“Impassioned Truth”

Views of Poetry

Almost every working-class journal issued between 1816 and 1858 published poetry; even the generally prosaic periodicals of Wooler, Cobbett, and Carlyle—journalists who had all shunned the imaginative horrors of fiction—included at least a little verse. Still, the sense on the part of working-class journalists as to which poems were valuable to their class developed significantly in the first part of the nineteenth century. Indeed, their ideas about what poetry should be and about what was valuable in it evolved as considerably as had their concepts about fiction. All working-class journalists in the first half of the nineteenth century operated within a canon of verse particular to that class, a canon that overlapped the middle-class canon of the time but that had its own distinct emphases. The canon broadened considerably during the years from the teens to the fifties.

Early working-class journalists approached poetry guardedly. While generally deplored the imaginative in poetry, they allowed that a limited number of poetic types could serve a useful purpose. The poems they published, almost always political and occasional—characterized by ridicule of the oppressor and uncompromising support for the people—included satires, poems honoring a politically correct historical figure, and those praising abstract qualities such as freedom or reason.

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The journalists of the thirties, forties, and fifties, on the other hand, generally had much more liberal ideas about what poetry could be and should do. They still admired the overtly political but found political justification for their views in the poetry of all ages and many countries—in poetry very often neglected or rejected by their predecessors. In other words, they ranged far beyond verse strictly linked to one occasion. They also approved of poetry that was at best only indirectly political, at times not apparently political at all, and often not directly relevant to British working-class issues. Chartist journalists were almost as likely to discuss or publish an excerpt from Tennyson’s “May Queen” as from Shelley's *Queen Mab*. Later working-class journalists increasingly realized that each member of their audience was an aesthetic as well as a political being and they believed that while political poetry was always important, the cultural improvement of the working class necessarily entailed its political improvement. Such an evolution of thought necessarily meant an expansion of the body of poetry that could be considered part of a class-based canon; later working-class critics worked wholeheartedly toward that expansion.

**Views of Poetry in the Early Working-Class Periodicals**

In the 1810s and 1820s, working-class journalists took what seems at first glance to be a confusing stance toward poetry. In their periodicals early journalists often published poems with one hand and condemned poetry with the other. Carlyle was especially prone to this sort of apparent hypocrisy. It is worth remembering that Carlyle was the one who declared war on the fiction of the poet as well as that of the novelist and romance writer (*Lion* 24 Oct. 1828: 523). After publishing a poem by Captain Bosquet “of the Navy,” he states: “It is our intention to exclude all Poetry from the future pages of ‘The Republican,’ unless it be something very superior in its powers of instruction. We are among those who do not think [poetry] any ornament to common sense, and bad Poetry is calculated to spoil it!” (17 May 1822: 627). In subsequent issues, he must have decided that a number of poems passed that test, for he published as many after writing this statement as he had done before.

Despite this antigeneric pronouncement, it was Carlyle, more than any other working-class figure of his day and perhaps of any time, who
brought Shelley and Byron to a mass audience. In 1822 he published an unexpurgated version of *Queen Mab*, providing, where Shelley did not, translations of those parts of the notes originally in other languages; and in the same year he published *Cain: A Mystery* and *The Vision of Judgment* (Wiener, *Radicalism* 68).1

Carlile offered two reasons for publishing Shelley and Byron. For one thing, Carlile held that by publishing them, he had fired another salvo in the struggle for the freedom of the press. He published *Queen Mab* in 1821 soon after an edition printed by William Clark was suppressed and *The Vision of Judgment* soon after John Hunt’s 1824 trial for publishing his edition of that work. In announcing his edition of *Queen Mab* in the *Republican*, Carlile explained that “the Vice Society, by an indictment, had succeeded in suppressing its public sale. They are now solicited to try what they can do again in that respect. If they please, they shall make it as common as they have made the ‘Age of Reason’” (8 Feb. 1822: 145).2 With Byron’s works, Carlile at times seems to hold that fighting for a free press is the only reason for publishing them at all: “*Cain is a Mystery*, and there is but little to be learned from it. I republished that and the VISION OF JUDGMENT, not from my admiration of the works; but, because I saw them menaced by my enemies” (11 Feb. 1825: 164). Carlile was not always as uncharitable toward Byron’s works, although he did see Byron as being greatly inferior to Shelley. Elsewhere, Carlile allowed that *Cain* “is a ponderous blow at superstition.” Shelley, or at least Shelley’s *Queen Mab*, he always respected.3

Carlile also maintained he published Byron and Shelley because of their political and free-thinking ideas; on the level of argument, both were worthy of publication. Whether that argument happened to be in verse or prose made not a whit of difference to him. As he wrote, “I am not a poet, or a lover of poetry, beyond those qualities which it might have in common with prose—the power of instructing mankind in useful knowledge.” As far as Carlile was concerned, the prose notes to *Queen Mab* were as good and as valuable as the poetry, “of equal bulk, equal beauties, and equal merit.” In all Carlile’s pronouncements about Shelley or Byron, I have found only one instance in which Carlile makes an aesthetic judgment about the work of either: in passing, he calls *Queen Mab* a “beautiful poem.”4

But what was such beauty? Carlile took a prosaic approach to poetry
and sought in it what he looked for in prose: political and religious truth and relevance to a working-class audience. *Queen Mab* had those things and was therefore beautiful. Other works—even some by Shelley—did not have them and were therefore not beautiful. Carlyle was far less sympathetic, for example, toward Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*. In *Lion* he wrote:

It appeared to me to be poetry without any other purpose than poetry, subject without sense, or to make the most of it, a discouragement to political virtue, by setting it forth as certain of defeat and destruction. There is an imaginary revolt against tyranny; but so far out of all time and locality, so unlike any thing historical or futurely probable, so badly exhibited, so completely subdued by tyranny, and a great deal of superstitious exhibition of future state reward only, to political virtue and constant love, that I could not but feel contempt for the author of *Queen Mab*. (3 Apr. 1829: 417)

Not only are the political principles wrong in the poem but the setting and culture that Shelley presents are, in Carlyle's mind, so distant from those of the early nineteenth-century British working class as to make it senseless to such an audience.

The failure to achieve an exact correspondence of setting and culture to those of the present—in other words, a lack of occasion—disqualified other works of poetry as well from having any value for Carlyle. While disparaging the theaters of the day in his *Republican*, Carlyle turns his attention to a performance of *Macbeth*:

Here the assassination of a good man by a villain is the leading trait of the play and a woman exhibits herself on the stage with her hands bathed in blood, holding two blood-stained daggers that have just done their work, after having stimulated her husband to commit the murder by a union of the art of the syren with the fury of the vixen. It is possible, that the reality of such a scene might have passed; but it is not likely to occur again, and therefore, not a fit subject to be remembered by an exhibition on the stage. (13 Feb. 1826: 56)

Carlyle believed that there were two sorts of poetry: poetry as imaginative fiction—to him a form as loathsome as fiction; and poetry as argument—argument strictly relevant to the political and social affairs of the day. The latter was the only form suitable to Carlyle, although he apparently
saw no reason why anyone would trouble to yoke good argument to irrelevant versification.

Carlile was almost certainly influenced in such views by his hero, Thomas Paine, who stated in Part I of *The Age of Reason*, “I had some turn, and I believe some talent, for poetry; but this I rather repressed than encouraged, as leading too much into the field of imagination” (434). Carlile had, as well, other influences for his views. Like his ideas about fiction, his notions of poetry are strikingly similar to those of the middle-class denouncers of imaginative literature, the Utilitarians and Evangelicals. Bentham and other Utilitarians intensely distrusted poetry; Bentham would have excluded poetry and all imaginative literature from his ideal republic (Altick 133–34) and held that there was “no more reason for teaching [poetry] than chips and cards” (Manning 106). It was this very exclusion from his own education, of course, that led to John Stuart Mill’s famous crisis, his turning to Wordsworth for therapy, and surely his later criticism of Bentham’s “deficiency of Imagination” (Mill 61). Strict Evangelicals, too, harbored a deep dislike of the genre. Richard Altick notes one extreme Evangelical sect that, as late as the 1860s, saw Shakespeare as “a lost soul now suffering for his sins in hell” (11–12, 126). Although probably familiar with these views, Carlile was not a slave to them; he infused his dislike of poetry with his distinctly working-class bias.

Cobbett and Carlile rarely agreed on anything, but their views on poetry were largely in accord. Cobbett, too, looked for the qualities of good prose in poetry and denounced the imaginative. His views can best be seen in his discussion of Byron’s *Vision of Judgment* and his many denunciations of Milton and Shakespeare.

Cobbett devoted almost all of the 24 January 1824 issue of *Political Register* to *The Vision of Judgment*—or, to be more exact, to the trial of John Hunt for publishing the poem (193–237). The article included a long excerpt of the transcript of the trial taken from the *Morning Chronicle*, and therefore provided Cobbett with a legal way to present extracts of the poem itself. Certainly, Cobbett was delighted with the barbs in the poem directed toward George III, George IV, and Robert Southey. But in his lengthy commentary on the case and the poem, Cobbett says nothing at
all about the work as poetry or about Byron as a poet. Instead, his explains how James Scarlett, Hunt’s lawyer, bungled the case and failed to get his client acquitted. Scarlett’s defense, Cobbett thought, consisted of hairsplitting about technicalities: of “pretty distinctions between public libel and private libel” (211). Scarlett should have defended Hunt by arguing that Byron was absolutely right in his accusations, and that George III was a miserable failure as a king. That is exactly what Cobbett proceeded to argue in the article. Cobbett’s intent, which he feels should have been Scarlett’s, was to flesh out Byron’s versified arguments with his own prose ones. Argument is everything, and genre is irrelevant; without the extracts from Byron that Cobbett provides, it would be hard to tell in this article that The Vision of Judgment is not itself prose.

Nowhere are Cobbett’s views about poetry clearer than in his persistent attacks on Milton and Shakespeare. His first salvo was in an article of 18 November 1815 with the unlikely title “To the Editor of the Agricultural Magazine: On the Subject of Potatoes.” The essay connects two of Cobbett’s better-known aversions: his hatred of potatoes, which he saw as an unhealthy and agriculturally unsound substitute for grain, and his apparent hatred of the works of Shakespeare and Milton. In it he proclaims that promoting “this worse than useless root,” the potato, is now the fashion, just as it was in his time merely fashion to like Shakespeare and Milton. To prove that both poets and tubers were fashionable rather than good, Cobbett savages them as worthless. He attacks Milton’s invention in Paradise Lost, arguing that the work is stuffed with unnatural and ludicrous happenings foreign to heaven and (more important) to earth. According to Cobbett, Milton writes of

God, almighty and all foreseeing, first permitting his chief angel to be disposed to rebel against him; his permitting him to enlist whole squadrons of angels under his banners, his permitting this host to come and dispute with him the throne of heaven; his permitting the contest to be long, and, at one time, doubtful; his permitting the devils to bring cannon into this battle in the clouds; his permitting one devil or angel, I forget which, to be split down the middle, from crown to crotch, as we split a pig; his permitting the two halves, intestines and all, to go slap, up together again, and become a perfect body; his, then, causing all the devil host to be tumbled head-long down into a place called Hell, of the local situation of which no man can have an idea; his causing
gates (iron gates too) to be erected to keep the devil in; his permitting him to go get out, nevertheless, and to come and destroy the peace and happiness of his new creation; his causing his son to take a pair of compasses out of a drawer, to trace the form of the earth. All this, and, indeed, the whole of Milton’s poem, is such barbarous trash, so outrageously offensive to reason and to common sense, that one is naturally led to wonder how it can have been tolerated by a people, amongst whom astronomy, navigation, and chemistry are understood. But, it is the fashion to turn up the eyes, when Paradise Lost is mentioned; and, if you fail herein you want taste; you want judgment even, if you do not admire this absurd and ridiculous stuff, when, if one of your relations were to write a letter in the same strain, you would send him to a madhouse and take his estate. It is the sacrificing of reason to fashion.

(193–94)

As far as Shakespeare is concerned, “the case is still more provoking.” Cobbett disdains “his ghosts, witches, sorcerers, fairies, and monsters . . . [and] his bombast and puns and smut, which appear to have been not much relished by his comparatively rude contemporaries” (194). His onslaught continues with unabated energy for two more pages before Cobbett finally turns to his main subject: those hated potatoes.

In subsequent articles, Cobbett reiterated his attack on these two “writers of bombast and far-fetched conceits and puns” (26 June 1824: 797). Almost every time that Cobbett brought up Milton or Shakespeare, he used the attack on them to support another point—here a warning against potatoes and elsewhere a fierce denunciation of Malthus’s then-fashionable “population lie” (26 June 1824: 797). Exaggeration to prove a point is a characteristic weapon of Cobbett’s, and he surely exaggerated in his attack on Milton and Shakespeare. The essay itself shows that he had read Shakespeare and Paradise Lost. Although he rarely quoted Milton in the Register, he quoted Shakespeare often. Indeed, George Spater notes in his biography of Cobbett that Cobbett quoted Shakespeare’s works more than any others except the Bible (538).

Cobbett attacked Milton and Shakespeare for their content and style, and it is in these areas that Shakespeare and Milton differ from Cobbett. They used puns and conceits to create “lies”; Cobbett used facts to create “truths.” They, like Scott, often ignored useful truths in favor of
useless fantasies. Cobbett's displeasure is not with the genre but with its misuse. Poetry could tell truths, and other poets could put the genre to good use. Both T. A. Birrell and Spater provide a long list of the poets whom Cobbett was decidedly influenced by in his own writing. Birrell connects him "to the great political satirical tradition of the eighteenth century: Dryden, Pope, Swift, Gay, Johnson, and Churchill—but especially Pope" (214–15). Spater concurs partially with this assessment, holding that Dryden, Pope, and Goldsmith "were his favorites" (18).9 Cobbett himself wrote several poems for the Register. Moreover, he mined the poems of Virgil, Dryden, Swift, Pope, Goldsmith, and Byron for quotations and had nothing but praise for Burns, "one single page of whose writings is worth more than a whole cart load that has been written by WALTER SCOTT" (17 Nov. 1832: 415).

Despite the fame William Hone earned for his satirical verse and parodies he presented little poetry or discussion of it in the short-lived Hone's Reformist's Register except for an extract from William Cowper's Task, a few satirical poems, including some by Defoe, and an excerpt from William Hazlitt's just-published commentary on Coriolanus.10 The most notable discussion of poetry in the Register is Hone's assault on Southey. The occasion for Hone's remarks was the publication during the same month (Feb. 1817) of Southey's Wat Tyler, a work he wrote in 1794 while still a strong republican but that was published only now by his enemies, "as proof of his political apostacy" (Madden 231). From the moment of its publication the republican sentiments in Wat Tyler made it an important work within the working-class canon. Hone was the first working-class journalist to notice the poem and the first to compare with scorn the (to the working class) now-servile poet laureate with the true poet of years before:

The present poem appears to have been written many years ago, when Mr. Southey had not merely reforming opinions, but very wild notions indeed. In consideration of a Court pension, he now regularly inflames his muse, in praise of official persons and business, at certain periods throughout the year, as precisely stated and rehearsed in verse, as the days whereon his pension is made payable and receivable. His present muse, however, is no more like to that which he formerly courted, than the black doll at an old rag shop is like Petrarch's Laura. Poor Southey! a pensioned Laureate! compelled to sing like a blind linnet by a sly
pinch, with every now and then a volume of his old verses flying into
his face, and putting him out! I have no doubt, he would at this mo-
moment exchange his situation, fleshpots and all, for that of the Negro,
who earns his 'daily,' by sweeping the crossing at Mr. Waithman's cor-
ner! (22 Feb. 1817: 157–58)\textsuperscript{11}

Hone here, largely by contrast, implies what a good poet is and there-
fore, by extension, offers something of an idea about what good poetry
is. The craft is irrelevant to him; the quality of a poem lies not in its
rhyme and rhythm but rather in its political truth and power.

Hone’s attack on Southey was the first of many directed at the poet
laureate by working-class journalists, attacks that continued to appear in
Chartist periodicals long after Southey’s death in 1843. For working-class
journalists, Southey was the whipping boy of poetry, just as Scott was the
whipping boy of fiction.

One month after Hone’s essay appeared, his friend Wooler pub-
lished an even more scathing attack on Southey in \textit{Black Dwarf}. To
Wooler, Southey’s apostacy was more detestable than it was to Hone. As
far as he was concerned, Southey was hardly a silly bird warbling pointless
songs, but was rather a traitor to the people, a former ally who had
turned against them. Citing an apology Southey had written excusing
himself from the sentiments of \textit{Wat Tyler}, Wooler writes: “He has con-
fessed himself guilty of throwing opinions like fire-brands amongst the
people, which he now says would lead them to destruction, and to cure
which he has dared to mark his own disciples as fit objects of ministerial
vengeance, and deserving of a halter as traitors to the state. In what does
such a man differ from the received opinion of the character of the
Devil? The agency of hell can do no more, than first seduce to sin, and
then betray to punishment” (26 Mar. 1817: 144).\textsuperscript{12} Southey’s present vil-
lainy, then, stems largely from his disavowal of his previous poetic hero-
ism. Wooler asserts in the review of \textit{Wat Tyler} that Southey has been able
to suggest ideas in his poetry that Paine, Cobbett, or Henry Hunt would
not have dared express in their prose writings or speeches. To Wooler,
\textit{Wat Tyler} is a great poem not simply because of its political sentiments but
because of its power to excite. Wooler holds that there is something ge-
nERICALLY more passionate and inciting about poetry than prose; a good
poet with an evil mind, like Southey, could therefore write a powerful
and yet untruthful poem. This point is one that none of Wooler’s working-class contemporaries expressed, and Wooler was the first working-class journalist to make a clear distinction between poetry and prose and to suggest that poetry could affect a reader in ways that prose could not.

In the review of *Wat Tyler* Wooler clearly drew historical parallels between the fourteenth-century Peasants’ Revolt (the nominal subject of the poem), the English war with the French Republic (which he maintains was the true subject of the poem), and the turbulent political events of his own day (140). Of all the early popular journalists, Wooler was the first to understand the value of analogy in poetry, the first to understand that poems about the past could be important to the working class of his day. Carlile never noticed *Wat Tyler*, but if he had, he very likely would have dismissed it as curtly as he dismissed *The Revolt of Islam* and *Macbeth*—as useless verse about the dead and buried. Wooler, on the other hand, liberates his nineteenth-century readers from the need for poetry to have a nineteen-century setting to have any value; he gives the poem a close reading, explaining the relevance of each incident for a contemporary working-class audience. After one excerpt, for example, Wooler writes: “Here is a brave *Poet Laureate* for ye! here are truths for courts. Here is plain speaking with a vengeance. But Mr. Southey is not one of your *half-reformers*: he is not satisfied with *half*-advocating his opinions. *Annual Parliaments* and *universal suffrage*, you see are already *trifles* in his view:—he seems to wish that with the *Royal Pests* all *governments* should perish” (140).

Throughout the *Dwarf*, Wooler published several more of Southey’s poems. Wooler particularly liked Southey’s “inscriptions”—short poems to liberty that appeared in several places in the *Black Dwarf*, which would appear again in later working-class periodicals. Wooler carefully explained the specific importance to a working-class audience of each one of these “specimen[s] of Robert Southey’s Better Days” as they appeared (12 Mar. 1822: 372). About one of them, lines addressed to “the exiled patriots, MUIR, PALMER, AND MARGAROT,” Wooler writes, “They would not now be inapplicably addressed to those who are now pining in English dungeons, for the maintenance of the same principles, and the demand of the same rights” (12 Mar. 1822: 372).

Obviously more aware than his fellows of the power of poetry, Wooler was the first popular journalist to regularly publish the verse of all
classes and literary periods. In his periodical he combined poems about
the Peterloo massacre with quotations from *King Lear* or *Paradise Lost*. In
his “Blackneb” series, Wooler published poetry by Pope, Shakespeare, 
Milton, Cowper, Mark Akenside, Goldsmith, Burns, Coleridge, Byron,
and many others. He was also the first working-class journalist to popular-
ize many of the sonnets that appeared in Wordsworth’s *Poems Dedicated
to National Independence and Liberty* (1815), which appeared in later
working-class periodicals far more frequently than anything else by
that poet.13

The influence of Pope upon Wooler is important, and I cannot pass
by a reference to Pope’s work in *Black Dwarf* without mentioning it. 
Wooler uses as a headnote to almost every one of his issues a quotation
from Pope’s “The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated,”
lines 69–72:

Satire’s my weapon, but I’m too discreet
To run a muck and tilt at all I meet,
I only wear it in a land of Hectors,
Thieves, Supercargoes, Sharpers, and directors.

The quotation fitly sums up the tone of Wooler’s prose attacks on the
abuses of his day; indeed Pope’s influence upon Wooler pervades his
prose far more than it does the poetry he publishes or discusses. Of all
the early journalists, Wooler is the most energetically and consistently sa-
tirical in his prose.

In his introduction to the “Blackneb” series, Wooler clearly makes a
generic distinction between poetry and many kinds of prose: “Now and
then we may relieve the severe gravity of the argumentative, by excur-
sions into the fields of Anecdote and Poetry” (26 Jan. 1823: 89). Wooler
was the first working-class journalist to take a Horatian approach to po-
etry: he felt that poetry must be both *utile et dulce*. He was the first work-
ing-class critic to notice and stress the idea of the pleasurable in poetry
and the notion of its nonargumentative and emotional power. Of course,
because poems were “pleasant” did not mean that Wooler did not have a
political purpose in publishing them. The poetic excerpts in *Black Dwarf*
aimed at reinforcing the ideological temper of his audience. Wooler sim-
ply believed that poetry and prose reinforced that ideology in different
ways. In discussing the purpose and uses of poetry, and in trying to define a working-class canon, Wooler anticipated more than any of his contemporaries the uses to which later working-class journalists would put poetry.

Views of Poetry, 1830–36

Poetry and politics entwined inseparably in the working-class periodicals published during the “War of the Unstamped.” Journalists during this period printed and lauded verse of the past and the present by writers of all classes, as long as they saw it as having a direct political relevance to their working-class audience. Their critical approach was strongly allegorical; to them, all true poetry of any age derived its primary meaning from the political state of the working class in the 1830s. Such a restricted focus indicates, perhaps, less the journalists’ own narrowness, or that of their audience, than the limitations of time under which working-class readers suffered. Few could devote hours to reading for aesthetic pleasure alone. The aesthetic might have value, but it was secondary for these readers to the need for personal and social improvement. During the 1830s, certainly the decade of the nineteenth century that saw the greatest number and variety of British working-class movements, poetry was a tool used in the service of those movements; beauty ran a distant second to functionality. It is not surprising, then, that editors provided—and their readers welcomed—studies of Coriolanus rather than, say, The Tempest, preferred now-forgotten political poets to Tennyson or Browning, and that working-class journalists would generally limit their criticism to political readings tailored very specifically toward their audience and the events of the year, month, or day in which they wrote. These readings may seem alien—or even worse, quaint—today. It is well worth keeping in mind, however, that a limited though clear focus gave the poetry that working-class journalists published and discussed a highly charged relevance to their readers. These periodicals show that poetry could have greater energy for working-class readers of the time than it has for many readers today.

During this period working-class journalists quarried the works of many poets, including Shakespeare, Southey (mostly, of course, his Wat Tyler), Thomas Moore, and especially Burns, Byron, and Shelley, for
headnotes or quotations to punctuate or counterpoint their own views, and often published works of established poets independently of their articles. Besides simply publishing a great deal of established poetry, though, the popular journalists of this time discussed poetry and its purposes much more frequently than did earlier working-class journalists.

A telling generic (and political) discussion appeared in the most popular working-class periodical of the time, Hetherington’s Poor Man’s Guardian, on 4 August 1832 (486–87). The discussion was sparked when a writer for that periodical noticed a poem, “The Weaver’s Song,” which was published in the SDUK’s Penny Magazine. The poem, by the then-famous Barry Cornwall, romantically and unrealistically describes a weaver’s happy condition:

Weave, brothers, weave!—Swiftly throw
   The shuttle athwart the loom,
And show us how bright your flowers grow
   That have beauty but no perfume!
Come, show us the rose, with a hundred dyes,
   The lily, that hath no spot;
The violet, deep as your true love’s eyes,
   and the little forget-me-not!
Sing,—sing, brothers! weave and sing!
   Tis good both to sing and to weave:
   Tis better to work than live idle:
   Tis better to sing than to grieve.

Weave, brothers, weave!—Weave, and bid
   The colours of sunset glow!
Let grace in each gliding thread be hid!
   Let beauty about ye blow!
Let your skein be long, and your silk be fine,
   And your hands both firm and sure,
And time nor chance shall your work untwine
   But all,—like a truth,—endure!
   So,—sing, brothers, &c.

Weave, brothers, weave!—Toil is ours;
   But toil is the lot of men:
One gathers the fruit, one gathers the flowers,
    One soweth the seed again.
There is not a creature, from England’s King,
    To the peasant that delves the soil,
That knows half the pleasures the seasons bring,
    If he have not his share of toil!
So, sing, brothers, &c. (486)"
Terry Eagleton and others have argued that in the nineteenth century "literature" increasingly replaced religion as a discourse intended to gain ideological control over the working class (22–27). The critic in Poor Man's Guardian lashes out at a poem that he or she feels is written with that very intent. The poem might be "beautiful," but it attempts in its beauty to turn a factory into a garden and to present economic exploitation as a happy and fixed truth. The writer here will have no beauty that covers an ugly opinion. He or she sees beauty for the purposes of deception as nothing but a middle-class trick.

The article generated three responses: one in prose and two in verse. The prose response, by a writer identified as Justitia, who claimed to be a Spitalfields weaver, is a fascinating close technical reading of the poem. Justitia's occupational claim seems a valid one, for he or she shows in-depth knowledge of the mechanics of weaving. In discussing Cornwall's words "the rose, with a hundred dyes," for example, Justitia writes, "Why the most arrant fool in Spitalfields would laugh in his face to hear him say such a thing, for our roses have seldom more than two or three 'dyes,' very often only one" (Poor Man's Guardian 11 Aug 1832: 494).

Most of Justitia's letter compares Cornwall's romantic illusion to the hard material reality of the weaver's life. Justitia begins the letter with a definition of poetry: "If it be true, and I think it is, that 'Poetry be impassioned TRUTH,' a man to be a poet must deal a little in that article" (494). Going through the poem almost line by line, Justitia shows that the verse does not deserve the name of poetry at all. After citing a line of "downright nonsense," "Let beauty about ye blow," Justitia writes, "This proves the whole 'song' to be merrily imaginative, and not to be 'impassioned TRUTH,' so that it is not poetry, but fiction, written by folly" (495).

To Justitia, then, true poetry is nonfiction; such nonsense as Cornwall's verse is not poetry at all.

The two responses in verse are in content, if not in meter, parodies of Cornwall's song. One poem, like Cornwall's, is entitled "The Weaver's Song," written "Not by Barry Cornwall." The second is called "The Weaver." Both attempt to describe accurately a weaver's degraded reality. The first decries the economic hardships of a weaver's life, in which almost all the produce of his labor profits another (3 Nov. 1832: 587). The second describes the physical and mental degradation imposed upon a weaver and bitterly exposes Cornwall's lies:
Toil, and still toil! I marvel that I bear
   To drudge so long; my little ones here too
Watching the loom with eyes of fear and care
   Lest some thread snap too swiftly for their view:
It is a harrowing sight—enough my arm
   To paralyze, as it hath done my heart:
He lies who babbles to me of the charm
   Love lends to labour; 'tis that Love I start
To Think of, as dull habit goads me on
   To earn a pittance for its hapless fruit.
Nor is there refuge when the day is gone,
   I pause, but do not rest from my pursuit.
Night's a grim sentinel, forbidding sleep,
Lest morn should on it break, and find it all too deep.

That beauty's in the handywork of God
   The flow'rs I toil to imitate declare,
Tho' what their brightness on the earth's green sod
   Be, I know not;—I never saw them there!
My sky's my work-jail's roof; my clouds, the breath
   Of my pent fellows panting for the air,
Which brick close piled on brick, prohibiteth
   From entering with its heav'n-commissioned pass:
'Tis true I have my Sabbath—'tis a day
   God and not man allows me; but, alas,
The brute-like six have taken all away
   That should live on the seventh; not an ark
Of peace my heart is, but a cavern dark:
I hear the church-bell ring, and sigh, but cannot pray.
   (31 Aug. 1833: 283)

In confronting Cornwall's poem, this poem indicates a contrasting aesthetic: a successful poem must convey accurately a sense of the way things are, no matter how miserable that may be. This poem, one imagines, would be considered true poetry by Justitia and by Hetherington and Bronterre O'Brien, the editor and publisher of the Poor Man's Guardian. This kind of poetry was, to them, an antidote to Cornwall's fantasies.
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The concept of "truth" carried strong class overtones in these periodicals, of course. In a world that these writers saw as full of oppressive class, economic, and literary lies, they—and other working-class journalists of the time—regarded themselves as among the few honest interpreters of what was and was not truthful. As poetry was, for them, by definition truth, they also necessarily saw themselves as the few honest interpreters of what was and was not poetry.

Because these critics were refining a poetic standard, almost every review—even the shortest—offers an important generic statement. While they did not believe that one had to be a member of the working class to be a true poet (though of course that never hurt), a true poet at least had to exhibit sympathy with that class. A poem, A Voice from the Factories, reviewed in 1836 in the full-feature, radical Weekly True Sun, was not by a laborer but by the Honorable Mrs. Norton. [15] The reviewer nonetheless holds the poem to be a good one because its subject—factory abuses—was fitting, "here urged with so much of force and of feeling, with such truth, beauty, grace, and earnestness, that any advocate, who could have been chosen from amongst our most illustrious living writers, would have done his fame no disservice by the avowal" (12 Dec. 1836: 1381). Norton's work, as poetry, is superior in the critic's mind to most of the prose written on factory reform. Indeed, he or she goes on to say more such poetry "would tend to purify the atmosphere of politics, and produce that elevated tone of thought and feeling which guide more surely to truth, than the blundering disquisitions of dogged economists, or the unprincipled logic of oratorical partizans" (1381). The great difference between Cornwall's poem and Norton's, of course, is that in Norton's, beauty does not mask truth; it promotes it. Beauty yoked to the service of truth raises this poem above much of the political prose of the day: "purity" and "elevation" allow a clearer sense of everyday working-class reality. The young Tennyson and Browning might not have been as completely ignored in the working-class periodicals of this time had they turned their minds to factory abuses, the Reform Bill, the new poor law, or the Tolpuddle Martyrs instead of to lotos-eaters or Paracelsus.

Two reviews of a poem by George Petrie, Equality, show working-class journalists applying distinctly working-class political views to their poetic criticism. One of the reviews, from John Cleave's very popular and strongly radical Cleave's Weekly Police Gazette, offers a hint as to why the
working-class canon was necessarily limited at this time: “Mr. Petrie’s poem, ‘EQUALITY,’ unites important truths and vigorous writing. It is genuine poetry consecrated to the service of mankind—a species of writing, of which, it must be admitted, there is a great dearth” (3 Sept. 1836: n.p.). A longer review of the same poem, from the Poor Man’s Guardian, begins with a generic statement of the kind that could be (and was) made by critics of all classes and sympathies: “Poetry is the genuine expression of human thoughts, and of human feelings. Genuine poetry is that fine quality and power by which man, yielding to the impulses of his nature, sees, feels, and expresses the nobleness of his nature, and the vast and unbounded power of his thoughts. Ask what is poetry? Poetry is the spirit of Nature! A poem is the genuine thoughts of the mind traced out by the pen of the poet, and described in words. Poetry is Nature herself” (22 Sept. 1832: 542). Turning to the poem itself, the reviewer makes it clear that he or she does not define Nature as rocks, and stones, and trees, but as something far more social. “Here then is the true end of the poet kept in constant view. Not the idle chiming of a syren song, to lure mankind from the contemplation of truth—but the bold and manly vigour of a powerful mind is exercised, to brand with shame the upholders of that cruel system of rapine and injustice, which has rendered mankind miserable, and deluged the earth with the blood and tears of millions of our deluded brethren” (543). This critic radically binds nature, truth, and beauty to a sense of working-class reality. “Nature” is the cruel and oppressive social system; “truth” is the accurate perception of that system; “beauty” is the quality of presentation of that truth. The critic was obviously aware of attempts by critics of other classes to define and use those terms but refuses to accept their definitions without modifying them for his or her own class.

The journalists of this time applied the same rigid 1830s working-class standards to the poets of other ages and expected long-dead poets to live up to those standards. The Literary Test, the periodical that offered many class readings of fiction in its five weeks of publication, did not ignore poetry. In fact, on 14 January 1832 it took on what might be considered the most ambitious literary project of any early nineteenth-century working-class periodical (Cobbett’s assault on Shakespeare and Milton, perhaps, excepted): one critic, called H., tried in two pages to “test” all Shakespeare’s works. As the Test’s critics did with fiction, H. applied the
usual proletarian-tilted Golden Rule to the subject. Admitting “that *Shakespeare’s* powers of language and delineation are stupendous, and his poetry exquisite,” H. argued that such talents meant next to nothing; much more to the point was whether Shakespeare applied those gifts toward the general good, or whether, “instead of applying them to the furtherance of knowledge and increase of happiness, he has not somewhat preferred the advancement of his own individual interest, and tended to the perpetuation of ignorance and wretched inequality, by truckling to the vicious and distempered opinions of those who benefited by their continuance” (48). In other words, H. considers whether Shakespeare is guilty of Southey’s kind of literary betrayal. As far as H. is concerned, Shakespeare fails this literary and human test miserably.

He has drawn his scenes among kings and nobles, and taught mankind little more than that princes are but men, and prone to all the faults and weaknesses of mortality;—occasionally, however, contenting himself by saying a kind sentence or two in favor of the unfortunate—and those too so admirably and effectively that I can the less excuse his omission to say more. *Shakespeare* in fact only studied the amusement of the aristocracy of his day, who were yet more difficult to please than the ‘society’ of the present;—if, indeed, he was not of himself rather inclined to agree with his betters,—or else, how could a mind of his substantial superiority have delighted so much in the pageantry of kings ‘and the pomp and circumstance of glorious war?’ (48)

In two sentences, H. condemns almost every line of Shakespeare as being reactionary and worthless. It should be noted that this critic and Cobbett stand almost alone in their absolute antipathy to Shakespeare. But they were not alone in their refusal to follow fashion or in their willingness to follow through with their political and critical ideas, even if that meant rebelling against two centuries of orthodox opinion.

In John Bell’s *Political Mirror* (1837), one critic, in a short-running series called “The Political Philosophies of Shakespeare’s Plays,” did not reject Shakespeare out of hand. On the contrary, he or she believed that Shakespeare could offer a good understanding of the politics of any age, since, to this critic, there is essentially no difference between the politics of the present and the past. In the introduction to the first installment, the critic states:
In the pages of Shakespeare, may be traced not only the operation of those social relations which have, from the earliest periods, connected, or disjoined human beings—but a most faithful picture of those political relations, also, which human beings have always borne and still bear, to each other. In history, there is nothing new. All is re-production. Names may change—but the political principles and passions which now agitate the world, have agitated the world since the commencement of time.

In England we are in the habit of dividing politicians into Tories, Whigs, Radicals, and pretended Radicals. All these varieties may be found in Shakespeare—although the specimens are not so ticketed and labelled. (19 Aug. 1837: 12)

For three weeks the same critic studied the character of Brutus from *Julius Caesar*, explaining scene by scene why he should be considered a "pretender to Radicalism" and a "weak, vain, obstinate creature" (19 Aug. 1837: 12; 26 Aug. 1837: 24). The analogy to contemporary pseudoradicals is strong; obviously, the critic’s intent here is to warn readers to be on guard against such characters. But after introducing the possibility of analogy at the beginning of the study, the critic makes no direct correlation between Brutus and nineteenth-century sham radicals, or between Rome (or Elizabethan England) and the writer’s present. Instead, the writer leaves the task of making direct connections up to the reader—an assumption of literary sophistication rare in earlier popular periodicals (19 Aug. 1837: 12–15; 26 Aug. 1837: 23–26; 2 Sept. 1837: 42–43).

This critic follows up his views about Brutus with a study of the political philosophy of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*. This study is as much a critical response to Hazlitt’s criticism of the play (from his *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*, published in 1817) as it is to the play itself. Completely overlooking the fact that in his essay Hazlitt’s sympathies are wholly with the plebeians, this writer takes issue with Hazlitt’s embittered declaration that poetry is the property of those in power, or that “the language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power.” To this critic, the language of poetry cannot be denied to the weak. “Poetry has an equal affinity with all social conditions. The language of suffering, issuing from a cotton-factory, may be quite as poetical as the language of independence in the mouth of a Swiss, rejoicing on his mountains” (16 Sept.
1837: 70). More than this, poetry offers the poor a way to transcend their weakness and helplessness. To be poetic is to be powerful. Hazlitt, the critic believes, has put the cart before the horse. “Hazlitt's definition, in truth, is based on mere confusion of thought. Wherever poetry is, there is power—and poetry may be anywhere, every where. Poetry gives no preference to beauty or rank, above decay and lowliness” (70). The critic believes, as Hazlitt does not, that the speeches of Coriolanus, “a vulgar-minded, foul-mouthed, swaggerer,” are “admirably rebuked by the language which Shakespeare puts into the mouths of his plebeian opponents” (68). To the critic, the poetical and political messages of Coriolanus are exactly the same.

If a work could not be read in a way that would empower a working-class audience of that time, if it could not excite that audience to proper thought and action, if, in short, it could not serve the exact purpose that almost every working-class periodical at this time held, then working-class journalists usually scorned or ignored it. In discussing Shakespeare both the Political Mirror's critic and the Literary Test's H. write with much more concern for the present than for Elizabethan England. Working-class journalists, in effect, translated for a working-class audience all the poetry they discussed, distilling the hard truth from a poem's character, tone, plot, and setting. In introducing Wat Tyler, for example, to which most of one issue of Cosmopolite is devoted, one writer is clearly much more concerned with the fortunes of the working class in the near future than with those of the peasants of 1381. “Let the people read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Southey's drama of Wat Tyler. Let them see what is to be imitated and what avoided. Let them qualify themselves by sobriety, by industry, by study, and by well-spent time, to play a better part in the next subject of the next Poet Laureate, and so we bid them God speed” (7 Sept. 1833: 167). The lessons in the rest of the introduction are concerned with the foolishness either of parlaying with the present oppressors or of thinking they will give up one bit of the power they hold without a struggle. Richard II's and William Walworth's betrayal of the peasants is significant only as a reflection of the betrayal of the working class by the Reform Bill of Lord Russell and Earl Grey, an event mentioned in the review and one that teaches the very same lessons (166).

Poems and references to poems in working-class journals generally reveal as much—and often more—about the historical and social
context of the journal's reader and the journalist citing or discussing the work as it does that of the poet or poem. In other words, poetry was chosen and evaluated at this time for very specific reasons; to understand those reasons is to gain some understanding of the relation between a particular periodical and its readers. A writer for the Owenite Co-operative Magazine, for example, after publishing Coleridge's "Sonnet: On the Prospect of Establishing a Pantisocracy in America," notes, "little did the writer of this sonnet then think, that on abandoning the scheme, such a Pantisocracy would be actually established in that country by Robert Owen, in about thirty years from that time" (Apr. 1826: 133). The "pantisocracy" to which the writer refers is New Harmony, Owen's Co-operative community in Indiana. The same periodical argues that Shelley's poems are important Co-operationist statements; they "abound in the most glowing descriptions of social perfection, and in the most persuasive appeals to the finest feelings of the heart in favour of social equality, and a just division of the rights, duties, and enjoyments of life" (Feb. 1830: 32). In much the same fashion a reviewer of Francis Macerone's Defensive Instructions for the People in Poor Man's Guardianprefaces his notice with an excerpt from Henry VI that exhorts the people to "get thee a sword, though made of lath" (11 Apr. 1831: 345). The excerpt had a clear and ominous import for a working-class audience during the turbulent time just before the passing of the Reform Bill.

If a poem could not be stretched to fit the context of the present moment, there was another option open to working-class journalists: it could be changed to fit that context. Parody is not quite the right term for such poetry. Revision is more appropriate: the journalists' main intent was usually less to ridicule the original poem than to broaden the political perception of a working-class audience. Such poems impart a working-class viewpoint to a neutral or even hostile poem. As we have seen, Cornwall's "Weaver's Song" elicited two such responses from working-class poets. Both of those verses do ridicule Cornwall, but they are far more concerned with correctly delineating the horrors of factory work. Three "Commentaries on Dr. Watt's Hymns," by I. H., which first appeared in Carpenter's Monthly Political Magazine (1831–32), typify this form. The first takes the most famous (and, incidentally, most parodied) of Isaac Watt's verses for children, and converts that well-known bit of conservative propaganda into a bitter political and anticlerical statement:
How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour
And gather honey all the day
From every opening Flower

And is not the mechanic's toil,
As constant and as true?
Yet what just praise have priests bestow'd,
My fellow-men, on you?

Not that the empty purse they give
Could ease us of our pain;
For tho' the bees have praise obtain'd,
To them their toil is vain? [sic]

What lazy priests have ever been
A friend to toil-worn man?
Have they not all, for ages past,
Upheld each tyrant's plan?

Then let their praises go for nought,
Instruction we would find;
And their dark words no longer shall
Deceive our waken'd mind. (Feb. 1832: 271)

G. S. R. Kitson Clark notes that 1830–50 was “the great age of the extension of hymn singing” (230); I. H. was one among many to make hymns serve working-class secular ends.

A variation on this kind of revised poem borrows a well-known meter or song and grafts upon it distinctly working-class lyrics. Appropriating tunes for the cause was a favorite recreation for working-class poets, one popular during this period and throughout the Chartist years. By appropriating in this way, working-class poets could relatively effortlessly impassion their truths with verse. Moreover, the simple regularity of meter was in itself compelling, and many working-class critics considered truth with a beat more memorable than truth without. A writer called J. F. justifies his original verse in sending it to the Guardian by saying the lines offer ideas for those “too apathetic to search for them in the argumentative field of prose (of which persons I fear there are too many) but whose
minds will readily retain a truth contained in the jingle of a couplet" (28 Apr. 1832: 326).

Many working-class poets wrote new lyrics to Burns’s well-known songs, especially “Scots, Wha’ Hae’ Wallace Bled,” and even more so to “A Man’s a Man for A’ That,” his “union of balladry with Tom Paine” (Woodring 59). Such revisions do not suggest that working-class composers saw any political impropriety in Burns’s original verse (as they did, for example, with Cornwall’s); rather, they suggested the popularity of the poet and his tunes. Applying new words to popular music allowed anyone to sing at any gathering without a music lesson. Newspapers such as the Poor Man’s Guardian often reported the minutes of working-class meetings; those reports show that group singing was a common, even central, activity. Burns’s songs, original and revised, were among the most frequently sung at these meetings.

Even more popular than appropriating Burns’s songs was “revising” and “correcting” national songs. Working-class writers simply kept the memorable and impassioned music and chucked out the reprehensible lyrics. This kind of composition can be found before the thirties; in Thomas Davison’s Medusa, for example, one poem, “The Watchword of Britons,” is meant to be sung to “Rule Britannia.” During the thirties especially, however, the form proliferated. The Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operator also published new lyrics to “Rule Britannia,” entitled “Each for All,” which offered the following Co-operative sentiments in its first verse:

The social brotherhood of man
   Alone can bless the boon of birth,
And nature in her generous plan
   Has taught us how to use the earth.
Proclaim the truth in bower, hut, and hall
Britons EACH must live for ALL! (n.d. [Nov. 1832?] 45)

Many other periodicals carried revised lyrics for this tune, among them the Poor Man’s Guardian (two different versions) and William Carpenter’s short-lived Political Unionist (a version by Ebenezer Elliott called “The Triumph of Reform”). New lyrics for “God Save the King” were equally abundant: different versions of that song are found in Carpenter’s
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Monthly Political Magazine and Political Letters and Pamphlets, in the Republican, or Voice of the People, the Glasgow Agitator, the Cosmopolite, and Poor Man’s Guardian.

Using selection, rejection, and appropriation, the journalists of this period were the first of the working class to codify a set of standards for judging poetry. They created the same tools that the Chartists used. The Chartists, however, generally had a broader perspective of poetry, and enlarged the working-class poetic canon considerably.

Chartist Views of Poetry

Chartist journalists appropriated or changed the works of other ages and classes to suit their own world view; they sought out and prized the politically “correct” in works of poetry and demanded that a poet speak in some way to the working class in order to be accepted by that class. All these things, of course, working-class journalists had done before. The extent of the Chartist appropriation of poetry, however, was greater than that of their predecessors; they considered much more British poetry worth the reading, and widened their net, seeing much in the poetry of other nations as appropriate for their audiences. Moreover, Chartist critics valued far more than just the obviously political in poetry—or, more accurately, their sense of what was political broadened considerably and their ideas of what was politically “correct” were generally more subtle than those of preceding journalists; they did not lose their taste for fiery radicalism and pungent satire, but they began to appreciate equally other poetic subgenres.

To argue the justice of their cause, the Chartists looked to many of the same poets as had their predecessors. Burns, Shelley, and Byron were still favorites, and appeared more frequently than ever before. Wat Tyler, too, had the same relevance for the Chartists that it had for the working class when it was first published in 1817. Parts of the work appeared in headnotes to several periodicals, and in 1839 the London Democrat, the organ of Harney’s London Democratic Association, published the second and third acts of the closet drama in full (18 May: 46–48; 1 June: 62–64). Contemporary poems by non-Chartists, too—those with an obvious relevance for Chartist audiences—were published in Chartist journals. The Northern Star, for example, in 1843 plundered “The Song of the Shirt”
from *Punch*'s Christmas issue for their own, republishing it before the public knew that Thomas Hood was its author. In 1844 the *Star* carried Hood's "The Lay of the Labourer," a poem that calls for fair compensation for labor.

Like their predecessors, Chartist editors often published revised lyrics to well-known songs in order to make popular music serve a political purpose. A writer in the late Chartist periodical *Northern Tribune* (1854–55), introducing one of that periodical's "Songs for the People," put into words the reason working-class poets had been doing this for years:

No Idea can be said to have reached the hearts of a People, until they have given it utterance in Song. Yet how many of our noblest National Airs are still united to sickly and unmeaning doggerel; while the words of others are absolutely sensual and indecent? . . . What an invaluable auxiliary in the work of Popular Regeneration Song might become, were sentiments of freedom, heroism, fraternity, and love allied to 'sweet sounds'! By attaching fitting words to some of our Popular Melodies, we shall strive to inspire higher and healthier social feelings; and "destroy custom by custom." (Feb. 1854: 40)  

A glance through Y. V. Kovalev's *Anthology of Chartist Literature* or Peter Scheckner's *An Anthology of Chartist Poetry* demonstrates convincingly that many Chartist poets favored this sort of metrical and musical appropriation. 18 "God Save the King" (or, after 1837, of course, "God Save the Queen") was still a favorite choice for this kind of treatment. A variation of that anthem is one of the "Songs for the People" in *Northern Tribune* (Sept. 1844: 319). Other versions are in *McDouall's Chartist and Republican Journal* (1841; 19 June 1841: 96; rpt. in Weisser 96), *The English Chartist Circular* ("Temperance Anthem," 9 Jan. 1842?: 8), *People: Their Rights and Liberties* (3 Feb. 1849: 292), and *People's Paper* (24 July 1852: 3; 12 Feb. 1853: 6). Robert Nicholl (a prolific working-class poet), Linton, Jones, and others all aimed to create a national Chartist anthem by revising the old one.

The "Marseillaise Hymn" became very popular at this time, either in its original form (translated by such writers as William Howitt or Jones) or in revisions. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in London in 1848, noted that "the 'Marseillaise' was sung [at working-class meetings] as songs are in our abolition meetings" (quoted in Schoyen 160). In the same year
Northern Star published three different translations of the song within seven weeks to celebrate the flight of Louis-Philippe from France (26 Feb.: 3; 1 Apr.: 3; 8 Apr.: 3).19

The Chartist journalists' serious interest in a French political song is one sign among many that they selected their poetry from a larger pool than had their predecessors. The presence of foreign poetry of any kind was a striking rarity in working-class periodicals before 1837. After that date foreign poems and references to them were very common. As they had with their politics, comrades, and choice of fiction, Chartists—especially the later ones—looked toward Europe and America. As would be expected, they generally chose the foreign poetry they published on ideological grounds. A list of the European poets the Chartists respected differs greatly from those a modern reader would consider canonical for the period; indeed it differs greatly from those the British middle class of the time would have considered leading European poets. Of those from France, Pierre-Jean de Beranger received high praise in several different issues of Northern Star. Called "the prince of political poets" (23 Sept. 1848: 3), he was the subject of a two-week appraisal in that periodical in 1848 (23 Sept.: 3; 30 Sept.: 3). That study inseparably connects the political and poetical, for Beranger, besides being a poet, was a recently retired member of the revolutionary National Assembly of 1848. The statement from the appraisal, "How nobly Beranger contrasts with those things Southey and Wordsworth!" is thus, of course, commentary both poetical and political. Of Beranger's poetry, the Star's critic writes, "His songs defy censure, and we despair to do him justice in the way of praise" (23 Sept.: 3).

Germany's Ferdinand Freiligrath was even more regularly noticed and highly praised in the Chartist press. His work, or discussions of it, appeared in the English Chartist Circular (n.d. [Jan. 1843?]: 399), Northern Star (5 July 1845: 3; 11 Apr. 1846: 3; and elsewhere), Notes to the People (four poems [5 July 1851: 186, 197; 13 Sept. 1851: 394; 11 Apr. 1852: 978–79]), and People's Paper (4 Sept. 1852: 6). Apparently, both Harney and Jones discussed Freiligrath's poetry at some length. Harney, the editor of the literary page of Northern Star in 1845, was almost certainly the critic incensed when in that year both the Athenæum and Tait's Magazine complained that Freiligrath had become political; Harney replied that Freiligrath had no choice but to be political:
When the great German people, divided and separated, are made the prey of contemptible [sic] beggarly princes, whose wretched tyrannies are only endured because propped up by the bayonets of the Austrian and Prussian despotisms; when those despotisms are allied with the bloody autocracy of Russia to stem the progress of free principles, making Germany the informer, gaoler, and executioner of Polish, Italian, and Swiss liberty; when kings have violated the solemn pledges, on the faith of which the millions poured out their blood like water to save those regal perjurers; when the wealth-producers are driven to insurrection by lack of bread, and cannon and chains are the only remedies prescribed for their sufferings; when the German mind is chained down by a tyrannical censorship, and all its aspirations for the right, the good, and the true, are choked by the strong red-hand of kingly tyranny; when, in short, the muzzle is on the mouth, the sword hews down the pen, patriots languish in prison, and poets sing the strains of their fatherland in exile—surely these are days when the bard may not only be permitted to throw himself into the political arena to combat for the right; but more than that, he is surely enjoined to do so, if he would not be a traitor to his most holy trust—a renegade to the mission for which heaven has endowed him with a gift the most glorious humanity can know. (5 July 1845: 3)

The statement is both a personal description and a generic observation: Harney clearly posits Freiligrath as the archetype of every poet in an unfree society. Jones, writing six years later in his Notes to the People, also makes Freiligrath the epitome of a “good” poet, but in a different way:

In his life and in his writings he stands alike before us, the pure democrat—and while too many other poets have sought the sunshine of an easy celebrity or the gain of a wide circulation, by a mean pliancy to existing powers, or, at least, by pandering to the prejudices and ignorance of a rich middle-class, this great man has scorned so to degrade his talents and violate his mission—and has ever consistently proved the poet and champion of the working man. (5 July 1851: 186)

Harney sees Freiligrath as a product of his time and place: Prussia in 1845. According to Jones’s description, on the other hand, Freiligrath could as easily have been Polish or Welsh as German; Jones, the Fraternal Democrat, the friend of political exiles of many nations, clearly holds not only that good poetry is class based, but that class interests, in poetry as well as politics, transcend national ones.
Jones, the great internationalist of Chartism, was also the great internationalist of poetry. All his periodicals show some interest in the works of foreign poets. In *People's Paper* and *Notes to the People* are reviews of, or poetry by, many Europeans. On the pages of his and O'Connor's *Labourer* he offers a series on the literature—almost exclusively poetry—of other nations. He does this, he explains, to present a model for his Chartist poets. "We would recommend our poet-friends to study some of the models of foreign composition, both in prose and verse, and not in an imitative spirit, but since new lights and new views, will open to them as they read—and since the intercourse of minds, like the confluence of streams, deepens the tide of thought, feeling, and imagination, and is more likely to produce the great, than isolated brooding over individual fancies" (Nov. 1847: 240). In this series, Jones assesses works by Poland's Zygmunt Krasinski as well as by Pushkin and Schiller. Clearly, to Jones, the class sympathies he sees in these poets render them far more valuable than many British poets to a Chartist audience.20

American poets were also well represented in Chartist periodicals. John Greenleaf Whittier, a Chartist sympathizer and friend of Harney (Vicinus 108), was called in the *Northern Star* "the chief of American poets" (3 July 1847: 3) and was published often in that periodical. Linton had "a lifelong interest in American verse"; indeed, he may have been the first English editor of any class to publish Longfellow (F. B. Smith 39).21 In *Northern Star* and other Chartist periodicals are poems by and reviews of Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, William Cullen Bryant, and more.

Several of the *Chartist Circular* 's many "Literary Sketches" are devoted to American poets, and the writer of that series explained why American poetry so attracted him:

America is the only democratic land of liberty and equality on the face of the globe; and though her political freedom is only about half a century old, yet she has already produced some of the most splendid poets not only of modern times, but men whose effusions, for sublimity, patriotism, beauty, and manly vigour, are unparalleled by the poetical rhapsodies of the ancient bards of Greece and Rome, and they stand alone in the loveliness of glory and liberty, like their native democracy—amid the despotisms of Europe, and the horrid slavery of Asia and Africa. (8 Jan. 1842: 494)
Of course, America at this time practiced its own "horrid slavery," and even this critic wished "American bards would awaken their wildly sounding lyres for the emancipation of their negro slaves" (494). The Chartists treasured not only American songs about freedom but also their songs against enslavement. A writer in *Northern Star* maintained that "the only poets America has yet produced, whose effusions are destined to live, are those who have devoted themselves to the Anti-Slavery cause" (5 July 1845: 3). On 9 March 1844 the *Northern Star* published a poem by a writer identified as W. B., "To the Poets of America," that sums up the Chartist attitude toward this American paradox. The poem exhorts the "Bards of Freedom's boasted land" to use their power to destroy slavery, which keeps them from being completely free and therefore from being fully poetic—"For Poetry is Freedom's child!" (rpt. in Kovalev 63–64).

Though they looked to other cultures for universal truths, Chartist journalists rarely forgot that they were working within a particular society—that they were writing for the working class of Great Britain and that their task was to expand the canon of poetry for that audience by giving them a functioning set of literary values. As before, a primary criterion for admission to their canon was that a work contain some political value for their class; to them, those who did not promote ideological values directly relevant to a Chartist audience—those who did not approach the condition of a Chartist reader directly, analogically, or allegorically—had nothing at all to offer. For some, it seems, only laborers had any poetry to offer laborers; the only poets George W. M. Reynolds discusses in *Reynolds's Political Instructor*, for example, are two that he considers working-class—Cooper and Elliott (1 Dec. 1849: 25–26; 22 Dec. 1849: 49–50).22 Many Chartist critics, on the other hand, quoted established poets out of context in order to squeeze their truths into a working-class mold. A writer for the *Chartist Circular*, in a series called "The Politics of Poets," endeavored to transform every poet he or she discussed into a die-hard radical with working-class sympathies. Not surprisingly, this critic thus represents Byron, Shelley, Burns, and Milton as class champions. More surprising is the writer's treatment of Coleridge and Wordsworth. The critic maintains that Coleridge's works "abound with the warmest aspirations after liberty, and the loudest warnings to this country on the tendency of its politics under Whig and Tory management" (13 Mar. 1841: 323). Wordsworth is considered even more a Chartist: his
poems "are Radical—deeply, essentially, entirely Radical." The critic is amazed that "he came to be called a Tory at all" (1 Aug. 1840: 182). Considering that both these assessments were written in the early 1840s, long after Wordsworth's and Coleridge's revolutionary sentiments had cooled (and indeed after Coleridge had died), one would imagine that this critic had to select his excerpts carefully. This is indeed the case. Though he purports to assess the entirety of Wordsworth's work, for example, all the excerpts he presents are sonnets from Wordsworth's Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty (1815), sonnets with sentiments such as "Advance! come forth from thy Tyrolean ground, / Dear Liberty!" and "Milton! thou shouldst been [sic] living at this hour" (quoted in Chartist Circular 1 Aug. 1840: 182). The critic never mentions that all the poems are carefully culled from the same narrow source.

The "Literary Sketches" in Chartist Circular mostly concerned Scottish literary figures. Almost certainly a different writer composed this series, for this writer is far less compelled than the author of "The Politics of Poets" to find a Chartist dwelling in the soul of every British poet. Nonetheless, in this series, too, Chartist sentiments crop up in surprising places. For example, of George Buchanan, the sixteenth-century Scottish political writer, poet, and tutor to James I, the writer states that "his political opinions are the Radical doctrines of modern Chartist" (8 May 1841: 359). This critic even pored over the works of the medieval poet Robert Henryson for republican sentiments, quickly passing over Henryson's Testament of Cresseid in order to present the second stanza of his obscure poem "In Praise of Age." That stanza is important to the critic because it "contains the bold sentiments of a Radical Reformer, and we may almost class his opinions, with political justice, among those of modern Chartists" (12 June 1841: 378). The stanza contains such sentiments as

Justice is fled—the helm is held by guile—
Despotic tyrants have the righteous slain,
And Freedom languisheth in iron chain.

(quoted in Chartist Circular 12 June 1841: 378)

Shakespeare, too, could be made into a Chartist. A series in the Northern Star in 1840, "Chartism from Shakespeare," tried to do just that. In that series quotations from Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2, Coriolanus, Julius
Caesar, King John, Richard III, and other plays express sentiments appropriate to Chartism. One excerpt from Henry IV, Part 2 is given the title, “Frost and Physical Force,” which draws a direct parallel between Hotspur’s rebellion and John Frost’s rising in Newport the year before. The editor of this series made other connections between Shakespeare’s political values and those of the Chartists with such titles as “The Chartist” and “True Guard of Royalty.” In the fifth and last installment of the series, the title was expanded to “Chartism from the Poets,” and its editor had James Thomson, Milton, and Charles Churchill join Shakespeare as Chartists.

In the Labourer, one critic, almost certainly Jones, in two separate articles tested contemporary poets for their worth to a Chartist audience. These articles contradict one another several times, but both argue that true poetry strives to state working-class ideals. In the first article, “Literary Review,” Jones notes that Chartist poetry is “the freshest and most stirring of the age” (Aug. 1847: 98). Comparing the works of established poets with those of Chartist writers, he argues that all the former are lost in imaginative worlds of their own making and are not “devoting their great talents to the great cause of the age,” as they should be (98). Of Tennyson and Browning he writes:

What is Robert Browning doing? He, who could fire the soul of a Luria, and develope the characters of a Victor and a Charles,—he, who could depict nature’s nobility in a Colombe,—has he nothing to say for popular rights? Let him eschew his kings, and queens,—let him quit the pageantry of courts—and ascend into the cottage of the poor.

“Can Tennison [sic] do no more than troll a courtly lay? His oak could tell other tales besides a love story. (98)

He goes on to attack James Sheridan Knowles, Charles Mackay, Archer Gurney, Philip Bailey (the author of Festus), and others, all in the same vein (98).

In the second article, primarily an assessment of the working-class poet Ebenezer Jones, Ernest Jones has a change of heart. He now argues that “there is decidedly a democratic tendency beginning to pervade our literature.” He feels that the established poets share in that tendency. Thus, of Tennyson and Browning he writes, “Even the court poet,
Tennyson, has chided the pride of ‘Lady Clara Vere de Vere.’ Browning himself has illustrated the dignity of man in his magnificent play of ‘Colombe’s Birthday’ (Oct. 1847: 235–36).

Jones—if indeed Jones wrote both articles—might offer a muddled criticism of individual works of poetry; yet he sums up the most common Chartist approach to poets: if a work has value, that value is to be found in its application to a working-class audience. In the work, a working-class reader should see some application to his political position. If a work has no such application, it has no value, and Chartists should reject it. One Chartist critic might revile Wordsworth or Southey, and another might argue that both are radicals, but their critical approach is largely the same. Whether a Chartist critic rejected or praised a certain poet often depended upon how diligently the critic wished to search that poet's work for appropriate sentiments. Generally, the Chartists far surpassed their predecessors in their willingness to make that diligent search.

That Jones can find “democracy” in the chiding of Tennyson’s Lady Clara Vere de Vere indicates that Chartists believed poems were more than just stirring anthems, hymns to popular causes, and sonnets to working-class heroes, although Chartist journals carried all of these. Linton published in his National: A Library for the People his own overtly political “Hymns for the Unenfranchised,” parts of Southey’s Wat Tyler, and parts of Shelley’s Queen Mab and Mask of Anarchy, as well as the whole of his “Song to the Men of England”; he also published the description of the prioress from Chaucer’s General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, Wordsworth’s “Intimations of Immortality,” Tennyson’s “Mariana,” and many other poems or parts of poems that, unlike verse in pre-Chartist journals, apparently had no direct political application for the working class. In his introduction to the National, Linton suggests how such works can be useful to the masses:

We purpose [sic] that [the National] shall most fully justify its title; that it shall indeed be a Library for the People, a Magazine of popular information. We well know how to appreciate the struggles of the Unmonied in their pursuit of knowledge. Our design is—to assist them in their difficulties, to aid the inquirer, to encourage the learner, to cultivate moral and intellectual power . . . to disseminate and aid the fructification of Truth, to assist to the uttermost the progression of humanity. (5 Jan. 1839: 3)
Linton's purpose here is much the same as Charles Knight's in his *Penny Magazine*. But while Knight and the SDUK carefully excluded direct references to politics from their periodical and had no desire for the working class to be any more powerful as a class, Linton strove to fuel with political verse the class consciousness of his readers, while cultivating their moral and intellectual improvement with verse not overtly political. Linton, like many other Chartists, believed in the self-help that reading "improving" works could bring. But while Samuel Smiles believed that that sort of self-help could allow workers to escape from the miseries common—and apparently inevitable—to working-class life, Linton shows in his *National* his belief that the elevation of some workers should lead to the elevation of the whole class. Smiles counseled working within the existing class structure; Linton advocated individual improvement in order to change it. That improvement, then, had to be political, but it also had to be moral and intellectual. The lessons of Tennyson and Chaucer are therefore in their own ways as politically important as the more explicitly political lessons of Shelley or Elliott.

Another reason for the greater variety of poetry in Chartist journals is that Chartist editors had a different sense of audience than did their predecessors. Pre-Chartist periodicals were generally oriented to men in tone and direct address; it's easy to picture working men passing around a well-worn copy of the latest *Black Dwarf* or *Poor Man's Guardian* in the coffeehouse, beer shop, or reading room. It would be hard to imagine such a group listening to one of their own reciting Robert Herrick's "To Daffodils" (which appeared in Linton's *National*) or reading to each other some of the less overtly political poems found in the "Feast of the Poets," a series in *Northern Star* that contained the work of both working-class and established writers. Many Chartist journals, unlike those of preceding years, were geared in whole or in part toward the hearth and the entire family, and not just toward politically minded men. That, in turn, affected the sense of what was "valuable" in poetry to Chartist journalists. Certainly, a wider sense of audience led some to adopt a hypersensitivity to the blushing of maidens' cheeks, a concern similar to that of many middle-class periodicals of the day. Many working-class journalists, on the other hand, recognized the need for a greater variety of poems in their periodicals to serve their more heterogeneous audiences.

Many Chartist critics differed from their predecessors in their
avowed concern with the impact of certain poems on women or children. The author of the “Literary Sketches” in the Chartist Circular is especially concerned with the proper education of children and with the role poetry plays in that education. He writes of Burns: “Every Chartist mother should repeat his patriotic songs, and sing his melting songs to her children, in the winter evenings, by the cottage hearth. His writings should be familiar to every young Chartist, and constitute part of his juvenile education” (20 Feb. 1841: 310). This critic argues that a proper Chartist mind is formed early, and formed equally by “melting” songs and patriotic ones. In his next literary sketch, on Allen Ramsay, this critic offers the opposite lesson: the influence of bad poetry on children. The critic at times praises Ramsay’s Gentle Shepherd, but he attacks Ramsay’s habit in that poem of adoring the titled and scorning the low. He then offers an anecdote about his own education to show the way in which dangerous political principles could be taught insidiously to children through poetry.

When I was at school, the Gentle Shepherd, and the tragedy of Douglas, were read as schoolbooks, by the scholars. I did not then comprehend their political tendency, and the master never explained it. I admired Patie and Douglas, and thought them gallant and noble; the vassals I laughed at and despised.

Thus was the intention of the teacher of Toryism fulfilled,—the minds of his pupils were poisoned with false political principles, and the seeds of Toryism were sown, which, like weeds in the garden, can never again be entirely eradicated from the soil.

In Chartist schools let no such books be read, nor principles taught; but should they at any time fall into the hands of youth, let the teacher explain their pernicious doctrines, and prevent them from impeding the progress of liberty, the triumph of intellect, and the independence of the people. (13 Feb. 1841: 314)

Children, then, are Chartist as well, and, for this critic, the class war begins in the classroom. Working-class children were part of the audience many Chartist journalists tried to reach with their poetry before Knight, the SDUK, and teachers of Toryism could.

Accompanying the widening sense of audience on the part of Chartist journalists was a widening sense of what made for great poetry. Political propriety and didactic quality were no longer enough; beauty, too,
qualified poetry for goodness and greatness. Shakespeare could be, and was, used by the Chartists to illustrate their tenets or to parallel Chartist events. But Shakespeare could do more than this. A review of the Pictorial Penny Shakespeare in Northern Star, which presented that periodical edition as the cheapest Shakespeare ever and therefore the first truly available to all classes, shows that some Chartists saw Shakespeare as more than a politician, and valued his aesthetic power:

The Englishman who has not read SHAKESPEARE may doubt his nationality; he is, at best, but half an Englishman, when ignorant of the works of his greatest countryman: and yet, to how many millions has SHAKESPEARE been but little, if anything, more than a mere name. It is painful to reflect that thousands, nay, millions have lived and died, and never known him, who, 'though dead yet speaketh,' and speaketh those words which, of mightier import than the words of priests or prophets, never fail to elevate the minds and purify the hearts of those who willingly list to them. (29 Nov. 1845: 3)23

Harney was one critic who valued the beautiful in poetry, emphasizing this requirement in the title of a series he edited for Northern Star, "The Beauties of Byron." Though his many selections in that series are largely political, Harney never forgets that Byron "has sung of Beauty and of love with a seraph's tongue" (10 Jan. 1846: 3). Months earlier, in the first "Feast of the Poets" in the Star, when Harney had instructed his readers in the elements of good poetry, he did not exhort them to write anthems or satires. Instead, he approvingly restated Leigh Hunt's definition of poetry as a valid standard for the working-class poet:

Poetry . . . is the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty, and power, embodying and illustrating its conceptions by imagination and fancy, and modulating its language on the principle of variety in uniformity. Its means are whatever the universe contains; and its ends, pleasure and exaltation. Poetry stands between nature and convention, keeping alive among us the enjoyment of the external and the spiritual world: it has constituted the most enduring fame of nations, and, next to Love and Beauty, which are its parents, is the greatest proof to man of the pleasure to be found in all things, and of the probable riches of infinitude. (19 Apr. 1845: 3)

Such a statement, which yokes beauty, truth, and power together as the
necessary elements of a good poem, does not downplay the political in poetry, but rather politicizes all good poetry. Poems lacking any one of the three components are not really poems at all. Beautiful verses without truth, in particular, are the confections of false poets such as Barry Cornwall, poets who served interests antithetical to those of the working class.

In 1852 Harney further delineated his beliefs about the power of beauty to elevate the individual. In one of the last issues of *Northern Star* (then called *Star of Freedom*) there appeared a literary dialogue, "Critic and Poet," in which Harney, the paper's new owner, took on the role of Critic (Vicinus 104 n). (The then Chartist and working-class poet Gerald Massey took on the role of Poet.) Harney is delighted by the beauty of Tennyson and emphasizes the importance of that beauty for a working-class audience: "His poetry is a very world of wondrous beauty—purifying and ennobling beauty; and working men should be made acquainted with it that they may get beauty into their souls, and thence into their daily lives" (8 May 1852: 3). Harney does find a fault in Tennyson: he "lacks the fire of passion." However, he states, "I am thankful for what he has given us" (3). The review mentions nothing about Tennyson's political stance. In his *Notes for the People*, Jones pays the same sort of homage to beauty in a review of Browning ("His excellences are, beauty of imagery, facility of diction, and highness of feeling"), and in close readings of "Anabel Lee" and "The Raven," by Edgar Allen Poe, whom Jones called "the most musical bard of the great west." According to Jones, "The purest of morals, the highest of thoughts, are compassed in these two astonishing efforts" (18 Oct. 1851: 644; 25 Oct.: 668–69; 8 Nov.: 704–6).

Keats, the least overtly political of the Romantic poets, and not surprisingly a poet long neglected by working-class journalists, finally entered the working-class canon with the Chartists. The first line of his *Endymion* ("A thing of beauty is a joy forever") appeared in Linton's *National* (16 Feb. 1839: 100), as well as in *Northern Tribune* (Jan 1854: 3) and in *Red Republican* (5 July 1850: 19). In the last case, the line forms the first words of an essay, "Poetry to Be Lived." The essay is by Massey, who was at this time a young and fiery republican, writing under the pen name Bandiera. The essay illustrates several enormous differences between views of poetry held by Chartist journalists and those held by their predecessors.
To Massey, as stated in "Poetry to Be Lived," "the world is full of poetry." The greatness of any written poem is only a dim reflection of humanity itself; the human mind and soul are the greater texts.

The commonest nature has some divine touch of poetry in it—crushed and degraded as we are, worn down by suffering and sorrow, blighted by the dry-rot of slavery, and the branding stamp of tyranny, there are times when we walk on the angel-side of life, and feel that our lives do not all turn in darkness—and the generous aspiration will be stirring at the heart, the sweet tears will be starting to the eyes, and we know we might have been something better, and lived a nobler life, if the world had done justice by us. Those tears are as a telescope to the soul, through which it catches big glimpses of the infinite: and those aspirations realize unto us the highest kind of poetry—the poetry to be lived.

Massey exhorts his audience to become poets themselves, to make great the texts of their lives. He tells them to find the inspiration they need to make their own lives great in poetry, in nature, and in the lives of great men. Among the great men whose lives Massey endorses as models of greatness are Kossuth, Bandiera, Mazzini, and other patriots—but just as important as models are the great English poets. In Massey's eyes, these poets' varied lives offer far more than simply political ideals to follow.

Witness . . . the life of the poet Milton; grandly magnificent as is the poetry of "Paradise Lost,"—there was a nobler, a truer poetry, in the life of the stern old republican. Of all the poets upon record, the life of Milton was the proudest, the completest, the manfullest. The life of Shakspere was a chequered youth, a green old age. Coleridge's was dreaming and weird-like. Byron's was the storm, the grandeur, and the gloom of the tempest, his poetry was like fruit on the side of Etna! Shelley's was like a drama, wherein Christ, Rousseau, and Ophelia should play their parts! and Keats—dear Keats!—his life was like the song of the nightingale, heard in the rich, still summer night, pouring her soul out on the balmy air, in passionate cadences, singing you into tears, as though the old fable were true that she sang with the thorn in her bleeding bosom.

Though Milton and his republicanism may gain Massey's highest respect, the other poets hold places of esteem, most of them not for overtly political reasons. Massey's impression of Keats's nightingale life seems a far cry
from his impression of Milton's republican life, but both are presented as appropriate exemplars of poetical greatness for the working class.

This new emphasis on Beauty—in life and in poetry—did not signal a softening on the part of the working-class thinkers of this time. Harney read Tennyson, Jones read Poe, and Massey read Keats, all with the question, "How does this writer speak to members of my class?" And the fact that each one recognized value in the writers they evaluated indicates that they all knew that the "political" in poetry is not just an incitement to riot, a mauling of Castlereagh, or a satire on the poor laws. To these three journalists, and others, all poetry was ideological; and all good poetry was ideologically sound and was a powerful tool with which to elevate the working class.

When Massey exclaims, later in his essay, "Brother Working-Men, let us endeavour to live this poetry in our lives!" he shows a respect for his audience as high as he has for any of the great poets. The essay, celebrating the boundless imaginative, intellectual, and political potential of the working class, puts into words the sentiments suggested by the many Chartist editors and critics who strove to bring a wider range of poetry than ever before to their working-class audience.

Shelley, Byron, and Burns

The Chartists of Sheffield adorned the walls of their public rooms with the names of those who they believed to be the greatest modern thinkers, politicians, and men of letters. Among such names as John Hampden, Washington, Jefferson, Paine, William Wallace, Algernon Sidney, Robert Emmet, and O'Connor, they listed three poets: Byron, Burns, and Shelley. Those walls serve as an emblem of a Chartist philosophy of ideas—indeed of a philosophy of ideas for the working-class for this period and before. Working-class thinkers respected these three poets as much as they did the greatest politicians; perhaps no higher compliment can be paid a poet by working-class writers. They had a deep respect for each of these poets as an individual—in life, in politics, and in poetic style. They recognized and celebrated the differences between the three. This ability—indeed, this need—to distinguish between the three and to respect the variety of work of each poet affirms that
working-class critics were very much aware that they were forming and defining a working-class poetic canon.

Three modern scholars have studied the influence that individual poets had upon the working class, particularly upon the Chartists. Philip Collins discusses Byron's influence in his *Thomas Cooper, the Chartist: Byron and the "Poets of the Poor"*; Bouthaina Shaaban discusses Shelley's influence in "Shelley in the Chartist Press"; and Albert K. Stevens investigates the link between "Milton and Chartism." Each study offers pertinent insight into working-class literary values of this period; but each is unfortunately limited in several ways. For one thing, because each of these critics focuses upon only one poet, in none of their works do we get a strong sense of the amazing variety in the poetry in Chartist journals and the amazing variety of poetic influences on the Chartists. Such an exclusive focus implies in each case a far duller working-class culture than that which actually existed. All the critics, for example, argue that Cooper was strongly influenced by the particular poet they are concerned with. But not one makes the far more important point: Cooper read widely and with discrimination, and was sophisticated enough in his reading to note the beauty and the power in the works of all these poets and others. Much can be said for the Chartist intelligentsia as a whole. And much can be said of many of the working-class intellectuals of the entire period.

Another limitation of the three modern studies, one that is perhaps necessary, considering the sheer volume of information each has to deal with, is that they focus exclusively on the Chartists. But Chartist views on poetry, as we have seen, did not develop in a vacuum. Setting the Chartist views of these poets in the context of previous working-class views demonstrates far more clearly the strong affection many Chartists felt for these three poets.

In this section I shall focus upon working-class views of Shelley, Byron, and Burns, the poets by far the most widely discussed and excerpted in the working-class press; or, to put it another way, the three established poets who formed the core of a working-class poetic canon. I will look not at their poetic abilities but rather at the critical abilities of the working-class journalists who discussed and published them. These writers and editors applied distinctly working-class critical standards to each poet and understood and respected each for his life as well as his
work. Choosing and promoting specific works particularly relevant to their audience from the corpus of each poet, working-class journalists endeavored to develop a canon of poetry, differentiating it from the dominant middle-class canon. They did not accept the poets wholesale; they judged and reevaluated them for a new audience. The many astute critical observations of working-class thinkers, I believe, indicate that they had a far greater literary sophistication than they have heretofore been accorded.

I do not wish, by focusing on these three very influential poets, to minimize the importance of other poets and their works. Southey, as we have seen, had a deep impact on working-class movements from 1817 on, particularly with Wat Tyler but also with the negative example he set through his political and poetical apostacy. Shakespeare was very important to working-class journalists during the entire period, of course; as I have tried to show, critics often tested their class-based literary ideas upon his plays. Indeed, in one case, a Chartist produced one of Shakespeare’s plays. In 1843, to help cover his legal expenses, Cooper persuaded a group of Leicester Chartists to hire a hall in order to put on Hamlet, with himself in the title role. Cooper had, years before, committed the entire play to memory (Cooper 68). The show ran two nights (Cooper 228–29).

Milton, too, was certainly important to working-class thinkers. Samuel Bamford, for one, declared his affection for Milton several times in his Passages from the Life of a Radical (1: 165–66, 176, 199).25 Cooper was deeply influenced by Milton as well; he stated that he knew the first four books of Paradise Lost by heart (Cooper 68). In most working-class periodicals, however, Milton’s poetry was less important than his prose. Stevens notes in his study of Milton’s influence on the Chartists that thirty-four cheap editions of Milton’s prose appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century (378). Cobbett, as we have seen, disliked Paradise Lost; Carlile called Milton “a gloomy fanatic” (Republican 19 Nov. 1819: 201). Wooler published some of Milton’s poetry, but much more of his prose, in his “Blackneb” series. Working-class periodicals of the thirties published little Milton; a review of Carpenter’s Life and Times of John Milton in the Weekly True Sun makes no mention at all of his poetry (6 June 1836: 1157). Linton, in the National, reviewed the same work and suggested that Milton’s prose is more dangerous than his poetry to the
ruling class, and therefore more valuable to the working class (23 Feb. 1839: 113). Harney makes much the same point about Milton’s prose in his *Democratic Review* (1849–50; July 1849: 75–80). In his *English Republic*, Linton argues that Milton’s life, and apparently his prose, are more important than his greatest work of poetry, holding that there are “some men who honor the memory of Milton (I say it reverently) for something more than one of his poems called ‘Paradise Lost’” (Jan. 1851: 3). Massey, writing as Bandiera in *Red Republican*, shows that he is one of these men (5 July 1815: 19–20).

Goldsmith (with his often-excerpted attack on enclosure, “The Deserted Village”), Thomson (with *The Seasons*), Pope, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Moore, Tennyson, and others were important influences upon the working class as well. By focusing upon the poets—Shelley, Byron, and Burns—that working-class journalists most commonly cited and discussed, and by showing the ways in which the journalists actively appropriated the poets for their own class, I hope to suggest that they applied their critical thinking as conscientiously to many other established poets. These three poets may have been at the core of a nineteenth-century working-class canon, but they were far from being the only poets in that canon.

Arguing that Shelley was more “important” than Byron to working-class journalists during this period, or vice versa, would be sheer folly. Some journalists obviously favored Byron, others Shelley. Carlyle, for example, though he pirated the works of both, clearly preferred Shelley’s poetry. He called some cantos of *Don Juan* “mere slip slop,” and maintained that *Cain*, a work Carlyle himself published, “is a Mystery” (*Republican* 11 Feb. 1825: 164), its only good qualities stolen from Shelley’s *Queen Mab* and, of *Cain* and *Queen Mab*, “as a poem, as a work of sentiment and merit, the former is much inferior to the latter, and not worthy of resting on the same shelf in the library” (*Republican* 15 Feb. 1822: 192). Carlyle was capable of changing his tastes to suit a given situation; some of his comments are in response to a correspondent, Zephyrus, who audaciously suggested that Byron had had greater political influence than Carlyle. Carlyle’s rebuttal consists in equal parts of belittling Byron’s political importance and of making himself out to be the most important political figure alive: “I am, in my own judgment at the very acme of that which is
right, best, and of the most importance, in a political point of view" (11 Feb. 1825: 164–68). Elsewhere, Carlile could be kinder to Byron, as when he called him "our great, persecuted, injured Byron" (19 Nov. 1819: 201). Never, however, did Carlile hold Byron to be as great a poet and thinker as Shelley (or Carlile).

Wooler, on the other hand, implicitly believed Byron to be more worthy of publication and study than Shelley; he published next to nothing by Shelley in his Black Dwarf, but published Byron's "Sonnet on Chillon," parts of Don Juan, The Giaour, and Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, and all or part of several other works by Byron. Cobbett published little by either, though he did argue that England's Byron was far better than Scotland's best writer, Scott, in an article contrasting the merits of the men of letters of each country (Political Register 5 Feb. 1825: 343). 27

This individual preference, which cannot be construed as one of class or of any particular movement, continued in later periodicals. The periodicals of the early and mid-thirties published both Byron and Shelley, again some preferring one over the other. The Poor Man's Advocate, for example, clearly favored Byron. John Doherty, the editor of that periodical, was obviously an avid reader of Byron; among other items by and on the poet, Doherty published his "The Irish Avatar," which he claimed "has never before been published entire in England" (28 Apr. 1832: 118). 28

Chartist journalists printed more poetry by Byron and Shelley than had any working-class journalists before them and showed the same preferences, as well as the same aversions. Linton, in his National, we have seen, published a great deal of poetry by Shelley. He published nothing at all by Byron. Northern Star published far more Byron than Shelley, especially in the days when Harney controlled the literary page. Collins points out that Harney "in his staider old age became an expert on minutiae of [Byron's] biography, in Notes and Queries" (19; see also Schoyen 274). Margaret Hambrick notes that Harney owned many works by and about Byron; her catalogue of the books in the Harney family library offers strong evidence of this (12). Harney's preference for Byron, and Linton's for Shelley, were, however, entirely personal.

Working-class journalists, rather than arguing which of the two poets was the better, or choosing one and rejecting the other, generally saw both as fighters on their side in the class struggle. To working-class
writers, both were aristocrats who turned their backs on class privilege and embraced the causes of the working-class. Carlile wrote: “Shelley, we know, from a boy, was both republican and Atheist; that as a heir to a great fortune and some prospect of a peerage, he sacrificed every thing, fortune, and family, and lived in poverty, dependent on friends in principle, for the purpose of preserving and exhibiting pure and uncontaminated those important principles which in his youth he had adopted. The aristocracy of England has not turned out a second man of Shelley’s stamp” (11 Feb. 1825: 168). Seven years later the Chartist Circular made a similar point about Shelley (19 Oct. 1839: 16) and said much the same thing of Byron:

Of all the poets who have directed their minds to the study of the social condition of man, none has sympathised more deeply with the sufferers, none shown a more determined spirit of resistance and retaliation to the oppressor than Byron: his noble and dignified soul scorned the idea of fattening on the ruins of his country; nor could he quietly submit, and not raise his far-heard voice against the wretches who made their own gain and their country’s ruin their study and practice. (22 Aug. 1840: 198)

Both Shelley and Byron were, in a sense, honorary members of the working-class. The task for many working-class writers was less to choose one over the other than to promote the individual merits of the works of each for a working-class audience. T. Frost tried to do just that in his article “Scott, Byron, and Shelley” in the Northern Star of 2 January 1847 (3). Although Frost saw a bit of good in Scott, he criticized him for worshipping a feudal and aristocratic past. Byron was the poet of the present: “His sympathies were ever with those who sought the elevation of their fellow-men, and he launched the most brilliant efforts of his muse, fraught with the keenest irony, against the abuses of the day.” Shelley, on the other hand, was the harbinger of the future: “not the futurity-idea inculcated by our clerical instructors, dim and shadowy as Ossian’s hall of Loda, but the moral summer of the world, the realisation of Arcadian fable and Hebraic myth.” Frost’s article puts into words sentiments common to many working-class journalists. We have seen earlier several examples of the working-class rejection of Scott’s feudal values. In one of his “ Beauties of Byron” essays, Harney anticipated Frost’s sentiments about Byron and
Shelley, holding that he views society much as Byron did, but "as respects the future, we cling to the belief in man's progress, and trust and believe with SHELLEY that 'A bright morn awaits the human day'" (Northern Star 10 Jan 1846: 3). Wooler, reviewing Byron's The Age of Bronze in Black Dwarf on 2 April 1823, is disappointed because that poem, unlike his others, deals for the most part with the recent past and not with the present (465–70). Cooper, in his Plain Speaker, notes Shelley's "prescience" (10 Mar. 1849: 58). In the hundreds of quotations and headnotes by the two poets, journalists generally used each to serve different purposes: most often Byron offered social commentary, Shelley expressed social ideals. Although some working-class thinkers preferred one over the other, most saw a different but important value in each.

Friedrich Engels described the deep respect the working-class had for Shelley and Byron in his Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844: "Shelley, the genius, the prophet, Shelley, and Byron, with his glowing sensuality and his bitter satire upon our existing society, find most of their readers in the proletariat; the bourgeoisie owns only castrated editions, family editions, cut down in accordance with the hypocritical morality of to-day" (240). His remark about the completeness of working-class publications of Shelley and Byron—at least as far as the working-class press is concerned—is not completely accurate. The poetry by Shelley and Byron most often published and excerpted in these journals was carefully selected, often cut down, and even at times cited out of context to display a working-class sensibility and sympathy.

In Shelley's case, "Song to the Men of England" was a favorite selection, one that appeared frequently in many periodicals, from Carlile's to the Chartists'. The free-thinking and utopian Queen Mab was another favorite, often excerpted, reviewed, and mentioned. Another popular work was The Revolt of Islam, written, according to Shelley, "in the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope for something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind" (2: 100). Also popular, after it was published in 1832, was The Mask of Anarchy. Almost all Shelley's poetry published or discussed by working-class journalists was explicitly political. Although most of these journalists treasured the "beauties" of Shelley, they clearly respected him for his politics first and the beauty of
his poetry second. Such works as "Mont Blanc," "Ode to the West Wind," or "Adonais" were strangers to the pages of working-class periodicals. If members of the British working class had more than the slightest acquaintance with poems by Shelley that were not primarily political, they gained that acquaintance elsewhere.

Most of the poems by Byron published in working-class periodicals were excerpts: parts of Don Juan, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, or other works. This did not mean that working-class audiences did not have access to complete poems by Byron; Louis James has noted twenty-five editions of Byron's various poems, exclusive of reprints, in the bibliography of his Fiction for the Working Man, 1830–1850 (235). The excerpts in working-class periodicals were generally presented not to provide the flavor of the whole work, but rather to stand on their own as points not needing the context of a larger work, or specific quotations to emphasize a journalist's argument. Thus, Byron was presented as a poet of quick satirical jabs and short political observations. He was a favorite for short illustrative quotations and for headnotes. A writer in the Radical Reformer's Gazette (1832–33), for example, quotes from Childe Harold, "Hereditary bondsmen know ye not / Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow" (canto 2, 720–21; quoted 26 Jan. 1833: 170), and quotes that passage not in the context that Byron gave it—a description of the Turkish enslavement of Greece—but rather as the headnote to an article describing the miserable condition of the poor in Birmingham. Byron was used similarly in Black Dwarf, Cobbett's Political Register, Republican, or Voice of the People, the Herald to the Trades' Advocate, and Co-Operative Journal, the Poor Man's Advocate, and many other papers, including, as might be expected, two influenced by Harney: the Northern Star and the Democratic Review.90

The poetry written by members of the working-class published in working-class periodicals shows that many of these writers were influenced by the poetry of Byron and Shelley. For one thing, working-class poems honoring those poets were common.91 Moreover, several critics have noted thematic and semantic parallels as well as connections of imagery between these two Romantics and working-class poets. James, for instance, notes that "the popularity of Romantic poetry influenced the verse of radical poets, for writers like Shelley had provided imagery to express the overthrow of evil by the powers of good" (86). Kovalev states
that “during its first few years Chartist poetry was chiefly imitative. Its models were usually popular working-class songs . . . as well as certain works by Shelley, Byron, and other democratic poets of the first three decades of the nineteenth century” ("The Literature of Chartism" 124). Certainly, many of the verses Kovalev published in his *Anthology of Chartist Literature* reflect the influence of both poets—and especially of Shelley. The following verses from E. C. H.’s “Address to the Charter,” for example, originally from *Northern Star*, seem clearly derivative of that poet:

The slave, oppress'd with canker'd chains,  
O'erworn with grief and care,  
He knows, he feels, there still remains  
A hope, though distant far.

The instrument of slavery's form  
Can flourish but an hour;  
Crush'd, like the moth, before the storm,  
How transient is their power!

A happier year, a brighter ray,  
Shall usher a glorious morn;  
How happy the poor, on that free-born day,  
Who have triumph'd o'er proud man's scorn.

(6 June 1840: 7)

The assumption that working-class poets borrowed wholesale from Shelley and Byron can be taken too far, however, and can cause one to mistake working-class creativity for mere derivation. The imagery of enslavement, chains, and rising up after slumber could suggest the influence of Shelley’s “Song to the Men of England.” More probably, such imagery reflects working-class poets' awareness of their own position; for what images are more appropriate to radical working-class poetry in the first half of the nineteenth century than chains, enslavement, and uprising? Several poems in the working-class press of 1819 and 1820, reacting to the Peterloo massacre, bear similarities to Shelley's poetic response to that event, *The Mask of Anarchy*. There seem obvious connections between Shelley's poem and the following verses from “Stanzas Occasioned by the Manchester Massacre,” by Hibernicus:
Oh, weep not for those who are freed
From bondage so frightful as ours!
Let tyranny mourn for the deed,
And howl o’er the prey she devours!

The mask for a century worn,
Has fallen from her visage at last;
Of all its sham attributes shorn,
Her reign of delusion is past.

In native deformity now
Behold her, how shatter’d and weak!
With murder impress’d on her brow,
And cowardice blanching on her cheek!

(Black Dwarf 27 Aug. 1819: 564)

These verses were published a few days after the massacre. *The Mask of Anarchy* was not actually published until thirteen years later, in 1832. Hibernicus could not have read Shelley’s *Mask*, and Shelley, in Italy at that time, almost certainly did not see this poem before writing his own. Neither poet influenced the other. Any connection between the two poems, and without question many of the similarities between Shelley’s work and that of working-class poets, signifies not imitation but rather parallel class sympathies and political philosophies.

Byron had his imitators among working-class writers as he did among other classes. The third issue of the *Political Penny Magazine* (1836), for example, carried a poem: “The Devil’s Visit to England,” by a poet signed Harold, that bears a resemblance to Byron’s poetry in more than its name (17 Sept. 1836: 24). Showing a similar influence are several poems by J. H. M. in Bronterre O’Brien’s *National Reformer, and Manx Weekly Review of Home and Foreign Affairs* (1846–47). Modern critics as well as those of the contemporary working-class noted the influence of Byron upon Cooper’s *Purgatory of Suicides*. But imitators of Byron—from any class—generally did not fare well at the hands of working-class reviewers; usually, when discussing an imitation, reviewers commented directly or indirectly on the originality of Byron—“the unattainable pattern of so many” and the lack of originality of his imitator (*Notes to the People* 3 Oct. 1851: 454). Byron and Shelley may have provided models for working-
class political verse, but a good working-class poet also had to be in touch with his own cultural reality to write good verse.

Burns was not as often quoted in the working-class press as Byron and Shelley, but this, I think, was a sign not that his poetry was any less popular, but rather that his best-loved lyrics were already familiar to a large section of the working class and did not need to be introduced to them, as Byron's and Shelley's poetry did. I have already noted that working-class writers appropriated the music to Burns's songs, especially of "Scots, Wha' Hae wi' Wallace Bled" and "A Man's a Man for A' That," more than they borrowed the music of any other writer. Harney, who notes that "Scots, Wha' Hae wi' Wallace Bled" was sung at every Chartist festival in England (Northern Star 25 Oct. 1845: 3), sees no reason to familiarize his audience with the "beauties" of Burns as he does those of Byron. In the Northern Star's "Christmas Garland" for 1843 Harney almost apologizes for publishing the universally known "A Man's a Man for A' That," stating, "We think we hear some grumbling critic, growling: 'Why, man, these are all old songs, everybody knows about 'A man's a man for a' that.'" He argues, however, that there is a great difference between familiarity with the poem and true knowledge of it: "O that the righteous principles contained in the above lyrics were really known to everybody; what a different world would this be to what it is!" (23 Dec. 1843: 3).

Despite the heavy dialect and the regionalism of most of Burns's poems, working-class writers saw his poetry as transcending nation. It is true that Scots working-class periodicals mentioned and published Burns more often than did their southern counterparts; the Chartist Circular, for example, repeatedly cited Burns as the standard for a good poet. English periodicals, however, also sometimes cited Burns as a poetic standard. A critic in the new series of Northern Star, for example, accords the French poet Pierre Dupont the highest praise in calling him "the Burns of France" (5 June 1852: 3). But while English working-class journalists were well aware of Burns's country of origin, not one considers Burns any less important for the English. Harney comments repeatedly on Burns's internationalism. A writer in Northern Tribune writes that Burns's simplicity allows him to transcend the regional: he "exhibits a striking example of the force, beauty, and true poetry of imagery and words the humblest and most unlettered can appreciate, admire, and adore" (Nov. 1854: 169).
While working-class writers generally held Burns's national origins to be unimportant, they did value his class origins highly. Burns, unlike Shelley or Byron, did not have to earn membership in the working class; he was always a member. Moreover, working-class journalists believed that Burns had always shared the interests of that class and never turned away from them. The reactionary Bristol Job Nott, or, Labouring Man's Friend (1831–33), a weekly periodical created in response to a then exploding working-class press, in publishing "The Cottar's Saturday Night," might "lament that [Burns's] pen was employed far more unworthily" (22 Dec. 1831: 8), but it was those "unworthy," class-conscious productions that endeared him to his class. It was his loyalty to his class, however, not simply his birth within it that earned him respect. Other poets born into the working class were far less respected. No working-class writer ever promoted George Crabbe, for example, as a working-class hero, in spite of his origins.37

Because of Burns's class consciousness and class fidelity as well as his origins, working-class journalists often saw him as the first true working-class poet. A writer in one of the final issues of Northern Star, reviewing a volume of poems by William Whitmore entitled Firstlings, emphatically accords Burns that place.

Giant-hearted Robert Burns, was the first in a kingly line, and the founder of a glorious dynasty of the people's poets. With his lamp, which was lit with fire from Heaven, he descended into the lowliest human heart, read the inscription which God had written on its narrow, dark chamber walls, and proclaimed to the world that the signs of beauty and gleams of light still illumined its darkness. He it was who sang "a man's a man for a' that"; and at the words the poor crushed masses felt the spirit of manhood stirring within them, and the spirit of freedom effervescing at the heart of them. The Serf was made noble in Robert Burns. He hoped our hopes, wept our tears, despaired our despairs, and his heart was pulsed by all our living impulses. The people lived in the large brave heart of Robert Burns, and we have taken him to live for ever and aye in the heart of the people. (7 Aug. 1852: 3)

Critics often traced the poetic ancestry of every working-class poet to Burns. The above reviewer, for example, goes on to say, "since Glorious Burns we have had many a true singer in the ranks of the Working Classes who have seen that their mission has been that of hand and heart
workers in the strife. We point with pride to John Clare, the peasant; Robert Nichol, the Scottish herd boy; Thomas Cooper, the Milton of Chartist; Prince, and Thom, and many another people's poet of the lineage of Burns" (3). A reviewer of Massey's *Voices of Freedom and Lyrics of Love* in *Northern Star* makes a similar observation about Massey's debt to Burns (12 Apr. 1851: 3).

Other working-class critics maintained that Burns had predecessors and was the outstanding working-class poet in a long line of them. Many critics maintained that Shakespeare, curiously enough, was an early working-class poet. In the *Chartist Circular*, for example, Shakespeare is called "one of the enslaved and despised people, a poacher and a 'vagabond' player" (10 Oct. 1840: 216). In another article in that periodical, "The Genius of Working Men," one writer holds that not only Shakespeare, but also Homer, Aesop, Socrates, Milton, Johnson, Defoe, and others "sprang from humble origins." This writer believes that "genius is almost exclusive to working men" (16 May 1840: 135–36). But it is Burns more than any other figure who was believed to have revolutionized poetry with his working-class sensibility. In the poetic "march of the intellect," Burns marched in the vanguard.

Most working-class writers unquestionably felt that while Byron and Shelley were sometimes teachers and other times comrades, Burns alone was a brother. From Cobbett's *Political Register* to *Northern Star*, we find working-class writers visiting Burns's dwellings and haunts, as well as his gravesite, as if they were those of a close relative. In 1832 Cobbett visited Dumfries, the town in which Burns had died; in reporting that visit in his *Register*, he expressed concern for Burns's widow (16 Nov. 1832: 415). The *Poor Man's Guardian* noted her death not long afterward (10 May 1834: 71). The *Northern Star* showed a similar concern for Burns's daughter (7 Sept. 1844: 3; 5 Oct. 1844: 3). A writer in the *Chartist Circular*, with the style of the novelist of sentiment, described an emotional visit he made to Burns's birthplace, Alloway: "When I wandered among these streets, musing on the Bard,—rehearsing his poems—chanting his songs... my bosom glowed with a patriot's ardour—my heart melted with poetical tenderness, and tears involuntarily trickled down my cheeks. It was an hour of mental ecstasy, spent in rapture on the soft green oasis of the barren desert of human existence" (20 Feb. 1841: 309–10). Harney, following in the footsteps of Cobbett, paid two visits to Dumfries. During
the first, in 1840, he dined with Burns's son, and during the second, in 1843, he made, "as a matter of course," an emotional visit to the grave of the poet, "this man of men . . . my hero, saint and sage" (20 Sept. 1843: 8). Although Byron was clearly Harney's favorite poet, he never recorded any desire to visit that poet's mausoleum. By the same token, it is difficult to imagine any working-class journalist showing a heartfelt concern for the welfare of Mary Shelley. Burns clearly occupied a far more familiar and familial place in the working-class canon.

While quoted, mentioned, and promoted less than Byron or Shelley, Burns's place in the working-class canon was as secure as theirs. But the three were not interchangeable: each was specifically evaluated by working-class thinkers; each was promoted for very different reasons, reasons of value particularly to the working class. In other words, there existed in the first half of the nineteenth century a definite working-class critical framework within which to view each writer, one quite different in emphases and standards from that of the middle class. That alternative critical framework has been forgotten, by and large, and the loss is a great one for the modern reader. For just as each of these three poets had unique value for the working-class of the early nineteenth century, so should the working-class critical framework in use between 1816 and 1858, in giving us a fresh way to evaluate these poets, ultimately make them more valuable to us.