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Poetry and Fin de Siècle Socialism

(Think not that I am in league
 With editors hungry for ads.;—
 My true poems have been scornfully W-P-B'd. more than once.
 Courage poet-comrades, editors shall be suppressed, and our songs yet ring through
 these islands.)

The lines above begin the fourth stanza of a poem published in the *Labour Leader* in May 1896 by one of the paper's regular journalists, who signed off as 'Ben.'¹ The poem, entitled 'Whitmanesque,' humorously parodies the American poet's expansive style to expose and attack the pervasiveness of advertising for consumer goods in late nineteenth-century Britain. Self-reflexively segueing into a consideration of the place of poetry within nineteenth-century print culture – specifically, within socialist print culture – the parenthetical interjection suggests some salient discussion points. First, that poetry was a major genre of the so-called 'socialist revival.' 'Ben' plays on the familiar joke in socialist newspapers and periodicals that their waste paper baskets (WPBs) were overflowing with submissions from their readers. Poetry was ubiquitous in these publications; Elizabeth Carolyn Miller argues that it was 'by far the most important literary genre of the radical press' ('Literature and the Late-Victorian Radical Press' 708). Second, 'Ben' raises questions about the notion of giving voice – about who was allowed to speak, and who decided what should be heard. The call to the speaker's fellow 'poet-comrades' figures their struggle with the editor in terms of the proletarian revolution, a poignant and rather jarring metaphor to find in a socialist publication. Related questions concern what an appropriate voice might sound like, what form socialist or 'democratic' poetry might take, and what a democratic poetic canon might consist of. Third, 'Ben' challenges the privileging of income-generating text – advertising – over affective and 'true' poetic text, a practice associated with the capitalist print industry which socialist publications were also often compelled to adopt. Finally, in the declaration that the songs of the poets would 'ring through these islands,' 'Ben' gestures towards a faith in the redemptive power of poetry.

However, writing on 'Socialism and Victorian Poetry' in this journal in 2004, Ruth Livesey observed that the two key terms of her title seemed to 'strain apart' in the twenty-first century (1). There is a disconnect, she argues, caused in part by a current 'separation of aesthetics and politics,' very much at odds with the lived experience and theorization of socialism in late nineteenth-century Britain (1). Working to dismantle this perceived divide for the twenty-first century reader, Livesey sketches a structure of feeling characterized by inclusiveness and pluralism, within a period of vibrant socialist history that meshed politics with spirituality, literature, art and community-building. Stephen Yeo's seminal 1977 study of the idea of the 'religion of socialism' offers a key theoretical orientation for the work that Livesey and others have recently done to locate poetry (and literature more generally) within this heterogeneous socialist culture. In what Yeo claims as an important phase of socialist history, broad understandings of what socialism meant made it subject to a range of philosophical, spiritual and cultural influences, and encouraged its literary and artistic as well as political expression. Yeo quotes Robert Blatchford in the *Labour Prophet* in 1897: 'If you want socialism to be a religion, you must widen your definition of socialism. You must draw out all the ethical and spiritual implications of these desires and efforts for a juster social order... The labour movement is but one sign of a new spirit at work in many directions throughout human affairs' (Yeo 5-6). This expansive conceptualization worked within a mode of associative socialism – a branch life

which included choirs, bicycling and book clubs alongside rallies, reformist agitation and industrial dispute – which Chris Waters has described as the attempt to develop ‘a politics of everyday life – and a politics of popular culture’ (Waters 14).

The interaction of these impulses – the visionary and spiritual, the practical and everyday – informed the discursive practices of socialism, including its literary production. Following Anne Janowitz’s lead in *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*, Livesey explores this dynamic in ‘Socialism and Victorian Poetry’ by introducing pairings which seem dichotomous – socialism and poetry, aesthetics and politics, materialism and idealism, collective struggle and the individuated lyric subject – and reconstructing them to demonstrate how they worked in a generative dialectic relationship. A fundamental line of enquiry concerns this productivity, asking what it is that poetry can be said to do. Putting it another way, as Mike Sanders asks in the Chartist context, how can poetry possess political agency (Sanders 6)? Invoking Sartre and Adorno’s theoretical debate about the political value of ‘committed’ as opposed to ‘autonomous’ modes of writing, Fabian Macpherson’s 2011 doctoral dissertation on ‘Poetry and Political Commitment in Late Nineteenth-Century England’ explores how verse was used in various ways to ‘incite the reader to effect change in the world’ but ultimately questions its ability to do so (3). Speaking of Chartist poetry, Sanders identifies two levels of political agency which also resonate in the socialist context: first, ‘discrete interventions in specific political debates,’ where the status of poetry itself is incidental; second, ‘the total qualitative transformation of consciousness wrought by poetry,’ where the medium is crucial to the aim (Sanders 13). I argue in my recent monograph that poetry and discussions about the nature and purpose of a democratic canon or aesthetic were also integrated in nuanced ways into debates about the nature and purpose of socialism itself: about what it meant as an oppositional anti-capitalist movement, what a future socialist society might look like, and how in the interim socialism could construct an alternative public sphere to challenge capitalist cultural hegemony (Harris 104).

As Livesey observes, the poetry of socialism – both what was written and what was read – lends itself to interdisciplinary critical methodologies (‘Socialism and Victorian Poetry’ 3-4). From a literary perspective the field has developed out of rigorous, historically-rich research, benefitting from what Miller describes as a ‘renewed emphasis on historical and cultural approaches to literary study’ (‘Literature and the Late-Victorian Radical Press’ 702). An emphasis on hybridity and pluralism has, rightly, become something of a commonplace in the analysis performed by the steadily growing (though still relatively small) group of scholars working in this cultural field. Historians and literary critics have challenged both the tripartite historiography put forward by Stanley Pierson in the 1970s, which divided late nineteenth-century socialism into social democracy, Fabianism and ‘ethical socialism,’ and a ‘rise and decline’ narrative separating this phase of socialist activity from modernist preoccupations.² Thomas Linehan, for instance, uses the example of Caroline Martyn – a popular Independent Labour Party (ILP) orator, elected to its National Administrative Council, who also belonged to the Fabian Society, the Guild of St Matthew and the Labour Church – to show that ‘the boundaries between the various branches of socialism tended to be quite fluid and blurred’ (Linehan 2). This deconstructive tendency has opened the field for more nuanced explorations of poetry, fiction, music and art as they worked across the borderlines of a movement in transition.

The title of Linehan’s work, *Modernism and British Socialism*, points to a major focal shift in recent research. Where Yeo had contained this ‘distinctive phase’ of socialism in the 13 years between 1883 and 1896 (Yeo 7), critics such as Anna Vaninskaya warn against glossing the 1900s as a period of ‘sober pragmatism’ in stark contrast to the ‘idealistic fervour’ which preceded it in the 1880s and 1890s (Vaninskaya 160). Literature and other cultural modes continued to operate within

socialism as it evolved in the twentieth century: 'The gold of the golden age was no pure metal, and the iron age that followed it had veins of gold' (Vaninskaya 160). Where Livesey's *Literature Compass* article had evocatively played on the incongruous connotations of the adjective 'Victorian' to uncover a radical nineteenth-century tradition of claiming the lyric 'as a site of collective engagement' ('Socialism and Victorian Poetry' 3), scholarship since – including Livesey's more recent work – has tended to set its face toward the twentieth century and explore continuities and tensions with the modernist political and literary imagination.

In *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922*, Ann Ardis proposes a periodization that recuperates these years from the 'long nineteenth century' critical paradigm. 'Turn-of-the-twentieth-century studies' would instead emphasize the fin de siècle sense of living in new times and interrogate the relationship between literary modernism and other forms of cultural production which preceded and developed around it, such as those associated with socialism. Where Ardis explores the competition between the self-fashioning of high modernism and socialist aesthetic and political modes, Linehan conversely pursues the affinities between late nineteenth-century socialism and a broad modernism which extended beyond avant-garde literature and art into 'political and social manifestations of revolt' (Linehan 6). Linehan's cultural history draws on literary sources as an archive of radical thought and influence, integral to understanding continuities such as conceptualizations of utopian modernism, the propagandist power of myth, ideas about community and social space, and aspirations for 'spiritual regeneration, transcendence and heightened consciousness' (Linehan 7). Edward Carpenter features prominently, alongside lesser-known poets such as C. Allen Clarke. Associations are drawn between the socialist belief that the late nineteenth century was a time of profound crisis, out of which society would be reborn and regenerated, and the modernist imagination typified by Eliot, Joyce and Pound (Linehan 52).

Major works by Livesey and Miller consider the intersection of socialist aestheticism and modernism. Both Livesey's *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880-1914* and Miller's *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* open with chapters on William Morris's influential reclamation of aestheticism 'as the natural adjunct of social engagement, rather than aesthetic autonomy' (*Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism* 19).³ Livesey argues that when aestheticism evolved into decadence and detachment, Morris revised his earlier theories of beauty in the light of the historical materialism he had learnt from Marx. Associating this development with the advancement of high capitalism, Morris resisted the 'aesthetics of consumption,' as Regenia Gagnier has called it, proposing instead an aesthetics of production (33).⁴ Alert to genderings of the socialist aesthetic, Livesey suggests that this mode reinscribed the manliness of art by locating it in the 'realm of the body via the pleasures of labour' (34). Art had a meaningful historical basis, being born out of inherited communal traditions rather than individual genius.

Miller explores the implications of Morris's revised, politically-engaged aestheticism as it was issued through his print ventures and as it was passed into other publications with working-class readerships. True art would only be possible after the overthrow of capitalism, but art could also hurry the revolution along (*Slow Print* 35). Literature provided a space to envision postrevolutionary society, Miller argues, and Morris's *Commonweal* published 'explicitly utopian' verse (45) which allowed readers 'to imagine what art might be like in the socialist future' (35). Neither Livesey nor Miller read Morris's own socialist poetry against the aesthetic they identify, but Miller's chapter on Morris discusses C. W. Beckett, a poet practically unknown today who was published more than any other in the *Commonweal*. Like many other socialist poets, Beckett mined the connotative power of

dawn imagery, and Miller discusses how this symbolism was incorporated into poetry which manipulated time and chronology to envision, and therefore bring about, a utopian post-capitalist future.⁵

Conversely, Ingrid Hanson's discussion in *William Morris and the Uses of Violence, 1856-1890* rests on the corporeal experience of the revolution itself. Challenging scholarship that has seen an increasing pacifism in Morris's later years, Hanson gives a version of Morris fiercely committed to 'an idea of redemptive violence' (135). Paying close attention to Morris's later socialist poetry, Hanson avers that metaphors of violence 'drive the content, form and structure of his propaganda poems' (132). Crucially, violent revolution would curtail the 'symbolic violence' wrought on workers under capitalism by making the enemy visible (132). Hanson agrees that Morris's socialist poems can be mapped onto the interventionist Romantic tradition that Janowitz uncovers but argues that they draw equally on the tradition of religious conversion that 'invites individuals into a community of struggle,' where conversion is rooted in the physical present and the body itself has the potential to be the 'centre of violent transformation' (136-37).

The body, inherently associated with labor and labor-value, is a key site in critical discussion. Resisting conceptualizations of art as a higher, intellectual endeavor divorced from working life, socialist poetry often embodies a complex relationship between manual and artistic labor. For Edward Carpenter, who together with Morris has been a major focus of scholarship in this field, the body was also bound into radical ideas about the liberating potential of desire and sexuality. In 'Morris, Carpenter, Wilde, and the Political Aesthetics of Labour,' Livesey contrasts Morris's 'somatic aesthetics of the pleasures of labor' (610) with Carpenter's, in which the intentional Lamarckian evolutionary transformation of the body was a force of social change. Humanity could direct its physiological development, and would therefore willfully replace diseased 'civilization' (always a negative term for Carpenter) with a communal society of 'beautiful laboring bodies' (609-10). 'Evolution was art,' Livesey writes, 'the body was the aesthetic object and the desiring self was the artist.' The poet was to prompt such evolutionary development by 'arousing desire' in his readers who would change themselves as a result, passing down any newly-acquired characteristics to succeeding generations (611).

In his chapter on Carpenter in *Transatlantic Connections, Whitman U.S., Whitman U.K.*, M. Wynn Thomas offers close readings of the long prose poem *Towards Democracy*, in which Carpenter contrasts gleeful, erotic celebrations of human physicality ('The heaving breasts of love, the phallus, the fleshy thighs, / The erect proud head and neck, the sturdy back'; Carpenter 360) with the diseased, malformed body caused by, and representative of, Victorian society (Thomas 180). Carpenter's belief in Lamarckian evolutionary perfectibility is encapsulated in a poetic set-piece, discussed by Thomas, where the speaker wrestles with Satan, as Jacob had wrestled with an angel, in order to uncover his true self, to 'reclaim his body, in all its aspects' (180). Body after body is cast aside as the speaker reincarnates stronger each time until, in victory, he recognizes the divinity in his opponent, and they unite to enter paradise together. Love, Thomas argues, particularly transgressive same-sex love that 'civilization' tried to repress, offered a 'vital means of resistance to the antihuman threat of social convention' (181). Physical self-improvement was therefore both a means by which socialism could resist capitalist 'civilization,' and a metaphor for other forms of social and spiritual evolution.

Where Livesey locates Carpenter's Lamarckian aesthetic in the body, my work on Carpenter in *Walt Whitman and British Socialism* focuses on its application to the soul. Carpenter believed that in order to achieve a socialist democracy, humanity needed to evolve from self-consciousness to

universal consciousness. Again, the poet was able to instigate widespread social change by inspiring an enlightened spiritual awareness in his readers which would be passed on to the next generation. 'Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy* have become as a kind of Twentieth-Century Old and New Testament,' avowed the ILP's Katharine Bruce Glasier in 1931, pointing to a notion of spiritual inheritance which is central to my reading. Carpenter believed that his sacred duty was not merely to disseminate the older poet's 'prophetic' message but to shape its evolution into a more explicitly reformist, socialist ideology (32-33).

Thomas alternatively employs a model of 'cultural translation' in which Carpenter converts Whitman's American poetry into 'the different sociopolitical idiom' of his own English culture, inflecting the text of *Towards Democracy* with his developing socialist philosophy (Thomas 171). The result is an 'angrily confrontational, radically anticapitalist text' (174), which rails against systems of land and property ownership, and does not only celebrate the dignity of labor but exposes its brutality under capitalist conditions. As this suggests, the Whitman-Carpenter literary pairing is a common feature of recent scholarship, as it was in contemporary discussions. In *The Making of British Socialism*, for instance, Mark Bevir identifies Whitman's influence in the ideas about spirituality, simple living and comradeship that Carpenter brought to 'ethical socialism' (247-53), and in 'Whitman, Democracy, and the English Clerisy' Andrew Elfenbein suggests that Carpenter 'actively reshaped' Whitman to meet radical English desires (81).

Socialism, wrote Robert Blatchford in his Clarion pamphlet *The New Religion*, was on 'all lips and pens' (3). In what he saw as a sign of the movement's ascendancy, it had established 'a literature of its own, and a Press of its own.' In fact, socialist literary culture was in large part a production of its press: a broad democratic canon was instituted through the poems, stories, plays and critical works that were printed, quoted, reviewed and advertised in its periodicals and newspapers. It is appropriate, then, that the first sustained analysis of the movement's poetry as a genre that extended beyond a familiar few players is anchored in its periodicals. Miller's discussion of socialist poetry in her chapter 'Measured Revolution: Poetry and the Late Victorian Radical Press' is situated within her wider project which explores how late Victorian radicals turned to what she calls 'slow print' ('independent small-scale print' directed toward 'a limited community') in the effort to resist the 'political failings' of the capitalist print industry (*Slow Print* 6). She reads this largely forgotten body of poetry in the context of the periodicals they were published in (some were later gathered into collections, anthologies and songbooks), joining a burgeoning school of archival criticism concerned with literature as it was experienced in a polyvocal medium which included articles, advertisements, pictures, cartoons and notices. As digitization remains relatively limited, reference texts such as Deborah Mutch's *English Socialist Periodicals, 1880-1900*, which indexes a selection of the movement's periodical poetry, and Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor's *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, are useful in getting an initial lay of the land.⁶

As Linda K. Hughes has established in her article 'What the "Wellesley Index" Left Out,' poetry 'mattered' in Victorian periodicals: it was rarely used as 'filler' (prose was better suited to that purpose), but was instead a 'value-added' literary feature that also introduced visual variation to the printed page (103). Miller's interrogation of how poetry 'mattered' in socialist periodicals draws on a wide range of poems (many by unknown or little-known poets) to combine historicist analysis with detailed close readings. A number of digital images are included, allowing the reader to see the poems as they appeared on the page. Observing that the majority of poems included in socialist periodicals took traditional forms, Miller argues that the political value of formal innovation was not privileged in socialist poetry, though it was discussed by the movement's critics. Rather,

socialist poetry depicted 'revolutionary political aims in "measured" terms,' situating 'radical ideals within the familiar forms and rhythms of the past' and claiming 'poetic tradition as a precapitalist formation' (*Slow Print* 167-68). Readings of poems by Henry Glasse, J. L. Joynes, John Bruce Glasier, and case studies of Tennyson parodies, the poetry of Morris's *Commonweal*, and Tom Maguire – the young ILP and Social Democratic Federation (SDF) activist who died aged 29 after contributing prolifically to the *Labour Leader* under the pen name 'Bardolph' – lead Miller to conclude that socialist poets were deeply concerned with the idea of rupture, specifically that of revolution, and formulated 'a poetics of political rupture that precedes modernism's aesthetic rupture' (170). New ways of thinking and living could be brought about by adapting familiar cultural forms.

Miller's discussion surrounding tradition and innovation suggests an area that has significant scope for future research. Writing of Chartism, Janowitz comments in *Lyric and Labour* that poetry was a 'flattering mirror to a movement-in-formation, offering conventions for group identity, and a social matrix within which people could discover themselves as belonging to an on-going set of traditions, goals, and expectations' (135). Chartist poetry was to 'excavate and invent that sense of tradition.' There is more work to be done on how this duality operated within the socialist context – on how a sense of radical tradition was uncovered but also crafted to tell an evolutionary narrative that located the socialist struggle as its final iteration, at the avant-garde of human and social transformation. The recent recuperation of Chartist literature by Sanders and others mirrors a similarly energetic reclamation a century earlier in the socialist press, as socialism both 'excavated' and 'invented' a radical literary tradition for itself. Chartist poetry was regularly printed in socialist periodicals, and socialist literary critics looked back to the earlier movement to claim a radical inheritance. Alongside the Chartist poets, established figures such as William Blake and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were co-opted for the socialist cause and integrated into its democratic 'canon.'

Writing in the *Labour Leader* in 1897, Henry Salt, for example, glosses the 'revolutionary' poets he had included in his *Songs of Freedom* anthology ('Some Revolutionary Poets' 23). Prefiguring Janowitz's 'double trajectory' of transcendence and intervention, Salt drew a democratic poetic line of inheritance from the Romantic poets through the Chartists and on to the socialist writers of his own time, identifying two primary strains: the Chartists worked out of 'prosaic fields of political activity,' giving their poetry a 'direct power,' whereas Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats and Shelley wrote from 'the high mountain-land of poetic vision.' According to Salt, the latter found their successors in John Barlas, Francis Adams, Morris and especially the formally-innovative Carpenter and Whitman. Perhaps paradoxically, this idea of innovation was fundamental to discussions about literary inheritance. A 'new spirit' – what one journalist defined as the 'Socialist passion for man' – was seen to populate nineteenth-century literature ('W. B.' 22). For some, this nebulous idea of a 'new spirit' was more important than formal stipulations, but other socialist critics demanded new forms of expression. For instance, in his regular literature column in the *Labour Leader*, a young Alfred Orage called for a poetic form befitting the 'gospel of unity' that he believed socialism to preach ('A Bookish Causerie' 328): 'To express the universal in terms of humanity—this is the function of the poet of Democracy' ('Towards Democracy' 197). Orage talked about 'new old' conceptions which should direct poetic development: fundamental, age-old democratic truths demanded novel applications, and new forms were needed to reflect and shape the direction of humanity's social and spiritual evolution. Miller examines Shelley's influence within the socialist movement, and I have considered Whitman, but there is more work to be done on what socialists read as well as what they wrote, and how they negotiated and reworked a perceived democratic literary inheritance.

Related to the formal politics of socialist poetry – the discussion about what it should look and sound like – was the question of who should do the talking. As literacy rates improved, and technological developments and the repeal of the so-called ‘taxes of knowledge’ made reading more affordable, the latter half of the nineteenth century saw the progressive democratization of print (Rubery 4-9). The sheer volume of publications produced opened platforms to a much broader range of speakers. This general shift received a particular slant in the socialist context where the democratization of the cultural sphere was integral to the movement’s political aims. Through its periodicals and presses (such as the Manchester Labour Press Society), numerous opportunities to publish literature and contribute to political and cultural discussion were afforded to socialists far removed from the metropolitan literary scene. However, hopeful submissions to periodicals such as the *Commonweal* and the *Labour Leader* often received frank and fairly unfraternal public rejections in ‘answers to correspondents’ columns. Not simply a question of artistic worth, this hierarchal dynamic could be further examined in the framework of the friction between the aspirational, affective structures of socialist poetry and the economic forces impacting its print production. Dissemination of socialist poetry cost money; even poems transmitted orally and aurally as they were sung together at socialist meetings and Labour Church services were distributed in print form in songbooks.⁷ Periodicals and pamphlets required readers who were prepared to pay, and issues of audience, reception and the pragmatics of print are increasingly being incorporated into discussions about socialist literary aesthetics.

The subgenre of socialist poetry concerned metapoetically with its own work would be fruitful to explore in this regard. J. L. Joynes, for example, former Eton schoolmaster turned SDF activist, introduced his 1884 collection, *Socialist Rhymes*, with an unsettlingly defeatist poem built around the symbolic association of the swan with the poet (2). A swan offers a quill to the speaker to ‘write the tale of human ill’; the speaker first uses his tears as ink but as the people could not read his words he pierces his veins to use his blood instead. A fruitless sacrifice, the poet is left broken on the riverbank begging the swan to take back the quill. The juxtaposition of the elevated connotations of the swan, which presumes the reader’s familiarity with its classical symbolism, and the title’s informal self-categorization as ‘rhyme’ suggests a disjoint which somehow needed to be navigated. The frustration that workers were as deaf to the socialist message as their oppressors was one frequently voiced in socialist discourse, and this poem, which questions what socialist poetry can do, critically asks how the writing of poetry could be adapted to enable its message to be better heard and understood.

A solution offered by some working-class poets was to give space to writers like themselves, who hailed from the communities that socialism wished to reach. C. Allen Clarke, for example, also made the association between ink and blood, writing in a prose piece that ‘My pen is a hot, oily spindle, and my ink a horrible mixture of soot and sweat coloured with human blood’ (*Effects of the Factory System* 25). Literary labor is again associated with self-sacrifice but for Clarke, who spent his childhood working in Bolton’s factories, the metaphor was not merely a literary affectation but a powerful expression of self-identification. In Clarke’s collection of poetry, *‘Voices’ and Other Verses*, the right to intercede on behalf of the ‘inarticulate’ is explained first in a framing introductory poem by an elevated bard-like speaker who gathers together the human voices of the collection (9-10), and secondly by one of these voices, the ‘poor poet,’ who uses less lofty language to restate the same intention (34-35). Like Clarke himself, Clarke’s speaker both mediates from above and speaks from within; the ability to manipulate these different modes allows him to campaign for a cultural space for the laboring classes. For Joseph Whittaker, a Labour Church activist who grew up in the

slums of Wolverhampton, the working-class poet had great agency. In his poem 'The Better Singer,' the speaker is a learned and accomplished poet who wishes to write a poem to cheer those who labor but fails because his verse 'soared too high' and could not connect with the people (Whittaker 70-72). In contrast, when 'one from themselves' sang 'simple songs,' he was able to control a million hearts.

Even as it is manipulated pointedly for effect by laboring-class poets, this kind of reductive categorization – the upper-class poet soaring transcendent, exploiting the complexity of the English language, while the humble lower-class poet sits close to the soil, using simple words and rhythms – reads uncomfortably today. And yet very little work has been done on socialism's laboring-class poets, though the class politics of the early socialist movement is frequently discussed. Partly, as John Goodridge suggests in 'Some Rhetorical Strategies in Later Nineteenth-Century Laboring-Class Poetry,' this may be due to conditioned prejudice against literary forms that laboring-class poets often used, such as melodrama and sentimental verse. These forms, however, could evince powerful social protest and the recognition of their performativity and inventiveness 'invites a richer critical response' (544). Tom Maguire, for instance, moved adroitly between different performative modes – humor, sentiment, melodrama, parody, occasional verse – while working under the pressure of tight print deadlines. His poem about writing poetry, 'Advertisement,' wittily sketches the travails of being a 'minor poet': 'Yet, know the minor poet is for now and evermore! / Though you vote him down a bother and a bore' (Maguire 18-19).

Not only laboring-class poets, but 'minor' poets from across the social classes have tended to be overlooked in favor of Morris and Carpenter. Many of these poets were not minor in the movement – leading activists such as Joynes, John Bruce Glasier and even Keir Hardie wrote verse in the name of the socialist cause. Others were less involved in the organization of the movement but were well-known for their literary and journalistic work. Exceptions include Livesey's chapter on Dollie Radford, exploring how Radford's poetry can be read as an attempt to challenge the gendered communal socialist aesthetic disseminated by Carpenter and Morris (*Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism* 132-60). In 'Francis Adams and *Songs of the Army of the Night*,' Meg Tasker considers the British-born socialist who emigrated to Australia in 1884 aged 22. She invokes a Bakhtinian dialogic framework to analyze the text's multiplicity of voices, arguing that the co-existence of these voices allows 'the "implied poet" of the whole volume to be constructed as both a member of the oppressed masses and a middle-class sympathizer' (71). Miller's recuperation of little-known writers such as Maguire is a field-defining intervention, and Fabian Macpherson also offers a welcome venture into this body of work in his analysis of poems by Joynes, Salt, Maguire and E. Nesbit, in addition to verse collected in Carpenter's *Chants of Labour*. Philip K. Cohen's *John Barlas, A Critical Biography* includes discussions of his socialism, and Paul Salvesson has written on the life of C. Allen Clarke in *Lancashire's Romantic Radical*.

Writing in 2010, Miller accounts for the growth in critical interest in the radical literature of the late nineteenth century – a 'radical turn' – in the light of disciplinary developments (increased digitization, the dominance of historicist and cultural approaches, the conscious recognition of class politics within an expanding canon) and our social and political context: the 'political shockwaves of the Bush years, especially the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan' ('Literature and the Late-Victorian Radical Press' 702). A year later, Bevir also looked to current events, suggesting a resurgence of interest in socialist ideas in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis (Bevir 1). In 2016, socialism is again hitting the headlines with the political ascent of Jeremy Corbyn in Britain and Bernie Sanders in the United States. Though aesthetics and politics may have become separated on the main political

stage, activists have continued throughout the twentieth century to work out of a proud tradition of associative, community-minded politics which integrates committed poetry, spoken word, storytelling, music, art and performance into its consciousness-raising activity. As this kind of socialism – what Edward Carpenter called a ‘larger socialism’ – is becoming more visible in the movements surrounding Corbyn and Sanders, an increased aesthetic energy is also noticeable. In the United States rappers such as Killer Mike and spoken word heavyweight Saul Williams have endorsed Sanders, and exhibitions such as ‘The Art of a Political Revolution’ demonstrate a willingness to invest creative energy into his politics (<https://hvw8.com/exhibitions/2016/the-art-of-a-political-revolution-artists-for-bernie-sanders/>). In September 2015 poets contributed to a volume in support of Corbyn’s leadership campaign; *Poets for Corbyn*, including poems by Michael Rosen, Pascale Petit and Ian Pindar, was made freely available on the internet and was downloaded 5,000 times in its first week (<http://www.berfrois.com/poets-for-corbyn/>). The #JC4PM tour in February 2016 brought poets, comedians, campaigners, musicians and politicians together to rally for a different kind of labor politics. In Britain, as this branch of the left looks to distance itself from New Labour by reclaiming its political inheritance, we might anticipate that activists and artists will engage in the ‘excavation’ and ‘invention’ of a sense of radical tradition and that interest in the poetry of the early socialist movement will continue to grow.

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¹'Ben' is likely to be one of two men that David Lowe, the sub-editor of the *Labour Leader* and both a journalist and poet himself, remembered as being on the newspaper's staff: Ben Shaw, who would hold the post of secretary of the Scottish Labour Party for 17 years, or Ben Gardner (Lowe 42).

² See, for example, Pierson's sketch of the socialist landscape, 'The Differentiation of the Socialist Ideology,' in *British Socialists: The Journey from Fantasy to Politics* (26-42). As the loading of the book's title suggests, Pierson reads a progressive narrative in which 'the path toward a better mastery of reality led beyond fantasy into ideology' (2-3). Conversely, contemporary accounts such as Joseph Clayton's *Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain* often emphasized a sense of diminished ideological force as socialism developed along parliamentary lines in the twentieth century.

³ See also the articles reworked by the authors in their longer studies, Livesey's 'Morris, Carpenter, Wilde, and the Political Aesthetics of Labor,' and Miller's 'William Morris, Print Culture, and the Politics of Aestheticism.'

⁴ For Gagnier see *The Insatiability of Human Wants* (123, 167).

⁵ Macpherson points to the caustic response that the reliance on such optimistic imaging drew from G. K. Chesterton (Macpherson 153): 'They were always waiting for the Dawn; without the least anticipation that they might be shot at dawn, or the least intelligent preparation for shooting anybody else at dawn. "England awake [sic]; the long long night is over; faint in the east behold the dawn appear." They were all like that; they were all Songs before Sunrise; as if the sun that rose on the just and the unjust did not also rise on the conquered and the conqueror. But the English revolutionary poet wrote as if he owned the sun and was certain to be the conqueror' (*Chesterton* 285-86).

⁶ See Miller, 'Literature and the Late-Victorian Radical Press' (710, n.3), for a detailed overview of the current state of digitized periodical resources. Increasingly, digital reproductions of pamphlets and books in their original form are freely available through digital repositories such as HathiTrust Digital Library (<https://www.hathitrust.org/>) and Internet Archive (<https://archive.org>). Poetry can also be found in the LSE Selected Pamphlets collection on JStor.

⁷ Some examples of popular socialist songbooks include Carpenter's *Chants of Labour*, Leatham's *Songs for Socialists*, *The Labour Church Hymnbook*, Pearce's *The Clarion Song Book* and John Bruce Glasier's *Socialist Songs*. On the 'socialist song' see Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture* (107-120), and Bowan and Pickering's chapter 'Singing for Socialism.'