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## Literature and the Late-Victorian Radical Press

**Abstract:** Amidst a larger surge in the number of books and periodicals published in late-nineteenth-century Britain, a corresponding surge occurred in the radical press. This counter-cultural press that emerged at the fin de siècle sought to define itself in opposition to commercial print and the capitalist press, and was deeply antagonistic to existing political, economic, and print publishing structures. Literature flourished across this counter-public print sphere, and major authors of the day such as William Morris and George Bernard Shaw published fiction, poetry, and literary criticism within it. Until recently, this corner of late-Victorian print culture has been of interest principally to historians, but literary critics have begun to take more interest in the late-Victorian radical press and in the literary cultures of socialist newspapers and journals such as the *Clarion* and the *New Age*.

Amidst a larger surge in the number of books and periodicals published in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, a corresponding surge occurred in the radical press: as Deian Hopkin calculates, several hundred periodicals representing a wide array of socialist perspectives were born, many to die soon after, in the decades surrounding the turn of the century (226). An independent infrastructure of radical presses, associated with various radical organizations and editors, emerged as an alternative means of periodical production apart from commercial, profit-oriented print.<sup>i</sup> Literature and literary discourse flourished across this counterpublic sphere, and major authors of the day published fiction, poetry, and journalism within it: in the 1880s, for example, William Morris spent five years editing and writing for the revolutionary paper *Commonweal*, while George Bernard Shaw cut his teeth as an author by serializing four novels in the socialist journals *To-Day* and *Our Corner*. Still, until recently, this corner of late-Victorian print culture has been of interest principally to historians, who have mined the radical archives in search of the origins of the socialist revival, the Labour Party, the internecine conflicts of the British left wing, and so on.<sup>ii</sup> In recent years, however, literary critics have begun to take more interest in the late-Victorian radical press and the rich literary history expressed within it; not only William Morris, but other major literary contributors, such as Edward Carpenter and Dollie

Radford, have garnered fresh scrutiny, and the literary cultures of socialist papers such as the *Clarion* and the *New Age* have too.

The reasons for this “radical turn” (perhaps better described as a “radical veer,” since it is incomplete and ongoing) are not hard to find: the renewed emphasis on historical and cultural approaches to literary study; the expanding literary canon and diversity of texts now appropriated for criticism; a recognition and rejection of the class politics involved in traditional canon formation; and perhaps most importantly, the ever-growing digital archive, which has transformed all fields of literary history by making rare and ephemeral texts and periodicals available to a wider audience of scholars and students.<sup>iii</sup> We might also attribute recent interest in the radical press to the political shockwaves of the Bush years, especially the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which triggered a flurry of radical protest around the world and perhaps an attendant rise of interest in radical movements of the past. Still, compared to critics of the first half of the nineteenth century, scholars of late-Victorian literature have much to do in the way of exploring and accounting for the literature of the radical press; this article will summarize recent work being done in this direction and paths of inquiry that have appeared thus far.

The early-nineteenth-century radical press, I have suggested, has been better served by literary and cultural critics than its late-century counterpart. Recent books by Kevin Gilmartin and Ian Haywood, not to mention a longstanding and thriving field of research in Chartist literature, have offered robust and comprehensive readings of pre-1860 radical print, drawing on over a century of historical research while simultaneously theorizing radical literature so as to advance broader critical accounts of politics, print, counterpublics and the public sphere.<sup>iv</sup> Over thirty years ago, Martha Vicinus’s important study *Industrial Muse* began with the caveat, “I have not included a study of the literature of the socialist movements of the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries; a study of it would make a valuable comparison with Chartist literature” (4-5), yet surprisingly few critics of radical literature have ventured into this territory. Instead, the first half of the nineteenth century has become established in critical discourse as a kind of heroic age for radical print in England: in the early decades of the century, editors, booksellers, and printers risked their shirts for the unstamped press, precisely because it was so patently effective a tool for political organization. As E. P. Thompson describes, “a whole pattern of distribution, with its own folklore, grew up around the militant press,” such that by 1832, there was “a Radical nucleus to be found in every county, in the smallest market towns and even in the larger rural villages” (*Making* 729, 733). It wasn’t until the 1840s and 1850s, Thompson says, that the commercial press began to make inroads into this radical reading public (732). Critics since Thompson have filled in and built on this narrative: Haywood, for example, describes a radical appropriation of “commercial publishing techniques” in the 1850s, and traces “the pragmatic imbrication of the radical press and popular fiction” in *Reynolds’s Weekly*, launched in 1850, and *Lloyd’s Weekly*, launched in 1842 (161). The repeal of the newspaper stamp tax in 1855 and the paper duty in 1861 meant the end of the taxes on knowledge, a set of laws that in many ways defined the early-nineteenth-century radical press, which “threw the publishing and printing trades into a happy uproar” (Altick 357).

Because of these and other major changes in publishing and radical publishing in the course of the nineteenth century, critics of late-Victorian radical print cannot simply follow in the tracks of the excellent work that has been done on the early decades of the century. At the fin de siècle emerged a counter-cultural press – evident in periodicals like *Justice*, *Freedom*, and the *Commonweal* – that sought to define itself in opposition to “the capitalist press,” as it was universally termed by the periodicals under discussion here.<sup>v</sup> As E. Belfort Bax asked in his

article “A ‘Free Press,’” printed in *Justice* 6 December 1884, “is not the newspaper proprietor himself a capitalist, generally on the largest scale, and hence naturally in perfect harmony with ... the body social and political as it is at present?” (4). Bax’s observation, typical of the radical press at this time, exemplifies how this counterpublic print sphere was antagonistic to existing political, economic, and print publishing structures in a way that *Reynolds’s*, for example, was not. As the *Labour Elector* (Henry Hyde Champion’s paper) put it on 14 January 1893, *Reynolds’s* “has now sunk so low as to be a mere Liberal Will-o’-the-wisp, whose flickering and expiring flame would lure the British workers to their destruction” (7). Such virulent suspicion of mass publishing is an indication of the distinct political and print cultural climate that critics of late-nineteenth-century radical print face, along with a distinct set of methodological and terminological dilemmas.

The term “radical,” for instance, is ostensibly better suited for the early nineteenth century than the late nineteenth century, suggestive as it is of an anti-government or limited-government perspective that suits the “Old Corruption” and “free trade” lines of Romantic-era radical journalists like William Cobbett. Class-oriented social protest literature at the end of the century does not sit so easily under the “radical” phraseology, both because of internal conflict over the role of state and governmental structures in achieving classlessness (e.g. gradualist vs. revolutionary vs. syndicalist approaches) and because by the end of the century, the term “Radical” had been effectively appropriated by the left wing of the Liberal Party, making it less useful in describing anti-establishment or anti-Parliamentarian groups. I will nonetheless use the uncapitalized term “radical” here as shorthand for “wholesale class-oriented social protest,” drawing on its etymological sense of “the root” to describe late-century activism with the aim of “root and branch” political and economic change. This is not a perfect terminological solution,

but neither are other potential descriptors such as “socialist,” which would exclude those anarchist, trade union, and labour groups that actively rejected that label; or “labour” or “working-class,” which would include some apolitical or politically tepid print organs, and exclude middle-class groups like the Fabians who shared the objective of a classless society; or “left-wing,” which might include left-wing Liberals who did not advocate thoroughgoing change.

The lack of a perfectly suitable term to describe the late-nineteenth-century radical press is indicative of the much-discussed lack of cohesion that plagued the British left wing during these tumultuous years, but it also signals the rich diversity and complexity of this literary and cultural field. A distinctive feature of *fin de siècle* radicalism was its cheerful (or befuddled) intermingling of seemingly contradictory ideologies, and this variegated quality is certainly evident in its print culture. As Matthew Beaumont describes in “William Reeves and Late-Victorian Radical Publishing” (2003), a study of Reeves’s pocket-sized radical print series, the list’s ideological diversity “is representative of the panorama of contemporary radicalism,” and “this pluralism was itself a product of the ideological heterogeneity of the *fin de siècle*” (97). Beaumont’s essay suggests that for contemporary critics to delimit the radical print sphere out of concern for ideological purity is to project a schema onto a moment when such demarcations were imprecise, when socialists, anarchists, Fabians, and “extreme Radicals” were printing together, advertising next to one another, and speaking on each other’s platforms.

The late-Victorian radical print sphere is so heterogenous and complex, indeed, and the archive so dauntingly vast (much larger than the Romantic-era radical press, for example) that we are to be particularly grateful for new scholarship undertaken with the goal of making this periodical literature more accessible and usable. *The Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century*

*Journalism*, edited by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor and published just last year, will be a good starting place for readers in this area; it gives welcome attention to numerous relevant editors and papers, including a few less-discussed papers such as the *Labour Prophet* (edited by John Trevor, with the punning subtitle “Organ of the Labour Church”) or Joseph Burgess’s *The Workman’s Times*. Since 1977, *The Warwick Guide to British Labour Periodicals 1790-1970* has been the major reference work on the topic, and it is still the most comprehensive, particularly handy for identifying dates, affiliations, and library holdings. Deborah Mutch’s recently published reference work *English Socialist Periodicals, 1880-1900* (2005) offers a much more focused, detailed directory of numerous relevant periodicals, and while by no means comprehensive, it employs organizational strategies of particular use to literary scholars, indexing contents not only by author, but by genre (“poetry,” “serialized fiction,” “literary extracts,” etc.), in the hope that “the literature of the late-Victorian British socialists will eventually gain the academic status achieved by Chartist literature” (viii).

Mutch has also published several recent articles on the literary culture of this archive. Her essay “The *Merrie England* Triptych” (2005) follows the methodology of much recent literary scholarship on Victorian periodicals, arguing that crucial dimensions of Robert Blatchford’s best-selling socialist work *Merrie England* can be gleaned by reading the work in its original periodical context in the *Clarion*, since in that venue it formed a dialogue with serialized fiction that emphasized older political values (e.g. the “Tory-socialist” values of patrician paternalism and *bonhomie*) in the service of socialist polemic. This sort of argument is a natural one for *Victorian Periodicals Review*, the journal in which Mutch’s article is published, since it suggests how the archival turn and the growing body of research on Victorian periodicals have pivoted bibliographic criticism to focus on audience and readers, not just writers and publishers.

Following the work of Jerome McGann, which revitalized textual approaches for a new generation of scholars, periodical research such as Mutch's employs what McGann calls a "materialist hermeneutics" (15) to find traces of audience response "scripted at the most material levels" (10). In this case, Mutch finds that the fiction published around *Merrie England* in the *Clarion* indelibly marked the experience of reading Blatchford's text, which, when published on its own, became one of the most popular and influential books of British socialism.

The *Clarion*, which was edited by Blatchford, was by far the most widely read and commercially successful of late-nineteenth-century socialist papers, and it inspired a whole social movement of "Clarionette" cycling clubs, choirs, rambling societies, clubhouses, and spin-off publications like *Scout*. Perhaps because the *Clarion* reached a predominately working-class audience, literary critics have for the most part ignored it, but the paper's thick literary context, distinctively New Journalist voice, and considerable impact mean that it is ripe for a closer look.<sup>vi</sup> Unlike many socialist papers, the *Clarion* ran advertisements and otherwise drew on the resources of the mass-oriented commercial press; its very first issue identified the paper with "New Journalism," the term Matthew Arnold had coined in 1887 to describe "feather-brained" popular journalism, but which the *Clarion* wielded as a badge of honor, reminding us of New Journalism's democratic associations: "The essence of this new journalism; for it *is* a new journalism ... is variety" (12 December 1891, 1).<sup>vii</sup> The *Clarion* is thus the most obvious instance of the fact that all radical papers were, to some extent, implicated in the capitalist print marketplace that they defined themselves against, but the *Clarion* also worked hard to generate a working-class counterpublic of loyal Clarionette socialists. Blatchford and his staff operated from the idea that they could use the forms of the commercial press while simultaneously undermining its ideological bases.



While Mutch discusses the *Clarion*'s serialized fiction in the above-mentioned article and in another essay published in *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2008), Ann Ardis approaches Blatchford's paper from a modernist critical orientation in her book *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880-1922* (2002) and in two related articles, "The Dialogics of Modernism(s) in the *New Age*" (2007) and "Oscar Wilde's Legacies to *Clarion* and *New Age* Socialist Aestheticism" (2003). Ardis's research puts the *Clarion*, unexpectedly, in dialogue with the *New Age*, a guild socialist periodical edited by Alfred Orage and as unlike the *Clarion* as one might imagine; the *New Age*, known as a seedbed for modernism, directs itself to the art-minded anti-bourgeois crowd, while the *Clarion* addresses an audience of working-class socialists, especially in the North, and speaks in the language of the Victorian sporting press. Thanks to the Modernist Journals Project, the *New Age* is now available online, and has been subject to a flurry of recent critical interest as a result; yet, as Ardis points out, many critics fail to address the journal's socialist roots, perhaps understandable given the wide range of ideological perspectives that the *New Age* included according to editorial practice. In Ardis's analysis, the *New Age* regularly criticized the *Clarion*'s concessions to capitalist print culture (such as advertisements and paid contributors) precisely because it hoped "to reach and radicalize a newly literate working-class populace" as the *Clarion* had done, but unlike the *Clarion* it sought to undermine "the spectacular attractions of commodity culture" rather than draw on their appeal (*Modernism* 162).

The *New Age* had intellectual roots in Theosophy as well as socialism, and in describing the links between these movements, Joy Dixon's *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (2001) discusses the *New Age* and related periodicals such as the *New Freewoman*. Theosophy was an occultist movement loosely based in Eastern religion, and its membership overlapped considerably with ethical and guild socialism during this era; it was an influence on

radical papers like the *New Age* and *Seed Time*, even if it was not overtly acknowledged. Dixon's study, while not specifically focused on literary or print culture, does emphasize the conflicts around feminism within this subset of the radical press. Because theosophists preached the unity of all being, she says, they offered a challenge to the "liberal vision of the state as an association of autonomous individuals" (123), and theosophical feminism functioned as a kind of counter-discourse to the liberal feminist perspective that dominated the women's movement. While in no sense a feminist journal, the *New Age* published, for example, a series of theosophy-tinged essays by the actress Florence Farr, later gathered in the volume *Modern Woman: Her Intentions* (1910), which improbably interweave feminism, socialism, free love, and Nietzscheism (148-9).<sup>viii</sup>

Annie Besant is certainly the most prominent person to have linked socialism, feminism, and Theosophy in the late-Victorian radical sphere, and she was also an important editor and contributor to the radical press. My recent essay "Body, Spirit, Print" (2009) describes Besant's editorial career, from the secularist journal *National Reformer* in the 1870s, to the socialist periodicals *Our Corner* and *The Link* in the 1880s, and eventually to the theosophical press in India; focusing on Besant's socialist journalism, and comparing her to Olivia and Helen Rossetti who edited the anarchist paper *Torch*, I suggest that Besant exploits new media conditions of late-Victorian publishing – mass audiences, New Journalism, celebrity authorship – to create a platform for radical women in the anti-capitalist print sphere. Carol Mackay's article "A Journal of Her Own" also appeared in 2009, and offers an in-depth study of Besant's editorship of *Our Corner* from 1883 to 1888. Judging that the monthly journal reached a tiny audience of only 500 readers or so (325), Mackay nonetheless demonstrates its significance as a link between freethought and socialist discourse. MacKay's new Broadview edition of Besant's

*Autobiographical Sketches*, a work originally serialized in *Our Corner*, was likewise published in 2009 with a superb editorial apparatus; the volume makes for easier access to one of Besant's most important literary contributions to her own radical publications.

As all this recent attention to Besant suggests, more and more scholars are now addressing the dynamics of gender and sexuality in the socialist revival as well as the work of women authors and editors in the radical press.<sup>ix</sup> Ruth Livesey's *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain* (2007), while not directly concerned with the radical press, offers a rich analysis of gender debates in socialist literary culture, focusing particularly on women authors' response to socialist constructions of the artist as a figure of masculine labor. Probing the complex politics of gender at the fin de siècle, Livesey argues that aestheticism and aestheticist values are imbricated in socialist art and literature, and that socialist theories of art were forged "in creative tension" with aestheticism (1). She describes, for example, how "Orage's literary columns in Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader* [the official newspaper of the Independent Labour Party] shuffle a Paterian interest in the passing shades of the individual mind with the collective demands of the future socialist state" (169). A devotee of Pater and Wilde in his early days, Orage would later, as editor of the *New Age*, deride their homosexuality.

Orage's career is just one example of a dynamic that Ardis also describes, wherein the influence of Wilde, Pater, and aestheticism in general is suppressed by early-twentieth-century writers under the influence of a homophobic, masculinist strain of modernism. Also attending to the connections between aestheticism and socialism and the suppressed history of their interrelation, my essay "William Morris, Print Culture, and the Politics of Aestheticism" (2008) focuses on Morris's career in radical print, which stretched from editing the socialist newspaper *Commonweal* in the 1880s to developing the celebrated fine printing house Kelmscott Press in

the 1890s. While Kelmscott is not overtly revolutionary in the manner of *Commonweal*, Morris's two major socialist novels, *News from Nowhere* and *A Dream of John Ball*, were published in both venues, and a comparison of the *Commonweal* and Kelmscott editions reveals the formal parallels between these seemingly dissimilar print projects, and between aestheticism and revolutionary socialism.

Here we touch on a major topic of controversy in studies of radical literature: the question of whether the Victorian novel is hopelessly bourgeois and individualist, wholly inadaptable to socialist ideology, or whether it can be “translated” from capitalist culture and appropriated by socialist writers.<sup>x</sup> Morris's *News from Nowhere* is certainly the most widely known British socialist novel of the era – and likewise the most widely known literary text to have originated in the late-Victorian radical press – but critics since Patrick Brantlinger, who labeled *News* an “anti-novel,” have tended to read it as an ironic declamation of the unsuitability of the novel for socialist literary culture. My essay on Morris suggests that *News from Nowhere* and *A Dream of John Ball* formally model key elements of revolutionary socialist thought for readers, but that this political work requires a wholesale dismantling of Victorian novelistic convention. John Plotz's recent study *Portable Property* (2008) likewise argues that *News from Nowhere* rejects the Victorian novel's “paradigm of sanctioned identification,” and its claim to “convey poignant, peculiar details about any individual's feelings” (145-46); this rejection of novelistic characterization, Plotz suggests, continues an experimental tradition also apparent in Chartist fiction. Plotz, like Anna Vaninskaya, sees Morris's late-career turn to the form of the prose romance – in works such as *The Wood Beyond the World* and *The Story of the Glittering Plain* – as part and parcel of his rejection of novelistic individuation.<sup>xi</sup>

Studies of realist socialist novels of the era – such as Livesey’s reading of Clementina Black’s 1894 novel *An Agitator*, or Kiernan Ryan’s reading of Grant Allen’s 1884 *Philistia* – generally suggest that the political intentions behind such works collapse under the weight of the bourgeois marriage plot or the novel of individual development, offering solutions of individual insight rather than collective union.<sup>xii</sup> C. Allen Clarke’s relatively successful Northern novel *The Knobstick*, originally serialized in Clarke’s own labor paper in 1893, is a perfect example of this tendency: much of the novel is engaged in weaving a political plot focused on labor agitation and “the great strike” in the fictional town of Spindleton; by the end, however, this plot is completely overtaken by a crime story (Belton goes to jail for a murder he didn’t commit) and a love story (Belton and Lizzie are in love). In the concluding pages, Belton is released from jail, nine months pass, and it is the morning of his wedding to Lizzie. The book ends. But what of the labor plot? “The strike had long been settled, and the men had been granted their demand” (262). This is all we get.<sup>xiii</sup>

Against the grain of such readings, Mutch’s article “Re-Righting the Past” (2009) argues otherwise – that novels published in the socialist press did successfully adapt the form of the Victorian novel in the service of “revolutionary aesthetic praxis” (17). According to Mutch, “The difficulty of marrying socialist vision with the persuasiveness of realism is handled in socialist fiction by the final chapters’ open-endedness, more reminiscent of the modernist novel than the trite resolutions of mid-century Victorian realism. Nevertheless, there was an unspoken assumption that socialism was the ultimate closure” (26). This last qualification was plainly an issue for Morris, who didn’t believe that art could really exist as it should exist until the advent of socialism. Art under capitalism was a stopgap measure; it might be revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, but it couldn’t yet exist for its own sake, as it would under socialism. In other

words, as I suggest in my essay on Morris, the difference between aestheticism's view of art and Morris's view of art was to some extent a matter of timing.<sup>xiv</sup>

If the novel's suitability as a literary form for a revolutionary vocation has been subject to critical dispute, it remains true that a great many novels were serialized in the radical press; Mutch's *English Socialist Periodicals* indexes pages and pages of such novels, some of which were reprinted from elsewhere (such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*), and others of which have never been subject to critical analysis, have perhaps never even been read by a contemporary critic.<sup>xv</sup> Were these novels meant as entertaining diversions to help the sales of radical papers, or did they also attempt radical political or ideological work? Clearly, much more must be done in this area for us to have a firmer grasp of the novel's place in the radical press, and by extension, of its formal and generic functionality in this context.

Scores of serialized novels and short stories notwithstanding, poetry was by far the most important literary genre of the radical press. Many late-nineteenth-century socialists felt that drama, above all, would be the radical art *par excellence*, but because drama is fundamentally a performative rather than a print genre, few plays were printed in the radical press.<sup>xvi</sup> Poetry, on the other hand, was ubiquitous, and almost all radical periodicals printed at least one poem per issue. Much research remains to be done in this area, and likely will be, now that the presence of poetry in Victorian periodicals is beginning to attract more critical interest.<sup>xvii</sup> Meanwhile, a few critics have begun the task, focusing on the more illustrious poets of the radical press. Edward Carpenter, not generally remembered for his poetry today, was one of the most popular poets of the radical press, and while Sheila Rowbotham's new biography is not properly a literary study, it sheds light on the wide influence of Carpenter's poetic work. Livesey's *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism* discusses socialist poets Dollie Radford and Edith Nesbit, offering close

analysis of Radford's poetry in particular, which Livesey places "within the radical socialist moment of aesthetic production" (134). Livesey describes Radford writing for the socialist journal *To-Day*, anticipating "that the journal required a vigorously material aesthetic" (144) – this being the organ of "Scientific Socialism," after all, co-edited by E. B. Bax – and feeling her poetry to be "lacking in what the editors required" (145). Nesbit also wrote verse for *To-Day*, but like Radford, felt alienated from the journal's aesthetic grounding in masculine labor.

This aesthetic of masculine labor, Livesey argues, emerged largely from the work of William Morris, who was so influential in forging late-nineteenth-century socialist ideals of art. Morris's poetry also commonly appeared in the socialist press, and while mainly focused on early-nineteenth-century radical poetry, Anne Janowitz's *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (1998) offers a *tour de force* reading of Morris's epic long poem *Pilgrims of Hope*, originally serialized in his paper, the *Commonweal*, in 1885. In Janowitz's reading, *Pilgrims of Hope* draws on "the narrative teleology of the ballad tradition and the depth psychology of the inward lyric" (197), the alliterative Anglo-Saxon tradition, and the hexameter of international classical epic mode (225).<sup>xviii</sup> In this way, Morris fuses native and international poetic forms and literary and oral poetic forms, whereas for other radical press poets, "the category of 'poetry' is often supplanted by that of 'song'" (199).

Songs, indeed, were extremely popular in the late-Victorian radical press and in radical culture more broadly; this popularity is usually attributed to the political symbolism of drawing many voices into one, the cross-class experience of group singing, or the craze for folk songs that emerged in tandem with the late-nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts movement.<sup>xix</sup> An important but overlooked factor in the popularity of radical song, however, is that songs could so easily traverse the print / performance divide: printed in radical periodicals in the manner of poems,

they could be set to familiar tunes and sung in person at rallies and meetings. The literary culture of the radical press sought, in all instances, to create a new culture for a radical public, a canon and tradition for a new day; print remained the most obvious means of forming and interpellating a public at this time, but songs enacted the promise of translating the communion of print into the realm of live voice and live action.

Not for long would print remain the preeminent public medium, but this is part of the reason why literature in the late-nineteenth-century radical press represents such a fascinating avenue of scholarship. This is the historical moment that saw the beginning of genuinely mass-market print and publishing; it saw the emergence of film and the steady incursion of all manner of visual media into everyday life; it saw at once an unprecedented explosion of print *and* the visual harbingers of print's displacement. The literature of the late-Victorian radical press speaks to us, consequently, of print's prospects as a political and literary medium at a moment when those prospects seemed to dim, when the consolidation of the publishing industry and the apparent overabundance of cheap print made the possibility of forming a radical public through print seem far more difficult, ironically, than it had in the days when the radical press operated on the edge of the law. What it can tell us bears not only on radical literary history, but on the interconnected relations of media, knowledge, and representation today.

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<sup>i</sup> For example, the Modern Press was associated with the Social Democratic Federation, England's first Marxist organization, and printed its paper *Justice* for a time (until a split between the press's proprietor, H. H. Champion, and the paper's editor, H. M. Hyndman), as well as other socialist pamphlets and periodicals (such as *To-Day* and *Labour Elector*). The Socialist League, William Morris's revolutionary socialist group, which split off from the SDF in the mid-1880s, also had its own press and its own paper, *Commonweal*. Annie Besant had founded Freethought Publishing Company with Charles Bradlaugh in the late 1870s; after converting to socialism in the mid-1880s, Besant printed socialist literature in addition to freethought literature at the press (including her own journal, *Our Corner*, which aligned with Fabian socialism in 1885). In Manchester, the Labour Press Society on Tib Street was founded in the 1890s and published a good deal of radical literature, including *The Labour Annual*. The



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anarchist paper *Freedom*, edited by Charlotte M. Wilson, is a good example of how resources and equipment were shared across the political spectrum in the late-Victorian radical print sphere: as Wilson describes, the paper was first printed at Besant and Bradlaugh's press; then, when that arrangement became unsustainable during the Chicago Haymarket affair due to tensions with Bradlaugh, the paper moved to the Socialist League's press, "by the kind permission of William Morris"; in 1891, after Morris had left the League, *Freedom* moved again to the New Fellowship Press (see Wilson's notes for "The History of *Freedom*," Freedom Archive, 4338/4, folder 2, International Institute for Social History). Eventually, the paper became its own printer and Freedom Press became a major press for anarchist literature in the period. Some of the smaller radical presses, however, were literally just a printing press tucked away in a corner: William Michael Rossetti's children, for example, printed the anarchist paper *Torch* in the basement of their parents' home, and sometimes offered their press for the printing of other anarchist literature.

<sup>ii</sup> See for example Ian Britain, Stanley Harrison, Patricia Hollis, Gareth Stedman Jones, Stanley Pierson, E. P. Thompson, and Chris Waters. Focusing on political rather than literary discourse, James Alexander's recent book *Shaw's Controversial Socialism* offers a comprehensive account of Shaw's political writings in the radical press. The *History Workshop Journal* is also a rich source for historical accounts of the late-Victorian radical press; this is where Stephen Yeo's important essay "A New Life" was originally published, and as just one example of more recent contributions, see John Barnes's article on Henry Hyde Champion, who edited and contributed to a good number of fin de siècle socialist journals.

<sup>iii</sup> More and more radical Victorian periodicals are now accessible online. Free to all, the website [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org) has posted many articles (though by no means all) from *Commonweal* (edited by William Morris) and *Justice* (edited by H. M. Hyndman), and includes a partial index for the *Social Democrat* (edited by Harry Quelch). The site also includes e-text versions of many important works by late-Victorian socialists such as Morris and E. B. Bax. The University of Michigan Library has posted a full run of the *Commonweal* online, which can be accessed by anyone via the *Commonweal* entry in the library catalog (<http://www.lib.umich.edu/>). Some issues of Annie Besant's *Our Corner* and other radical periodicals, including *To-Day*, edited by J. L. Joynes and E. B. Bax, can be accessed free (in North America, at least) via Google Books. The *New Age* is accessible to all via the Modernist Journals Project (<http://dl.lib.brown.edu/mjp>). As for paid subscription services, Proquest's British Periodicals collections includes *Our Corner*, *To-Day*, and several early-nineteenth-century radical papers; The British Library Nineteenth Century Newspapers has no socialist papers as of yet, but does have *Reynolds's* and several Chartist papers; and while Gale's 19<sup>th</sup> Century UK Periodicals Online collection does not yet offer papers in this area, its planned series in the area of "Knowledge," including political journals, will no doubt offer many of interest.

<sup>iv</sup> In addition to Gilmartin and Haywood, for exceptional work in this area see Anne Janowitz, Martha Vicinus, and Stephanie Kuduk Weiner.

<sup>v</sup> These three papers were all revolutionary socialist or anarchist papers, with smaller circulations than many more moderate radical papers, but because of the influential organizations the three

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papers were tied to, they were more influential than mere circulation would suggest. *Justice*, the SDF paper, had a circulation of around 3,500 a week, according to a 29 December 1884 letter from Friedrich Engels to Eduard Bernstein; the *Commonweal*, the official paper of the Socialist League, had a circulation of around 2,500-3,000 a week, according to Morris's correspondence; *Freedom*, the long-running anarchist paper associated with C. M. Wilson and Kropotkin, had a varying circulation between 500 to 3,000 a week (Thomas 38)

<sup>vi</sup> The weekly paper's circulation, according to Deborah Mutch's entry in *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, "peaked around 90,000 and avgd b/w 40,000 and 50,000" (583).

<sup>vii</sup> Also included in this issue was an article titled "City of Dreadful Night," a classic New Journalism piece about a day in the life of a coal miner: "Just think of it, ladies and gentlemen – nine hours a day lying on your ribs in the dusty darkness, hacking coal, with the shadow of death for ever on your heart, and half-a-mile of rocky mountain hanging over you!" (5).

<sup>viii</sup> Sarah Edwards's article "Co-operation and Co-authorship: Automatic Writing, Socialism and Gender in Late Victorian and Edwardian Birmingham" also focuses on feminism and occultism in the socialist movement, although she suggests that female spiritualism and automatic writing "proved a problematic model for the development of new female political and literary voices" (373).

<sup>ix</sup> For recent historical work in this area, see for example Karen Hunt, Seth Koven, Sheila Rowbotham, and Barbara Taylor.

<sup>x</sup> This connects to a broader debate in leftist thought about the politics of novelistic realism, exemplified in the work of George Lukacs.

<sup>xi</sup> Keir Hardie, England's first Labour M.P., also wrote anti-realist fantasy narratives for his paper *Labour Leader*, but he wrote them for the children's column under the pen-name "Daddy Time," as Caroline Sumpter discusses in "Joining the 'Crusade Against the Giants'" (2006). Keir's socialist fantasies were far more didactic than Morris's, and clearly aimed at "individual conversion" of the young (38). See also Sumpter's *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (2008), pp. 88-130.

<sup>xii</sup> Margaret Harkness, who published under the name "John Law," is one of the better known socialist novelists of the period, but most of her novels originally appeared as volumes rather than serially in periodicals. See John Goode or Ingrid Von Rosenberg for more on Harkness.

<sup>xiii</sup> For more on *The Knobstick*, see Klaus ("The Strike") or Salvesson.

<sup>xiv</sup> This raises the question of the status of Utopian fiction in late-nineteenth-century socialism. While Utopian novels were rife in this period, Matthew Beaumont has suggested that the "utopian structure of feeling at the *fin de siècle* described what was, finally, only a phantom pregnancy" (30); counterintuitively, that is, the attraction to Utopianism among socialists and radicals expresses how far from revolutionary change Britain actually was. Far from

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undermining the novel's allegiance to bourgeois capitalism, in Beaumont's analysis, "state-socialist utopias exemplify the petty-bourgeois temperament" (46). He regards *News from Nowhere*, it should be said, as a separate and more successfully socialist case.

<sup>xv</sup> Critics of *A Working Class Tragedy*, for example – the only novel to be serialized in *Justice*, and a novel that has attracted a fair amount of critical interest – are not even sure of the real identity of the author. See Mitchell and Mutch.

<sup>xvi</sup> Many radical papers did include a theatre column with reviews of contemporary plays, and some dramas were printed in the radical press: Ibsen's *Ghosts*, for example, which was censored from public exhibition, appeared serially in *To-Day* in 1885.

<sup>xvii</sup> See for example the group of essays collected by Catherine Robson under the title "The Presence of Poetry" in the winter 2008 issue of *Victorian Studies*. Also see Kathryn Ledbetter's *Tennyson and Victorian Periodicals* (2007).

<sup>xviii</sup> This deft reading challenges Jack Mitchell's claim (less convincing, to my mind) that the verse of *Pilgrims* "is a curiously shamefaced verse, for the most part, as if it felt it really ought to be prose. It moves in a stylistic limbo which corresponds to the vague setting the hero moves in" (54).

<sup>xix</sup> See Chris Waters for more on song in late-Victorian radical culture.

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