association Papers."

messages were encoded in everyday speech forms. Pamphlets such as “Dialogue Between a Labourer and a Gentleman,” or the exchange between “Mr. T--, a tradesman in the city, and his Porter, John W.--” use a language of intimacy to disrupt the familiarity of LCS leaders with their audiences. One popular rhetorical mode in the low-priced publications of the Association is that of dialogue between the master and his worker, where the former gently and patiently persuades the latter to choose his paternal benevolence against the seditious arguments of “liberty clubs.” In one such pamphlet published in 1792, entitled “Equality as Consistent with the British Constitution, In a Dialogue between a Master-Manufacturer and One of his Workmen,” the master takes up each of the issues of “rights of man”—economic disparity, taxes, and suffrage—to convince the worker against Paine, French Revolution and reform societies. The rhetorical strategy used here—that of a face-to-face dialogue where the master repeatedly addresses the worker by his name—not only sought to present warmth and familiarity as a counter to the speechified distance of LCS leaders, but also aims at closing class-distance between the master and worker. The master, who “seldom read except in [his] Bible and Ledger,” presents elements from his own life as arguments against reformist agendas. His rags-to-riches story, while advocating frugality as an answer to the question of economic disparity, also urges the worker to increase his labouring time in order to augment his chances of improving his status. Precise arithmetic calculations (a-la-Malthus) are provided to emphasize the rationality of the argument that “in fourteen years, [John] might have saved three hundred and eighty pounds,” which prompts the worker to admit

43 “Equality as Consistent with the British Constitution, In a Dialogue between a Master-Manufacturer and One of his Workmen,” Association Papers, 1792 5.
that “every body has not the same head for these reckonings that [the master has]” (4). Further, French Jacobin tyranny is revealed through the master’s first-hand encounter with France’s impoverished masses who had been betrayed by their leaders. The final effect upon the worker is summarized in the latter’s resolve that “instead of going to the liberty-club, I will begin my work; for, I should not like to see a Frenchman lie with my wife, or take the bread out of my children’s mouths; and I now see, that, if I go on as you do, and mind my business, I may in time be as rich and as happy as you” (15). Another pamphlet entitled, “A Serious Caution to the Poor,” uses a stricter tone of address towards its readers by emphasizing class distance, rather than bridging it. Here the readers are admonished for thinking that it was in their power “to tell us how Government can be managed more frugally,” or to give “deep and useful calculations upon this head.” The writer finally settles the issue by declaring that “[m]any of these expences were incurred a hundred years ago—long before we were born, and you ought not to be angry with our governors for being honest, and preserving our national character in paying our just debts:—and debts too which they had no hand in contracting” (12). A parallel line of attack was conducted by cautioning middle classes against Paine’s radical ideas. In one such pamphlet addressed to the members of a book club, the writer who declares himself to be “a real friend of fair and candid discussion,” argues against the inclusion of Paine’s Rights of Man by discriminating between “strong, experienced, and well-informed minds” (a.k.a. middle classes) that could resist its “fallacious and sophistical” messages, and the (lower class) intellect that is “not accustomed to weigh and discriminate; and

44 “A Serious Caution to the Poor,” Association Papers 12.
which [is] ever ready, from indolence, weakness, or inexperience, to receive such impressions" (7). The writer then draws an analogy from ‘nature’ to emphasize the irrationality of Paine’s goal of overturning class divisions in society:

It would be just as rational to attempt to persuade the Feet, that considering their importance and utility, they ought not to submit to those offices which are assigned to them--that it is a hardship and an injustice for them to be obliged to wade through the dirt, and to bear the weight of the whole body--that they are entitled to some nobler capacity, some more elevated station--that having nerves as well as the Head . . . their opinions ought to be taken, their will consulted, and themselves into the council; and that they ought, in maintenance of their rights, to rebel against the subsisting inequality of arrangement, and refuse to perform their accustomed works of drudgery. (8)

On the other hand, “A Plain and Earnest Address to Britons Especially Farmers on the Interesting State of Public Affairs in Great Britain and France” written by “a Farmer” reveals a more stringent approach to the problem at hand, where readers were reminded that the French Revolution was not a quarrel between “liberty and tyranny, or between protecting and oppressive systems of government,” but rather a question of “property.” The writer strategically forecloses any possibility of argument by conflating republican demands with “levelling” ideals--where “those who have nothing seize and possess the property of those who have something” (4). This line of attack proved to be effective enough to generate an ambivalence in Thelwall’s discourse where he is forced to banish a full enquiry into the role of property in political economy and take refuge in a repeated insistence that “[t]he equality I mean, is the equality of rights--the equality which says, that a man without a shilling is as valuable in society as he who has 50,000 l. a year--the equality which protects the poor against the insults and oppressions of the rich, as well as the rich against the insults and invasions of the poor--the equality that enables the poorest
labourer to get as complete and as expeditious justice, as he who can pay thousands for stamps and lawyers’ fees” (October Speech 14).

The astonishing variety of means and methods devised by the Association to counteract the LCS range from ad hominem attacks on Paine’s character, to gory details about the condition of France after the revolution where “one poor woman . . . actually devoured her own infant . . . for want of provisions,”45 to pragmatic conclusions that “many things which appear excellent in theory, cannot be reduced to practice.”46 While complaining about ignorance of common people, these ideologues did not balk from spreading patriotic frenzy and fear among them by reminding them of their traditional enmity with France. Where Thelwall called for a reinvention of national identities by boldly declaring, “Shew me the principles of peace, benevolence, and universal affection, of equal rights and equal laws, I will hail and venerate that country as my own, and rejoice in the establishment of such principles, whatever may be the exterior incumbrances, with which accident, or choice, may happen to have surrounded it” (Tribune 97), the Association avowed its faith in the British constitution in countless pamphlets that contrasted the “saucy, artful, chattering Frenchman” with the “good and kind-hearted Englishman.”47 The success of this strategy may be gauged by the violence on Thomas Hardy’s home after his arrest, that indirectly caused his wife’s death. E. P.

45. “A Picture of True and False Liberty: Addressed to the Understandings and Feelings of Britons,” Association Papers (No.5) 12.


47. “The Englishman and the Frenchman,” Association Papers (No. 3) 5.
Thompson gives us a glimpse into the way in which the anti-Jacobin Pitt government generated a mass-hysteria to legalize its arrest of LCS leaders on the charge of treason:

In the immediate aftermath of these arrests, with sensational “disclosures” of conspiracy in the House, and rumours of insurrectionary plots and of liaison between the societies and the French, public opinion was stampeded against the societies. Ballad and broadsheet-vendors ran through the streets with sheets headed “TREASON! TREASON! TREASON!” Bills were posted throughout the city. *(Making 132)*

**Working Class and Its Other: The Case of Thelwall’s “Arrested Dialectic”**

The arrest and trial of LCS leaders mark a watershed event in the history of working-class resistance at the end of the eighteenth century. Not only did Pitt’s repressive measures push LCS leaders into a defensive position that affected their radical discourse in detrimental ways, but a protracted program of harassment also forced the LCS and similar organizations to go underground. Subjugation of the LCS was conducted along two lines. First, there was an imposition of legal restrictions upon public gatherings, through measures such as Two Acts, Stamp Act and Combination Act, etc., an imposition that forced the LCS leaders to investigate alternate means of spreading their radical message, such as lecturing within a limited audience. Spies were always present in these meetings in the hopes of catching some seditious rhetoric that would once and for all end the radical career of the leaders. Thelwall’s bold inventiveness in this oppressive milieu is indeed remarkable. Not only did he undermine restrictions on radical discourse by relocating it within innocuous lectures on Roman history, but he also subverted government infiltration by cheerfully addressing spies in the audience, as can be seen from this account of LCS’s Chalk Farm meeting on April 1794:

*By 3 o’Clock I am sure there were upwards of 2000 persons—I saw Mr. Walsh come in. . . Thelwal accosted Walsh with a ‘How do you do Sir— I*
hope your late Irish Journey agreed with you--I suppose you will give a
very good Account tomorrow of our proceedings to day, & let Government
know all about it[’] . . . In short [Walsh] was badgered about by half
dozens & dozens till he was obliged to retreat -- at last he came in again--
Some were for shoving him out--others for hissing & hooting him, but
Hardy & Thelwal desired he might be let alone as their Meeting was legal
peaceable & Constitutional & would shake his employers with terror . . . 48

But such bravado could not be sustained against the steady onslaught of subjugation.

Caught in the deterministic space between the French Revolution and its aftermath of
terror, LCS leaders were pushed into a defensive position of disengaging their projects
from the French legacy of violence. Godwin’s terminology came in handy for
emphasizing the importance of reason against passion, where Thelwall summoned a
“prospective principle of virtue” for rejecting both emotions, gratitude as well as revenge,
in order to emphasize the supremacy of principle. In this new rendering, Thelwall
presented the LCS as a tool for containing rather than promoting violence, by contrasting
Wat Tyler’s violence with LCS’s method of disquisition:

When Wat Tyler, and his insurgents, oppressed by the hardships brought
upon them by mad and frantic crusades for the subjugation of France,
spread terror to the very recesses of the court; were these insurgents men
of enquiry? Were they men who had been in the habit of political
association? Were they members of Corresponding Societies, or did they
attend Lectures in Beaufort Buildings? No, neither lectures in Beaufort
Buildings, not London Corresponding Societies then existed. Political
associations were then unknown; and the men who committed the violence
had never heard of meetings for the discussion of political principles.
(Tribune 322)

Thelwall’s choice of figures is interesting, especially in a situation where the anti-Jacobin
faction was attempting to direct readers’ attention towards the superiority of English

48 Quoted in Nicholas Roe, Wordworth and Coleridge: the Radical Years (Oxford:
tradition against French “innovation.” On the one hand Wat Tyler’s example clearly argues against violence. But, interestingly, seen within an influential context of the “immortal memory of our brave and simple ancestors” (NCR 13) evoked by Thelwall and the pro-Burkean ideologues, Tyler’s legacy functions as a reminder of an English tradition of protest, rather than servility. This subversive message is further enhanced by drawing an analogy between Tyler’s circumstances that led him to violence, and those of Thelwall’s plebeian audience, who, like Tyler before them, were “oppressed by the hardships brought upon them by mad and frantic crusades for the subjugation of France.”

This rhetorical ambiguity performs a subversive role even in the championing of “prospective morality,” where Thelwall uses the primacy of “principle” to draw a comparison between Robespierre (the bugbear of the anti-Jacobins) and Pitt, only to show that the former was preferable!

*Robespierre* has a soul capacious, an imagination various, a judgement commanding, penetrating, severe. Fertile of resources, he foresaw, created and turned to his advantage all the events that could possibly tend to the accomplishments of his designs. The mind of *Pitt* is barren and inflated, his projects are crude, and his views short sighted. (*Tribune* 136)

This daring public denunciation of Pitt, as well as his confident assertion, “I venerate, I esteem, I adore the principles upon which the French Revolution has been established” (October Speech 12), are Thelwall’s most remarkable contributions that grant him an

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49 Thompson captures the charged atmosphere of 1794-5 thus: “The exceptionally severe winter of 1794-5, war dislocation, crop failures,--all sent the price of provisions soaring. May 1795, is the date of the famous Speenhamland decision, regulating the relief of wages in relation to the price of bread. The price of wheat reached impossible heights . . . while in many places it was unobtainable. During the unprecedented rash of food rioting which swept the country in the summer and autumn, there were several occasions when the Militia took the part of the rioters” (*Making* 142-43).
unparalleled position in the long line of radical leadership, far above the Cobbetts and Hunts.

While the leaders faced magisterial harassment for attracting the attention of a crowd of citizens, there was another method of subjugation that followed a more brutal policy of repression. This second mode of assault continued the work of repression outside the courtroom, and enforced the decline of Thelwall’s radical career. While specific legal measures put an end to his lecturing at Beaufort Buildings, what is truly horrifying is the persistence with which Thelwall was targeted wherever he went, until he was forced to declare in a letter to Hardy in 1798, “Let me be part farmer and fisherman. But no more politics -- no more politics in this bad world!” (Romantics 181). Gregory Claeys summarizes the circumstances that forced Thelwall into such a recantation of his earlier assertions:

With the Tribune halted, and his lecturing prospects reduced to a nil in London, Thelwall now set out for the provinces . . . to rally support and recoup some of his losses. . . . In at least four towns, Thelwall was physically attacked, usually with the connivance of local authorities. At Ashby de la Zouch, a small mob of soldiers and rabble attacked him. At Yarmouth . . . a crowd of some ninety persons rioted on his arrival, and a large group of sailors . . . assisted by several clergymen, seemed bent on carrying him off into forced naval service. . . . Here Thelwall rescued himself only by putting a pistol to the head of his most resolute pursuer and exclaiming, “Offer the least violence, and you’re a dead man!” But the books on which he was to lecture. . . . were either torn to pieces or carried off as trophies. At Lynn, loyalists smashed the windows of his hall and threw brickbats and stones at his audience. At Wisbech a similar scene was repeated. Riots provoked by soldiers also led to the gutting of two public houses when Thelwall returned to Norwich to lecture . . . In the Midlands, at Derby, on 23 March 1797, he faced an angry loyalist mob with a pistol in his hand, declaring that he “would shoot any person who molested him,” and again escaped without injury. (xxx-xxxi)
Viewed in this context, Thelwall’s disgust with politics certainly seems more well-deserved than his friends Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s to whom he turned as a respite against anti-Jacobin repression. But here too he was met with disappointment. Thelwall’s request to visit Wordsworth and Coleridge at Stowey in 1795 was rebuffed by the latter, who, concerned that he might be identified with Thelwall’s Jacobinism, advised him to

--come! but not yet!--come in two or three months--take lodgings at Bridgewater--familiarize the people to your name & appearance--and when the monstrosity of the thing is gone off, & the people shall have begun to consider you, as a man whose mouth won’t eat them--& whose pocket is better adapted for a bundle of sonnets than the transportation or ambush-place of a French army--then you may take a house--but indeed--I say it with a very sad, but a very clear conviction--at present I see that much evil & little good would result from your settling here. (Roe 235)

Thelwall’s Romantic connection forms another context in which to examine the topics of radical discourse and leadership. As a variant model of intellectual activism his legacy certainly allows an “external” critique of romantic/Godwinian apostasy. But we also have an added advantage of the “internal” evidence of Thelwall’s relationship with Godwin’s group, that recontextualizes the radicalism of these men within a rare interpretive space. But first it is important to sketch Thelwall’s own investment in Godwin’s intellectual circle, which may be understood as the self-taught artisan’s fascination with the world of letters, a story that begins in Thelwall’s childhood as a son of a silk-mercer, where a dislike for his job of account-keeping transmutes itself into an inclination for the intellectual world of literature and philosophy. Thelwall’s wife recounts his initiation into the subtle tragedy of liminality as the conflict between limitations of his social status and an equally adamant resolve to be the architect of his fortunes:
New scenes had opened up his imagination; a more liberal establishment, pursuits, and studies congenial to his long-fostered wishes, and the prospect of mingling in circles of society, more correspondent to his taste and turn of mind than those to which he had hitherto been confined, had altogether formed an association somewhat intoxicating. . . . Gloom and dejection seized upon his spirits and forced his resolution to assume a decisive tone. He once more burst his fetters, determined to endure all the consequences of his disastrous circumstances, rather than continue in a situation so irreconcilable to his taste, his genius, and his wishes. (Life 18-19)

“Deficiency of physical powers” forms a related context in which to analyze the intellectual turns of Thelwall and “shabby, genteel” surgeon and LCS leader John Gale Jones, where the former’s “harsh and dissonant” voice (Life 140) and the latter’s “paralytic affection . . . [and] convulsive twitching of his head, shoulders & arms” (Making 145) are conquered through declamatory prowess. The LCS and its culture of debates and argumentation offered an attractive space for combining Thelwall’s desire for edification, stamina for persistence, and ambition for eminence. Here Thelwall presents himself as a man who,

without patronage and without pecuniary assistance . . . devoted the whole powers of his mind to the asserting the rights of his fellow-countrymen, by those unanswerable arguments, which being communicated by one intellectual friend of freedom to another, and, at length, being diligently promulgated through the various ranks of society, from the highest to the lowest, [made] the tyrannical and oppressive government of the day tremble in its strongholds” (Life 41).

The significance of this self-construction needs to be emphasized by a comparison with another self-taught artisan, Francis Place, the famous radical tailor, who rose into eminence from a greater impoverishment to become a prominent leader within the LCS. More than Thelwall, Place’s identity was forged by LCS’s bilateral emphases on debate and communal praxis. But, interestingly, Place’s exposure to the world of letters resulted
in an anti-plebeian backlash and a vehement rejection of “taverns and tavern company,” with the declaration, “I cannot drink, I cannot for any considerable time consent to converse with fools” (Making 58). This disavowal of working-class culture is compounded by his espousal of a Benthamite model of change that stressed individual aptitude against communal action. In the light of this new ideological slant, Place delineates his LCS experiences within a middle-class ethos of respectability. By filtering out the dialogism that characterized the weekly meetings, Place reinscribes the LCS within a frigid narrative of bourgeois public sphere and its monologic discourse of edification, where men were induced “to read instead of spending time at public houses . . . [and] elevate them[elves] in their own opinion” (Making 155). The differences between the emergent Place-type of intellectual and the Thelwall-type are significant. Against Place’s uncritical acceptance of bourgeois values, Thelwall’s discerning outlook successfully resists the pressure of intellectual hegemony, as can be seen from his strained relationships with Godwin and Horne Tooke. Though Thelwall showed complete approbation for Godwin’s conceptual vision by delivering lectures on the latter’s most celebrated work, Principles of Political Justice, and also enrolling in the Philomathean Society, his disagreement with Godwin on the important topic of popular radicalism distinguishes the latter from Place’s upwardly-mobile complacence. For Thelwall, radical activity was inextricably linked with a practical desire for transforming society, a topic

50 McCalman has examined the detrimental effects of Place’s middle-class values by placing them within a parallel low-brow trajectory espoused by the Spencean circle towards the end of the eighteenth century. In this reading, Place’s emphasis on respectability and sobriety becomes a marker for distinguishing him from the insurrectionary discourse of Thomas Evans and Spence, a demarcation that did much harm to the reputation of the Spenceans.
that also implicated the intellectual’s relationship with a community that had conferred an
iconic grandeur upon him. While protesting that “[Godwin] has frequently endeavoured
to dissuade me from continuing my Lectures, by arguments, strong and convincing I
suppose to him, though to me they appeared visionary and futile” (Tribune, ii, pp. Vii-
viii), Thelwall is able to criticize the impotence of a radicalism that sought to transform
the public mind “by writing quarto volumes and conversing with a few speculative
philosophers by the fire side” (Romantics 16). This criticism gains further significance
upon noting the intellectual growth of Godwin and Place in a Benthamite direction,
against Thelwall’s predilection towards an enquiry into the inequalities of wage
distribution and monopolistic trade.

While these ideological differences ensured Thelwall a fringe status in the
intellectual world of the early nineteenth century, placing his waning career against
Coleridge’s growing eminence lends a unique perspective for understanding E. P.
Thompson’s rather generous conception of an “arrested dialectic” of the Romantics.\footnote{\textsuperscript{51}} In
this reading, Thelwall performs a dual function for his Romantic friends. First Thelwall’s

\footnote{\textsuperscript{51} Though I generally agree with Thompson’s reading of Wordsworth and Coleridge in
terms of a “Jacobinism-in-recoil or a Jacobinism-of-doubt” (Romantics 36), I think
Thelwall is more deserving of the dilemma that Thompson has ascribed to Wordsworth
thus: “How could any man have stood a tension of that sort, at its full creative intensity,
between a vision of the universal heart, and the marching and countermarching of armies
across Europe? There must be some referent for social hope, and it is one trick of
the mind to latch on to an unworthy object to sustain such hope” (68-69). Unfortunately,
Thompson’s description of Thelwall does not display the same indulgence that he be

\begin{quote}
Wordsworth, a striking injustice in light of the fact that Thelwall paid more heavily for his Jacobinism than the Romantic poets. His concluding remark on
Thelwall, where Thelwall is seen as “yet one more example of the hazards which descend upon reformers who allow their political hopes or strategies to become too much involved in the outcome of the developments in other countries” seems rather harsh (Romantics 203).
\end{quote}
life with all its trials and tribulations becomes useful to Wordsworth as a model for his recluse/solitary figure (a debt that is never acknowledged, but is hinted at by Thelwall\(^52\)).

Second, Coleridge uses Thelwall as a synecdoche for Jacobinism, whereby he assures middle-class readers of his newborn anti-Jacobinism by measuring his distance from Thelwall.\(^53\) Not only does Coleridge impose a physical distance from Thelwall, but also declares him to be intellectually “deficient in that patience of mind which can look intensely and frequently at the same subject” (Roe 181). Class and status differences are further emphasized in 1801, when requesting Thelwall “not to mention [his] name in [Thelwall’s] memoirs,” Coleridge stresses that they “are so utterly unlike each other in . . . habits of thinking, and . . . have adopted such irreconcilably different opinions in Politics, Religion, & Metaphysics, (& probably in Taste too) . . . [and] such . . . is the chasm between [them], that so far from being able to shake hands across it, [they] cannot even make our Words intelligible to each other” (Romantics 183). The Edinburgh Review continues what Coleridge had only hinted at, by suggesting that Thelwall was better suited for a tailor’s job—“to cut out cashmere, or stitch in buckram” (Romantics 189)—than writing poetry.

\(^{52}\) Thompson reports that Thelwall mentions something of this in his rather mysterious statement about Wordsworth owing him something. Mentioned in Romantics 203.

\(^{53}\) Interestingly, Thelwall’s reproach against his Coleridge’s rejection of Jacobinism (and himself) takes the shape of writing comments on the margins of his copy of Biographia Literaria. Against Coleridge’s declaration “how opposite . . . my principles were to those of Jacobinism or even of democracy,” Thelwall noted “Mr. C was indeed far from Democracy, because he as far beyond it, I well remember—for he was a downright leveller & indeed in one of the worst senses of the word he was a Jacobin, a man of blood . . .’” (Quoted in Romantics 191).
Thelwall’s “spleenful solitude in Llyswen” must be understood as the result of the multiple levels of coercion he was subjected to that resulted in the loss of an intellectual community, as well as a plebeian audience. The LCS was no longer available as a cultural space for debates and edification since, as McCalman points out, “the logic of events after 1795 pushed surviving elements within the London Corresponding Society towards the option of violent clandestine revolution” (11). With the passing of leadership into the hands of Spenceans such as Thomas Evans and John Bone after 1797 the LCS began to identify with the revolutionary programs of United Englishmen and United Irishmen.\(^{54}\) Thelwall’s artisanal discourse of “principle” was interpreted differently in this new radical underworld of prophets, revolutionaries and pornographers, whose millennial philosophy did not quite fit into Thelwall’s faith in reason. In a letter to Hardy, Thelwall sardonically dramatizes his downfall as the consequence of multiple hegemonies, where legal superstructures as well as ex-radicals conspire to reduce him to obscurity:

\(^{54}\) McCalman connects up the changes in LCS membership and its consequent adoption of a radical program towards the end of the eighteenth century with the impoverished situation of working classes after the war:

The disillusionment of servicemen after leaving the army or navy was also conducive to social discontent. Home Office files bulge with poignant and angry letters from former servicemen--both officers and other ranks--who were owed backpay, prize-money or pensions, or were disabled and helpless, or simply unable to find work after being summarily demobbed at the end of hostilities. Goaded by anger at the ingratitude of King and Country, such men were frequently attracted to popular religious or political movements which promised to restore their rightful dues. Schooling in the techniques and mores of violence and command often influenced the forms of their protest. Ex-servicemen were conspicuous in every insurrection plot in London from 1798 to 1820, as well as in most popular prophetic movements and assassination attempts by 'enthusiasts' over the same period. (53-54)
Do the people of London talk of me at all--what is the lie of the day? (That I am at Portsmouth I have heard already)--but am I gone over to France on a treasonable embassy? Am I teaching the United Irishmen the use of Arms? (The great Gun, you know, I learnt to work in the Tower!!!) or have I got a pension for preaching moderation?--or a snug sinecure for arguing against petitions for peace and removal of ministers? Or have I finally retired upon an immense fortune collected in crooked sixpences during seven months lectures at Beaufort Buildings?--Something or the other I hope and trust the Londoners continue to say about me--& if my enemies cannot invent a lie malignant enough, let them go to my friends and they will help out. (Romantics 166)

In the face of an unrelenting persecution Thelwall, like other radicals, directed his attention away from Jacobin topics and turned towards picturesque and romantic themes to make a living through his magazine *Champion*. While Thelwall thus retired from a radical field, the effects of his persecution permeate even into the relatively innocuous domain of aesthetic appreciation, evidenced in his two contrary views on art. In 1795 Thelwall’s critical evaluation had demystified discursive practices by placing the form and function of literature within the habitus of ideology, by asserting that

privileged classes, though not themselves very famous for works of genius, have, in considerable degree held not only the sword but the pen . . . and therefore it is, that more than one half of the romances which are sent into the world under the denomination of histories, political surveys, views of society and *morals*, topographical descriptions, and the like, are stuffed with nothing but servile adulations and time-serving misrepresentations, to gloss over the character of the higher, and calumnious abuse and false descriptions of the lower orders--calculated to steel the hearts of the readers against them. (250)

55. Though I focus on the aspect of *The Champion* that concerned itself with picturesque and romantic themes, it is important to assert that Thelwall tried to include political messages through it as well, which explains its early demise.
But in 1820, Thelwall becomes the argument of his earlier scorn through his comment on “hedge-cockney” shepherds. According to Thelwall, these shepherds were inappropriate subjects for poetic pastoral because

\[\text{the characteristics of this portion of our peasantry are stamped in prose indelibly upon every mind--the lowest in the nation--ignorant without simplicity, nefarious without shrewdness,--the most sordid, and the most oafish--in short, the most unpoetical portion of the national community; with a dialect of unintelligible vulgarity--obscure from the mixture of all sorts of barbarisms, yet enriched with none of those antiquated and expressive idioms which give a sort of poetic grace to many of our provincial dialects. . . .}^{56}\]

This shift in perspective is significant. The transition from a Jacobin narrative of anti-authoritarianism to a hegemonic discourse reminiscent of the Reeevsites is perhaps one version of romantic apostasy that has traditionally been associated with Wordsworth and Coleridge. In fact, the Wordsworthian bridge between the ex-radical poet and the rural poor caught in the formulation “There I heard / From the mouths of lowly men and of obscure / A tale of honour”\(^{57}\) seems laudable in comparison with Thelwall’s vituperative and didactic dismissal. Thelwall’s unhappy experiences in the countryside, his strained relations with his Welsh neighbours no doubt contributed to this vehement denunciation of pastoral idealization of the objects of his ire.\(^{58}\) Nevertheless this contradictory portrayal

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\(^{56}\) *Poetical Recreations of the Champion*, 59-60.


\(^{58}\) E. P. Thompson has dwelt upon this phase of Thelwall’s life in great detail. Thelwall’s lament about his intellectual decline highlights the reality of his tragedy, a story largely neglected by critics: “From ‘Theatres and Halls of Assembly’ to a little Village of only twenty miserable cottages--from the friendly, the enlightened the animated circles of Norwich--from the elegant and highly intellectual society of Derby, to the sordid ignorance of a neighbourhood whose boorish inhabitants hash up a barbarous jargon of
does indicate a deviation from Thelwall’s earlier trans-class model of “free-born Briton’
that included all members of society in formulating “aggregate public opinion.” In the
energetic days after his acquittal from the charge of treason, Thelwall had embarked upon
an unprecedented course of radical praxis that William Cobbett was to follow in the
nineteenth-century post-war England, described thus by the former:

I have been rambling, according to my wonted practice, in the true
democratic way, on foot, from, village to village, from pleasant hill to
barren heath . . . In the course of these rambles I have dropped,
occasionally, into the little hedge ale-houses to refresh myself. I have sat
down among the rough clowns, whose tattered garments were soiled with
their rustic labours; for I have not forgot that all mankind are equally my
brethren; and I love to see the labourer in his ragged coat--that is I love the
labourer: I am sorry his coat is obliged to be so ragged. . . . (Tribune 151-2)

This new method of radical enquiry is important as an extension of the “public sphere”
into the domains of impoverished cottages and deracinated countryside, and the
formulation of “public opinion” from the perspective of the working-class experience.

Seen against this earlier disposition towards a ‘history-from-below,’ Thelwall’s
ideological rupture may be located between the 1795 attempt at building kinship between
unrepresented classes, and the later untheorized dismissal of the same “rough clown”
upon whom he had earlier conferred the identity of an “intellectual being.” But while
Thelwall’s contradictory attitude towards the rural labourer may be the fallout of a
coercive regime that labeled any compassionate representation as Jacobin, there is also
another way in which his project was doomed from the start. E. P. Thompson has noted
the ideological inadequacy of Thelwall’s urban, middle-class condescension towards the
corrupted Welsh, with still more corrupted English . . . was another of those sudden
transitions by which the faculties are necessarily stunned and stupified” (Romantics 183).
rural worker, in which the gesture of including of “rough clowns” within the public sphere reeks of a hegemonic paternalism worthy of Mill’s disciplinarian capitalist.

But Thelwall’s contradictory stance may also be understood as a result of his experience of un-belonging that extended in both directions, towards the higher as well as lower classes, caught in the limitations of his epistemology of abstractions. His exemplary effort of understanding “[e]very fact connected with the history and actual condition of the labouring classes” is circumvented by an incapacity to comprehend the worker within his local compass, as a contextually-determined being, rather than the synchronically-idealized commonwealthman. Thompson paints a telling picture of Thelwall’s failed attempts at understanding popular political economy:

‘Every question was repelled by some sly rub, or sagacious hint; and his arch gestures, and emphatic half-syllables, displayed the self-congratulating cunning of suspicion.’ Elsewhere he encountered the ‘jealous reluctance of communication.’ Eventually he met with a labourer who was ‘inquisitive, shrewd, and communicative.’ He claimed to read several newspapers, and was, no doubt, the ‘oracle of every pot-house:’ Unfortunately, however, we could no way turn his conversation into the channel we desired. He talked of nothing but Parker and the delegates, of war and of parties. In short, he was too full of liquor and temporary politics, to furnish any information on the subject of political economy . . . (Romantics 167-68)

But it is important to note that Thelwall’s experience of frustration points to an aporia that not only demystifies universalist jargon’s avoidance of class-analysis, but also demands the reformulation of radical vocabulary within prosaic, contextual determinations. Thomas Spence’s contributions are noteworthy in this regard. While challenging Place’s respectable radicalism by relocating his version of it within an uncivic, subterranean audience, his innovations of form, and the heteroglossic fullness of
his discourse point to an intimacy with his proletarian friends that outclasses Thelwall’s concept-oriented vocabulary. McCalman notes that, while surpassing Paine and Thelwall by unambiguously demanding the abolition of private ownership of land, “Spence deliberately and successfully sought to use the language and literary forms of the vulgar, poor and semi-literate (including chap-books, ballads, posters and almanacs) . . . [and] never left the milieu of poor artisans and tradesmen, and never abandoned their idioms, ideas and practices” (52). By assembling a dictionary based on phonetic systems and pronunciation he attempted at making language communicable to the lower classes, an effort that Thelwall’s doctrinaire approach could never envisage. Rather than the singular radical ambition of gathering public opinion, Spence’s career reveals multiple modes of radical praxis, as “a token dealer and manufacturer, a philologist and phonician, a graffiti artist, a journal editor, a leader of debating societies in London and Newcastle, a printmaker . . . a publisher of extraordinary courage and ambition . . . [as an editor] of two journals, Pig’s Meat and The Giant Killer, and his numerous chapbooks, broadsides, pamphlets, and handbills contained songs, hymns, poems, showman’s notices, marginalia, advertisements, letters, declarations, and constitutions” (Wood 68). Spence’s use of variegated forms is matched by an equally diverse message of radicalism that went far beyond its middle-class origins. McCalman points out the “many strands of enlightenment thought” that converged in Spence discourse:

There was his advocacy of a revolution of reason through popular printing and a free press; his desire for toleration of all religious opinion ‘not repugnant to the Rights of Man’; his wish to throw off the ‘chains of Hymen’ imposed by Christian marriage and to substitute open divorce and perhaps free love; and his commitment to the abolition of slavery and to the right of all peoples to freedom of movement, association and trade. (24)
Viewed from the perspective of his innovative methods and messages, Spence does appear better-suited for the role of an organic intellectual, and indeed his legacy is central to Marx’s “proletarian revolutions” of the nineteenth century. But it would be unfair to dismiss Thelwall without noting his important contribution to working-class consciousness. While Thelwall’s relationship with the worker is circumscribed by the loss of a shared language of communication, it is equally important to stress the absence of an idiom of political economy among the lower classes at the end of the eighteenth century that would have directed their experience towards a structural critique. Appropriately enough, it from an appreciation of Thelwall’s contributions to the discourse of political economy that Gregory Claeys argues for Thelwall’s contribution to history. First, Thelwall’s reformist discourse inaugurates the foundation for a labour theory of value by voicing sympathy for the labouring class whose unique afflictions are directly connected with class-status:

Look at the mass of mankind. Do we not find them still doomed to eternal drudgery! Still plunged in ignorance and servitude? It is not their bitter lot (even when they can obtain sustenance at this rate) to go from the hard pallet to their different occupations, from their occupations to the scanty meal, from the scanty meal to labour, and from labour again to repose? As if the bulk of human species, existed for nothing, were fit for nothing, were capable of nothing but to drudge eternally for the luxuries of a few, to eat, to drink, to propagate, and rot. (Tribune 84)

From an recognition of this socio-economic inequality, rather than falling back on the trope of a humanist model based upon an idealized past as many reformers were wont to do, Thelwall is able to carry his argument forward by critically engaging with the concept of “social contract” and placing it within a terrain of political economy. This meant
arguing for the worker’s right, not only to sustenance wages, but also to a share in the 
profits obtained by his labour. While rewriting the contract in economic terms, Thelwall 
interprets it to signify a “full partnership . . . implied in the very distinction of labourer 
and employer . . . by the reason of the thing, and the rules of moral justice,” specifically 
because capital could not be productive without labour, or vice versa.\textsuperscript{59} Claeys also notes 
that while Thelwall emphasized an improvement of “the physical, the moral, and 
intellectual enjoyments, not of a few only, but of the whole population of the state,” he 
does not

attempt to revive a ‘moral economy’ of just prices and fair wages, since wages were now to be proportionate to profit, not to the cost of living. Instead he proposed a new vision of economic justice that assumed an expanding economy, centered on the contractual relations between worker and employer, and did not merely expect economic grievances to be removed by the alleviation of unduly heavy taxation.\textsuperscript{(Claeys liii)}

Thelwall’s forward-looking insight into the question of wages is significant when 
measured against the approach of the next generation of leaders such as Cobbett, whose 
locus of radicalism is confined within an atavistic model of civic-humanism that narrowly 
focused its invective upon the tax system. Unlike bourgeois ideologues of his generation, 
whose incomplete critique followed a pattern where “[a] particular social sphere [was

\textsuperscript{59} Claeys highlights the importance of Thelwall’s contribution to a developing discourse of political economy by analyzing his ideas against a variety of approaches espoused by Reform proponents. In this reading Thelwall’s critique of the state overturns the equation of property and rights by pointing out that “property is nothing but human labour.” In adopting this labour-oriented perspective Thelwall not only disengages the discourse of political economy from the “commonwealth tradition” but also relocates it in the economic sphere, with a special emphasis upon the debilitating effects of poverty. In an age that saw the growth of luxury and commodities for the higher classes, Thelwall’s critique did not refer back to the mythic topos of an Arcadia (as Cobbett’s did a few years later) but instead preffered to work within the same discourse of wages and profits in order to secure an equal share for the working man. (Claeys xlix)
made to] stand for the notorious crime of the whole society, so that liberation from that sphere appears to be universal liberation” (“Critique” 34), Thelwall advances his enquiry into the emergent field of *laissez faire* economics by equating the ideal of “the general welfare of mankind” with access to profits and increased wages, rather than a naive faith in middle-class morality.

In *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* Marx privileges proletarian revolutions of the nineteenth century over the backward-looking bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century in the following way, by pointing out that the former “constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals” (*Brumaire* 4). Thelwall occupies a central space within the dialectical transition from the incomplete critiques of the eighteenth century to the self-critical, autotelic methods of the nineteenth century. The innovative bent of his thought, while groping for answers to the disaster of the French Revolution ends up with a remarkable insight that sets him apart from the intellectual apostasy of other intellectuals of the day. According to him, “[t]he revolution in France, or more properly speaking, the philosophers and patriots who first set the *new order of things* in motion, did not create their agents. . . . They were obliged to make use of the instruments already made to their hands; and when the game was on foot, the bad as well as the good would have their
share of the play” (Tribune 87). This is the kind of perception that Marx accords to
nineteenth-century proletarian self-apprehension, where history, even one’s own
immediate history, is grounded within an intuitive totality of relations and the contextual
limitations of agency. Thelwall’s indomitable spirit of optimism speaks to us today in our
postmodern disdain for grand narratives and sends a powerful reminder: “Let any
individual who has once felt this enthusiastic ardor consider what he has attained by its
means, and it is impossible that he should conclude that ardor and enthusiasm are fruitless” (Tribune 105).
CHAPTER 4
“ASSAILING THE THING”: TRIUMPHS AND LIMITS OF WILLIAM COBBETT’S “PHYSICAL” METHOD

... when I hear of people “suffering;” when I hear of people being “ruined;” when I hear of “unfortunate families;” when I hear a talk of this kind, I stop, before I express or feel compassion, to ascertain who and what the sufferers are . . . for . . . if they have malignantly calumniated those who have been labouring to prevent their ruin and misery, then a crushed earwig, or spider, or eft, or toad, is as much entitled to the compassion of a just and sensible man. ¹

The Leader in Context

The turbulent decades of early nineteenth century are exciting as a site for analyzing various inflections of class-consciousness in Britain, not only in the growth of a “revolutionary crowd,” but also in the rise of a new generation of leaders whose oppositional tendencies, defined within the locus of popular radicalism, display interesting dilemmas of intellectual praxis. Without rigidifying the historical space between evanescence of Jacobin leadership at the end of eighteenth century and emergence of Chartism in the 1830s,² we may identify two types of leaders within various


² The history of British working-class protest comes through as more continuous in character, than indicated by the structure I am proposing. But though the Jacobin legacy lives on through various strains of class protest, both intellectual and action-oriented, I tend to see the suppression of organizations such as the LCS and leaders such as John Thelwall and Despard, along with the rise of Loyalism, as decisively ending a particular
working-class rebellions of early nineteenth century. First, there is the radicalism of leaders such as Jeremiah Brandeth of the failed Pentridge Rebellion, Arthur Thistlewood and James Ings of the Cato-Street Conspiracy, who attempted to raise the “sub-political” tradition of working-class protest into an organized movement at a national level. In the absence of strategic skills and historical prescience, these leaders met with inevitable defeat against powerful repression. But what exonerates these men who “composed defiant verses while awaiting sentence” (Making 704) from the milder fault of self-

3 It would be impossible to do justice to the complexities of such proletarian movements as Pentrich Rebellion and the heteroglossic appeal of leaders such as Brandeth, in the narrow space of a footnote. Though not informed by prescriptive notions of class-consciousness, these rebellions may be seen as a prototype for later movements built upon the memory of patriotic fervour and heroism. But, in their own moment of glory, both the leaders as well as followers were caught in the deterministic space of naiveté, as explained in this description by Thomis and Holt:

Brandeth’s appeal to his followers in the field was designed to make the exercise of waging a revolution as painless and as pleasurable as possible. At Nottingham they would receive plenty of rum and a hundred guineas each, and there would be bread and beef for every man. A band of music would meet them, they would go down the river, and the whole enterprise would be ‘like a journey of pleasure.’ And afterwards there would be a provisional government formed and sent down into the country to relieve the families of those who had gone away, attending to provisioning, as its function was supposed to be. (Malcolm Thomis and Peter Holt, Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848 [London: Macmillan, 1977] 18.

Notwithstanding such tragic self-delusion for which he was to pay with his life, Brandeth also displays astonishing courage in the face of death at the gallows, where he refuses to implicate the role of Oliver the spy (this might have saved his life) fearing that it might indict his followers. E. P. Thompson has discussed this aspect of Brandeth’s courage in Making of the English Working Class (London: Vintage, 1966) 666.
delusion is their revolutionary fervor and their stubborn choice of suicidal martyrdom over surrender. At the risk of romanticizing their “customary consciousness,” they can be seen to represent a generation of “organic intellectuals” gone awry, whose indomitable courage, in spite of their narratives of defeat, occupies an important place in the history of working-class protest. The legacy of these working-class leaders forms the critical matrix within which to evaluate the other type of leader in early nineteenth-century Britain, the “gentleman leader,” or the “gentleman of the platform,” who oscillated between roles of the “demagogue” and the “martyr” in the attempt to combine self-worth with civic virtue. While willing participants in the canonization rituals of the “lower orders,” these leaders such as Henry Hunt, John Horne Tooke and others

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4 Antonio Gramsci’s idea of the organic intellectual is central to this investigation. Against the more liminal figure of the “traditional” intellectual, the “organic” leader, while sharing the common experience of a class, is able to organize its members towards the construction of a new society. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Hoare and Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) 5-8. James Epstein has analyzed the applicability and limits of this category in the English working-class situation in the figure of Richard Carlile, who, like a host of other intellectuals of his time was caught between the pull of ambition and the interests of his community. “Bred as a Mechanic: Plebeian Intellectuals and Popular Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century England,” *Intellectuals and Public Life: Between Radicalism and Reform*, ed. Leon Fink et al. (London, 1996). Needless to say, this binary is useful for analyzing the preceding generation of middle-class radicals as well, even if they did not spring from the working classes. On the other hand, leaders such as Brandeth, though belonging to the labouring classes, neither saw themselves in the specialized role of intellectuals (unlike the radical writers and publishers), nor were they able to organize themselves in any effective way.

5 John Belchem and James Epstein have used the term “Gentleman of the platform” in “The Nineteenth-Century Gentleman Leader Revisited,” *Social History* 22, No. 2, (May 1997): 174-93. E. P. Thompson has used the categories of “demagogue” and “martyr” to describe the twin identities of the middle-class intellectual in the making of the working classes. *Making* 603-710.

6 It is imperative to note while I suggest two different paradigms—the working-class hero and the middle-class radical—for understanding the roles played by the leader, these models were by no means always clear-cut or oppositional in the minds of either the leaders or the masses. Leaders such as Henry Hunt, John Horne Tooke and others
leaders occupy a liminal place within the community they address in their writings and speeches. Set against the drama of working-class heroes who were closely connected with their community and its experience of deracination, middle-class radicalism was characterized by an “exotic distance” that was “mediated by declarations of personal sacrifice, singular devotion to working people, familiarity as well as unmistakable touches of deference: a father returning home to his children” (Belchem and Epstein 178).

This chapter will examine some of the key issues of nineteenth-century radical leadership, its contributions and limitations through the life and writings of William Cobbett. Cobbett exemplifies the contradictory space of these leaders in the history of class-struggle in at least two ways. First, his legacy as “father of Reform” points towards a complex relationship with his rebellious community of “chopsticks,” dramatized “around a mythic unity of sentiment between high and low: gentleman and people” (Belchem and Epstein 181), as may be seen from Cobbett’s representation of his interest in the working-classes:

Born in a farm house, bred up at the plough tail, with a smock-frock on my back, taking great delight in all the pursuits of farmers, liking their society, and having amongst them my most esteemed friends, it is natural that I should feel, and I do feel, uncommonly anxious to prevent, as far as I am able, that total ruin that now menaces them. But, the labourer, was I to have no feeling for him? Was he not my countryman too? And was I not to feel indignation against those farmers, who had had the hard-heartedness

participated in some of the popular protests that they organized, as seen in the memorable instance of the Peterloo massacre of 1819, where Hunt was as much object of the yeomanry’s wrath as were the mass of labourers. Richard Carlile’s insistence on reading out the entire text of Paine’s *Age of Reason* during his trial is as self-destructive as Brandeth’s refusal to confess and exonerate himself. But it is certainly plausible to differentiate two forms of leadership using Kevin Gilmartin’s terms: one conducted along the “vertical axis of inspiration” such as Brandeth’s and the other along “a horizontal axis of publication.” “This is Very Material: William Cobbett and the Rhetoric of Radical Opposition,” *SiR* 34 (Spring 1995) 91.
to put the bell around [the labourer’s] neck, and thus wantonly insult and degrade the class to whose toils they owed their own ease? (RR I 91)

Secondly, what distinguishes Cobbett’s leadership from the emergent, class-conscious Chartist type is his predilection for “Old England,” a mythic ethos of feudal paternalism that restricts a systemic inquiry into secular time and space of history. Cobbett’s peculiar combination of convention/stasis and change/mobility—“We want great alteration, but we want nothing new”7—bears testimony to the reciprocal quality of historical processes, which, in Marx’s words, “continue the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modify the old circumstances with a completely changed activity.”8

But before we proceed to investigate the significance of Cobbett as an intellectual, it is important to chart out the changed atmosphere of the early nineteenth century Reformist agendas. Having gone through the long and arduous repressive regime of English anti-Jacobinism, the LCS leaders and other sympathetic intellectuals were forced to reformulate their goals in the wake of Loyalist response to the war against France. Men such as Horne Tooke and John Cartwright underwent the chastising process of Jacobin repression to emerge as the “romantic radicals”9 in the nineteenth century, who now


9 Peter Spence’s exhaustive analysis of early nineteenth-century English radicalism in terms of “a romantic appeal to a organic national identity, epitomized by the patriarchal monarchy, the apostolic church, and an historicist constitutional, legal and moral theory
directed their critique of corruption away from the English constitution and the crown, towards the “boroughmongering” Pitt ministry, a move that marks a transition from the seditious rhetoric that characterized their eighteenth-century phase, to a milder one of parliamentary reform. Peter Spence contextualizes the radical climate of early nineteenth century as the politico-ethical fallout of the horrors of the French Revolution that prompted “a curious coalition between those patriots who were the heirs of Wilkes and Paine, and those loyalists whose views were best expressed by Cobbett” (Spence 198). While replacing the Jacobin legacy of Paineite “natural rights” theories with a neo-Harringtonian rhetoric of civic virtue, the new leadership also changed the topos and formula of rebellion. The gap of class-experience that separated the gentleman leader from his constituency also dictated the shape of his radicalism as a verbal countertheatre, rather than physical violence. While the untutored activism of the Brandeth-type of

of knowledge,” is key to understanding the differences of these gentlemen leaders from their earlier Jacobin prototype. Birth of Romantic Radicalism: War, Popular Politics and English Radical Reformism, 1800--1815 (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996) 10. Not only does the appeal to tradition rescind the idea of structural transformation, but also places the question of leadership within the arena of private virtues. These themes will be examined in detail a bit later.

10 I borrow this concept from J. G. A. Pocock’s seminal analysis of the revival of pre-capitalist and utopian ideas in capitalist eighteenth-century England in the form of a neo-Harringtonian doctrine of propertied virtue, that is relevant for the nineteenth-century context as well. In eighteenth century, this doctrine assumed a moral vocabulary against the Whig stock-system, and conducted its arguments along the antinomies of virtue-commerce, autonomy-dependence, land-money, country-court. As we will see, these categories are supremely important for a radical writer such as William Cobbett, and his definition of political economy. Pocock’s Politics Language and Time (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), Virtue, Commerce and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), and Eugene Kamenka and R. S. Neale ed. Feudalism, Capitalism and Beyond (New York: St. Martin’s, 1976) are useful for a detailed analysis of the neo-Harringtonian phenomenon.
leadership aspired to the role “professional revolutionaries,” and drew inspiration from the French example, radical leaders such as Francis Burdett, William Cobbett, Henry Hunt, Major Cartwright, John Horne Tooke, fit the category of “professional intellectuals” who were educated, and participated in what John Brewer has called the “alternative structure of politics” of the radical press.\(^\text{11}\) “Independent” press became the preferred instrument of propaganda for these leaders, who, according to Kevin Gilmartin, “combined in their own persons the roles of writer, editor, printer, or publisher” (91). Even though these intellectuals re-deployed the persuasive threat of an imminent revolution by “lower orders,” it was through the tools of mass journalism and publication, rather than the violence of a revolutionary army that had formed the mainstay of popular protests led by the active rebels. Samuel Bamford, the famous nineteenth-century Hampden Club radical, marks the changed atmosphere of 1816 as the starting point of a new well-informed constituency built upon a slow erosion of the “revolutionary crowd”:

At this time the writings of William Cobbett suddenly became of great authority; they were read on nearly every cottage hearth in the manufacturing districts of South Lancashire, in those of Leicester, Derby, and Nottingham; also in many of the Scottish manufacturing towns. Their influence was speedily visible; he directed his readers to the true cause of their sufferings--misgovernment; and to its proper corrective--parliamentary reform. Riots soon became scarce, and from that time they have never obtained their ancient vogue with the labourers of this country.\(^\text{12}\)


The transition from revolution to reform also marked a change in the horizon of expectations of the audience, as the intellectual-leader’s claim to public approbation increasingly came to depend upon an ethical system governed by ideas of autonomy and moral rectitude. As radical leaders turned more towards popular press as a gesture of their independence from Jacobin and Pittite factions (a move that already demarcated them from one variety of popular politics), they simultaneously delinked the intellectual from a collective identity, and placed him in an arena of individual culpability and glory. In this form of radicalism, the intellectual assumes a contradictory status of an authoritarian figure of an anti-authoritarian stance, a position that enables him to eulogize his own life and career as signifiers of collective resistance. The narrative of individualism combines the energy of the entrepreneur and the grandeur of the folk hero in Cobbett’s evaluation of his long career of resistance:

Let the readers in my native county and parish, remember, that I am now at the end of thirty years of calumnies, poured out incessantly on me from the poisonous mouths and pens, of three hundred volumes in those thirty years; and that more than a thousand volumes have been written and published for the sole purpose of impeding the progress of these truths that dropped from my pen; that my whole life has been a life of sobriety and labour; that I have invariably shown that I loved and honoured my country, and that I preferred its greatness and happiness far beyond my own; that, at four distinct periods, I might have rolled in wealth derived from the public money, which I always refused in any way to touch; that, for having thwarted this government. (RR II 374)

I will examine the limitations and achievements of Cobbett’s radicalism by placing him against these divergent narratives of the nineteenth century, in which Cobbett may be seen to occupy a unique position. While continuing an earlier type of civic leadership such as Thelwall’s into an early-industrial landscape marked by developing
discourse of working-class political economy, Cobbett becomes an interesting site as a transition point from one working-class idiom to another. What Cobbett brings to the discourse of working-class radicalism as it matured from Paine’s “natural rights” to the “class” consciousness of Chartism in these early nineteenth century decades is one brilliant, last example of the vanishing epistemology of contiguity. I examine Cobbett’s “physical” style as a method that generates a powerful radical discourse where the worker’s starving body and the official rhetoric of improvement are shown to be politico-economic-social counterparts of the same seamless universe of early nineteenth-century England. The significance of Cobbett’s perspective, albeit inadequate for an “organic” leadership, is located in his materialist emphasis that intuitively attacked a burgeoning discourse of ratiocinative utilitarianism characteristic of the “abstract” methods of Adam Smith and Malthus. Cobbett’s own formula of political economy, an interesting mix of Paine’s metacritical discourse and the ethical vocabulary of civic-humanist ideals, combines with a heteroglossic narrative style to project the ravages of the “THING,” a concrete-abstract term for the system of debt and taxation.

One word on the significance of my approach towards Cobbett. While evaluating the complex legacy of these “gentleman leaders,” whose kinship with the working classes was seemingly at odds with their own class-interest, Marx’s category of “feudal socialists,” provides one analytical model. According to Marx,

[i]n order to arouse sympathy, the aristocracy were obliged to lose sight, apparently, of their own interests, and to formulate their indictment against the bourgeoisie in the interest of the working class alone. Thus the
aristocracy took their revenge by singing lampoons on their new master, and whispering in his ear sinister prophecies of coming catastrophe.  

Seen from the perspective of his exaltation of the labouring community, this description seems to fit our "gentleman leader" very well. The two defining features of "feudal socialists"—critique of capitalist boroughmongers and sympathy for the working classes—are also central features of the "Radical" type. But the problem is more complex than indicated by Marx’s macro-political description of a self-deluded and vindictive set of people. The intense history of this generation of leaders, and their vacillation between contrary pulls of ambition and commitment may perhaps be better understood by Antonio Gramsci’s transactional model of intellectual-practical activity that configures the historical space of this leadership within a dialectical process. Gramsci’s notion of the "active man-in-the-mass" who resolves his "contradictory consciousness" through a "struggle of political hegemonies . . . first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper" (Gramsci 333), allows us an entry point into the intricate combination of circumstance and aspiration that motivated these men. In this reading, "practical activity" of the nineteenth-century radical leader is derived from an exchange between received structures of thought ("uncritically absorbed" and interiorized), and a natural desire to

13 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto, ed. Robert Tucker, The Marx-Engels Reader (New York: Norton, 1978) 491. It is important to note that Marx’s main focus while discussing "feudal socialists" is on the "French Legitimists" and "Young England" rather than the Reform Movement as such. But the descriptions fit the earlier intellectuals as well, though they are notably removed from the Christian strain of this category. Also, they did not have the chance, and in Cobbett’s case, neither the inclination, to join hands with the bourgeoisie, as Marx charges. It should be noted that this contradiction between critiquing bourgeoisdom and yet investing in its economy formed part of the eighteenth-century anxiety of Pope and Swift, where the former lost a considerable fortune in the South Sea Bubble Crisis.
transform the world as a member of a larger community, also dramatized as a conflict between opposite demands of the ego and civic selfhood. While allowing us to read the confusion of their revolutionary rhetoric and reformist aims as both the limitation of conceptual paradigms in which to theorize experience and the trap of a “spontaneous” ideological preference, the idea of a “contradictory consciousness” also liberates critical evaluation from the temptations of a synchronic mode of thought.

Before we turn to an analysis of *Rural Rides*, it is useful to get an idea of Cobbett’s changing political allegiances from an early republicanism to a brief anti-Jacobinism ending finally in a Radical agenda. I would like to suggest that Cobbett’s dialectical growth from the late-eighteenth-century type of radical to the early-nineteenth-century one contributes to the strengths of his writing.

**Politics**

Apart from the adventures of circumventing governmental regulations to successfully invent radical journalism in Britain, what distinguishes Cobbett from other intellectuals of the day is the astonishing vigour of his writings, a form of “language in action” as John Belchem calls it, that was as effective as any platform address in its use of rhetoric and style. Indeed, if we were to impose a sense of unity over the many reversals and shifts of Cobbett’s political career, two things leap to mind: an unhesitant oppositional stance, coupled with an immediacy of address that could successfully undertake diametrically opposed agendas. While an examination of the entire corpus of Cobbett’s writings may lead us to take seriously Plato’s separation of “virtue” from

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"oratio," it is perhaps more instructive to view the inconsistencies of Cobbett's critique as the substance of an intellectual growth set against the backdrop of early nineteenth-century radicalism. Such a reading has to deal with a double element of Cobbett's writings in a text such as *Rural Rides*, where contrary programs of gradualist change (Reform), and violent, paradigmatic change (along the lines of French Revolution) are woven into an organic and heteroglossic narrative that speaks of a self-possessed, holistic vision, rather than the anxieties of fractured perspective. This dualism finds a homology in the twin identity of working classes, celebrated, on the one hand, as the vanguard of a new society, but one that would be based on a paternal hierarchy, where the "gentleman farmer" would benevolently supervise over their rights and duties.

But not all inconsistencies are negative: in an age that was characterized by intellectual *volte face* with regard to revolutionary gestures and attitudes, with Wordsworth seeking refuge in philosophic quietism, Cobbett undertakes an opposite trajectory in his move from virulent anti-Jacobinism to an equally aggressive radicalism. But before proceeding further, it is useful to briefly trace Cobbett's career during which, as George Spater pithily describes, "[a] self-educated son of a tavern-keeper . . . rose from ploughboy to soldier, from soldier to journalist, and from journalist to member of parliament, [to occupy] a unique position of power in England and America."15 This version of events is close to Cobbett's representation of his own life, as seen from the proposed outline for his autobiography: "I shall entitle my book 'The Progress of a Plough-boy to a seat in Parliament, as exemplified in the History of the Life of William

Cobbett, Member for Oldham;' and, I intend that the frontispiece to the book shall represent me, first in a smock-frock, driving the rooks from the corn; and, in the lower compartment of the picture, standing in the House of Commons, addressing the Speaker." While this edifying narrative combines a "hagiology" of worldly success with the organicism of a disinterested farmer-turned-politician model of "vivere civile," it also locates praxis in the power of the individual/intellectual who is undaunted by hegemonic processes. Further, in the construction of a mythical self, history is replaced by an epic mode of narration where Cobbett can boldly claim, "I have all along, been right. I have foreseen and foretold every thing: at twelve or fourteen different epocha, all

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17 Kevin Binfield’s analysis of Cobbett’s political method proposes the twin concepts of "hagiology" and "demonology," as the moral vocabulary of "radical martyrology." While "demonology" launches an invective against enemies, "hagiology" elevates Cobbett to the status of a "moral guardian," in a "moral drama, or perhaps a battle, requiring a suitable hero." "Demonology, Ethos and Community in Cobbett and Shelley," Romanticism, Radicalism and the Press, ed. Stephen Behrendt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997) 160-61. While discussing "hagiology" it is also pertinent to understand another binary that is central to the civic-humanist identity: the antagonistic pulls of "virtue" and "fortune." While "fortune"--given the contingencies of political life--stood for the phenomenal world of desire, the ideal of virtue became a moral principle, a formative principle that gave shape to the chaos of fortune. Therefore Cobbett’s rise to success and fortune, the substance of ideological interpellation and hegemonic lures, is subsumed under the larger plot of moral action.

18 The neo-Harringtonian concept of selfhood and political activity is based on an Aristotelian model of ethics, where the two states of "vita activa" and "vita contemplativa" were mediated by the ideal of "vivere civile," in Pocock’s words, "a way of life given over to civic concerns and the (ultimately political) activity of citizenship." The Machiavellian Moment (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) 56. The philosophic basis of vivere civile was the conception that it was in action and production of works and deeds, that life of man rose to the stature of those universal values which were immanent in it.
my predictions have been verified, and all my principles proved to have been true” (PR, 12 January 1828). But what is of interest to us is the other, diachronic narrative that traces Cobbett’s shifts in political commitments and choice of operative communities, and places the intellectual within the habitus of ideology. It is useful to divide this second, colourful history into three segments that capture the main events and circumstances surrounding Cobbett’s conversion from one political faction to another: an inchoate republicanism that in 1791 motivates his spirited action against corruption in the army; followed by a High Tory phase in America during the years of 1792-1800, where radicalism and Paine are denounced in favour of virtues of the English Constitution, and, finally, the events following his return to England in 1801 that saw the gradual adoption of a program of parliamentary reform, culminating in Cobbett’s election into the House of Commons.

The story unfolds with Cobbett’s initiation into the world of politics and pamphleteering in the failed attempts to bring charges of corruption against his superiors in the army in 1792. His decision to enlist in the Royal Marines in 1784 leads Cobbett to his earliest experience of the realities of poverty and power structures, and also marks his entry into the world of literacy in his painstaking efforts to learn grammar. This initial experience of poverty is worth recounting briefly, in light of Daniel Green’s speculation that this event underlies Cobbett’s sympathetic response to rural poverty. Cobbett recalls,

19 Daniel Green builds upon the idea that, “those who have gone through [hunger] will never be able to take it for granted, nor will they be able to accept, without anger, the proposition that it is part of the human condition that some part of mankind must always starve” to account for Cobbett’s sometimes self-destructive identification with the cause
I had no money to purchase candle or oil; in winter time it was rarely that I could get any evening light but that of the fire, and only my turn even of that. To buy a pen or a sheet of paper I was compelled to forgo some portion of food, though in a state of half-starvation, I had no moment of time that I could call my own; and I had to read and write amidst the talking, singing, whistling, and brawling of at least half a score of the most thoughtless of men, and that, too, in the hours of their freedom from all control. (AUTO 26)

Study of English grammar helped Cobbett to rise to the rank of Sergeant-Major, while imbuing him with an oppositional sensibility. Cobbett was keenly aware that “those who were commanding [him] . . . were in fact uttering words, which [he] had taught them, and were, in everything except in authority, [his] inferiors; and ought to have been commanded by [him]” (AUTO 33). This personalized sense of injustice later informs his daring denunciation of corruption in the army, where soldiers were being deprived of their full income. This event is also important as it marks Cobbett’s entry into the intellectual world, with the distribution of Soldier’s Friend, a pamphlet that addressed the grievances of soldiers, and combined few key ingredients of Cobbett’s later writings, such as patriotic denunciation of high finance and factionalism. According to David Wilson, this phase of Cobbett’s politics is influenced by republican ideas; the terms of his critique evidence a familiarity with the second part of Paine’s Rights of Man.


20 David A. Wilson, Paine and Cobbett: The Transatlantic Connection (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988). Wilson reminds us of the similarities between The Soldier’s Friend and Rights of Man, not only in terms of the blunt style but also in the terminology of critique: “Paine had linked poor treatment of soldiers with the aristocratic system of government . . . Paine articulated the kind of grievances Cobbett had directly experienced, and Paine located those grievances within the wider system.” It is also worth noting that Paine was thought to be the author of the subversive pamphlet, and was said to have created “ten times more mischief than [the] Rights of Man.” (108-9).
The failure of court-martial proceedings and Cobbett's subsequent flight to America mark another important phase in Cobbett's political career. Strangely, he not only disavows any vestigial Paineite influences during these years, but he also declares an open war against any version of republican ideas, whether in the form of French Revolution, American self-representation as a nascent republic, or, most importantly, English Jacobinism. The anti-Jacobin years of 1792-1800 in America that made him famous as a journalist with the publication of *Peter Porcupine* form a curious context for analyzing Cobbett's intellectual growth, poised between an initial republicanism and later radicalism. Wilson explains Cobbett's shift from Paine to Burke as the outcome of the immigrant's patriotic zeal, as well his general disillusionment with American republicanism (Wilson 114-16). Where previously Paine had given him the language to awaken into a political consciousness, now Cobbett denounced 'mad Tom' as an 'infidel', and the French Revolution as a result of his rabble-rousing. In his characteristically exaggerated style, Cobbett lays out his preference for monarchy:

> People may say what they please about the misery of the French peasantry, under the old government; I have conversed with thousands of them, not ten among them whom did not regret the change. I have not room to go into the causes that have led these people to become passive instruments, the slaves of a set of tyrants such as the world never saw before, but I venture to predict, that, sooner or later, they will return to that form of government under which they were happy and under which alone they can ever be so again.  

Wilson's persuasive reading that traces Cobbett's changing loyalties as the outcome of a perceived gap between the 'ideal' and the 'real' goes a long way to explain the latter's reversal to republicanism upon his return to England. Just as America had

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fallen short of an ideal republican society, so England failed to display the ideal constitutional government that Cobbett had always placed his faith in. One important event can be employed as a master narrative for Cobbett’s change to radicalism. Cobbett, who, in 1796 had famously written, “[h]ow Tom [Paine] gets his living now, what brothel he inhabits . . . whether his carcass is at last to be suffered to rot on the earth, or to be dried in the air, is of very little consequence,” 22 in 1819 travels twenty two miles at night to gather the bones of the same Thomas Paine to take home to England. Not only is Paine now resurrected as a champion of liberty, who, like Cobbett suffered under the yoke of a repressive government, but even the Jacobin model of revolutionary threat becomes acceptable. Now, it is just a matter of time: “When, great God! when shall we be allowed to enjoy God’s gifts, in freedom, as the people of France enjoy them?” (RR I 320).

Invocation of Paine is important also in introducing the question of a working-class agency. Cobbett’s gradual movement towards the working classes from his earlier identification with the propertied people of “middling walks of life” peaks in the publication of his famous “Address to Journeymen and Labourers” in the Political Register of 1816 and marks the change that later informs the subaltern perspective of Rural Rides, where “the girls at work in the fields” become Cobbett’s standard for judging the condition of England. One of our last images of Cobbett testifies to his enduring commitment toward his constituency, when at the age of seventy one, suffering from an excruciatingly painful disease and a worsening financial condition, he takes up arms against the House of Commons for amending the Poor Law bill of 1834.

22 Quoted in Wilson 4.
While it is possible to resolve the agonistic history of anti-Paine and anti-Burke pamphleteering into a dialectical model where, in the end, Cobbett emerges as the “poor man’s friend,” an analysis of his radical writings reveals a more tentative attitude towards the matter of social change. Contrasts with earlier Jacobin model of radicalism and its deployment of Paine reveals two major changes that are worth examining. At the outset, a program of reform at a time when organic leadership could perhaps have effected revolution along the lines of France seems to point towards a conservative mode of thought, rather than subversive radicalism. Further, the extravagance of organizations such as the London Corresponding Society that aimed at “members unlimited” is now replaced by a local field of radicalism, where a national/contextual analysis with tangible heroes and villains takes precedence over a holistic approach. The reformist intent of an alliance with the working classes via Paine points to a unique combination of means and methods. The following passage captures various nuances—personal and political—of Cobbett’s radicalism, and the strong anti-revolutionary, pro-Constitution flavour that at once demarcates him from the Jacobin type:

In the city of Bath, the people, amidst the crash of banks, shouted in the streets, ‘COBBETT IS RIGHT! COBBETT IS A TRUE PROPHET!’ It was my anxious wish to put a stop to the fatal progress of hideous revolution. I was well aware that it was no easy task to effect an object like this. No small part of every twenty-four hours, whether on sea or on land, on my pillow, in my garden, on my horse, or on my feet, was spent thinking of the means necessary, when the danger should have become clear to all eyes, to the rescuing of England from the natural and inevitable consequences of all-corrupting, all-enfeebling, all-degrading curse of paper money. The measures I proposed, subverted nothing that was acknowledged by the laws and constitution of England; tended not to pull down, but to uphold, the government of King, Lords, and Commons; took away no lawful privilege or immunity; tended to destroy no lawful establishment; and they would have restored a fixedness as to property,
and that harmony and good will between the rich and the poor, which had so long been banished from the land. (AUTO 201)

Here, the pleasure of a revolutionary stance, where Cobbett’s very name poses the threat of unleashing the violence of a French Revolution, is safely anchored within a gradualist vision, thus channeling both, popular radicalism of the masses, as well as Paine’s quasi-dialectical terminology of “natural and inevitable consequences” into portents of reform. E. P. Thompson views this insistence on traditionalism, among other things, as an effort to escape censorship, a reading that gains strength in light of Cobbett’s flight to America during the imposition of the Seditious Meetings Act and the suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1817. While rejecting “Political Clubs . . . secret cabals . . Correspondencies,” Cobbett now insisted on the importance of the “general, free, unpacked, unbiased, impression and expression of the public mind,” much to the chagrin of his Hampden Club compatriots who were left alone to face the wrath of the government.23

But while Cobbett may come through as ideologically suspect for diverting radical possibilities into a rather ineffective program of change, it is useful to place his double narrative in two different, but related contexts that determine the struggles of his political

23 Quoted in Making 640. E. P. Thompson suggests that Cobbett’s defection did serious damage to the morale of his colleagues and the movement. Wooler’s censure of Cobbett’s public renunciation not only highlights the irresponsibility of such an act during a repressive time, but also debunks the exaggerated virtue of autonomy by arguing for the power of group formations: “I have always thought that clubs of every description were the most important means of collecting and condensing that general, free, unpacked, and unbiased opinion of the public voice which you say is essential. . . . Sir, you are playing very mischievously with the cause of reform, by thus giving its opponents the your sanction to the worst arguments against it . . . ” (Thompson 640). But it is also important to note that while Thompson’s scrupulous reading provides one useful method for understanding lags between revolutionary rhetoric and reformist aims, the fact that Cobbett was unable to escape imprisonment and financial ruin mitigates the charge of hypocrisy to some extent.
consciousness. One, the changing terrain of political economy during the years that Cobbett was developing his ideas between Paine and Burke, and two, the multifarious effects of French Revolution upon construction of English self-hood. An examination of Cobbett’s writings from these two contexts allows us to reconfigure reform’s contradictory discourse as a dialectical struggle for political hegemonies. More importantly, the putative organicism of texts such as *Rural Rides*, which envisages a seamless experience of space and time unencumbered by the cataclysmic transformations industrial capitalism, may be linked to this process of identity-formation in the fluid world of nineteenth century Britain. Also, the domineering strain of an egotistic self-aggrandizement that threatened to disrupt this organicism may be read as a fallout of the blend between a backward-looking political vision, and the social *excess* that shaped men such as Cobbett into leaders.

**Paine, Political Economy and the Working Classes**

Noel Thompson’s *The People’s Science*\(^24\) charts out the changing discourse of political economy in nineteenth-century Britain as a movement away from an emphasis on the “physical” and phenomenal topoi of the “agrarian radicals” in working-class journals such as *Political Register* and the *Black Dwarf*, to a more structural critique that, after 1825, addressed issues of exploitation at an increasingly theoretical level in *Trades Newspaper* and other cooperative press publications. In the triangular locus surrounding issues of labour and poverty in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, Cobbett occupies a middle position between the Placian faction that held state intervention as the cause of

evil, and an emergent socialist discourse that was awakening to a labour theory of value that saw economic exploitation as intrinsic to capitalism. Cobbett, whose critique is more political than economic, distinguishes himself from classical economists ("the impudent Scotch quacks . . . crying up the doctrine of Malthus") as well as the metanarratives of labour theories, by yoking together an older binary between land/property and labour and a Paineite rhetoric of "natural rights." In this version of events, the problem of poverty and unrest (specifically in the countryside) is seen as the direct outcome of a "system" led by "boroughmongers" and "tax-eaters," that forced labourers into impoverishment. Following Paine's analysis of the system of debt and taxation in *Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance* (1796), Cobbett unearths the reality of rural deracination and depopulation by chastising the Whig bravado of "waust improvements" in the countryside. The terms of the critique are significant as a converging of various

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25 Noel Thompson's description of the political economy of Spence and Ogilvie appears is striking in its similarities with Cobbett's understanding of it. Thompson describes the "agrarian radical" position thus:

First, exploitation is seen by them as an essentially agrarian phenomenon; it is the cultivator, the landless labourer stripped of his natural rights, whose product is appropriated. Secondly, both Ogilvie and Spence appear to have conceived of and explained exploitation in physical terms. This meant not only that their analysis and explanation of working-class poverty was applicable to an economy and society essentially agrarian in character but also that the analytical tools and theoretical constructs which they deployed could not easily be utilised, by them or subsequent writers, to formulate and articulate a critique of an economy characterised by a diversity of productive activity, specialisation and the use of capital equipment" (43).

Cobbett has often been castigated for not extending his critique to include the new breed of industrial capitalists ("the Lords of the Loom") and issues of factory labour. Perhaps one reason for that myopia is in his adoption of the limited Spence-Ogilvie model of political economy.
strands of economic thought. On the one hand, Paine points towards the beginnings of a structural critique, whose quasi-abstract definitions of labour and liberties aim at replacing hierarchical, property-based social order with a democratic labour-based one. This proceeds from a meta-legal perspective of principles rather than personalities, that places the sanction of tradition under a demystificatory gaze of reason:

But, after all, what is this metaphor called a crown, or rather what is monarchy? Is it a thing, or is it a name, or is it a fraud? Is it a "contrivance of human wisdom," or human craft, to obtain money from a nation under specious pretences? Is it a thing necessary to a nation? If it is, in what does that necessity consist, what service does it perform, what is its business, and what are its merits? 26

Like other intellectuals of the day, Cobbett displays the influence of Paine's irresistible metacritical method. Critics have celebrated Cobbett's "Address to Journeymen and Labourers" as a significant step towards the idiom of political economy, where he begins to lay down the foundations of his critique in seemingly abstract terms, a move that is paralleled by a renewal of intellectual commitment, with the replacement of a detached "I" with the more communal "we." 27 The vindication of the labouring community in the "Address" injects narratives of English nationalism with a subaltern perspective by both creating and responding to the rise of class as a presence, as seen from the opening lines:


27 While Kevin Binfield has examined the "Address" as Cobbett's decisive move towards a working-class identification, I tend to side with Raymond Williams' critical reading that uses the "Address" as a model of a process, where an "intense phase of self-organization and protest by a still-forming working and labouring class was intervened in and in part appropriated by a primarily middle-class reforming movement, in the interest of small employers" (Williams 17).
Whatever the Pride of rank, of riches or of scholarship may have induced some men to believe, or to affect to believe, the real strength and all the resources of the country, ever have sprung and ever must spring, from the labour of its people. . . . Elegant dresses, superb furniture, stately buildings, fine roads and canals, fleet horses and carriages, numerous and stout ships, warehouses teeming with goods; all these, and many other objects that fall under our view, are many marks of national wealth and resources. But all these spring from labour. Without the Journeyman and the labourer none of them could exist; without the assistance of their hands, the country would be a wilderness, hardly worth the notice of an invader. (Address 433)

But a closer examination of the “Address” belies claims for a well-defined and consistent adoption of Paineite rhetoric, even in light of the fact that its publication sent Cobbett to Newgate for sedition. The burgeoning framework of a labour theory of value is soon overtaken by the contingencies of a local analysis. After a promising start, the attempt to locate the cause of the present deracination focuses entirely upon the immediate factors of war, taxation and paper money, and, instead of progressing into a systemic analysis of labour exploitation, remains within a parliamentary turf of “Pitt system:” “As to the Cause of our present miseries, it is the enormous amount of the taxes, which the government compels us to pay for the support of its army, its placemen, its pensioners, &c. and for the payment of the interest of its debt” (Address 435). Just as the cause of the problem is local, so must the solution be: “Thus, then, it is clear, that it is the weight of the taxes, under which you are sinking, which has already presses so many of you down into the state of paupers, and which now threatens to deprive many of you of your existence . . . and you will soon see, that this intolerable weight has all proceeded from the want of a Parliamentary Reform” (Address 438).
In the process of elevating the labourer to the position of a civilian with rights (denied by the system) and duties (to save England from the system by opposing it), Cobbett falls back upon a model of civic humanism, with the argument that labour as the creator of value should be awarded with an equal power of franchise given to property owners. This interpretation of political economy strongly resembles a democratized version of neo-Harringtonianism, whose ideals of propertied virtue go far back into English intellectual history. Eighteenth-century retrieval of neo-Harringtonianism infects writers such as Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, whose trenchant critique of a Whig order based on commercialism, takes the form of “country vs. city” and “land vs. money” polarities. J. G. A. Pocock has analyzed this model as a moral one that sought to counter the eighteenth-century “epistemology of fantasy”28 generated by the booms and busts of a “financial revolution,”29 by stressing the “gentleman’s or yeoman’s independence in land

28 Pocock’s instructive term is an important one, that traces an experience associated with modernity (where ‘all that is solid melts into air’) to an eighteenth-century experience of an “epistemology of fantasy” generated by a market economy. In this set-up, “[b]ooms and busts, bulls and bears, became the determinants of politics. The value of public stock, the Dow Jones ratings of the eighteenth century becomes the index to the stability of governments, and all this was seen as placing politics at the mercy of a self-generated hysteria” (Virtue 112).

29 P. G. M. Dickson explains the “financial revolution” of eighteenth century in the following way:

The political revolution of 1688-9—a bipartisan and somewhat backward-looking affair— had to be paid for with intensive English involvement in the Franco-Dutch wars of the continent, and was followed within a few years by a drastic series of innovations now becoming known as the Financial Revolution, beginning about 1694-6, whose outcome was the erection of a structure of public credit that rendered England capable of waging war as a great power. . . . The crucial steps in the Financial Revolution were the foundation of the Bank of England and the institution of National Debt. Individuals great and small were now encouraged to
and arms as performing the function of the oikos in an English or Virginian polis.”

Cobbett carries over this ideology of rootedness and land-based virtue into the rather complex locale of the nineteenth century, where the debt situation after Waterloo allows an appropriate homology with the eighteenth-century situation. Now, the “Pitt system” is seen as a threat to the moral fabric of English society:

This vile paper-money and funding-system, this system of Dutch descent, begotten by Bishop Burnett, and born in hell; this system has turned everything into a gamble. There are hundreds of men who live by being the agents to carry on gambling. . . . In such a state of things how are you to expect young men to enter on a course of patient industry? How are you to expect that they will seek to acquire fortune and fame by study or by application of any kind? (RR I 261)

Critique of the “funding system” proceeds from a reference to the loss of Arcadia. In this rendering, an opulent agrarian economy and an ethos of intuitive morality, presided over by gentlemen farmers, is threatened by a new breed of bourgeoisie interested only in profit and commodity. For Cobbett, replacement of land by money initiates “unnatural changes” that threaten the moral fabric of society. Social relations are

lend money to the government and live off the returns on their capital, thus investing in the future stability of the Revolution. With these loans as its security, the government was enabled to borrow on a yet larger scale and with funds thus raised to carry out a massive expansion and perpetuation of the professional army and navy, together with the civilian bureaucracies that sustained them and their conquests. It reached a point of embarking upon enterprises and contracting loans that could not be paid off on the security of existing funds, so that repayment had to be secured upon revenues to be raised in the future; but war could not be paid out of public credit alone, and necessitated a steady rise in taxes, levied for the most part upon land.” (The Financial Revolution in England: a Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756 [New York: St. Martin’s, 1967] 11).

30 Feudalism 80.
replaced by commodity relations: “a resident native gentry, attached to the soil, known to
every farmer and labourer from their childhood, frequently mixing with them in those
pursuits where all artificial distinctions are lost, practising hospitality without ceremony,
from habit and not on calculation” were metamorphosing into “a gentry, only now-and-
then residing at all, having no relish for country delights, foreign in their manners, distant
and haughty in their behaviour, looking to the soil only for its rents, viewing it as a mere
object of speculation, unacquainted with its cultivators, despising them and their pursuits,
and relying, for influence, not upon the good will of the vicinage, but upon the dread of
their power” (RR I 46).

Cobbett’s distaste for the commodification of land and human relationships may
perhaps be the motivational factor behind a change of audience, similar to the manner in
which an earlier “politics of nostalgia”31 saw an alliance between the working-class and
aristocracy in the eighteenth century. In 1816, the labourer, whose poverty keeps him
outside the pale of market pressures, comes to represent an authentic community, rather
than the middle-class farmer of Cobbett’s childhood recollections. But while the
confluence of neo-Harringtonian rhetoric and Paineite ideas allowed Cobbett to critique
the injustice meted out to the labouring community under the current system, his vision
suffers from the limitations of the “agrarian radical” position, where as Noel Thompson
observes, “writers in the radical press saw labour exploitation as a product of actions and

31 Isaac Kramnick’s term that attempts to explain the impetus behind an unlikely alliance
between displaced aristocracy that formed the “Bolingbroke Circle” and dispossessed
workers in the eighteenth century. Bolingbroke and his Circle: Politics of Nostalgia in the
Age of Walpole (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). Though not an
aristocrat, Cobbett carries over this political strain into a Paineite England.
decisions made with consciously exploitative intent, i.e. as a product of legislative or political rather than economic action” (Thompson 114). Politics of ‘presence’ displays a fundamental myopia with respect to the process of history, as can be seen from Cobbett’s understanding of the French Revolution. The critique of debt and taxation leads Cobbett to condemn the war against France (a complete reversal of his earlier position), which is now seen as an attempt to curb the process of radicalism in England. Where France had earlier provided an example for the inhumanity of the Jacobins, what became obvious now was the barbarity of the English government, whose object was “to make the French people miserable; to force back the Bourbons upon them as a means of making them miserable; to degrade France, to make people wretched; and then to say to their people of England, Look here: see what they have got by their attempts to obtain liberty!” (RR I 315). Further, the French Revolution is reclaimed as a typological precursor for change at home, where, “the cause of reform, which had never ceased to have supporters in England for a great many years, now acquired new life, and the Reformers urged the Parliament to grant reform, instead of going to war against the people of France” (Address 438).

While democratizing the neo-Harringtonian doctrine via Paine, Cobbett also performs a reverse move of appropriating Paine’s internationalist vision into an English locale, as an argument for and not against the English Constitution. Bringing home Paine’s bones not only indicated a re-inauguration of Paineite radicalism, but, significantly, a reconstruction of Paine’s identity within a tradition of English nonconformity, ignoring Paine’s internationalist focus. This insistence upon an English Paine assumes importance in light of the effect of French Revolution on English self-
identity. Among the various fictions of the revolution, David Simpson has identified one dominant strain within the English response that continues well into the twentieth century.\(^{32}\) English debates on the French Revolution that aligned themselves along a pro-Paine/Jacobin or a pro-Burke/Loyalist axis were conducted, according to Simpson, along the agon of French theory vs. English pragmatism, where the former was held responsible for the terror and violence generated by the attempt to construct a society from abstract principles. This myth was serviced in the construction of an anti-rationalist paradigm “that identified being ‘English’ with being against theory, against method, against rules and systems, and in favor of practicality, tolerance, compromise, and common sense, all the things that a methodized paradigm most visibly threatens” (Simpson 139). This is where Cobbett departs from Paine’s universalist gesture, by conflating a nationalist sentiment with an anti-theory bias that stressed the solidity of the written constitution. Appeals to reason and rational paradigms are carried into the concrete space of everyday life, symbolized by time-tested English traditions. In this context, the reclamation of the French Revolution has a double significance as both poison and cure. While it has use as a metaphoric threat for securing a reformist agenda, in Cobbett’s version, the Revolution simultaneously provides arguments against its method of a speculative and intellectual re-ordering of society. Therefore, even while embracing the French Revolution as a spontaneous movement of an oppressed people, Cobbett contrasts the English legacy of

Constitutionalism with French anarchy of thought and action, thus furthering his arguments for reform, rather than revolution:

It was the misfortune of the French people that they had no great and settled principles to refer to in their laws or history. They sallied forth and inflicted vengeance on their oppressors; but, for want of settled principles, to which to refer, they fell into confusion; they massacred each other; they next flew to a military chief to protect them even against themselves; and the result has been what we too well know. (Address 455)

While at one end of the spectrum Robespierre signified the practical threat of a social-intellectual project defined outside of history and tradition, at the other end was the ideological danger of purely intellectual activity, where a “verbose and obscure” Adam Smith, along with “population-check parson” Malthus and the “cant and affectation” of Methodist preachers conspired to hide “facts” from people. Against these two models—Robespierre and Malthus—Cobbett based his method upon “experience,” in the tradition of the self-styled English yeoman Arthur Young, who defined intellectual inquiry within an agrarian terrain: “I have been too long a farmer to be governed by any thing but events; I have a constitutional abhorrence of theory; of all trust in abstract reasoning; and consequently a reliance merely on experience, in other words, on events, the only principle worthy of an experimenter.” In Cobbett, the privileging of encounter over theory displaces a statistical approach by an active method that gathers knowledge by “[h]earing what gentlemen, farmers, tradesmen, journeymen, labourers, women, girls, boys and all have to say; reasoning with some, laughing with others and observing all that passes” (RR I 45).

33 Quoted in Simpson 137.
But this preference for encounter over intellect is not free of dangers. Burke deploys the same binary to devise a conservative agenda based on a “method of nature,” that, in Simpson’s words, configured “social and political life as a living organism (or sometimes a family) composed of variously active and harmlessly redundant elements all shuffling through time in a harmonious aggregate and at an instinctive slow rate of adaptation” (Simpson 136). What rescues Cobbett from falling into the trap of right-wing politics is, of course, the point of contestation. It is possible to surmise that Cobbett’s putative kinship with nature and community, albeit mythified and inadequate as a reference point for historical analysis, is also responsible for his circumvention of Burkean ideology. Radicalism is a fortunate accident that happens to Cobbett during his forays through an impoverished countryside marked by violence and repression. The memory of his father who “used to sit at the head of the oak table along with his men, say grace with them, and cut up the meat and pudding,” provides a chronotopic ideal with which to critique the present and map the future.

What is remarkable about Cobbett’s constellation of social ills and ideals is its heteroglossic quality, where a multiplicity of moral and political registers are effectively combined into a countertheatre of common sense that challenges prescriptive formulas (both nineteenth and twentieth-century ones). The energy of direct engagement comes together with a multifaceted narrative and reinforces the corporeal character of Cobbett’s encounter with his milieu. The connecting factor between eighteenth-century epistemology of physicalism and the narrative style of the travelogue *Rural Rides* may be located in Cobbett’s materialist analysis that waged a double war against enemies, by re-
defining the "real": one, by cataloguing the effects of war and taxation upon rural working classes, Cobbett provides substance for a subaltern perspective where capitalist schemes are made to face its necessary correlative of labour exploitation; and, two, by its style of inclusiveness and method of first-hand encounter, his narrative also presents an alternative to the Malthusian catalogue of numbers and statistics, and recontextualizes it within ideological processes. While it is possible to contest some of Cobbett’s facts and figures, especially with respect to his observations on rural depopulation, it is his narrative style and its feature of multi-layeredness that has relevance for an intellectual appraisal.

For modern readers of Cobbett, it is something of a minor shock-encounter to take in the entire breadth of Rural Rides and its quality of seamlessness that recreates a ‘pre-modern’ way of seeing, where topoi flow into one another, and the space of the body, physical landscapes and political events are the harmonic, yet, rude counterparts of a unified social ethos. In Cobbett’s writing, autobiography and political economy are one and the same discourse: enemies are to be identified by seemingly unrelated standards such as their animosity towards Cobbett and their knowledge of grammar, as well as their political ideologies. Raymond Williams captures the oneness of method and matter that characterized Cobbett’s writings as a function of a “personal” approach to political economy, where

... the whole man, with whole interests, is engaged at every turn: the politics, the prices, the methods of cultivation and breeding, the look of the people and the houses, the weather and the seasons, the meetings and the conversations, the histories and changes – all are learned and told in what seems and often is a form of writing, which not only in its opinions but in its most basic method is a radical journalism (very different from the ‘journalism’ of the one-way ‘reporter’). (Williams 25)
Yet, an unrestricted mingling of two disparate spaces--a self-referential epic adventure interwoven with the relativism of historical circumstance--exerts a strain on Cobbett’s narrative that veers between the two antagonistic extremities of ethnographic reportage. First, a deeply personal approach faces the danger of monologic obsession, not only in the construction of an epic selfhood, but also in the singularity of outlook that converts all observable phenomena into evidence of a corrupt system. This hermeneutic faces an uneasy reconciliation with the intimacy of an insider’s rendering of encounter, whose mode of perception and narration display an authentic and extensive knowledge of his community. The following passage typically combines both aspects of Cobbett’s narrative:

The landlady sent her son to get me some cream, and he was just such a chap as I was at his age. . . . This boy will, I dare say, perform his part at Billinghurst, or at some place not far from it. If accident had not shaken me from a similar scene, how many villains and fools, who have been well teased and tormented, would have slept in peace at night, and have fearlessly swaggered about by day! When I look at this little chap; at his smock-frock, his nailed shoes, and his clean, plain, coarse shirt, I ask myself, will anything, I wonder, ever send this chap across the ocean, to tackle the base, corrupt, perjured Republican Judges of Pennsylvania? Will this little lively, but, at the same time, simple boy, ever become the terror of villains and hypocrites across the Atlantic? (RR I 216-17)

While the method of immanence assumes the political form of an immediate and diachronic formulation of praxis with a clear naming of enemies, it also displays its worst moments when it capitulates into a self-gratificatory narrative of demon-martyr binaries.

34 The importance of this point is driven home by Cobbett himself: ‘All my plans in private life; all my pursuits; all my designs, wishes, and thoughts, have this one great object in view: The overthrow of the ruffian Boroughmongers. If I write grammars; is I write on agriculture; if I sow, plant, or deal in seeds; whatever I do has first in view the destruction of those infamous tyrants. PR, 14 August, 1819.
The stress on the personal, rather than institutional enemies (ignoring Paine’s stress on attacking principles rather than people), also dictates the strain of “radical demonology” in their writings, that according to Binfield, “permitted audience to rethink political and economic crises in terms of personal conflict rather than institutional processes” (160). In the zeal to declare himself a “self-dependent politician,”35 Cobbett turned to his “personal identity [as] the last refuge of integrity.”36 This meant de-linking himself not only from parliamentary factions, as can be seen from his refusal to write as a paid agent of the Pitt industry in his anti-Jacobin days, but also adopting a critical approach towards fellow-radicals, an attitude that disrupted the strength of a collective identity. Bamford’s account of a radical meeting highlights ill-concealed feelings of jealousy and animosity among gentlemen-leaders:

The absence of Baronet [Francis Burdett] was the subject of much observation by the delegates; and yet, in deference to his wishes . . . a resolution was introduced and supported by Cobbett, limiting the suffrage to householders. . . . Hunt treated the idea with little respect, and I thought he felt no discomfort at obtaining a sarcastic fling or two at the baronet. . . . The discussion proceeded for some time and no one grappled the objection; until, fearing a resolution would be adopted, I in a few words explained how universal suffrage might be carried into effect. . . . Hunt took up the idea, in a way which I thought rather annoyed Cobbett, who at length arose, and expressed his conviction of its practicability, giving me all the merit of his conversion. (Bamford 21)

Apart from the shortcomings of an ad hominem approach to politics, there was also the danger of leadership working a negative direction towards self-validation rather than common weal, with leaders such as Hunt and Cobbett jealously guarding public

35 From one of Cobbett’s Registers, quoted in Making 627.

esteem, even at the risk of compromising their mandate. The breakdown of the ideal of organic leadership is reflected as a crisis of representation, where, as Francis Place describes, “if none shows himself but Hunt, Hunt must be [the working people’s] man.”

The paternal ambition to guide the working class while feeding off their huzzahs of approbation, fits in neatly with the ideal of an agrarian power structure of freeholders. Civic duty intervenes to restore a hierarchical order against the excess of a class-for-itself, whereby “control, and compulsion [over servants], is not only the master’s right, but they are also included in his bounden duties. It is his duty to make them rise early, keep good hours, be industrious and careful, be cleanly in their persons and habits, be civil in their language” (RR I 356).

When measured against the generosity and boldness of Jacobin self-representation and ideals, middle-class radicalism falls short in many ways. The line that connected the professional intellectual and the professional revolutionary was divided by differing degrees of commitment, whereas E. P. Thompson points out, “the national leaders---Cobbett and Wooler with their pens, Hunt with his voice---were adept at pitching their rhetoric just on the right side of treason; but they laid themselves open... to the charge of encouraging other men to take illegal or treasonable actions, from the consequences of which they themselves escaped” (Making 626). But it is equally important to evaluate this leadership from the perspective of its dialogue with a burgeoning discourse of rationalism that sought to replace a collective cultural experience with a private indulgence in commodity. Though Cobbett may be guilty of converting every event into an exaggerated

37 Quoted in Making 630.
and self-referential narrative, it is also important to note that this vanity is morphologically different from the mass-egotism of modernity’s ‘one-dimensional society’ whose method of abstraction is central to a capitalist ethos that sequestered reason within ratiocination. Modernity’s structure of perception, inaugurated in Malthus’ and James Kay’s benevolent projects of quantifying and anatomizing the problem of poverty, coupled with Adam Smith’s conversion of labour into an abstract factor of production, signifies the breakdown of an intuitive and organic relationship with phenomena. Theodor Adorno indicates the shortcomings of an analytical structure that, at the behest of capitalism’s relentless quest for profit, substituted calculation for spontaneity, and method for intuition. In this version of scientific Enlightenment,

[a]n atom is smashed not in representation but as a specimen of matter, and the rabbit does not represent but, as a mere example, is virtually ignored by the zeal of the laboratory. . . . The multitudinous affinities between existents are suppressed by the single relation between the subject who bestows meaning and the meaningless object, between rational significance and the chance vehicle of significance. 3 8

This is where Cobbett’s method of physicalism assumes importance, which, against the “leveling domination of abstraction” insists on talking to the reader, explaining political and economic processes as lived encounters rather than as discrete objects of intellectual inquiry. The “THING,” Cobbett’s ‘concrete abstraction’ for political, economic, and social totality aptly captures the ineffable breadth of the “Pitt system” that affects individuals at multifarious levels, determining everything from family structure, food, clothing, values, and so on. Thus, in contrast with middle-class moral hegemony of

Hannah More and others, Cobbett is able to articulate a radically altered perspective that places questions of ethics within a macro-economic context: “But, who is to expect morality in a half-starved man, who is whipped if he do no work, though he has not, for his whole day’s food, so much as I and my little boy snapped up in six or seven minutes upon Stoke-Charity down?” (RR I 386-87).

Cobbett’s “Physical” Style

Cobbett’s narrative emphasizes a sensory interaction with the objective world. The descriptive cast of *Rural Rides* details all kinds of observable phenomena with uniform attention. Trivia about cows without horns, whose black or red spots ranged “from the size of a plate to that of a crown piece,” (RR I 8) are related with the same factual rigour as the story of “very pretty girls . . . ragged as colts, and pale as ashes” who go about with “blue arms and blue lips” on a cold frosty day (RR I 18). This basic preference for matter over ratiocination determines Cobbett’s system of values and tendencies even at a sub-political level: fertility of soil is preferred over picturesque

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39 Cobbett is very clear about his attitude towards charity and Sunday schools etc. For him they were part of a hegemonic order that sought to control by “coaxing work” and “comforting system.” While looking at a charity school, his response is critical: “I saw a School-house with this motto on it: ‘Train up a child as he should walk,’ &c. That is to say, try to breed up the Boys and Girls of this village in such a way, tat they may never know anything about Lord Abergavenny’s sinecure; or, knowing about it, that they may think it right that he should roll in wealth coming to him in such a way” (RR I 286). His counter to Hannah More—the “Old Bishop in Petticoats”—and her Cheap Repository Tracts that aimed at constructing the worker into a bourgeois subject is from an empathetic perspective: “Go to an ale house in an old enclosed county and there you will see the origin of poverty and poor rates. For whom are they to be sober? For whom are they to save? For the Parish? If I am sober, shall I have land for a cow? If I am frugal, shall I have an acre of potatoes? You offer no motives; you have nothing but a parish officer and a workhouse—bring me another pot” (RR II 13).
beauty, action rather than inspiration, sports over schools, sand-hill rather than Oxford and Cambridge, rootedness over mobility, frugality against commodity, country vs. city, and the list goes on. These isomorphs become especially interesting and revelatory when they come in conflict with each other, where preferences for picturesque beauty, institutions, mobility, commodity and so on, all become elements of the same capitalist ethos that Cobbett denounces.

At the very outset Cobbett reveals the possibilities and limits of a narrative shaped by an unrelenting faith in tactility. Riding through a foggy patch Cobbett declares with characteristic self-confidence:

> I am convinced that these fogs are dry clouds, such as those that I saw on the Hampshire-Downs. . . . It is the fogs that rise out of swamps, and other places, full of putrid vegetable matter, that kill people. . . . Thus the smell has a great deal to do with health. There can be no doubt that Butchers and their wives fatten upon the smell of meat. And this accounts for the precept of my grandmother, who used to tell me to bite my bread and smell to my cheese; talk, much more wise than that of certain old grannies, who go about England crying up “the blessings” of paper-money, taxes, and national debts. (RR I 2-3)

We can forgive Cobbett for his fatuous excess only because of the other purpose served by the sensory method, that is able to link up with a “customary consciousness” dictated by “common sense” to critique the present system. This preference for tradition over fashion, based on smell and touch also transmutes itself into the primacy of material over metaphysical, and the body over mind, “not ‘Religious Tracts,’ which would, if they could, make the labourer content with half-starvation, but . . . bread and cheese and beer, being firmly convinced, that it is the body that wants filling and not the mind” (RR I 127). Further, bodily language has an equally important role in the war against corruption.
Cobbett’s envisions himself as a ‘physical’ intellectual, not content with sparring only with words, but, when needed, with his considerable physical prowess. His confrontation with a gang of thugs hired to attack him is narrated with a sense of pride and pleasure: “I got many blows in the sides, and, if I had been either a short or a weak man, I would have been pressed under foot, and inevitably killed. . . I had to fight with my right hand. I had to strike back-handed . . .” (PR March 15, 1826). Physical pain and hunger are unsentimental facts that challenge the intellectual activity of “the metaphysical gentleman” who, according to Cobbett, should have “a spade put into his hands for ten days [and be] compelled to dig only just as much as one of the common labourers at Fulham,” before passing his judgments (RR II 77-78).

The moving force behind political consciousness is an encounter with spectacle that invests the worker’s wasted body, the “poor assemblage of skin and bones” with a revelatory function. For Cobbett, both the space of the body with its visible tribulations, and the physical topoi of rural England reveal the spatial practice of the “THING.” Through what James Mulvihill calls “the medium of landscape,” Cobbett points to locales such as the “very anti-Jacobin Hill,” or, Whitchurch, the site of money production (“the curse of England”) as “villanous” participants in the process of “unnatural changes.” Both bad roads and smooth roads (a “real stockjobber’s road”), represent the corruption of the “accursed Pitt system.” In the large picture the entire landscape of rural Britain is seen to bear the marks of a changing political and economic order. Where a Constable or

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Wordsworth might conceive of rural landscape in picturesque or reflective ways, Cobbett characteristically fastens on the issue of production and distribution. For him,

> [i]t is impossible to be upon this honey-combed hill; upon this enormous mass of anti-Jacobin expenditure, without seeing the chalk-cliffs of Calais and the corn-fields of France. At this season, it is impossible to see those fields without knowing that the farmers are getting in their corn there as well as here; and it is impossible to think of that fact without reflecting, at the same time, on the example which the farmers of France hold out to the farmers of England. Looking down from this very anti-Jacobin hill, this day, I saw the parsons' shocks of wheat and barley left in the field after the farmer had taken his away. Turning my head, and looking across the channel, “There,” said I, pointing to France, “There the spirited and sensible people have ridded themselves of this burden, of which our farmers so bitterly complain.” (RR I 315-16)

While Friedrich Engels would walk through the streets of Manchester a few years later to unearth the workings of political economy in a radically different landscape shaped industrial revolution, in Cobbett’s story it is underpopulated rural landscape that becomes a signifier of an oppressive system. Churches are devoid of congregation, and a “once populous village . . .” shows “indubitable marks of most melancholy decay”(RR II 176). “Unnatural changes” are responsible for the destruction of sensus communis: “the long oak-table,” a symbol of rootedness and communal values, may now end up at the “bottom of a bridge that some stock-jobber will stick up over an artificial river in his cockney garden” (RR I 347). Further, bourgeois notions of picturesque beauty that spoke of artifice rather than character are dismissed in one fell stroke: “There was a lion's mouth spouting out water into the lake, which was so much like the vomiting of a dog, that I could almost have pitied the poor Lion” (RR I 5).

The insertion of emaciated workers into the countryside not only critiques the Whig outlook of utilitarian improvement, but also threatens to expose romantic
landscapes of picturesque beauty and timeless values as ideologically suspect. Cobbett’s hermeneutic of suspicion refuses to partake of aesthetic pleasure untested by economic obligations. Thus, Cobbett “cannot forget” Lord Abergavenny’s sinecure, “received of the public money,” that allows him to buy his “very pretty place” (RR I 286). Landscape was first and foremost economic, not only in the sense of bearing class-distinctions through exchangeability and profit-controlled exploitation of labour, but also in its productive capacity, within a geological frame of richness or poorness of soil. Daniel Green reports that only a year before he died, Cobbett wrote, “I have, for my part, no idea of picturesque beauty separate from fertility of soil . . . if I must have one or the other, any body may have the picturesque beauty for me” (31). But this bias towards fecundity--once again demonstrating Cobbett’s preference for a materialist view, rather than a philosophic or aesthetic outlook--is always tied up with the preservation of community (the girls in the field are always his standard), an ideal that rescues him from the disruptive apathy of output-oriented Enclosure movements.

Apart from de-fetishizing the image of rural labourers, Cobbett’s intense performative drive can also form a useful context in which to analyze the romantic ideal of contemplative resignation from society and politics. At one level, Cobbett voices a similar faith in the wisdom of nature, rather than institutions, as celebrated by the romantics. But where a Wordsworth praises the sublime beauty of the lake district that endowed him with “spots of time,” in Cobbett we have something of a carnivalesque physical engagement with nature, that imparts the a material kind of wisdom to the subject. The “sand-hill” is the topos of enlightenment where sport meets education, “the
sort of education; and I am perfectly satisfied that if I had not received such an education.

. . that, if I had been brought up a milksop, with a nursery-maid everlastingly at my heels, I should have been at this day, as great a fool, as inefficient a mortal, as any of those frivolous idiots that are turned out from Winchester and Westminster School or from any of those dens of dunces called Colleges and Universities” (RR I 125). In another instance, the philosophy of vita activa is portrayed as an agonized moral choice between a practical obligation towards the community; and a spontaneous desire to retire into the lap of nature. While appreciating Sir Thomas Winnington’s beautiful estate, Cobbett dramatizes one of his rare, renunciatory impulses in the following way:

“Well then,” says the devil of laziness, “and could you not be contented to live here all the rest of your life; and never again pester yourself with the cursed politics?” “Why, I think I have laboured enough. Let others work now. And such a pretty place for coursing and for hare-hunting and woodcock shooting, I dare say; and then those pretty wild-ducks in the water, and the flowers and the grass and the trees and all the birds in spring and the fresh air, and never, never again to be stifled with the smoke that from the infernal Wen ascendeth for ever more, and that every easterly wind brings to choke me at Kensington!” The last word of this soliloquy carried me back, slap, to my own study . . . and bade me think of the complete triumph, that I have yet to enjoy: promised me the pleasure of seeing a million of trees of my own, and sown by my own hands this very year. Ah! But the hares and the pheasants and the wild ducks! Yes, but the delight of seeing Prosperity Robinson hang his head for shame: the delight of beholding the tormenting embarrassments of those who have so long retained crowds of base miscreants to revile me. . . .Yes, but, then, the flowers and the birds and the sweet air! What, then, shall Canning never again hear of the “reverend and ruptured Ogden!” . . . Oh! God forbid! Farewell hares and dogs and birds! (RR II 161-62)

This passage voices the multiple registers of a materialist approach. On the one hand the optimistic activist critiques the despair of romantic converts such as Thelwall who
buckled under an immense anti-Jacobin drive. Secondly, the prospect of picturesque landscape, worked upon by hired labour, is discarded for an unmediated link with the soil and “trees of my own.” Finally, the ideal of civic duty, dramatized as the joy of bullying parliamentarian villains into submission, gains preference over secluded consumption of nature. Although the subliminal force of this multiple critique is weakened by the unresolved issue of self-importance, Cobbett’s philosophy of praxis is interesting as a practical counterpart to the heterogeneous narrative. Praxis is dramatized at various levels, all of which contribute to an essential image of personal integrity and organic virtue. There is the intellectual work of a radical publisher and reformer, such as attending dinners and making speeches at radical meetings, recorded with special emphasis on his popularity with the audience. Further, as a “practical radical” Cobbett builds upon his agrarian experience to create a practico-gradualist subplot within the explosive narrative of reform. Rural landscape reveals not only the ravages of the “THING,” but also the “great additions to the wealth of the nation, introduced under the name of Cobbett,” such as the straw-plaiting scheme that saved many labouring families

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41 It should be pointed out that John Thelwall's sense of disenchantment in the later years of his life can be directly traced to the hard-hitting repressive measures adopted by upper classes, who were intimidated by the sight of miners, potters and cutlers reading Rights of Man. Gregory Claeys notes that “government spies followed Thelwall everywhere... His handbills were torn down as soon as they went up. Landlords were threatened with the loss of their licenses when they rented him premises, and gangs of loyalists thugs shadowed his footsteps.” The Politics of English Jacobinism : Writings of John Thelwall (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) xx. In this context, Thelwall’s turn to romanticism and his friends Wordsworth and Coleridge is understandable, though it should be kept in mind that Thelwall never completely gave up his activist duties. In spite of repression, he devised methods by which he could circumvent the Two Acts and Combination Laws, and commanded a huge audience for his lectures. What distinguishes him from the reactionary stance of his romantic friends is his response to the Terror in
Cobbett cleverly conflates field labour and intellectual labour to introduce a "radical system of husbandry" where one activity becomes a metaphor for the other:

[T]he main principle of this system is, that the root of the plant is to be fed by deep tillage, while it is growing; and, to do this we must have our wide distances. our system of husbandry is happily illustrative of our system of politics. Our lines of movement are fair and straightforward. We destroy all weeds, which, like taxeaters, do nothing but devour the sustenance that ought to feed the valuable plants. (RR I 33)

Praxis is also advanced from a personal level of persuasion, where the speaker's character is shown to live up to ethical standards, commensurate with the demands of integrity. Peter Spence explains this feature as the outcome of an emphasis on organicism that argues for both public and private virtue, whereby "romantic reformers made a personal issue of their morality and gave it a significance which otherwise might have been less important . . . [and] whereas the personal improprieties and inconsistencies of earlier reformers such as Wilkes, Paine and Fox did little to dent their popularity, those of the romantic radicals could be used as proof of their unreliability, at best, and potential treason, at worst" (Spence 170). In Rural Rides readers are presented with a second, behind-the-scenes narrative, of private praxis: giving advice to "poor assemblage[s] of skin and bones;" dissuading a crowd from exacting revenge upon a poor cabbage-stealer;

France: "equal rights and equal laws," was, he insisted, unrelated to what "a few ruffians" had perpetrated by dictatorial means.

42 Any bibliography of Cobbett's works reveals an astonishing number and variety of writings. Apart from political writings, there are works such as Cottage Economy, Grammar of the English Language, etc. that detail his contributions to gardening, farming and other domestic matters. Among other achievements he is also responsible for introducing a new type of locust tree to England, and a new variety of "Cobbett's corn."
sacrificing one’s own bread and cheese to provide food for the hungry poor; or giving
sixpence to a poor man “under the pretence of rewarding him for telling [him] the way to
Thursley, which [Cobbett] knew as well as he, and which I had determined, in my own
mind, not to follow” (RR II 24).

Conclusions

It is possible to say that Cobbett’s wish or claim to represent an authentic story of
the realities of working-class life is circumscribed by a conflicting set of demands that
impart him a liminal position in the long history of labour struggles. But perhaps the
shortcomings of a leadership impaired by a heightened sense of self-importance,
combined with what Harold Perkin views as the condescension of middle-class
intellectual towards the “deplorable-looking objects” of his benevolence,⁴³ may be
understood as elements of the dialectical process of history. In this analysis Cobbett and
his type represent a unique historical moment where a “restitutionalist” romanticism⁴⁴

⁴³ Harold Perkin has strongly cautioned students against what he perceives to be the
condescension of middle-class intellectuals towards the history and ethos of the working
classes. According to him, “ever since Marx and Engels, if not . . . James Mill and
Andrew Ure, English working people have not, until very recently, been allowed to have
their own history but have had it imposed upon them from above by self-appointed
champions and apologists from the ‘higher’ classes.” The Structured Crowd (Sussex:
Harvester Press, 1981) 168. Interestingly, his reading continues the theory vs. common
sense debates that we have touched upon, while favouring the “overdetermined”
contingencies of working class ethos against “vulgar Marxists.”

⁴⁴ Among the various “figures of romantic anti-capitalism” detailed by Robert Sayre and
Michael Lowy, “restitutionalist romanticism,” defined as “neither resigned to the
degraded present out of disenchanted realism nor oriented toward the future, toward
transcendence of both past and present, but rather calls for an actual return to the past that
is the object of nostalgia,” seems to fit Cobbett’s backward-looking politics. “Figures of
Romantic Anti-Capitalism,” Spirits of Fire: English Romantic Writers and Contemporary
Historical Methods, ed. G. A. Rosso and Daniel P. Watkins (London: Associated
University Presses, 1990) 40.
joins hands with a displaced and rebellious labouring class to forever alter both their destinies. We look back at Cobbett now, from the vantage point of a chronotope that daily reinforces the vapidity and violence of the much abhorred “speculative” system and feel the need to painfully and methodically chart out every little component of that long historical process that has now left us with very little other than “constant anxiety, constant desire to overreach; constant apprehension: general gloom, enlivened, now and then, by a gleam of hope or of success” (AUTO 72). Agonistic binaries are important for dialectical thought and more so in Cobbett’s case, who always located himself in an oppositional role, playing the self-proclaimed martyr to the corrupt demons. But while Cobbett constructs himself within epic narratives, we may perhaps contextualize him within a contentious confrontation of “rational” and “traditional” values in nineteenth-century Britain. Against the drive towards a utilitarian and scientific domination of nature conducted under auspices of calculative reason, whose full effect continues to unfold even today, Cobbett argues fiercely and passionately for the values of a “traditional society.” Habermas sheds lights upon the characteristics and limitations of the traditionalist argument that defined itself against “rational” paradigms:

[t]he expression “traditional society” refers to the circumstance that the institutional framework is grounded in the unquestionable underpinning of legitimation constituted by efficacy of cultural traditions. This is the basis for the “superiority” of the institutional framework, which does not preclude structural changes adapted to a potential surplus generated in the economic system but does preclude critically challenging the traditional form of legitimation.45

In Cobbett's version of traditional society all elements tie up nicely into a patriarchal order, enunciated fully in his *Advice to Young Men and (incidentally) to Young Women*. This text lays out the principles of a property-based society whose moral fabric is based upon ideals of work ethic, deference to authority, and frugality in a society increasingly discovering the lure of commodities, "the evil . . . [of] imaginary wants . . . [and] unnecessary enjoyments" (Advice 59). The rudiments of civil society also include details about the domestic sphere of activity. Women and men are advised that "[t]he wife ought to be heard, and patiently heard; she ought to be reasoned with, and, if possible, convinced; but if, after all endeavours in this way, she remain opposed to the husband's opinion, his will must be obeyed, or he at once becomes nothing; she is, in fact, the master, and he is nothing but an insignificant inmate" (Advice 184). While challenge to authority proceeds as a defence of custom, albeit of an unworthy patriarchal order, Cobbett's attack on democratic models based on individualist freedom reveals an important point. Reference to the past enables a critical look at the present, where a society based upon wage labour appears analogous to a slave order, rather than an improvement, and that "vassalage, only under other names, exists now as completely as it

46 William Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men and (incidentally) to Young Women in the Middle & Higher Ranks of Life, in a Series of Letters Addressed to a Youth, a Bachelor, a Lover, a Husband, a Father, a Citizen, or a Subject by William Cobbett* (London: B. Bensley, 1926).

47 For whatever it is worth, it should be noted that Cobbett did take his civic duties seriously. As a landlord, his dealings with an old cottager, living in retirement on the farm at Botley shows paternalistic ideals in action: "The old man paid me no rent; when he died I had a headstone put to his grave to record, that he had been an honest, skilful, and industrious labouring man; and I gave his widow a shilling a week as long as I was at Botley." Quoted in *Making* 760.
existed then” (RR I 228-29). But this radical insight that isolatedly contains all the elements of a theory of historical materialism is yet unable to formulate itself into the epochal vision that “the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles.” Atavistic thought is unable to contain the full significance of the emergence of a class-divided society, an event that strikes Cobbett with the force of an indefinable phenomenon that neither past nor present structures can satisfactorily explain or resolve.

Though labour can be contained within an ethical model whereby labouring classes are seen as deserving of franchise, the lowest rung of capitalist society, “mere menial servants, vagrants, pickpockets and scamps of all sorts,” remain outside of the pale of civic identity. What becomes obvious from these points is the lack of a paradigm where the working class could be given the status of a “class-for-itself.” The force of hunger that would bring about change will somehow stop short of realizing the spectacle of dehumanization and breakdown of communal bonds, already set into motion by wage labour:

> If one could suppose the power of doing what they liked placed in the hands of the labouring classes; if one could suppose such a thing as this, which was never yet seen; if one could suppose anything so monstrous as that of a revolution that would leave no public authority any where; even

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48 *The Communist Manifesto* 473. In this interesting encounter with historical formations outside the range of his perceptions, Cobbett comes close to deserving Marx’s rage against the feudal socialists, though I would once again argue that Cobbett is more critically conscious than Marx envisages. Marx says, “In pointing out that their mode of exploitation was different to that of bourgeoisie, the feudalists forgot that they exploited under circumstances and conditions that were quite different, and that are now antiquated. In showing that, that, under their rule, the modern proletariat never existed, they forgot that the modern bourgeoisie is the necessary offspring of their own form of society.” *The Communist Manifesto* 492. Cobbett’s inability to resolve the argument whether the slaves were better off in feudal or modern society indicates a crack in the well-rounded and self-deluded structure that Marx proposes here.
in such a case, it is against nature to suppose, that the people would come and turn him out of his house and leave him without food; and yet that they must do to make him, as a landholder, worse off than he is; or, at least, worse off than he must be in a very short time” (RR I 198).

Other lived spaces of the new social experience also escape Cobbett’s net of significations. While he is able to point out the hegemonic function of Methodism that sought to control the labouring masses by educating them, Cobbett is unable to understand its lure as a “psychic masturbation” for the hopeless worker. In Cobbett’s

49 E. P. Thompson’s uses this term to indicate the seducement of “Methodist” rituals that were available as an alternate group experience. Cobbett’s criticism of the Methodist community, though insightful in some ways, does not understand the power it had over the workers. Cobbett responds to Methodist experience in three ways. First, he criticises the preacher for lack of feeling (a curious move, in light of the emotional frenzy associated with Methodist rituals):

[The preacher] called upon them to subscribe with all their hearts; but alas! how little of persuasive power was there in what he said! No effort to make them see the use of the schools. . . . No argument, in short, nor anything to move. No appeal either to the reason, or to the feeling. All was general, commonplace, cold observation; and that, too, in language which the far greater part of the hearers could not understand.” Secondly, workers are blamed for falling prey to the Methodist lure: “What silly; nay, what base creatures those must be, who really give their money, give their pennies, which ought to buy bread for their own children; who thus give their money to these lazy and impudent fellows, who call themselves ministers of God, who prowl about the country living easy and jovial lives upon the fruit of the labour of other people. However, it is, in some measure, these people’s fault. . . . I wish to see every labouring man well fed and well clad; but, really, the man who gives any portion of his earnings to these fellows, deserves to want: he deserves to be pinched with hunger: misery is the just reward of this worst species of prodigality.”

Third, there is a faint recognition of the power of “psychic masturbation,” but Cobbett cleverly measures that against his own brand of activism: “Men are sometimes pretty nearly bewitched without knowing how. Eyes do a good deal, but tongues do more. . . . The parson seemed to be fully aware of the importance of this part of the ‘service.’ . . . [T]he parson read, or gave out, the verses, in a singularly soft and sighing voice, with his head on one side, and giving it rather a swing. I am satisfied, that the singing forms great part of the attraction. Young girls like to sing; and young men
physical method, the “poor assemblage of skin and bones” is unable to escape his significatory role to reveal a private dimension of selfhood.

Friedrich Engels provides a different perspective a decade later, where the British working classes are given the important task of ushering in a socialist utopia by reconciling “philosophical Germany, “political France” and “social England.” Engels already displays the quintessential modernist dilemma of perception, where the quest for facts--“more than a mere abstract knowledge of [his] subject”--is circumscribed by the objective of “provid[ing] solid ground for socialist theories.” 50 Here, some elements of Cobbett’s method--primacy of the senses, and personal encounter with working men and women in their own homes--are injected with a dose of scientific theory, that, while arguing for the importance of structural thought, falls prey to the very system it wishes to transcend. 51 What we understand is that synchronically-regulated perceptions of both kind--spontaneity as well as formula--are inadequate in the final analysis. But Cobbett does inspire us with his indefatigable will-to-action in an age marked by postmodern

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like to hear them. Nay, old ones too; and as I have just said, it was the singing that drew me three hundred yards down the street at Tenterden, to enter this meeting-house. By-the-by, I wrote some Hymns myself, and published them in ‘Twopenny Trash.’ I will give any Methodist parson leave, to put them into his hymn book.” (RR I 299-301)


51 In my reading of Engels’ Condition of the Working Class in England in the next chapter, I attempt to locate Engels’ spatial analysis of the topos of Manchester within a modernist formula of abstract reasoning. While privileging a “scientific” method that reduces the object of the gaze (the industrial worker) to the role of an example, Engels filters out any private encounter of space, thus reproducing the same conceptual structure of bourgeois society that he seeks to critique.
indolence. His optimism in some ways outlives his limitations, and imparts us with a fresh energy to proceed with our own battles. Notwithstanding criticisms about his incapacity “to comprehend the march of modern history” (Communist Manifesto 491) Cobbett shows us yet another way of arriving at the much-desired “end” of history,

when millions of long-suffering creatures will be in a state that they and you now little dream of. All that we now behold of combinations, and the like, are mere indications of what the great body of suffering people feel, and of the thoughts that are passing in their mind. The coaxing work of schools and tracts will only add to what would be quite enough without them. There is not a labourer in the whole country, who does not see to the bottom of this coaxing work. They are not deceived in this respect. Hunger has opened their eyes. (RR I 392)
CHAPTER 5
"MORE THAN ABSTRACT KNOWLEDGE": FRIEDRICH ENGELS IN
INDUSTRIAL MANCHESTER

Oh, blank confusion! true epitome
Of what the mighty City is herself
To thousands upon thousands of her sons,
Living amid the same perpetual whirl
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity, by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end--
Oppression, under which even the highest minds
Must labour, whence the strongest are not free. ¹

Overview

In his book Marxism and the City, Ira Katznelson, while lamenting the
disappearance of spatial elements within Marxist thought, points to Friedrich Engels’

Condition of the Working Class in England as an ur-text that is able to provide “positive
specification of the mechanisms linking base and superstructure.”² As a corrective to the
narrowly ‘scientific’ strain of Marxism that privileged “structure” over “agency,”
Katznelson views Engels’ early text on the industrial city of Manchester as the bearer of a
double message: “Writing at the precise branching moment of the emergence of the
modern industrial city, [Engels] connected the development of this new urban form to the
epochal changes of the industrial revolution; he showed how changes in organization of

¹ William Wordsworth, The Prelude; or, Growth of a Poet's Mind (London: Oxford

city space affected social relationships within and between classes; and he tied this social geography to the suffering and coming to consciousness of the new proletariat” (Katznelson 144). In this critical exchange between “base” and “superstructure,” where Marxism becomes a tool for reading the city, and the city a space for revising Marxist method, class consciousness gets redefined as “urban consciousness,” thus supplanting the site of resistance and change from the arena of production of space to the psycho-social experience of it.

Engels’ explorations of Manchester in The Condition of Working Class in England not only provide an alternative model of social morphology, but also indicate the methods by which space and economy may be integrated within Marxist critical discourse. It is the latter proposition—the insertion of spatial issues into Marxism as an attempt to grasp the totality of social experience—and its effects on (class)consciousness that I am particularly interested in. While I largely agree that Engels performs the important task of inscribing economic processes within spatial configurations (and vice-versa), I nevertheless see it as an incomplete gesture that remains subservient to the very structure of capitalist space that it attempts to critique. But my analysis is

3 Katznelson describes the changed ethos in the following way:

The effects of the explosion of knowledge and its impact on production and human relations have included the refashioning of space, the autonomous assertion of the urban, and the planned development of cities as new kinds of fields of invention, production, and play. This basic change has invalidated the traditional Marxist view of how human liberation might occur, but it did not negate either the idea or the possibility of such liberation. A decisive shift had occurred. The vision of a non-exploitative society must now focus on the city and on urban relationships, not, as before, principally on the ownership or organization of industrial production” (Katznelson 95).
underscored by a dialectical model within Marxist epistemology that takes seriously Engels' own wisdom regarding his early work: "My book represents one of the phases of [Socialism's] embryonic development; and as the human embryo, in its early stages, still reproduces the gill-arches of our fish-ancestors, so this book exhibits everywhere the traces of the descent of modern Socialism from one of its ancestors, German philosophy."^4

Henri Lefebvre's seminal work *The Production of Space* attempts the complex task of unifying the configuration of space in capitalist society by proposing a dynamic model where space is not only a product to be consumed but, also, a "means of production" that determines "networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy."^5 This seamless view complements the spatial analyses of David Harvey^6 and others by expanding the experience of space into a three-fold locus of representation: "spatial practice" or the knowledge, both philosophical as well as material, deriving from a given mode of perception; "representation of space" or the conception of that space within the physical realm, which underlies architecture and urban planning etc.; and "representational space" or the space of the everyday, lived realities. For Lefebvre the

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^6 While tracing David Harvey's contributions to the field of social geography Katznelson points to Harvey's seminal discovery in *Social Justice and the City* that "Spatial forms are . . . seen not as inanimate objects within which social processes unfolds, but as things which 'contain' social processes in the same manner that social processes are spatial" (Katznelson 105).
"perceived," "conceived," and "lived" exist as a unity (even if the individual elements appear to contradict each other) at any given time in society, enabling the return of subjectivity to the privileged, intellectual space of analysis and theory. Lefebvre's insertion of the subject’s mental and bodily configurations is crucial for Engels' project. By evoking Lefebvre's categories to understand Engels’ multifarious responses to the modern city, I address the inadequacies of the latter’s spatial practice, and attempt to give a new direction to the unfinished project of history. In a situation where the third world is generating new Manchesters to avoid the ‘pain of extinction’ under the onslaught of global capitalism, it is important to visit the originary moments of cities such as Manchester, armed with lessons of history. Reciprocally, Marxist critics like Lefebvre and Harvey, who deal with the space of advanced capitalist societies, thus become relevant for examining themes of mid-nineteenth century urban society. To retrace the roots of the modern city is also to retrace the routes/roots of Marxism, under the compelling notion that Marxist modernity is made possible only by the topos of the city.

While *The Condition of Working Class in England* may be situated within epistemological frameworks of mid-nineteenth century England, there is also the important question of the subject, Engels, whose carefully-constructed walks around Manchester bring ethnographic dilemmas of subject-object mediation to the text. George Marcus has identified two ethnographic methods that are relevant for contextualizing Engels’ position of as a “midwife.” According to Marcus, a narrative that idealizes objective observation may take any of these forms to mediate the gap between analytical models, and the experience of space:
First, by sequential narrative and the effect of simultaneity, the ethnographer might try in a single text to represent multiple, blindly interdependent locales, each explored ethnographically and mutually linked by the intended and unintended consequences of activities between them... the point of this kind of project would be to start with some prior view of a system and to provide ethnographic account of it, by showing the forms of local life that the system encompasses, and then lead into novel or revised views of the nature of the system itself, translating its abstract qualities into more fully human terms... In the second, much more manageable, mode, the ethnographer constructs the text around a strategically selected locale, treating the system as background, albeit without losing sight of the fact that it is integrally constitutive of cultural life within the bounded subject matter. The rhetorical and self-conscious emphasis on the strategic and purposeful situating of ethnography is an important move in such works, linking it to broader issues of political economy.  

Engels' "spatial practice" may be located in the movement of his narrative from the second mode of representation to the first, where a "readerly" text built on claims of detachment and immediacy of observation, ends up foregrounding principles of historical materialism as an a priori model for understanding the working classes of England. This latter method, that shares the Enlightenment epistemology of abstraction, also conspires to suppress "representational" spaces of self-consciousness in a double move of author-ity, where in Paul Rabinow's words, "[a]n experiential 'I was there' element establishes the unique authority [of Engels' observations]... [and] its suppression in the text establishes [his] scientific authority." 

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8 Paul Rabinow, "Representations are Social Facts: Modernity and Postmodernity in Anthropology," Writing Culture 244.
It is precisely on the issue of the morphology of space that my analysis challenges both Engels and Katznelson, by introducing, in Harvey’s words, “the space of the body, of consciousness of the psyche--spaces kept too long repressed, given the absolute suppositions of Enlightenment thought.” My essay is divided into two parts to cover the wide range of themes that such a project entails. The first part situates Engels within certain epistemological traditions of nineteenth century thought that direct his perceptions of Manchester. I use the figure of a contemporary writer, James Kay, as a contrapuntal voice to highlight Engels’ investment in, and departure from, certain strains of nineteenth-century thought. The second part of the essay returns the observer to his field of view, the city-space of Manchester, and Engels’ experiences within it. In some ways the second part acts as a locale/‘representation of space’ to the first part that deals with spatial practices.

In-Sight

In 1842, twenty-two year old Friedrich Engels, a Young-Hegelian-turned-Communist, son of an affluent manufacturer of sewing threads, came to the industrial town of Manchester with the intent of uniting business interests with his newly found political aspirations. In the Preface to the first German edition of The Condition of the Working Class in England, Engels declares that “proletarian conditions exist in their classical form, in their perfection, only in the British Empire, particularly in England proper” (Condition 12). Engels’ self-appointed task as an intellectual was to enlighten the masses about a history of working-class oppression.

hidden in the topos of prosperous Manchester. An archaeology of space, conducted under the aegis of dialectical thought would reveal the blueprint of history as it moved to its putative telos of a socialist society. In that spirit the work is addressed to the “Working Classes of Great Britain,” members of the “Family of ‘One and Indivisible’ Mankind,” the would-be architects of a radically altered social space. The book, also written for “German Countrymen,” has a typological significance for the historically backward working-classes of Germany (and the rest of Europe) as stated in the Preface:

And while the conditions of existence of Germany's proletariat have not assumed the classical form that they have in England, we nevertheless have, at the bottom, the same order. . . . In the meantime, however, the established fact of wretched conditions in England will impel us to establish also the fact of wretched conditions in Germany and will provide us with a yardstick wherewith to measure the extent and the magnitude of the danger . . . . (Condition 13)

Engels’ choice of Manchester as a locale for understanding dialectical materialism reflects a popular intellectual response to the industrial city that saw Manchester as a symbol of a sui generis society, an archetype of a social order based on self-generated definitions of ethics and human relations. Asa Briggs calls Manchester the “shock city”\(^{10}\) of the nineteenth century, where great advancements in manufacture were accompanied

\(^{10}\)The idea of a new social order not only sparked the imagination of various novelists of the age, but also influenced the language of political economy, and gave rise to the putative “Manchester School” (a term coined by Disraeli in 1846) that came to be identified as a fallout of the new social order. One contemporary summed up the perceptions of Manchester in the following way: “The whole kingdom has seen that district which it condemned as a region of grinding capitalists, without a thought save of cotton and stunted serfs . . . suddenly dart into magnificent political energy and power, found a new economic and social system; and by the peculiar clearheadedness of its views, and the still more peculiar working energy of its people, triumphantly direct the policy of the land.” Quoted in Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) 125.
by a bold display of unsympathetic class relations. Nineteenth-century responses to the contradictory legacy of the new manufacturing system may be divided into two broad categories. The ‘romantic’ response sought to capture the psycho-social effects of the modern city through an integration of a variety of spatial experiences using the heteroglossic space of fiction. Elizabeth Gaskell’s portrait of the manufacturing town of in *North and South* presents Milton as the economic space of industrial-capitalist society, whose organizational feature of production-relations distinguished it from London’s self-conscious urbanism and Helstone’s rural bliss. This portrait uses Manchester as a site for enacting out the ‘condition of England’ debate against the backdrop of the chaos of the industrial city, where the smoke and squalor of the busy streets is complemented by “battle of the classes.”11 While there is an inherent criticism of the division of city-space into disparate domains of the bourgeoisie and the working class, the novel resolves class-conflict through the trope of marriage, where the ‘countrified’ heroine Margaret Hale, brings taste and tolerance into the austere bourgeois house of the entrepreneur-capitalist, Thornton. Charles Dickens’ portrait of “Coketown” in *Hard Times*,12 extends Gaskell’s criticism beyond mere descriptions of filth and poverty to critique the larger spatial architectonic of capitalist society itself. Dickens’ radical vision reveals the process of the production of space where the poverty of working class neighbourhoods are interlinked with the spaces of the factory and the school, and where the monotonous “piston of the steam engine” conspires with “triumph of fact” (Dickens


60) to homogenize people and places. The novel opens in the topos of the schoolroom where the spatial practice of capitalism becomes evident. Both human subjects as well as city-spaces are annihilated in the relentless quest for profit. Social relations become power relations even in the very positioning of the observing eye:

The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.(Dickens 7-8)

The configuration of human subjects as passive vessels is paralleled by an aggressive use of material space according to the demands of production. In one perceptive image Dickens captures the process of annihilation of space by time that was to characterize later half of the nineteenth century.

Dickens’ critique is invaluable as it disrupts the other, “scientific” perception of space in the nineteenth century, whose method of abstraction is central to the capitalist ethos. In contrast with the “lived” aspect of romantic experience, where individual fates are altered with the same fluidity as external topoi, the “scientific” mode allied itself with the practical task of taking stock of the new social fabric generated by capitalism. David Harvey connects this method of “perspectivism” to Enlightenment’s epistemology of quantification, whose tendencies of rationalization and homogenization were amenable to the capitalist production relations:

The conquest and control of space . . . first requires that it be conceived of as something usable, malleable, and therefore capable of domination through human action. Perspectivism and mathematical mapping did this by conceiving of space as abstract, homogenous, and universal in its qualities, a framework of thought and action that was stable and knowable. Euclidean geometry provided the basic language of discourse. Builders, engineers, architects, and land managers for their part showed how Euclidean representations of objective space could be converted into a
spatially ordered physically landscape. Merchants and landowners used such practices for their own class purposes, while the absolutist state . . . likewise relished the capacity to define and produce spaces with fixed spatial co-ordinates. (Harvey 254)

There are two things of interest in linking Engels with the “scientific” conception of space: the extent to which this hermeneutic of transparency circumscribes Engels’ vision of a new society, especially as a response to capitalist appropriation of space; and the nexus between the spatial practice of mapping/planning and the containment of class-consciousness.

Engels’ scientific mapping of class-consciousness in Manchester presents itself as a critique of middle-class responses to the working class, which characteristically deflected the theme of exploitation into issues of urban sanitation and sexual excesses without reference to the structures that created these conditions. Pamphlets such as James Kay’s *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* which ran into two editions in 1832, followed by Peter Gaskell’s *The Manufacturing Population of England in 1833* and Edwin Chadwick’s *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842) are interesting as ideological utterances of social investigators-cum-surgeons, who also represented the interests of the burgeoning business community of Manchester. Kay’s observations on the poverty-ridden parts of the city display the limits of bourgeois structures of perception that contained the double legacy of industrialization by a "technoideological coding"13 of what Mary Poovey calls the “anatomical realism”14 of

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13 Evan Watkins’ useful term explains how hegemony works within power structures: "Technoideological coding permits the internalization of changing conditions as within the range of ideological signification from the beginning, with the result that dominant
nineteenth-century discourse:

... we have exposed, with a faithful, though friendly hand, the condition of the lower orders connected with the manufactures of this town, because we conceive that the evils affecting them result from foreign and accidental causes. A system, which promotes the advance of civilisation, diffuses it all over the world which promises to maintain the peace of nations, by establishing a permanent international law, founded on the benefits of commercial association, cannot be inconsistent with the happiness of the great mass of people.\textsuperscript{15}

The proliferation of such medical investigators in nineteenth-century Manchester, as well as the advancement of a cause-and-effect terminology into discourse of social analysis deserves further elaboration. The empirical method of "anatomical realism" was predicated upon the primacy of the observer's gaze as a pedagogical tool of social experience and has multiple registers of significance, from presaging the encounter

\hspace{1in}\underline{\text{ideologies need not be expected to appear coherent and stable by means of freezing a temporarily existing configuration of social position under the sign of some universalized model. Rather than such adaptation to new conditions made visible across a map of structural exchange between nature and the social field, positional dominance as technoideologically coded requires a continual production of new terms defining the social field.}" Thowaways: Work Culture and Consumer Education (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1993) 4.}

\textsuperscript{14} Mary Poovey has identified this heuristic method as a version of "anatomical realism," conducted by a scientific inquiry governed by three assumptions about the relationships among phenomena, representation and knowledge: (1) Complex phenomena or problems should be approached through analysis, which consists of reducing complexities into simpler elements or problems; (2) solutions to complex problems should then be reached through synthesis, which recombines the results of analysis into a new, comprehensible (mental) whole; and (3) these methods are independent of their subject matter and can therefore be applied to any phenomenon, including social problems." Mary Poovey, Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 27-28

between subject and phenomena, to modernity's drive towards a rational society. The institutionalization of space, with the establishment of the Manchester Statistical Society in 1833 (spearheaded by Kay) and Manchester Improvement Committee in 1844 and later, the public park, Free Library and Manchester University for the pursuit of culture and knowledge, is the social outcome of the method of abstraction and isolation. The growing ranks of industrialists and middle classes, in an effort to make Manchester respectable, and also in the fear of epidemics that did not distinguish between classes, turned towards the disease and filth of the working classes. Malthus' statistical method and Mills' model of political economy provided the necessary legitimation of "reason" for men like Edwin Chadwick, Kay and their associates, who went forth to rectify the moral and physical condition of the "lower orders." The sanitary ideal of a rational society not only configured politico-economic processes and their effects on the working classes in medical terms of hygiene and moral terms of depravation, but also rendered the encounter with the working class at a statistical remove from reality. Michel Foucault's analysis of eighteenth-century medical

16 Steven Marcus traces the path of this institutional drive to its origins in the Poor Law Reform Act of 1832 (also known as the New Poor Law) that, according to "provided England with a new model of administrative machinery centralized decision-making on substantive issues of policy, professionalized civil servants, bureaucratic rationality." Steven Marcus, *Engels, Manchester, and the Working Class* (New York: Random House, 1974) 18.

17 Mills' utilitarian philosophy prescribes hegemony through middle-class paternalism built on the notion that "the prospect of the future depends on the degree in which [the working class] can be made rational beings." *Principles of Political Economy* (New York: Appleton, 1908) 311. Dickens' radical critique in *Hard Times* not only explodes that ideal through the figures of Thomas Gradgrind and Bounderby, but also subverts the primacy of reason by equating it with inhumanity.
practice provides an insight into the clinical perceptions of nineteenth-century investigators. Foucault highlights a three-fold spatialization—"primary," "secondary" and "tertiary"—implicit in the localization of the body of the sufferer under the suzerainty of the doctor/observer's gaze, the "speaking eye [that] would be the servant of things and the master of truth." The observing eye of medical men like Kay, and even the materialist Engels, is built upon a primacy of the visual that influences their ideological projects in different ways. The process of abstraction that underlies the "strange character of the medical gaze" is described by Foucault in the following way:

In order to know the truth of the pathological fact, the doctor must abstract the patient: He who describes a disease must take care to distinguish the symptoms that necessarily accompany it, and which are proper to it, from those that are only accidental and fortuitous, such as those that depend on the temperament and age of the patient. Paradoxically, in relation to that which he is suffering from, the patient is only an external fact; the medical reading must take him into account only to place him in parentheses. It is not the pathological that functions, in relation to life, as a counter-nature, but the patient in relation to the disease itself. (Birth 8)

We may extend the implications of the gaze to its hegemonic function as the spatial practice of capitalist society. Marx's discovery "that the worker does not make use of the working conditions" in the factory system, but that "the working conditions make use of the worker; [and that] it takes machinery to give this reversal a technically concrete form," not only bears a homology with the replacement of the patient by the disease, but also points to the way hegemony works in modern societies, by always-already containing

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the encounter between peoples and classes. Kay's discourse replicates this process of abstraction by severing the homology between disease of the body and disease engendered by the body politic. The disease suffered by the "lower orders" in Manchester, and Manchester's disease of the "lower orders" are both "accidental" and "foreign" to the space of political economy, rather than an organic component of the manufacturing system. In Kay's "friendly" inspection it is imperative to observe "objectally" as well as objectively under the auspices of clinical expressionism which will necessary preclude any personal (accidental/foreign) details such as history or context. The diseased part had to be administered (and that is a word that medical practitioners and statesmen would agree upon) a cure which came in the form of Borough Police Act of 1844 and Sanitary Improvement Act of 1845.

Against Kay's emphasis on the "accidental" and "foreign" causes, Engels' science of dialectical materialism reads the situation as the fallout of a politico-economic system called the "industrial epoch:"

Everything which here arouses horror and indignation is of recent origin, belongs to the industrial epoch. The couple of hundred houses, which belong to old Manchester, have been long since abandoned by their original inhabitants; the industrial epoch alone has crammed into them the swarms of workers whom they now shelter; the industrial epoch alone has built up every spot between these old houses to win a covering for the masses whom it has conjured hither from the agricultural districts and

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20 An instructive term used by Lefebvre to indicate the method of abstraction. According to him, "abstract space functions 'objectally,' as a set of things/signs and their formal relationships: glass and stone, concrete and steel, angles and curves, full and empty. Formal and quantitative, it erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity). The signification of this ensemble refers back to a sort of super-signification which escapes meaning's net: the functioning of capitalism, which contrives to be blatant and covert at one and the same time" (Lefebvre 51).
from Ireland; the industrial epoch alone enables the owners of these cattleshed to rent them for high prices to human beings, to plunder the poverty of the workers, to undermine the health of thousands, in order that they alone, the owners, may grow rich. In the industrial epoch alone has it become possible that the worker scarcely freed from feudal servitude could be used as mere material, a mere chattel; that he must let himself be crowded into a dwelling too bad for every other, which he for his hard-earned wages buys the right to let go utterly to ruin. (Condition 35)

In his refreshing reading, Engels conflates oppression and injustice with mobility and change, and highlights the debilitating effects of unrestrained and rapid reordering of physical space and human life conducted under capitalism's epistemology of transience. The modern city is not so much the space of chaos as it seemed to be to its inhabitants, but rather the "systematic shutting out of the poor." Not only is physical space colonized by capital's unfettered quest for profit, but the worker's body also displays unprecedented horrors of poverty and underpaid labour. In one of the many examples of death and decay to be found in the text, Engels tells of the fate of one Ann Galway from Surrey:

She lay dead beside her son upon a heap of feathers which were scattered over her almost naked body, there being neither sheet nor coverlet. The feathers stuck so fast over the whole body that the physician could not examine the corpse until it was cleansed, and then found it starved and scarred from the bites of vermin. (Condition 42)

While such an examination of capitalism's annihilation of space in the worker's body is instructive for a revolutionary project, it is still crucial to understand meta-structure of Engels' demystifying gaze, that, in a rudimentary dimension, is continuous with the capitalist inheritance of Enlightenment's homogenized space. Spatial practice extends not only from the observing, ethnographic eye that renders the observed phenomenon transparent, but, more importantly, from the self-conscious location of that reflective self within the observed community (of workers), as well as the jargon of authenticity that
underscores the method of observation. While Engels' humanist vision attempts to negotiate with the idea of a rationally-ordered discourse of distance and facts, it remains deeply circumscribed by the "anatomical realism" of nineteenth-century scientific discourse. This structure of perception interpellates Engels' consciousness by configuring the observer as an ‘outsider,’ an analytic stance that dramatizes the dilemma of narratorial authority.

Before we proceed to examine Engels' spatial practice, it is imperative to highlight the various contexts that map the observer's field of view. While it is every ethnographer's burden to deal with the limitations of the “outsider” posture, Engels' observational distance is intermeshed with other crises of identifications. In Engels' case the desire to be vindicated by the working classes of Manchester is closely tied with a self-consciousness about his German identity that leads his discourse to alternate between two contradictory moments of poison and cure, where the foreign intruder is identified as the cause of the disease (in the example of the Irish immigrant), as well as the cure (prescribed by Engels, the German philosopher). We will soon examine the implications of this extraordinary binary as the nadir of a medical gaze that is built on the principle of exclusions. Interestingly, the dilemmas of selfhood are further complicated by the fact that Engels hails from a bourgeois background. As an employee his father's company, during work hours he is compelled to oppress the same workers whose freedom he uphold during leisure hours. As his letter to Marx indicates, this doubleness of identity was a source of concern for Engels:

A few days in my old man's factory were enough to bring before my eyes such horrors as I have tended to let grow dim in my mind. . . . If I did not have to record each day in my book the most horrible stories about English
society, I believe that I would have already gone sour; but this at least has kept my fury boiling. Perhaps it is conceivable for a communist to remain in his external condition a bourgeois and Schacher-beast, as long as one does not write; but to carry on communist propaganda on a wide scale and to engage simultaneously in Schacher [business] simply will not work.  

Engels' anxiety to remain untainted by the bourgeois ethos he is tethered to and longs to escape from, imparts multiple registers of meaning to his readings of hovel of the worker. The crossing over of topographical threshold takes on the confidence of a linear path, rather than the liminalities of an oscillatory one, where the observer resolves his dual identity by choosing the preferred community of workers. The rejection of bourgeoisdom is perceived as an act of self-sacrifice, but one that is necessitated by history, for personal restitution and for the benefit of the larger body politic.

I have done so: I forsook the company and the dinner-parties, the port wine and champagne of the middle-classes, and devoted my leisure hours almost exclusively to the intercourse with plain Working Men; I am glad and proud of having done so. Glad, because thus I was induced to spend many a happy hour in obtaining a knowledge of the realities of life many an hour, which else would have been wasted in fashionable talk and tiresome etiquette; proud, because thus I got an opportunity of doing justice to an oppresses and calumniated class of men who, with all their faults and under all the disadvantages of their situation, yet command the respect of everyone but an English money-monger; proud, too, because thus I was placed in a position to save the English people from the growing contempt which on the Continent has been the necessary consequence of the brutally selfish policy and general behaviour of your ruling middle class. (Condition 9)

To begin with, the narrator presents himself as observer whose interest in the subaltern and misrepresented topos of the worker is complemented by an openness to a potentially heteroglossic experience of that space. Against the statistical dehumanizations of

\[21\text{Qtd. in Marcus 117-18.}\]
bourgeois commentators, Engels wants to represent the concrete realities of the working classes by presumably allowing the locale to dictate the direction of analysis: "I wanted more than a mere abstract knowledge of my subject, I wanted to see you [working men and women] in your own homes, to observe you in your everyday life, to chat with you on your condition and grievances, to witness your struggles against the social and political power of your oppressors" (Condition 9). But concreteness and objectivity are already foreshadowed by a structured perception (that is interested in locating class-conflict), thus undercutting the freedom of a roving eye and the unthematized gaze. For Engels, simple transparency of motive--an investigation into the lived experience of the working class that would fit into the larger pattern of capitalist oppression--converts the "abstract" knowledge of other middle-class ideologues into the more absolute "knowledge of the realities of life." But, while the observer locates himself in the midst of his preferred topos, his mode of scientificity disavows his own lived experience in that space. Engels gets caught between two unresolved narratives: one, that attempts to preserve the human figure beyond the merely statistical inquiry of the blue books;22 and the other, scientific narrative that casts the singularity of the worker as a function of a production model structurally determined by History. The diseased body of the worker becomes the site of these twin perspectives. By suggesting a homology between the physical and the philosophical, whereby the body of the worker spatializes the larger sickness of a society built upon class oppression, Engels is able to arrive at a different perspective that

22 Blue Books were the various official and unofficial statistical reports of the 1840s, that focused on the issues of mortality, sanitation and health etc. of the poorer districts of Manchester.
anticipates cure as an organic outcome of the disease itself: "For the course of the social
disease from which England is suffering is the same as the course of a physical disease; it
develops according to certain laws, has its own crises, the last and most violent of which
determines the fate of the patient" (Condition 47). But equally, transformation of the
diseased body of the worker into a metaphor for the failure of the body-politic is built
upon a process of abstraction and isolation that infects Engels' spatial analysis. The
hypostatization of social change in clinical terminology marks the shift from the sphere of
the lived to the realm of theory, from the polysemic "dans tous les sens" to system of
synchronic significations. This slippage from the particular to the universal, from the
body to metaphor, undoes the project of acquiring "more than abstract knowledge" of the
English working classes, that now gets caught between Foucault's "primary" and
"secondary spatialization" of the gaze. In narrating the condition of the working classes,
"primary spatialization" corresponds with the privileging of an a priori analytic model
over the exigencies of the locale, where "the individual [having been relegated to the
status of the symptom] could receive no positive status." On the other hand, Engels' humanist vision claims the immanence of a "secondary spatialization," where the
individual is privileged over the precept in the configuration of the symptom--the ignored
and diseased worker--as a site for rewriting the body politic.

Engels' hermeneutic of transparency extends from the decoding of an oppressive
narrative in the physical space of disease and filth in Manchester (which makes its appeal
to the logic of the visual tempered by an outraged moral sense), to the re-appropriation of
that space by a vision of social action unhindered by the workings of hegemony (popular
mentalities of subordination in the form of middle-class charity, Sunday schools etc.).
This illusion of transparency assumes a close connection between knowledge and
consciousness, as is indicated in his perceived raison d'etre in undertaking the writing of
*Condition*: "The role of talent is to convince the masses of the truth of its ideas, and it
will then have no need to further to worry about their application, which will follow
entirely of its own accord." The nosological method advocates gathering of knowledge as
a rational observer and speaks for itself: there is nothing to be recorded beyond whatever
data has been gathered, beyond the stories of men and women from Medford, or Little
Ireland. The narrative itself is structured as the gaze, not so much as labyrinthine
encounter with the city, but rather, as a movement on a predetermined dialectical orbit of
synthesizing data. The data collected is in the service of an experiment where "social"
England will be reconciled with "philosophical" Germany: "A knowledge of proletarian
conditions is absolutely necessary to be able to provide solid ground for socialist theories,
on the one hand, and for judgments about their right to exist, on the other; and to put an
end to all sentimental dreams and fancies pro and con" (*Condition* 12). In the above
formulation the "facts" of the English worker have the function of legitimizing a
theory by providing "solid ground" to it. Theory precedes data, and Engels' zeal to prove
that socialist theories have a "right to exist" dissolves the myth of the disinterested
observer. Workers become the language in which to express theory, just as the patient
becomes a symptom of the disease. The authoritarianism implicit in that gesture is the
substance of Enlightenment's reversal into myth. Horkheimer and Adorno point out the
effect of "leveling domination of abstraction" in the connection between language and
For science the word is a sign: as sound, image, and as word proper it is distributed among the different arts, and is not permitted to reconstitute itself by their addition, by synesthesia. As a system of signs, language is required to resign itself to calculation in order to know nature, and must discard the claim to be like her. As image, it is required to resign itself to mirror-like imagery in order to be nature entire, and must discard the claim to know her.  

In the light of the above formulation it is possible to see Engels' materialism as a replication (and not the ‘other’) of Kay's clinical vision. The danger of this shared discourse becomes most evident in Engels' discussion of the Irish worker, where an extraordinary homology develops between Kay's and Engels' structures of perception. For Kay, in the grand scheme of capitalist advancement, workers' poverty and disease appear as "foreign" and "accidental," rather than organic outcomes of the system. Similarly, for Engels, in the grand project of socialist revolution, the Irish worker appears as an accident of history, whose irrational capacity of endurance is in excess of the structure of class-conflict. In his ability to subsist on the minimum, the Irish worker represents the lowest denominator of tolerability that threatens to displace a dialectical process of class opposition:

These Irishmen who migrate for fourpence to England, on the deck of a steamship on which they are often packed like cattle, insinuate themselves everywhere. The worst dwellings are good enough for them; their clothing causes them little trouble, so long as it holds together by a single thread; shoes they know not; their food consists of potatoes and potatoes only; whatever they earn beyond these needs they spend on drink. What does such a race want with high wages? The worst quarters of all large towns inhabited by Irishmen . . . the Irish have . . . discovered the minimum necessities of life, and are now making the English workers acquainted

with it. Filth and drunkenness, too, they have brought with them. . . . The Irishman loves his pig as the Arab his horse, with the difference that he sells it when it is fat enough to kill. . . . Drink is the only thing which makes the Irishman's life worth having. . . . The southern facile character of the Irishman, his crudity, which places him but little above the savage, his contempt for all humane enjoyments, in which his very crudeness makes him incapable of sharing, his filth and poverty, all favour drunkenness. (Condition 102-3)

In the case of the Irish worker, disease and poverty escape the net of significations that had linked the working classes to industrial-capitalist exploitation. Instead, divorced from a historical perspective, filth and poverty come to represent a challenge to the formulation of a socialist society. The Irish force the English worker to a barbaric and degraded position by settling for the "minimum of wages," the "something more than nothing" that deters the revolution. The uncivilized and unskilled Irish migrants are called upon to socialize themselves along the refined model of the skilled and disciplined English worker. The Irish are castigated for their refusal to follow the example of the good foreigner, Engels, in seeking refuge within an English identity. The foreign observer Engels creates a space of entry into the privileged community of English workers by creating an image of the other foreigner, the Irishman, who is not given any role in the march of dialectic between "philosophical Germany," "political France" and "social England." Engels' ad hominem attack reinscribes the "Family of One and Indivisible' Mankind" within a hierarchical structure of centers and peripheries that threatens to displace the primacy of class as an ontological category of identification. The English worker occupies the center and the Irish the margins, skilled labour has primacy over the unskilled, mind over body:

All such as demand little or no skill are open to the Irish. For work which requires long training or regular, pertinacious application, the dissolute,
unsteady, drunken Irishman is on too low a plane. To become a mechanic, a mill-hand, he would have to adopt the English civilisation, the English customs, become, in the main, an Englishman. But for all simple, less exact work, wherever it is a question more of strength than skill, the Irishman is as good as the Englishman. \((\text{Condition 104})\)

In his expulsion of the Irish workers from the narrative of history, Engels surrenders to the crude anthropological typology of nineteenth century discourse\(^{24}\). It is no wonder that Engels' objective account of his wanderings in Manchester carefully filters out the story of Mary Burns, the Irish girl who guided him around the working class districts of Manchester, and served as his mistress and housekeeper throughout his twenty-year stay.

While the example of the Irish worker reveals the insufficiency of a mechanistic vision that sets out to obtain "more than abstract knowledge" by reinscribing the observer within structures of power and ideology, one has to be careful while configuring the problem of perception. On the one hand critique of the scientific method has to deal with the questions that David Harvey has raised regarding alternatives to the "tyranny of perspectivism":

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\text{If social life is to be rationally planned and controlled so as to promote social equality and the welfare of all, then how can production, consumption and social interaction be planned and efficiently organized except through the incorporation of the ideal abstractions of space and time as given in the map, the chronometer, and the calendar? If perspectivism, for all its mathematical rigour, constructs the world from a}
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\(^{24}\) The response to the huge influx of Irish immigrants in nineteenth-century was unequivocally racist and negative in two ways. On the one hand, writers expressed hostility by associating the "Celtic" character either with filth and irrationality (as in Carlyle and Kay) or, in the manner of Arnold and, even Engels, plotting the "passionate, mercurial temperament" of the Irish against the "cold rationality" of the English. In either case, nineteenth-century discourse on the Irish worker displays a nationalist-colonialist stereotypification of the native into an 'other.' Also see M.A. Busteed's "Irish Migrant Responses to Urban Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Manchester," The Geographical Journal 62.2 (July 1996).
given individual viewpoint, then from whose perspective is the physical landscape to be shaped? (Harvey 253)

Set against this larger problematic is the another one of situating the contradictions of 'everyday life' within the rubric of a historical framework, without creating a facile narrative of defeat. Marc Blanchard's rather harsh suggestion that Engels is "[h]ere and there seemingly affected by the horror of the spectacle before him" but "is able to maintain the clinical tone of the inspector investigating a crime or the doctor diagnosing an illness, both extremely careful about the truth of their assertions" is an extreme example of converting this methodological dilemma into the crime of hypocrisy, which seemingly stems from "the narrator's desire to avoid any kind of association with destitution itself." Against this insensitive reading I adopt Kristin Ross' method that negotiates between formalist and phenomenological readings "by imagining the lived experience of actors in particular oppositional moments" and thereby "avoid[ing] an analytic structure that insists on starting from the (predetermined) result." The next part of this essay examines this oppositional structure in the context of the topos of the modern city, moving from the philosophical arena of spatial practice to the


26 In her analysis of Arthur Rimbaud's representation of social space in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, Kristin Ross points out the methodological problems of arriving at a holistic understanding of that historical moment: "...if I were to read both literally and dans tous les sens, I would have to develop a new perspective on both the biographical (historical) material and the information to be gleaned from close textual interpretation. For that kind of reading would entail a balancing act: neither did I wish to mobilize formalist skills for the reading of historical data... nor could I allow the weight of psychosexual, biographical fact determine, in the sense of explain, textual intricacy." Kristin Ross, The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 10.
phenomenological field of the lived experience of space in Engels' narrative.

The City

While the majority of commentators agreed with Wordsworth's impression of London as a topos of infinite confusion and lawlessness, there was also the contradictory sensibility that responded to the city with a sense of awe and exhilaration. The Mancunian celebration of the city reversed the romantic desire to escape to the countryside by setting up the city as a site of excitement and progress, against the torpor and monotony of the village.27 Engels, though not a proclaimed Mancunian, borrows from this sentiment, but with an eye on his philosophical premise of dialectics. His reading of Manchester attempts to provide an organic backdrop to the "unmanageable" chaos (as Wordsworth would have it) of the city by tracing a pattern in which human consciousness travels from a "prehistoric" topos of the country to a progressive urban space. The city becomes synonymous with the industrial revolution in its impact upon human intellect, converting monotonous lives into active ones. Before the rise of industry,

the workers vegetated throughout a passably comfortable existence, leading a righteous and peaceful life in all piety and probity. . . . But intellectually they were dead; lived only for their petty, private interest, for their looms and gardens, and knew nothing of the mighty movements which, beyond their horizon, was sweeping through mankind. . . . In truth, they were not human beings; they were merely toiling machines in the service of the few aristocrats who had guided history down to that time. The industrial revolution has simply carried this out to its logical end by making the workers machines pure and simple, taking from them the last trace of independent activity, and so forcing them to think and demand a

27 Asa Briggs describes the "proud" Mancunians in the following way: "These men did not argue on the defensive. They persistently carried the attack into the countryside, comparing contemptuously the passive with the active, the idlers with the workers, the landlords with the businessmen, the voluntary initiative of the city with the 'torpor' and 'monotony' of the village, and urban freedom with rustic 'feudalism.'" 67-68.
Leaving aside for the time being the charge of crude materialism in the simplified view of the pre-industrial rural topos, it is interesting to examine Engels' chronocentrism that equates rise of industry with the end of history. While signaling a break with time in the creation of a new society, the industrial revolution is also the essential end of a historical trajectory: the mechanization of human beings that it poses is a solidification of the always-already lost independence of the workers (in the pre-industrial state), and therefore continuous from the past as 'real'/Being made visible. In this sense, the industrial topos of Manchester has the function of spatializing the process of time as it draws to its inevitable conclusion. On the other hand, industrial production also creates an intensification of capitalist self-interest that works in consonance with new forms of production. Only in the "industrial epoch" have the workers been reduced to the status of a commodity by the bourgeoisie who are "far better off under the present arrangement than under the old slave system." The "wholesale selfishness of the bourgeoisie" has no historical roots: exploitation of man by man has made itself present throughout history, and forms the agonistic counterpart of the other narrative of the "industrial epoch" which has sanctioned the use of workers as "mere material, a mere chattel" (Condition 66). Interestingly, in this other reading of Manchester what becomes evident is the annihilation of space by time, where new forms of exploitation and social relations dictate the process/Becoming of time/history. The dialectic between freedom and enslavement in the modern age appears as a contradiction, where complete freedom is actually complete enslavement (real made visible) and complete enslavement is, de facto, complete freedom for the workers (with
the advent of class consciousness). The industrial city provides the dialectical space of a "heterotopia," where exploitation and its other confront each other. Where Wordsworth laments the loss of a holistic vision in the city, Engels celebrates it as the harbinger of the unity of the "parts" and the "whole:"

The great cities are the birthplaces of labour movements; in them the workers first began to reflect upon their own condition, and to struggle against it; in them the opposition between the proletariat and bourgeoisie first made itself manifest; from them proceeded the Trade Unions, Chartism, and Socialism. The great cities have transformed the disease of the social body, which appears in chronic form in this country, into an acute one, and so made manifest its real nature and the means of curing it. Without the great cities and their forcing influence upon the popular intelligence, the working-class would be far less advanced that it is. (Condition 133)

The fascination of the city is that it is the site of the symptom as well as the cure. The vision of history-as-progress informs Engels' project of reading as well as writing the city. But the image of the modern city found in Engels' writings is not without its contradictory moments. Cities like London or Manchester that strike a chord in Engels, the rational observer, also affect him as a subject of modernity at the dawn of a new, urban consciousness. His response to the city-scpe of London is symptomatic of a radically altered structure of feeling that, in a momentary lapse of reason, makes visible the

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28 Instead of the 'unreal' space of a utopia, Foucault uses the term "heterotopia" to describe the materialization of the utopian within culture. "Heterotopia," a very useful word, captures the gap between thought and reality: "There are . . . probably in every culture . . . real places-places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society-which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality." Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," Diacritics (Spring 1986) 24.
amorphous space modernity. London is a place of ambiguities where “fixed, fast-frozen structures” are daily replaced by the new:

A town, such as London, where a man may wander for hours together without reaching the beginning of the end, without meeting the slightest hint which could lead to the inference that there is open country within reach, is a strange thing. This colossal centralisation, this heaping together of two and a half millions of human beings at one point, has multiplied the power of this two and a half millions a hundredfold; has raised London to the commercial capital of the world, created the giant docks and assembled the thousand vessels that continually cover the Thames. I know nothing more imposing than the view which the Thames offers during the ascent from the sea to London Bridge. The masses of buildings, the wharves on both sides, especially from Woolwich upwards, the countless ships along both shores, crowding ever closer and closer together, until, at last, only a narrow passage remains in the middle of the river, a passage through which hundreds of steamers shoot by one another; all this is so vast, so impressive, that a man cannot collect himself, but is lost in the marvel of England's greatness before he sets foot upon English soil. (Condition 36)

The city appears as a labyrinth that threatens the subject with deracination in the midst of a fast-paced economy. The unthematized facticity of this response to the experience of the city is significantly different from the confident voice of the larger narrative that seeks to order the chaos of the city into a recognizable model of political economy. The throwing together of millions of people not only produces the space for revealing symptoms and cures, but also produces that "strange" effect whereby "a man cannot collect himself." The psychosomatic effects created by the malady of noisy and crowded streets, described later as 'neurasthenia' finds its antecedent in experiences such as Engels. 29 The city enters into

29 The increasing malady of "topophobias" in the later half of the nineteenth century is an interesting site of continuation of the medical-symbolic experience of modern space. Dr. George Beard, who coined the term "neurasthenia" to describe the effect of urban space on psychic makeup of city dwellers, also combines the experience of alienation with space in his diagnosis of the maladies of claustrophobia and agoraphobia where "the patients suffer from fear of space, of the void, not only in the street but also in the theater, in church, on an upper floor, at a window giving onto a large courtyard or looking over
the subjective consciousness of the observer as a lived space of ambivalence. Against the space of historical materialism, here a physiognomy reveals only the immanence of amorphous and excessive spaces, "without beginning or end," where one may lose oneself in the attempt to make sense of the city. There is a change in the experience of space: to journey linearly into the city is to be the subject who writes the city-as-text, whereas to journey within a labyrinth is to be both the subject as well as object who reads the city-as-text, one who wanders without destination, one who is able to lose him or herself in the metropolis.

Walter Benjamin has analyzed a similar representation of modern space the works of Charles Baudelaire, whose poetic expression is, for Benjamin, imbued with the sense of "shock" experienced in the city. It is important to understand the idea of "shock" as an infringement of history and space upon individual psychological makeup. Following Benjamin, we may borrow from Georg Simmel's analysis of shock in terms of the neurasthenic effect it has upon modern city-dwellers. Simmel's analysis of an attitude of "reserve" found in modern city-dwellers is built upon an idea of the excess that one encounters in the city, where space is no longer experienced in a unified way, but is reduced instead to a seemingly random series of half-impressions, of images and thoughts in the countryside, in an omnibus, a ferry or on a bridge." Anthony Vidler, "Psychopathologies of Modern Space," Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics, and the Psyche, ed. Michael S. Roth (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) 12.

30 The concept of 'shock' is central to Benjamin's analysis of Baudelaire's poetry. The experience of shock in the topos of the modern city where coherent, integrated experience is destroyed within the urban multitudes. Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968).
only partially registered. Coherent, integrated experience is destroyed within the urban multitudes as a result of "the frequency of stimuli" and leads to a dampening one's responsive processes. The subject develops a stimulus shield in the form of an atomic behaviour, socially and externally in order to preserve his internal wholeness and integrity. Just as the city that gave rise to labour movements can also be a space where the individual is overwhelmed by innumerable and diverse stimuli, so the community of workers can dissolve into a mere collection of alienated monads, destroying the possibility of a collective consciousness. As a perplexed Engels notes:

The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. The hundreds of thousands of all classes and ranks crowding past each other, are they not all human beings with the same qualities and powers, and with the same interest in being happy! And have they not, in the end, to seek happiness in the same way, by the same means? And still they crowd by one another as though they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another, and their only agreement is the tacit one, that each keep to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposing streams of the crowd, while it occurs to no man to honour another with so much as a glance. The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest, becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. And, however much one may be aware that this isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking, is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city. The dissolution of mankind into monads, of which each one has a separate principle, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme. (Condition 37)

31 Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald Levine (Chicago, U of Chicago Press, 1971). Explain it some more As Simmel says, "If so many inner reactions were responses to the continuous external contacts with innumerable people as are those in a small town, where one knows almost everybody one meets and where one has a positive relation to almost everyone, one would be completely atomized internally and come to an unimaginable psychic state."
This perception of the estranging effect of the urban space repudiates and challenges the earlier optimistic assertion of a collective working-class consciousness evidenced in the city. Here is the other effect of industrialization: the dissolution of mankind into monads and loss of the rebellious crowd. The industrial city had made possible the decline of a "patriarchal relation that hypocritically concealed the slavery of the worker" so that "when estranged from his employer . . . when the sentimental bond between them, which stood not the slightest test, had wholly fallen away, then only did the worker begin to recognise his own interests and develop independently . . . ." (Condition 134). The difficulty arises when this unsentimental estrangement extends beyond the function of establishing class identities, and threatens to destroy the very communal consciousness it was presumed to bring forth. The overwhelming problem is one that spans various realms, from political economy to individual consciousness: how does one define a spatial practice/praxis that addresses the double legacy of modern ethos, of collective action thrown in the midst of an ethos that encourages the mechanization of the human consciousness. What Engels desires is the appropriation of the very space that one is forced to walk on, and not the "tacit agreement" that "each keep his own side of the pavement" (Condition 37). The skill of negotiating through modern streets is a testament to the loss of meaningful praxis, and herein lies the problem with Baudelaire's flaneur who is celebrated as a modern hero by Benjamin. The space within which the flaneur moves is the locus of modernity: "I was crossing the boulevard, in a great hurry, in the midst of a moving chaos, with death galloping at me from every side." 32 Marshall Berman, following Benjamin, explains the

32 Qtd. in Marshall Berman, All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) 156.
heroism implicit in the ability to survive the "moving chaos" of modernity:

The man in the modern street, thrown into this maelstrom, is driven back on his own resources--often on resources he never knew he had--and forced to stretch them desperately in order to survive. In order to cross the moving chaos, he must attune and adapt himself to its moves, must learn to not merely keep up with it but to stay at least a soubresauts and mouvements brusques, at sudden, abrupt, jagged twists and shifts--and not only with his legs and his body, but with his mind and his sensibility as well. (Berman 160)

The issue here is the value associated with maneuverability within the crowds. Lefebvre has identified the space of modern crowds and movement within it as an "abstract space" that "has something of a dialogue about it, in that it implies a tacit agreement, a non-aggression pact, a contract, as it were, of non-violence," where "[i]n the street, each individual is supposed not to attack those he meets" and "anyone who transgresses this law is deemed guilty of a criminal act" (Lefebvre 220). The consensual aspect of modern space defies the notion of intellectual praxis that attempts to reveal hidden power structures in the physiognomy of space. The illusion that one manipulates oneself in the crowd (thereby displaying courage) conceals the reality of being manipulated spatially and materially by the socio-economic fabric. If moving within crowds is an act of heroism, then the modern hero is a figure of ruination rather than revolution. In locating praxis in the figure of the flaneur sauntering through crowds with ease, selling his wares, not only have we have moved from the site of production to the site of consumption, we have also bid our last farewells to the utopian desire of a radically altered topos. Berman points out that modernity is built upon an ideal of "desanctification," where the modern
poet celebrates the loss of his halo by declaring, "[n]ow I can walk around incognito, do low things, throw myself into every kind of filth, just like ordinary mortals" (Berman 156). Engels' own desanctification of parental authority is quintessential to modernity in some ways. The narrator of *Condition* celebrates the same crossing over of topographical thresholds as does the modern poet when he declares, "I have done so: I forsook the company and the dinner-parties . . . the middle-classes, and devoted my leisure hours almost exclusively to the intercourse with plain Working Men; I am glad and proud of having done so." In leaving the company of cigars and champagne Engels breaks away from the spatial economy that controls space, where the bourgeoisie inhabit the privileged topos of the market and the workers are relegated to the slums.

The contrast between the romantic Baudelaire and the practical Engels as two prototypical observers of modern urban spaces is instructive in evaluating the stance of the narrator and consequently the role of the observer-intellectual, vis-à-vis the masses. Baudelaire's flaneur operates from within the crowd: he is a figure of ambivalence who recognizes the alienation of the crowd, and yet adopts a celebratory stance in his dealings with it. As Benjamin says, "he becomes their accomplice even as he dissociates himself from them. He becomes deeply involved with them, only to relegate them to oblivion with a single glance of contempt."33 In this contradictory stance of "innovative self-destruction" (Berman's term34) the flaneur becomes the preferred figure of modernity,

33 Qtd. in Graeme Gilloch, Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1996) 141.

34 Berman uses this phrase to understand the contradictory character of capitalist ethos, seen here in the example of its urban landscape that like the mental landscape of its subjects is subject to economic necessity and transience, depriving it of substance: "The
replicating himself in Benjamin's "dialectical image" of the city. In contrast with Baudelaire's flaneur, Engels' observing gaze is that of an outsider, who, in response to the contradictions of the city, is able to pull up a "stimulus shield" of distance, of rational "reserve" combined with an apocalyptic utopian vision. Engels' narrative is also modern, voicing contradictory impulses that generate an agonistic interplay between a utopian desire to transform society, and the breakdown of meaning in the alienating urban landscape. Benjamin's evaluation of Engels' commentary focuses on the dilemma of the narrator poised at the threshold of modernity:

[This description] lacks the skill and ease with which the flaneur moves among the crowd and which the journalist eagerly learns from him. Engels is dismayed by the crowd; he responds with a moral reaction, and as aesthetic one as well; the speed with which people rush past one another unsettles him. The charm of his description lies in the intersecting of unshakable critical integrity with an old-fashioned attitude. The writer came from a Germany that was still provincial; he may never have faced the temptation to lose himself in a stream of people. . . . To move in this crowd was natural for a Parisian. No matter how great the distance which an individual cared to keep from it, he was still colored by it and, unlike Engels, was not able to view it from without. (Benjamin 167)

For Benjamin, authentic knowledge of history is predicated upon the stance of writing from 'within,' where the narrator gives in to the temptation of the crowd and of the commodity. His heroes, like Baudelaire, are ones who are doomed to endure modernity, while at the same time engaged somehow in subverting it. But Benjamin fails to explain how a consciousness that has willfully transfigured itself into a metonym of modernity is yet able to retain the critical faculty required for subverting it. This is where Adorno's pathos of all bourgeois monuments is that their material strength and solidity actually count for nothing and carry no weight at all, that they are blown away like frail reeds by the very forces of capitalist development that they celebrate" (97).
critique of Benjamin's "wide-eyed presentation of mere facts" takes us back to Engels' vantage position of the outsider. On the one hand modernity nudges the subject towards experience as "Erlebnis" (to use Benjamin's term) which is "concerned with the domain of inner life, with the chaotic contents of psychic life," and calls for a new narrative mode in which to relate such novel experiences. In the Preface to Paris Spleen, Baudelaire proclaims that la vie moderne requires a new language: "a poetic prose, musical without rhythm and without rhyme, supple enough and rugged enough to adapt itself to the soul's lyrical impulses, the undulations of reverie, the leaps and jolts of consciousness ...." He emphasizes that "it was above all from the exploration of enormous cities and from the convergence of their innumerable connections that this obsessive ideal was born." Here, space is seen to produce its own forms of experience rather than being the static container of events, that then reproduces itself in a radically altered form of perception.

But while the lyricism implicit in the "Erlebnis" technique may faithfully capture the

35 Qtd. in Gilloch 30.

36 Benjamin identifies the "Erlebnis" technique as a fallout of the shock of modernity and the innumerable stimuli of the modern city. According to him, "the greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience (Erfahrung), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour of one's life (Erlebnis). . . [The intellect] would turn the incident into a moment that has been lived (Erlebnis)" (163). Also see Gilloch's treatment of these concepts (143).

37 Qtd. in Berman 148.

38 The important realization that urbanization of capital leads to the urbanization of consciousness is what makes Dickens' fictional method unique, in that it represents the experience of the city in "the general movement" of the narrative itself as a "a hurrying seemingly random passing of men and women, each heard in some fixed phrase, seen in some fixed expression: a way of seeing men and women that belongs to the street." Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 155.
modern experience, it poses the threat of obfuscating the connections between the material and the real. At the other end of the spectrum is Engels' technique of "Erfahrung," the narrative as a storytelling which is "coherent, communicable and readily intelligible," that, while attempting a metacritical grasp, ends up hypostatizing the idea of objectivity and sublimates all personal/contradictory moments from its record. Instead of the sauntering flaneur, Engels prefers to see himself as a "philosophical-commercial-traveller," as he explains in a letter to Arnold Ruge. The significance of that figure is pointed out by Balzac who (as Marcus notes) had discerned in the traveling salesman an apotheosis of the new social organization:

The commercial traveller, a personage unknown to antiquity, is he not one of the most curious figures created by the manners and customs of the present epoch? Is he not destined, in some order of things, to mark the great transition which, in the eyes of critical observers, welds the period of material development and improvement to that of intellectual development and improvement... Is not the commercial traveller to ideas just what our stage-coaches are to packages and men? (from the opening of "The Illustrious Gaudissart" (1833).

The traveller-cum-observer assumes the illusion of transparency as a vehicle of ideas, whose movement between topoi has a static function of transporting and relocating ideas that somehow remain insulated from the habitus of the carrier. The individual, like physical space, becomes a vessel that carries time or history. We are back again in the ratiocinative zeal of Enlightenment: "Subject and object are both rendered ineffectual.

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39 Gilloch expands on the concept of Erfahrung thus: "Erfahrung (derived from the verb fahren meaning 'to travel') refers to experience as the accumulation of knowledge. It means experience in the sense of being widely travelled, of having witnessed many things, of having gained wisdom. The experience related by the story-teller is what one may designate Erfahrung: coherent, communicable, readily intelligible" (143).

40 Qtd. in Marcus 80.
The abstract self, which justifies record-making and systematization, has nothing set over against it but the abstract material which possesses no other quality than to be a substrate of such possession” (Horkheimer and Adorno 26).

At this point it is perhaps instructive to move self-reflexively from the macrosocial level of analysis to a microsocial one, in keeping with my privileged model of ethnography, where, in Paul Willis' words,

Social reproduction and contradiction must be shown not as abstract entities, but as embedded dynamically within the real lives of real people in a way that is not simple "correspondence" or "reflection" of unchanged, somehow "deeper" structures. . . . Agents' intentions do not proceed from themselves, but are bound up in the complex way in which structures are inhabited through "cultural forms" . . . (179)

To examine the narrator of *Condition of Working Class in England* from a psycho-biographical perspective reveals an interesting countertheatre of transgression. The story begins with Engels' experience of childhood in the valley of Wuppertal, among members of polite society and his father's bourgeois friends that produces an intense dislike for that lifestyle. "Letters from Wuppertal," written and published anonymously in 1839, reveals Engels' early attempts at a critical inquiry into his surroundings, and forms an interesting counterpart for *Condition*. Unlike the theory-oriented autodidacticism of *Condition*, in these early critiques Engels wrote as an insider about the ennui of bourgeois existence in a provincial town. Here Engels could be a pre-modern Baudelaire whose topos is not the working-class ghetto of *Condition*, but the bourgeois household of his parents, with its sacrosanct, interior spaces. This critique prepares the way for the rise of an urban consciousness that revels in the dynamism of the city, away from the vapidity of the pre-modern topos:
In Barmen and Elberfeld... people lead a terrible life, and yet they are at the same time so pleased with it all: daylong they sink themselves in the figures of their account-books, and they do so with a frenzy and an interest that is scarcely believable... So it goes every day, without variation... The young people have been fairly taken in hand by their fathers and show every promise of becoming just like them. Their subjects of conversation are rather uniform... Once every half-century, they speak about literature...  

"Letters from Wuppertal" betray the impatience of a young Engels, who, in a quest for meaningful activity, reacted violently to the perceived simplicities of a pre-industrial consciousness. Without sacrificing the text to narrowly biographical reading, we may locate Engels' radical stance as a psychological fallout of the "philistinism" he associated with the bourgeois ethos, captured par excellence in the authority of his father and the meekness of his mother. His letter about the situation at home reveals a drama of mutiny against patriarchal influence, where the child's attempts at creating a separate community outside the boundaries of class interests are met with disapproval by the parents. In a letter to Marx in 1845 Engels describes his situation, that is worthy of extensive quotation:

I am indeed living a genuine dog's life here. All the religious fanaticism of my old man has been rearoused by the Communist meetings and by the "dissolute character" of several of our local Communists with whom, naturally, I associate. And his fanaticism has been increased by my declaration, definitively made, of giving up the Schacher. Moreover, my open appearance in public as a Communist has brought out in him a superb bourgeois fanaticism. You can imagine my position... If a letter comes for me, it is sniffed at from all sides before I ever get it. Since they know that these are all Communist letters, there is on each occasion such a putting on of faces of pious misery that it is enough to drive one crazy. If I go out, the same faces. If I sit in my room and write--naturally, about Communism, they know that--more of the same. I cannot eat, drink, or sleep, I cannot let loose a fart, without the same accursed pious

41 Qtd. Marcus 79.
countenances standing there in front of my nose. Whether I go out or stay at home, keep silent or speak, read or write, laugh or not, it makes no difference. Whatever I do, my old man immediately puts on this infamous grimace. What is more, he is so dense that he lumps Communism and Liberalism together as "revolutionary" movements and--despite all that I say in reply to him--regularly holds me responsible for all the infamies perpetrated by the English middle classes in Parliament. To complete my run of bad luck, I spent last night with Hess in Elberfeld, where we went on about Communism until two in the morning. Naturally today long faces about my staying out so late, and intimations that I was probably in the pokey. At last someone summons up the courage to ask where I had been.-- With Hess.--"With Hess! Good God!" Pause. Rising Christian despair in every face. "What company you choose to keep!" Sighings and so forth. . . . All my old man needs to do now is to discover the existence of the ‘Critical Critique,’ he is quite capable of showing me the door. At the same time there is this perpetual anger in myself in seeing that nothing will help with these people; that they absolutely want to worry and torture themselves with their fantasies about hell; that one cannot bring them to consider the most pedestrian principles of justice. My mother is at bottom a lovely human being; it is only in relation to my father that she has no independence. . . . It is to be tolerated no longer, I have to get away and hardly know how I can bear the next few weeks of my being here. 42

This is Engels at his critical best, where the lived experience of being locked in a dismal, parental home, and the thrill and excitement of crossing over into forbidden spaces is subtly interwoven with the utopian promise of Communism as an alternate community. Though Condition does not allow the interjection of an excavation of personal experience within the larger theme of the archaeology of class oppression (Benjamin's recipe for the narrative), the personal merges with the political when Engels loses himself in the labyrinthine streets of the city and strays into proletarian districts. In subverting class-based boundaries Engels, like capitalist entrepreneur, becomes the “architect of his own fortunes.” His affair with the poor, working-class Irish girl, Mary Burns, can be read

in this context as an act of revenge against his father who had snooped among his son's belongings and found there before Friedrich was yet fifteen—a "dirty book," a romance set in the thirteenth century that his son had borrowed from a circulating library, for which he "severely punished" his son. While the publication of the *Condition* marks a definitive stage in his life as a transition from the anonymity of a hidden critique to the author-ity of an openly Socialist agenda, Engels was to occupy a contradictory role in the Ermen and Engels firm for twenty years. But just as he had subverted his father's intentions by relocating himself in the midst of the working classes of Manchester rather than in the commercial centers of the city, Engels further placed the detailed knowledge of the manufacturing district which he gained in the service of Ermen and Engels at Marx's disposal. A number of passages on the English cotton industry in the first volume of *Capital* bear witness to the help that Engels gave to his friend. Though lamenting the fact of having to work in his father's firm, Engels never lost an opportunity to celebrate its losses. Engels wrote gleefully to Marx in 1851 that there was likely to be a "crash in the market" and that "Peter Ermen is already shitting his pants when he thinks of it and that little bullfrog is a good barometer of the state of trade." There is a praxis here of appropriating the space of authority (both patriarchal/private and commercial/public) and overturning its sanctioned usage by giving out both, commercial data to Marx for his radical project, as well as monetary allowances that came from the coffers of the firm, without which the bulk of Marx's writings may not have even been written.

43 Qtd. in Marcus 71.

Writing in the transitional moment between the passing of an industrial architectonic of chaos, and an emergent homogenized and modular capitalist space that converted "works" into "production," and "residence" into "housing," Engels performs the important task of critically evaluating the narrative of capitalism before it loses itself in the abstract space of a rational society. The spatial arrangement surrounding work, leisure and life in the bourgeois epoch reflect its epistemology of concealment which is nevertheless built upon the primacy of sight where, as Lefebvre says, "people look, and take sight, take seeing for life itself." While *Condition* does ample justice to the "representation of space" in a capitalist society, it is unable to formulate connections between that landscape of injustice and the factors that make it possible: the "unconscious tacit agreement" between classes that works in consonance with ideologies of fragmentation such as racism, sexism to contain the heteroglossic space of the city, along with the capitalist domination of spaces. What I argue for is a narrative that includes both chronotopes, one that is grounded in indisputable facts of deracination, poverty and oppression, a narrative that marks the rapacity of capitalism in the hovel of the worker, as well as the chronotope of the other lived space of the narrator, the bourgeois residence and its spatial architectonics that have a necessary effect upon the narrator. From the

45 Lefebvre 51.

46 Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope" provides another interesting method of analyzing the space-time continuum as reflected in the material space of a social configuration. Bakhtin defines the chronotope as "a narrative device" where "the graphically visible markers of historical time as well as of biographical everyday time are concentrated and condensed; at the same time they are intertwined with each other in the tightest possible fashion, fused into unitary markers of the epoch. The epoch becomes not only graphically visible [space], but narratively visible [time]." *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, c1981) 247.
perspective of Engels' long relationship with Mary Burns, Manchester is also the space of the erotic and personal, as is the "condition of the working class." But like the bourgeois dwelling that disavows libidinal spaces, the text filters out Eros in favour of a rational discourse. While Engels dramatizes the representational space of his rebellion against bourgeois parental control by destroying the facade of familial conjugality in his "Letters From Wuppertal," his method of abstraction keeps him from linking that critique with the subliminal energy of *Condition*. In surrendering to the machinery of thought, Engels unwittingly falls prey to the very homogenizing tendencies that characterized the capitalist valorization of "surface" over "volume." The replacement of historical space by the fearful symmetry of the Haussman project, the quartering and of zoning the city, and the filtering of the erotic out of everyday life are the fallouts of modernity's ideal of a rational society. Its millennial effects upon the human landscape continue well into the consumer culture of the twenty-first century. By 1851 Manchester had been initiated into the process, much to the satisfaction of Queen Victoria who celebrates the acculturating effect of the Great Exhibition that marked the extinction of Manchester's rebellious history:

> The streets were immensely full and the cheering and enthusiasm most gratifying. The order and good behaviour of the people, who were not placed behind any barriers, were the most complete we have seen . . . for there never was a running crowd. Nobody moved, and therefore everybody saw well, and there was no squeezing. . . . Everyone says that in no other town could one depend so entirely upon the quiet and orderly behaviour of the people as in Manchester. You had only to tell them what ought to be done, and it was sure to be carried out. ⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Qtd. in Briggs 112.
CONCLUSION

The question of class-struggle and working-class-identity has been the bone of contention between various schools of critique that though unified under a historicist rubric differ in their interpretation of working-class consciousness. The central issue at stake in these debates is the ability of “grand narratives” to adequately represent, what is perceived by some to be, the overdetermined and contradictory experience of lived realities. At the level of popular politics, the confusion of motives and agencies is expressed as the indeterminate objectives and objects of the working-class’ revolt and resentment. The agons surrounding this debate are organized along the axis of “theory”

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1 Various historians have attempted to deal with the topic of British working-class radicalism from different perspectives. I summarize only a few of the arguments here. E. P. Thompson’s approach is based upon a ressentiment with the rigidity of Althusserian structuralism, and builds more upon Gramsci’s transactional model, and configures change around the idea of ‘moral economy’ and ‘customary consciousness.’ In his rendering, ‘class’ is not so much a disparate category as much as a fluid relationship between people. But Thompson does invest faith in a dialectical model based upon economic determinants, unlike Harold Perkin, who prefers to localize the idea of causes and extend it in extra-economic directions, where complex inter-relationships between social structures are given a large role in the formation of the working-class consciousness. The Origin of Modern English Society 1780-1880 (London, 1969). John Foster (who has been called a “platonist marxist” by Thompson) deploys a Leninist model of analysis and identifies discrete stages in the growth of the working-classes from a purely economic struggle to an intellectual one. Class Struggle in the Industrial Revolution (London, 1974). Gareth Stedman Jones’s analysis delinks the idea of a revolutionary class from its anti-capitalist activity in his book, The Languages of Class (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Finally, Craig Calhoun valorizes the idea of local communities against a unified class theory, while rejecting the idea that class identities would supercede all other considerations. The Question of Class Struggle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
vs. “practice,” where “working-class consciousness” becomes a contested category, along with questions of agency (working-class leaders vs. middle-class radical) and topos (local/communal determinations vs. class-experience). While this debate is of central importance to any study of working-class struggles, my work does not position itself completely in either camps. What I have attempted to show through my investigations of the liminalities of the working-class intellectual and the intellectual for the working-class are the complex motives that characterize and limit their complete development along any one particular/privileged axis. I offer a structure in which the history of English working-classes is placed alongside a parallel trajectory of the formation of middle-class culture. The juxtaposition of these two events within a single contrapuntal structure allows a unique insight into the process where a middle-class anti-authoritarian rhetoric of “principles” and “rights” paradoxically initiates and restricts the formation of working-class identity. At the same time, the working classes exert a reverse pressure upon middle-class identity-formation by appropriating their vocabulary in order to reveal the limits of its universalist claims. I suggest that the evolution of working classes within the interstitial spaces of a middle-class ethos generates an epistemology of *becoming* in which both classes define their identities through a creative interpretation of a shared discourse. By linking the middle and working classes together within an interactive yet antagonistic relationship, I rediscover the formation of Jurgen Habermas’s “bourgeois public sphere” within its *other*, subaltern, context of the plebeian popular sphere.

The trajectory that Collier initiates by her novelization of received forms of expression from her position as a double victim of patriarchy and class-hierarchy finds a
full intellectual explication in Marx’s self-conscious model of history. The significance of Marx’s critical method lies first in its ability to resolve the analytical split between the categories of “class” (that faces the charge of abstraction) and “community” (with the dangers of untheorized empiricism) by inaugurating a structure of perception whereby these categories can be both “simple” and “abstract” at the same time. Secondly, Marx’s “spatial practice” has the important quality of self-criticism, whereby a demystification of synchronic structures is pointed in a direction that would negate Marxism’s own desire for permanence. Rather than inscribing ideals of liberty and justice within an arrested dialectic that swings between a euphoric promise of deliverance and the despairing loss of faith, it is perhaps more useful to follow a third model that locates permanence within change. By using a trope of “innovative self-destruction” that Marshall Berman associates with a capitalist ethos I would like to suggest that ideas ensure their permanence only by changing their forms.

The pre-history of Chartism is also an objective context for understanding the formative influences that shape the values of the latter half of the Victorian era, and what it excludes in its formulation of “high seriousness” reflected in Tennyson’s regressive model of change that is curiously familiar to us in our times:

Forward then, but still remember how the course of time will swerve,
Crook and turn upon itself in many a backward-streaming curve.  

While following these arguments into the twenty-first century, we are still left with the question of appropriating space in order to combat the hegemony of global capitalism.

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Perhaps this challenge needs to take into account E. P. Thompson’s analysis that “the strength of distinctions of class and status in twentieth century England is in part a consequence of the lack, in the twentieth century labour movement, of Jacobin virtues.”

This would suggest a strategy that attempts to redeploy a rebellious crowd informed by “common sense” and a “customary consciousness.”

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