

**THE WRITING LIFE OF ROBERT STORY, 1795-1860:  
'THE CONSERVATIVE BARD'**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the writing life of the Northumbrian labouring-class poet Robert Story (1795-1860) who, during the political turmoil of the 1830s, achieved national celebrity for writing a series of songs and poems for Peel's Conservative party. In his unpublished autobiography (c.1853) he alludes to building an archive of his work. Drawing on these manuscripts, all of which have until now remained hidden, and his published writing, this thesis investigates the relationship between Story's apparent political conservatism and his progressive and experimental approach to writing.

The study is organised into three main parts. The first forms a study of Story's biographical manuscripts, using his accounts of reading to raise the wider complex theoretical questions that inform the thesis. It goes beyond Story's connection with the pastoral tradition and hypothesises that Story's writing was always rhetorical. Tracing Story's circle of 'brother' poets, part two locates him in a distinctly labouring-class canon, imagined or otherwise, that he believed was at least equal to the polite realm of literature. This phase of research also resituates Story's satirical modes of writing and his party ballads within the great body of political literature produced by working men during the first half of the nineteenth century. Story's importance lies not only in his pursuit of politics but also in his cultural ambition: the third part of the thesis examines formal hybridity in his writing. It reveals how Story was searching for new forms of self-expression and asks to what extent his pursuit of literature was politicised and predicated on the belief that social and economic emancipation was

contingent on cultural equality. Overall this thesis argues that Story was using literature to challenge the political, social and cultural boundaries imposed on him as both a workingman and a labouring-class writer.

## Introduction

This thesis recovers the life and work of the Northumbrian labouring-class poet Robert Story (1795-1860) who, during the political turmoil of the 1830s, achieved national fame by writing a series of songs and poems for the Conservative Party. Using extensive archival findings, it considers whether Story can be categorised as a Conservative poet in political terms and still be viewed as a progressive and experimental writer. The study argues that his work was always self-aware and should be seen in terms of his literary ambition and his desire for cultural autonomy. Story not only questioned the restrictions placed on him as a self-taught poet, he also challenged, and attempted to change, the conditions that denied him the legitimacy attributed to those writers belonging to the polite realm of literature.

Story's cultural significance has hitherto gone relatively unnoticed by scholars. Critical work on labouring-class writing has been overwhelmingly on radical writers displaying class or gender consciousness. Although historians have uncovered the roots of popular Toryism, critics have yet to fully delineate a tradition of Conservative labouring-class writing and its relationship to both politics and literary culture. This thesis suggests that there is a need to go beyond the writing of Chartist and labour radicals in order to interrogate the strategies adopted by Conservative self-taught poets. The complex and often problematic methodological questions posed by Story's reactionary political objectives shape this study: how do we reconcile his opposition to parliamentary reform with his struggle for cultural equality and his drive for self-determination



as a distinctly labouring-class poet? This question is not easily answered. And yet, it is exactly these idiosyncrasies that make him both a fascinating and frustrating case study.

The thesis examines a wealth of unused archival sources to test a wide range of critical perspectives that have until now underpinned our understanding on labouring-class writing. Story currently resides on the boundaries of an already marginalised group of writers who are mentioned only in passing in the groundbreaking studies that have sought to recover working-class writers. He makes a brief appearance in David Vincent's argument for the deficiency of rural education, before the historian comments on the poet's first encounter with Watts' *Divine Songs for Children*.<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Rose emphasises the poet's recollections of Sir Walter Scott to demonstrate the importance of reading experiences in the cultural development of working people.<sup>2</sup> By foregrounding Story's cultural identity as a reader, both Rose and Vincent undervalue his importance as a writer. Brian Maidment, in his influential anthology *Poorhouse Fugitives*, tells us that 'in using pastoral to shape a sense of self, Story follows the dominant pattern of pastoral lyrics by self-taught writers.'<sup>3</sup> However, although pastoral and nature poetry were important to him, Story cannot be defined by these modes of writing alone. His political ballads, drama and his life writing were at least equally important in the formation of his cultural identity. Indeed, an eclectic range of forms, including satire, drama, epic,

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<sup>1</sup> David Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1981), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life Of The Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 118-119.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-taught poets and poetry in Victorian Britain*, ed. by B. Maidment (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1987), p. 144.

autobiography, and prose fiction, underpinned Story's sense of himself as a writer.

Martha Vicinus is more generous than most scholars in the attention she gives to the poet. She acknowledges Story's aesthetic sensibilities by placing him alongside the 'more talented' self-taught poets such as John Nicholson, John Critchley Prince and Joseph Skipsey.<sup>4</sup> And yet, also assigning this same group to 'a poetry little attuned to working-class life', Vicinus does not fully recognise the breadth of Story's work or the polemical nature of the writer.<sup>5</sup> Whilst this thesis is indebted to the existing scholarship, it goes beyond his association with the hegemonic and naturalising imagery of the pastoral to interrogate his political and polemical writing. Each chapter centres on a different aspect of his writing life while situating his work within the wider context of labouring-class and self-taught poetry. In dislocating Story's association with the pastoral and relocating him within these progressive modes of writing, the thesis tests the assumption that non-radical labouring-class writing was necessarily reactionary in form. It seeks to bring to the fore Story's remarkable sense of himself as a writer and recover the ways in which his work was motivated by inequality and the hardships he endured as a self-taught poet. It redefines Story as an ambitious and experimental writer who consistently questioned the cultural hierarchies of nineteenth-century society. Above all else, it explores how Story's pursuit of literature and poetry was a way of challenging existing literary discourses that worked to subordinate him as a workingman.

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<sup>4</sup> Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse*, p. 144

Through its original archival research across Story's oeuvre, this project rethinks the cultural and political landscape that shaped his search for subjectivity.

Remarkably, Story wrote three versions of his autobiography. Two of these important individual examples of labouring-class life writing, *Memoirs of Robert Story* (1826-1846) and the *Life of Robert Story* (c. 1853), lost until now, shape this investigation.<sup>6</sup> Both were unpublished but Story drew upon them for his published autobiography *Love and Literature* (1842).<sup>7</sup> Where the eclectic form that characterised Story's published autobiography, seeks to satisfy the tastes of its intended readership, these archival manuscripts were written for 'prosperity' and are, therefore, less susceptible to the self-conscious commercial strategies determined by the marketplace.<sup>8</sup> There are other significant documents pasted into the back of the *Life of Robert Story* that have until now remained hidden. These include an unfinished novel named after the poet's local tavern, *The Chronicles of the Swan* (c.1833), and a series of letters to his friend and subsequently his biographer, John James, in which Story discusses the publication of his forthcoming collection *The Poetical Works of Robert Story* (1857).<sup>9</sup> As a putative novel and a very early example of a labouring-class

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Story, *Memoirs of the life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c. 1826), West Yorkshire Archive Service, Bradford, MS DB3/C60/1. Hereafter, the West Yorkshire Archive Service, Bradford is referred to as WYASB. Robert Story, *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2. Note, Story transcribed his later autobiography *Life of Robert Story*, from his earlier *Memoirs of Robert Story*. There are, however, many differences between the two narratives.

<sup>7</sup> Over the course of this thesis the dates recorded for Story's archival manuscripts have often been proven inaccurate. For example the archival record for *Memoirs of the Life of Robert Story* is dated 1846 but the MS is inscribed and dated by the author 1826. His short prose novel *Chronicles of the Swan* has been recorded as 1855 but was written c.1833 (see chapter six).

<sup>8</sup> See chapter six of this thesis for Story's formal experimentation in his autobiography, *Love and Literature; Being The Reminiscences, Literary Opinions, And Fugitive Pieces Of A Poet In Humble Life* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1842).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Story, *Chronicles of the Swan* (c.1833), pasted into *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2. Robert Story, 'Six Letters to John James', Dec 1852-Feb 1858, pasted into *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2. The historian John James (1811-1867) was both Story's biographer and one of his closest friends. For further information on James see chapter one.

popular prose fiction, *The Chronicles of the Swan* is a particularly valuable piece of evidence in defining Story as an experimental writer.

Also in the West Yorkshire Archives, Bradford, is a three hundred and twenty page manuscript book in which the poet began to transcribe and record his life's work and preserve his own literary archive.<sup>10</sup> As well as containing many unpublished poems it chronicles his chance meeting with 'the celebrated Boz' and a diary account of his pilgrimage to the Lake District in 1833, where Story had hoped to meet Southey and Wordsworth.<sup>11</sup> This extraordinary personal archive includes *Cocarde* (c. 1858) an unpublished drama inspired by the French novel *Le Bossu* (1857), and Story's earliest surviving work, *Miscellaneous Pieces in Poetry* (1817), a manuscript written prior to the appearance of his first published collection, *Harvest and Other Poems* (1818).<sup>12</sup> Containing sheet music, it also offers evidence for the poet's musicality and his relationship to popular culture.<sup>13</sup>

Alongside this new archival material the thesis gives centre stage to a number of substantial pieces of work written by Story but previously listed as anonymous.

*Critics and Scribblers of the Day: A Satire. By a Scribbler* (1827), is a forty-two

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Story, *Poems in Manuscript*, [literary works], Holograph MS, 1 bundle, (1817-1859), WYASB, MS DB3/C59. In a footnote to each poem Story recorded the name of the publication and the exact date it appeared, as well as often giving a brief description of the piece. He appears to have used this manuscript to record and index his countless appearances in the literary press.

<sup>11</sup> For Story's trip to the Lake District see chapter two on Story's reading experiences.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Story, *Cocarde*, [A play in two acts by Robert Story], Holograph MS, 1 envelope, (c. 1858) WYASB, MS DB3/C59/4. *Cocarde* is a dramatic adaptation of Paul Féval's 'cape and sword' adventure novel *Le Bossu*, (Originally published in the newspaper *La Siècle* 1857). Robert Story, *West Allardean Miscellaneous pieces in poetry*, Holograph MS, 1 item, (20 Nov 1817), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/3.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Story, 'Hurrah for the Blue', [sheet music] (Leeds: Printed by J. Swallow and sold by E. Butterworth, c. 1835) WYASB, B3/C60/6. Note this item has again been dated incorrectly and is listed as twentieth century. The printer's inscription, 'J. Swallow Printer Corn Exchange Leeds', can be traced to the mid 1830s and it was probably published for Lord Egerton's election campaign in East Lancashire (1835). For Story's alliance with Lord Egerton see chapter five.

page satirical pamphlet in which he criticises the metropolitan literary press.<sup>14</sup>

The study identifies Story as the author of ‘Reminiscences of Publication’ (1826), an unfinished serialisation appearing in the *Newcastle Magazine* under the pseudonyms ‘S’ and ‘ORTESY’.<sup>15</sup> For the first time the thesis draws together this previously unseen material to illustrate and map out the ways in which Story sought to overcome the cultural boundaries that restricted him as a labouring-class poet.

The recent interest in labouring-class autobiography is an important starting point in understanding the circumstances that motivated, and shaped, Story’s pursuit of literature. Carolyn Steedman reminds us that ‘the idea of a life - was infinitely and inextricably bound up with the capacity to write a life story... To tell, to write, to live a life... was the dominant (by now possibly the only) way of imagining or figuring one.’<sup>16</sup> There is clear evidence that in using autobiographical narrative to construct his cultural identity as a distinctively self-taught poet, Story was both typical and unrepresentative of other writers from below. Like many labouring-class writers Story was creating his own Burnsian myth. The ‘Burnsian model’ was a recurrent feature in labouring-class constructions of the self.<sup>17</sup> The pervasive theme of literacy, or the lack thereof, in his life writing was a way of framing his rudimentary education within a poetic

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Story, *The Critics and Scribblers of the Day: A Satire by a Scribbler* (London: Henry Washbourn, 1827).

<sup>15</sup> Robert Story, ‘Reminiscences of Publication: No. 1—Seeking Subscribers’, *The Newcastle Magazine*, March-April 1826, collected edn January to December 1826, 10 vols (Newcastle Upon Tyne: W. A Mitchell, 1826), V, pp. 111-114, 166-169.

<sup>16</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Master and Servant: Love and Labour in the English Industrial Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 59.

<sup>17</sup> For the significance of Burns in the life writing of another self-taught poet, see James Hogg in Daniel Allington’s ‘On The Use of Anecdotal Evidence in Reception Study and the History of Reading’, in *Reading in History: New Methodologies from Anglo-American Tradition*, ed. by B. Gunzenhauser (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), pp.11-28.

discourse of natural genius. Story's recollections of tending sheep on the Northumbrian hillsides as a youth echoed the loco-descriptive poetry he encountered in his reading experiences. He repeatedly invokes Burns by contrasting the freedom of working in the fields at harvest time with the suffocating monotony of the classroom and even attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to become a ploughman.

The juxtaposition between the fields and the classroom where he first studied and then taught illustrates how Story's search for subjectivity as a writer and a poet were inseparable from his ideas of masculinity and his sense of himself as a workingman. While regional identity was a key theme in the cultural formation of most, if not all, labouring-class writers, Story's life writing suggests he was consciously mediating his identity as a border poet through Sir Walter Scott's popular renditions of Minstrelsy. Story was, as Kirstie Blair puts it, 'alert to literary tradition and aware of his place within it.'<sup>18</sup> And yet, there are many instances where he steps beyond these expectations and attempts to articulate what it meant to him to be a self-taught poet. The force in which he exerts his cultural legitimacy goes against the deference and self-censorship displayed by many labouring-class writers. Story went further than writers such as Robert Bloomfield or John Clare in not only pursuing the idea of a writerly community but imagining an independent canon that offered himself, and his 'brother poets', the freedom and recognition they deserved.<sup>19</sup> As Blair contends, 'poetry was a medium within which [plebeian writers] could explore their relationship to

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<sup>18</sup> Kirstie Blair, *Class and the Canon Constructing Labouring-Class Poetry and Poetics, 1750-1900*, ed. by K. Blair and M. Gorji (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Story here was, what Kirstie Blair describes as, 'shaping both a recognisable image of the labouring-class poet, and a labouring-class canon, while defining the relationship of both to established poets and established literary genres and forms.' Blair, *Class and the Canon*, p. 13.

broader social, literary and political contexts.<sup>20</sup> Story used literature and poetry to negotiate the restrictions placed on him by his society. His manuscripts offer us a narrative of protest and resistance, of hardship and struggle, which foregrounds throughout his ability to succeed despite these obstacles.

In recovering Story's life-writing manuscripts the first part of this thesis begins to build a comprehensive record of the poet's reading experiences and the role they played in his cultural formation. Although Story appears in some scholarship on the histories of reading the extraordinary amount of source material found in his archival manuscripts has been completely overlooked. In chapter two I scrutinise the ways he used a discourse of reading to construct his identity as a self-taught poet. He claimed that his relationship to literature eclipsed the passive experiences of most contemporary readers, regardless of their class or economic background. Indeed, Story believed that his desire to go beyond his reading experiences and imitate the poetry he encountered was a sign of 'innate' literary genius. He also represented himself as a critical reader. He constantly interrogated the authors he read and questioned what their work meant to him as both a poet and a workingman. He presented himself as a critic as well as an author. In developing his own practice of criticism, Story was often a critic of critics. In his influential study, Paul Thomas Murphy describes how contemporary plebeian editors of the popular press 'destabiliz[ed] and recanoniz[ed] established writers... to fit the values of their own class.'<sup>21</sup> This practice, however, was not confined to the press and Story criticised Byron's

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<sup>20</sup> Blair, *Class and the Canon*, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Murphy looks specifically at working-class editors and journalists such as James Somerville in order to understand the attitudes of working people towards literary culture. Paul Thomas Murphy, *Toward A Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals 1816-1858* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1994), p. 3.

*Don Juan* for being inaccessible to the labouring class and incompatible with their lived experience.

Story was also atypical of many contemporary labouring class readers and writers in that his reading experiences were not limited to eighteenth-century poetry. He had intimate knowledge of the Romantics such as Byron, Southey, and Wordsworth well before the 1830s.<sup>22</sup> Ownership and independence were key factors in Story's accounts of reading and the presence of other labouring-class writers is a recurring theme in his work. Indeed, Story's autobiographical works reveal the misconception that it was major and popular works of literature that influenced his decision to begin writing verse.<sup>23</sup> Using new archival material I show that Story's earliest verse writing was an attempt at imitating and emulating the work of labouring-class poet Andrew Scott. Where Burns featured in the accounts of most, if not all, provincial self-taught poets, Story presents his introduction to the poet alongside a discourse of class-consciousness. Burns was the cornerstone in Story's cultural awakening but, more importantly, the bard's very existence was the means through which he challenged and overcame the discourses that excluded him from the polite realm of literature. The second chapter concludes by examining Story's trip to the Lakes and his failed attempt to meet Wordsworth and Southey in person. Retracing his steps for the first time, it illustrates how the poet was attempting to go beyond his reading experiences

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<sup>22</sup> According to both Vicinus and William St Clair very few working people had access to the Romantics prior to 1830. See Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse*, p. 143 and William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Rose is unintentionally misleading when he tells us that 'Pope happened to be the first English poet that Story discovered...' Although Scottish, it was John Home who gave Story his first 'idea of English Poetry' and prior to that he was imitating the poetry of local labouring-class writer Andrew Scott. David Vincent correctly emphasises the early influence of Watts' *Divine songs for Children* but, like Rose, the historian is unaware of the significant role Andrew Scott played in Story's cultural development. Rose, *The Intellectual Life Of The Working Classes*, p. 118. Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 135.



and considers how he was literally, and metaphorically, using the books he encountered to circumvent cultural boundaries and extricate himself from the disadvantages of his background.

Part two of the thesis begins by examining Story's dialogue with a number of prominent self-taught poets and traces his attempts at creating a literary community for his 'brother authors'.<sup>24</sup> Story's desire to map out a literature belonging to the artisan classes compels us to rethink the role of nineteenth-century self-taught poets in reforming the cultural landscape for working people. He believed that it was the duty of all provincial labouring-class writers to promote literature and poetry within their own communities. The poet's published autobiography, *Love and Literature*, (1842) offers significant insight on how communitarian identity and shared cultural experience shaped the aesthetic sensibilities of labouring-class writers. Story understood how the idea of a writerly community served both himself and the tradition of self-taught poets to which he belonged. He used his opening chapter to construct a framework for an emergent labouring-class canon and, in so doing, attempted to carve out an alternative cultural space through which he could reconcile being both a workingman and an accomplished poet.

John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan remind us that 'the sheer number of poets from labouring-class backgrounds, the common themes and styles evident in their verse, and their self-conscious response and resistance to trends within polite and popular poetry, demonstrate that these authors comprise a parallel

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<sup>24</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 261.

tradition in British literature...’<sup>25</sup> And yet, in this respect Story’s expectations exceeded those of other labouring-class writers or, at the very least, he appears to have been more imaginative than his contemporaries. Whilst Clare was influenced by Thomas Chatterton, as well as engaging in a dialogue of sorts with Robert Bloomfield and Keats, Story envisaged a ‘parallel’ community of self-taught poets comprising all ‘grades’ and abilities. Chapter Three, then, explores Story’s strategies for exploiting his alliances (either imagined or real) with other labouring-class poets. It uses E. P. Thompson’s seminal study *The Making of the English Working Class* to define the writer’s sense of himself as a rural self-taught poet and considers the extent to which he framed the term ‘provincial’ within an emergent language of class. Story’s defence of the self-taught tradition hinged on its literary treatment of working people and there are similarities here between Story’s ideas and the aesthetic Simon White assigns to Robert Bloomfield.<sup>26</sup> Story argued that in drawing on his direct experiences of working in the fields he was more qualified than more established authors to represent provincial working life.

Ownership was a cornerstone of Story’s writerly community and he used his group to challenge the dominant critical discourses that characterised the work of labouring-class writers as derivative. He understood that in order to develop, he had to adapt and shape the work of canonical authors to form his own unique literary character. His assertion that ‘every poet must at first be an imitator’ hints

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<sup>25</sup> John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan, ‘John Clare and the traditions of Labouring-class verse’, in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*, ed. by T. Keymer and J. Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 280-295 (p. 280).

<sup>26</sup> Simon J. White, *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007). Also see *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class and the Romantic Canon*, ed. by S. J. White, J. Goodridge and B. Keegan (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006).

at how the imitative practices employed by many self-taught poets was, at least on some level, a form of ‘recononisation’.<sup>27</sup> Story measured the work of celebrated authors by their relevance to his own cultural experiences. Sir Walter Scott’s popular revival of Minstrelsy, for instance, was a framework through which he could promote his connection to the Bardic tradition and assert his cultural identity.<sup>28</sup> It was, however, the idea of an existing labouring-class canon that provided Story with cultural legitimacy. His emergent ideas of class can be traced directly back to his writerly community. For Story the cultural experiences he shared with his ‘brother poets’ offered a way of negotiating the existing critical discourses that marginalised socially excluded writers like him.

Part two also turns to Story’s explicitly political writing. This is exemplified by his forty-two-page satirical pamphlet, *Critics and Scribblers of the Day: A Satire. By a Scribbler* (1827), in which he vehemently attacked the metropolitan press for its treatment of provincial self-taught poets. Until now both The British Library and Copac have listed this important example of labouring-class satire as anonymous. By resituating Story’s pamphlet within the self-taught tradition for the first time since its publication, this study considers the extent to which labouring-class poets resented their dependency on the approval of others and the lengths they went to in order to maintain control over their work. Story’s account of his early attempts at publication included in *Critics and Scribblers* goes some way in correcting a gap in scholarship on nineteenth-century labouring-class writing. In *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, Maidment tells us that he

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<sup>27</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 96. For working-class ‘Recononisation’ see Paul Thomas Murphy’s chapter ‘A Sense of Canon’ in *Toward A Working-Class Canon*, pp. 32-61 (p. 35)

<sup>28</sup> In 1803 Story left home and accompanied a travelling musician on a month-long excursion along the Scottish border. See ‘Young Love and Minstrelsy’ in *Love and Literature*, pp 30-38. See also Story’s manuscripts *Life of Robert Story*, p. 9. and *Memoirs*, p. 8.

was unable ‘to find much discussion of the difficulties of publishing from self-taught poets themselves’.<sup>29</sup> Vincent reminds us that publication was easier than we would perhaps expect.<sup>30</sup> However, appearing in print was not enough for more ambitious writers like Story. He understood that the asymmetrical relationship between himself and the metropolitan press prevented him from moving beyond the patronage and support of his provincial circle.<sup>31</sup>

*Critics and Scribblers of the Day* and Story’s other lost pieces are used to make two main points. First, in vehemently attacking a number of prominent literary critics, Story’s behaviour was at odds with the deference and humility displayed in the customary image of the self-taught poet. Second, Story was driven by his desire for cultural equality and used satire in ways that subverted and transgressed the boundaries of literary convention. He was, of course, one of many labouring-class writers who called upon the eighteenth-century Scriblerus Club.<sup>32</sup> Although Story would later extol Pope’s work, his imitation on this occasion was a departure from what Goodridge and Keegan describe as the ‘reverential invocations’ found in the work of many eighteenth-century self-taught poets.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, *Critics and Scribblers of the Day* was a form of parody. Using the Scriblerians to promote himself as a distinctly labouring-class writer,

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<sup>29</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 329.

<sup>30</sup> Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 151.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Hobbs is correct in stressing the wide circulation of many nineteenth-century provincial magazines; however, Story suggests that for culturally ambitious poets the metropolitan press was still a primary means of legitimising their work. Andrew Hobbs, ‘When the Provincial Press was the National Press (c.1836-c.1900)’, *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, 5.1, (2009), pp. 16-43.

<sup>32</sup> William J. Christmas notes that plebeian poet James Woodhouse published excerpts from his memoirs under the pseudonym “Crispinus Scriblerus”. William J. Christmas, *The Lab’ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (London: Associated University Press, 2001), p. 186.

<sup>33</sup> Goodridge and Keegan identify ‘Henry Jones, Mary Leapor, and the itinerant player and poet Cuthbert Shaw’ as reverential towards Pope. Goodridge and Keegan, ‘Clare and the Traditions of Labouring-Class Verse’, p. 286.

Story was attempting to undermine the type of cultural conservatism synonymous with the Scriblerus Club. His reference to the Scriblerians in his title was tinged with irony. It was a way of challenging and destabilising the dominant critical discourses that excluded him on account of his rural labouring-class background. This thesis, then, analyses Story's use of satire in terms of class identity and asks how his condemnation of the metropolitan literary press and his opposition to contemporary critical discourses shaped his sense of self as a distinctly self-taught poet.

As Story's request to be judged on literary merit alone challenged existing preconceptions surrounding labouring-class writers, I examine the extent to which his demands for cultural equality provoked a negative critical response from the literary establishment in London.<sup>34</sup> The contrasting reception Story received in the provincial and metropolitan press hints at how self-taught writers were expected to adapt and conform to two separate and often disparate critical modes. This study identifies, for the first time, Story as the author of the magazine article 'Moods of the Day' (1826), an essay that provides new contextual evidence of labouring-class writers influenced by contemporary critical responses. Written under the pseudonym ORTESY for *The Newcastle Magazine* it contrasts his despair at being ignored in London with his exhilaration at suddenly seeing his book on the shelves of several local villagers.

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<sup>34</sup> Story demanded in the introduction to his second publication, *Craven Blossoms* (1826), that he be judged on literary merit alone and that no leniency should be given on account of his background. See chapter four for more information. Robert Storey, *Craven Blossoms: or, Poems Chiefly Connected with the District of Craven* (Skipton: J. Tasker, 1826). Storey (spelt with an e)—his name prior to the publication of *The Magic Fountain* in 1829.

Chapter Four also explores the on-going tension between the poet's local celebrity and his rejection by the literary establishment. Recovering a number of nineteenth-century reviews, it examines the ways in which Story's metropolitan critics undermined his cultural authority by foregrounding the poet's provincial self-taught status. Interrogating Story's accusations of widespread corruption in the metropolitan press, it asks exactly what this meant for labouring-class writers. His allegations of 'puffing' suggest that the critical acclaim of a number of popular authors, including Letitia Elizabeth Landon, was due to the shared commercial interests of the newspaper and the publisher. While Clare followed popular contemporaries such as Landon, Story was attempting to undermine their status and reveal the ways in which reputations were artificially inflated. In naming and implicating a number of prominent journalists and publications in London, Story was effectively exiled from the capital for a number of years. And yet, by 1832 he had obtained both the notice of many sections of the London press for his Conservative ballads and secured the respect and support of many critics he had recently offended.

Although nature poetry and the pastoral were important aspects of Story's work, he cannot be defined by these modes of writing alone. His Conservative songs and poems, examined in Chapter Five, were at least equally important in the formation of his cultural identity. Story was unusual for a labouring-class writer in that he managed to sustain a cross-class dialogue with a mainstream political party for well over a decade. Labelled the 'Bard of Conservatism' he played a significant role in Lord Francis Egerton's victory for East Lancashire in 1835, Sir George Strickland's election campaign for East Cumberland in 1837, and was

still being championed by the national press in the lead up to Peel's re-election victory in 1841. While there were other self-taught poets who flirted with the Conservative Party, none were as effective and none were indulged to the same degree.<sup>35</sup>

Copac, the British Library, and the University of Liverpool, all list *Story's Songs and Poems* as circa 1845 but I prove beyond doubt that the first edition of Story's political verse was published in 1836.<sup>36</sup> The poet's celebrity coincided with the rise and fall of Peel's government and the struggle for power after the 1832 Reform Bill. In resituating his party ballads within their original political and cultural context for the first time, this study examines Story's Conservatism alongside the 1834 dissolution of parliament, Sir Robert Peel's minority government of 1835, and the election defeat of the Conservative Party in 1837. Using extensive unpublished material, including a transcript of Story's speech to the Skipton Conservative Association (1835), I aim to resituate his party ballads within the great body of political literature produced by workingmen during the first half of the nineteenth-century.

Chapter Five also explores the identities of Conservative self-taught poets in relation to British patriotism and nationhood.<sup>37</sup> Story was writing for a popular audience and exploiting the contemporary political climate, so the crude reactionary ideology echoed by his political writing should not automatically be

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<sup>35</sup> See John Nicholson's ill-fated collaboration with Richard Oastler and John Critchley Prince's dialogue with both Lord Egerton and Sir Robert Peel.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Story, *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 1st edn (Liverpool: printed by C. Ingram, and sold by Whittaker & Co., London; Grapel, Liverpool; Sowler, Manchester; Clarke & Addison, Preston; Heaton & Sons, Bolton-Le-Moors; Tasker, Skipton; Inkersley, Bradford; and Ramsay, Berwick-Upon-Tweed; 1836).

<sup>37</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Yale University Press, 1992).

read as representing personal ignorance or lack of sophistication. The Tory axioms of ‘Nation, Religion, and Freedom’ featured in his poems enabled him to negotiate, and overcome, the cultural obstacles that had previously inhibited his access to the wider marketplace. The zeitgeist of parliamentary reform was, I suspect, first and foremost a way of legitimising his cultural status while his unprecedented celebrity as a Conservative poet allowed him to enter into new arenas. Recovering his early radical poem, ‘Written on the Death of Princess Charlotte’, chapter Five also maps out Story’s formative political beliefs and illustrates how his later Conservative ballads materialised out of an existing radical tradition.<sup>38</sup> In recovering the wider radical context of Story’s Conservative songs and poems, the thesis illustrates how popular modes of writing not only belonged to the Chartists but also were shared across parties and political divides.<sup>39</sup>

This study is indebted to Maidment’s recovery work on labouring class poetry. However, his focus on Story’s pastoral poem ‘My Own Hills’ risks depoliticising the poet and framing his work exclusively within the literary expectations of most, if not all, self-taught poets.<sup>40</sup> The final part of the thesis examines Story’s work for formal hybridity and challenges the assumption that his attitudes

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<sup>38</sup> Mike Sanders’s research on Chartist poets, *The Poetry of Chartism*, is a key text in examining the relationship between literary culture and the radical politics of the Chartist movement. Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

For the relationship between popular authors and the radical discourse of working-class writers see Sally Ledger’s influential study *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

<sup>39</sup> Ian Haywood claims that ‘in the period before the 1830s, the agitation value of formal literary fiction seems to have been a very low priority for radicals’ and that Loyalists were ‘much quicker off the mark with fiction’. Although Haywood’s study focuses predominantly on prose fiction, Story’s popularity suggests that the Tory press also pursued and understood the value of popular verse forms in promoting their cause. Ian Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 88.

<sup>40</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 137.



towards literature were predominantly reactionary. As his manuscripts show, Story was constantly searching for alternative modes of writing to frame his cultural experiences, undermine middle-class appropriations of the aesthetic, and interrogate his place in history and his motives for writing. Story argued passionately for the emancipatory potential of literature, believing above all else that the economic liberation of working people was contingent on cultural equality. In this sense his work was always politically charged and motivated by his immediate social circumstances. Even the cultural ideal of a morally redemptive and seemingly depoliticised aesthetic such as the pastoral was an opportunity for change.<sup>41</sup> Story used his life writing especially as a platform to reinforce his cultural autonomy. Chapter six therefore focuses on his autobiographical narrative *Love and Literature* (1842). Structured around a fictional conversation between a literary commentator and a celebrity poet, this playful twist on the Socratic dialogue is a form of self-parody and a swipe at his own vanity.<sup>42</sup> In his autobiographical work he was adapting and shaping existing modes of writing in his search for subjectivity as a writer.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, his putative novel *The Chronicles of the Swan*, surviving only as a handwritten manuscript, illustrates how Story experimented with the prose novel form popularised by Sir Walter Scott. Story's main protagonist 'Hum' is largely

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<sup>41</sup> Regenia Gagnier argues that autobiographers had the potential to simultaneously challenge and reinforce the dominant ideologies of subjectivity. The plurality implied by Gagnier's title 'subjectivities' implies how identity cannot be reduced to a singular unified construction of selfhood. R. Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation In Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> For the Socratic dialogue in labouring class and plebeian writing such as William James Linton's *Bob Thin*, see Haywood's seminal research on popular literary culture, *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, pp. 16, 48, 151, 153.

<sup>43</sup> For formal hybridity in the work of labouring-class writers see Kirstie Blair's essay, "'He Sings Alone": Hybrid Forms And The Victorian Working-Class Poet' in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37.2 (2009), pp. 523-541.

autobiographical and the pun echoes both the poet's musical associations and his humble background. In recovering *The Chronicles of the Swan* I ask whether Story's manuscript can be considered a labouring-class novel and, if so, what exactly defines it as such? In answering these questions, I consider the author's strategy for using speech and dialect. The character's eloquent vocabulary and perfect diction is defined against the strong parochial accents of both the novel's high status and labouring-class characters. If we are to read *Chronicles of the Swan* as a labouring-class novel (which I argue we can) then we must first acknowledge how Story's complex sense of himself as a writer and a poet elevated him above others, regardless of their economic background.

Chapter seven examines evidence of formal dissonance in Story's closet drama *The Outlaw* (1839) and traces the author's movement between shared communal experience and individual interiority to the play's formal hybridity.<sup>44</sup> Emerging directly out of popular ballads such as 'Robin Hood' and the 'Nut Brown Maid', as well as emulating the nineteenth-century interiority imbibed from reading Romantic authors such as Wordsworth, Southey, and Scott, *The Outlaw's* arbitration between communitarian and individual constructions of the self suggests that these literary axioms could coexist and were equally complicit in the writer's cultural formation.<sup>45</sup> The chapter also connects *The Outlaw's* hybridity to romantic melodrama and argues that Story was using character dialogue to test the formal boundaries between theatrical performance and

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Story, *The Outlaw; A Drama In Five Acts* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co, 1839), first serialised in the *Halifax Guardian* 16 August to 13 December 1834 and then published by subscription in 1839. For *The Outlaw's* publication in the *Halifax Guardian* see Christopher Heywood, 'A Yorkshire Background for *Wuthering Heights*', *The Modern Language Review*, 88.4 (Oct 1993), pp 817-830 (p. 821).

<sup>45</sup> This phase of research is indebted to the groundbreaking work of Anne Janowitz in *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Romantic interiority.<sup>46</sup> The final phase of analysis frames *The Outlaw's* themes of patriarchal deference, and its romantic embroidering of medieval society, within Story's Conservative social conscience and his opposition to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. Where scholarship has successfully assigned these theatrical modes to an earlier radical tradition of popular protest writing, Story's play proves how melodrama's political undercurrent could be appropriated by labouring-class Conservatives.<sup>47</sup> By focusing on *The Outlaw's* formal hybridity, this final chapter argues Story deserves to be recognised for his radical and experimental aesthetic and not just his conservative sentiments. This piece is symptomatic of Story's eclectic, experimental approach to writing that can be traced across his career and makes him such an interesting case study.

In his anticipation of a new era of cultural and political self-expression for labouring-class writers, Story deserves the same attention as the Radical and Chartist poets that currently dominate the critical field. As the Conservative poet his celebrity outstripped the aspirations of most writers of the day, whatever their class or economic background, and his exposure was at least comparable to that of the later Chartist poets who were still to emerge. Despite Story's politics his attitudes towards literary culture were often unorthodox and non-conformist and he was experimenting with different modes of writing to press his singularity as a self-educated workingman. In recovering the wider context of Story's writing

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<sup>46</sup> From the body of scholarship on melodrama the thesis is particularly informed by Juliet John's nuanced approach in *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> For melodrama and radical politics see Sally Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination Op. Cit.* and Elaine Hadley, *Theatrical Dissent in the Marketplace 1800-1885* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) David Worrall, *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality 1787-1832* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance 1790-1820* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993). For Melodrama in popular culture see Michael Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965) and Juliet John, *Dickens's Villains Op. Cit.*

life and considering unpublished manuscripts that show him to be a progressive and explorative author, this thesis also attempts to release the writer from the fixed ideology of his songs and poems and considers how it is necessary to rethink the ways in which scholarship has categorised and delimited Tory self-taught poets.

## Part One

### Chapter 1

#### Sketching the Life of Robert Story (1795-1860)

This biographical chapter uses previously unseen archival material to explore and contextualise the more complex theoretical questions arising from the thesis. It also builds a comprehensive record of Story's publishing history and identifies a number of key texts that either remained in manuscript form or appeared anonymously. Despite Story's prodigious and eclectic literary output, only a small amount of secondary biographical material exists, most of which was published in, or just after, the year of his death in 1860. The most important study is John James' sketch of his life in *The Lyrical and Other Minor Poems by Robert Story* (1861).<sup>1</sup> As a close friend of the poet James edited and arranged the book's publication to support Story's widow Ellen and his three remaining children, Robert, Esther, and Ellen.<sup>2</sup> This collection was preceded by James's article 'Sketch of the Life of Robert Story', published in the *Bradfordian Magazine*, 1 October 1860.<sup>3</sup> Most, if not all, contemporary biographies and

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<sup>1</sup> John James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems Of Robert Story, With A Sketch Of His Life* by John James, F.S.A. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, [Bradford: Henry Gaskarth], 1861), *Internet Archive* <[www.archive.org/details/lyricalothermino00stor](http://www.archive.org/details/lyricalothermino00stor)> [accessed 18 June 2017]

<sup>2</sup> John James (1811-1867) was one of Story's closest friends and belonged to the inner circle of artists, poets and autodidacts who regularly met at the George Hotel, Bradford, during the 1830s. James was unusually sympathetic towards the problems faced by self-taught writers. After their deaths he edited the poems of Story and another self-taught poet closely associated with the Yorkshire area, named John Nicholson, donating the proceeds of the publications to their families. James would make an interesting case study in his own right and offers a possible opportunity for future research. Although establishing himself as a respected antiquary, author and journalist, he came from a labouring-class background and received little education as a child. His appraisal of Story is thoroughly researched and published a year after the poet's death his text remains a valuable source for this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> John James, 'Sketch of the Life of Robert Story' in *The Bradfordian*, October 1860, pp. 8-9.

obituaries written after Story's death adopted James's narrative.<sup>4</sup> The small amount of recent biographical research relating to Story tends to reproduce James's work in its entirety or follows his text so closely that it is difficult to separate the contemporary adaptation from its original source. In short, James' translation of Story's life forms the framework for most of what we currently know about the poet.



**Fig.1**

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<sup>4</sup> For existing biographical sources see 'Robert Story (1795-1860)', *English Poetry 1579-1830: Spenser and the Tradition* < <http://spenserians.cath.vt.edu/> > [accessed 16 July 2017].

James's reputation as a respected local historian and author, coupled with his intimate knowledge of Story, lends credence to the prominence of his account in this and other studies. And yet, where his book is an extremely valuable resource, its purpose of providing financial support for Story's family, and the author's close friendship with the poet, are, of course, problematic.<sup>5</sup> Where I make extensive use of this source, I interrogate the material for errors and elisions and, when possible, attempt to evaluate contrasting information by cross-referencing contemporary sources. James's study was comprehensive but by no means complete. He possessed a significant amount of Story's unpublished material that he deemed either irrelevant or too controversial to appear in print.<sup>6</sup> What James discarded holds major value and significance for this study. For instance, where he deliberately avoided any analysis of Story's imitative writing practices, this study considers the imitation of established authors and poets as crucial to Story's cultural formation as a distinctly labouring-class writer. This thesis, however, is indebted to the historian's extraordinary prescience. It was almost certainly James who collected and archived Story's manuscripts and his intention was, without doubt, to preserve Story's legacy and promote future interest in his work.<sup>7</sup> Until now, these important documents have been

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<sup>5</sup> There are minor but notable differences between James' texts and the numerous inaccuracies appearing in the literary press at the time of Story's death such as the exact age of the poet. I therefore also use census reports, local parish records, and formal legal documents: this empirical data is particularly useful in testing the different contemporary accounts of Story's life.

<sup>6</sup> There are at least two instances where pages have purposely been removed from Story's manuscripts. Cross referencing suggests that they referred to Story's confession of being drawn towards Deism as a young man and an overly familiar description of the wife of his then patron, the Duke of Northumberland. The latter was probably removed after Mr Dickson, Clerk of the Peace for Northumberland, had advised Story to discard a poem dedicated to the Duchess. For further details see Robert Story, *Memoirs of the life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c. 1826), WYASB, MS DB3/C60/1p. 20-21. Robert Story, *Poems in Manuscript*, [literary works], Holograph MS, 1 bundle, (1817-1859), WYASB, MS DB3/C59, pp. 319-320.

<sup>7</sup> Story's manuscripts are archived in the West Yorkshire Archives, Bradford, alongside the original drafts of James' biographical sketch and a significant amount of correspondence with the book's publisher, Henry Gaskarth: John James, *Draft of Life of Robert Story, the Craven-dale Poet*, Holograph MS, Extent 1 envelope, (1860-1866), WYASB, MS DB5/C25/1.

completely overlooked in evaluating the poet's contribution to nineteenth-century labouring-class writing.

Robert Story was born in the Northumberland village of Wark on 17 October 1795.<sup>8</sup> He was unsure of his mother's maiden name but recorded it as being either Mary Whooliston or Hooliston.<sup>9</sup> Literacy was a recurring feature in Story's descriptions of both his parents. Telling us that his mother was an apt learner but unable to read or write, he emphasised the social and cultural inequality that defined both his background and his emergence as a self-taught poet. His manuscripts corroborate James's original description of Story's mother being born in Lauder on the Scottish side of the Borders. He recalls her telling him how she witnessed Prince Charlie marching down Edinburgh High Street with a bible in his hand and he tentatively validated her claim that she was born three years after the insurrection of 1745. Story's descriptions of his birthplace are a theme he returned to throughout his self-writing. This, and the assertion that his parents were born on either side of the Scottish border, worked to reinforce his connection to Minstrelsy.<sup>10</sup> At least to some extent Story was appropriating and adapting his life narrative to fit within existing expectations of labouring-class writers.

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<sup>8</sup> Story's date of birth is imprecisely recorded as 'about the year 1797' in the obituary appearing in *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Review*, 209, September 1860, p 323. Story was the youngest of nine children.

<sup>9</sup> Neither Story nor James actually record the Christian name Mary but it can be found in his dedication to his mother in the *Magic Fountain*: 'To Mary Story, Of Wooler, Northumberland, This Volume Is Affectionately Inscribed, By Her Son, The Author.' Robert Story, *The Magic Fountain with Other Poems* (London: Printed for W. Crofts, 1829).

<sup>10</sup> Minstrelsy offered Story cultural legitimacy and was the literary persona he adopted throughout his life writing. For Story's actual experiences of minstrelsy see his childhood friendship with the travelling musician George Johnson. Also see his obsession with Sir Walter Scott in the following chapter of this thesis.



Story framed his early cultural development within his father's piety and honesty. Like many labouring-class writers he was introduced to cadence and metre through devotional songs, psalms, and hymns. And yet, his accounts of these reading experiences subordinated the morality and spiritual transcendence of religious verse and instead emphasised the vital role it played in his progression towards poetic legitimacy. His father, Robin Storey, was born in Northumberland near Flodden Field.<sup>11</sup> Orphaned as a child he was left to fend for himself and his two younger brothers for a large portion of their early life.<sup>12</sup> His father's profession was that of a 'Hind' and 'Shepherd' but he moved between many different agricultural roles during his lifetime: He 'excelled at all rustic labour—in ploughing, sowing, mowing, and stacking he was allowed to excel; in all he wrought like a slave'.<sup>13</sup> Where we would expect a narrative that either ritualised or rewarded his father's hard work, instead we find an irony that hints at the exploitation of rural working people. Story was taught to read by his father and he tells us 'I can hardly remember a time when I did not know my letters and the small words thanks to [his] attention'.<sup>14</sup> He later described him as being 'illiterate' and said 'like the majority of his class in Northumberland' he read the bible but was unable to write even his own name.<sup>15</sup> This juxtaposition is another cultural assertion that hints at how Story's narrative was predicated on

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<sup>11</sup> Note, that following Burns' example Story drops the 'e' from his surname, adopting Story rather than Storey. The change coincides with the publication of his collection of poems *The Magic Fountain* (1829); however, his name still formally appears as R. Storey in the polling book for the West Riding By-Election, (May 1836).

<sup>12</sup> For further information regarding his father's childhood see Story's footnote 10, Canto VI, *Guthrum the Dane*, appearing in Robert Story, *The Poetical Works of Robert Story* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857), pp. 308-402, (p. 402).

<sup>13</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, pp. 2, 14. A Hind is a farm servant hired by the year and formerly paid in kind by the produce of the farm, 'which included the pasturage of a cow...' For further information on the role of a 'Hind' see the full definition in Reverend Oliver Heslop's *A Glossary of Words Used in the County of Northumberland and on Tyneside: Published for the English Dialect Society* (London: Oxford University Press. 1893-1894), p. 375.

<sup>14</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, p. 16.

class inequality. In teaching himself and his son to read the bible, Story made it clear that his father lacked neither intelligence nor determination. Instead, any failures in his father's learning were determined by his immediate social and economic circumstances.

Story used irregularities and deficiencies in his own early rural education to define his later status as a distinctly self-taught poet. However, somewhat ironically, his practice of imitation coincided with the start of his formal learning at around five or six years of age.<sup>16</sup> Whilst visiting his sister he attended the local school and, though he only stayed for a few weeks, according to his own account, he demonstrated a 'manifest delight in learning'.<sup>17</sup> He quickly mastered the class reading primer before advancing on to Solomon's Proverbs. On his return his parents sent him to the local school in Wark where he 'learned to write a little.'<sup>18</sup> Story quickly moved beyond the passive relationship with literature experienced by most early nineteenth-century readers. He recalls persuading his parents to buy a copy of William Scott's *Collection of Prose and Verse for Schools* and reciting extracts from the book to his new schoolmaster.<sup>19</sup> The pleasure he experienced in learning, and his desire to imitate the poets he read,

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<sup>16</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, p. 4. Story's age originally appears as 'six or seven' in his MS but he later crossed out the original inscription and revised it to 'five or six'. Note that *Memoirs of the life of Robert Story* is much more detailed in describing Story's early education than the later MS *Life of Robert Story*. Story's school was situated in the village of Howtel.

<sup>17</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, p. 5

<sup>18</sup> Robert Story, *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2, p. 5. The name of Story's teacher was Mr Kinton. Although his social and economic background is unclear he was the brother of a Reverend Kinton and appears to be middle-class.

<sup>19</sup> Story is referring to an early edition of a book by William Scott (1750-1804), titled *Lessons in elocution: or, A selection of pieces, in prose and verse, for the improvement of youth in reading and speaking*. It is likely that Story became acquainted with the textbook from either his teacher in Howtel or some of the older pupils.

are what separated him from his classmates and he later applied this idea to the term poetic genius. He argued that his 'innate' need to memorise and then reproduce the verse of more established poets superseded any natural poetic ability he possessed.<sup>20</sup>

Story defined his early childhood and his family's financial status through his recollection of a great famine or 'dearth'.<sup>21</sup> What is significant here and important for this study is that he makes a direct link between the interruption of his education and the disadvantages of his background. According to Story, during the famine his father's employer fled the country still owing him and the other labourers a relatively large sum of money in unpaid wages. The family were forced to leave Wark for the village of Old Heaton where his father managed to find new employment. Although he recommenced his education, the three mile walk to school combined with the severity of his new schoolmaster meant that he only attended 'two or three days a week'.<sup>22</sup> He preferred instead to spend his time in the fields, only returning home to his unsuspecting family in the evening. Dispossessed of any formal education he turned towards nature for instruction. Situating his childhood within the Romantic imagery of nature and landscape we see Story begin to construct the foundations for his later identity as a self-taught poet. The village of Heaton is situated not far from Twizel Castle on the banks of the Till and Story recalls in great detail the impression this

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<sup>20</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 21. Story argued both for and against poetic genius. For extensive and in-depth analysis on the popular discourses of poetic genius and the role they played in constructing Story's cultural identity see the following chapter of this thesis.

<sup>21</sup> The famine Story describes was referred to in the North as 'Barley Time'. James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. x.

<sup>22</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 7.

landscape had in shaping his character.<sup>23</sup> He used his depiction of the ruin and its surrounding landscape to convey to the reader his first childhood experiences of the sublime.

According to Story's own admission, Sir Walter Scott's restoration of Border Minstrelsy was central to his formation as a labouring-class poet. When not in school he could be found in the company of a local man named George Johnson or 'Doddy'.<sup>24</sup> Johnson was 'born lame' and managed to earn a living for himself and his aged mother by playing the fiddle.<sup>25</sup> Following the ancient tradition of Minstrelsy during seeding-time, Johnson would buy a 'worn out' horse and visit the local farmsteads along the Scottish side of the Borders, playing his fiddle in return for 'sixpence or its equivalent in corn'.<sup>26</sup> It was customary for Johnson to be accompanied on his journey by a boy whose duty it was to carry the fiddle case and look after the horse. Against his father's wishes Story ran away with Johnson, only returning home after a month-long excursion.<sup>27</sup> Story's narrative of Minstrelsy is another cultural assertion. He drew on these early experiences of travelling the countryside with Doddy and used them alongside the fictional writing of Scott, to shape his later conceptual understanding of Border Minstrelsy and the Bardic tradition. That is not to say that Story's accounts of

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<sup>23</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> At this point in both his autobiographical manuscripts Story refers the reader to the detailed narrative account of his journey published in *Love and Literature* (1842). See his chapter 'Young Love and Minstrelsy' in *Love and Literature; Being The Reminiscences, Literary Opinions, And Fugitive Pieces Of A Poet In Humble Life* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1842), pp. 30-38. For a semi-fictionalised account of his journey also see Story's long running serialisation 'Nicholas Greenshaw, The Hermit of Rothbury Forest', first appearing in *The Newcastle Magazine*, Nov 1822, collected edn January to December 1822, 10 vols (Newcastle Upon Tyne: W. A Mitchell, 1822), I, p. 582-584. This earlier serialisation was mostly written under the pseudonym Bob Tickler and appears to have been relatively successful, appearing in monthly instalments until September 1823 the following year.

George Johnson were false; he did without doubt become a ‘Minstrel’s Boy’. But Scott’s recovery of marginalised literary forms such as oral narrative, and Minstrelsy’s direct correlation to Story’s Border identity, had particular resonance for the poet. The pivotal role that Scott’s novels and poems played in Story’s sense of himself should not be reduced to hegemony or the desire to conform; rather, it is evidence of how labouring-class writers used established authors to re-imagine, and therein, renegotiate, the existing cultural boundaries that restricted their development. Scott’s popular literary representation of Minstrelsy enabled Story to invent a cultural space through which he could legitimately call himself a poet.

Reading Story’s autobiographical manuscripts, it is easy to arrive mistakenly at the conclusion that he was in the cultural sense a reactionary or conservative poet. However, when fully contextualised these same accounts illustrate how he exceeded the expectations of many labouring-class writers. For example Story recalls how he was taught to ‘get by heart’ several pieces of verse by a shepherd named Howey whilst they tended the flock.<sup>28</sup> Story amazed his teacher by memorising large pieces of verse and ‘getting off in an hour the task intended for a week’ and he tells us ‘with these hymns, and the Divine Songs by the same author began my love of poetry.’<sup>29</sup> What is relevant, here, and often gets lost in Story’s foregrounding of the pastoral, is that being taught by men like Howey, and George Johnson before him, Story implicates the dissemination of literature

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<sup>28</sup> Howey owned a copy of Isaac Watts’ *Divine and Moral Songs for Children*, first published 1795 (edition unknown). Story indicates how he began imitating other poets by first memorising the poem, and then making numerous written copies. Quoted from Story, *Memoirs*, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, p. 10.

and cultural knowledge between working people as being central to his formation as labouring-class writer.

The sudden death of his father in 1809 determined Story's working life and influenced his cultural development and aesthetic attitudes.<sup>30</sup> With the main provider gone he 'seemed in a likely way to become in a few years a staid, steady, settled Hind' but his mother, believing that he had 'received a great education', decided that labouring was 'beneath' him.<sup>31</sup> Hearing that a neighbouring village was in need of a Schoolmaster, she rented a Schoolhouse and lodgings at the cost of four pounds per annum. This was a relatively risky financial investment by his mother and her ambition must have reinforced Story's sense of his social and cultural difference. In July 1810 and, at the age of just fourteen, he opened his first school. His own education having only consisted of reading and a small amount of arithmetic, he was ill equipped to be a schoolmaster, even a provincial one.<sup>32</sup> And yet, to begin with he was 'wonderfully successful' in this new position, and attracted more than fifty students.<sup>33</sup> But his classroom lacked discipline and the school would last for little more than six months. In the autumn of 1812 he travelled to Grindon where

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<sup>30</sup> For further reading on autobiography and child labour see Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> For further insight on working-class schools see Philip W. Gardner, *The Lost Elementary Schools of Victorian England: The People's Educations* (London: Croom Helm, 1984). Story says 'Of meausuration and grammar I had not the most distant idea, such were my acquirements when I entered Humbleton!' and he later amends this in his later manuscript by saying apart from reading and a little arithmetic 'all beyond were mysteries.' Story, *Memoirs*, p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, p. 18.

his brother was steward. He was subsequently employed as a ‘Binder, in a field of nearly a hundred reapers.’<sup>34</sup> Story would now move between teaching, writing poetry, and working in the fields.

Story’s differing accounts of teaching in the classroom and working in the fields were a recurring juxtaposition in his autobiographical writing. Lasting from six in the morning until six at night Story describes reaping as ‘toil—toil with very little intermission’, but though physically hard, he preferred the camaraderie and convivial atmosphere of the fields to the isolation of the classroom.<sup>35</sup> In rejecting his occupation as schoolmaster and choosing instead to define himself by his agricultural work Story illustrates how his life writing is performative:

There was a life, a bustle, a gaiety connected with it, which made me prefer it to teaching school. I hated solitude—except in poetical moods; my mind there preyed upon itself; but in the harvest field placed beside the lass I loved—and sometimes song ringing around me, my mind had other employment, and I was happy.<sup>36</sup>

This contrast again hints at how Story’s sense of himself is shaped by his reading experiences. Working in the fields rather than the classroom he is much closer to both Romantic depictions of the countryside and his idol Burns. Moreover, in devaluing his position as a schoolmaster Story’s narrative works to differentiate his identity as a self-taught poet from the characteristics of a labouring-class autodidact. He was an autodidact but what he repeatedly offers the reader is a literary self-representation. This combination of moving between the classroom

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<sup>34</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 30.

and the fields symbolises both his liminality and his early poetic direction. As a poet he transcended his class position but he was always looking back and foregrounding his socio-economic background. In truth, Story's vocation as a schoolmaster offered him the freedom to read and write poetry, whilst returning to work in the fields at harvest time authorised his cultural identity as a distinctly labouring-class poet.

By November 1812 Story had returned to teaching and living in his school in the township of Roddam where he entered into a phase of intense reading. He describes staying up until the early hours of the morning to read Milton, Ossian, and Pope's translation of Homer.<sup>37</sup> Story had read the work of Goldsmith and Leyden but, at this time, was still unaware of any nineteenth-century poets. The poor conditions at night did little to obstruct his progress and he gives us a nostalgic account of reading by moonlight at his window when his candles and fire had both expired. Story here validates Jonathan Rose's, David Vincent's and William St Clair's view that the works of contemporary authors and poets were generally unavailable to working people. His early reading experiences should not be misconstrued, however, as being representative of the overall level of his access to literature during his lifetime. Although still firmly fixed within eighteenth-century literature, moving from Watts' religious verse to Pope's translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, he was rapidly evolving into a highly sophisticated reader. By the time Story published *Love and Literature* in 1842

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<sup>37</sup> For classical self-education see the research project *Classics and Class* <[www.classicsandclass.info](http://www.classicsandclass.info)> [accessed 18 July 2017].



his repertoire and intimate knowledge of contemporary literature had outstripped that of most middle-class readers.

The influence of other labouring-class writers in Story's early cultural formation has been entirely overlooked by modern scholarship. By providing new and extensive evidence of his access to a number of major and minor labouring-class poets, this thesis reconsiders both the performative role they played in Story's life-writing and their central importance to his cultural identity. In 1815, during a brief and ill-fated spell teaching at an academy near Halifax in Yorkshire, Story managed to obtain access to James Currie's, *The Works of Robert Burns*.<sup>38</sup> Containing a biographical sketch of Burns, this edition had particular resonance for Story and he signals that this was the precise moment at which he made the poet's 'acquaintance'. According to Story, he read Burns' 'letters and life' with 'indescribable interest'.<sup>39</sup> The familiarity and the association of intimacy implied here suggest that Burns' biography held as much value as his poetry. Indeed, after reading the text he appeared to re-evaluate, and realign, his ideas of class and culture. Burns made Story rethink his position of being a teacher and, albeit briefly, he decided to 'give up all pretension to scholar-craft' for the life of a ploughman.<sup>40</sup> What matters to this study, is that Story was not conforming to middle-class values; he was promoting his labouring-class background through cultural means: 'however cheaply I had rated the ploughman of Northumberland, they now appeared to my fancy everything that was enviable;

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<sup>38</sup> Robert Burns, *The works of Robert Burns; with an account of his life, and a criticism on his writing. To which are prefixed some observations on the character and condition of the Scottish peasantry* (London: Printed for T. Cadell, and W. Davis, and W. Creech at Edinburgh by J. M'Creery: 1813: first published 1800).

<sup>39</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*. p. 52.

<sup>40</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 54.

and I resolved to give up all pretensions to scholar-craft for the sake of the ploughman, and no doubt, as my vanity whispered, the Burns of Beaumontside.’<sup>41</sup> Due to factors beyond his control, not least his physique, Story’s ideas of becoming a ploughman never materialized. It was no coincidence, however, that during 1815 and at the age of nineteen he decided to begin work on what would be his first published poem, ‘Harvest’.<sup>42</sup>

Story’s collection, *Harvest and other Poems*, eventually appeared in 1818.<sup>43</sup> While this vindicates David Vincent’s argument that publication was relatively easy for labouring-class writers, Story’s manuscripts highlight several problems he struggled to overcome when the book initially entered the marketplace. His inexperience in negotiating with the printer and his complacency around certain basic but crucial economic factors pertaining to publication, such as copyright and printing costs, left him susceptible to exploitation.<sup>44</sup> Story’s return from a print run of three hundred books was just twenty-six copies, which he either sold or gave away. There is a discrepancy between Story’s unpublished manuscripts and his article ‘Reminiscences of Publication’ (1827) as to why this happened. His accounts move between him misunderstanding the terms of his original agreement with the printer to suggesting that he had been deliberately deceived. What is certain is that the final figure for printing costs was double the amount he had expected. When Story defaulted on the bill, and having somewhat naively given the printer a list of his subscribers, the books were supplied

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<sup>41</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 54.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Storey, *Harvest & Other Poems* (Berwick: William Lochhead, 1818)

<sup>43</sup> *Harvest* was published as a ‘small half crown volume’. Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 65.

<sup>44</sup> For copyright laws during this period and their effects on the book market see William St Clair’s *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

directly from source. The printer was able to recoup around half the sum stipulated on his bill through the sale of the subscription copies alone and the demand for the remaining stock was so high that the remaining two hundred copies were sold in their entirety for their original price.<sup>45</sup>

Although Story was born in Northumbria he is commonly associated with the village of Gargrave in Yorkshire. The circumstances that lead up to his arrival in Yorkshire are left out of James's official 1861 biography.<sup>46</sup> Where we would expect Story to censor this part of his narrative, he is surprisingly honest. Having entered into a relationship with a local servant girl, Ann Brown, and facing the prospect of a second illegitimate child, Story abandoned his schoolhouse in Roddam and began walking towards Newcastle on the first leg of his intended journey to London.<sup>47</sup> It was on his departure south that he was offered the position of schoolmaster in Gargrave.<sup>48</sup> Story's transparency and willingness to discuss his transgressions challenges the idea that labouring-class autobiography was a conservative mode of writing.<sup>49</sup> He appropriates literary tropes from popular culture to represent his internal conflict and guilt:

I took the road in silence. I felt the full degradation of the step I was taking. I knew that I was taking the part of the villain, and, in contradiction to my then religious creed, I expected to receive punishment proportionate to the offence. Yet with a heroism worthy of a better cause, I determined to meet, and to suffer, the worst that vengeance

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<sup>45</sup> Story had around one hundred names on his subscription list.

<sup>46</sup> Story's unpublished manuscripts are the only surviving record of these events.

<sup>47</sup> Ann Brown's name is omitted in Story's later autobiographical manuscript. There is also no mention of when, and with whom, his first illegitimate child was conceived except that in 1818 he received a 'form of security' from the township of Humbleton ordering him to pay two pounds maintenance. In addition to this figure the parish of Roddam also initially ordered Story to pay the sum of five pounds as maintenance for his second child. Story, *Life of Robert Story*. p. 71.

<sup>48</sup> Story left Roddam on the evening of the 30 March 1820.

<sup>49</sup> For self-censorship and illegitimacy see Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 43. Also note how the reference to Ellen Johnston's illegitimate daughter was excluded from the second edition of her *Autobiography, Poems, and Songs of Ellen Johnston, the Factory Girl* (Glasgow: William Love, 1867).

might inflict—blasphemously careless, in that moment of distraction, whether the vengeance were human or divine!<sup>50</sup>

In admitting to ‘taking the part of the villain’ Story was using melodrama in order to contextualise and make sense of his life.<sup>51</sup> The fact that he delayed his journey and stopped in Newcastle in order to write his poem ‘My Farewell’, and then took it to a local newspaper for publication, suggests the extent to which Story translated major events in his life through literary and poetic terms.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, it was Story’s original intention to find employment working for the Radical press in London: ‘I had an idea that I might get employed on the Radical press there; for my political notions—not opinions—were then of the democratic school.’<sup>53</sup> Even in these early stages of his poetic development he was seeking cultural means as a way of improving his social and economic circumstances. Story was, it seems, already drawn towards political writing prior to his Conservative songs and poems.

Story’s arrival in the village of Gargrave in 1820 marked the beginning of what should have been a relatively prosperous period but we find him on the brink of ruin. He already owed a substantial amount of money and the lack of support he received for his school, at least initially, threw him into even greater debt.

According to his own account he was able to raise his reputation and establish

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<sup>50</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>51</sup> For melodrama and working-class autobiography see Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: the Other Side of Silence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985).

<sup>52</sup> Story’s poem ‘My Farewell’ appears in Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 77.

<sup>53</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 80. Chapter five of this thesis considers how Story’s political modes of writing during the 1830s developed out of an earlier radical tradition. For work on the radical press and poetry see Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

himself as both a successful teacher and the parish clerk. His requirements as a teacher also enabled him to develop his reading experiences. When asked to teach Latin, he quickly added to his existing knowledge by ‘studying hard’ and even managed to familiarise himself with the poetry of Virgil, Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, the writing of Sallust and Caesar.<sup>54</sup> Here, Story is using his impromptu and extemporaneous teaching practices to bind his social position as provincial schoolmaster to the cultural sense of himself as both an autodidact and a self-taught poet.

The lack of any major publications since *Harvest* (1819) suggests Story’s priorities during this period were to establish himself in Gargrave and improve his financial circumstances. By 1823 he had met a local girl, Ellen Ellison and their marriage appears to have reinforced his social status in the village as he was soon also appointed Parish Clerk. He had though not completely abandoned his pursuit of poetry and the provincial press played a pivotal role at this stage in his cultural development, not least, because it gave him the legitimacy he would not otherwise have had. Indeed, at this time Story assigned more value to appearing in the *Newcastle Magazine* than he did to self-publication by subscription.<sup>55</sup> When, at his second attempt, he was accepted by the periodical he says it was ‘a great triumph’.<sup>56</sup> Story’s collaboration with *The Newcastle Magazine* was atypical in that it lasted over ten years and this was the first of many

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<sup>54</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 86

<sup>55</sup> The editor of *The Newcastle Magazine*, William Andrew Mitchell, appears to have been unusually sympathetic towards labouring-class writers and the way they were treated by the Metropolitan press.

<sup>56</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 91. Story’s first attempt was the poem ‘Written on the Death of Queen Caroline’. The editor praised the piece but rejected it for being too political. Encouraged by the response Story persevered and on his second attempt was successful.

contributions, including prose articles, short fictional narrative, and countless poems. The provincial press also offered him a critical response by which he could measure his work. Where he had previously relied on the opinions of his friends he was now able to evaluate his poems by the response of the local press and its readership. There are many indications that Story's work was tailored towards, or at least aware of, the expectations and aesthetic values of a provincial audience.<sup>57</sup>

Story's manuscripts reinforce the idea that labouring-class writers played a central role in his cultural formation. Around 1824 he became friends with the Conservative self-taught poet John Nicholson who was then 'attracting great attention' in the Craven district. Comparing Nicholson's poetry to a 'rough gem' he adds that this was only to be expected because, like himself, he was 'uneducated'. By framing their relationship within the distinctly self-taught tradition Story is again making a cultural assertion. By Story's account, Nicholson's reputation was a 'spur' to his own 'poetic ambition and influenced his second publication, *Craven Blossoms* (1826).<sup>58</sup> Story's collection was an attempt to follow Nicholson's success. Its focus on the scenery at Malham Cove and Gordale Scar was almost certainly inspired by descriptions of the exact same locations found in Nicholson's *Airedale in Ancient Times and Other Poems*, (1825).

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<sup>57</sup> Story's alliance with the provincial press and his personal friendship with the editor of *The Newcastle Magazine* are explored in greater depth in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Storey *Craven Blossoms: or, Poems Chiefly Connected with the District of Craven* (Skipton: J. Tasker, 1826). For Nicholson's influence also see Story's later publication Robert Story, *The Rose of the World, A Craven Tale* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1833).

With the publication of *Craven Blossoms* in 1826, Story entered into a bitter dispute with several prominent figures belonging to the metropolitan press. Exiled by the literary establishment in London and Edinburgh, the conflict pushed him to the brink of abandoning poetic composition altogether. Story's provocative actions and his refusal to be subordinated as labouring-class poet illustrate exactly why his search for subjectivity cannot be reduced to cultural hegemony. When *Craven Blossoms* was ignored in London with the exception of a 'small' but scathing 'paragraph' in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Story began writing a lengthy satirical poem titled *The Critics and Scribblers of the Day; A Satire by a Scribbler*.<sup>59</sup> The piece openly names and attacks the leading writers working for the metropolitan literary press including John Nichols, the editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Despite the satire being printed anonymously in 1827 his reputation in the capital was damaged for many years and he recalls how the notable journalists A. A. Watts and William Jerdan never forgot this transgression.<sup>60</sup> Story's account is corroborated by several reviews in the literary press and by the fact that he did not appear again in the metropolitan press until 1832 when he began to receive recognition for his Conservative songs and poems. *The Critics and Scribblers of the Day* is an extremely important text in tracing Story's pursuit of cultural independence. Listed until now by both Copac and the British Library as being published anonymously, it has been completely lost.

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<sup>59</sup> Robert Story, *Critics and Scribblers of the Day, a Satire by a Scribbler* (London: Henry Washbourne, 1827).

<sup>60</sup> A. A. Watts worked for *The Standard*. William Jerdan was a famous journalist and critic who was coincidentally born in Kelso where Story's sister had resided. For further information on Jerdan see *The Autobiography of William Jerdan*, 2 vols (London: Authur Hall, Virtue & Co, 1852), I.

Story now issued a prospectus for a volume of poetry titled *The Magic Fountain* (1829).<sup>61</sup> The collection can be defined by the strong life writing elements that characterised nearly all of Story's work. Its autobiographical content emphasises how his approach to poetry is closely related to his search for subjectivity. Bearing the same title as the book, the first poem in the collection uses a religious narrative that can be traced to Story's early crisis of faith and his flirtation with Deism through to his reformation after his marriage to Ellen. Story saw the material benefits of writing and time and again we find him resorting to publication in order to raise money. Ignoring his advice, Story's mother had 'voluntarily' taken-in his illegitimate child by Ann Brown. Although she received a 'Parish allowance' he felt it was his duty to make a financial contribution to the household. He states how *The Magic Fountain* was successful everywhere except in London, enabling him to send two shillings a week to his mother for the rest of her life.<sup>62</sup>

Story saw himself in political terms as the oppressed not the oppressor. Prior to publishing his *Magic Fountain*, his annual income from his school was around one hundred pounds. Earnings from his various roles within the parish also ensured his salary kept pace with his growing family.<sup>63</sup> However, his fortunes took a dramatic change for the worse when, around 1829, he began attending a number of 'Ale House meetings' on Catholic Emancipation and Parliamentary Reform. Support for reform was in its ascendancy in the West Riding and his

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<sup>61</sup> *Op. Cit.*

<sup>62</sup> The book sold at six shillings.

<sup>63</sup> As Parish Clerk he was also entitled to ten pounds per annum, to which he added a further ten pounds for running the village Sunday school.



Conservatism provoked extreme hostility.<sup>64</sup> When he refused to conform to the political majority the conflict worsened and he was publically humiliated by being ‘burnt in effigy’.<sup>65</sup> It was, then, not only Radicals that were marginalised and suppressed but also labouring-class Conservatives.

Story’s fame and notoriety as a political poet, equalled most, if not all, of the later Chartists now celebrated by recent scholarship. He tells how he had ‘become what may almost be termed “famous”, not so much for my power as a lyricist, as from my having struck a chord which was just then extremely sensitive.’ Story frames his ascendancy within a narrative of accident and good fortune but he was extremely adept at exploiting the political climate.<sup>66</sup> In achieving both his cultural and political aims he adopted a sophisticated strategy that combined political agency with the immediate commercial appeal of popular cultural forms. The provenance for his most successful, ballad, ‘The Isles are Awake’ (1834), were the words of the King’s speech in November 1834.<sup>67</sup> He sent the piece to the *London Standard* which, to his amazement, published it.

Within a few days the song’s popularity had grown considerably. The

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<sup>64</sup> For radical politics in the West Riding area see William H Dawson, *History of Skipton: (W. R. Yorks)* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1882), Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place 1789-1848* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016). Also see Nicholas C Edsall’s work on the Radical Tory Reverend Joseph Rayner Stephens in *The Anti-Poor Law Movement 1834-44* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971). Although Stephens was against universal suffrage, he campaigned for factory reform and supported the Anti-Poor Law Movement.

<sup>65</sup> Story says that there were two reasons why he was burnt in effigy. The first was for his tavern discussions with Tatham and the other was his public defence of a prominent Tory Magistrate.

<sup>66</sup> *Songs and Lyrical Poems* was separated into two parts; the first containing his political writing and the second comprising of his earlier pastoral and nature poems. Robert Story, *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 1st edn (Liverpool: printed by C. Ingram, and sold by Whittaker & Co., London; Grapel, Liverpool; Sowler, Manchester; Clarke & Addison, Preston; Heaton & Sons, Bolton-Le-Moors; Tasker, Skipton; Inkersley, Bradford; and Ramsay, Berwick-Upon-Tweed; 1836).

<sup>67</sup> See King William IV’s speech and his dismissal of the Whig administration in November 1834.

Conservative press took it up and it made several tours of the English, Irish and Scottish papers. Its popularity was recognised by Lord Francis Egerton's election committee and 'circulated by the thousands' during his campaign for South Lancashire in 1835.<sup>68</sup> The piece had until that point always appeared anonymously and was now widely thought to be Egerton's work, a factor that added to its popularity. During the celebration dinner its lyrics featured in the speeches of many of the attending dignitaries and, when Egerton himself finally revealed Story's identity as the author, the revelation stirred up even more excitement.<sup>69</sup> Story seized the moment and in quick succession made public a series of political ballads.<sup>70</sup> Songs such as 'The Church of our Fathers' and 'The Rock of our Ocean' were immediately taken up by the Tory press and earned him the title "The Poet of Conservatism."<sup>71</sup> Story is unusual in that not only did a mainstream political party endorse his poetry; he was also officially accredited for the role he played in the General Election of 1835 and became a symbol of labouring-class opposition to political reform.

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<sup>68</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 104. Story's political ballads were again rolled out by the Tory press during the general election of 1841. He also published the third enlarged edition of his political poem in 1849, in direct response to the Chartist demonstration on Kennington Common (1848).

<sup>69</sup> Story gives us an exact description of Lord Francis Egerton's speech: 'His lordship arose and having quoted some of the lines—added in the words of this song—which has been attributed to me, but of which, though I would have been proud to be so, I am not the author, and it would be a species of literary theft not to say at once. In the eloquent words of this song—"Self hath no part in the raptures that spring / To see the Isles wake to the voice of the King!"' Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 105.

<sup>70</sup> Note that just prior to composing his Conservative songs and poems Story published a collection of non-political verse, *The Rose of the World*, that gained little notice outside of the provincial press. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>71</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 106.

Story again demonstrated his enterprise by capitalising on Egerton's endorsement and issued a prospectus for a collection of his party ballads, *Songs and Lyrical Poems* (1836).<sup>72</sup> The first edition sold out in less than a week and, generating a net profit of 'eighty to a hundred pounds', amounted to nearly as much as Story's annual salary from teaching.<sup>73</sup> He was also adept at exploiting universally respected themes that transcended political boundaries. The book's literary merits were even recognised in some the 'Whig and Radical quarters' and its subscription list included the same men in Gargrave who had recently dispossessed Story of his right to vote.<sup>74</sup>

Story had finally attracted the attention of not only the literary establishment but also the political elite. And yet, the social and cultural value of his new found celebrity far outweighed any long-term economic benefits. Believing that that he had moved a step closer to realising his dream of 'fortune as well as fame' he attempted to publish a second edition within the same year.<sup>75</sup> Relying again on his alliance with the Tory press he travelled to London with the intention of selling the copyright to James Fraser, publisher of *Fraser's Magazine*.<sup>76</sup> Due to the risks involved, Fraser was unwilling to publish 'on his own account.'<sup>77</sup>

Undeterred Story travelled directly to Liverpool where he arranged for the second edition to be printed out of his newly acquired profits. Its sales were

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<sup>72</sup> *Op. Cit.*

<sup>73</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p.111.

<sup>74</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 111.

<sup>75</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 111.

<sup>76</sup> For both Story's introduction to James Fraser and a detailed diary account of his London publishing trip see his unpublished literary papers, *Poems in Manuscript*, pp. 139-147.

<sup>77</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p.112.

much slower than he had expected. This disparity between the first and second editions of Story's book illustrates the difficulty labouring-class writers had in negotiating the literary marketplace. It also emphasises the importance of subscription sales. Although he eventually went on to publish a third edition of *Songs and Lyrical Poems* (1848), Story's popularity with audiences in the national and provincial press did not necessarily translate into a wider commercial success.

Political conflict was a form of self-affirmation for Story. Themes of oppression and prejudice, though undoubtedly heartfelt, added gravitas to his cultural identity as both a labouring-class poet and a political writer. His personal narrative of disenfranchisement is evidence for how discourses of Conservative and Radical labouring-class political protest converged and intersected. Prior to the 1832 Reform Act, Parish Clerks were 'generally if not universally' given the electoral franchise but Story now encountered some resistance in registering his vote as a right of his office.<sup>78</sup> When he voted for the Conservative candidate in the May 1835 by-election, the 'Whig Magnates' in the district were fired 'with indignation' and he was excluded from future polling.<sup>79</sup> The fact that it was

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<sup>78</sup> It was Matthew Wilson of Eshton Hall who had Story struck off the voting register. Note that there were two Matthew Wilsons living at Eshton Hall when Story arrived in Gargrave: Mathew Wilson Esq. (1772 to 1854), and his son, Sir Mathew Wilson, (1802 to 1891). It should also be pointed out that sometime after Story established himself in the village a Matthew Wilson, presumably the elder, built Story a schoolhouse. It is unclear whether Story quarrelled with both men but evidence suggests that it was Sir Matthew Wilson, with whom he entered into a bitter political feud and it was his sanctions that forced him into moving to London. Story, *Life of Robert Story*, pp. 87, 108.

<sup>79</sup> Story was one of thirty-six voters in the village of Gargrave. See the Conservative candidate John Wortley's initials next to Story's name in the 1835 polling book for the West Riding: *West Riding Election. The Poll for a Knight of the Shire* (Wakefield: John Stanfield, 1835), p. 345.

Whigs who effectively disenfranchised him only reinforced his political stance. Story was incensed and vowed to recover his vote ‘hap what hap!’<sup>80</sup> His struggle subverts expectations of what it means to be a labouring-class Conservative. Story’s vulnerability, his pursuit of a political voice and his refusal to be silenced no matter what the consequences, are all radical forms of self-representation.

While Story’s politics attracted unwanted attention at home, his celebrity status enabled him to dramatically increase his circle of patrons, mostly high status Conservative supporters who were successful businessmen, professionals or journalists. When he obtained permission to dedicate *Songs and Lyrical Poems* to Lord Francis Egerton he had taken the first steps in securing the support of the politician whom he then described as ‘my great Patron.’<sup>81</sup> Story was also personally introduced to the ‘celebrated Boz’ by Dickens’ father-in-law, George Hogarth.<sup>82</sup> The extent to which his support increased during this period is a measure of his popularity and prominence amongst the literary and political elite.

These newly established alliances introduced Story to new ways of thinking, both politically and culturally. His identity as a self-taught poet cannot be defined solely by his relationship with literary or poetic forms. Where the polite realm of literature influenced many labouring-class writers, during this period the

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<sup>80</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p 108.

<sup>81</sup> Story wrote this comment prior to securing the patronage of the Duke of Northumberland in 1857. For a description of Story’s subscribers and their professions see footnote 80 in chapter 5 of this thesis.

<sup>82</sup> Story, *Poems in Manuscript*, p. 143

little known political journalist, Robert Alexander, motivated Story. He describes Alexander as ‘the greatest man with whose intimate friendship I was ever honoured.’<sup>83</sup> In particular he valued the agency of Alexander’s overtly political prose and compares its immediacy with the long-term benefits of traditional verse forms adding: As a ‘political writer’ Alexander had ‘no superior’ and instead of pursuing ‘fame or fortune’ he did his utmost to promote his ideals and values ‘in his own day and generation.’<sup>84</sup> Here Story hints at the contemporary dichotomy between apolitical poetic forms and polemical modes of writing. In attempting to transform the social conditions of ‘his own day’ through political means, Alexander justifies Story’s own movement from pastoral and nature poetry to political ballads.<sup>85</sup>

There are many instances where Story’s Conservatism appears incongruous with his labouring-class background. According to Story, however, his political ideologies did not contradict his marginalised position. He insisted that parliamentary reform was based on false promises and that further changes to the electoral system would fall short of the radical changes that attracted the support of so many working people. In 1837 Story did eventually reclaim his vote by buying a ‘property qualification’ at great personal cost: ‘I kept my oath but at the expense of humiliations to which I had never before submitted, and of difficulties which I had never before encountered.’<sup>86</sup> There were two small run-down huts in the village and, though barely habitable, the existing landlord let

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<sup>83</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 110.

<sup>84</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 110.

<sup>85</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 110.

<sup>86</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 108.

them for two pounds each per annum. Story purchased the properties at the extortionate price of ‘eighty pounds’.<sup>87</sup> With no obvious financial benefits, his motives were clearly political rather than commercial, illustrating the length to which he was prepared to go to in returning his own name to the register of voters.

Story’s account also reveals the extent to which his political and cultural identities were interdependent. Facing demands for immediate reparation for his property and having no means to pay, the poet reluctantly turned to his patrons for financial support. He sent a letter to Lord Francis Egerton offering to mortgage the property. Egerton declined his request but sent him a cheque for fifteen pounds. Story then turned to another well-known patron of the arts, Miss Frances Richardson-Currer of Eshton Hall.<sup>88</sup> He signed a ‘document of security’ for the loan of twenty pounds to Richardson-Currer but his patron eventually wrote off the debt essentially giving him the full amount as a gift.<sup>89</sup> Story’s strategy for regaining the right of enfranchisement was underpinned by his cultural alliances and his dependence on the patronage system.

Sometime between 1833 and commencing work on *Love and Literature* (1842) Story began writing his unfinished putative novel *The Chronicles of the Swan*

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<sup>87</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 114.

<sup>88</sup> Miss Currer was a wealthy heiress and well known throughout the district for her library and as being a patron of the arts (she was also acquainted with the Brontës and a possible source for Charlotte’s pseudonym Currer Bell). She was also the stepsister of Matthew Wilson who had only recently contested Story’s right to vote as Parish Clerk.

<sup>89</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 118.

(c.1833).<sup>90</sup> This unpublished, and previously lost, manuscript challenges the modern assumption that he almost exclusively wrote pastoral or nature poems. The novel's eclectic, and often irregular, narrative structure proves that Story was exploring popular cultural forms and the manuscript is crucial evidence in redefining the author as a progressive and experimental writer. The strong autobiographical elements of the novel emphasise how Story's work was a primary form of self-representation. Read alongside his unpublished life writing, the plot can be traced to a land dispute between the village and a local official occurring in 1833. According to Story a number of influential Conservatives in the district installed him as one of two Overseers. However, when the Tories started a new legal dispute against the Township over land, to the surprise of everyone, including his former allies, Story sided with the village. He tells us 'they knew not their man', and though he was 'impulsive' he was 'not unprincipled'.<sup>91</sup> Story refused to be bound by the men who had appointed him, and he doggedly pursued the interests of the Township despite opposition. Story's character Hum is a form of self-parody, playing on the 'humble' and lyrical associations of the self-taught tradition. These and other autobiographical elements found in the text are crucial in considering the extent to which *The Chronicles of the Swan* can be categorised as an early example of labouring-class novel writing.

Story used publishing as a way of appeasing his creditors and on at least two separate occasions he released major works with the direct intention of liberating

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<sup>90</sup> Dating this manuscript is difficult due to the author's narrative framing and context. The novel is set in 1833 but it is possible that it was written at a later date. Although *Chronicles of the Swan* remained unpublished Story repurposed it for the introduction of his later autobiography, *Love and Literature* (1842). *Op. Cit.*

<sup>91</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 100.



himself, and his family, from an immediate financial crisis. His gambles reveal self-confidence in his ability as a writer and a strong belief in the commercial value of his work. If his publications failed to sell, almost certainly he would have had to enter the workhouse. This also raises important considerations around Story's eclectic use of form. In 1838 he found himself in desperate need of funds due to the debt incurred in pursuing his property qualification. His strategy for raising capital was to quickly complete and publish his historical drama *The Outlaw* (1839).<sup>92</sup> His adaptation of existing material was determined to an extent by necessity. The first draft of *The Outlaw* was already written in 1834 and adapted from his earlier poem 'The Hunting in Craven'.<sup>93</sup> However, his prospectus did not attract as many subscribers as expected and his following account reveals the often arbitrary and desperate measures that some labouring-class writers resorted to in order to publish their work. He tells us that he had no other option than to sell his 'library', raising ten pounds. In financing his own publication through the sale of his library, Story's sacrifice is symbolic in that he exchanged and traded his cultural status as a reader for that of an author.<sup>94</sup> He dedicated the drama to his patron Frances Richardson-Currer who contributed five pounds towards the printing costs. Receiving a further twelve pounds for his role as 'Overseer', *The Outlaw* was eventually published in 1839.<sup>95</sup> Although the drama signals a departure from Story's overtly Conservative songs and poems, the final chapter of this thesis considers the political context running through its narrative. The labouring-class poet John Nicholson is again one of

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<sup>92</sup> Robert Story, *The Outlaw; A Drama In Five Acts* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co, 1839).

<sup>93</sup> Robert Storey, 'The Hunting in Craven' in *Craven Blossoms: or, Poems Chiefly Connected with the District of Craven* (Skipton: J. Tasker, 1826), pp. 9-34.

<sup>94</sup> For the further information on the exchange value of books see William St Clair's *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>95</sup> Dickens' father-in-law, George Hogarth, was editor of the *Halifax Guardian* until 1834. Both Patrick and Branwell Brontë were regular contributors.

the probable sources for this formal diversification. Nicholson had at least two plays performed in Bradford and his success may have persuaded Story to experiment with dramatic form.<sup>96</sup>

The putative autobiography, *Love and Literature*, (1842), was the second major publication to emerge from Story's financial difficulties.<sup>97</sup> The author's desperate economic position is a key consideration in analysing this publication and *The Outlaw* before it.<sup>98</sup> By 1842 his Conservative allies were unable to forestall his creditors any longer; 'I found that I should be inevitably crushed if I did not make some great effort to extricate myself.'<sup>99</sup> His solution was to issue a prospectus by subscription for a new work. *Love and Literature's* price of seven and sixpence and its eclectic use of 'prose and verse' were designed to appeal to widest possible audience.<sup>100</sup> The repurposing of previously published material was largely determined by the exceptional circumstances in which the text was produced. Story's manuscripts suggest that even the book's modest cover and its relatively large print run of one thousand copies were influenced by economic necessity. However, it appears to have been a particularly difficult time for publication. Opposition to poor factory conditions and the Corn Laws sparked violence in neighbouring Lancashire and the trouble had started to spill over into

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<sup>96</sup> For Nicholson's influence see in particular John Nicholson, *The Siege of Bradford*, 2nd edn (Bradford: E. Keighley, 1831).

<sup>97</sup> *Op. Cit.*

<sup>98</sup> Story's Conservatism was again the direct cause of this financial crisis. In 1839 the Skipton Union was divided into districts and the position of Collector was advertised for each area at a salary of seventy-five pounds per annum. Gargrave was situated at the centre of one of these districts and with his previous experience as Overseer Story was the obvious candidate. However, while the position increased his salary by seventy-five pounds, the prominent Whig landowner Matthew Wilson opposed Story's appointment and sought retribution by systematically destroying his reputation and introducing an opposition schoolmaster into the village.

<sup>99</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 123.

<sup>100</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 124.

the district of Skipton.<sup>101</sup> The national economy was in severe depression with many people starving. These economic circumstances may have contributed to Story's on-going financial problems as well as making it harder for him to find subscribers. The initial two hundred names he received barely covered the cost of printing. Story's solution was to abandon his remaining pupils and tour Lancashire and Yorkshire: 'I made a plunge which must either extricate me or sink me deeper'.<sup>102</sup> The gamble paid off and he was now left with around three to four hundred copies that he believed he would be able to sell in his native Northumbria. Canvassing across three different counties, Story's progressive commercial strategy illustrates how he had to some extent moved beyond the expectations of most local self-taught poets. Compared to the naivety of his first publication, *Love and Literature* reveals how he had become a resourceful and relatively shrewd operator within the literary marketplace.

Story's account of *Love and Literature* also shows the range and diversity of his many cultural and political alliances and it is worth pausing here to consider some of these relationships. We know from his manuscript that John Tasker of Skipton agreed to advertise the publication in the window of his bookshop.<sup>103</sup> Although on this occasion Story chose to print *Love and Literature* elsewhere, their relationship can be traced back to as early as 1826 and the publication of *Craven Blossoms*. Having alienated many of the local residents Story's favour

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<sup>101</sup> See William H Dawson, 'The "Plug-Drawing" Riots of 1842', *History of Skipton: (W. R. Yorks)* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1882), pp. 285-288.

<sup>102</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 126.

<sup>103</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 124.

with the reputed businessman was a significant asset.<sup>104</sup> In promoting his autobiography and publicly supporting a writer known for his extreme and controversial political views, the bookseller risked alienating local customers. It is probable then that Tasker was a Conservative sympathiser. More than this though, the advertisement hanging in his shop window was a public display of his long-term support and patronage and the cultural cachet offered by a well-known local poet appears to have outweighed any adverse publicity surrounding Story's politics.<sup>105</sup> His manuscripts also reveal the status of Story's political supporters and emphasise how these alliances were inseparable from his cultural identity as a poet. On the second day of canvassing in Newcastle he received news that with the help of Robert Peel the Conservative politician John Wortley had found him a post at Somerset House in London.<sup>106</sup>

This is where Story's autobiographical manuscripts end and the remainder of this chapter is dependent on the author's letters, census records, obituaries and James's posthumous biography of 1861. James's account of the poet's life in London further emphasises the difficulties and hardships he endured. Arriving in 1843 and finding the rent and cost of living excessively high, Story realised the struggle he would have in feeding and clothing his family. His desperate financial circumstances emphasise the importance of his relationship with the Conservative Party. On hearing of his plight his political allies in the West

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<sup>104</sup> John Tasker is identified in *Pigot's Directory* of 1829 as one of only two booksellers trading in Skipton. 9<sup>th</sup> February 1864 John Tasker laid the foundation stone for the new Wesleyan Chapel in Skipton. John Tasker and son also published the Craven Herald. Dawson, *History of Skipton*, pp. 307, 364.

<sup>105</sup> Although on this occasion Story chose to print *Love and Literature* elsewhere, Tasker's relationship with Story can be traced back to as early as 1826 and the publication of *Craven Blossoms*.

<sup>106</sup> There are similarities here between Story and John Critchley Prince. See R. A. Douglas Lithgow, *The Life of John Critchley Prince, Minor Victorian Poets and Authors*, <[www.gerald-massey.org.uk/prince/b\\_biog.htm](http://www.gerald-massey.org.uk/prince/b_biog.htm)> [accessed 06 June 2017]

Riding managed to raise an annual subscription amounting to fifty-three pounds, fourteen shillings that was added to his salary from the Audit Office. The literary marketplace also continued to offer Story an opportunity to supplement his income and during 1849 he published the third edition of his Conservative ballads.<sup>107</sup> While Story claimed this was a direct response to the great Chartist meeting on Kennington Common in 1848, his decision to publish was also opportunistic and again hints how he was exploiting the political climate.

Story continued to write new material and in the autumn of 1852 he published the epic poem *Guthrum the Dane*.<sup>108</sup> Written as a metrical romance, the poem again demonstrates the extent to which Scott's popular modes of writing underpinned Story's sense of himself as a poet.<sup>109</sup> *Guthrum* received good reviews in both the Provincial and Metropolitan press and it appears to have been relatively successful, extending to a second edition in 1853. Indeed, *Guthrum*'s success was the reason for writing his autobiographical manuscript, illustrating how literature and poetry continued to underpin each other: 'In connection with my lyrical and other efforts, it may carry my name to posterity.'<sup>110</sup> *Guthrum* shows that provinciality was an enduring and essential feature of Story's cultural self-representation. Its plot revolves around the conflict between Alfred the Great

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<sup>107</sup> Robert Story, *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 3rd edn (London: Longman Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1849)

<sup>108</sup> Robert Story, *Guthrum the Dane: A Tale of Heptarchy* (London: Longman, brown, green, & Longmans, 1852). The publication is incorrectly dated in James' biography as 1849. Story first called the poem *Aymund the Dane* but afterwards changed it to *Guthrum the Dane*. A second enlarged edition was published in 1853.

<sup>109</sup> See James' reference to Peter Cunningham, (literary critic and son of the poet Allan Cunningham) 'who however, gently chided him for copying Scott's manner, and thus, to some extent, detracting from the intrinsic value of the Poem.' James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems Of Robert Story*, p. Lxiv.

<sup>110</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, preface to manuscript.

and the invading Danes and, as in *The Outlaw*, he was drawing on his connection with both the district of Craven and his native Northumberland.

The fact that he lost four of his children during this period, serves as a general reminder of the poor conditions in the capital.<sup>111</sup> Besides receiving the profit from the sale of *Guthrum* in early 1852, Story's salary was increased to £110; however, poor health continued to dog his family, and in the same year his eldest daughter Sarah died of consumption at the age of twenty-eight. Along with the emotional cost of these bereavements, like many working people, Story struggled to pay his medical and funeral expenses. A letter he wrote to James on the death of his daughter Sarah in 1852 illustrates the level of his poverty:

Dear Sir, Lord! I wish I were with you! In spite of all that has occurred to me, we would have a night of it! But sad things have occurred—not merely sorrow but great expense and the latter item so heavy as to have left me “poor indeed”.<sup>112</sup>

Sarah was the subject of the poem ‘Fairest of all Stars’ (1852). Although it was not unusual for Story to write so personally, her death had a profound effect on him.<sup>113</sup> Despite this Story continued to exploit his poetic celebrity and make many influential friends. In an attempt to recover from his bereavement he travelled to Yorkshire where he visited the ongoing building work at Saltaire. It was during this trip his poem ‘The Peerage of Industry’ (1853) was recited in

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<sup>111</sup> See Story's poem ‘The Thames’ (1857), written for a brochure on sanitary reform in which he described the river as ‘a common sewer’. Robert Story, ‘The Thames’, *Poems in Manuscript*, [literary works], Holograph MS, 1 bundle, (1817-1859), WYASB, MS DB3/C59, pp. 328-329.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Story to John James, 22 Dec 1852, pasted into MS *Life of Robert Story*, WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2.

<sup>113</sup> Robert Story, ‘Fairest of All Stars’, *The Poetical Works of Robert Story* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857), p. 404. Also see ‘My William’ (1846) written on the death of Story's son, in MS *Poems in Manuscript*, p. 298.

front of several thousand people at the opening of the great ‘Model Mill’ when Sir Titus Salt also presented Story with twenty pounds.<sup>114</sup> In the autumn of 1854 he was invited to visit Paris to see the Exposition.<sup>115</sup> He was given a tour of the city and was introduced to Napoleon III as the next Robert Burns. On returning from France he published a collection of work titled, *The Third Napoleon, an Ode Addressed to Alfred Tennyson, Esq.*<sup>116</sup> Although the poem celebrated Story’s experiences in Paris, it is also notable for its critique of Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, and his use of classical and fictional heroes when there were worthy historical figures to eulogise, such as Napoleon III. In criticising Tennyson, Story foregrounds his own cultural authority and contradicts the humility that defined so many labouring-class writers. This appears to be alluded to by *The New London Magazine* which commented ‘The verses are passable, but will not, we imagine, induce Mr Tennyson to invest his talents in so unpromising a speculation. Some war-songs follow the Ode, which do not remind us of Dibdin.’<sup>117</sup> Although the publication’s mixed reviews were not unusual, they suggest he was again provoking rather than courting the metropolitan press.

Story’s approach to patronage and publication was still extremely ambitious. He managed to solicit support for what would become his greatest publication, *The*

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<sup>114</sup> Robert Story, ‘The Peerage of Industry’ in *Spice Islands Passed in the Sea of Reading* (Bradford, Abraham Holroyd, 1859), p. 94.

<sup>115</sup> James tells us that it was a Captain Hastings and his wife of Battersea who invited Story to Paris. James also records Story’s visit as occurring in the autumn of 1854; however, he also indicates that the purpose of Story’s trip was to see the Paris Exposition held in the following year, 1855.

<sup>116</sup> Robert Story, *The Third Napoleon, An Ode Addressed To Tennyson, Esq. Poet Laureate To Which Are Added Songs Of The War* (London: John Hearne, 1854)

<sup>117</sup> *The New London Magazine*, [volume and issue unknown], (London: Effingham Wilson, 1854), p. 373

*Poetical Works of Robert Story* (1857).<sup>118</sup> The book collects over one hundred and thirty of Story's poems, (1816-1857), as well his historical drama *The Outlaw*, (1839), and his epic poem *Guthrum the Dane*, (1852).<sup>119</sup> Prior to publication Story managed to arrange for a selection of his poems to be presented to the Duke of Northumberland who not only gave his permission to dedicate the collection to him, but also offered to finance its publication.<sup>120</sup> Story travelled to Alnwick in August 1856 to arrange publication and spent several days as a personal guest of the Duke:

At parting the Duke said that my Poems would now be read and admired by thousands who never before had seen them; and added that 'The Ancient Barons' should be painted in one of the rooms of the castle, and that he would have it painted in the same spirit as the poem.<sup>121</sup>

Story's purpose was to preserve his legacy and he was pursuing cultural recognition rather than financial reward. Indeed, the profits from publication were not as considerable as they should have been, due to him being overgenerous in sending his book out for review.<sup>122</sup> Its critical reception exceeded even his expectations. The book's extravagant presentation and design eclipsed anything he had achieved before.<sup>123</sup> Its publication was an exceptional achievement for any class of writer, prompting Thomas Carlyle to remark that it contained 'probably the finest bit of typography' that he had ever

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<sup>118</sup> Story, *The Poetical Works of Robert Story*, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>119</sup> The book is arranged in chronological order and Story adds context and narrative to his work by giving the reader a brief introduction to each composition.

<sup>120</sup> Mr Dickson of Alnwick presented the Duke with the poems. He was an admirer of Story's work and as the Clerk of the Peace for Northumberland he had access to the Duke. James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxvii.

<sup>121</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxviii.

<sup>122</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxx.

<sup>123</sup> There were two editions printed, the premium edition costing a guinea and the more modest copy selling at ten shillings and six pence. The book was printed in vibrant colour and each page is adorned with illuminated letters and a gold coloured inlay. The decoration alone cost five hundred pounds. James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxix.



seen.<sup>124</sup> Story also received correspondence from commentators and critics including Macaulay, Aytoun, Jerdan and Gilfillan.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, the Duke appears to have genuinely held Story in high esteem. The poet was named the ‘Duke’s Laureate’ and his patron presented him with one hundred bottles of ‘excellent sherry’, a gift James likens ‘to the present of sack to Ben Jonson’.<sup>126</sup>

Pasted onto a set of loose cards and placed amongst his other unpublished manuscripts, Story’s unfinished play *Cocarde* (c. 1858) has until now remained entirely hidden.<sup>127</sup> *Cocarde* is a dramatic adaptation of Paul Féval’s adventure novel *Le Bossu*, (Originally published in the newspaper *La Siècle* in 1857).<sup>128</sup> Described as ‘cape and sword’ adventure, Féval’s novel can again be traced to Story’s interest in popular literary culture.<sup>129</sup> Story’s title *Cocarde* is the French term for the red, white and blue rosette worn by the revolutionaries; it is also a play on the name of Féval’s secondary character, ‘Cocardasse’. Following the plot of *Le Bossu*, Story’s drama is set at the beginning of the eighteenth-century and is loosely based on real events and historical characters. Although the events of *Cocarde* precede the French revolution 1789-1799, Story’s focus on the

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<sup>124</sup> Thomas Carlyle, ‘Letter to Robert Story’, 1 November 1857, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, August 1857–June 1858, ed. by I. Campbell [et al.] (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), XXXIII, pp. 107-108. For a full transcript of the letter also see James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, pp. lxxv-lxxvi.

<sup>125</sup> Lord Thomas Macaulay (Whig politician, historian and poet), Professor William Aytoun (Scottish poet), William Jerdan (Prominent literary editor and journalist), George Gilfillan (Scottish poet, author and editor).

<sup>126</sup> The Poet Laureate Ben Jonson (1572-1637) received a “terse of Canary Spanish wine yearly”. The tradition still survives today and in 2009 Carol Ann Duffy was presented with six hundred bottles of Spanish Sherry. The ‘sack’ or butt of sack referred to by James is a wooden cask of white wine or sherry from the Spanish Canary islands (normally the equivalent of about 600 bottles). Ben Jonson, *The Works of Ben Jonson in Seven Volumes*, ed. by P. Whalley (London: 1756) James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxxv.

<sup>127</sup> Story, *Cocarde*, pasted into *Life of Robert Story*, WYASB, MS DB3/C59/4.

<sup>128</sup> Paul Féval (1816-1887), popular French author and dramatist. *Le Bossu*, (Originally published in the newspaper *La Siècle* 1857). It is unclear whether Story read the French edition or a later translation.

<sup>129</sup> Stephen Knight, *Mysteries of the Cities, Urban Crime Fiction in the Nineteenth-Century* (North Carolina, McFarland & Inc Publishers, 2012), p. 129.

nobility hints at his Conservative politics and his opposition to radical reform. Containing no stage direction, it appears that, like the closet drama *The Outlaw*, Story intended the play to be read. It is probable that the author found *Cocarde*'s more theatrical elements difficult to implement and eschewed them for a less restrictive and onerous model that was better suited to his inclination for narrative.<sup>130</sup>

Burns was a constant presence in the lives of most nineteenth-century labouring class writers but Story's relationship to the poet went beyond normal expectations. Burns was one of the reasons why he positioned himself on either side of the Scottish / English border: '...he was not quite sure whether the English Muse acknowledged him, for if she had anything of the jealousy of other females, she must have witnessed many of his flirtations with her Scottish sister.'<sup>131</sup> If he was creating a Burnsian myth of his own, the literary establishment also supported and promoted the association. In January 1859 he was invited to act as Vice-Chairman at the Burns' Centenary Festival held in Ayr, an experience James describes as one of the most 'gratifying' in Story's life.<sup>132</sup> He was given the honour of sitting in the 'Croupier's Seat' at a dinner held at Burns' cottage and recited his poems 'What Moves Fair Scotland' and 'I cam to the hill' to an audience of nearly one hundred guests.<sup>133</sup> Prior to the event

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<sup>130</sup> Despite the poor condition of the *Cocarde* manuscript, it offers the potential for future research into Story's formal hybridity and his attitudes towards popular modes of writing.

<sup>131</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxxi.

<sup>132</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxx.

<sup>133</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxx.

Story had entered into the Burns centenary competition.<sup>134</sup> His contribution was placed behind Gerald Massey but alongside the Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais.

While following up a number of subscriptions he had received at the Burns centenary celebration, Story aggravated what James described as a ‘disease of the heart’.<sup>135</sup> Already suffering from a severe cold he ‘foolishly’ travelled to Scotland unprotected at night on the deck of a steamer.<sup>136</sup> On his return he continued to commute to work by river regardless of the weather and by May 1860 his health had deteriorated considerably. Story died on the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1860. James writes he was ‘in the full possession of his mental faculties, without bodily pain, but sad at the thought of leaving his wife, two daughters and a son, and the numerous friends he possessed.’<sup>137</sup>

The fact that Story had a very strong sense of himself and of curating his literary persona are ideas explored in later chapters especially in relation to his autobiographical writing. While he was constructing his identity out of popular cultural and political discourses, he also rejected these narratives where they restricted his ability to fully express himself. He railed against cultural inequality and pursued legitimacy for himself and other self-taught poets. His pursuit of politics and refusal to change his allegiance to the Conservative Party also took him, and his family, within steps of entering the Workhouse. Story’s

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<sup>134</sup> Successful entries were included in the forthcoming publication, *Burns Centenary Poems: A Collection of Fifty of the Best Out of Many Hundreds Written on Occasion of the Centenary Celebration*, ed. by G. Anderson and J. Finlay (Glasgow: Thomas Murray & Son, 1859). For further information see ‘Burns Centenary Competition’, *Gerald Massey.Org*, <gerald-massey.org.uk/massey/cmc\_burns\_centenary.htm> [accessed 01 October 2017]

<sup>135</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxxxvi.

<sup>136</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxxxvi

<sup>137</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. lxxxvii

life writing was above all else driven by the desire to show others how literary culture improved the lives of working people by offering them the means through which they could challenge and overcome existing social and political boundaries.

## Chapter 2

### Awakening ‘the dormant chords’: Robert Story’s Reading Experiences

#### Introduction

Before my research began Robert Story only appeared on *The Reading Experience Database* as a reader, not author.<sup>1</sup> In foregrounding Story’s value as a reader, cultural historians such as David Vincent and Jonathan Rose have overlooked his importance as a poet and a writer.<sup>2</sup> The inadequacy of this model is seen in the way Rose devalues Story’s cultural importance by repeatedly defining him as a ‘shepherd poet’. The categorisation is inaccurate, or at least reductive, for in fact he had only spent a few years tending sheep as a child before opening his first schoolhouse at the age of fifteen. Even labelling Story as a pastoral poet is problematic; he was a provincial self-taught writer who on some occasions wrote pastoral poems as well as experimenting with political songs and ballads, Spenserian sonnets, drama in blank verse, epic, parody, satire, and prose fiction. Rose and Vincent are primarily concerned with Story’s writing practices in relation to his access to literature. For them, he is only one small case study in a huge body of work that sets out to prove how literary culture was instrumental in the social formation of the labouring-classes.

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<sup>1</sup> For research contributed to the database during the course of this project see ‘Listing for Author: Robert Story’, *The Reading Experience Database*, <<https://goo.gl/HQV8hg>> and ‘Listing for Author: John Nicholson’, *The Reading Experience Database*, <<https://goo.gl/5gv2ZA>> [accessed 26th September 2010].

<sup>2</sup> For Vincent’s and Rose’s evaluation of Story see: David Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1981), p.135. Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life Of The Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001) pp. 118-119.

Above all else Story saw himself as a writer. Moreover, he believed that his desire to imitate the poets and authors he encountered set him apart from most nineteenth-century readers regardless of their class or economic background. This chapter sets out to prove how, in precipitating Story's practice of imitation, his reading experiences went beyond a passive or conventional relationship with literary culture and formed the basis for his formal experimentation.<sup>3</sup> Where Rose and Vincent define his writing practices by his access and response to literature, Story used imitation to separate himself from the vast majority of readers and foreground his own singularity and differences. He was a writer and he cannot be entirely defined by, or reduced to, the books he read.

### **Imitation and Innate Genius**

Story refused to attach any inadequacy or lack of originality to the practice of imitation. In his unpublished *Life of Robert Story*, he speaks openly of how after reading *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) he 'took' the 'manner and measure' of Scott's book and used it to structure his first published poem 'Harvest' (1818).<sup>4</sup> The agency and force implied in the verb 'took' hints at how he appropriated and used his access to books to assert his unique cultural identity not only as a poet but also as self-taught poet. Here, he ponders the question of whether 'poetic

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Maidment claims that the imitation of traditional literary forms by self-taught poets was only an 'intelligent response to prevailing literary and social constraints.' Brian Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-taught poets and poetry in Victorian Britain*, ed. by B. Maidment (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1987), p 18.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Story, *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2, p. 66.

genius' is 'innate' and concludes that it is his intrinsic desire to recreate and imitate his reading experiences that defined his literariness:<sup>5</sup>

This would be the place to discuss the question whether genius for poetry is innate or acquired / or rather a propensity to compose poetry; for I am not sure that I possess a poetic genius. (The world, I suppose, must be sole judge of this.) But I have no inclination to the discussion, I would only ask those who think poetic genius / I cannot after all, get quit of the term / merely an acquirement—How happened it, that of the scores of Boys of my own age who got Watts by heart at that school, not one but myself ever thought of imitating what he learnt; and how happened it, that the perusal of a volume of middling verses, which hundreds must have read and forgot raised a flame in me; which it is probable the grave alone will extinguish? Does not this seem to prove that there was in my breast a slumbering feeling, a dormant chord, which it required only a touch to awaken?<sup>6</sup>

As so often, Story foregrounds his writing practices rather than his reading experiences. In telling us that Watts was only capable of 'middling' verse, he dislocates the transformative power from these religious songs and resituates their cultural value within himself.<sup>7</sup> His premise that literature and poetry awakened a 'dormant chord' ritualises the imagination and resonates with the idea of Romantic transcendence; however, the spiritual or divine resides in Story

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<sup>5</sup> Story's strategy of invoking 'poetic genius' draws on the prominent and longstanding tradition of critical commentary that privileges the self-taught status of labouring-class writers. For a thorough discussion of William Duff's treatises on the subject and the natural genius attributed to eighteenth-century plebeian poets, such as Stephen Duck, see William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (London: Associated University Press, 2001), pp. 210-211. The idea of natural genius is a common trope found in the self-writing of many labouring-class poets; for instance, Bridget Keegan tells us that the topographical poet, William Lane, believed it was 'precisely his lack of a refined education that leads to a more authentic poetry.' Bridget Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730-1837* (Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 90.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Story, *Memoirs of the life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c. 1826), West Yorkshire Archive Service, Bradford, MS DB3/C60/1, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Story's response to Watts in his unpublished manuscripts is more critical and subjective than his published autobiography where he suggests how as a child he was enamoured with Watts, even obsessed. The quotation used by Vincent to portray literature's role in labouring-class self-improvement was taken from the latter and is therefore problematic when used as being solely representative of Story's overall critical perception of an author or poet. Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, p. 135.

not Watts. According to his unpublished life-writing, Watts' verse is at best mediocre and it is he who is exceptional. Story also portrays his relationship with books as being atypical. His reasoning here implies how, for working people, the desire to write poetry goes beyond contemporary social expectations. He uses imitation to single himself out and separate himself from not only his old school classmates but also most members of his social class.

Story's singularity and cultural differences were also corroborated and reinforced by others. He writes that at public and social gatherings his friends 'exhibited him as a kind of lion.'<sup>8</sup> Story suggests his audience, and even his friends, found his cultural identity as an adept labouring-class writer both exotic and dangerous. The mere presence of a self-taught poet within the early nineteenth-century subverted prevailing ideologies about polite literary culture. Where the imitative writing practices of labouring-class writers can be connected to hegemony and the desire to conform, Story's manuscripts emphasise the radical consciousness of self-taught poets. The poet's celebrity suggests that his pursuit of the aesthetic transgressed class boundaries and challenged the conformist and reactionary attitudes of his contemporary society.

Story attached aesthetic value to imitation in order to address an essential but pejorative component of his writing practices. As a self-taught poet he was compelled to use the work of established authors as a form of pedagogy and he

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Story, 'Notes of a Journey to London 1836', in *Poems in Manuscript*, [literary works], Holograph MS, 1 bundle, (1817-1859), WYASB, MS DB3/C59, pp 139-147 (p. 139).



presents it as a preliminary step towards his own formal experimentation and freedom of expression. The literary models he encountered in his reading experiences only ever perform in a way that guide and educate. In fact he celebrated and drew attention to the ways in which he imitated others, though the provenance for his poetic genius ultimately resided within himself. In the opening lines of 'Harvest', he calls out: 'Oh! with thy mind, devotion-taught, / Congenial raise thy poet's thought / To subjects more divine!'<sup>9</sup> Story is again foregrounding his practice of imitation alongside his reading experiences. Although he appears to call out for divine inspiration, the adjective 'devotion-taught' echoes with his self-taught status and the lines work to elevate and define his didactic approach to writing.

In reducing the term 'poetic genius' to his 'innate' desire to reproduce and recreate verse forms, Story's framework for becoming a poet was surprisingly accessible. His pragmatic approach to reading and then imitating popular authors, such as Scott, works to demystify his creative process. He presents his ability to recall large sections of verse as a vital component in becoming a poet and his process of imitation begins by simply memorising the texts he had access to. In this respect Story's 'poetic genius', and his literary identity, are both 'innate' and 'acquired'. It is, then, his cultural ambition, and his willingness to trespass through seemingly fixed social and cultural boundaries that sets him apart and goes beyond the conventional expectations of readers. Story

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Storey, *Harvest & Other Poems* (Berwick: William Lochhead, 1818), p. 11.

deconstructs his writing practices in his published autobiography *Love and Literature* (1842). Although he ponders the question of whether a poet is ‘born’ or ‘made’, his conclusion is the same: the provenance for ‘poetic genius’ is both instinctive and earned.

I am aware of the maxim that a poet is *born*—not *made*; but I know also that something is requisite besides original genius. The celestial flame may burn within; but it will burn in vain, and will ultimately perish, unless a medium is found through which it may dart its irradiations. That medium is the language of our *approved* bards.<sup>10</sup>

Where Story relies on an existing canon of work to give shape to his writing practices, his relationship with its authors only ever draws out and cultivates what was already there. He is defining a distinct cultural space for himself as a self-taught writer and his emphasis on the value of literary culture for working people leaves room for independence and autonomy. Story’s argument both endorses the imitative writing practices of self-educated poets and legitimises their dependency on other authors. Moreover, Story does not present his adaptation of existing poetic frameworks as being restrictive; they are only initial stepping stones on his journey towards independence. According to Story ‘the language of our *approved* bards’ is egalitarian and relatively free from social or economic constraints. His possessive pronoun ‘our’ implies how literary culture enabled him to participate in discourses of national identity and offered him an

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Story, *Love and Literature; Being The Reminiscences, Literary Opinions, And Fugitive Pieces Of A Poet In Humble Life* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1842), p. 96. [Story’s italics]

alternative language to contemporary debates on politics and industry that exclude on the basis of class status.

If we are to understand the formation of Story's writing practices as a complex process of cultivation and experimentation, it is also important to acknowledge the difficulties he had in predicating his work on a group of authorised and valorised literary figures. That is to say the problems he encountered in imitating their work encouraged him to experiment with, and explore, alternative writing models. Story admits to a fundamental error of judgement in publishing his first collection of poetry, *Harvest* (1818), and believed that the lead poem's rural labouring-class themes were entirely unsuited to Sir Walter Scott's rhyme and metre. Although Story has already illustrated how his ideas often merged with the books he read, he was also extremely self-conscious of how difficult it was to translate his experiences into his writing practices:

But I committed a great error when, as in "Harvest," took his [Scott's] manner and measure, and applied them to subjects as opposite as possible to those, which the "Great Minstrel" had employed them. My poem, in consequence of this, had the air of parody. This, however, was not pointed out to me by my friends, and was not discovered by me, till long afterwards.<sup>11</sup>

This extract shows how Story learned early on in his development as a self-taught writer that the verse forms of established authors would not always accommodate his rural labouring-class background. He was, at least initially, attracted to Scott's less restricted form because he believed it was a suitable

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<sup>11</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, pp. 64-65.

framework through which he could express his experiences of working in the fields. He soon found out that this idea was extremely difficult to put into practice and the obstacles he encountered in adapting metrical romance are most apparent where he constructs a skirmish between his band of reapers and another group of labourers: 'Of sickles spoke commencing war'.<sup>12</sup> In his attempt to replicate the romance and drama of *Lay of the Last Minstrel's* chivalric battle scenes, Story's plebeian characters jar awkwardly and, as he points out, the poem is easily mistaken for a parody or even a burlesque of Scott's heroic themes.

This was not the first time Story's formal imitation of a writer had slipped into parody either. After purchasing his copy of Home's *Douglas* in 1812, he immediately began work on *Mr Youthful*, a drama written in blank verse.<sup>13</sup> The narrative of Story's play revolved around the courtship of his then suitor Margaret Duncan and her father's disapproval of their relationship. His semi-autobiographical plot is a form of self-writing and he is again shaping a sense of himself through his writing practices.<sup>14</sup> Even here in his early poetry, Story was experimenting with form in order to translate his labouring-class experiences. Although his adaptation ultimately failed he was not confined nor restricted by Home's model; rather he combines eighteenth-century tragedy with other popular literary forms. Containing many common tropes and plot devices found in comedy and melodrama, Story's play shows how he was adapting his reading

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<sup>12</sup> Story, *Harvest*, p. 50.

<sup>13</sup> Story's play was destroyed but he refers to it in both his unpublished manuscripts and his published autobiography *Love and Literature*.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the role of literary culture in the formation of labouring-class identity see Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), p. 144.

experiences into something more manageable and fitting.<sup>15</sup> He recalls how he ‘elevated’ the class status of his characters. Margaret’s father, ‘Old George Duncan’, is transformed into a peer, whilst Story himself becomes ‘Mr Youthful’, the unsuitable admirer of Lord Duncan’s daughter.<sup>16</sup> The drama unfolds through Mr Youthful’s pursuit of Lady Margaret and concludes with a climatic plot twist centred on the discovery of the hero’s noble birth.<sup>17</sup> Like his reading experiences, Story’s writing practices were eclectic and developed through his access to many different and often contrasting literary forms.

What is important here is that Story measures his play’s literary merits by it being read by others. His life-writing situates his first attempts at blank verse within a narrative of other peoples’ reading experiences. He adds levity and humour to his account by joking ‘it pleased old Jenny Tate, my landlady who used to laugh till her side ached, and sing the songs with which it was interspersed.’ Margaret’s and her family’s response, by contrast, was wholly unexpected. Story’s play caused a great uproar in the Duncan household where it was ‘considered a burlesque upon the whole family’ and therefore subsequently destroyed.<sup>18</sup> Here, Story is foregrounding his cultural identity as a writer and a poet rather than a reader. His unpublished account signals that he had already exceeded and eclipsed the relationship held by most early nineteenth-century people with literature and books.

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<sup>15</sup> For melodrama and its appeal to the poor see Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalised Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) and Rohan McWilliam, ‘The Licensed Stare: Melodrama and the Culture of Spectacle’, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 13 (1999), pp. 151-61.

<sup>16</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> For Story’s use of melodrama see chapter seven of this thesis and its analysis of his closet drama, *The Outlaw* (1839).

<sup>18</sup> Story believed that the play was burnt: ‘I have no doubt [it] suffered martyrdom for its supposed demerits.’ Story, *Memoirs*, p. 30.

Story presents his relationship with the books of educated authors and poets as an ‘apprenticeship’ but, because these alliances are always didactic, his identity as a self-taught poet is never restricted or reduced to the work of others.

[The poet] must throw his hand over every string of the many toned lyre of British poetry, until he elicits the notes to which his heart utters the readiest and most congenial response. The time spent in trials of this kind, may be called the *apprenticeship* which every poet must serve to his art, before he can presume to claim, with well-grounded confidence, the distinction it confers.<sup>19</sup>

In throwing his ‘hand over every string’ of the lyre, Story’s rubric for becoming a poet suggests how formal experimentation was a fundamental aspect of the self-taught tradition. He is also challenging cultural discourses that debase self-taught poets for their lack of originality. According to Story his cultural development is a process of self-improvement and the pursuit of useful knowledge. His frequent focus on innate poetic genius is derived from Romantic ideas of subjectivity and the imagination; and yet, as we see here, his pragmatism often undermines and challenges the concept of divine inspiration. The proposition that ‘every poet’ must first serve his ‘apprenticeship’, gives weight to a cultural status that was otherwise devalued for being misappropriated.

Class does not bind the process Story sets out for becoming a writer. Through hard work and perseverance he will eventually earn the ‘distinction’ of calling himself a poet and at least in this sense he will be the peer of the acclaimed authors he is imitating. Where nineteenth-century critics tended to delimit

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Story, ‘The Poet’, *The Newcastle Magazine*, collected edn January to December March 1824, 10 vols (Newcastle Upon Tyne: W. A Mitchell, 1824), III, pp. 106-108 (p. 107).

labouring-class writers for their desire to reproduce the work of the major poets, Story argues that this same praxis is evidence of his pragmatism and aesthetic sensibilities. Story's determiner 'his', in 'his heart utters the readiest and most congenial response', makes it clear that he is not merely copying and rendering the books that he read.

### **Critical Voice**

Scholarship has tended to discuss self-educated writers in relation to their reliance on polite poetic discourses and the literary establishment. And yet, Story's critical voice challenges the assumption that labouring-class literature was, to use Martha Vicinus's phrase, a "borrowed culture".<sup>20</sup> His ability to judge and apply objective criticism to the work of more established poets was, for Story, a primary method of measuring his own writing practices as well as separating his work from the poetic models he was imitating. Story's cultural assertion is that if he is capable of his own critical judgement, then as a self-taught writer the responsibility for his literary development ultimately lies within himself. In *Love and Literature* he describes how his introduction to Thomson's *Seasons* (1726) encouraged him to experiment with different forms in order to explore his cultural differences as labouring-class poet:<sup>21</sup>

When I became familiar with the works of Thom[p]son, I had attained to the eighteenth year of my age. My taste had been gradually, though imperceptibly, improving. Superfluous branch after branch had been lopped away, and the tree began to give something like a promise of

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<sup>20</sup> Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse*, p. 168. As Kirstie Blair reminds us that though Vicinus overwhelmingly focuses on working-class conformism and cultural hegemony, her research is a foundational study in recovering the work of self-educated poets; see, "He Sings Alone": Hybrid Forms And The Victorian Working-Class Poet' in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37.2 (2009), pp. 523-541 (p. 525).

<sup>21</sup> Thomson's *Seasons* appealed to many self-taught poets including John Clare. See John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton, 'John Clare the Trespasser', *John Clare in Context*, ed. by H. Haughton, A. Phillips, G. Summerfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 87-129.

future strength and gracefulness. I could now distinguish the natural from the extravagant in composition. I had begun to look round on the world, and to examine my own heart; and I was no longer satisfied with giving a new dress to the thoughts and feelings of others. I watched the clouds and the stars—observed the streams and the woods—ransacked the garden and the wild—for untried similes, and new illustrations. In a word, I had begun to feel my own strength—I was determined to be independent of all but my own resources—and the perusal of Thom[p]son at once confirmed my resolutions, and stimulated my efforts.<sup>22</sup>

Story's imagery of growth and cultivation is closely connected to ideas of paternalism. The critical skills that Thomson taught him enable Story to become independent and take responsibility for his development. The ability for self-appraisal was, of course, a key skill for all self-educated poets and, in learning to examine his 'own heart', Story is forming a cultural sense of himself. Moreover, under Thomson's supervision he is developing the poetic skills necessary for self-determination. Story is no longer satisfied with reproducing 'the thoughts and feelings of others'. His account of Thomson challenges the assumption that, due to their dependency on a literary canon, labouring-class poets lacked originality. Where Story elevates, even ritualises, the influence of Thomson, at the same time he consciously separates and distances himself from his work. Story is using his life writing to create his own identity as a self-taught poet and his practice of imitation is always underpinned by his search for singularity.<sup>23</sup>

Story's critical appraisals often transgress the role of the humble self-taught poet. He appears to relish the chance to measure and evaluate the work of literary figures. Indeed, by evaluating the work of Pope, Ossian, Thomson, Leyden, Sir

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<sup>22</sup> In Story's published autobiography Thomson's name is misspelt 'Thompson'. As Thomson's name appears correctly in Story's handwritten manuscripts this appears to be an error made by the printer, not the author. Story, *Love and Literature*, p.153.

<sup>23</sup> For singularity and labouring-class identity see Jonathan Rose's chapter 'A Desire for Singularity' in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, pp, 12-57.



Walter Scott, Byron, Moore, Wordsworth, and Southey, Story is attempting to shape his audience's tastes and assert his cultural authority. In offering us his 'unborrowed opinion' of 'every poet' deemed to have 'influenced' his writing practices, Story challenges our existing expectations of what it means to be a labouring-class writer.<sup>24</sup> His awkward adjective 'unborrowed' signifies his forceful and conscious attempt to distinguish his critical voice from being thought of as a derivative or subsidiary form of imitation. He is challenging the assumption that his attitudes towards literary culture may be deemed imitative and therefore counterfeit or pejorative.

Story's critical voice is inseparable from both his creativity and his sense of subjectivity as a labouring-class writer. He maintains that Byron was not a poet 'after' his 'own heart' and tells us that that he felt '*compelled*, rather than *allured*' to read his longer narrative poems.<sup>25</sup> Implying that he was forced or coerced into reading a major poet such as Byron, Story again suggests that his 'taste', and by association the accessibility of certain writers, were major factors when experimenting with poetic models. Where I discuss later in this chapter how he made the labouring-class writer Burns his 'constant study', here he subordinates the influence of Byron on account that his language was too 'original' and 'uncommon'.<sup>26</sup> He describes reading Byron's 'Childe Harold' (1812-1818) 'with the vacant astonishment as one of who, ignorant of the play, comes into the theatre at the end of the fourth act.'<sup>27</sup> According to Story, then, Byron required an existing understanding, or at least an awareness, of the poem's

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<sup>24</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 191.

<sup>25</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 176.

<sup>26</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 81.

<sup>27</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, pp. 176, 174.

political content and its literary form. As a provincial labouring-class poet, these preconditions were alienating. Pointing out that ‘What I could not reflect on with delight, it was not natural that I should attempt to imitate’, Story wants us to believe that his writing practices are didactic and that the responsibility for his poetic development lies ultimately within himself and his personal literary tastes.<sup>28</sup>

Story’s estimation of Byron goes against popular opinion. His evaluation is a cultural assertion that both legitimises and reinforces his own singularity. When assessing Wordsworth’s ‘The Excursion’ (1814) Story again presses his claims for independence as a writer and a critical thinker: ‘This is not the indiscriminate praise of a eulogist; it is the inference which his poetry compels me to draw... but its tamest and most tedious paragraphs (for such it has) are besprinkled with thoughts and phrases of the purest beauty.’<sup>29</sup> In defining Wordsworth’s writing as ‘tedious’, even if only in parts, Story suggests that the more ambitious Parnassian labouring-class writers were not indiscriminately imitating their major counterparts.<sup>30</sup> His response to Wordsworth is circumspect and again pragmatic. Where Story uses ‘The Excursion’ and ‘Childe Harold’ to educate himself, he also has the critical awareness, and the autonomy, to identify which aspects of these poems have no use value for him.

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<sup>28</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 177. There is a vast amount of scholarship on the literary tastes of nineteenth-century working people. In this instance see Jonathan Rose’s chapter ‘A Conservative Canon’ in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, pp. 116-145. Also see David Vincent’s chapter ‘The Pursuit of Books’ in *Bread Knowledge and Freedom*, pp. 109-132. For the conflation between ‘polite taste’ and class see Cassandra Falke’s *Literature by the Working Class, English Autobiographies, 1820-1848* (New York: Cambria Press, 2013), p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 187.

<sup>30</sup> For examples of other Parnassian poets see Brian Maidment’s anthology *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, pp. 95-119.

Southey's epic poem *Roderick the Last of the Goths* (1814) is one of Story's most admired pieces but he still maintains enough autonomy and pragmatism to criticise another of Southey's poems, *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801), for its extravagance: 'The versification was not at all to my taste, and though the incidents were extravagant in the highest degree, the careless strength of a gigantic mind, and the fire of genuine inspiration pervaded the whole performance.'<sup>31</sup> The determiner 'my', in 'my taste', is a rhetorical device that again signifies possession and individuality. Story is pressing his right for an opinion. Although his judgement is undoubtedly predicated on existing responses to the poem, his critical voice is always political in that it is directly linked to his claims for cultural equality. Story goes on to challenge Wordsworth's belief that Southey was the 'greatest poet' since Milton.<sup>32</sup> He agrees with Thomas Moore's evaluation that *Roderick* was the 'best' poem to be 'published' since 'Paradise Lost' but states categorically that he is 'not prepared to go' as 'far' as naming Southey the greatest poet.<sup>33</sup> He places his own appraisal of Southey, if not above the critical opinions of celebrated authors, then at least as being a worthy addition to their commentary. In determining who should sit at the highest point of the literary hierarchy he is engaging in a dialogue with Wordsworth and Moore as their equal.

### **Types of Literature**

If Story's critical dialogue with Wordsworth and Moore opened a doorway to the polite realm of letters, then the types of literature that were available to him were also an essential aspect in constructing a sense of himself as a writer. There was

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<sup>31</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 187.

<sup>32</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 187.

<sup>33</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 187.

a considerable delay between an author's first appearance in the literary marketplace and Story's introduction to their work. Opportunities to procure current or recently published books were rare and, to some extent, he validates the claims made by Vincent, Rose, Vicinus, and St Clair that autodidacts relied on earlier generations of writers. As Vicinus observes, 'Since the more famous Romantic poets were unavailable until the 1830s, or to be read only in snippets in magazines, the majority of workingmen were introduced to poetry through the works of Milton, Shakespeare and the many minor eighteenth century versifiers.'<sup>34</sup> Story tells us that whilst residing in his schoolhouse at Roddam in Northumbria in 1812, he would stay awake until the early hours of the morning, reading by moonlight the work of Milton, Ossian, and Pope's translation of Homer.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the year he had been introduced to Goldsmith and Leyden but was still unaware of any of the 'nineteenth-century poets', such as Byron, Coleridge, and Wordsworth.<sup>36</sup> The connection, however, between the difficulties he encountered in accessing contemporary literature and his progress as a writer are not always clear.

Reading by moonlight Story was situating himself within an approved poetic discourse. His account should be approached cautiously because these tropes of romantic isolation hint at how he is using the disadvantages of his self-taught status to map out and define his cultural identity as a distinctly labouring

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<sup>34</sup> Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse*, p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> After his lessons had finished for the day Story turned his classroom into a makeshift living quarters. Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 33. Other than Pope's translations of Homer (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*), Story does not reveal the exact publications he was reading by these poets.

<sup>36</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 33.

writer.<sup>37</sup> ‘Turned aside by the mountains that sheltered my cottage’, authors such as Byron, Wordsworth, Southey and Scott, he claimed, ‘rolled away into distance—unheard and unenjoyed!’<sup>38</sup> Yet Story’s archival manuscripts suggest that he first read Scott around 1815-16: ‘Smith when at Roddam procured me a reading of the “Lady of the Lake” and of “Marmion.” I was instantly smit with the itch of imitation.’<sup>39</sup> But in fact he had first heard of the author from a local girl in 1812: ‘It was from the lips of this beautiful young woman that I first heard the name Walter Scott.’<sup>40</sup> Where it can perhaps be debated whether a popular author such as Scott can be included in Vicinus’s category of ‘famous Romantic poets’, Story certainly had access to alternative nineteenth-century modes of writing well before 1830.<sup>41</sup>

Even after the major Romantic poets of the nineteenth-century became widely available, Scott’s influence still eclipsed that of any new arrivals for Story. The metrical romance remained the pinnacle of his cultural ambition throughout his

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<sup>37</sup> For Romantic isolation and labouring-class writers see Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 99 and John Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 64. John Smith was Story’s childhood friend and the nephew of a local farmer. It is unclear but the verb ‘procured’ suggests that Smith did not purchase the copies of Scott’s work but nevertheless he had better access to books than the then schoolmaster. According to Story, Smith was ‘one of those gifted beings who like Burns, or, in a still higher sense like Shakespeare—acquire knowledge nobody knows whence, when, or where.’ To Story’s dismay his friend ‘died a maniac in Newcastle asylum’. Story, *Life of Robert Story*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>40</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 32. Margaret Duncan, whom Story first met whilst residing with his sister in Kelso, Northumbria (1812). She was the daughter of a gentleman’s porter and her father may have been the provenance for her knowledge on contemporary popular literature.

<sup>41</sup> Due to insufficient dating of Story’s reading experiences a direct comparative analysis between his access to books and the level of Stamp Duty is not possible. For further reading on the taxation of knowledge see Ian Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

life. So why did he value the author above all others?<sup>42</sup> As I see it, (and here my argument is in agreement with Rose), Scott subverted the tenets that Story had, until then, believed to be fixed and permanent. Less restricted than the poetic models he was accustomed to, Scott's verse appeared both accessible and empowering: 'I was not sorry to see discarded the rules by which the Pope school was governed; but the 'Lay' was, in its versification, absolutely *without rule*; it was built on no principle; it was harsh, puerile, and fantastic.'<sup>43</sup> Scott was an approved author who broke the rules of polite literary convention and was rewarded for crossing these boundaries. More than this, Scott's revival of balladry and border Minstrelsy transformed the ways in which Story was able to contextualise and promote his cultural identity.<sup>44</sup> He uses Scott's fictional accounts to frame his actual experiences of minstrelsy and the time he spent as the companion of the travelling musician George Johnston: 'I have been happy; happy for a minute—for an hour—perhaps for a day; but I have never been happy for a *month together* since I was a *fiddler's callant!*'<sup>45</sup> Scott's narratives fired his imagination and legitimised his sense of himself as a labouring-class writer. Foregrounding his accounts of crisscrossing the Anglo-Scottish borders

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<sup>42</sup> Paul Thomas Murphy points out how the leading labouring-class periodicals of the period boycotted Scott's fictional accounts of feudal society. They mistrusted Scott and blamed fiction more generally for distracting working people from the pursuit of more 'Useful Knowledge'. Paul Thomas Murphy, *Toward A Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals 1816-1858* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 168. Story here points to the poetic rules set out by Alexander Pope in his poem 'An Essay on Criticism' (1711).

<sup>44</sup> Where the editors of labouring-class periodicals dismissed Scott, Story connects his Poetical Romances to oral narrative and an existing labouring-class tradition. According to Story 'Sir Walter Scott is professedly not a poet, but a Minstrel'; the key difference being that whilst the former writes specifically for a reader the latter is performed to an audience'. Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 169.

<sup>45</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, p. 9.

in his life writing, Story was both literally and metaphorically traversing the boundaries of nineteenth-century popular literary culture.

### **Religious Verse**

I deliberately began with Scott to emphasise his position in Story's pantheon of literary greats and avoid the historiography of reading that fixes Story's cultural formation to his earliest reading experiences. His aesthetic sensibilities were constantly evolving and his initial responses to a piece of work do not, of course, necessarily represent the writer's overall opinions during his lifetime.

Nevertheless, there are gaps in the existing scholarship that need addressing.

Like many working people, Story's earliest access to literature was mediated through hymns and religious writing. Bridget Keegan, in her otherwise insightful study, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry, 1730-1837*, makes the mistake of placing theocracy and religion as the cornerstone of his poetic expression.<sup>46</sup> Themes of religion in Story's poetry should be treated with a

certain amount of scepticism. Although his father raised him to be a

Presbyterian he was suspicious of the more preternatural aspects of Judeo-

Christianity and prior to his marriage in 1823 he considered himself to be a

Deist.<sup>47</sup> There is a danger of conflating Story's religious motifs with his overall attitudes towards literature and poetry when, in fact, he was only working within

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<sup>46</sup> Bridget Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry*, p. 95.

<sup>47</sup> Story's turn towards deism was not unique and according to John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan, John Clare also 'had early tendencies to deism'. John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan, 'John Clare and the traditions of Labouring-class verse', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*, ed. by T. Keymer and J. Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 280-295 (p. 289). For deism and the radical tradition also see Ian Haywood, *The Revolution In Popular Literature*, p. 27. William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, p. 85.

the expectations of a polite nineteenth-century audience.<sup>48</sup> His pseudo-religious displays of piety are a panegyric to the pastoral landscapes of his youth rather than a declaration of religious devotion.

Where Story presents reading Watts as a spiritual encounter, it is the lyricism of his psalms rather than their religious content that captivates his imagination:

‘...with these hymns, and the Divine Songs by the same author began my love of poetry.’<sup>49</sup> Story’s initial introduction to the author is a way of signposting his search for subjectivity as a labouring-class poet.<sup>50</sup> He traces his encounter with Watts to a shepherd who, owning a copy of his hymns, made Story ‘get by heart’ several pieces from the book whilst they tended the flock.<sup>51</sup> Story uses his initiation to Watts’ religious verse forms to invoke the prelapsarian innocence of the pastoral.<sup>52</sup> He also later describes how he composed ‘semi-poetical sketches in the manner of Hervey’ as well as attempting to rewrite ‘the prose hymns of Mrs Barbauld’s prose in verse.’<sup>53</sup> In transposing their work Story’s relationship to these writers was cultural rather than religious. He approached them from his perspective as a poet.

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<sup>48</sup> Story’s relationship to Deism is easily overlooked. He kept his beliefs a secret from all but a few of his closest allies and the account is only ever recorded in his unpublished manuscript. He felt that his lack of faith would jeopardise his position as a schoolmaster. Indeed, it appears that either Story or John James later removed at least two manuscript pages that referred to the poet’s early crisis of faith.

<sup>49</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>50</sup> Goodridge and Keegan tell us that Clare owned collections of Watts’ and Wesley’s hymns. See ‘Clare and the traditions of labouring-class verse’, p. 289. The *Reading Experience Database* also suggests that Watts was a prevalent author for labouring-class readers.

<sup>51</sup> Story, *Memoirs*, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Although Story should not be exclusively associated with the pastoral, here he validates Maidment’s claims that ‘...in using pastoral to shape a sense of self, Story follows the dominant pattern of pastoral lyrics by self-taught writers.’ Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 144. Story here also resembles Hogg who recalls reading Burns on the hillsides of Ettrick. See Daniel Allington’s essay ‘On The Use of Anecdotal Evidence in Reception Study and the History of Reading’, in *Reading in History: New Methodologies from Anglo-American Tradition*, ed. by B. Gunzenhauser (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), pp.11-28.

<sup>53</sup> John Hervey (1714-1758), also known as ‘The Prose Poet’ and Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825). Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 29.



## Ownership

Story understood the significance of owning and possessing his own books. Having his own library meant less dependency than borrowing and he resented the fact that his access to literature relied on the charity and philanthropy of others who were less deserving. Shortly after reading the work of Hervey and Barbauld we find him purchasing a copy of the eighteenth-century writer John Home.<sup>54</sup> This is the first evidence we have of him actually buying books instead of either borrowing them or copies being given to him:

I had by this time become acquainted with Thomson—a native by the bye of the very neighbourhood I was then in—and had purchased Home’s *Douglas* which gave me an idea of English Poetry and blank verse.<sup>55</sup>

Story makes it clear that he purchased Home’s *Douglas* in order to develop his understanding of ‘English Poetry’ and his account is again a narrative of self-improvement. Although he emphasised his own resourcefulness and cultural ambition, books often appear to be entrusted to the ignorant and uncultured. Towards the end of 1817 a Dissenting minister, hearing how Story intended on ‘coming out as a poet’, granted him access to his library.<sup>56</sup> Story questioned his mentor’s cultural authority and with a growing sense of irony writes he had ‘no judgement and little taste’.<sup>57</sup> When the two men eventually decided to separate,

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<sup>54</sup> James Thomson (1700-1748). Thomson was born in the village in Ednam in Roxburghshire on the Scottish side of the Borders. Thomson’s birthplace of Ednam is situated very near to Kelso and the poet was native to the local area where Story was then staying with his sister. Story was first introduced to the work of James Thomson through his series of four poems, *The Seasons* (1730). John Home (1722-1808). Although unclear, Home was born in either Ancrum (also in Roxburghshire) or Leith near Edinburgh; however, either way Story’s proximity to the author’s birthplace may have enabled greater access to his work.

<sup>55</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 66.

<sup>57</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 66.

the minister ‘fancied and received’ a number of Story’s books as repayment for his outstanding debts.<sup>58</sup> Where the debutant writer was promised access to the minister’s library, the alliance ultimately robbed him of the few valuable volumes of poetry he possessed.<sup>59</sup> According to Story, then, books can be both symbols of emancipation and the currency through which power and control is maintained over him. It is worth noting that Clare, of course, also borrowed books from the libraries of patrons and supporters but he does not appear to have shared, or at least vocalised, Story’s apparent resentment.<sup>60</sup>

### **Reading Labouring-Class Authors**

Despite the difficulties of ownership there were alternative poetic models within Story’s reach. Evidence recovered by this study suggests that his desire to become a writer began after reading the work of another self-taught poet:

A volume of Scottish poetry fell into my hand. It was written by a labouring man residing at Bowden, near Melrose of the name of Andrew Scott—not Walter, of whom, though in the full flow of his poetic fame, I had never then heard of. Following at a respectful distance the steps of Burns, Andrew was yet not without genius. He had considerable humour, and no little ability to portray rustic manners. Many of the pieces suited my taste exactly. I read them all till I could repeat almost the whole volume by hand; and at long last I began to scribble copies of them as I had done—when hardly eleven years old—of Watts’ ‘Divine Songs’.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 69.

<sup>59</sup> The minister ‘Mr Hall’ may have played a bigger role in the publication of Story’s *Harvest* than he is given credit for here. For an alternative narrative account, see Story’s serialisation, Robert Story, ‘Reminiscences of Publication: No. 1—Seeking Subscribers’, *The Newcastle Magazine*, March-April 1826, collected edn January to December 1826, 10 vols (Newcastle Upon Tyne: W. A Mitchell, 1826), V, pp. 111-114, 166-169.

<sup>60</sup> For Clare and his access to his patrons’ libraries see Mina Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2008), pp. 11-12.

<sup>61</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, pp. 25-26.

Where Vincent and Rose have already touched upon Story's imitation of Watts, his connection to the labouring-class writer Andrew Scott has been completely overlooked.<sup>62</sup> According to this extract from Story's unpublished manuscripts there was a cessation of around four to five years between his first attempts at memorising and copying Watts' hymns and his realisation that he wanted to be a writer. Indeed, the writer only returned to his practice of imitation after reading Scott's collection of poems. Story situates his introduction to Andrew Scott within a narrative of class-identity and class-consciousness.<sup>63</sup> The language and scenes of Scott's loco-descriptive poetry were instantly accessible to Story who had grown up herding sheep on the same Scottish Borders. Scott's dialect, and his depiction of local landscapes, offered a level of ownership that was not present in the work of Watts. Apart from the obvious formal influences on Story, Scott showed him there was a market for labouring-class writers. The poet's collections appear to have been relatively successful with demand in the local area warranting three editions. Moreover, he appealed to a cross-class audience. Notable subscribers were the Duke and Duchess of Roxburgh, the Earl of Buchan, Walter Scott Esq. and several Captains in the army but the remaining readers appear to have been mostly an eclectic mix of merchants, artisans, and working people, including labourers, woolers, gardeners, masons, joiners, shoemakers, clothiers, weavers, and servants. The demand for Scott's books

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<sup>62</sup> Andrew Scott (1759-1839), also known as the Bowden Poet, was a farm worker and labouring-class writer residing at Bowden, near Melrose. Andrew Scott, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, 3rd edn (Kelso: Alexander Leadbetter, 1811) First and second editions printed in 1805 and 1808. Although Scott can be considered a pastoral poet his verse also touches on his experiences of fighting for the British in the American War of Independence.

<sup>63</sup> For class-consciousness see E. P. Thompson's, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Bucks: Pelican Books, 1970).

demonstrated that there was a position in the marketplace for labouring-class poets. After reading his work Story's literary aspirations suddenly appeared realistic and obtainable.

Story's early ideas of culture and identity were modelled on those of Andrew Scott. Many of the events and circumstances that shaped Story's sense of himself as a self-taught poet intersect and overlap with Scott's biography. They had the same rural labouring-class education and upbringing. During the winter months they attended a rudimentary school but when summer arrived they were sent away to tend sheep on the hillsides of Northumbria. Due to economic pressures their education was also cut short when their fathers died prematurely. Story's life-writing manuscripts suggest that Scott's class and his economic background were of primary importance to him. Scott was an obvious role model for Story and he aligned himself accordingly. The poet also introduced Story to other labouring-class writers. The preface to the third edition of *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* contains a small autobiographical sketch in which Scott connects his early reading experiences to his writing practices:

At twelve years of age, when herding in the fields, I purchased a pamphlet copy of the Gentle Shepherd, and being charmed with the melody of the pastoral reed of Allan Ramsay, I began to attempt some verses in they style.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Andrew Scott, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, p. viii.

There is obvious slippage between Story's own narrative accounts of imitating Andrew Scott and Scott's earlier attempts at copying the style of Allan Ramsay.<sup>65</sup> These writers share a cultural lineage and their pedigree can be traced from Ramsey to Scott and then Story. It was also Andrew Scott who first introduced Story to Burns. Scott's Burnsian style and his panegyric lyrics meant that Story was already familiar with Burns prior to reading his work: 'Mang Scotia's hills, tho' strange to tell, / Was hatched once a Philomel'<sup>66</sup> Although Burns is being mediated through Scott in these lines, they give a sense of the omniscient-like presence of other labouring-class writers in Story's consciousness.

Story's account of first reading Burns suggests his position, as a provincial schoolmaster, is another important consideration when evaluating whether his access to books was atypical. While Martha Vicinus reminds us how 'the difficulties of self-education cannot be underestimated', by November 1812 Story had established his school in Roddam and he tells us that 'whenever the pursuit of pleasure permitted I was reading'.<sup>67</sup> The opportunities to travel and change locations afforded by his profession also considerably increased his access to books. In February 1815 he secured short-term positions as a teaching assistant at Warley near Halifax and then at the prestigious academy, Castleton Lodge. Although he returned to Northumbria in June of the same year, having failed in his attempts to establish himself in Yorkshire, it was through the

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<sup>65</sup> Allan Ramsey (1684-1758), Scottish poet and playwright. See entry in *Labouring-Class Poets Online* < <https://lcpoets.wordpress.com/introtobibliography/> > [accessed 12 May 2017]

<sup>66</sup> 'Philomel': Classical reference often used as a literary symbol and applied here by Andrew Scott to emphasise Burns' hierarchal position. Andrew Scott, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* p. 58.

<sup>67</sup> Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse*, p. 142. Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 33.

school's library at Castleton in 1815 that Story managed to obtain access to Currie's edition of *Burns' Life and Works*.<sup>68</sup> His understanding of himself as a distinctly labouring-class writer increased considerably after reading Burns and, during his brief period teaching in Yorkshire, he appears to have reevaluated his ideas of culture and class.

However cheaply I had rated the ploughman of Northumberland, they now appeared to my fancy everything that was enviable; and I resolved to give up all pretensions to scholar-craft for the sake of the ploughman, and no doubt, as my vanity whispered, the Burns of Beaumontside.<sup>69</sup>

Story had, in fact, started imitating Burns as early as 1812 but, though there are earlier references to the poet in his manuscripts, he signals that it was through this particular edition that he made his 'acquaintance' with the poet.<sup>70</sup> Reading the poet's 'letters and life' with 'indescribable interest', he began to rethink his previous perceptions of agricultural work.<sup>71</sup> Burns revealed how Story could also draw on his labouring-class experiences. Discarding his 'pretensions to scholar craft', Story signals his departure from the educated poets of the nineteenth-century. He is again echoing existing critical discourses that privileged the unmediated natural genius of labouring-class writers over the more structured learning of the literary elite. Story's decision to forego 'scholar craft' is underpinned by the *précis* that natural genius is the prodigy of labouring-class literary culture. William Christmas tells us that many literary commentators of the eighteenth-century felt that Stephen Duck's introduction to the classical

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<sup>68</sup> Robert Burns, *The works of Robert Burns; with an account of his life, and a criticism on his writing. To which are prefixed some observations on the character and condition of the Scottish peasantry* (London: Printed for T. Cadell, and W. Davis, and W. Creech at Edinburgh by J. M'Creery: 1813: first published 1800). There is no mention in Story's manuscripts of reading Burns in the Scottish language and therefore it seems unlikely.

<sup>69</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>70</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 52.

<sup>71</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 52

canon was detrimental to his development and, when he failed to live up to expectations, they ‘explicitly advised against bookish learning’ for other plebeian poets.<sup>72</sup> Story was also privileging certain reading experiences by their relevance to his labouring-class background.

...his songs and verses in praise of the hills, the glens, and the streams of the North touched a chord in my breast of exquisite feeling; and my own imitative effusions of the beauty and distance of beloved objects, gave me a deep sense of expatriation, as if I had been banished to the most remote region of the earth.’<sup>73</sup>

He claims that it was at this precise moment that he began work on *Harvest* (1818).<sup>74</sup> The landscapes and dialect depicted by Burns exacerbated his feelings of isolation and magnified the distance between himself and his native Northumbria.<sup>75</sup> Returning home to versify his experiences of reaping in the fields, he was attempting to create his own Burnsian myth. Where *Harvest* imitates the formal style of Sir Walter Scott’s metrical romances, Burns inspired its themes of shared labouring-class experience. Indeed, even the name of ‘Harvest’s’ main protagonist, Sylvander, was almost certainly named after reading Burns’ letters to Agnes Macle hose (1787).<sup>76</sup> The Scottish bard provided

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<sup>72</sup> Christmas, *The Lab’ring Muses*, p. 210.

<sup>73</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 53.

<sup>74</sup> Note that though Story left Castleton Lodge in June 1815 and *Harvest* was not published until 1818, he began writing the text either late 1815 or the beginning of 1816.

<sup>75</sup> As there were no railways and he was unable to afford travel by coach his only mode of transport was by foot. Story’s description of the railway system is an important contemporary account in evaluating nineteenth-century modes of travel and their effect on labouring-class people: ‘Nor was I in reality, at a short distance from home. There were no railways to contract time, and almost annihilate space. Coaches there were, but cash there was not—at least in my pocket. So the distance was always calculated on my pedestrian ability.’ Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 53.

<sup>76</sup> For ‘Sylvander and Clarinda’ see Burns’ letters and poems to Agnes Macle hose in *The works of Robert Burns. Op. Cit.*

Story with the literary inheritance through which he could construct a sense of himself as both a workingman and a poet.

Whilst Rose is correct in claiming that reading the major poets of the nineteenth-century transformed the lives of working people, as a labouring-class writer Story resented the cultural deference that was expected of him.<sup>77</sup> In his seemingly formulaic panegyric to the contemporary realm of letters, there are tensions lying just beneath the surface of his polite discourse:

At the very time when I was lamenting the lack of poets in the nineteenth-century, and almost fancying that I should myself be the *oasis* in the desert—Wordsworth had produced his “Lyrical Ballads,” Rogers his “Pleasure of Memory,” and Campbell his “Pleasures of Hope;” the strains of Scott were still in all their freshness; Byron had just wrapped himself in the mantle of “Childe Harold;” Moore had displayed—or was displaying—the riches of oriental imagery; and Southey, by tale upon tale, each more brilliant than the last, was continuing a climax that was to terminate in “Roderick!”<sup>78</sup>

Story is, one suspects, being intentionally ironic here. Nevertheless, believing himself to be the ‘*oasis* in the desert—’ he suggests that this new group of educated writers took up the same space that he had intended to occupy. Story’s work, by comparison, appeared archaic and they rendered his attempts at poetry obsolete. In this sense Story’s relationship with writers such as Wordsworth and Southey is more complicated and less secure than Rose suggests. Over the course of this thesis I will reveal how the writer made many attempts at

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<sup>77</sup> Rose, *The Intellectual Life Of The Working Classes*, p. 119.

<sup>78</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 132.



addressing the problems of his own cultural legitimacy. This preliminary example taken from his preface to *Harvest* (1818) shows him constructing his identity as a distinctly labouring-class poet by contesting the cultural authority of the nineteenth-century poets he read.

While wide flash'd the light'ning terrificly grand,  
And wrapp'd and discover'd, by turns sky and land!  
Think you I'd forego such a scene, to survey  
A cot's feeble taper diffuse its poor ray?  
And can they who have revel'd in lux'ry divine,  
Of SCOTT or of BYRON, taste rapture of mine?  
Why not? Though I grant theirs the lightening of  
Song,<sup>79</sup>

Story's versified account of reading Byron and Scott is underpinned by his sudden realisation that he too could become a poet. Awakening him from his 'cot' their 'light'ning' appears to offer him a new poetic perspective and the opportunity for self-improvement. Story's rhetoric, however, contains an undertone of cultural conflict. Illuminating his surroundings, their 'lightening of Song' enables him to see, as if for the first time, the confines of his labouring-class existence. The contrast between the sublime landscapes depicted by Byron and Scott and the gloomy interior of Story's humble cottage is a jarring reminder of both his disadvantages and his limitations. In comparison, Story's attempts at poetry now appear to be nothing but a 'feeble taper' and render his status as a self-taught writer unbearable. His figurative imagery is a way of foregrounding the debilitating social conditions that dogged his progress. More than this, he is

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<sup>79</sup> Story, *Harvest*, p. 8.

campaigning for his own cultural status. Story's final question 'Why not?' forces his reader to pause and reconsider the proposition of a successful self-taught poet. His poetic turn is a cultural assertion and he is testing the audience's idea of a fixed and stable literary hierarchy.

Story goes even further and offers himself as an alternative to Byron. Though the educated poet has 'rifled the "Gardens of Gul in her bloom"', he himself has 'ranged Cheviot for the wild flowers of the mountain'.<sup>80</sup> Story's juxtaposition subordinates Byron's privileged background and bequeaths his own poetry a unique character.<sup>81</sup> The reference was designed to resonate with his provincial audience and he is using his labouring-class status to promote his publication. His direct comparison between himself and the celebrated poet contains an undertone of satire. The violence implied in his verb 'rifled' suggests that whilst Byron's exotic imagery has been taken by force, his own depictions of the Cheviots are bequeathed to him. Like Byron he offers his book to the audience 'with a heart as fondly beating with desire to please'.<sup>82</sup> Story's adverb 'as' suggests that though his poetry may lack the polite idioms of his peers, his sentiment is the same and, at least in this respect, he is their equal.

Story's manuscript 'Journal of a Pedestrian Tour of Keswick' (July 12<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> 1833), again suggests that he was consciously using his reading experiences to negotiate cultural boundaries that subordinated him as a labouring-class

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<sup>80</sup> Story, *Harvest*, author's preface.

<sup>81</sup> For the symbolic 'politicisation of the garden space' in nineteenth-century labouring-class poetry see Keegan, *British Labouring-Class Nature Poetry*, p. 38.

<sup>82</sup> Story, *Harvest*, author's preface.

writer.<sup>83</sup> Travelling to the Lakes (on foot) with the intention of meeting Wordsworth and Southey, he was both literally and figuratively closing the distance between himself and the poets he read. Wordsworth was in Scotland when Story visited, but the autobiographer recalled in vivid detail standing outside his house: ‘Placed my hand on the iron gate, and was pleased to feel assured that I touched what Wordsworth had touched, and stood where Wordsworth had stood.’<sup>84</sup> Poised before the gate of Rydal Mount, Story was not only standing in Wordsworth’s footsteps he was also teetering on the threshold of the established literary realm. He got within even closer proximity to Southey but, like Wordsworth, the poet appeared just out of reach:

Had the consequently unexpected gratification of seeing Mr Southey himself leaving his home with a book in his hand. Wondered what kind of book a man like Southey would condescend to read. Waited at a gate through which he passed. Marked with reverence the “hooked nose of Byron”. I was gazing over Southey! Saw the head whence had issued “Roderick the last of the Goths”, and I thought of the battle cry— ‘Roderick the Goth! Roderick and Victory! Spain and Vengeance!’<sup>85</sup>

Story was again left ‘waiting at a gate’ and his failure to actually meet either poet in person is a reminder of his peripheral position on the margins. And yet, his recurring imagery echoes his reading experiences in that he could see Southey, and was in the presence of the poet, but was unable to actually touch him. Indeed, on closer inspection, Story constructs his whole encounter with Southey around the book he was holding. The possibility that he had also read or even owned the same copy is the cultural hinge that binds the two poets together.

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<sup>83</sup> Maidment tells us that there has always been a tendency by middle-class commentators to ‘dismiss self-taught writers by concentration on their technical inexperience.’ Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 17. Robert Story, ‘Journal of a Pedestrian Tour to Keswick in 1833’, *Poems in Manuscript*, [literary works], Holograph MS, 1 bundle, (1817-1859), WYASB, MS DB3/C59, p. 129-138.

<sup>84</sup> Story, ‘Journal of a Pedestrian Tour’, p. 138.

<sup>85</sup> Story, ‘Journal of a Pedestrian Tour’, p. 136.

Story is using a type of narrative framing and, constantly adding intertextual layers, his account is mediated through a shared discourse of reading. His reference to Southey's "hooked nose" also draws on Byron's satirical description of his great rival.<sup>86</sup> Story even claims he was so excited at seeing the poet he stopped just short of shouting out the battle cry from *Roderick*. It does not appear to matter that he failed to meet either poet. What is important to him, and is relevant to this chapter, is that he was able to use his reading experiences to negate the obstacles that stood between himself as a labouring-class writer and the major literary figures of the nineteenth century. His strategy is another cultural assertion and whilst Story, for now, appears content to remain unseen, 'gazing' at Southey and Wordsworth from their gates, he is by no means a passive observer.<sup>87</sup> Story's pilgrimage to the Lake District is symbolic of how the writer used his reading experiences to negotiate, and circumvent, cultural boundaries that marginalised self-educated writers.

## **Conclusion**

I began this chapter by tracing Story's reading experiences to his cultural development as a self-taught poet. His belief that 'every poet must at first be an imitator' implies that every poet must first be a reader.<sup>88</sup> The level of intimacy Story developed with the authors he read far outstripped that of most nineteenth-century readers, regardless of their social or economic background. He rapidly

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<sup>86</sup> See Byron's *Vision of Judgement* (1822): 'The varlet was not an ill favoured knave; / A good deal like a vulture in the face, / With a hook nose and a hawk's eye which gave / A smart and sharper-looking aspect / To his whole aspect...'

<sup>87</sup> Story, 'Journal of a Pedestrian Tour,' p. 137.

<sup>88</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 96.

evolved into a highly sophisticated reader and, by the time he published *Love and Literature* in 1842, he was capable of offering his own analysis of most if not all the major contemporary poets of his generation. His evaluation of a number of prominent literary figures reveals the extent to which he exercised his critical voice as a way of reinforcing his autonomy and cultural independence. However, he both ritualised and challenged the authority of famous authors such as Byron and Scott. Often frustrated by his dependency on the polite realm of literature, he turned towards an alternative canon of ‘brother authors’.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, his earliest attempts at verse imitated, and emulated, the work of the self-taught poet Andrew Scott, dispelling the myth that it was mainly major and popular works of literature that influenced the cultural progression of labouring-class writers. It is to Story’s ‘brotherhood of authors’ I now turn.

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<sup>89</sup> Story, ‘Journal of a Pedestrian Tour’, p. 262.

## Part Two

### Chapter 3

#### ‘My brother authors’: Identity and Class

##### Introduction

Story’s autobiography, *Love and Literature* (1842), offers significant insight into the aesthetic and cultural formation of self-taught poets. Dedicating its opening chapter to constructing an alternative canon of self-taught provincial poets, his narrative of shared experience was a way of negotiating existing critical discourses imposed on peripheral and marginalised labouring-class writers.<sup>1</sup>

Story’s group provided him with the companionship and cultural legitimacy through which he could withstand the adversity he encountered as a self-taught poet. His ideas of community were motivated by his pursuit of cultural equality and his desire to map out an aesthetic belonging to the artisan classes, forces us to rethink the role of self-taught poets in reforming the cultural landscape for nineteenth-century working people.<sup>2</sup>

Much of the critical framework for this phase of research emerges out of Goodridge’s influential study *John Clare and Community*. Goodridge tells us that when faced with adversity the poet John Clare turned to ‘the story of his

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Story, ‘Provincial Poets’, *Love and Literature; Being The Reminiscences, Literary Opinions, And Fugitive Pieces Of A Poet In Humble Life* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1842), pp, 9-15.

<sup>2</sup> For the connection between cultural equality and the economic emancipation of working people see Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life Of The Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001).

landscape and community, for consolation and to learn how to endure.<sup>3</sup> This type of ‘reaching out’ was not unique.<sup>4</sup> Using his life-writing to map out and define a canon that he could call his own, Story goes further than Clare. Story imagined a new cultural landscape for his ‘brother’ poets and attempted to force others into acknowledging the role of labouring-class writing in the polite realm of literature.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, he seems to have abandoned his pursuit of singularity as an individual or autonomous author and here his poetic character is essentially communitarian in form. Or at least that is what he wants us to believe.

Goodridge reminds us that for writers like Clare and Story the idea of collective identity was, at least to some extent, performative. By creating a group of distinctly self-taught poets Story was renegotiating his own position on the periphery or margins of nineteenth-century literary culture. His search for legitimacy is complicated by a need to co-exist with other labouring-class poets and, in this chapter, I consider the ways in which the dialogue he shared with his fellow bards served both himself and the community of writers to which he belonged.

Goodridge claims that Clare’s sense of himself as a writer contradicts the ‘western idea of authorship’ in that the poet interprets his literary self-worth through a circle or brotherhood of poets.<sup>6</sup> Although Goodridge’s study is not restricted to Clare’s exchanges with other labouring-class writers, Clare’s interest in Thomas Chatterton and Robert Bloomfield is particularly important to this study. It is here that Clare converges with Story’s ideas of co-dependency.

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<sup>3</sup>John Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community*, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 262.

<sup>6</sup>Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community*, p. 34.

Story resembled Clare in that, whilst he treasured the voices he encountered through reading, he valued ‘even more the idea of a writerly community from which he [could] draw sustenance and inspiration, and to which he [could] himself contribute.’<sup>7</sup> While these alliances were sometimes intertextual or even imagined, Story’s and Clare’s ideas of fraternity clearly overlap.

Goodridge points out that the type of methodological approach that endeavours to recover the ‘literary echoes’ of other writers is superfluous.<sup>8</sup> He argues convincingly that the ‘weight of influence may lie somewhere other than in the legacy of fine lines and memorable images.’<sup>9</sup> Although Story imitated the work of other labouring-class poets, formal similarities are less important than the notion of a writerly community. If Chatterton was a role model for Clare then it was not his poetic style that appeared most attractive but the hardships he endured as a poet writing from below. The idea of an existing labouring-class tradition helped both Clare and Story visualise themselves as poets despite contemporary attitudes. There is, however, an important distinction between the two writers. Goodridge’s study has two definite focal points, ‘writerly and rural’, and as well as examining Clare’s literary community he considers the ways in which the author’s poetic treatment of kinship and fraternity echoed the increasing pressures of enclosure.<sup>10</sup> The title of Story’s chapter ‘Provincial Poets’ hints, too, at his anxiety over the fragmentation of rural society but, above all else, he simply resented having to negotiate the existing critical discourses that subordinated him as a writer. Paul Thomas Murphy argues that ‘working-

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<sup>7</sup> Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community*, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community*, p. 13

<sup>10</sup> Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community*, p. 7



class reviewers rejected outright the many critical models offered by middle-class commentary.<sup>11</sup> It was primarily for this same reason that Story promoted a cultural network of largely labouring-class writers. He was rejecting the existing expectations placed on him and constructing a canon of poets that could exist in its own right.

Before proceeding further it should be pointed out that Story's imaginary group of provincial poets, and his narrative of communitarian identity, took precedence over his immediate circle of writers, artists and cultural commentators, including Branwell Brontë and the eldest son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Hartley Coleridge, who were now meeting regularly at the George Hotel in Bradford.

There is nothing substantial regarding the George Hotel Group recorded anywhere in Story's life-writing and the omission is significant in that it suggests, for Story, his community of provincial poets was more important than his actual alliances.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, for a contemporary account of the Bradford Circle we have to return to John James's biography:

It was soon after the publication of 'The Outlaw', in the midsummer of 1838, that I became acquainted with Story. I remember, with vivid

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Thomas Murphy, *Toward A Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals 1816-1858* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Although a complete and comprehensive record does not exist for the George Hotel Group, this study has combined several disparate sources and recovered the names of the following men as definite members: Robert Story (Poet and Schoolmaster), John James (Historian), Edward Collinson (Poet and Solicitor's clerk), John Wilson Anderson (Landscape Painter), William Overend Geller (Mezzotint Engraver), Hartley Coleridge (eldest son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge), Branwell Brontë, Francis Leyland, (Bookseller and Brontë Biographer), J. B. Leyland (Sculptor, Poet, also Branwell Brontë's closest friend and Francis Leyland's source for his biography). In addition there are several probable associate members that either belonged to Story's group or were at least closely connected to it: John Nicholson (Poet and Wool-comber), Chas. F. Foreshaw (Poet), William Heaton (Poet), Skerrit (Actor) [first name unknown], Edward Sloane (Correspondent for the *Bradford Observer* and the *Leeds Times*), William Dearden (Poet, friend of Patrick Brontë and J.B. Leyland. Also edited a collection of John Nicholson's poems after his death), George Searle Philips (Journalist and writer), Francis Grundy (Railway Engineer), H. Woolven (Railway Engineer). It should be pointed out that Miss Reaney, the proprietor and landlady of the George Hotel, was also a close associate of Story's circle and later sponsored Story's publication *Guthrum the Dane* (1852).

exactness, the circumstances of a meeting at the Albion Hotel Bradford, where four solicitors, Story, and a brother poet, myself and two others were present. A right merry company was there assembled; the wine and social glee circulated freely; and literary subjects of great interest were discussed.<sup>13</sup>

Story appears to have been one of the driving forces of the Bradford circle:

‘Story constituted the life and soul of the party; his recitations and conversation formed the pleasant condiments of entertainment.’<sup>14</sup> Yet while Story had established a relatively large fraternity of cultural enthusiasts in Bradford, when it came to expressing his own cultural identity he chose to subordinate his cross-class associations and align himself within his group of predominantly rural self-taught poets. So why did he disregard these alliances in his autobiographical writing? Over the course of this chapter I will demonstrate how Story was accentuating his cultural identity and recognised the potential of assuming and defining a separate artistic category for himself, that emphasised both his liminality and labouring-class background.

### **‘Provincial Poets’**

There is a certain amount of ambiguity in Story’s chapter title ‘Provincial Poets’ and, having already claimed that he was creating an alternative labouring-class canon, I need to be clear. Whilst membership of Story’s categorisation was by no means restricted to a specific class background, seven out of the eight poets he refers to as provincial poets appear in the *Labouring-Class Writers Project*

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<sup>13</sup> John James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems Of Robert Story, With A Sketch Of His Life by John James, F.S.A.* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, And Roberts; Henry Gaskarth, Bradford, 1861), pp. 52-53.

<sup>14</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. 53.

*Database*.<sup>15</sup> The following poets were all named by Story in his chapter as belonging to his group: Thomas Whittle (1683-1736), was a Northumberland dialect poet / songwriter and was also known as ‘The Licentious Poet’. Robert Anderson (1770-1833), the Cumberland Bard, was an assistant to a Calico Painter from the age of 10 and then a Pattern drawer. Andrew Scott (1757-1839), was a farm worker from Bowden, and known for local border dialect and his lack of formal education. John Nicholson, the Airedale Poet (1790-1843) briefly collaborated with the Tory Radical Richard Oastler before splitting acrimoniously. He was one of the few poets on the list that Story knew personally. Stephen Fawcett (1805-1876) was a farmer’s son and known as the ten hours movement poet. Robert Dibb named himself the Wharfedale Poet, (date of birth unknown). John Critchley Prince (1808-1866) was a prominent member of Manchester’s ‘Sun Inn’ group. Edward Collinson (1819-1872) was the only writer named by Story who does not appear in the *Labouring-class Writers Database*. Although Collinson was not a manual labourer, as a low paid lawyer’s clerk he was only semi-professional and he might also be defined as a ‘working man’. Along with Nicholson, Collinson was part of Story’s inner circle that regularly met at the George Hotel in Bradford and it may have been this close association rather than the writer’s class that contributed to his name being included in his list.

Story’s descriptive language is saturated with tropes and motifs that designate all of his poets as being self-taught. In naming and then assigning each individual writer included in his group of provincial poets a unique character, he gives their

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<sup>15</sup> *Labouring-Class Poets Online*, < <https://lcpoets.wordpress.com/introtobibliography/> > [accessed 21 October 2017]

verse the same respect normally reserved for the nineteenth-century literati. His primary mode of representation for his peers was undoubtedly their rural labouring-class backgrounds and his desire to emulate the work of established writers appears less important than being a self-taught poet:

Advancing higher in the scale, we come to poets who arrest our attention by the powers they exhibit, and the effects they produce. We see a WHITTLE cheering, by his local lyrics, the firesides of the Northumbrian peasantry; an ANDERSON giving, in his unrivalled ballads, a perfect reflex of the manners, customs, and feelings of the cottagers, of Cumberland; and a SCOTT—not Sir Walter, but plain Andrew—delighting, by his homely but truthful songs, the simple-hearted rustics of the Border. To come nearer home, we have a NICHOLSON in Airedale, a FAWCETT and a DIBB in the Vale of Wharfe; each of whom has done something to stir the public mind, and by so much to abstract it from soulless pursuits.<sup>16</sup>

Story adopts a narrative of progress and continuity. His genealogy implies a connection between past and present rural labouring-class poets. Thomas Whittle dates back to the seventeenth century. Robert Anderson and Andrew Scott were both deceased by the time *Love and Literature* was published. Story's strategy of looking back suggests that he was pursuing independence and cultural recognition through the idea of an existing writerly community. His position on the margins is insecure and focusing on an alternative literary inheritance he attempts to rewrite cultural discourses that excluded and alienated working people as outsiders. Story is beginning to hint at the commercial potential of labouring-class writers and their ability appeal to a popular audience. The sense of place and geography implied in Story's loco-description connects his poets to a specific cultural landscape and rural labouring-class experience.

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<sup>16</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, pp. 11-12.

The value of these writers is located in the contribution they made to their communities rather than the role they played in the polite realm of letters. Introducing his list with the rhetorical repetition of the first person plural ‘We’ the author adopts a conversational tone and this softer less formal style of prose creates an impression of familiarity.<sup>17</sup> The obvious stress and weight of Story’s capitalisation presents his writers as household names, whilst the intimacy of his syntax, punctuation, and lexis, all hint at the group’s homely disposition.<sup>18</sup> The connotation of domesticity within his semantic field seen in the noun ‘fireside’ and the adjectives ‘cheering’ and ‘homely’, work to give the reader an immediate feeling of warmth and kinship.<sup>19</sup>

Story’s outline clearly borrows many of the prominent tropes and descriptive markers used by middle-class commentators. Promoting his group within a romanticised rural idyll, it can be argued that his description only reinforces conventional attitudes towards the self-taught tradition. However, if, as Maidment claims, labouring-class poetry was ‘generally mediated into public consciousness through its middle-class supporters’, here we have a labouring-class poet performing the role of editor and sponsor.<sup>20</sup> His strategy is evidence of how he was fiercely independent and attempting to be culturally self-sufficient. Paul Thomas Murphy reminds us that labouring-class periodicals had by this time begun to accept the idea that the aesthetics of poetry could be

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<sup>17</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> For Homely Rhymers see Brian Maidment’s categorisation in *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-taught poets and poetry in Victorian Britain*, ed. by B. Maidment (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 283.

politicised.<sup>21</sup> It was no longer deemed necessary that the lyrics of a poem had to be directly political for it to contain agency, since cultural discourses, alone, could be used for socio-economic change. Story was appropriating the idea of a labouring-class aesthetic and using it for his own advantage. Carefully contextualising and unfolding the abilities of each individual poet he was defining these writers by their departure from established authors. Story was attempting to liberate his poets from the traditional expectations of form and, rather than focusing on their economic disadvantages, he chose to foreground his group's cultural distinctions. He ignored the existing convention of comparing labouring-class writers to their polite counterparts and instead strove to distinguish their poetry from traditional modes of writing. Story foregrounds the intimate communal relationship between self-taught poets and the landscape as a way of atoning for their heterogeneity and formal differences.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, his approach is both opportunistic and pragmatic. Whilst he cultivates a distinctly labouring-class aesthetic he also realises how success hinges on engaging a polite middle-class audience. Continually framing his poets within the natural innocence propagated by their unique proximity to nature, he was exploiting the commercial appeal of existing poetic discourses on natural genius.<sup>23</sup>

In his account of metropolitan essayists, such as Carlyle, Southey, and W. J Fox, Maidment suggests that by 1830 the literary establishment had already linked the

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<sup>21</sup> Murphy, *Toward A Working-Class Canon*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> For the hybrid forms of labouring-class writer Janet Hamilton see Kirstie Blair's essay, "'He Sings Alone': Hybrid Forms And The Victorian Working-Class Poet" in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37.2 (2009), pp. 523-541.

<sup>23</sup> For popular discourses of natural genius and the labouring-class tradition see chapter two of this thesis.

‘development of provincial poetry by self-taught writers’ to working people.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, due to its arbitrary nature Story’s classification ‘provincial’ deserves more attention. The great northern industrial centres such as Bradford, Manchester, and Liverpool, can of course all be labelled provincial areas. Moreover, if the city of London is a metropolis then what do we call its outlying districts? It was precisely this type of slippage that Story found so appealing. A closer look at his language suggests that he was using the term ‘provincial’ rhetorically and as a way of exploiting his position on the margins.

I allude to the Poets of the Provinces; in which term I include all those who occupy certain circles, be they of greater or smaller dimensions; but who have not yet achieved a national fame.<sup>25</sup>

Story constructed his writerly community as a way of contesting the dominant literary and cultural discourses that subordinated him as a poet.<sup>26</sup> Even his term ‘circles’ can be stretched to include the circular or symbiotic relationship between provincial labouring-class poets and their audiences.<sup>27</sup> His provinciality was a way of adding cultural value to the self-taught tradition. He used the title ‘Provincial Poets’ to replace the popular nineteenth-century categorisation of labouring-class writers as minor poets. The cadence of Story’s phrasing, ‘Poets of the Provinces’, —its extra syllables, alliteration and archaic syntax, all work to tease out and extend the group’s cultural authority.<sup>28</sup> Although the provincial status of Story’s circle invokes the Lake Poets, according to his criteria the

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<sup>24</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 281. For an in depth analysis of Maidment’s study into middle-class commentators and their influence over self-taught poets see chapter four of this thesis.

<sup>25</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> For Story’s direct challenge to the Metropolitan literary press see chapter four of this thesis.

<sup>27</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 10.

‘national fame’ of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, now excluded them from membership.<sup>29</sup> He was juxtaposing the idea of ‘national fame’ against the local celebrity of his writers. The relativity implied in this alternative measure of literariness hints, if not stipulates directly, that his poets are all ‘writing from below’.

The irony here, though, is that Story fails to mention that after his political songs and poems were taken up by the national press he had, in some senses, already outgrown his provincial status. The disparity between Story and his ‘brother’ poets indicates how the role he was performing within his writerly community was editorial. Story’s ambiguity also illustrates why the language of class during the first half of the nineteenth century is considered notoriously allusive and any attempt to fix his terminology to a modern contemporary perspective should be approached cautiously. Indeed, Maidment warns us that calling a writer ‘working-class’ is reductive in that the categorisation usually contains a ‘political, economic, or geographical’ assumption.<sup>30</sup> Story demonstrates the point succinctly not least because, despite being almost destitute when *Love and Literature* was published, he was no longer able to categorise himself as a manual labourer and had long since left the harvest fields behind for the schoolroom.

Was Story unusual in expressing his ideas of class through his provincial status?

According to E.P. Thompson the beginnings of class-consciousness can be

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<sup>29</sup> In the literary sense, the category provincial predates the Romantic Movement. For further scholarship on provincial poets see C. R. Johnson, *Provincial Poets, 1789-1839; British Verse Printed in the Provinces: the Romantic Background* (Michigan: Jed Press, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 13.



identified ‘from 1830 onwards’. Indeed he believed that by the late 1830s ‘the working class were no longer in the making but (in its Chartist form) already made’.<sup>31</sup> More recently, however, William Christmas suggests, albeit tentatively, that ‘a vocabulary of class’ started to emerge as early as the eighteenth-century.<sup>32</sup> In pursuing a community of self-taught poets Story validates Thompson’s ideas of class-consciousness. However, rather than explicitly adopting a language of class, Story preferred to articulate the idea of community alongside his provincial status. Patrick Joyce reminds us in *Democratic Subjects* that the idea of ‘social or collective selves’ held more weight than ‘class’.<sup>33</sup> He points out that class-consciousness was symbolised through communitarian terms such as ‘the people’ and ‘humanity’.<sup>34</sup> Story’s categorisation ‘provincial’ is more akin to these popular modes of self-representation described by Joyce. His ideas of class were inseparable from community and the collective shared experience of rural working people. Story was attempting to redefine his circle of writers and create an alternative classification that would better suit their needs.

### **Democratic Vision**

While the full title of Story’s autobiography suggests a formulaic narrative, through which most if not all self-taught poets have described themselves, it also echoes the book’s interior polemic for an alternative canon: *Love and Literature; Being the Reminiscences, Literary Opinions, and Fugitive Pieces of a*

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<sup>31</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Middlesex, Penguin Books Ltd, 1968), p. 782.

<sup>32</sup> William J. Christmas, *The Lab’ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (London: Associated University Press, 2001), p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The self and the social in nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*, p. 1.

*Poet in Humble Life*. Before confirming his ‘humble’ status Story boldly designates himself a ‘Poet’. Even in this familiar and supposedly self-effacing opening, his assertion negates any challenge to his cultural legitimacy.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, when the eighteenth-century writer Henry Jones finally earned the title of poet, he ceased defining himself by his humble origins, according to William J. Christmas.<sup>36</sup> Goodridge also points out, somewhat ironically, that, following on from Chatterton and creating his own forgeries, Clare was motivated by a momentary desire to lose his labouring-class identity. Clare discarded the ‘literary clothes he had been made to wear’ and was searching for a more ‘auspicious and an alternative sense of himself’<sup>37</sup> Yet, writers like Ellen Johnston and Alexander Anderson wore their occupation as a ‘badge of poetic integrity’.<sup>38</sup> It is this latter approach that Story is exploiting.

Above all else, Story’s title was a way of clothing himself in the self-taught tradition. Although he attempted to elevate both his cultural and social status, he was trying to be a labouring-class poet, not mask or hide it. The title anticipates and revises the reader’s existing expectations of him as an author. Cassandra Falke reminds us that even by the late 1790s the word literature was ‘gaining appropriate significance as a term and [was] developing capacity as a cultural signifier.’<sup>39</sup> Foregrounding his ‘Literary Opinions’, Story was affirming his legitimacy as a self-taught poet. His title page tells us that Story is the ‘Author

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<sup>35</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Christmas, *The Lab’ring Muses*, p. 155.

<sup>37</sup> Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community*, pp. 30, 32.

<sup>38</sup> John Goodridge, ‘Some Rhetorical Strategies in Later Nineteenth-Century Labouring-Class Poetry’ in *Criticism*, 47, (Fall 2005) [Special number: ‘Learning to Read in the Long Revolution: New Perspectives on Labouring-Class Poets, Aesthetics, and Politics’, ed. by W. J. Christmas and D. Landry], pp. 531-547 (p. 543).

<sup>39</sup> Cassandra Falke, *Literature by the Working Class: English Autobiographies, 1820–1848* (New York, Cambria Press, 2013), p. 6.

of “*Songs and Lyrical Poems*,” “*The Outlaw a Drama*,” &c.’ Despite the author being self-taught, his audience is assured that he is a published poet.<sup>40</sup> Class does not prevent him from being a poet, Story proposes. Although the stress he gives to the adjective ‘humble’ implies a reticence in stepping forward, he ignores the boundaries of polite literary convention and ascribes cultural value to himself and the group of writers to which he belongs.

Story’s vision for a writerly community was essentially democratic. Throughout his chapter he acknowledges, indeed emphasises, his group’s connection to so-called high and low culture. His own writing was eclectic so it is not surprising that his approach to membership was similarly heterogeneous. And yet, there was another impulse driving his inclusiveness. Maidment warns us that for most self-taught poets the summit of Mount Parnassus was ‘illusory’ and out of reach.<sup>41</sup> Although Story was capable of working with complex poetic frameworks, such as seen in his Spenserian poems ‘To Spring’ (1829) and ‘An Autumnal Thought’ (1829), he also recognised that he was unable to compete with the formal proficiency of more educated writers.<sup>42</sup> His tolerance for lesser poets was partly a response to being compared to established literary figures. There are signs here that Story refused to conform to critical discourses that subordinated him for his self-taught status.<sup>43</sup> He believed that the literary ideals held by many contemporary critics were outdated and incongruent with an emerging labouring-class canon. He was promoting alternative measures of

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<sup>40</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p.15.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Robert Story, 1795-1860’, *English Poetry 1579-1830: Spenser and the Tradition*, <<https://goo.gl/k8q1Da>> [accessed 11 October 2017]

<sup>43</sup> After publishing a satirical attack on the literary establishment Story was essentially exiled by the metropolitan press during the late 1820s. See chapter four of my thesis for how he positioned the provincial press in direct opposition to literary critics in London and Edinburgh.

aesthetic value that were less hierarchal and limiting. Whilst polite readers were increasingly fetishising the idea of taste and the type of books they read, Story embraced all categories of literary production:

Of these there are many grades, and some of them so low as hardly to deserve, it may be thought, the name of poets at all. But such is not my view. I cannot, it is true, think very highly of a man whose utmost ambition it is, to dress in doggerel verse some topic of village scandal; but he is worthy of notice as the first link of a chain which terminates in the highest human intellect, or rather which does not terminate there, but is thence continued upwards to the loftiest angelic intelligence, and which may thus be said to “link heaven and earth.”<sup>44</sup>

Endorsing the role of every writer in the ‘chain’ that ‘links heaven to earth’, Story emphasises how his group is part of a collective or collaborative cultural project.<sup>45</sup> Even the clumsiest ‘doggerel’ has its place in his writerly community.<sup>46</sup> Here, in particular, Story appears to endorse the role of Maidment’s third category of artisan writer: ‘homely rhymers [who] sought to articulate common feeling within the working and artisan classes at the lowest level of cultural ambition.’<sup>47</sup> Indeed, Story goes further and extends the title of Poet to all rural labouring-class versifiers. Arguing that a ‘bad poet’ is still a poet, and vowing to give all labouring-class writers a ‘degree of consideration’, he flouts existing cultural hierarchies.<sup>48</sup> Story, here, is almost certainly following Southey’s introductory essay to John Jones’s collection where he claimed that even ‘bad poetry’ was beneficial as it offered ‘innocent pleasures’ to its author.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 11.

<sup>49</sup> John Jones, *Attempts at verse by John Jones, an Old Servant: With an Account of his Life Written by Himself and an Introductory Essay on the Lines and Works of our Uneducated Poets by Robert Southey, Esq. Poet Laureate* (London: John Murray, 1831), p. 11

Yet Story reworked Southey's defence, by suggesting that poetic ability was less relevant than the role literature played in promoting community and commonalty.

Another fundamental role for Story's group was to educate rural labouring-class communities and provide them with the necessary tools for reading and writing poetry. By stimulating an appreciation of verse form and attempting to encourage others to follow his example, Story supports the idea that self-taught poets played a significant role in securing cultural equality for nineteenth-century working people:

He is worthy of notice, too, inasmuch as he pleases minds that could not be pleased with anything superior then, and is useful to prepare them for the relish of it when it shall fall in their way. He, a bad poet if you will, is nevertheless a pioneer for the best. Such, at least, is the view I take of it, and it leads me to excuse, if not to treat with a degree of consideration, the poorest attempt at rhyme or song.<sup>50</sup>

It is clear that Story acknowledges how working people were handicapped by their cultural deficiencies and how he saw it as his group's responsibility to address these inequalities. The adjective 'pioneer' also suggests the experimental nature of his task and how he was again transgressing cultural boundaries. Whilst Story romanticises the didactic role of his writerly community he was also candidly honest and suggests that he was working within a largely uncultivated landscape. His evaluation validates the claim of social historian David Vincent that 'composition of fiction or poetry, whether published

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<sup>50</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 11.

or not, is likely to be the prerogative of only a minority of any community...'<sup>51</sup> What Story offers is concrete evidence for the eclectic reading habits of these labouring-class communities and their overwhelming desire to consume literary culture.<sup>52</sup> The phrasing 'when it shall fall in their way' implies the idiosyncratic and erratic manner in which audiences obtained and read literature.<sup>53</sup> His weight on the verb 'fall' also emphasises the arbitrary way in which nineteenth-century working people accessed books and he makes their reading experiences appear almost accidental. In this sense the ignorance and cultural deprivation of the provincial poor were a symptom of their economic circumstances and the role of Story's circle was to gently 'prepare' labouring-class audiences to appreciate complex verse forms by introducing them to the very basic concept of rhyme and metre.<sup>54</sup>

### **Tam O' Glanton**

Despite Story's encouragement to poets of all 'grades' we should remain circumspect.<sup>55</sup> His belief that he was 'a bard of no despicable dimensions' implies that he was also defining himself against these inferior labouring-class writers.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, in an earlier serialisation 'Reminiscences of Publication' (1826) he makes a direct comparison between himself and the failed self-taught

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<sup>51</sup> David Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1981), p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> For the eclectic reading habits of labouring-class communities and their pursuit of knowledge see Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life Of The Working Classes* and David Vincent's *Bread Knowledge and Freedom. Op. Cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Story, 'Reminiscences of Publication: No. 1—Seeking Subscribers', *The Newcastle Magazine*, March-April 1826, collected edn January to December 1826, 10 vols (Newcastle Upon Tyne: W. A Mitchell, 1826), V, pp. 111-114, 166-169 (p. 111).

poet Thomas Donaldson.<sup>57</sup> It was this poet's ineptness, and Donaldson's ability to appear in print regardless of his flaws, that persuaded Story to publish his first collection of poetry: 'After all, however, it is problematical whether I should ever have found courage to appear in print, if there had not been such a man as *Tam O' Glanton*.'<sup>58</sup> According to this account, then, it was neither Pope's translation of Homer nor Milton's vision of Eden that beckoned Story towards publication; it was the flawed cadence and the empty poetic themes of Thomas 'Weaver' Donaldson. Here, Story appears to reject the idea of a writerly community and instead chooses to promote his own superiority. Where we would expect Donaldson's dialect writing to have resonated with Story, considering their shared Northumbrian heritage, he ridiculed the poet's outdated Augustan model and described his agricultural themes as sterile and 'drear'.<sup>59</sup>

Those of my readers who have seen the volume will agree with me in characterising it as being filled with the poorest, the most miserable stuff that ever came from a grey goose quill. It had not a single ray of genius to brighten the drear wilderness of sterility. Throwing all vanity out of sight, I was absolutely a Virgil to *Tam O' Glanton*. How I will shine in comparison!<sup>60</sup>

Compared to Donaldson's literary treatment of 'hens, ducks, and cats', Story believed that his own representation of rural labouring-class life, written in the style of Sir Walter Scott's popular romances, would excite his audience.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> The poet Thomas Donaldson was given the pen name Tam O'Glanton by virtue of his association with the village of Glanton near Alnwick in Northumbria. Undoubtedly influenced by Burns, Donaldson published a collection of verse in 1809 titled, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. The publication had the same exact title as Andrew Scott's collection. Story was highly critical of Donaldson's work and he claimed that the low esteem he held for the publication encouraged him to publish *Harvest*. Thomas Weaver Donaldson, *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Alnwick: Apollo Press, [Published and sold by the bookseller W. M. Davison.] 1809).

<sup>58</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 111.

<sup>59</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 112.

<sup>60</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 112.

<sup>61</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 112.

Story is telling us that not all labouring-class poets are the same. His exclamation ‘How I will shine in comparison!’ again reminds us that his scrutiny was a way of demonstrating his own proficiency. Challenging Donaldson’s cultural status he simultaneously sets himself apart from his peers and reinforces his own sense of singularity and independence. There remains, then, an unresolved tension or, at least, an inconsistency in Story’s life-writing accounts. Where he later criticised the literary establishment for excluding self-taught poets here he assumes an editorial role over another labouring-class writer and illustrates how discourses of subordination were still central to his search for cultural legitimacy. Donaldson’s failure was a measure of Story’s own success. Perhaps this was not exactly what he had in mind when he later claimed for his writerly community that every poet was ‘worthy of notice’. And yet, if Donaldson was a failed poet, he was still the ‘first link’ in the ‘chain’ that preceded Story becoming a published poet.

### **Aesthetics**

Story was also using his group as a way of challenging the fragmentation of nineteenth-century industrial society. Offering the communitarian identity of his poets as an alternative to individualism and capitalist progress, he illustrates his ability to appropriate a popular rubric and use it to promote a labouring-class aesthetic.<sup>62</sup>

The genius of the present age is practical, calculating, mercenary—  
money-getting its inspiration and its object. It has deserted the world of  
the imagination and the heart... Everything is prosaic, and the globe  
itself a mere convenience for its mills and its laboratories! But amid the

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<sup>62</sup> Although Story’s language was again ambiguous in terms of class, if he was referring specifically to his writerly community then it is also reasonable to assume that his ‘worshippers of a purer divinity’ were all primarily rural self-taught poets.



general devotion to Mammon there still are found some worshippers of a purer divinity—minds whose influence incessantly and insensibly mingles with, and exalts, the worldly spirit of the time.<sup>63</sup>

Story follows a well-trodden nineteenth-century juxtaposition. Invoking a Blakeian underworld of ‘mills’ and ‘laboratories’, and placing stress on the noun ‘everything’, he suggests that the imagination has been rejected by contemporary society in favour of the pursuit of capital and science.<sup>64</sup> His Aramaic ‘Mammon’ also hints at how he was engaging with contemporary social commentators such as Carlyle.<sup>65</sup> However, characterising his contemporary society through the adjective ‘prosaic’, Story inadvertently subordinates the utility and pragmatism of popular social commentators. Verse is of course the obvious antonym of prose and whilst the cross-class discourses of Carlyle contested utilitarian tenets, for Story provincial self-taught poets were just as capable of changing society through their affinity with nature. Indeed, Story’s proximity and experience of working on the land is what makes him different to Wordsworth. His archaic grammar makes it unclear whether the Brothers were influencing or influenced by the ‘worldly spirit of the time’ but, either way, he locates his group firmly in the present and illuminates its symbiotic relationship with the natural world against a backdrop of industrial mechanisation. Story’s assonance ‘incessantly and insensibly’ echoes the distinct character of his writerly community.

Reducing the pace of the line, his tempo symbolises how his group follows a

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<sup>63</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 10. Story here also pre-empts Matthew Arnold’s discourse on ‘light and shade’.

<sup>65</sup> Carlyle railed against Mammon and Story can again to be seen to be shaping the popular discourse of an established commentator to suit his needs. For Story’s correspondence with Carlyle see Thomas Carlyle, ‘Letter to Robert Story’, 1 November 1857, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, August 1857–June 1858*, ed. by I. Campbell [et al.] (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), XXXIII, pp. 107-108. Also see chapter one of this thesis. For Carlyle’s criticism of industrialism see chapter four ‘Thomas Carlyle’ in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), pp. 77-93.

more organic and instinctive metre. Story reverses dominant discourses of exclusion and again presents their relative lack of formal training as an advantage that precipitates aesthetic freedom.

The idea that labouring-class poets were empowered by their intimate knowledge of local landscapes, dialects and customs, and were therefore best placed to produce literary representations of rural labouring-class communities, was a cornerstone of Story's group. Carefully unpacking the poetic character of each writer he suggests they are the perfect literary embodiment of their communities. The authenticity suggested in Robert Anderson's ballads of 'perfect reflex' and Andrew Scott's 'truthful songs' tells us that their verse is a faithful and accurate portrayal of their local districts.<sup>66</sup> Also italicising the verb '*stir*' and the adjective '*reflex*' Story reinforces a sense of cultural awakening and an agency that originates within the group's ability to reliably represent working people.<sup>67</sup> Story's claim for labouring-class self-representation was not unique. According to Simon White, it was an integral component of Robert Bloomfield's aesthetic.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, White goes as far as claiming that Bloomfield surpasses Wordsworth in his ability to realistically portray rural working life. Story's desire to articulate labouring-class experience from within can be traced as far back as his first publication, *Harvest* (1818). He believed that it was this ability in particular that signalled his departure from more established poets. Although he admits to imitating Scott's form and metre, his personal and intimate portrayal of working in the fields ensured that his poem remains a primary mode of self-

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<sup>66</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 11-12.

<sup>67</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> Simon J. White, *Robert Bloomfield: Romanticism and the Poetry of Community* (Oxford, Routledge, 2007).

representation. Story's conscious approach to finding suitable subjects was such an important aspect of his creative process that the idea even finds its way into his verse:

Your themes are not high, nor contemptibly low;  
No hen flutters there, and no duckling cries 'woe!'  
No Christian, expiring 'mid battle's alarms,  
Thanks Jove for the vic'try that favour'd his arms."  
Did all think like you, one perhaps might—"Fear  
Not;  
Attempt;—if you fail, be resign'd to your lot;  
At last it is only to perish—forgot."<sup>69</sup>

Story's intertextuality again suggests the idea of shared experience. These lines are addressed to Story's poetic self but the second person possessive pronoun 'your' at the start of the stanza suggests that his themes belong to both himself and his community. In searching for a labouring-class aesthetic Story reminds us how he treads a fine line between two extremes. Neither 'high, nor contemptibly low' he is consciously trying to define and map out a labouring-class aesthetic that strikes the right balance between the Romantic themes of Scott and the doggerel he associated with writers such as Thomas Donaldson. He emphasises, however, the difficulty in finding a labouring-class poetics suitable for the marketplace. His initial 'attempt' at self-representation is followed in quick succession by the doubt implied in the verbs 'fail', 'perish' and 'forgot'. There remains an unresolved tension in Story's lines. While he eulogises 'Harvest's' themes, he expresses anxiety at the prospect of returning to working in the fields. Placing his poetry before the public he risks everything and his fear resonates with his desire to move beyond the labouring-class existence he promotes through his poem.

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Storey, *Harvest & Other Poems* (Berwick: William Lochhead, 1818), p. 8.

There is further evidence in ‘Harvest’ that Story was asserting his cultural authority as a distinctly labouring-class writer and his self-conscious references to the creative process are indicative that he was attempting to fulfil a specific communitarian role.

Yet some there are—it bleeds to say—  
Who deem themselves made but to sway  
O’er wretches form’d of rougher clay;  
Beneath the greivous loads they lay,  
    Poor, patient Labour groans!<sup>70</sup>

Story’s lines convey the exploitation of his fellow reapers by unscrupulous landowners. These lines are also a direct reference to his literary treatment of working people and the way in which, as a poet, he can be seen to be holding ‘sway’ ‘o’er wretches form’d of rougher clay’. The connection is further implied in his rhyming couplet ‘clay’ and ‘lay’ where the poet draws attention to his ability to mould and shape labouring-class subjects into verse. When he tells us that ‘Poor, patient Labour groans!’ his portrayal is more realistic than existing poetic representations and he is attempting to lift the romantic veil that obfuscated the drudgery and exertion of rural labour. If Story believed that social and economic change was contingent on cultural equality then this early attempt at tackling labouring-class themes is his first tentative step towards achieving his goal.

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<sup>70</sup> Story, *Harvest*, p. 10.

## Wordsworth

Having already claimed that Story excluded the Lake Poets from his writerly community on account of their fame, it is necessary to pause for a moment and ask why he underpinned his chapter title ‘Provincial Poets’ with a quote from Wordsworth: ‘Blessings be with them, and eternal praise, / Who gave us nobler loves, and nobler cares— / The Poets!’<sup>71</sup> In the first instance, Story was pointing out that prior to their national celebrity these polite literary figures were once considered provincial. He was adding literary weight to himself and his group by making an obvious connection between his poets on the margins and an approved literary movement. However, there is evidence that he was also reading Wordsworth’s lines against the grain. This idea is not, of course, unique to Story. Goodridge tells us that John Clare also collected quotations and extracts from Thomas Chatterton and looked for meaning that was not the poet’s ‘first aim to deliver’.<sup>72</sup> For Story, so-called ‘high culture’ was not the exclusive property of the dominant classes and he picks these particular lines because of their relevance to working people. Wordsworth raises the poetic to the divine and presents literary culture as a spiritual salve that transcends a society ailing from immorality and poor living conditions. Spoken from the mouth of a labouring-class poet the cathartic ‘nobler loves, and nobler cares’ becomes politically charged and reverberates with the desire for self-improvement through access to literary culture. Framing his labouring-class voice within the verse of an established author, Story’s inclusion of Wordsworth was neither deferential nor submissive. To borrow an idea from Paul Murphy’s study on nineteenth-

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<sup>71</sup> William Wordsworth, ‘Personal Talk’, *The Sonnets of William Wordsworth* (London, Edward Moxon, 1838), pp. 43-46, in Story’s *Love and Literature*, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> Goodridge, *John Clare and Community*, pp. 23-24.

century labouring-class periodicals, he was attempting to ‘recanonicalize’ the work of an established literary figure to ‘fit the values of [his] own class’.<sup>73</sup>

## **Burns**

Although the fame of Burns presumably also excluded him from Story’s immediate group, the poet was given special dispensation to be a part of a wider community of writers that he could draw on. Identifying the author as an example of one of the ‘greatest poets of past or present times’ Story again legitimises his group through the existence of an approved labouring-class writer.<sup>74</sup>

If any one feels inclined to sneer at the limited reputation acquired by these individuals, he would do well to reflect, that the greatest poets of past or present times, were, originally, provincial poets. They pleased a neighbourhood before they electrified a nation. Burns himself was, for a long time, the poet of Ayrshire, then of Scotland, and now—the world!<sup>75</sup>

Murphy points out that, in pursuing a canon of their own, the editors of labouring-class periodicals encouraged working people to read Burns with a sense of ownership and therefore to read his verse differently to that of middle-class audiences.<sup>76</sup> Burns played an essential role in what Murphy calls the ‘struggle for literary and cultural authority’.<sup>77</sup> Story also perceived Burns as pioneer of the self-taught tradition and adopted the poet as a model for cultural

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<sup>73</sup> For labouring-class ‘Recanonization’ see Paul Thomas Murphy’s *Toward A Working-Class Canon*.

<sup>74</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 12.

<sup>75</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> Murphy, *Toward A Working-Class Canon*, p. 53.

<sup>77</sup> Murphy, *Toward A Working-Class Canon*, p. 85.

advancement. As ‘the poet of Ayrshire, then of Scotland, and now—the world!’ his progression from provinciality to universal acceptance transgresses existing cultural boundaries. Story exploited Burns’s privileged status wherever possible and positioned the poet in direct opposition to the derogatory preconceptions of those commentators ‘inclined to sneer’ at his provincial group. As pointed out in the previous chapter, another example of Story’s estimation of Burns is ‘Sylvander’, the protagonist of his first publication, *Harvest*. The character was largely autobiographical and, in symbolically fixing his poetic self to Burns and in versifying his account of class-prejudice, he illustrates how shared labouring-class experience was inseparable from his ideas of protest and opposition: ‘Our Bard had left his native plain, / To seek promotion in the vale’.<sup>78</sup> These lines were in fact part of a cautionary tale. Although he originally sought ‘promotion in the vale’ all he finds there is the ‘Pedant’s sneer’ and his search for cultural recognition can only be realised by returning home. Story’s possessive plural pronoun in ‘our Bard’ illustrates that he was promoting a narrative of community and shared identity through cultural means.

For all of Burns’s fame, however, he was still treated by many observers as the exception. Though Story ritualises the poet he also realises how his mythologisation had a tendency to overshadow and displace the work of his fellow labouring-class writers. The emergence of Burns did not automatically herald a new era and Story understands that in canonising the bard other self-taught poets were discarded or overlooked: ‘Accordingly we find, almost every year, someone or other emerging from the mist of his locality, stepping into the

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<sup>78</sup> Story, *Harvest*, p. 21.

sunshine, and taking his place among the acknowledged masters of song.<sup>79</sup> The nonchalance implied in the phrase ‘someone or other’ again suggests the emergence of other accomplished labouring-class poets alongside Burns. The gothic imagery Story invokes with his ‘mist’ also symbolises how the path to cultural recognition for rural self-taught poets was obfuscated by Burns’s omniscient presence. By claiming that all poets needed to seek the approval of their ‘neighbourhoods’ before they could electrify a ‘nation’, he was democratising existing literary and cultural discourses that subordinated the provincial status of his group.<sup>80</sup> Story reminds us that though Burns had already scaled Mount Parnassus, he was not alone and there were countless other writers following in his footsteps.

There is further evidence to suggest that Story’s sense of community and shared experience became more politicised directly after reading Burns.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the provenance for using his provinciality as the locus for protest and resistance can be traced as far back as 1815 when, excluded from teaching at a high-status academy on account of his ‘bashful rusticity’, he used the idea that Burns had endured similar adversity as a way of defying his oppressors: “Give the fame of Burns” I exclaimed, “and welcome all the storms that crushed prematurely the

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<sup>79</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 12.

<sup>80</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 12.

<sup>81</sup> Story had begun reading and imitating Burns’ poems whilst teaching at Presson Hill in 1812. Here he is certainly referring to Currie’s biographical sketch of Burns and not his poetry.



blossoms of his genius!”<sup>82</sup> Burns’s greatest legacy, it seems, was that he offered labouring-class writers like Story the cultural means through which they could withstand their immediate social and economic circumstances. Where the masters and students at the academy made him feel ‘unfit to make [his] way in a world’, the companionship he felt reading Burns enabled him to defy those who used his socio-economic background to curb his cultural ambition. The poet’s very existence was a way of contesting the discourses that subordinated him both as a schoolteacher and as a self-taught writer. He was drawing on Burns for writerly companionship and Story’s relationship with the poet was similar to Clare’s interest in Chatterton. The knowledge that another labouring-class poet had experienced the same hardships enabled to Story to endure class-based prejudices and conceive how his ill treatment was a wider measure of nineteenth-century society.

### **John Nicholson**

If Burns inspired Story’s first publication then the companionship of another member of his writerly community, John Nicholson, was the reason for publishing his second collection of verse.<sup>83</sup> Until now their alliance has gone relatively unnoticed but as one of only two poets named in Story’s group who he knew personally, Nicholson deserves further attention. John James claimed that

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<sup>82</sup> Story’s unpublished manuscripts tell us that around 1815 he travelled to Yorkshire where he was employed as an assistant teacher at Castleton Lodge. The status of the academy was much higher than he had expected and he describes being singled out for his uncultivated manners and dialect. ‘All this disheartened me. I concluded that I was unfit to make my way in a world, where such trifles appeared to form serious obstacles; and my breast really throbbing with every honourable sentiment, I was heartily disgusted with a state of society which seemed to render mere ceremony an important requisite. I determined to return home.’ Robert Story, *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2, p. 52

<sup>83</sup> Nicholson’s friendship coincides with Story’s decision to begin writing again after a cessation of around eight years.

when Story was considering abandoning verse writing altogether it was Nicholson's friendship that persuaded him to continue.<sup>84</sup>

In the year 1824 the poems of John Nicholson, the Airedale Poet, a man of great poetical genius, were attracting much attention in the West-Riding of Yorkshire, especially in Craven and gained for the author not only much local celebrity, but also considerable pecuniary award. Nicholson and Story became acquainted, were often in the company of each other, and the glowing report which the former gave of the success of his poetic labours, stimulated Story's ambition to again appear before the public with a volume of poetry.<sup>85</sup>

The volume of poetry that 'appeared before the public' was *Craven Blossoms* (1826) and, as James alludes, Story's literary treatment of Malham Cove and Gordale Scar followed on from Nicholson's *Airedale in Ancient Times and Other Poems*, (1825).<sup>86</sup> Although there is no doubt that Nicholson was the catalyst for *Craven Blossoms*, attempts at identifying the poet's literary echoes in Story's work should be approached cautiously. A simple comparative analysis shows there were, in fact, significant overlaps between Nicholson's and Story's aesthetic prior to them ever meeting. Both of these writers were following the same pastoral form adopted by countless other self-taught poets during the early nineteenth-century.<sup>87</sup> Story begins his poem, 'The Heath Is Green' (1816), with the lines 'The heath is green on Roseden Edge, / The sweet-brier rose begins to bloom'.<sup>88</sup> The first lines of Nicholson's 'Love On The Heath' (circa 1825) were very similar: 'ON the heath-vestur'd hills, where I courted my Sally, / Like stars

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<sup>84</sup> See chapter five of this thesis to see how Isobel Armstrong, in her otherwise ground-breaking study on labouring-class writers, was unaware of Story's friendship with Nicholson and incorrectly positions them in direct opposition to each other.

<sup>85</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. xxxix.

<sup>86</sup> Robert Storey, *Craven blossoms: or, poems chiefly connected with the district of Craven* (Skipton: Printed for the author by J. Tasker, 1826). N.B. At the time of publishing the poet had not yet changed his name from Storey to Story.

<sup>87</sup> For the pastoral form and self-taught poets see Maidment's subchapter, "'Such Gems as Moorland Drew": nature poetry, pastoral, and self-taught writers', in *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, pp. 136-147.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Story, 'The Heath is Green' in *The Poetical Works of Robert Story*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857), p.1.

was the bloom on the cranberry stalk'.<sup>89</sup> Although Story's poem predates Nicholson's *Airedale in Ancient Times* they underpin their northern landscapes with the same fertility symbolised by the verb and noun 'bloom'. Their shared imagery illustrates how they were working within an explicit pastoral tradition and independently invoking an almost identical narrative that connected labouring-class writers to natural genius.

It is important to consider the extent to which Nicholson's premature death in 1843 affected Story's ideas of community and solidarity.<sup>90</sup> Although not as debilitating as Goodridge suggests the news of Bloomfield's death was for Clare, Nicholson's passing appears to have made Story's feelings of isolation and seclusion more acute.<sup>91</sup> Despite Nicholson being a chronic alcoholic Story placed the blame for the poet's death squarely at the feet of his patrons and sponsors and these lines taken from Story's elegy for Nicholson, 'Mute is the Lyre of Ebor', emphasise the neglect of the poet by those around him: 'Ay, mourn him—whom ye left to mourn! / Give him a stone—ye gave not bread'.<sup>92</sup>

The wealthy landowner George Lane Fox paid for Nicholson's tombstone.

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<sup>89</sup> John Nicholson, 'Love On The Heath', in *Poems by John Nicholson and a Sketch of his Life by John James F.S.A.* ed. by W. Dearden, 4th edn (London: W. H. Young, 1859), p. 145.

<sup>90</sup> On the evening of April 13 1843 Nicholson set out from Bradford to visit his aunt. The poet had been drinking and deciding to take a shortcut using stepping-stones to cross the Aire he slipped and was swept down river. Nicholson managed to drag himself onto the banks of the river—a feat James describes as requiring 'great presence of mind and physical strength.' He then crawled to a nearby field where he collapsed and lay unconscious. Nicholson's body was found the following day. His official cause of death was recorded as 'apoplexy owing to the body having been long exposed to water and cold.' It was reported that a 'half-witted fellow' saw Nicholson whilst still alive but, terrified by the sight of the semi-conscious man, fled without helping. When Nicholson's body was eventually found it was still warm and James believed there was 'no question' that he would have been saved if the poet's plight had been reported sooner. James, *Poems by John Nicholson*, xxix.

<sup>91</sup> Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community*, p 96.

<sup>92</sup> Story, 'Mute is the Lyre of Ebor', *The Poetical Works of Robert Story*, (lines 43-44), pp. 278-280.

Although it is unclear whether Story was directly accusing Fox, he implies a certain amount of hypocrisy on the behalf of Nicholson's patron.<sup>93</sup>

Story's eulogy was also a more general response to the indifference of Nicholson's sponsors and their failure to recognise the poet's genius whilst he was still alive.

In what was almost certainly a reference to Nicholson's ill-fated collaboration with Oastler and his flirtation with Tory Radical politics, Story tells us elsewhere that the poet was 'victimised by many who first pampered him then spurned him.'<sup>94</sup> Adopting a language of class, his elegy shows how his ideals of commonality and solidarity with other labouring-class writers were politicised:

The tale is told—what is the tale?  
The same that still the ear hath won,  
As oft in life's humbler vale,  
GENIUS hath recogniz'd a Son.<sup>95</sup>

The chiasmic structure of Story's first line emphasises Nicholson's importance to other self-taught writers but what exactly was his 'tale'? Nicholson's lesson appears to be that despite his socio-economic disadvantages he proved that working people could also be accomplished poets. The idea of narrative is even present in Story's title. Naming Nicholson the 'Lyre of Ebor' he mythologised

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<sup>93</sup> For James' account of George Lane Fox see, *Poems by John Nicholson*, p. xvii.

<sup>94</sup> For Nicholson's support of Oastler see 'The Factory Child'. Alternatively for evidence of their split see his vehement attack on the Ten Hour Movement in 'The Factory Child's Mother'. In my Masters dissertation I argued that Nicholson's Tory Radicalism has been underrepresented by modern scholarship and, when categorising Nicholson as a Conservative poet, his initial condemnation of the factory system should be taken into account. Philip Crown, *John Nicholson (1790-1843), and Robert Story (1795-1860): Reconsidering the Culture and Politics of Conservative Working-Class Poets*, (unpublished master's thesis, Liverpool John Moores University, 2010).

<sup>95</sup> Story, *The Poetical Works of Robert Story*, pp. 278-280.

the writer and framed his drowning within a classical poetic discourse of tragedy and pathos.<sup>96</sup> There is a sense here that Nicholson had overcome his critics but, as Goodridge points out, death as a way of levelling the cultural landscape was always a ‘pyrrhic victory’.<sup>97</sup> There is an intentional elision in Story’s lines. By replacing Nicholson’s sponsors with the ethereal personification ‘GENIUS’, he implies the absence of any earthly recognition from the polite realm of letters. Although Nicholson’s and Story’s companionship is neither proof of their shared cultural identity nor evidence that they even discussed class allegiances, Story was self-consciously structuring a sense of himself through his relationship to another labouring-class writer.

### **Story’s Conclusion**

Returning to his community of writers in the conclusion of *Love and Literature*, and situating their names at either side of his life-writing, he again stresses their importance in reinforcing his cultural identity. There are signs that by the time he reached the end of his autobiography, his group has become even more clearly defined as communitarian.

My brother authors—if I may venture to claim fraternity with them—have come nobly forward. I have a PRINCE who has already “received his fame,” and a COLLINSON who very soon will have; together with a score of others whose esteem I enjoy and reciprocate, but who might shrink from praises which as I know them to be deserved, I rejoice to bestow.<sup>98</sup>

The parity implied in his phrase ‘brother authors’ and the noun ‘fraternity’ echo Story’s attempts at unifying his group and form a definite writerly community.

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<sup>96</sup> Story’s portrayal of Nicholson draws on Classical tragedy and in particular the tale of Orpheus.

<sup>97</sup> John Goodridge, ‘Three Cheers for Mute Ingloriousness!: Gray’s Elegy in the Poetry of John Clare’, *Critical Survey*, 11.3 (1999), pp. 11-20 (p. 16).

<sup>98</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 262.

His use of dashes in the opening line also works to connect and symbolically bind each individual writer. Whilst his privileged position as narrator gives him a certain amount of natural authority and he assumes the role of editor and patron, he also rejects the ideal of individualism. The repetition of the pronoun 'I' and the possession implied in the clause 'I have a Prince', illustrates how Story acts as a mediator between the 'fraternity' and their audience. Singling out individual poets that he felt best represented the self-taught tradition, his editorial voice was sociable and demonstrates how he took responsibility for the group. Story never doubted the collaboration of Prince and Collinson and his request for permission to form an alliance is, of course, rhetorical. The fact that Story was able to 'bestow' recognition on other self-taught poets illustrates how he saw himself as a leader of these writers. Although there is a clear sense of pace and progression in Story's speech, his syntax in the first sentence causes the reader to pause twice and the flow is interrupted whilst he appears to figuratively pick up Prince and Collinson and carry them along with him. The sense of duty implied by his assertion that these poets 'have come nobly forward' suggests how Story is recruiting his group and willing them into action. His belief that his fraternity are ready to bravely step forth is full of optimism for a new generation of labouring-class writers. Where he traces his group he is using it to promote a new era of literary and cultural advancement. If we accept that Story believed that the economic emancipation of nineteenth-century working people was contingent on cultural equality, then his writerly community was a political mode of self-representation.

## Chapter 4

### **‘Words which were seared into my brain as if by characters of fire!’: *Critics and Scribblers of the Day***

#### **Introduction**

This thesis recovers for the first time Story’s satirical pamphlet *Critics and Scribblers of the Day, a Satire by a Scribbler* (1827).<sup>1</sup> Returning this important example of labouring-class satire to its rightful author, allows a rethinking of the ways in which self-taught poets resisted contemporary critical discourse that impeded their path to publication.<sup>2</sup> *Critics and Scribblers*’ purpose was to expose the corruption and prejudice of London’s and Edinburgh’s most distinguished publications, including *Blackwoods*, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, *The Literary Gazette*, and *The New Monthly Magazine*.<sup>3</sup> In attacking some of the most prominent literary figures and critics of his day Story was, for a number of years, exiled by the literary establishment. The pamphlet was undoubtedly driven by his desire for cultural equality as a distinctly labouring-class writer : through its publication he was shaping a literary sense of himself in opposition to a ‘metropolitan other’.<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically his single most important measure of success was the opinion of the metropolitan literary press. There were of course other ways of appearing in print but for a writer of Story’s cultural ambition

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Story, *The Critics and Scribblers of the Day: A Satire by a Scribbler* (London: Henry Washbourn, 1827).

<sup>2</sup> The British Library, Copac and Oxford University have until now listed Story’s pamphlet as anonymous.

<sup>3</sup> Story’s accusations of inequality are substantiated by modern scholarship. Brian Maidment states ‘Literary relationships, which had changed so much for the increasingly professional metropolitan writer... still seemed designed to enable the middle classes alone to articulate their attitudes and ideologies while preventing the working populace from appearing in print.’ Brian Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-taught poets and poetry in Victorian Britain*, ed. by B. Maidment (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1987), p. 323

<sup>4</sup> For the formation of British identity and opposition to the metropolitan other see Katrina Navickas’, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 44.

these were only ever pyrrhic victories. He resented being dependent on the philanthropy and altruism of others and, though he would, probably, have denied this, he saw his supporters in the provinces as subaltern voices in an otherwise silent hierarchy of literary commentators.<sup>5</sup> Without the consent of the metropolitan press he would forever be prevented from moving beyond his local celebrity.<sup>6</sup> In recovering Story's vehement campaign, I seek to correct a prominent gap in existing scholarship on the difficulties of publication for nineteenth-century labouring-class writers. While David Vincent correctly claims that publication during the early part of the nineteenth century was easier than we would first expect, there is a tendency to overlook the importance of the metropolitan press in validating the work of self-taught poets. Moreover, in *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, Brian Maidment tells us that he was unable 'to find much discussion of the difficulties of publishing from self-taught poets themselves'.<sup>7</sup> Even the journals of John Clare, whom Maidment considered the 'exception', provided hardly anything more than 'occasional insights into the problems which beset the publication of self-taught poetry.'<sup>8</sup>

However, Story was not, of course, the first poet to attack the literary establishment or the metropolitan press: in challenging the cultural legitimacy of the literary establishment he was adapting, and engaging with, an existing body of work. Indeed, intertextuality was a key theme in the composition of *Critics*

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<sup>5</sup> David Vincent *Bread Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1981), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Story's attitudes are not unusual. He represents what Maidment describes as the desire of self-taught poets 'to transcend the local, and to enter the world of literary London.' Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p.326.

<sup>7</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 329.

<sup>8</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 329. Story probably feared retribution for publishing his pamphlet. The text's anonymity hints at one of the reasons why evidence of this type is so difficult to find.



*and Scribblers of the Day*. Story's reply to his critics was shaped by an earlier tradition of satirical writing. Designating himself a 'Scribbler' in the title of his pamphlet he was of course aligning himself with the eighteenth-century Scriblerus Club.<sup>9</sup> Story makes a connection, albeit a tenuous one, between the Scriblerians' rejection of modern intellectual life and his own contempt for the literary establishment in London and Edinburgh. In particular, he exploited Pope's earlier claims that professional writers and critics such as Lewis Thobald were debasing literary culture.<sup>10</sup> The alliance, however, is problematic. Whilst Story's satire draws heavily on Pope's mock epic *The Dunciad* (1728), he himself, as a plebeian poet, would have almost certainly been rejected by the conservative Scriblerians and deemed a symptom of false learning.

Story was not the first self-taught poet to invoke the Scriblerus Club. The plebeian poet James Woodhouse published excerpts from his memoirs under the pseudonym "Crispinus Scriblerus" (1814, 1816).<sup>11</sup> In so doing both upturn literary hierarchies. By promoting himself as a distinctly labouring-class writer, Story, and to some extent Woodhouse before him, undermine the cultural

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<sup>9</sup> The key members of the Scriblerus Club (1714-1745) were Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Gay, Thomas Parnell and John Arbuthnot. The Scriblerians collaborated on the satirical text *Memoirs of the extraordinary life, works, and discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus* (1741). There is a vast body of scholarship on the Scriblerus Club but for a brief synopsis of the literary circle see Paul Goring, *Eighteenth-century Literature and Culture* (London: Continuum, 2008). For its relationship to satirical modes of writing see *A Companion to Satire Ancient and Modern*, ed. by R. Quintero (West Sussex, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011). For the parodic practices of the Scriblerians and their 'war on hacks and popular writers' see Simon Dentith's *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 96-122.

<sup>10</sup> Imitations of Pope were a dominant trope of labouring class writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: 'In terms of awareness of new-classical poetry and poetics, the influence of Pope upon eighteenth-century labouring-class poets were extensive.' John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan, 'John Clare and the traditions of Labouring-class verse', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*, ed. by T. Keymer and J. Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 280-295 (p. 286).

<sup>11</sup> James Woodhouse (1735-1820), *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*, written c. 1800, *Life and Poetical works*, ed. by R. I. Woodhouse (London: Leadenhall Press, 1896) For James Woodhouse see William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (London: Associated University Press, 2001), p. 186.

conservatism of the Scriblerians. In gate-crashing the Scriblerus Club, and teasing out the censure of Pope, Swift, Gay, and Arbuthnot, he was being intentionally provocative. Story was, like many other labouring-class poets, a great admirer of Pope's work but the writer did not intimidate him. Indeed, there are signs that he twisted Pope's own parody of the classical-hero in *The Dunciad* to fit his own cultural experiences as a distinctly self-taught writer. Where Pope creates a protagonist who is incapable of influencing either the plot or those around him, Story's anti-hero in *Scribblers and Critics* is rendered both impotent and powerless by the overwhelming judicial authority of the metropolitan press. Story's subversion of Pope was a departure from the 'Reverential invocations and imitations...' found in the work of many eighteenth-century plebeian poets.<sup>12</sup> However, his attempt at adapting and reshaping earlier modes of writing to correspond with labouring-class experience was not unique. John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan suggest John Clare 'both responds to and resists polite poetic discourses available to him... drawing on mainstream eighteenth-century poems like Gray's *Elegy* or Pomfret's *The Choice*, but often transforming them to answer his own needs.'<sup>13</sup>

Byron's poem *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, A Satire* (1809) is another obvious but important source of intertextuality for Story's pamphlet. Where Byron constructs himself as an English poet challenging the Scottish press, Story considered himself a Border poet who was, in the main, contesting English reviewers in London. Byron's attack on the Edinburgh critics Henry Brougham

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<sup>12</sup> Goodridge and Keegan identify 'Henry Jones, Mary Leapor, and the itinerant player and poet Cuthbert Shaw' as being reverential towards Pope. Goodridge and Keegan, 'John Clare and the traditions of Labouring-class verse', p. 286.

<sup>13</sup> Goodridge and Keegan, 'John Clare and the traditions of Labouring-class verse' p. 281.

and Capel Lofft offered Story a way of justifying and legitimising his own assault on the metropolitan literary press.<sup>14</sup> In fact, he was prepared to go further than Byron. In accusing and naming a long list of influential literary figures of ‘puffing’, he revealed how the shared commercial interests of established poets and their publishers worked to exclude labouring-class writers from the marketplace. And yet, the connection he makes with Byron is again more complicated than it first appears. As well as satirising his critics in Edinburgh, Byron used his poem to ridicule the success of labouring-class writers Bloomfield, Burns, and Gifford. William Christmas points out how Byron’s criticism of the self-taught tradition echoed Scriblerian attitudes towards the eighteenth-century plebeian poets ‘Stephen Duck and John Bancks.’<sup>15</sup> Maidment also identifies what he describes as Byron’s ‘Olympian contempt’ for labouring-class writers as an example of the types of prejudice that self-taught poets had to endure.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, one of Byron’s grievances with Capel Lofft appears to have been that his patronage and support of Bloomfield encouraged other working people to pursue poetry.

Crucially, Story was again being intentionally perverse in appropriating Byron’s poetic framework. He was satirising Byron’s cultural conservatism, presenting himself and other self-taught poets as unfairly excluded by these types of discourses. While Maidment is correct in suggesting Byron’s commentary worked to protect the existing literary hierarchy, Story’s satire indicates that these forms of control were not as debilitating as might appear. He not only

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<sup>14</sup> For Henry Brougham’s review of Byron’s *the Hours of Idleness* (1807) see Henry Brougham, ‘Review of Byron, Hours of Idleness’, *Edinburgh Review*, 11 (Jan 1808), pp. 285-88, *English Poetry 1579-1830: Spenser and the Tradition*, < <https://goo.gl/po4iLX> > [accessed 20 Oct 2017].

<sup>15</sup> Christmas, *The Lab’ring Muses*, p. 278.

<sup>16</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhopuse Fugitives*, p. 290.

ignored the restrictions put in place by Byron and Pope but also appropriated their work and used it to assert his own identity as a poet writing from below. Moreover, Story's noun 'scribbler' was not always used to invoke the Scriblerus Club or Byron. It was also appropriated from Southey's response to Byron: 'His Lordship has thought it not unbecoming in him to call me a scribbler of all work.' The irony and self-deprecation implied in Story's title was an attempt to replicate Southey's deference and the poet's decision to 'let the word scribbler pass'. In pairing Southey and Byron against each other, he hints at the undercurrent of class-consciousness running just below the surface of his narrative. He was using the term scribbler to align himself with a number of prominent self-taught poets who he deemed to have either attracted unfair criticism or, like Story, had been neglected by the literary establishment. He clearly saw Southey as a champion of the self-taught tradition and here he was positioning the poet's support of John Jones in direct contradiction to Byron's criticism of Bloomfield.<sup>17</sup> This chapter's critical framework, then, also interrogates Maidment's insistence that self-taught writers 'were inhibited and controlled by middle-class values and ideologies'.<sup>18</sup> Story not only clearly understood how these discourses subordinated him as a writer, he also sought to defy and challenge the limitations they imposed on him.

### ***Craven Blossoms* (1826): Provincial Press**

In attacking some of the most prominent writers and critics of his day Story was labelled a pariah in London and pushed even further to the margins. His

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<sup>17</sup> See Robert Southey's essay 'On the Lives and Works of our Uneducated Poets', introduction to *Attempts in verse, by John Jones, an Old Servant, Written by Himself*, (London: John Murray, 1831), pp. 1-168. Although John Jones' collection was published in 1831 Southey's essay appeared in *The Spectator* as early as 1825, almost contemporaneously with Story's satirical pamphlet.

<sup>18</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 286.

exclusion supports Maidment's claims that demands for cultural equality made by working people were 'read as a symptom of wider, more disruptive aspirations.'<sup>19</sup> Maidment is cautious as to whether the decision to annex self-taught writers was 'conscious', but argues that there are 'several places where the apparently "tacit" or "hidden" ways in which such ideological control operated becomes more obvious'.<sup>20</sup> The dismissal of Story's second publication, *Craven Blossoms* (1826), in London was one such place where the polite realm of literature was being policed.<sup>21</sup> In its introduction he insisted that readers should not, under any circumstances, make allowances for his social and economic background. Story's conflict with the metropolitan literary press can be traced to the reception of this earlier piece.

At first glance this small collection of verse appears unexceptional and there is little to suggest that its publication would, for a time, destroy the poet's reputation. Story was now a regular correspondent to a number of provincial magazines and his loco-descriptive ballads hint how he was adapting and shaping his work to suit the literary tastes of his audience. In the absence of any real objective criticism the provincial press was a cultural space through which he could measure and develop his poetry. His provincial appeal is demonstrated by

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<sup>19</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 282.

<sup>20</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 286.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Storey *Craven Blossoms: or, Poems Chiefly Connected with the District of Craven* (Skipton: J. Tasker, 1826)

the extravagant praise his book received from *The Newcastle Magazine*.<sup>22</sup> In the following extract its editor, William Andrew Mitchell, foregrounds the publication's relationship with Story.<sup>23</sup> Relying heavily on a discourse of paternalism and shared cultural experience, he presents its readership as being directly responsible for the poet's apparent success.

Our readers have known Mr Storey long, though he has come to them in disguise;—but in every form in which they have seen him he has deserved and received their warmest approbation.—When we and our readers are agreed then as to his powers, we do not think we can be much blamed for thus commencing our brief notice of his little volume. Blame or no blame, however, “what is writ, is writ” — what we have written we think—written it with feelings of exultation, as we said at first we should do, because Mr Storey has ‘grown up and become strong’ in his poetical

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<sup>22</sup> *The Newcastle Magazine* (1820-1831) first appeared as a literary magazine but, as it was facing direct competition from the major publishers in London, its editor, W. A. Mitchell reduced its price to one shilling and re-launched the magazine under more generalised themes: ‘achieving an impressive blend of contents within its reopened fifty-six octavo pages: history, theology, geography, chemistry, antiquarianism, natural history, fine art, poetry, drama, mathematics.’ *The Newcastle Magazine* was the sister publication to the better known *Tyne Mercury, and Northumberland and Durham Gazette* (1802-1845): ‘This paper [*The Tyne Mercury*] is not distinguished by any particular set of principles, but advocates the cause of reform generally, and treats of local abuses, improvements, the fine arts, &c. with spirit and discrimination.’ Mitchell appears to adopt a similar political stance at the *Newcastle Magazine* and its moderate Radicalism, at least initially, was compatible with Story's own politics prior to his conversion to the Conservative Party in the late 1820s: ‘Mr. MITCHELL steadily advocated the freedom of the people, popular government, a free press, and the principles of rational liberty...’ Citations in order of appearance: Maurice Milne, ‘The Mitchell Family of Newcastle Upon Tyne’, *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, 10.4 (Dec., 1977), pp. 174-182 (p. 177). Enease Mackenzie, *Periodical Publishing in the Provinces: A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Town and Country of Newcastle Upon Tyne, Including the Borough of Gateshead*, (Newcastle: Mackenzie & Dent, 1827), I, pp. 728-729. *Carlisle Journal*, 29 Nov 1845, p. 3, col. 7, on *Rootsweb, Ancestry.com* <<https://goo.gl/a7SWJy>> [accessed 15 May 2017].

<sup>23</sup> William Andrew Mitchell (1796-1842) was one of Story's closest friends and allies. He belonged to a well-known publishing family and was the editor, publisher and printer, of both the *Newcastle Magazine* and the *Tyne Mercury*. Mitchell was also the secretary of the Institution for the Promotion of Fine Arts and the Newcastle Mechanics Institute. He had a strong sense of social justice and, writing under the pseudonym Peter Putright, he sought to expose corruption in urban towns and cities. His political sentiments were greatly influenced by the Enlightenment thinker John Locke and his book length treatise, *An Essay on Capacity and Genius* (1820), illustrates the relationship between an individual's ability and the immediate social and economic conditions in which they lived: ‘... there is no original mental superiority between the most illiterate and the most learned of mankind; and that no genius, whether individual or national, is innate, but solely produced by and dependent on circumstances.’ Despite the *Newcastle Magazine*'s more generalised themes, literature and poetry remained the cornerstone of Mitchell's stewardship. Indeed, the editor was himself the author of the poem ‘The Thoughts of One that Wandereth’ (1819) and the play *Crohore of the Bill Hook* (1826). William A. Mitchell, *An Essay on Capacity and Genius* (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1820), Title page, and Maurice Milne, ‘The Mitchell Family of Newcastle Upon Tyne’, pp. 728-729.

existence under our own eyes and as it were under our special guardianship.<sup>24</sup>

Although Mitchell's language is melodramatic there was some substance to his claims that the *Newcastle Magazine* had nurtured and cultivated Story's talent. Indeed the editor was well known for his support of other labouring-class writers and was patron to the 'Bard of Tyneside' Robert Gilchrist (1797-1844). Many of the poems included in *Craven Blossoms* first appeared in this magazine and it offered Story a platform through which he could test and develop his work before publishing by subscription. Story's appearance in print represented the longstanding collaboration between the poet, the magazine, and its readership. In celebrating his publication Mitchell's review endorsed the communitarian values of its audience. Yet the editor still deemed it necessary to defend his review. The idiom 'what is writ, is writ' underlines a tension between the provincial press and the literary establishment and his assertion suggests that their attitudes towards labouring-class writers were disparate. While he was resolute in his recognition of Story's achievements, he anticipated a negative response from the metropolitan press to both *Craven Blossoms* and his own review. This in turn implies the autonomy of the provincial press. To some extent Mitchell and his readership exist independently of the literary establishment. Although he expects to attract negative criticism for his endorsement he appears relatively free to connect his publication to a labouring-class writer without jeopardising his own cultural authority. His 'special guardianship' suggests Story's vulnerability as a provincial self-taught writer;

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<sup>24</sup> William. A. Mitchell, 'Remarks on Craven Blossoms', *The Newcastle Magazine*, March 1826, collected edn January to December 1826, 10 vols (Newcastle Upon Tyne: W. A Mitchell, 1826), V, pp. 108-111 (p. 109).

throughout, *The Newcastle Magazine* emphasises its own role in helping Story to overcome the disadvantages of his socio-economic background. Although the review falls just short of placing Story alongside Byron and Scott, it does suggest that he has the potential to become their equal. The comparison undermines both literary convention and existing cultural discourses that separate established authors from their labouring-class counterparts:

Though too young to call ourself [sic] his father, we have been as far as we could an elder brother to this genius, and if he should become a Byron or a Scott, or an equal of those shining lights in the firmament of lyrical glory, we shall still claim ourselves the share we have had in fostering his youth, we shall still shed the tear of paternal joy when we are told the deeds of the might of his maturity.<sup>25</sup>

Story's struggle to realise his literary ambitions and overcome the disadvantages of his economic background are mythologized. We have already seen in previous chapters how, in foregrounding Story's innate poetic 'genius', Mitchell follows a well-trodden narrative on labouring-class writers. Mitchell's invocation of Story's innate ability contradicts his later book *An Essay on Capacity and Genius* (1820), in which he sets out to repudiate the idea of natural genius. Goodridge and Keegan note that 'despite the evidence of erudition in much labouring-class poetry, the myth of genius remained powerful, if powerfully deceiving, rubric within which to read it.'<sup>26</sup> Mitchell here hints at the almost impossible task of speaking or commentating on Story's work without resorting to the conventional discourses and idioms associated with labouring-class writers. Furthermore, he adopts a number of classical literary tropes that elevate Story's cultural achievements to the heroic, challenging associations of

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<sup>25</sup> W. A. Mitchell, 'Remarks on Craven Blossoms', p. 109.

<sup>26</sup> Goodridge and Keegan, 'John Clare and the traditions of Labouring-Class Verse,' p. 286.



passivity. The agency implied in Story's courageous 'deeds' of 'lyrical glory' alludes to the obstacles that the poet had to overcome in order to publish.

Understandably this initial response to his book inflated Story's confidence and increased his expectations of its overall reception. Mitchell's overindulgent and highly sentimental appraisal of Story's work disarmed the poet and left him unprepared for the cold indifference of the metropolitan literary press.

This elevation of Story's ability can be traced to his ambitious introduction in *Craven Blossoms*. In requesting that his book be measured on literary merit alone the author's opening address to the critics suggests he has overestimated his own talent. Story recognised that by viewing his work through the clouded lens of his socio-economic background middle-class commentators simultaneously offered him clemency for his formal deficiencies and worked to subordinate him as a labouring-class writer. He categorically rejected the offer of leniency and, demanding the same treatment as everyone else, attempted to renegotiate the terms of his relationship with the critical establishment:

In appearing before the public, I shall not seek to deprecate the severity of criticism by a statement of disqualifications arising from situation and circumstances; however true such a statement might be, or however it might be called for in extenuation of the many defects in my compositions. It is internal value alone, which finally decides the character of every work, and by that standard I am willing, nay solicitous, that mine should now be estimated. I would rather have it consigned to instant oblivion, as being unworthy of notice, than it should constitute an ephemeral wonder, and be pronounced "very fair—all things considered!"<sup>27</sup>

Story was no longer satisfied with his peripheral role on the margins. In correcting his language from 'willingness' to 'solicitous', he is testing his

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<sup>27</sup> Storey, *Craven Blossoms*, p. iv

cultural authority and taking a significant step towards being an active participant in the critical practices through which his work is measured. Story recognised the disparate ways in which critics approached the work of self-taught writers and begins to articulate what Maidment describes as ‘the inconsistencies of the prevailing literary systems.’<sup>28</sup> The negative connotation of Story’s term ‘disqualifications’ hints at how, by deferring any formal deficiencies, the apparent altruism of middle-class commentators, surreptitiously prevented labouring-class writers from entering the polite realm of literature. If Story was unable to withstand the traditional measures that educated authors were assessed by then he would always exist on the boundaries of the conventional marketplace. Foregrounding the ‘internal value’ of his poetry Story rejects the external ‘circumstances’ that denigrate his book as something less than those of established authors and poets. The introduction to *Craven Blossoms* is driven by his pursuit of cultural equality and his desire to see his work taken seriously.

### ***Craven Blossoms*: Metropolitan Response**

In challenging and transgressing the existing expectations of labouring-class writers, Story drew unwanted attention from the metropolitan press. Encouraged by his favourable review in *The Newcastle Magazine* and many other local publications, he sent several copies of his new book to London where it was completely ignored with one exception. *The Gentleman’s Magazine* singled out and ridiculed the poet’s request that he be given no leniency for his background

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<sup>28</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 327.

and, refusing to review *Craven Blossoms* any further, gave a pledge to its readers to disregard Story's work until it improved.<sup>29</sup>

The author of *Craven Blossoms* has spurned somewhat contemptuously the mercy which might be shown to his volume by reference to his situation and circumstances, and bravely pleading the "general issue," demands to be tried by his merits. His little volume, it appears, has been honoured by the names of 300 subscribers, "including some of the proudest and most respected names that Craven or that England knows." *Bravissimo!* Far be it from us to attempt to undervalue what the "Craven" district has patronized, and the "Newcastle Magazine" has approved. We will suspend our opinion until our Author shall favour us with his more "extended efforts;" in the meantime, as Johnson observed, *We can wait.*<sup>30</sup>

Focusing almost exclusively on Story's introduction, *The Gentleman's Magazine* suggests that the poet's decision to forgo any leniency was its primary reason for rejecting his work.<sup>31</sup> In reprinting a disproportionate number of lines from his opening address, the review parodies the poet's authorial voice. Its excessive use of quotation also mocks Story's pursuit of independence and undermines his assertion of cultural authority. Moreover, the juridical terms 'mercy' and 'tried' assert that the poet is on trial, sentenced and punished for questioning the existing dialogue between labouring-class writers and the literary establishment.

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<sup>29</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1731-1922) was founded by the English printer and publisher Edward Cave (1691-1754). The publication was extremely successful and its business model was the benchmark for many other eighteenth-century periodicals. It supplied its audience of well-educated male readers with an eclectic mix of contemporary topics and maintained strong links to literature, regularly included essays on poetry. Indeed, the publication had a reputation for satire and had a long-standing relationship with the writer and literary commentator Samuel Johnson. It was Cave's intention that the publication should remain neutral and report on a diverse range of political attitudes. Reporting on parliamentary debates was at this time forbidden and the editor regularly used Swift's fictional Lilliput as a way of codifying his contemporary accounts of the House.

<sup>30</sup> 'Miscellaneous Reviews, No. 63' [*Craven Blossoms*], *The Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1826, collected edn January to June 1826, (London: John Nichols and Son: 1826), XCVI, p. 254.

<sup>31</sup> The critical discourse adopted by the *Gentleman's Magazine* reinforces Maidment's claims that the 'social and political threat offered by proletarian or artisan poetic articulacy is constantly glossed over by focusing the discussion on the literary weakness apparent in the texts.' Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 287.

*The Gentleman's Magazine's* review illustrates how critics and middle-class commentators maintained their cultural dominance through their apparent ownership of specific literary discourses. It was the first publication to employ Samuel Johnson. In appropriating Johnson's sarcastic rebuttal 'We can wait' to snub Story's advances, its reviewer was exploiting the association to define and reinforce its own cultural position within the London-centric literary hierarchy. Where the *Newcastle Magazine* nurtured the poetic talents of a self-taught poet, Robert Story, the *Gentleman's Magazine* retraces its association with Samuel Johnson and depicts itself as directly responsible for cultivating the writing genius of an established author. This attempt to negate Story's aesthetic sensibility through cultural means would have been particularly provocative to a self-taught poet who in his local area was considered to be a custodian of all things literary as well as being a worthy successor to Scott and Byron. Story's provincality was for the *Gentleman's Magazine* a way of demeaning his cultural status. Challenging the tastes of both his subscribers and the *Newcastle Magazine*, the metropolitan publication destabilised a fundamental cornerstone on which the poet had built his literary identity. In questioning the provenance of Story's cultural authority the review threatened to undermine his entire sense of subjectivity as rural self-taught poet. It was, however, above all else the brevity of the review that provoked and inflamed Story's anger. Literally threatening to 'suspend' and withhold its opinion, *The Gentleman's Magazine* was asserting its authority over the poet and excluded him on account of his provincial status.

### **‘The Mind a Barometer; or, The Moods of a Day’ (1826)**

The effects this review had on Story and his literary ambitions were considerable: in the prologue to *Critics and Scribblers* he wrote that it was ‘seared into my brain as if by characters of fire!’<sup>32</sup> What is important is that he was using the disparate critical attitudes of the provincial and metropolitan press as a cultural discourse through which to construct his literary identity as a self-taught poet:

The little volume was however well received in the district, was noticed by the provincial press, and was warmly lauded by the "Newcastle Magazine". I sent a few copies to London, but there, with one exception, it attracted no attention. The exception was a brief paragraph in the "Gentleman's Magazine" which was flippant and cutting enough, certainly; but which, with my present experience of reviews would have little disturbed my equanimity. It was differently reviewed then! I was filled with resentment, and was determined to revenge myself on my critic.<sup>33</sup>

Story is also telling us that, however foolish his actions later appeared, he was not prepared to conform to the expectations and opinions of others. He justifies his actions by foregrounding the opinions of the provincial press and, in this instance, abandoned the persona of the humble poet. Although in this later memoir he adopted a more mature and detached perspective, Story was still using his relationship with the *Newcastle Magazine* to challenge popular discourses that subordinated him. His provincial status offered him the cultural legitimacy to question and challenge the discourses that subordinated him as a labouring-class poet.

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<sup>32</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers of the Day*, p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Story, *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2, p. 92.

Although Story later recognised how his sense of injustice was disproportionate, the considerable amount of archival material surrounding these events hints at their importance to his cultural development. His first response was not *Critics and Scribblers of the Day*, as James suggests, but a prose article titled ‘The Mind a Barometer; or, The Moods of a Day’, (1826) in which he illustrates the mental hardships that labouring-class writers had to endure and overcome, a theme later adapted into the satirical pamphlet. This article was without doubt Story’s initial response to the negative review of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*. It includes many ideas later repurposed in *Critics and Scribblers*, such as Story’s criticism of the poet and critic Letitia Elizabeth Landon. The article was published under the pseudonym ORTESY, an anagram of Storey (spelt with an e)—his name prior to the publication of *The Magic Fountain* in 1829.<sup>34</sup> Story acknowledges that the ways in which he measured his own work were subjective: ‘NO observation has been oftener exemplified, or is the subject of more frequent experience, than this—that the estimate we make of our own abilities rises [sic] and falls with the varying moods of our minds.’<sup>35</sup> Inseparable from the changeable state of his own mind his perceptions were deceptive and unreliable. Here he is beginning to question the way others valued his poetic ability and there are signs that he had grown impatient with his inferior status: ‘I am a bit of a poet myself. In my desponding moods I consider myself a *bit* of a poet.’<sup>36</sup> The qualifier ‘bit’ suggests that there is something lacking or missing from Story’s cultural identity.

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<sup>34</sup> Work published in *The Newcastle Magazine* rarely appears under Story’s real name. He sometimes signs with the letter S, but more articles appear under the pseudonym ORTESY than any other. ‘ORTESY’ is significant in that it is part of Story’s authorial persona. Rhyming with courtesy it may have been chosen because of its connotation of politeness.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Story [written under the Pseudonym ORTESY], ‘The Mind a Barometer; or, The Moods of a Day’, *The Newcastle Magazine*, May 1826, collected edn January to December 1826, 10 vols, (Newcastle Upon Tyne: W. A Mitchell, 1826), V, pp. 195-197.

<sup>36</sup> Story, ‘The Mind a Barometer’, p. 195.

If he is only a ‘*bit* of a poet’ then he is less than the established poets and authors he was attempting to follow. Again Story’s sense of himself as a writer is underpinned by a desire for cultural equality.

Story’s article progresses from his own self-doubt to directly questioning and challenging the outside opinions and influence of critics. He again foregrounds the issues of prejudice, suggesting that he was using the idea of his provincial status as a type of class language.

I began my walk in a bad humour.—“People do not see one’s merit. I want the aids of high birth and fortune to recommend me to their notice, and without these they will not notice me.” Such was the tenor of my meditations.—“Well well !” I added, proudly, “who the devil cares for the review-led boobies of the present generation! I appeal from them to posterity!” “Posterity will never hear the appeal,” was echoed by a sneering demon in my own breast...<sup>37</sup>

In drawing attention to the privileges of ‘high birth and fortune’ Story clearly connects his lack of recognition with his socio-economic circumstances. The association is evidence of his emerging sense of class: throughout he reinforces his literary identity by foregrounding the hardships he faced as a self-taught writer. There are also signs here that he believed that the elitist attitudes of the literary intelligentsia were particularly acute in his contemporary society. His ‘appeal’ to ‘future posterity’ illustrates an historical awareness and suggests how the conditions in which he was writing were transitory. Despite his posturing, however, the ‘sneering’ voice he hears belongs to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* and wrestling with his ‘demon’ Story appears to be attempting to exorcise and drive out the self-doubt it induced. Framing his inner dialogue within a biblical struggle between good and evil, he emphasises the enormous weight of pressure

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<sup>37</sup> Story, ‘The Mind a Barometer’, p. 195.

he felt in resisting convention and questioning the criticism attributed to him as a self-taught writer.

Story's answer to this self-conflict was, somewhat predictably, to invoke his communitarian identity. He contrasts his despair at being ignored in London with his pride at suddenly seeing his new book on the shelves of his local village. Story is negating the criticism of the *Gentleman's Magazine* and at least in some sense shaping the foundations from which he could construct a new cultural sense of himself. Juxtaposing the warm reception of his provincial audience against the cold indifference of the metropolitan press, his literary philosophising challenges the assumption that his 'moods', and ultimately the value of his work, must always be determined by the outside opinions of professional critics.

The hearty welcome of Mr and Mrs M—— chased the cloud at once from my breast. They showed me their library, where my eye soon caught the blue covering of my own publication, exactly in the state in which an author likes best to see the work he has sold: it bore evident marks of usage. I studiously kept my glance on a part of the bookcase where it was not; but Mrs M—— drew my not reluctant attention to it, by taking it in her hand, and bidding me observe the state to which, as she was pleased to say, its merits had reduced it. Mr M—— expressed an opinion equally favourable, and, as I knew them to be fond of reading, and of course acquainted with all the leading poets of the day, I was highly gratified. They invited me to dine, an invitation, too agreeable to be declined; and after taking a few glasses of port, I set out once more, delighted with the encomiums my poetry had elicited.<sup>38</sup>

Opening the door to their house and inviting Story inside the actions of Mr and Mrs M—— symbolise the idea of collective shared experience. They also illustrate how his status as a poet enabled him to move across class boundaries. The 'blue' cover of the book on their shelf identifies it as *Craven Blossoms*, the

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<sup>38</sup> Story, 'The Mind a Barometer' p. 197.



same publication rejected a few weeks earlier by the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Story is positioning his readers' response to his work in direct opposition the negative opinions of the metropolitan press: although major poets are often displayed and placed on show to increase their owner's social status, his books are read over and over until practically worn out. In pointing out their acquaintance with the 'leading poets of the day' he also validates the literary tastes of Mr and Mrs M—— and elevates their opinions of his own book. Story was using the opinions of Mr and Mrs M—— to legitimise and rebuild his cultural identity. This narrative of seeing his book in their relatively small collection of books, and the fact that Story was collecting poor rates from the household, suggests that Mr and Mrs M—— were stolidly middle class and provincial. Their indulgence and admiration of the poet illustrates how his local celebrity appears to transcend socio-economic background and even supersedes the relatively high-status position of Parish Clerk.

We should not, of course, be fooled by Story's article, *The Mind a Barometer*. He wants us to believe that he was satisfied with his provincial status, but his narrative both literally and figuratively links the process of publication to his critical reception in London and Edinburgh. Although he chose to frame his early experiences of publishing within the communal space of his local village, he also tries to conceal a fundamental desire for acceptance by the critical establishment. What is important here is that he was testing both the external discourses that subordinated him as a self-taught writer and his need to conform to these conventions in order to establish himself as more than a '*bit* of a poet'. If, in the short-term Story's new collection of poetry elevated his status within

his local community, to be accepted as a credible poet he had to secure cultural recognition from the metropolitan elite.

### ***Critics and Scribblers of the Day***

The small amount of material from labouring-class writers themselves on the problems of appearing in print, suggests that the common response to this type of rejection appears to have been grudging acceptance. Story was different, however, and he now began work on *Critics and Scribblers of the Day: A Satire. By a Scribbler*, (1827), in which he vehemently attacked the editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and other high profile literary critics for their attitudes towards marginalised poets like himself. The pamphlet contained forty-four-pages, an appendix defending his decision to publish, and eight pages of notes listing individual critics, whom they worked for, and the specific reasons why they had been singled out. Yet in naively holding John Nichols personally responsible for writing the review, Story illustrates the fundamental cultural disadvantages of many rural labouring-class writers.<sup>39</sup> Unlike the editor of the *Newcastle Magazine* who reviewed *Craven Blossoms*, Nichols - the editor of a substantial metropolitan literary publication - was completely unaware of either Story or his book. Worse still, Nichols was dead by the time *Critics and Scribblers of the Day* was ready for print. Faced with the moral dilemma of whether to discard the piece or proceed with its publication, Story chose the latter. Where he again received a favourable review in *The Newcastle Magazine*, in London his satire unsurprisingly caused uproar. *Critics and Scribblers* was

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<sup>39</sup> John Nichols (1745-1826) remained editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine* from 1788 until his death. He maintained the publication's strong literary connections and was the author of *The Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century 1745-1827*, (1812-1815) and *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century* (1817).

branded distasteful and universally condemned.<sup>40</sup> Story at last possessed the power to draw the attention of the metropolitan press but his publication incurred substantial losses and, not without irony, its failure consumed the original fifteen pounds profit he received only a year earlier for *Craven Blossoms*.

*Critics and Scribblers* offers us a significant insight into how some nineteenth-century labouring-class writers directly challenged the authority of the literary establishment. The pamphlet was, from its very start, intentionally provocative. Using a short polemical extract from the body of the poem as his opening page, Story's introduction immediately subverts conventional representations of the humble poet and disregards existing discourses that promote labouring-class self-deprecation:

And must it be so? Shall an author fear  
To render back his critic sneer for sneer?  
To tell the world, in satire sharp and just,  
How mean the censors in whose word they trust?  
No! ere beneath their fiat high we droop,  
Let us at least unmask the awful group;  
Trace if we can, the hidden springs that move  
Their wills to lash, be silent, or approve;  
And shew them ever in an honest song,  
Right but by chance, by taste and nature wrong!<sup>41</sup>

Story begins by interrogating the asymmetrical dialogue between marginalised writers and the London-centric critics who rejected him on account of his self-taught status. He refused to be silenced by his 'censors' and, in opening with a succession of questions, was testing and subverting the existing cultural conventions that prohibited him from challenging the judicial authority of the

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<sup>40</sup> Whilst publishing anonymously allowed Story to distance himself from the piece, it appears that he purposely made it known that he was the author.

<sup>41</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, Title page.

literary establishment. Adopting a satirical mode of writing reminiscent of Pope, Story's rhetorical 'And must it be so?' destabilises the authority of the Metropolitan intelligentsia and its overreliance on the aesthetic judgement of a number of prominent critics. The anonymity of Story's voice, moreover, gives the appearance that he is speaking for all self-taught poets. He uses the archaism 'fiat high' to describe the omniscient power of his critics and their seemingly insurmountable position within the literary hierarchy. Their demands and strictures are represented as out of reach, separated from the lives and experiences of most working people. According to Story the critical tradition had become tainted and, again echoing Scriblerian sentiments, he uses a well-trodden literary discourse to connect publication and print culture and the greed of nineteenth-century industrial society. He offers his 'honest song' and its suggestion of shared communitarian experience, as an alternative to the profit driven interests of the literary marketplace.

Story was directly accusing the London press of censorship and shaping the critical landscape to restrict the access of self-taught poets. Although Maidment is understandably cautious as to whether this type of ideological control was conscious, Story appears to have had no doubts. The poet's call to 'unmask the awful group' is shot through with irony and, though he was ridiculing the anonymity of critics and literary commentators, Story's final exclamation marks the movement from questioning the role of the critic to publically denouncing the metropolitan literary press and demanding change. The first clause of his last line, 'they are right but by chance', underlines the arbitrary and artificial position of power that educated critics hold over self-taught poets. Story reminds us that

cultural inequality was maintained through a hierarchy largely contingent on rank and class privilege.

Story was fighting for parity but he went further than satirising a number of prominent literary critics. Story was also acting out the role of the critic: his poem is evidence of a labouring-class writer explicitly adopting a strategy of self-determination. Having exposed the prejudice and corruption of the metropolitan literary press through in his initial verse extract, he uses prose satire to describe why he deems himself worthy of positions as both critic and editor:

...As to my brother scribbler, it seemed proper that I should examine into their claims to that distinction that had been denied to me. This I have done freely; yet I am sure the unprejudiced reader will admit, that I have not suffered my discontent to blind my discrimination—that if I have been liberal of censure, I have by no means been parsimonious of praise.<sup>42</sup>

Story's offer to review the work of his 'brother' authors is a direct challenge to the *Gentleman's Magazine* and its decision to withhold its opinion of his publication *Craven Blossoms*. In the absence of any legitimate criticism Story presents himself as a credible alternative. It can be argued that, in assuming the role of the critic, he was only aping the existing discourses that he seeks to discredit; however, his categorisation 'brother scribbler' indicates a fundamentally different relationship between critic and author. Story foregrounds his connection to other writers and he was attempting to democratise the nineteenth-century literary hierarchy. Through his shared experiences with

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<sup>42</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, Preface.

his ‘brother’ poets, he imagined a new critical framework that worked autonomously and outside of the polite realm of literature.

References to major poets who might help his cause are scattered through *Critics and Scribblers* but it was Wordsworth’s connection to the provinces in particular that resonated with Story’s rendering of a London-centric literary establishment:

You search, from JEFFREY’S famed but faded page  
Down to the poorest weekly of the age;  
By paragraph, by line, the search maintain;  
For praise of WORDSWORTH you shall search in vain.<sup>43</sup>

Story is using Francis Jeffrey’s attacks on Wordsworth in the *Edinburgh Review* to reinforce his own claims of prejudice and neglect. If someone of Wordsworth’s talent could be censured then the existing process for identifying and appraising poetic ability was superficial and fundamentally flawed. Story was essentially deconstructing the practices through which the metropolitan press maintained its control over the nineteenth-century literary marketplace. He reminds us how Wordsworth’s poetry has outlived the now ‘faded pages’ of the publications that once failed to recognise his work and, in doing so, implies that taste and conventional forms of criticism are insubstantial and transitory whereas poetic genius is permanent.

Story’s text is extremely self-conscious in that the poet questions then rejects his own pursuit of fame. Its narrative, then, is as much about personal redemption as it is revenge. He contrasts his vanity and desire for critical approval with the natural innocence and pleasure of simply learning to write verse as a child.

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<sup>43</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 19.

What wonder?—E'en in boyhood's careless time,  
My ear, delighted, drank the flowing rhyme;  
E'en then I tried,—uncensored, unapproved,  
To form an echo of the strain I loved;  
E'en then, like POPE, not yet a fool to fame,  
"I lisped in numbers, and numbers came."<sup>44</sup>

This criticism of Pope supports the idea that Story was satirising the conservative sentiments of the Scriblerian rather than simply appropriating his modes of writing. Indeed, Story was experimenting with a number of different forms: although he maintains the poem's heroic couplets there is a definite movement between the satiric discourses of Pope to the romantic, and even sentimental, prelapsarian imagery of his childhood. Story was separating himself from his educated counterparts by invoking the popular belief that learning and conventional poetic training somehow reversed the natural genius of labouring-class. He demystifies and then democratises the concept of poetic ability by foregrounding his simple desire to reproduce rhythm and metre. The suggestion that he first 'lisped' implies the innocence of a child attempting to speak his first words but, moving from adolescence to adulthood, he has somehow become distracted by the pursuit of fame. Story longs to return to a time, when, 'uncensored' and 'unapproved', he no longer deems the endorsement of others an essential requirement for cultural legitimacy.

Story's desire to dispense with the metropolitan press and return to anonymity was, of course, affectation. Indeed, in the absence of any objective measure of his ability he was forced to seek other sources of criticism and was at times completely dependent on the highly subjective opinions of his friends. He

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<sup>44</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 6.

clearly struggles to reconcile these tensions, attempting an awkward juxtaposition of the critical insights of his companions and the expertise of the literary elite in London:

My friends have answered. G—— the profound  
Allowed my numbers sense, as well as sound;  
And M——, graced with all the critic's lore,  
Read, and commended. Need I mention more?<sup>45</sup>

Despite his posturing Story understood that any leniency shown towards his work was nearly as harmful as the intolerant stance of metropolitan press. His lines unintentionally draw attention to the difficulty he had in finding a reliable critical perspective. 'G—— the profound' is William Gourley, an autodidact and self-taught mathematician who until the age of twenty worked as a ploughman; 'M——' is the editor of the *Newcastle Magazine*, William Andrew Mitchell. What matters here is that we know from Story's manuscripts that both Gourley and Mitchell were close companions of the poet. In the absence of any nonpartisan criticism Story is left with only his friends to measure and develop his poetic ability. Gourley and Mitchell possess a certain amount of regional status but their reputations hold little influence outside the local area. Although Mitchell was the editor of a provincial literary magazine his own attempts at poetry were limited and he was better known for the publication of a scientific treatise. Moreover, the fact that Story uses Gourley's expertise in mathematics to measure poetic metre illustrates his desperation in trying to validate his work. Story's argument here does little more than illustrate how publication elevates and reinforces his cultural status within his immediate peer group.

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<sup>45</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 7.



Unable to secure the approval of the literary press in London and Edinburgh, Story was now solely dependent on local support. Surprisingly he chose this moment as an opportunity to satirise his hard-won relationships and alliances in the provinces. The local patronage system was also counterintuitive to his ambition of being self-sufficient.<sup>46</sup> He resented having to bow and scrape to patrons and subscribers and, at least for now, was no longer prepared to play the role of the humble poet. *Critics and Scribblers*, then, was a polemic against all types of cultural control even when it was dressed in the guise of philanthropy:

Yet one resource remains; which, let me hint,  
The best have practiced—By subscription print.  
But let them tell, who have the canvass tried,  
How uncongenial with the throb of pride  
Which swells the breast of Genius—to descend,  
And court each sordid wretch to be your friend;  
To ask the paltry sum (by you so judged,)  
And yet to know that trifle will be grudged;  
To bear the taunts of birth-proud fops, and feel  
Yourself the nobler, yet that thought conceal!<sup>47</sup>

Story clearly voices his desire for absolute independence, rejecting all forms of cultural deference.<sup>48</sup> The unconventional movement of Story's argument subverts the ways in which labouring-class poets were expected to behave. His derogatory description of his patrons challenges the dedicatory lines that most if not all labouring-class writers (including Story himself) usually used to frame their publications. He appears set on his martyrdom. Although *Critics and*

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<sup>46</sup> Story's directness was unusual but he was, of course, not alone in resenting his dependency on the handouts of those he deemed less qualified. For examples of this type of resistance see James Woodhouse and his acrimonious split from Edward Montagu in Christmas', *The Lab'ring Muses*, p. 184. See also John Critchley Prince's preface to *Hours with the Muses* in Maidment's *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 326.

<sup>47</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> Maidment reminds us that deferring 'the development of a potential market' undermined the obvious benefits of the patronage system for 'regional self-taught poetry'. Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 326.

*Scribblers* was published anonymously his contemporaries easily identified him as its author and his decision to publicly criticise the patronage system appears extraordinarily reckless and self-destructive. These lines also show how Story was always extremely self-conscious and aware of class. His eighteenth-century language ‘birth-proud fops’ echoes the archaic patronage system and how its reliance on privilege and rank was now obsolete. Hinting at the vanity of the aristocracy the plural pronoun ‘fops’ was also a way of contesting the masculinity of those who held power over him. In asking for a ‘paltry sum’ Story suggests that labouring-class writers were forced to sell their work below its market value. Articulating his belief that he was ‘nobler’ than his ‘birth-proud’ patrons he was, at least to some extent, questioning the fundamental relationship between class and culture within his contemporary society.

According to the poet his provinciality was also a deciding factor in prohibiting entry to the literary marketplace. He used this position on the margins to directly challenge his critics in the city: ‘Born in the country, bred by dale and downs, / Not mine to pierce the dark cabals in town.’<sup>49</sup> In detaching himself from the critics ‘in town’, Story was constructing a separate cultural identity for himself that to some extent transcended his ideas of class. Story juxtaposes his rural innocence against an inherently corrupt literary establishment and throughout his satire he reveals an existing undercurrent of nepotism that excluded poets existing outside of the normal jurisdiction of the metropolitan literary press:

Yet as in acts the actors oft are shown,  
So by the bards they laud are critics known.

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<sup>49</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 8.

Stand forth, then, mighty men of blank and rhyme,  
In magazines dubbed idols of the time,—<sup>50</sup>

Story's imagery of artifice and performance implied in 'acts' and 'actors' reveals the self-perpetuating and disingenuous relationship between critics and their favoured authors. He accuses critics and their publications of collusion. In working together to promote specific authors they raise their own profiles whilst excluding provincial poets such as Story. Positioning himself on the margins and outside this circle, he foregrounds his identity as a poet and uses his ability as a writer to expose their dishonesty: 'And pardon if my feeble pen essay / To draw your real merits into day—'<sup>51</sup> If Story's 'pen' was 'feeble' it was still a powerful instrument: by challenging popular opinion and rewriting the reviews of his contemporary poets he is literally threatening to bring down the critical establishment.

Story began his alternative editorship by scrutinising Letitia Elizabeth Landon's position as lead reviewer on the *Literary Gazette*, using the popularity of her poetry to reveal alliances between writers and the major literary publications as motivated by shared commercial interests.<sup>52</sup> Here Story's writing is more politicised than the labouring-class poet John Clare. Whilst Clare was an

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<sup>50</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838) was the author of poems *The Fate of Adelaide* (1821), *The Improvisatrice* (1824) and the novel *Romance and Reality* (1831). She regularly published her work in the *Literary Gazette* under the pseudonym L.E.L. for whom she worked as a reviewer. Her career was shadowed by allegations of sexual impropriety. Story's satirical rendition of Landon's circle of influence was founded on an element of truth and relies heavily on reports in the popular press that she was having an illicit affair with the editor of the *Literary Gazette*, William Jerdan. It was widely rumoured that this liaison, and perhaps others, resulted in the birth of an illegitimate child. There are signs, however, that Landon was writing against the patriarchal society in which she found herself and despite these allegations the opinions of modern scholarship suggests that her popularity was justified. Isobel Armstrong observed a subtlety and refinement in Landon's work, arguing she has long been neglected. Isobel Armstrong, *Poetry, Poetics And Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 318-319.

admirer of Landon's work, collecting her poetry when possible, Story was suspicious of her as part of the literary establishment.<sup>53</sup>

But if thy friends, too warm to be discreet,  
Placard and trumpet thee in every street—  
If JERDAN, careless what he puffs or whom,  
Vote thee a garland of perennial bloom—  
If CAMPBELL, won by beauty or by bribes,  
In thy behalf rouse all his monthly scribes—  
If BLACKWOOD, critic of the tender soul,  
Forget in praising thee his wonted growl,  
And prosing NICHOLS, marked by heaven a dunce,  
Surprise the world with liveliness for once—<sup>54</sup>

Categorising Nichols as a 'dunce' and again invoking *The Dunciad's* assault on Grub Street, Story was borrowing Pope's discourse and using it to attack Landon and her supporters in the press. His main complaint was that Landon's popularity was owing to her beauty rather than her poetic ability. By conflating her relationship with a number of prominent literary figures, he undermined Landon's work on the basis that she was a woman writer. His introduction of her, 'Tis Moore in petticoats—or L. E. L', reminds us that the contemporary argument for cultural equality was still largely unconnected to gender.<sup>55</sup> It should also be pointed out that without Landon's alleged impropriety her arrangement with the *Literary Gazette* appears almost identical to Story's relationship with Mitchell and the *Newcastle Magazine*. In foregrounding the contemporary scandal surrounding Landon's personal life, and naming nearly

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<sup>53</sup> For Clare's appreciation of Landon's poetry see John Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 14. Despite Story's criticism of Landon his unpublished literary papers indicate that he later not only approved of woman writers but saw them as a measure of progress. These inconsistencies suggest the potential for further research on Story's attitudes towards women writers. See his poem 'To Miss Lindo on Receiving a Copy of her Hebrew and English Lexicon', March 1846, Robert Story, *Poems in Manuscript*, [literary works], Holograph MS, 1 bundle, (1817-1859), WYASB, MS DB3/C59. p. 293.

every notable critic in London and Edinburgh, Story's text draws on his intimate knowledge of both the popular press and the literary establishment. Story goes further, however, and accuses Landon's supporters of 'puffing' or accepting bribes for direct financial gain: 'This lady is, after all, a very pretty poetess; but the outrageous puffs which her poetry has received, betoken more of gallantry than taste,—and perhaps more of mercenary than either.'<sup>56</sup> According to Story the shared financial interests of the press and a number of prominent publishing houses are counter intuitive to a free marketplace.

There is clear evidence that Story's poem was class specific and that he was speaking on behalf of all self-taught poets.<sup>57</sup> He juxtaposes Landon's privileged position at the *Literary Gazette*, and her intimate relationship with the critic Jerdan, in direct opposition to the superficial support given to more deserving writers and poets such as John Clare and James Hogg. According to Story the existing relationships between labouring-class writers and the metropolitan elite were only ever transitory. He even suggests here that Hogg was nothing more than a curiosity soon to be passed up.<sup>58</sup>

As BLACKWOOD's merriman, [sic] a hired buffoon!  
While Ettrick's mountains blush with native heath.  
But what thy present meed? The scribes, we see,  
That puff all scribblers, scarcely mention thee;  
And Tales and Poems few could write so well,

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<sup>56</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 37. Story believed puffing was a significant difference between the Metropolitan and Provincial press. In promoting and elevating Story's cultural status the *Newcastle Magazine* received no direct financial benefit (other than increasing its own readership).

<sup>57</sup> William J. Christmas claims that James Woodhouse was the first plebeian poet to 'speak self-reflexively for a larger group, in effect, in an entire segment of poor, disenfranchised workers. W. J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses*, p. 187.

<sup>58</sup> James Hogg (1770-1835), was a rural, Scottish labouring-class poet who wrote extensively for *Blackwood's Magazine* under the pseudonym the Ettrick Shepherd. He was also author of the relatively recently published novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (London: Longman, 1824)

Though praised by BLACKWOOD, yet but slowly sell.<sup>59</sup>

Describing Hogg as ‘hired buffoon’ suggests the poet’s fame was bought at too great a cost. He had become a parody of a poet and his comic persona only worked to cheapen the reputation of other self-taught writers. Story also makes an important distinction here between himself and his peers: Hogg’s debasement reminds other self-taught poets to resist the dominant critical discourses that drained their work of its cultural legitimacy. Story also attempts to illustrate how success was almost impossible without the endorsement of the literary establishment in the capital. Despite having great ability and receiving the praise of *Blackwood’s* in Edinburgh, he believed that Hogg’s lack of support in London resulted in poor sales.

Story’s backhanded compliment to William Blackwood suggests that not all sections of the metropolitan literary establishment were the same. In a footnote on the labouring-class poets John Clare and Allan Cunningham he recognised the role of publishers such Taylor and Hessey in championing their cause:

Honest Allan [Cunningham] was a great man in the “London Magazine,” during the proprietorship of Taylor and Hessey. So was Clare. They are now seldom heard of, and, would be forgotten, but for their annual appearance in Mr. Watts’ “Literary Souvenir,” in which flash publication I mean to have a piece next year.<sup>60</sup>

The stewardship of John Taylor and James Hessey, however, was not representative of the wider exploitation and neglect that labouring-class writers had to endure. Story’s line ‘To CLARE, forgot with head and conscience clear’

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<sup>59</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 39.

shows he still believed, somewhat naively, that publishers had a responsibility to nurture the talent of self-taught writers.<sup>61</sup> The preposition ‘To’ in this direct address ‘To CLARE’ emphasises how the protégé was later forgotten and discarded; it was now left to Story and his brother poets to remember his achievements. In drawing attention to this type of neglect Story was, in some sense, dismissing those commentators and critics who may have presented the relatively fleeting fame of Clare as a sign of cultural progression. Anticipating that he would soon appear alongside these poets, in the less than prestigious *Literary Souvenir*, Story ironically suggests that he too would soon be forgotten. He was using the abandonment of Clare and Cunningham as a way of cutting through the paternalistic posturing of many literary commentators. In linking Clare and Cunningham with the publishing house Taylor and Hessey, Story again illustrates a sophisticated knowledge of both the London publishing houses and the contemporary literary marketplace. Where his satire may at first appear crude and unsophisticated, it was in fact an extremely detailed and, at times, perceptive analysis.

Singling out two distinctly self-taught poets, Story was clearly entering into a discourse of class. *Critics and Scribblers* was, at least on some level, a form of protest writing, using satire to challenge cultural inequality. Furthermore, Story was defining himself against the literary discourses that disqualified working people from writing poetry on account of their socio-economic background:

“‘And who art thou?’ A man. Not College-bred, / Yet with some gleams of

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<sup>61</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 22.

learning in my head.’<sup>62</sup> His initial question ‘who art thou?’ clearly indicates the poet’s search for subjectivity and signals how he was using his opposition to the literary establishment in London as a way of interpreting and constructing his identity as a distinctly self-taught poet. He arrives at the conclusion that whilst he may not have received the advantages of a ‘college’ education he is still ‘a man’ of ‘learning’ and knowledge. Story’s stress on the noun ‘man’ also hints again how, in subordinating his cultural authority, he sees existing epistemological discourses on learning and education emasculating him. *Critics and Scribblers*, then, was more than a hastily written response to a poor review in the metropolitan press; it was a protest against the unjust distribution of knowledge that privileged the wealthy and disenfranchised the poor. Indeed, Story presents his decision to publish as an act of transgression and identifies how self-taught writers were seen by some sections of the press to devalue the literary marketplace: ‘Enough, I published—surely no great vice; / My book, if poor in wit, was poor in price’.<sup>63</sup> Story attempted to critique the London intelligentsia for devaluing the self-taught tradition and openly sought to restore parity with his educated counterparts by forging a more egalitarian way of accessing the contemporary marketplace.

## **Conclusion**

After the publication of *Critics and Scribblers*, Story was ostracised by large sections of the metropolitan literary press. *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in particular sought to punish the poet: ‘There are some lines in the present poem that indicate a certain degree of poetical talent, but as the author has determined,

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<sup>62</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 32.

<sup>63</sup> Story, *Critics and Scribblers*, p. 7.



and we think wisely, “No more to murder time / In counting syllables and sinking rhyme;”<sup>64</sup> The London publication also resorted to the same eighteenth-century literary discourses as Story, parodying his inversion of Pope and the Scriblerus Club:

TO the author of this tract we would say, “more in pity than in anger,” that having pointed his shafts with all the venom he possesses, and having discharged them with all the vigour with which he is endowed, we are as unharmed as was Gulliver in the land of Lilliput, when, according to the Historian, —— “The doughty manikins Employed themselves in sticking pins And needles in the great man’s breeches.”<sup>65</sup>

The comical but disproportionate violence implied in the verbs ‘pointing’ and ‘sticking’ suggests again that *The Gentleman’s Magazine* saw Story’s demands for cultural equality as an act of aggression. Its Swiftian satire was a way of undermining his literary vocabulary and an attempt at depriving him of the satirical modes of writing through which he was asserting his cultural authority.<sup>66</sup> In the first instance the publication was comparing Story’s supposedly amusing display of strength and misplaced pride to the Lilliputians. In assuming the role of Gulliver *The Gentleman’s Magazine* invokes the disparate distance in size from Story. Indeed, when the analogy with *Gulliver’s Travels* is followed to its natural conclusion, it implies a clash of cultures and suggests that, in claiming equality with his educated counterparts, Story was somehow attempting to enslave or, at least, restrain his superiors.

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<sup>64</sup> ‘REVIEW—*Critics and Scribblers of the Day*’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, March 1827, collected edn January to June 1827, (London: John Nichols and Son: 1827), XCVII, p. 244.

<sup>65</sup> ‘REVIEW—*Critics and Scribblers of the Day*’, p. 244.

<sup>66</sup> ‘REVIEW—*Critics and Scribblers of the Day*’, p. 244.

*Critics and Scribblers* illustrates the extent to which Story was conscious of how critical discourses worked to suppress the voices of provincial self-taught poets.<sup>67</sup> He refused to conform to these existing expectations and went to great lengths in his pursuit of cultural equality. He was, in fact, constructing his cultural identity in opposition to the literary elite in London: his sense of himself as a poet was most distinct when questioning and challenging the commentators and critics who attempted to subjugate him. After the pamphlet was published Story's reputation appeared to be irretrievably destroyed and his ambition of rising above his provincial status seemingly impossible. And yet, by 1834 he had secured the respect and support of many of the London critics he had accused and gained access to many sections of the national press. So what precipitated these changes in Story's relationship with the literary establishment? Where his romantic and pastoral poetry had, until now, failed almost entirely to excite a response in the capital, his party ballads for the Conservative Party gained him almost instant notoriety and success. Story's departure from loco-descriptive or prospect poetry to satire was a prelude to his political phase. That is to say his movement towards political writing was motivated by cultural conflict. In the following chapter, I consider the role Story's Conservative songs and poem played in his cultural development as a distinctly labouring-class writer.

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<sup>67</sup> There were other labouring-class poets who wrote about the metropolitan press and the difficulties of appearing in print. Another important source for *Critics and Scribblers* was John Nicholson's poem 'To the Critics' (c.1825). Although Nicholson also challenged the contemporary critical approach towards labouring-class writers, his style and delivery differed greatly to Story. These formal differences emphasise Story's heightened political sensibilities. If Nicholson, and of course Clare, were arguably more accomplished poets than Story, the determination and sense of justice exemplified in *Critics and Scribblers* sets him apart. Nicholson questioned the disadvantages he had to endure as a self-taught poet, but it was Story who risked everything and offered the clear and more direct challenge in overcoming the contemporary discourses that stood in the way of his cultural legitimacy. As a friend and a member of his literary circle in Bradford, Nicholson was a significant influence on Story's work during this period and their alliance offers an opportunity for future research. John Nicholson, 'To the Critics', *Airedale in Ancient Times, Elwood and Elvina, The Poacher and Other Poems* (London: W. Jones, 1825).

## Chapter 5

### ‘The Conservative Bard’: Robert Story’s Political Songs and Poems

#### Introduction

Story’s alliance with the Conservative Party was consummated in 1834 when, inspired by the King’s speech to Parliament, he composed the political ballad ‘The Isles Are Awake’.<sup>1</sup> The poem was published by *The Standard* and then taken up by ‘every Conservative newspaper in the three kingdoms’.<sup>2</sup>

Encouraged by its extraordinary success Story seized the moment and in quick succession made public a series of popular political compositions including ‘The Church of our Fathers’, ‘Hurrah for the Blue’ and ‘The Rock of our Ocean’.<sup>3</sup> By 1835 the Tory press had ‘claimed’ Story for itself.<sup>4</sup> His celebrity had far outstripped the aspirations of most writers of the day whatever their class or economic background and his exposure was at least comparable to that of the later Chartist poets who were still to emerge. Ian Haywood reminds us that ‘in the period before the 1830s, the agitational value of formal literary fiction seems to have been a very low priority for radicals’ and that Loyalists were ‘much quicker off the mark with fiction...’<sup>5</sup> Although Haywood’s study focuses predominantly on prose fiction, Story’s popularity suggests that the Tory press

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Story, *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 1st edn (Liverpool: printed by C. Ingram, and sold by Whittaker & Co., London; Grapel, Liverpool; Sowler, Manchester; Clarke & Addison, Preston; Heaton & Sons, Bolton-Le-Moors; Tasker, Skipton; Inkersley, Bradford; and Ramsay, Berwick-Upon-Tweed; 1836), pp. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Story, *The Poetical Works of Robert Story* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1857), p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Story, ‘The Church of our Fathers’ pp. 15-16, ‘Hurrah for the Blue’, pp. 34-35, and ‘The Rock of our Ocean’, pp. 38-39, in *Story’s Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 1st edn.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Story, *Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849), p. vii.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 88.

pursued and understood the value of popular verse forms in promoting their cause.

Story was unique among other labouring-class writers in that he managed to sustain a cross-class dialogue with an established mainstream political party for well over a decade. Lauded as ‘the Bard of Conservatism’, he played a significant role in Lord Francis Egerton’s victory for East Lancashire in 1835, Sir George Strickland’s election campaign for East Cumberland in 1837, and was still being championed by the national press leading up to Peel’s re-election victory in 1841. There were, of course, other self-taught poets who flirted with the Conservative party but none were promoted in the same way as Story and none were indulged to the same degree.<sup>6</sup> Recovering for the first time the writer’s ballads, electioneering pamphlets and speeches, I aim to resituate his work within the great body of political literature produced by workingmen during the first half of the nineteenth-century. Story anticipated a new era of political self-expression for labouring-class writers and he deserves the same attention as the Radical and Chartist poets that currently form the focus of academic scholarship.

### **Context**

In widening Story’s oeuvre to include his political phase, this chapter challenges the assumption that his work was predominantly conventional in form and content. In particular, it seeks to provide a wider context to the entry on him in *Poorhouse Fugitives*, in which Maidment claims that ‘using pastoral to shape a

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<sup>6</sup> See John Nicholson’s ill-fated collaboration with Richard Oastler and John Critchley Prince’s dialogue with both Lord Egerton and Sir Robert Peel.

sense of self, Story follows the dominant pattern of pastoral lyrics by self-taught writers'.<sup>7</sup> Maidment suggests that in ritualising the pastoral and investing it with a religious or 'spiritual' aura, Story emptied his poems of any social or political meaning.<sup>8</sup>

Generally, the landscape of the many hundreds of rural lyrics produced by self-taught writers is a de-politicised one of an Edenic, pre-social world, in which human perfection can only be achieved without the presence of Man... 'My Own Hills' links landscape with childhood, patriotism, and local pride in a half-apologetic statement of a modest local identity.<sup>9</sup>

Story's only poem included in Maidment's anthology, 'My Own Hills' (1821), is used to evidence the ways in which Parnassian self-taught poets dislocated their rural landscapes from their immediate social and economic conditions and resituated them within the patriarchal deference of a prelapsarian idyll. And yet, even in this poem we can detect the polemical undertone that later developed into the more direct political voice underpinning Story's Conservative songs and poems. 'My Own Hills' was autobiographical and its first line, 'These are not my own hills', was not sentimental or melancholic romanticism but a statement of fact. Although Maidment is correct in linking the poem to the author's 'sense of self', it was much more than a representation of 'modest local identity'. Above all else Story was reinforcing his cultural identity as a Border Poet through his opposition to an English 'Other'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Brian Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-taught poets and poetry in Victorian Britain*, ed. by B. Maidment (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1987), p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 144.

<sup>10</sup> The theoretical 'Other' is associated with phenomenology and psychoanalysis (Hegel, Lacan); however, for the post-colonial deployment see Edward Said's foundational text, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

Written just after Story's arrival in Yorkshire, the poem's sense of alienation mirrors his unpublished manuscripts in which he describes being constantly reminded of his cultural differences. On arriving in Gargrave in 1820 Story wrote that his father was an 'Englishman' but later amended his original assertion, stating that '...it must have been written under a feeling of annoyance, felt not owned, at being called a Scotchman by the people of Gargrave. In reality I am more Scotch than English in my tastes and feelings.'<sup>11</sup> Juxtaposing his native Northumbrian hillsides alongside the landscapes of North Yorkshire, his poetic illustration of alienation was a literal representation of his immediate social circumstances.

There was also a narrower economic significance to Story's isolation. As an outsider he found it extremely difficult to attract pupils and at the time of writing 'Mine own Hills' he described his situation as being 'ruin only less perceptible' and 'every week sinking deeper and deeper in debt'.<sup>12</sup> Story repurposed the poem for his 1842 autobiography. In this later context, the pastoral innocence of Story's native hills can be read against alleged corruption in the West Riding where, he felt, the Whig Magistrates persecuted him for his political beliefs. There was a clear polemic already bubbling just beneath the narrative of his verse prior to the overtly political phase of the 1830s and this seemingly benign example of Story's pastoral poetry proves that he was, in fact, one of Maidment's few self-taught poets who possessed the 'ability to use pastoral as a form of self-

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Story, *Memoirs of the life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c. 1826), West Yorkshire Archive Service, Bradford, MS DB3/C60/1, pp, 139-140.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Story, *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2, p. 82.

exploration'.<sup>13</sup> It is only by close attention to Story's writing and circumstances that we can make convincing claims about whether his work was political or not.

This chapter aims to extend the work of Ian Haywood's influential study *The Revolution in Popular Literature*.<sup>14</sup> Haywood reminds us that although recent scholarship on Romanticism has been revised to include labouring-class writers, it 'rarely embraces the wider issues of the connections between public politics and popular literary and cultural production.'<sup>15</sup> And yet, by reducing Loyalist literature to the function of state apparatus, Haywood overlooks its significant contribution to popular modes of writing. The unprecedented support for Story's political ballads substantiates the idea that the 'interweaving of popular culture and radical politics in the period of the reform bill' should be expanded to include Conservative labouring-class writers.<sup>16</sup> Story's use of popular political verse forms suggests that by the 1830s the dichotomy between Radical and Loyalist cultural strategy was not as wide as it first appears. Underpinned by the popular idioms of freedom and loyalty, Story's Conservative songs and poems, such as 'The Isles are Awake' and 'Hurrah for the Blue', negotiated class boundaries and attempted to unite the 'people' through a common discourse of emancipation.

Whilst Haywood correctly points out that 'conservative and liberal anti-Jacobinism has been underplayed or even ignored...' he also argues that 'conservatives of the late eighteenth-century expanded on the political literacy of

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<sup>13</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, *Op. Cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, p.107.

the nation at the same time as they desired to regulate it.’<sup>17</sup> This implies that later non-radical writers like Story had little or no autonomy. Yet, whether Radical or Conservative these were individual writers following their own political paths. Story not only pursued a popular audience, he also saw himself as being responsible for the cultural advancement of other working people.<sup>18</sup> The financial support he received from a number of prominent politicians, including Lord Edgerton, does not support the view that Loyalists wished to suppress the ‘common reader’ or censor popular culture *per se*; rather it was the opinions of the radical press the Tories wished to counter. When many working people were still struggling to find their political voice, Story recognised that popular verse was a cultural space through which he could make himself heard and it is precisely this type of overlap between Conservative and Radical labouring-class writers that deserves wider consideration.

The chapter examines the formation of Story’s political and cultural ideologies in the light of Linda Colley’s ground breaking study, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. Where earlier scholarship on subjectivity focused on class and cultural self-representation, Colley examines a broader national identity and argues that Britain was defined by its conflicts with France and its antagonism towards Catholicism. Colley uncovers ‘the identity, actions and ideas of those men and women who were willing to support the existing order against the major threats their nation faced without’.<sup>19</sup> She contends that a British consciousness was forged in opposition to a ‘hostile other’. Colley’s argument resonates with

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<sup>17</sup> Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> For Story’s didactic mission see chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>19</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 1.



Story's nationalism. Story's views were neither reactionary nor regressive. He was fighting to protect existing freedoms; his fidelity towards the monarchy and belief in the sanctity of the British constitution, were part of a collective identity united against the threat of Catholic emancipation. Far from being negative, Colley explains that reactionary allegiances to the state were underpinned by the maxims of liberty and freedom. Patriotism symbolised an opportunity of citizenship for the disenfranchised and excluded.

Story believed that the autonomy of the British people, regardless of class or economic background, was contingent on resisting Rome and preserving its national institutions.<sup>20</sup> By presenting economic incompetency as the reason for widespread famines in mainland Europe, he fostered the Protestant ideology of British prosperity whilst reinforcing anti-Catholic sentiment. Written between 1834 and 1836, Story's first series of party ballads were underpinned by the old Conservative axioms of patriotism and religion. The freedom to worship the word of God through the King James Bible, economic progress, and the lack of internal trade restrictions, were all popular symbols of national emancipation that formed the paradigm for Story's political writing. Indeed, his political narrative is one of personal conflict and persecution. In this chapter, I examine how Story used the prejudice he experienced during the 1830s and early 1840s in the West Riding area to promote and legitimise his Conservative beliefs.

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<sup>20</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 5.

Accurate publication dates are crucial in aligning Story's work with key moments in nineteenth-century political history.<sup>21</sup> Copac, the British Library, and Oxford University all list Story's collection of political verse, *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, as circa 1845; however, we know from his reference to the King in its introduction that it must have been published before the accession of Victoria in June 1837.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, though the Liverpool printer, C. Ingram, did not date the first edition of the text, Story's unpublished manuscripts prove beyond doubt that it was first published in the spring of 1836, closely followed by the second edition in the summer of the same year.<sup>23</sup> Story's manuscripts tell us that within a few days of 'The Isles Are Awake' first appearing in *The Standard* newspaper (December 1834) the English, Irish and Scottish papers had all taken it up. During the general election of 1835 it did another circuit of the national press and was adopted by Lord Francis Egerton.<sup>24</sup> The poem was generally thought to be Egerton's work and, when the self-taught poet finally stepped forward to claim the piece, it caused a sensation. We can now realign his political poems with the 1834 dissolution of parliament, Sir Robert Peel's minority government of 1835, and the election defeat of the Conservative Party

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<sup>21</sup> For further reading on the nineteenth-century Conservative Party and the events that shaped Story's politics see John Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics Since 1830* (1996, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) Paul Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party 1830-1850* (Essex: Longman Group UK Limited, 1989), Michael J. Turner, *British Politics in an Age of Reform* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> The correct publishing dates for Story's various editions are as follows: Robert Story, *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 1st edn (Liverpool: printed by C. Ingram, and sold by Whittaker & Co., London; Grapel, Liverpool; Sowler, Manchester; Clarke & Addison, Preston; Heaton & Sons, Bolton-Le-Moors; Tasker, Skipton; Inkersley, Bradford; and Ramsay, Berwick-Upon-Tweed; 1836), Robert Story, *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 2nd edn (Liverpool: sold by Fraser, London; 1836), Robert Story, *Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1849). Note that the title of Story's volume is also slightly amended from *Songs and Lyrical Poems* in the first and second editions to *Story's Songs and Poems* in the third edition.

<sup>23</sup> For Story's detailed diary account of his London publishing trip in 1836 see his unpublished literary papers. Robert Story, 'Notes of a Journey to London 1836', in *Poems in Manuscript*, [literary works], Holograph MS, 1 bundle, (1817-1859), WYASB, MS DB3/C59, pp 139-147.

<sup>24</sup> Story's poem was sanctioned by the head of Lord Francis Egerton's election committee, Richard Dawson Esq. of Liverpool, whom had it 'circulated by the thousands'. Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 104.

in 1837. This new timeline proves how Story's celebrity coincided with the rise and fall of Peel's government and the struggle for power after the 1832 Reform Bill. Moreover, his party ballads anticipated and predated the ways in which Chartists used popular literary culture to negotiate the social and economic boundaries that prevented them entering the political arena. Oversights such as this have greatly diminished Story's political and cultural importance and are typical of the fragmented research currently available.

### **Early Radicalism: 'Written on the Death of Princess Charlotte' (1817)**

It is equally important to correct the idea that Story's success was simply fortuitous. His strategy was in fact highly self-conscious and he proved adept at exploiting the contemporary political climate: 'I had become what may almost be termed "famous", not so much for my power as a lyricist, as from my having struck a chord which was just then extremely sensitive.'<sup>25</sup> Story recognised a potential opportunity in the marketplace and he aimed to fulfil the demand for both popular modes of writing and political debate. To borrow a modern analogy, Conservatism was now his unique selling point. The relationship between politics and culture had, however, already begun to form in the consciousness of the young poet well before he aligned himself with Peel's Party. He tells us that prior to the debate on Catholic Emancipation he 'leaned' towards radicalism. His first attempts at political verse were anti-establishment and he hoped to gain a place with a radical journal/publisher in London: 'I had an idea that I might get employed on the Radical press there; for my political notions—not opinions—were then of the democratic school.'<sup>26</sup> In making the

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<sup>25</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 106.

<sup>26</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 80.

distinction between his early ‘political notions’ and fully formed ‘opinions’, Story confines his earlier politics to a narrative of youthful exuberance and naivety and presents his movement away from Radicalism as an organic and natural progression towards a more pragmatic way of political thinking. Yet, despite Story’s attempts to negate his past, a sample of his early radical writing still survives in manuscript form and offers clear evidence that his Conservative ballads were underpinned by an earlier tradition of protest writing.<sup>27</sup>

His elegy, ‘Written on the Death of Princess Charlotte’ (1817), recovered in archival research for this thesis, illustrates how Story underpinned his early political writing with a popular and well-trodden radical discourse.<sup>28</sup> There was a huge popular movement for Princess Caroline and though the title presents Charlotte as the subject of his poem, he uses Charlotte’s premature death as an excuse to lament the mistreatment of her mother:

Far from the land where thy thoughts must be often,  
Though shamefully spurned it, to wander in woe,  
Oh Princess! What balm thy deep anguish will soften,  
When the heart-rending tidings thy stunned ear shall know?<sup>29</sup>

Story’s accusation that Caroline was ‘shamefully spurned’ is a direct criticism of George IV. His phrase ‘stunned ear shall know’ echoes the coverage of

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<sup>27</sup> For further context of radical protest writing see Michael Scrivener, *Poetry and Reform: Periodical Verse from the English Democratic Press, 1792-1824* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> From the body of scholarship on Queen Caroline Affair this thesis is particularly informed by Rohan McWilliam, *Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1998), Anna Clark, *Scandal: The sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), Thomas W. Laqueur, ‘The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV,’ *Journal of Modern History*, 54.3 (September 1982), pp. 417-466. Linda Colley, *Britons Forging the Nation*, p. 265.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Storey, ‘Written on the Death of Princess Charlotte’ (1817), in Robert Story, *West Allardean Miscellaneous pieces in poetry*, Holograph MS, 1 item, (20 Nov 1817), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/3, p. 8.

Caroline's grief in the popular press. According to contemporary newspaper reports, on hearing of her daughter's death Princess Caroline fainted; Story was using the audience's prior knowledge of these accounts to stir up further resentment towards the monarchy. His political leanings at this time were amorphous and, with no distinct movement such as Chartism available to frame his poetry, the extent to which his early writing could be considered Radical is open to debate. But for some contemporaries Story had clearly crossed a line. *The Newcastle Magazine* rejected the piece for its 'political' sentiment.<sup>30</sup>

Both the form and content of 'Written on the Death of Princess Charlotte' contain striking similarities to the electioneering songs and poems Story wrote for Peel's Conservative Party. Mirroring his later ballads, his elegy exploits the ideas of patriotism and unity but positions the three Nations of 'Erin', 'Scotia', and 'England', in direct opposition to King George III and his son George IV:

Long shall arise from the green vale of Erin,  
From Scotia's mountains of heath or of snow,  
The wail of the harp, and the voice of despairing,  
Lamenting the Flower that now ceases to blow.  
Awake, Bards of England! The woe-sounding shell;  
The Worth we have lost to posterity tell;  
The wise and the good the sad chorus shall swell—  
"The Hope of her country lies silent and low!"<sup>31</sup>

Story's radical invocations of the British Union, his foregrounding of the command 'Awake', and his popular focus on voices, are almost identical to his Conservative poem 'The Isles Are Awake':

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<sup>30</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 91.

<sup>31</sup> Storey, 'Written on the Death of Princess Charlotte', pp. 9-10.

He hath spoke like his Father—“THE ALTAR SHALL  
STAND!”  
Which England re-echoes from mountain to strand;  
The dark heaths of Scotia the burden prolong,  
And the green dales of Erin burst out into song;  
For the harpies of strife and blood have ta'en wing,  
And the Isles are awake at the voice of the King!<sup>32</sup>

Story's final rallying cry, 'And the Isles are awake at the voice of the King!', is an inversion of his earlier chorus elegising the death of Charlotte, 'And the Hope of her country lies silent and low!' Story's exclamation marks suggest that the lines should be shouted and he locates both poems within the many political gatherings taking place at the time of their writing. The foregrounding of Nation in the above comparisons again suggests that he was adapting and amending the form and content found in his earlier transgressive poem and repurposing it for his Conservative Party Ballads. In Colley's interrogation of British patriotism she attempts to 'establish exactly what Britons thought they were being loyal to, and what they expected to gain from their commitment.'<sup>33</sup> For the disenfranchised and excluded, patriotism symbolised an opportunity to demonstrate citizenship. The idea of collective identity was the cornerstone of Story's fidelity towards Caroline and his later Conservative belief in the sanctity of the monarchy. He was exploiting the same popular motifs for both poems and the formation of his political ideologies were mutually dependent on the same modes of writing.

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Story, 'The Isles Are Awake' (Lines 21-27), in *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, p. 18. Hereafter, Story's 1st edn is used when referring to 'The Isles Are Awake' as the poem was later amended for future publications.

<sup>33</sup> Colley, *Britons*, p. 1.

The overlap between Story's Radical and Tory poems, then, shows exactly why we should resist the temptation to situate nineteenth-century labouring-class poets into fixed cultural and political groupings. This methodology is flawed in its tendency to define one category of poets against another and fix boundaries when, in reality, the differences between form, content, and even ideology, were often blurred and unstable.

### **Conservative Ballads (1834-1836)**

To begin to understand Story's Conservatism we should start by decoding his party ballads. His reference to the dissolved parliament in the introduction to *Songs and Lyrical Poems* suggests how meaning within his verse is located within the Catholic Relief Act (1829), and the Parliamentary Reform Act (1832).<sup>34</sup> Story's political phase of writing was motivated by what he perceived to be fundamental changes to the constitution and the underlying external threat of Catholicism. The 'voice of the King!' appearing in the final line of 'The Isles Are Awake' belonged to William IV.<sup>35</sup> Speaking like his father, William's speech mirrored the religious ideologies of George IV and his opposition to the Catholic Relief Act. Story's awkward enjambment in the lines "'THE ALTAR SHALL / STAND!'" presents the unified islands of Britain as a solitary bastion against the 'harpies' of Catholic Europe.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, where he refers to 'Scotia' and 'Erin' by their archaic names, his romantic imagery can be contextualised through Story's religious and political ideology. The 'burden' prolonged by 'Scotia' alludes to Scotland's historical association with Jacobitism and the

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<sup>34</sup> Story, *Story's Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn, p. VI.

<sup>35</sup> Story, 'The Isles Are Awake', pp. 18-19.

<sup>36</sup> Story, 'The Isles Are Awake', (Lines 21-22), p. 18.

Catholic resistance to the Union in the ‘dark heaths’ of the Highlands. His vision for Conservative Britain was therefore clearly hierarchal.

Story’s jarring capitalisation in ‘The Isles Are Awake’ contrasts sharply with the subtler delivery of his Romantic and Pastoral verse and his crude delivery anticipates the contemporary demand for popular modes of writing. Indeed, his battle cry ‘hurrah’, adopted in another of his political songs, ‘Hurrah For The Blue’ (1834), indicates Story’s patriotism.<sup>37</sup> This type of emotive and patriotic language is echoed throughout his political work and can be easily identified in titles such as ‘Our British Hearts are Loyal Still’ and ‘My Native Land’.<sup>38</sup>

According to his manuscripts, ‘Hurrah For The Blue’ was ‘Printed on blue paper in every town in the West Riding’. His footnote to the poem reads: ‘G. Linley has composed very spirited music to this song, which may be sung by loyal men of all parties—where the *colour* is suitable.’<sup>39</sup> Blue was, of course, the colour readily associated with the Conservative Party and Story was using the footnote to imbue his political verse with comedy and satire. Story’s humour suggests again that balladry and song were popular cultural forms that belonged to both Radical and Conservative labouring-class writers.<sup>40</sup> Story’s party ballads also appear to depart from the cultural and social conservatism that characterised the work many of the Parnassians in Maidment’s anthology. The central theme of conviviality in ‘Hurrah For The Blue’, ‘The Blue Rosette’, and ‘The King, In a Bumper’ contradict what Maidment identifies as the ‘ideologies of temperance,

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<sup>37</sup> Story, ‘Hurrah for the Blue’, *Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn, p, 21-22.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Story, ‘Our British Hearts are Loyal Still’, p, 11 and ‘My Native Land’ pp, 19-20 in *Story’s Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn.

<sup>39</sup> Story, *Story’s Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn, p. 163.

<sup>40</sup> The radical and conservative contest for the ‘common reader’ was well established by the 1830’s. See Haywood’s chapter ‘Writing for their country: the plebeian public sphere in the 1790s’ in *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, pp. 26-55.



stoicism, domesticity, religious devotion, and quietism' often associated with self-taught poets, who used verse writing as a way of conquering their socio-economic circumstances.<sup>41</sup>

Story's defence of the constitution and his campaign for English liberty and freedoms poses an obvious question: to what extent did Edmund Burke influence his political ideals? The question is complicated by the absence of Burke in Story's manuscripts. Although he shared Burke's contempt for radicalism, Story's vehement opposition to Catholic emancipation reminds us how their political values were at times incompatible.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, there is an obvious contradiction in Story's Conservatism that deserves further scrutiny. While he used his verse to promote a political Party that opposed further enfranchisement, he fought passionately for his right to vote. Where Story attempted to explain his Conservative allegiances through religion, not once does he directly address the issue of labouring-class suffrage in his unpublished manuscripts.

Story's silence suggests that he was conscious of the dissonance and incongruity in his politics. The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 and the Reform Act of 1832 were interconnected but Story's opposition to reform was not primarily

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<sup>41</sup> Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 98. Robert Story, 'The Blue Rosette', pp. 29-30 and 'The King, In a Bumper', pp. 22-23, in *Story's Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn.

<sup>42</sup> For Burke's political philosophy see Emily Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830-1914: An Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Frank O'Gorman, *Political Thinkers, Vol. II, Edmund Burke* (London: Routledge, 2004), Burleigh Taylor Wilkins, *The problem of Burke's Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967). For Burkean opposition to radicalism and its significance for the working classes see E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Middlesex, Penguin Books Ltd, 1968), pp. 91-92. For Burke's categories of 'habit, custom and tradition' and their influence on the Romantic tradition see Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 37-38. Also see James Chandler's *Wordsworth's second nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

based on class but religious dogmatism. The political historian Paul Adelman reminds us that Catholic Emancipation was ‘the battering ram that broke down the old unreformed system.’<sup>43</sup> Whilst Story was condemned for his opposition to Parliamentary Reform his attitudes towards Catholic Emancipation were much more widely accepted. The contemporary demand for Protestant propaganda reflected the foregrounding of religion in his political poems. At the heart of Story’s polemic lay the belief that in rejecting individual worship in favour of a church hierarchy, Catholicism required the passive submission of the human intellect. His position relied on the polarisation of two oppositional ideologies—the supposed Catholic ‘prostration’ of mind and the Protestant freedom of thought.<sup>44</sup> The religious symbolism in the second poem published in his series of political writing, ‘The Church Of Our Fathers’, (1834) was particularly dogmatic:

O say, shall it fall by the rash and profane?  
 No!—Perish the impious hand that would take  
 One shred from its altar, one stone from its towers!  
 The life-blood of martyrs hath flowed for its sake,  
 And its fall—if it fall—shall be reddened with ours!<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party 1830-1850*, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Story’s self-reflection is an important historical account of early nineteenth-century labouring-class opposition to the Catholic Emancipation Bill and as such I have included a brief transcript of his unpublished manuscript: ‘I had been brought up with a prejudice against the Papists. I had read at school, their cruelties during the Irish Rebellion of 1798. Subsequently I had found them in the *History of England*. But putting aside all prejudice, and judging of their system by its slavish tenants alone—by the complete prostration of mind and opinion, which it demands on the part of the people to the priest—it cannot be defended on any hypothesis consistent with the dignity of the human intellect. It is antagonistic to freedom and thought; and no man who wishes Thought to be free, should permit himself, from any motive, party or personal to say a word in its favour. In this matter I have been consistent. When I thought myself a Believer. I was its bitter opponent. I am its bitter opponent still,—when I think as I like, and because I wish to think as I like. Let me just add—and because I wish every man to think as he likes!’ Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 95.

<sup>45</sup> Story, *Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn, p. 18.

Story's religious symbolism invoked the propagandist view that reform threatened to destabilise British nineteenth-century society as a whole. And yet, we know from his private memoirs that for long periods of his life he secretly considered himself a Deist.<sup>46</sup> Even after he regained his faith he hinted he was never quite able to reconcile the disparity between theology and science. The violence implied in the verbs 'perish' and 'reddened' in 'The Church of Our Fathers' is inconsistent with the more considered theological religious perspective Story tried to convey in his later life writing. The incongruity again points to how he was exploiting the contemporary political climate. Where in his manuscripts Story, to some extent, reconsidered his opposition to religious reform, in this poem he was bordering on the fanatical: his verse is infused with images of brutality, conflict, and the threat of civil war. The systematic dismantling of the Protestant Church is an ironic gesture towards the Dissolution of the monasteries. Calling on past accounts of martyrdom he used a historical precedent to justify religious conflict. Story was opposed to Catholic Emancipation but the inconsistencies between this passionate and emotional defence of the Church of England in his poetry and his attempt to rationalise his religious beliefs in his life writing, point towards a rhetorical mode of writing that was designed to take advantage of the contemporary marketplace.

Story understood how his pursuit of politics enabled him to access patrons and markets that most self-taught poets were denied. In his article 'Reminiscences of Publication' (1826), written anonymously for *The Newcastle Magazine*, he recalls how his first patron, a Dissenting minister name 'Mr Hall', instructed him

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<sup>46</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, pp. 24-25.

in how to exploit the rivalry between opposing political factions as a way of establishing himself.<sup>47</sup> The admission hints at how Story's cultural search for legitimacy as a poet, galvanised, if not eclipsed, his political sense of himself.

Much to my surprise, he began by drawing up a letter to Lady C—— in which he depicted my situation and project; assured her that nothing was to be expected from the Whig families in the neighbourhood; and concluded by an anxious wish that “the star” (I quote his words) “which has shone so brilliant at Paris and Vienna would dart one cheering ray to Northumberland.” Mr H—— is a Tory thought I to myself. A second epistle he wrote to the Earl of L—— couched in nearly the same words; only as the peerage addressed was supposed to hold different political sentiments from those of her ladyship, or more correctly, of her husband, nothing was said about the Whig families... This is devilish queer thought I to myself!<sup>48</sup>

Story's anecdotal account should be treated with a certain amount of caution. Framing his younger self within a narrative of innocence, he was adopting a common trope used by many labouring-class poets. Moreover, his primary purpose here is to entertain. Although it appears factual the piece is dripping with satire and intended to amuse the magazine's readers. And yet, at least to some extent, Story followed Mr H——'s advice to “turn the opinions or prejudices of others to [his] own advantage”.<sup>49</sup> His later party ballads were part of this longstanding strategy for exploiting the relationship between popular literature and politics. Indeed, there were very few nineteenth-century labouring-class writers before or after Story who were more skilful in tapping into the zeitgeist of political reform. That is not to say he was less than fully committed to the Conservative cause. There is no doubt that Story believed whole-heartedly

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Story, ‘Reminiscences of Publication: No. 1—Seeking Subscribers’, *The Newcastle Magazine*, March-April 1826, collected edn January to December 1826, 10 vols (Newcastle Upon Tyne: W. A Mitchell, 1826), V, pp. 111-114, 166-169.

<sup>48</sup> Story, ‘Reminiscences of Publication’, p. 168.

<sup>49</sup> Story, ‘Reminiscences of Publication’, p. 168.

in what he was writing but it is a mistake to separate his political identity from his pursuit of literary fame.

### **‘Public Questions’ and ‘Ale House Meetings’**

Story’s impulsive nature was never suited to the political middle ground. Towards the latter end of the 1820s Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform polarised opinions and ensured that he was unable to exploit party allegiances in quite the same way his Patron had a decade before. The upswing in popular political debate fired his imagination and he threw himself unconditionally behind the Conservative cause. Story’s new political voice was forged through a series of ‘Ale House meetings and discussions’ that centred around heated and often hostile exchanges with his main protagonist, Elijah Tatham, a Methodist preacher and relatively wealthy coal merchant in Gargrave.<sup>50</sup> What is of particular importance here is that Story again depicts and interprets these events in cultural rather than political terms. There is a direct and obvious connection between his status as a poet and his ability to engage in political debate and argument.

Story and Tatham held their political meetings in the exact same venues and format through which they had previously hosted public debates on literature. Although their contests gradually shifted away from the ‘comparative merits of Scott and Byron’ to parliamentary reform, Story’s status as the village poet appears to have precipitated and legitimised his authority as a political

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<sup>50</sup> In his unpublished manuscripts Story tells us how of an evening he would seek Tatham out in the local public houses where they would engage in a series of ‘public questions’. Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 96.

spokesman.<sup>51</sup> While he describes his opponent as being ‘intelligent’, he presented Tatham’s ‘spice of poetry’ as clearly inferior to his own published work.<sup>52</sup> And yet, if Tatham was not quite his equal, Story felt he was still a worthy adversary and he constructed a narrative of rivalry and competition that informed many of his later electioneering songs and poems. According to his unpublished manuscripts, their arguments would often descend into ‘loudness rather than logic’. Attracting a large audience, they provided the village with entertainment.<sup>53</sup> Story sees these early encounters as a personal contest and he never fully discards this competitive attitude towards political debate. His later political poems often contained crude ribaldry, counter arguments, and personal attacks, which were all designed to antagonise and provoke a response from the opposition. In this sense Story was still entertaining and playing to the crowd.

Another cultural dimension to Story’s political awakening revealed by this study is his use of ‘useful knowledge’ and reading as a way of justifying opposition to reform.<sup>54</sup> He tells us that though his views on politics had been similar to Tatham’s, he ‘increased his reading, especially in history’, changing his position and throwing the two men into conflict.<sup>55</sup> Although Story’s assertion that he read ‘history’ books prior to his political turn appears didactic, he was validating his decision through religion. The reading that introduced him to Conservatism included *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* and, in constructing his political identity, Story was adopting a familiar narrative of oppression and persecution. That is not to

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<sup>51</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 96.

<sup>52</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 96.

<sup>53</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 96.

<sup>54</sup> For the pervasiveness of popular modes of political writing during this period see Ian Haywood’s chapter “‘Democratic fervour and journal ascendancy’: Popular Culture and the ‘unstamped’ wars of the 1830s”, in *The revolution in Popular Literature*.

<sup>55</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 96.

say his accounts were fictional. He tells us that the ‘mania of reform began to rage’ in the village and his public opposition to the Bill stirred up a great deal of animosity: ‘a spirit, almost fiendish, was generated against me’ and ‘every check which the Tories in parliament gave to the passage of the bill, was visited upon my poor self’.<sup>56</sup> According to Story the people of Gargrave held him personally responsible for obstructing the Reform Bill in parliament and the hostility he provoked was clearly disproportionate to his own political agency. Story did suffer prejudice for his political beliefs; however, these events enabled him to write from the same marginalised position as later labouring-class writers such as the Chartists. His strategy of writing from below again suggests how his search for a political voice contains residual traces from his earlier flirtation with the Radical tradition.

### **Speech to the Skipton Conservative Association (1835)**

There is further unpublished evidence that Story’s account of political persecution was at least to some extent performative: he uses exactly the same version of events to excite the audience in a speech given to the Skipton Conservative Association 25 May 1835:<sup>57</sup>

Gentlemen I am no mere Convert to Conservative principles. For many years, in what I may call my adopted village I have stood mainly alone against the whole array of Whiggery (cheers). I have suffered martyrdom in your cause! (immense cheering). Yes, gentlemen, though you see me here tonight hale and hearty. I assure you that something which was

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<sup>56</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 97.

<sup>57</sup> Associations were by this time beginning to emerge as an important part of Conservative strategy in the provinces. ‘The years after 1835 were followed by a dramatic growth of Conservative constituency associations, mainly as a result of local initiative and enterprise, itself the expression of party vigour and the strength of local political opinion.’ Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party 1830-1850*, p. 22.

called me—something which was meant for my effigy—was treated like the saints of old! (great cheering).<sup>58</sup>

At the height of the debate on reform an effigy of Story was burnt on at least three occasions in the village of Gargrave but his embellishment of these events, through religious and historical imagery, and his desire to ingratiate himself to the audience, indicate a certain amount of showmanship.<sup>59</sup> Story's discourse of piety and faith are highly symbolic not least in that his comparison to the Protestant Martyrs identifies him as neither a conformist nor a reactionary but a heretic fighting for religious reform.

Despite his rhetoric, Story's hyperbole suggests that he did not take the ritual burning of his effigy in Gargrave too seriously. Opposition and conflict were fundamental formal devices that he used to develop and promote his political poetry. Although the events he described eventually escalated into something far more serious, here he was performing and playing to the audience. His parenthesis of the crowd's cheers, his self-parody, and his comic timing exemplified in the transcript's last sentence, can all be connected to early nineteenth-century theatre and melodrama. The Gothic symbolism of the burning effigy and the ambiguity emphasised by the noun 'something', were literary devices used to produce an emotive response and increase the dramatic effect of the staged scene. The language, imagery and form, of Story's speech are all highly self-conscious and, in adopting images of subjection and

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<sup>58</sup> Robert Story, 'Speech given to the Skipton Conservative Association', 25 May 1835, *Poems in Manuscript*, pp. 74-79.

<sup>59</sup> For the existing Lancashire tradition of effigy burning and political symbolism see Katrina Navickas, *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p 9.



oppression, he was acting out the prescriptive roles of both the self-taught poet and the ‘Bard of Conservatism’.<sup>60</sup>

The slippage between the tone of his speech and the ways in which he defended his publications, suggest Story needed to justify his presence at the political gathering because he was a workingman. Whether we believe the sincerity of his words or not, his speech at Skipton followed a common discourse of gratitude and deferment adopted by nearly all self-taught poets when addressing their audiences and patrons.

I say that I feel myself utterly inadequate to the task of sufficiently thanking you for the honour you have just done me.... when I see you overlooking the disadvantages of my birth and station in life— overlooking in me the Peasant and the Parish Clerk—(cheers)—and paying to my principles and my zeal the same valued distinction that you could have accorded to one of your own grade in society! (cheers)<sup>61</sup>

Adopting the same language he repeatedly used to introduce his verse, Story applies his experiences as a poet and writer within the political arena. Moreover, he illustrates how literature and poetry were always connected to social mobility. From his reception, we would be forgiven for believing that Story’s audience accepted him on equal terms but his skills as an orator or public speaker were not the primary reason for his being invited. It was his party ballads that enabled him to engage in this cross-class political forum. If his cultural capital granted him access to the debate, then it is not surprising that he adopted the same

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<sup>60</sup> Although here Story’s persecution is political it parallels the cultural narrative adopted by many self-taught poets including John Clare, whom, Goodridge describes as ‘the martyr and a rebel, the ultimate victimised literary outsider’. John Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Story, ‘Speech’, p. 75.

discourses found in the prefaces of his poetic publications as he did to introduce himself to the members of the Skipton Conservative Association.

Story did not accept the political limitations imposed on him as a workingman and at every opportunity he used his literary identity to overcome the disadvantages of his labouring-class background. When Story was disenfranchised and forcibly removed from the polling register in 1835, he refused to allow his political voice to be diminished and endeavoured to use his cultural capital as a way of reversing his political exile.<sup>62</sup>

... though they may deprive me of the power of assisting you by my solitary vote, they cannot and they shall not, disenfranchise my zeal in your cause—(cheering) they cannot disenfranchise my exertions—and, if I may say so without vanity, they cannot disenfranchise the ability, which you have been kind to honour with your appreciation. (Roars of applause).<sup>63</sup>

In his speech to the Skipton Conservative Association, Story makes a direct comparison between the power and agency of writing and the right of enfranchisement. Although he had been disempowered, poetry offered him an alternative means of changing the social and political landscape and he retained his right to speak on contemporary issues. Story's later Conservative poetry challenges his disenfranchisement and, somewhat ironically, in this respect he again anticipated the labouring-class Chartists.<sup>64</sup> The validity of Story's argument for political autonomy is less important here than the direct connection he made between his cultural identity and his entitlement to argue and express

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<sup>62</sup> For Story's removal from the voting register see chapter one of this thesis.

<sup>63</sup> Story, 'Speech', p. 79.

<sup>64</sup> For the recognition of the aesthetic as an emancipatory force see Mike Sanders', *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

his political opinions. As a self-taught poet Story believed his cultural experiences gave him both the political-literacy and the opportunity to comment on, and contribute to, contemporary debates on parliamentary reform.

Despite Story's rhetoric, his promise to further the Conservative cause through poetry alone was not enough to satiate his desire for political self-expression. He fought desperately to recover his vote and by 1838 had, at great cost, achieved his goal by purchasing two small run-down huts. Subsidised partly by his patrons, Story's property qualification proved how his cultural ties enabled him access to political arenas most workingmen were denied. Indeed, when his new cottages were being erected he buried a poem under the foundation stone.

Describing how they were 'built by song', he made a direct connection between his verse writing and his right to vote:<sup>65</sup>

Here rest forever, firm and strong  
Base of a structure built by song,  
and dedicated to the cause  
Of Britain's Queen and Britain's laws!  
But should thine owner, false to fame,  
and to the cause that raised his name,  
E'er vote for men like those in power—  
No, no, in office—at this hour,  
The Moment he shall thus disgrace thee  
I care not if an Earthquake raise thee! <sup>66</sup>

Using poetry literally, and metaphorically, to underpin his newly built property, Story suggests how literary culture emancipated him from his rural labouring-class background and offered him the opportunity for social mobility. The poem is also politically self-conscious in that it hints at an alternative solution to

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<sup>65</sup> Robert Story, 'Lines enclosed in the foundation of my New Cottages laid May 29th 1838', *Poems in Manuscript*, p. 161.

<sup>66</sup> Story, 'Lines enclosed', p. 161.

parliamentary reform. When Chartists were beginning to push for universal enfranchisement, Story proved that it was possible to enter the political arena whilst still adhering to ‘Britain’s laws’. Yet while he offered his own narrative of social mobility as a practical example of what could be achieved under the current legislation, in reality his mortgage repayments plunged him into insurmountable debt. Nevertheless, Story’s property qualification was a way of negating the argument for further parliamentary reform and his vow that he would not ‘E’er vote for men like those in power’—’ was directed towards the Whig magistrates who had previously struck him off the register.<sup>67</sup>

### **Tory Radicalism**

‘Conservatism [was] only another word for adherence to the constitution’, Story tells us, and he was a ‘conservative—in the legitimate sense of the word’.<sup>68</sup> And yet, the writer’s political ideas were more complex than this. His ideologies were neither fixed nor stable and there are several instances where he challenges the assumption that his politics were exclusively reactionary or non-radical.

Isobel Armstrong is a little too quick to point out Story’s ‘simpler conservatism.’<sup>69</sup> In her influential study, *Victorian Poetry, Poetry, Poetics and Politics*, she warns us that ‘it would be rash to equate the conservatism of Robert Story, whose Poetical Works were published in 1857, with that of the earlier John Nicholson.’<sup>70</sup> Armstrong’s argument is based on Nicholson’s flirtation with the Tory Radical Richard Oastler; however, she makes an understandable, but significant, oversight. Nicholson later became a vehement critic of his former

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<sup>67</sup> Story, ‘Lines enclosed’, p. 161.

<sup>68</sup> Story, *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 3rd edn, p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Isobel Armstrong, *Poetry, Poetics And Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 228.

<sup>70</sup> Armstrong, *Poetry, Poetics And Politics*, p. 170.

patron Oastler and wrote extensively against factory reform. It is also worth pointing out that, although published in 1857, *The Poetical Works of Robert Story* was a collection of his earlier verse.<sup>71</sup> Assuming that Armstrong was basing her argument on Nicholson's and Story's polemical poems, almost all of their political work was written and published contemporaneously between 1829 and 1836. A more thorough comparison between these two writers would need to include the verse collected in Story's *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, (1836) and Nicholson's attack on Tory Radicalism, 'The Factory's Child's Mother'.<sup>72</sup>

There is some evidence, however, that points towards a softening of Story's Conservatism. In a footnote to his poem 'Rich And The Poor' (1847), he explained how factory legislation 'has done something, but not enough' to help improve the working conditions of the labouring classes.<sup>73</sup> Commenting on his poem 'The Union Workhouse' (1838), he wrote that the Liberal politician and President of the Poor Law Board, Matthew Talbot Baines, was the 'first minister who, by his humane and enlightened management, rendered the New Poor Law

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<sup>71</sup> *Op. Cit.* Financed by the Duke of Northumberland to commemorate Story's poetical achievements, the collection contained over one hundred and thirty poems, (1816-1857), Story's historical drama *The Outlaw*, (1834), and his epic poem 'Guthrum the Dane', (1849-1850). Story's work is arranged in chronological order and each individual poem is dated in large bold italics beneath its title. The premium edition originally cost a guinea and the more modest copy was published at ten shillings and six pence.

<sup>72</sup> John Nicholson, 'The Factory Child's Mother', *The Life and Poems of John Nicholson The Airedale Poet With a Sketch of His Life and Writings by John James, F.S.A.*, ed. by A. Holroyd (Bingley: Thomas Harrison, 1876).

<sup>73</sup> Story, *Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn, p. 164.

Act tolerable to the English people.’<sup>74</sup> Although Story often framed his songs and poems within the older reactionary ideologies of the Ultra Tories, his party ballads were designed to appeal to the masses and it would be a mistake to assume that these older axioms were a straight-forward representation of his politics. At every opportunity he assigned his party allegiances to Sir Robert Peel who, post 1832, had assumed a position ‘of moderation between opposite extremes of Ultra-Toryism and Radicalism’.<sup>75</sup> His poem ‘Sir Robert Peel’ (ca.1842) was written in defence of the Prime Minister’s decision to repeal the Corn Laws and Story went on to argue that ‘The question of the corn-laws was a fiscal, or social question; scarcely a party, and still less a constitutional one. In repealing those laws he may have acted wisely, or unwisely; but the act was no apostacy [sic] from conservative principles.’<sup>76</sup>

Story’s unpublished poem ‘A health to Burdett’ (1838) was dedicated to one of the new proponents of Tory Radicalism, Sir Francis Burdett, who had recently defected from the Whigs.<sup>77</sup> The poem was recited at a dinner held by the Leeds

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<sup>74</sup> The improvements made by Baines to the New Poor Law are unclear. However, by the late 1840s the Poor Law Board had been granted a certain amount of autonomy in administering the legislation and it is probable that as president of the board he had made some concessions. For example the Outdoor Labour Test Order (1842) authorised the use of outdoor relief to the able bodied where it was impractical to house large numbers of the poor. This was particularly relevant in the Industrial towns of the North. As Overseer, Story had a professional understanding of the New Poor Law and its administration. He was also emotionally invested in the legislation, having been on the verge of entering the Workhouse on several occasions. Robert Story, ‘The Union Workhouse’, *The Poetical Works of Robert Story*, p. 259.

<sup>75</sup> Peel’s New Conservatism also appealed to Story’s social aspirations. According to Adelman, Peel seemed to be creating a new party which ‘without denying its aristocratic links or the interests of its traditional supporters, could yet harness to its purposes the energy, influence and abilities of the new middle class.’ Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party*, p. 11. Sir Robert Peel, ‘Letter to Henry Goulburn’, 3 January 1833, *The Peel Web*, <[www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/politics/conprin.htm](http://www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/politics/conprin.htm)> [accessed 23 September 2016]

<sup>76</sup> Story here echoes the rhetoric and discourses of Peel’s political speeches. Paul Adelman claims that for Peel ‘party loyalty did not come first; and he reiterated time and time again; in an often somewhat grating way, his personal integrity and personal responsibility as chief minister of the Crown’. Adelman, *Peel and the Conservative Party*, p. 13. Story, *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 3rd edn, p. 164.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Story, ‘A Health to Burdett’, *Poems in Manuscript*, p. 160.

Operative Conservative Association, March 7<sup>th</sup> 1838. It is worth noting, however, that Story had not been invited to the dinner, an indication, perhaps, that his popularity was in decline following the heady heights of 1834-1837. It is unclear whether the Association commissioned Story to write the poem or if he produced it independently, possibly in an attempt to tempering and adjust his politics to the changing position of the Conservative Party. Story's line 'But green is the wreath that encircles his brow' borrows the popular depiction of Burdett as the triumphant and victorious leader fighting for legislation changes. Burdett himself had been a vehement supporter of both Parliamentary Reform and Catholic Emancipation, and even had connections to Fergus O'Connor. The evidence I offer here is not substantial enough to support the idea that Story endorsed Tory Radicalism but his eulogy to Burdett hints that he was embracing some of its social agenda.

### **Response to Story's Political Writing**

Story's social and economic background was an important aspect of his alliance with the Conservative Party and his contribution to the cause had become much more than just his poetry. In an article in *The Times*, Monday, December 5, 1836 titled 'Grand Conservative Dinner At Bradford Yorkshire', we find him at the centre of ideological debate on cross-class alliances.

He (the speaker), however, sincerely hoped, for the credit of his countrymen, that they at all events had yet to learn that it was a disgrace to be raised in the scale of society by the honourable fruits of successful industry. Hopeless, indeed, was that cause whose defenders were driven to sneer at the rise of individuals from the humble ranks of life. In the words of a living poet (Robert Story), who he was happy to see present,

he would say- “I envy not, covet not, title nor sway / Yet ’tis pleasant to think that to all they are free; / That, thanks to the laws”...<sup>78</sup>

According to this speech, Story’s Conservatism was not counter to his labouring-class background; rather it was a narrative of triumph and success over adversity. He was now a living symbol and embodiment of Conservative paternalism. His opposition to reform was presented in direct juxtaposition to a divided society that threatened to collapse under the weight of political reform. Quoting his poem, ‘I Was Bred In A Cot’, the speaker is soliciting the support of other working people. The fact that this was the first poem that appeared in Story’s collection of political verse, *Songs and Poems*, also suggests that his labouring-class background was an important aspect of his Conservatism.

The significance of Story’s class should not completely overshadow his poetry and there is evidence to suggest that prominent politicians and campaigners recognised the potency of his verse and its power to resonant with the electorate. Story gives us a description of another after-dinner speech delivered by Lord Egerton to celebrate his victory in East Lancashire:

His lordship arose and having quoted some of the lines—added, ‘this song—which has been attributed to me, but of which, though I would have been proud to be so, I am not the author, and it would be a species of literary theft not to say at once. In the eloquent words of this song—“Self hath no part in the raptures that spring To see the Isles wake to the voice of the King!”’<sup>79</sup>

In quoting directly from ‘The Isles Are Awake’ in his victory speech, Egerton clearly shows how Story was valued not only as a symbol of class mobility but

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<sup>78</sup> ‘Grand Conservative Dinner at Bradford Yorkshire’, *The Times*, 5 December 1836, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 105.



also as a poet. Story was exceptional in that he was able to transgress traditional boundaries through cross-class discourses of mutual dependency. It is significant that Story was not revealed as the poem's author until after the election campaign. This may have been deliberately planned by Egerton's committee in order to encourage the misperception that the politician was its author and promote his cultural appeal. Story's dialogue with Egerton may appear asymmetrical but Story is far from being exploited and could have claimed ownership of his work at any time. Waiting until after Egerton's victory before claiming authorship, he maximised his coverage in the press and his apparent reticence in coming forward was part of a larger strategy that increased his celebrity and allowed him to exploit his political associations to the full.

Story had an astute understanding of how to use his political connections for both cultural and financial gain. His presence at these formal dinners and functions enabled him to secure large numbers of influential patrons. For the most part his supporters comprised of politicians, professionals, successful businessmen, and journalists. This group ensured his success by generously contributing to his subscription list and with their help the first edition of *Songs and Lyrical Poems*

generated a net profit of ‘eighty to a hundred pounds’.<sup>80</sup> Story was particularly interested in cultivating alliances and relationships with the Conservative press and if Lord Francis Egerton was Story’s most prestigious patron then the editor of *The Liverpool Mail*, Robert Alexander, was his most valued, closely followed by the editor of *The Leeds Mercury*, Robert Perring. Alexander not only supported Story’s publications and introduced him to new groups of potential subscribers, he also provided him with the framework from which he could construct his identity as a political writer. In his unpublished memoirs Story tells us that, as a ‘political writer’, the editor had ‘no superior’ and, instead of pursuing ‘fame or fortune’, he did his utmost to promote Conservative ideals and values ‘in his own day and generation.’<sup>81</sup> Story also composed a number of unpublished poems about Alexander including the piece titled ‘To a Gentleman (R. Alexander) whose motto is “I dare”’ (1837), in which he describes the editor’s writing style as ‘a tiger dissecting his prey!’<sup>82</sup> Although Story’s direct and combative political persona had already been formed by this time, his

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<sup>80</sup> The names Story notes here are: Robert Alexander: (twenty copies), a political writer and editor of numerous newspapers. In chronological order he worked for *The Sentinel* in Glasgow, *The Morning Journal* in London, *The Liverpool Standard*, and *The Liverpool Mail*. For further information on Alexander see ‘Memoirs of the Political Life of Robert Alexander, and Others, Late Editors of *The Glasgow Sentinel*’ (1823) <<https://goo.gl/Rqu9Yn>> [accessed 15 April 2017] William Hudson: (four copies), Bradford solicitor and friend to Story until his early death. See Story’s poem ‘Dear Hudson’. Benjamin Briggs Popplewell: (five copies), Successful wine and spirit merchant— for coverage of an event that both Popplewell and Story attended see the article ‘Grand Conservative Dinner at Bradford Yorkshire’, *The Times*, 5 December 1836, p. 3. There are four members of the Cronhelm family listed in Story’s subscription index—Frederick William, Henry, William, and John. The patron Story refers to in his manuscripts is John Cronhelm, a solicitor. His father F.W was also a supporter of Story and a respected accountant who published a book on the subject. F. W. became editor of the *Halifax Guardian* in 1836, the publication in which Story’s *The Outlaw* was first serialised. Both he and his son Edward were notable chess players. Robert Perring: (twelve copies), letter press printer, editor, and one of two proprietors of the *Leeds Intelligencer*. Like the Cronhelm family he was also relatively well known in Yorkshire for being a competitive chess player.

<sup>81</sup> Although Alexander was not a wealthy man he ‘subscribed and paid for’ twenty copies of Story’s book and also persuaded many of his friends to take up subscriptions. Story, *Life of Robert Story*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>82</sup> Story, *Poems in Manuscript*, p. 117.

description of Alexander illustrates how they were both using an existing template for their polemical opposition to Radical Reform.

By writing overtly political verse, Story was able to negotiate critical discourses that had previously subordinated him as a self-taught poet. *The Standard* claimed ‘we long had reason to be proud that Mr. Story’s beautiful song, “The Isles are Awake,” first appeared in these columns’.<sup>83</sup> It is fair to say that Story’s poem can be described as being passionate, patriotic, or even rousing but it is difficult to envisage a nonpartisan critique that labels it as ‘beautiful’. The *Leeds Intelligencer*, one of Story’s strongest supporters in the provincial press, emphatically told its readers that Story was ‘the Conservative Bard, and long after his truly English heart shall have ceased to beat, will his beautiful and spirit-stirring lyrics animate the constitution of Old England.’<sup>84</sup> And yet, Story’s movement towards political verse displeased other members of the provincial press, illustrating again the contradictions and ambiguity that plagued self-taught poets. The dichotomy between his aesthetics and politics was nowhere more apparent than in M. A. Richardson’s *The Borderer’s Table Book*. Richardson demonised Story for his polemical work whilst extolling his pastoral lyrics:

Many of his lyrical pieces are exquisitely beautiful, and would have enjoyed greater popularity, if their author had not unfortunately embarked as a violent political partisan, and injured his fame, by too often appearing before the public, as the writer of party ballads, having no recommendation whatever but their violence.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Story, ‘Opinions of the Press’, *Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn, p. 166.

<sup>84</sup> R. Story, *Life of Robert Story*, p. 168.

<sup>85</sup> M. A. Richardson, *The Borderer’s Table Book Or Gatherings Of The Local History And Romance Of The English and Scottish Border*, 8 vols (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1846), VII, p. 196.

Richardson's comments obfuscate the boundaries between Tory and Chartist labouring-class radicals. The extremism and violence implied by his hyperbolic language parallels the reactionary rhetoric used to describe the work of many labour radicals. From this ambiguous description of Story's political writing it is possible to mistake him for a Chartist. Moreover, it seems that in some quarters of the provincial press the appeal of Story's poems still resided in their aesthetic value rather than their political agency.

### **Conclusion**

It is debatable whether Story's political writing was worth the hardship it caused him and his family. He was persecuted for his Conservatism in Yorkshire and was eventually forced to flee for London in 1843 where several of his children succumbed to the poor living conditions. Although his political allies secured him a position at Somerset House, he was unable to extricate himself from the economic uncertainty that dogged most if not all labouring-class poets. So why did he pursue this particular path? Without his political songs and poems Story would never have attracted the same amount of attention. His party ballads went beyond his political beliefs; they were a means through which he could pursue cultural legitimacy as a labouring-class poet.

In his unpublished diary account of his publishing trip to London, 'Notes of a journey to London in 1836', Story reinforced the argument that his primary motivation for writing political poems was about promoting his cultural identity as much as his opposition to parliamentary reform.<sup>86</sup> The clipped diary account

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<sup>86</sup> Story, 'Notes of a Journey to London 1836', pp 139-147.

of meeting George Hogarth, Dickens's father-in-law, illustrates how his new-found celebrity granted him access to publishing opportunities he had never before experienced.

Visited by Geo. Hogarth Esq. Invited to his house. Went in the evening. The family amiable in the highest degree. Mrs H. a daughter of G Thompson of Edinburgh—well known from connection with Burns. Saw Mr H's son-in-law, the celebrated "Boz" – his real name Charles Dickens.<sup>87</sup>

Arriving in the capital he was also granted access to the Houses of Commons and the House of Lords. It was, however, his pilgrimage to Poet's Corner that fired his imagination and his description of that visit is full of religious imagery: 'July 12<sup>th</sup>, Adelaide Gallery. St Pauls Westminster Abbey Poets' Corner. Mingled and indefinable feelings of awe and piety—wound up by them to a pitch of enthusiasm.'<sup>88</sup>

Story's emotions at Westminster Abbey clearly threatened to overwhelm him; his response was a measure of just how much he drew on literature to orientate himself within his social and economic landscape. Face to face with Shakespeare and Milton, his sense of himself as a poet was in danger of drowning under the symbolism and meaning. Conservatism offered him the opportunity to realise his ambition and literally stand amongst his idols. Story's ability to exploit the popular political debate over reform is one of his most important contributions to our understanding of nineteenth-century labouring class writers.

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<sup>87</sup> Story, 'Notes of a Journey to London 1836', pp. 142-143.

<sup>88</sup> Story, 'Notes of a Journey to London 1836', p. 141.

## Part Three

### Chapter 6

#### **‘I am now, at its conclusion, MYSELF AGAIN’: Formal Experimentation in Story’s Poetry and Prose**

##### **Introduction**

In turning to Story’s autobiography *Love and Literature* (1842), a short prose narrative contained within that text, and his unpublished putative novel *Chronicles of the Swan* (c.1833), I attempt to resolve two central questions of this thesis: first, to what extent can his approach to genre and form be considered experimental; secondly, whether his primary modes for writing can be considered political in that they are inseparable from class and his cultural formation as a distinctly self-taught poet.<sup>1</sup> Examining *Love and Literature* (1842), the chapter considers the extent to which Story used his life writing to reinforce his own autonomy and negotiate the cultural boundaries that subordinated and marginalised self-educated writers. Written entirely as a conversation between a fictional narrator and a celebrity poet, Story’s autobiography blurs the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. Through my analysis I connect Story’s experimental form to his search for subjectivity as a labouring-class writer. In the second part of the chapter I explore Story’s struggle to reconcile the cultural ideal of a morally redemptive and an entirely depoliticised aesthetic through his short prose narrative ‘The Queen of the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Story, *Love and Literature; Being The Reminiscences, Literary Opinions, And Fugitive Pieces Of A Poet In Humble Life* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1842). Robert Story, *Chronicles of the Swan* (c.1833), pasted into *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2.

North' (1842).<sup>2</sup> Here Story's muse identifies herself as a '*Radical Reformer*' and declares her intention of 'repairing the ravages' of 'oppression'. Story's parody of invocation, or 'calling out' to his muse, transgresses existing cultural hierarchies by subverting both Classical and Romantic depictions of divine inspiration. Finally the chapter traces Story's preliminary steps in attempting to write a satirical novel. Until now his unfinished manuscript the *Chronicles of the Swan* has been lost and therefore overlooked by scholarship on nineteenth-century labouring-class writing. The novel's experimental form challenges existing assumptions that associate Story almost entirely with the traditional ballad and pastoral forms of poetry.

### ***Love and Literature***

Written as a dialogue between a celebrity poet and one of his followers, the experimental form of Story's autobiography *Love and Literature* draws heavily on both Menippean satire and Socratic dialogue.<sup>3</sup> The text's classical provenance is hidden and easily missed. Predicated on a chance encounter in Story's local tavern, its content echoes the author's contemporary focus on popular literary culture. In using a frame narrative to separate himself from the

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Story, 'The Queen of the North', appearing in the sub-chapter 'Poetical Dreams' of *Love and Literature*, pp. 232-238.

<sup>3</sup> Menippean Satire: 'A form of intellectually humorous work characterised by miscellaneous contents, displays of curious erudition, and comical discussions on philosophical topics'. Chris Baldick, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 150-151. Socratic Dialogue: 'A dialogue in prose (rather than poetry)... based on the speech of individual characters (rather than a chorus) who engage in conversations of philosophical topics for the purpose of either giving instruction or accumulating knowledge.' Martin Puchner, *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theatre and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 21. According to Bakhtin the Socratic Dialogue is connected to speech genre and its central characteristic 'is a spoken dialogue framed by a dialogized story'. Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse In The Novel', *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by M. Holquist (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2000), p. 25.

text he was following Sir Walter Scott's novel *Old Mortality* (1816).<sup>4</sup> Story was also almost certainly influenced by the setting and fictional editor in Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and possibly Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

If my imaginary traveller comes from the south-east, almost the first object he sees is a good house directly fronting him, and upon which he may read, in large gilt letters—THE SWAN INN—a name destined, it is firmly believed, to immortality, from the high associations which will henceforth be connected therewith, and from the manner, it may be modestly hinted, in which the writer shall be found to have discharged his task.<sup>5</sup>

Frame narratives were not uncommon but they are normally reserved for writing prose fiction and Story is unusual in using this literary device to structure his non-fictional autobiography. These formal choices enabled him to assume the language and subjectivity of a celebrity self-taught poet:

... the hero of my work, *the Poet in Humble Life*, is nothing but an IMAGINARY BEING; and that instead of conversing with *him*—which, were this hypothesis correct, would indeed be an impossibility—I have been talking to *myself*—or to my *shadow*—or, more ludicrous still, that my shadow has been *talking to me!*<sup>6</sup>

Asserting his cultural legitimacy in this manner and assuming the character of an established poet suggests the author's desire to conform to existing cultural conventions. The performance implied in Story's fictional identity is, however, explicit throughout. His non-linear narrative is extremely self-aware while the inflated sense of self parodies contemporary cultural discourses on how a poet

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<sup>4</sup> Frame narrative: 'A story in which another story is enclosed or embedded as a "tale within a tale", or which contains several such tales.' Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 101. *Old Mortality*, along with *The Black Dwarf*, formed the first series of *Tales of My Landlord*. The fact that Scott's fictional narrator Jedediah Cleishbotham was both a schoolmaster and parish clerk like Story would have instantly appealed to the poet. For Scott's *Tales of My Landlord* see also my analysis of Story's putative novel *Chronicles of the Swan* in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, pp. 259-260



should behave or sound. Story's cultural authority is ultimately a construct, fulfilling the reader's expectations of what it is to be a poet. As the narrative progresses Story uses satire, and a growing sense of irony, to strip away the poet's artifice and conceit. In using dialogue to reveal the narrator's contradictions Story's form again echoes earlier classical forms. Indeed, in building his narrative through speech the entire form and structure of his autobiography blurs the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction.

This chapter engages with (and seeks to contribute to) Kirstie Blair's project of challenging the tendency in existing scholarship to discuss self-educated poets in relation to their reliance on the literary establishment.<sup>7</sup> Many labouring-class writers, including Story, often defied the expectations assigned to them by the polite realm of literature. Indeed, Story's attitude towards the established literary canon was neither servile nor deferential. Blair's influential essay, "'He Sings Alone': Hybrid Forms And The Victorian Working-Class Poet", identifies the work of Scottish working-class poet Janet Hamilton as a hybrid form.<sup>8</sup> Blair's argument hinges on Hamilton's ability to create an original "cento" sonnet by pasting together the lines of Cowper and Byron.<sup>9</sup> By sewing together multiple 'poetic voices, and registers', Blair reveals in Hamilton the radical potential of an

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<sup>7</sup> See Blair's counter-argument to Frederick Jameson's claims that the work of many working-class poets was 'derivative'. Kirstie Blair, "'He Sings Alone': Hybrid Forms And The Victorian Working-Class Poet" in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37.2 (2009), pp. 523-541 (p. 524). Also see Blair's challenge to Martha Vicinus and her perception that working-class literature was a "'borrowed culture'", *The Industrial Muse* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), p. 168. Cited in Blair's "'He Sings Alone'", p. 525. Although Vicinus focuses on working-class conformism and cultural hegemony, Blair still recognises her research as a foundational study in recovering the work of self-educated poets.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. Cit.*

<sup>9</sup> The Latin expression "Centio" is primarily associated with a garment constructed out of several pieces of cloth sewn together.

aesthetic that blends working-class voices with the poetic language of the literary establishment.<sup>10</sup>

Just as Dickens is constantly alert to the “social languages” of his time and their relation to “literary language,” so these poets exploit a double “linguistic consciousness” created by writing in a literary language from a lower-class perspective.<sup>11</sup>

Whether Hamilton’s parlour game was a conscious or direct challenge to the authority of Cowper and Byron, in deconstructing their poems and piecing and them back together she was interweaving their lines with new purpose and meaning. Blair demonstrates how Bakhtin’s linguistic theory can be applied to nineteenth-century working-class verse.<sup>12</sup> Bakhtin’s analysis of the English comic novel provides a paradigm for exploring heterogeneity within working-class verse, emphasising the “multivoicedness” of self-taught poets.<sup>13</sup> Instead of merely imitating the form of canonical poets, working-class writers were able to negotiate the linguistic boundaries between the “literary language” of “high” culture and the working-class aesthetic.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Blair, “He Sings Alone”, p. 538.

<sup>11</sup> Blair, “He Sings Alone”, p. 527.

<sup>12</sup> It can be argued that because he privileged prose over verse Bakhtinian readings of anything other than the novel are problematic and fundamentally flawed—indeed, Bakhtin himself insists that polyphony does not exist within the versified forms of poetry and drama. However, many critics have challenged Bakhtin’s apparent theoretical negation of poetic genres. In particular the Russian critic, A. V. Lunacharsky, in his 1929 essay ‘Dostoyevsky’s Plurality of Voices (Re the Book Problems of the Works of Dostoyevsky by M. M. Bakhtin)’ refutes Bakhtin’s apparent theoretical negation of polyphony in Shakespeare. For Bakhtin’s reply to Lunacharsky see *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 32-36.

<sup>13</sup> For “multivoicedness” also see Bakhtin’s conception of polyphony in *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*. The nineteenth-century comic novel is of particular interest to Bakhtin as its degradation of “literary language” closely resembles the carnivalesque transgression of Rabelais. Bakhtin, ‘Discourse In The Novel’, p. 301.

<sup>14</sup> Bakhtin tells us that hybridisation is ‘a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance.’ Bakhtin, ‘Discourse In The Novel’, p. 358.

Story's acknowledgement of the interdependence between his own voice and those of more established authors, supports Blair's argument for a dialogic potential in labouring-class literary culture.

Acquired ideas are so blended in a poetic brain with original conceptions, that it is in many instances difficult, in some impossible, to discriminate between the impulses of mind and the suggestions of memory.<sup>15</sup>

Story was aware his poetic voice was neither fixed nor stable. He often combined labouring-class dialect with formal poetic language; his relationship to "High" poetic culture suggests a certain amount of autonomy. Chapter two showed how Story 'took' the 'manner and measure' of Scott's verse and applied them to labouring-class 'subjects' in *Harvest* (1818); in this chapter I test Blair's theory through close analysis of Story's autobiography *Love and Literature* (1842).<sup>16</sup>

Story's experimental prose suggests the potential for labouring-class hybridity in both form and content. Essentially written in the first person Story's life is recovered through a series of third-person narratives recounted by an anonymous poet.

"Mr.——, the poet, has just been reciting 'The Parish Wine.'" "What! Does he reside here?" I asked. "He does," returned the landlord; "Should you like to see him?" "Above all things," I answered. The next minute I was introduced to the poet, whom, without further preamble, I shall now introduce to the reader.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, 149.

<sup>16</sup> For Story's attitudes towards imitation and poetic genius see chapter two of this thesis and its extensive analysis of Story's reading experiences.

<sup>17</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 15.

Story's autobiography obfuscates the boundaries between first- and third-person narration. The complex form of Story's self-writing suggests an author who, unused to the freedom of prose, attempts to impress the reader through his technical ability. Like Hamilton's parlour game Story's movement between different voices is underpinned by the poet's playfulness. Story's self-writing is also structured through dialogic conflict. Though partly a form of self-parody, the first-person narrator constantly undermines the reliability of the fictional poet. Their dialogue contains disagreements, scepticism, and doubt — and throughout, Story's consciousness is presented alongside another perspective.<sup>18</sup>

The presence of multiple competing voices within Story's autobiography support's Blair's claims for formal hybridity and challenges critics such as Fredric Jameson who categorise labouring-class writing as derivative.<sup>19</sup>

Story's character dialogue and multiple narrators are connected to popular culture and commercial literary forms such as the novel. He stages his autobiography in the Swan Inn because he feels both he and his audience will feel most comfortable there.<sup>20</sup> The tavern's convivial atmosphere strips away any conceit and artifice and resonates with the author's desire for levity. In gently teasing the reader with the landlord's question "should you like to see him?", Story is recreating his landlord's genial character. However, there is a hint of irony in the narrator's reply and his excitement at the chance of meeting a

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<sup>18</sup> Bakhtin's later conception of polyphony appears particularly pertinent to the experimental form of *Love and Literature*; Story, however, is engaging in a contemporary literary debate around language and speech. Bakhtin argued that characters appear to exist autonomously from the author within the polyphonic form of the novel and 'every experience, every thought of a character is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled with struggle'. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> Blair, "He Sings Alone", p. 524.

<sup>20</sup> On private and public spaces in nineteenth-century Britain and their theatrical and literary significance see David Vincent, *I Hope I Don't Intrude: Privacy And Its Dilemmas in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

celebrity poet is hyperbolic. Drawing attention to the poet's celebrity status in this self-conscious way Story satirises his own ego and self-importance. There are also signs that he is exploiting the contemporary demand for literary and cultural debate. The narrator tells us 'I am an enthusiast myself, and Mr.—and I were soon deep in poetry and poets.'<sup>21</sup> Story's setting hints at how, even in the small provincial village of Gargrave, literature and poetry were regularly debated.<sup>22</sup>

*Love and Literature* is highly self-aware; Story's intertextual references to form further situate his book as separate from, and outside, normal literary convention.

“If I were *writing*, instead of talking, it might be considered bad taste to make the transition I am about to make, from Old Ballads to the *Divine Songs* of Dr. Watts; but the transition occurred in the fact, and why should it not do so in the reminiscence?”<sup>23</sup>

The joke here is that if the poet was writing instead of conversing informally with another character he would be breaking the rules but, of course, Story is writing. He is policing the boundaries of his own discourse on literature and poetry and, having noticed a transgression, carries on regardless. In this sense Story is removing the obstacles between narrative convention and speech genre; what he should not write he is able speak. Jumping between archaic Ballads and the religious verse of Watts, Story's conflation raises an important question over autobiographical narrative: its often-competing facets of form and memory.

Watts's songs were in fact preceded by the ballad form in Story's literary

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<sup>21</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> See Story's account of his 'Ale House meetings and discussions' in Gargrave. Robert Story, *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2, p. 96.

<sup>23</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 58.

education and so here, in his recollections, he introduces them first. His autobiographical structure privileges memory over form. Story is deliberately drawing attention to the way his writing is not restricted by its conventional restrictions of genre. He was determined to present events exactly how they ‘occurred’ and assert his authority over both the text and the reader. This is his story and in order to tell it properly he is prepared to disregard aesthetic boundaries.<sup>24</sup>

Like all life-writing *Love and Literature* is difficult to separate from its author’s search for subjectivity. Story is using narrative to manifest a sense of himself as a poet and a writer. And yet, the experimental form of his autobiography again emphasises how at times he found cultural self-representation extremely difficult. Due to his movement between first person narrator and fictional poet it is often unclear exactly which character is Story: he is *both* the celebrity poet and his attentive listener. Does this suggest, then, that in order to become the poet Story wants to be, he has to pretend to be someone else? The question is extremely complicated and according to Story’s conclusion the answer is both yes and no.

And finally, should he, like my friend, really entertain the conviction that the preceding conversations are purely imaginary; should he believe that I have been in truth talking to *myself*; I still hope that he will not draw what I confess would then be the natural inference, that I have been *beside myself*; or at any rate, that he will do me the justice to admit, that whatever I may have been in the introduction and through the body of the work, I am now, at its conclusion, MYSELF AGAIN—and his very humble and obliged servant.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Another reason why Story unceremoniously situates his imitation of ballads alongside his attempts at religious verse was that when publishing *Love and Literature* he had no time for a more ordered structure. For Story’s financial difficulties see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>25</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 264.

Asking whether he has been ‘talking to *myself*’ Story is again drawing attention to form in order to emphasise the fictional aspects of his life-writing and strip away its artifice. In this sense *Love and Literature* parodies autobiographical modes of writing. In this enterprise nothing is sacrosanct, not even his self-taught status: Story acknowledges that while he categorises himself as being ‘self-taught’, he was in fact ‘little studious’. This joke works to undermine his cultural authority.<sup>26</sup> Talking to himself rather than the audience, Story also acknowledges he is consciously using form to construct identity. Read as a parody or satire of literary form, Story’s text is transgressive and deeply revealing. The movement of his authorial voice between narrator and fictional poet symbolises his fractured identity, an identity that cannot be fully realised through either character. As poet Story accrues the literary status that the title affords; as the narrator he is nothing more than an admirer of poetry. In this guise Story is an amateur, even an interloper, an outsider looking in at the world of poetry. Story’s narrator means that he exists on the margins and situated outside the conventional boundaries of narrative. As a passive listener Story’s narrator works as an allegory for his otherness and exclusion as a labouring-class writer.

And yet, Story tells us that at the end of his life-writing he is unchanged: he is who he always was—a working man. In case anyone was fooled by the guise of an established poet, he throws off these garments and resolutely asserts his labouring-class background. Where plurality in his self-writing resists, even

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<sup>26</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 264.

subverts, the conception of individual subjectivity, here, where it really matters he reinforces the characteristics of a unified identity. Story may be a working man but he starts his conclusion by repeating the cultural assertion that he is also a poet—‘thousands’ have said so.<sup>27</sup> In foregrounding his literary identity in this way Story’s autobiography is political; he is emphasising his cultural legitimacy alongside class. In order to express his labouring-class experiences he invents a form and structure that literally splits him in two. If in returning to the subservient role of the humble poet and resolving these tensions at its very conclusion Story’s book feels disappointing, then it is worth remembering that he adopts a form of parody throughout. Is he here, then, also parodying the language and discourse of the humble poet? Over the course of *Love and Literature* he has shown his audience that he is anything but a ‘humble and obliged servant’. Story neither fits into this categorisation nor can he be reduced to these terms.

Most interestingly, Story’s autobiography raises another important question in connection to Blair’s idea of formal hybridity: to what extent was the experimentation of working-class writers determined by their immediate financial circumstances? *Love and Literature* (1842) was written and published with the express purpose of appeasing the author’s creditors and saving him and his family from the workhouse. He was gambling the fate of himself and his family on its sale so it was understandable he would construct a publication to entertain and attract the widest possible audience. Story’s eclectic use of genre clearly anticipates the periodical market and a readership with which he was

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<sup>27</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 264.



intimately familiar. Even the ambitious run of one thousand printed copies was calculated to cover the relatively large debt he owed to his creditors. Where subscriptions offered, Story guaranteed returns: *Love and Literature* needed to attract sales outside of his local circle of supporters and patrons. More significantly, the heterogeneous form of his autobiography was also determined by his need to publish immediately. Threatened with the workhouse Story rifled through his manuscripts, published and unpublished, and quickly stitched together an eclectic range of disparate poems and prose from his existing catalogue of work:

I have had little choice in the matter; the pressing NECESSITY which compelled me to “make a book,” compelling me to seize such materials as I had by me, and leaving me a very brief period of time in which to compare their value, or determine their arrangement.<sup>28</sup>

The different poetic registers found in *Love and Literature*, and its use of different genres, are evidence of the extent to which economic circumstances shaped the work of labouring-class writers. They also reveal the adaptability and practicality of self-taught poets in their ability to shape existing literary forms to suit their needs. Story uses the dialogue of his characters to cleverly bind his previously unconnected manuscripts together and then frames their different modes of writing through an overriding autobiographical narrative. His autobiography illustrates how financial necessity both encouraged and coerced labouring-class writers into reconstructing conventional and traditional literary forms into something they could call their own.

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<sup>28</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 260.

## **‘The Queen of the North’**

Story’s short prose narrative, ‘The Queen of the North’ which appears in a sub-chapter of *Love and Literature*, demonstrates how his autobiography is defined by its author’s formal diversification and experimental approach to writing.<sup>29</sup>

Here the poet’s muse visits him and forces him to confront both his vices and his failings as a writer. Although a piece of prose fiction, the story borrows many elements of poetic invocation; the self-conscious and often comic dialogue between the author and his muse is to some extent a parody of poetic transcendence and the fetishism of classical literature. Their exchange, however, is dialectical in that it also reveals Story’s underlying perception of art and literary culture being morally redemptive. Story’s narrative is political in that it works to recover his belief that his writing contained the radical potential to change the existing social and economic conditions of most working people.

Story neither summons his poetic muse nor does he seemingly have any authority over her. Appearing voluntarily and of her own accord she symbolises how, as a self-taught poet, his relationship with literature is unpredictable and undisciplined. At the same time the frankness and the clarity with which she converses directly with the author suggests a power superior to that of poetic invocation.<sup>30</sup> If Story’s muse is a direct translation and measure of his literary identity then her spontaneity and unchecked veracity symbolises his relative

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<sup>29</sup> *Op. Cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Story is not alone in structuring his narrative in this way. For example Elizabeth Barrett Browning is thrown into conflict with her muse in the epic poem *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Gavin Hopps claims that ‘after Milton no other poet could ever again straightforwardly or even deviously command the muse to sing save satirically...’ Gavin Hopps, ‘Romantic Impossibility: A Form of Impossibility’, *Romanticism and Form*, ed. by A. Rawes (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 40-59 (p. 41).

autonomy, free from the formal constraints of more established authors. Her outspokenness is also a symbolic assertion of Story's refusal to be influenced by expectations around class. Although his surprise at seeing her suggests that as a labouring-class writer her arrival was relatively unexpected, his muse's devotion, and acceptance of his flaws, suggests that literature is not bound by economic background or social status.

"I perceive you are surprised to see me," were the first words of my lovely visitant. I am indeed, my most divine lady! I replied. "Divine!" she echoed with a face of raillery; but I certainly deserve that better than many to whom you have applied it."<sup>31</sup>

Throughout his autobiography Story's self-representation is contingent on literary culture and his aesthetic sensibilities. It is significant, then, that the first question he asks his muse is 'Do you know anything of me?'<sup>32</sup> According to Story poetry is inseparable from nature. His personification simultaneously unifies his muse and the pagan deity Spring.<sup>33</sup> The religious connotation of the adjective 'divine' also illustrates how he privileges literary culture and invests it with an aesthetic and spiritual aura. At the same time comic use of the noun 'raillery' emphasises how his dialogue with Spring is underpinned by humour. His muse's wit can be connected to the playfulness and frivolity of many of Story's songs. Moreover, the artifice implied within the adjective 'applied' suggests how Story's flattery is performative. The poet's opening question suggests a dialogic relationship with his own consciousness and symbolises how he was searching for subjectivity through artistic modes of production. For Story

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<sup>31</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 234.

<sup>32</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 234

<sup>33</sup> For Story's personification of spring see Thompson's *Seasons* (1726) as well as the countless other nature poems Story was influenced by and attempted to imitate.

whether it be poetry, novel writing, or autobiography, his writing practices are always a form of self-writing.

Story's dialogue with Spring hints at his aesthetic sensibilities as well as offering us insight into his authorial purpose. I have argued elsewhere that Story attempts to "link heaven and earth", combining spiritual and material realms through the medium of verse; here he adopts the same strategy.<sup>34</sup> Story's muse is someone he can converse, even flirt, with; and though otherworldly and ephemeral she is no longer the unattainable elusive figure Milton communed with. Story separates his muse from the realm of the classical imagination and resituates her within the landscape of his labouring-class background. In creating his own model and framework for his muse he is adapting literary culture according to his experiences as a provincial self-taught poet. It is both cultural appropriation and assertion.

"I assure you I speak the truth. I visited you several times at a certain village near to the Cheviots, and always found you at one employment." A proof of steadiness, no doubt, said I; but pray what might that employment be? "Wandering about the greenwood," she answered, "Pretending to be greatly enchanted by the beauties of nature, but in reality enchanted charms of the young maidens—writing love-songs and talking nonsense—exalting into goddesses or nymphs the hoydens of the neighbourhood—and reciting your strains to those who had neither eyes to see, nor ears to hear."<sup>35</sup>

By knowing the location of Story's provincial village the deity reinforces the poet's labouring-class association with the aesthetic. The muse's knowledge of the Cheviots momentarily separates spring from the spiritual realm and relocates

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<sup>34</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 234.

her within the landscape of the Northumbrian hills. Story uses dashes throughout his text to represent the conscious act of remembering. By briefly pausing and thinking before referring to past events his internal dialogue simultaneously evokes the style of a conversation and the form of the confessional. His dashes interrupt the flow of the author's sentences and reproduce the punctuated speech rhythm of someone reminiscing. Story's narrative device authenticates his authorial voice and connects his self-writing to speech genre. And yet here, in the final sentence of this passage, it is his muse who pauses. She is looking inwards in an attempt to accurately recall Story's past. Recreating his memories the author is again humanising the character and reinforcing her central role in constructing a sense of himself. Calling the poet's former suitors 'hoydens', Spring's noun also hints at the deity's jealousy. Although the insult can be attributed to the author's vanity it is in fact a comic gesture; if anything Story is expressing ironic regret at wasting his youth.

At times Story's irony and humour slips into parody: his familiarity with his muse challenges the idea of the aesthetic as something that should be revered or ritualised. His muse is breaking down the formal boundaries of literary culture and the exchange demystifies the aesthetic aura surrounding both invocation and the classical muse.

I am sure, had I seen you at that period, I should have possessed or died for you. "Be less presuming in your speech," she said; for know that you talk to a king's Daughter—I am the Queen OF The NORTH!" I was a little piqued by her manner, and said—What, art thou the Genius of the city of Edinburgh? "Thou art always thinking of poetry, personification,

and nonsense,” she replied; “I tell thee I am in reality what I have stated myself to be.”<sup>36</sup>

The conditional ‘should’ in ‘I should have possessed or died for you’ creates a teasing uncertainty, suggesting that the author is not subordinated to Spring and he is at least her equal. In turn her chastisement of the poet presents their dialogue as a domestic quarrel between a married-couple. The indifference in Story’s admission that he was feeling a ‘little piqued’ also works to undermine the power of his muse. Spring, is, of course, also only one of Story’s personifications; and yet, showing her displeasure at Story’s ‘personification, and nonsense’, her comic self-awareness suggests that she exists outside of the text. Her moment of consciousness works to test the boundaries of the conventional narrative that suppresses her and works to restrict her indomitable spirit. The syntax in her final sentence, and the archaisms ‘thou’ and ‘thee’, also imitate the language of Shakespeare. Story’s invocation here is parodying “high” literature and experimenting with conventional poetic tropes he subverts contemporary cultural constructions that subordinate self-taught writers.<sup>37</sup>

Story’s muse offers important insights into the poet’s ideological attitudes towards both culture and politics. In identifying herself as ‘Radical Reformer’ she emphasises the transformative potential of art and literature:

“I am of a disposition diametrically opposite to that of my father, though, in my way, I am equally positive and determined. *He* adheres inflexibly to the oppressive maxims he has governed by so long: *I* as inflexibly persist in repairing the ravages of his oppression. I am a Radical

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<sup>36</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 236.

<sup>37</sup> Maidment reminds us that in ‘straying away’ from the ‘rules and conventions’ that governed the polite realm of literature self-taught poets ‘threatened or overturned’ existing cultural boundaries. Brian Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-taught poets and poetry in Victorian Britain*, ed. by B. Maidment (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1987), p. 288.

Reformer.” If you, interrupted I, were to advocate that cause in the houses of parliament, you would do more for it than all the Hunts and all the Cartwrights that ever existed. The bishops would smile upon your suit, and Lord Eldon himself would feel, for the first time, inclined to regret the knowledge that must ever prevent him from granting it.<sup>38</sup>

And yet it appears that at the same time Story’s muse suggests social change can only be achieved through an entirely apolitical aesthetic. The contradictions in ‘The Queen of the North’ express a tension between his pursuit of an aesthetic ideal and the desire for political agency:

“I am not a Radical in the sense you mean,” she replied; “I leave state affairs to wiser heads. But do you understand Latin?” You need not have asked that question, said I, after the manner in which you have seen me pass my youth. Latin and courtship *ne concrescunt*—that word is the extent of my Latinity. “Yet you know, I dare say,” she resumed, “that the word radical comes from the Latin *radix*, a root; and in this sense, I may truly be called a Radical Reformer. My reforms all begin literally at the root, and proceeding thence, beautify the whole surface. My father rules with a rod of iron—myself with a flower-enwreathed sceptre.”<sup>39</sup>

Spring’s intention to ‘beautify the whole surface’ with poetry engages with contemporary discourses on literature and art during the 1830s and early 1840s. In presenting cultural equality as a means for pacifying social unrest he invokes Carlyle’s question on the Condition of England, as well as anticipating Arnold’s later aesthetics.<sup>40</sup> Story’s muse advocates society abandons authoritarian and oppressive forms of control in favour of literary culture and the ‘flower-enwreathed sceptre’. This desire to undermine class oppression through the aesthetic is, of course, ultimately reactionary. By presenting poetry as being

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<sup>38</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 236.

<sup>39</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 236.

<sup>40</sup> For Carlyle’s ‘Condition of England Question’ see Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism* (London: James Fraser, 1840). For Arnold’s later privileging of the aesthetic in Victorian industrial society see *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, 1869, ed. by S. Collini, 9th edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

disinterested Story is in danger of negating the role of literary culture in effecting reform on both sides of the debate.<sup>41</sup>

Crucially Story's muse is representing what type of poet he 'should' have been and not, in reality, what he was. Story is disillusioned with existing systems of government but realises that promoting art and literature as the solution to social and economic inequality is impractical. Although his muse promises to leave 'state affairs to wiser heads', Story was at this time still writing and publishing material to rally support for Peel's Conservative party. Indeed the primary reason for publishing *Love and Literature* was to compensate for the boycotting of his school and the debts arising from his political exile. This tension between the poet Story was, and the poet his muse wanted him to be, highlights the dangers of accepting Story's life writing as a literal representation of his attitudes towards poetry and politics. Story desires an aesthetic culture that embodies transcendent values; however, in practice he uses his writing as a way of participating and intervening in contemporary political debate. His muse symbolises his remorse and regret at his aesthetic transgressions but he was, and resolutely remained, a political poet.

If it is unclear whether Story's muse can actually be considered a 'Radical Reformer', at least not in the direct political sense. It is quite clear her transformative power does not extend to universal suffrage. Moreover, she possesses the ability to make Lord Eldon 'regret' his views on Catholic

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<sup>41</sup> Mike Sanders examines the labouring-aesthetic and its relationship to the radical politics of Chartism. Adopting the poetry columns of the *Northern Star* as his primary resource, he demonstrates poetry did not necessarily have to contain polemical content in order to have political agency. Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).



emancipation but not the agency to remove the obstacles ‘that must ever prevent him from granting it.’ Moreover, where Story’s muse depoliticises literary culture she uses her relatively sophisticated knowledge of language to depoliticise the word radical. In tracing the etymology of its meaning to the Latin ‘radix’ she deconstructs and then reassembles the seemingly fixed boundaries of language to suit her own purposes. Her apolitical interpretation is directly juxtaposed to the political intervention of radical figures such as Henry Hunt and John Cartwright. Story’s dialogue with his muse, then, is always political, situated firmly within the material world of unrest. It even alludes to the earlier Peterloo Massacre. It appears that the Spring deity is transformative because she would appease the masses and therefore negate the need for radical politics. Story’s argument then is still predominately reactionary and conservative in form. What he does make clear however is that, if not demanding universal suffrage, he is advocating equal status when it comes art and literature. If he is demanding cultural equality then he can be understood as working towards political and economic emancipation.

### ***Chronicles of the Swan***

The final part of this chapter traces Story’s preliminary attempts to write a satirical novel. Pasted into the back of the author’s memoirs, his unfinished manuscript, *The Chronicles of the Swan* (c.1833), has until now remained absent from scholarship on nineteenth-century labouring-class writing.<sup>42</sup> The novel is set in 1833 but it is possible that it was written at a later date. The text can be situated between a Parish meeting held in Gargrave (1833) and the publication of

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<sup>42</sup> *The Chronicles of the Swan* is pasted into the back of the unpublished manuscript *Life of Robert Story*.

Story's autobiography *Love and Literature* (1842). The work appears to have held contemporary importance for Story himself. The manuscript is mentioned, albeit briefly, by John James in his 1861 biography and, though *The Chronicles of the Swan* remained unfinished, the words 'First Packet' written in Story's hand above the title hints at how it was his intention to publish. Why, then, was the project abandoned?

The narrative of the text overlaps with *Love and Literature* suggesting that, when pressed by his creditors in 1842, Story decided to revisit his novel and adapt it into a more readily publishable and commercially viable format. The opening to Story's autobiography is copied verbatim from the first few pages of his satirical novel. The dialogue and speech found in his autobiography are also directly adapted from his earlier manuscript. At the very least, then, Story's unfinished novel is again evidence of financial and economic pressures directly influencing and determining his writing practices. Moreover, as the basis for his published autobiography, *The Chronicles of the Swan* emphasises just how closely Story's life-writing was related to fictional narrative. In this respect Story illustrates the versatility of labouring-class poets and their willingness to adapt to a range of literary genres and forms. He anticipates a contemporary reading audience and the growing demand for fictional prose in periodicals and literary magazines. The novel illustrates how Story was testing and experimenting with different modes of writing in order to define and secure his place within the contemporary literary marketplace.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For analysis of the literary marketplace during the early 1840s see William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

The novel's form and content merit attention. *Chronicles of the Swan* is again undoubtedly influenced by Scott's series of novels, *Tales of My Landlord* (1771-1832), James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), and, possibly, the later *Pickwick Papers* (1837). It begins through the first-person voice of a fictional writer, who, travelling north, arrives in the small village of Gargrave and enters the Swan Inn. Engaging the proprietor in conversation, he is soon made aware of a ledger in which the previous landlord freely recorded, and commented on, the village's affairs. Fascinated by what he has uncovered the writer decides to remain at the inn and adapt the characters and events depicted in the manuscript into a novel. After this initial introduction, the narrative voice transfers from fictional writer to the former landlord of the Swan who begins to describe the events of a Parish meeting held at the inn during 1833.

The meeting hinges on a petty dispute over land and a parishioner's objection to the high rates levied on his property. In a further shift in narrative form, the novel reproduces a direct transcription of the gathering. Story constructs a dramatic dialogue, with speech designated by the name of the character appearing at the beginning of the sentence. In yet another twist, the landlord speaks directly to the audience and interrupts the dramatic dialogue in order to ridicule the meeting's participants. This satirical intervention is achieved largely by highlighting how the parish officials are misappropriating the village's rates to pay for glasses of brandy and rum. The more alcohol consumed the further the meeting threatens to descend into disorder and chaos. The labouring-class character 'Hum', who, as both the parish clerk and local poet, ends the meeting,

stands up and recites Story's satirical poem, 'The Spotted Dog' (1832). (This ballad is politically motivated and written in imitation of Percy Bysshe Shelley's protest poem 'The Devil's Walk' (1812) in which Shelley attacks the British Government over the inflated cost of grain.)<sup>44</sup> Using Shelley's satire as a template to ridicule the local political factions in Gargrave, Story again illustrates how he was 'writing in a literary language from lower class perspectives'.<sup>45</sup>

*The Chronicles of the Swan* is first and foremost satirical but it is also experimental in that it combines parody, comedy, and dramatic dialogue, as well as elements of the Gothic and Romantic Novel. Constructed through a relatively complex system of narrative voices and different textual layers, Story's putative novel illustrates how formal hybridity was a fundamental aspect of his aesthetic. At all times the voices of his narrators are distinct and separate from one another. The author's first-person address to the audience serves to immerse the reader, ensuring the narrative is believable.

My reader will understand the nature of the proposal, when I tell them that I am now an inmate at the Swan employing myself in copying such parts of this Chronicles as may seem to me likely to hit the taste of the friends of Regina, to whom I will serve them up, at such times, and in such quantities, as my most honoured patron, Oliver Yorke, may please to determine. And now, without further preamble, leave them to peruse the first extract from: *The Chronicles of the Swan*.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> In a footnote to the poem in his unpublished literary papers Story writes somewhat ironically: 'I had not seen 'The Devil's Walk' when I wrote this, but I had read pieces that proved to be imitations of it. My own is therefore an imitation of an imitation.' Robert Story, 'The Spotted Dog', *Poems in Manuscript*, [literary works], Holograph MS, 1 bundle, (1817-1859), WYASB, MS DB3/C59, pp.105-107.

<sup>45</sup> Blair, "'He Sings Alone'", p. 527.

<sup>46</sup> Story, *The Chronicles of the Swan*, p.1.

Story's frame narrative creates a credible backdrop for his characters and reinforces his attempt to construct voices his audience will deem reliable. The fictional author's reference to his 'patron Oliver Yorke' suggests he is working for either William Maginn or Francis Maloney at *Fraser's Magazine*. His assertion that the novel will appeal to the 'taste of the friends of Regina' is almost certainly another intertextual reference to a contemporary poem, 'Epistle to the Reading Public' (1832), written under the pseudonym Oliver Yorke.<sup>47</sup> Story again consciously blurs the formal boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. The author is essentially masquerading as a travelling writer, who, having discovered a non-fictional manuscript, turns it into a novel. These references to *Fraser's Magazine* are not only a form of misdirection but also tell us something about Story's intended audience. He was undoubtedly engaging with popular cultural forms and targeting the periodical market.

Story's narrator, in particular, is heavily influenced by the work of Scott and the labouring-class writer James Hogg.<sup>48</sup> The presentation of the landlord is inherently contradictory. His narrative voice should be unreliable and yet, we are told he is a good judge of character; his frankness and sobriety are placed in opposition to the intemperance and petty disputes of the parishioners. He situates himself outside of the parish meeting, firmly refusing to meddle in the affairs of the village other than to induce its inhabitants to drink. Comically, he is also depicted as having remarkable, almost supernatural powers, of

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<sup>47</sup> Oliver Yorke was the fictional editor of *Fraser's Magazine*. The publication's real editor William Maginn (1794-1842) also adopted the name as a pseudonym. See 'Oliver Yorke's Epistle to the Reading Public', *Fraser's Magazine*, Feb 1832, collected edn February to July (London: James Fraser, 1832), V, pp. 1-5.

<sup>48</sup> See the destabilising influence of Hogg's narrator in Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Also see Scott's narrator in *Tales of My Landlord* (1771-1832).

discernment, able to identify the type of drinks about to be ordered by the force in which the bell-chord is pulled: ‘A small glass of gin—a slight tinkle; of rum—a little louder; of wine and water—a gentle touch; but let the order be brandy hot with—and one would think the wire must give way.’<sup>49</sup> Focusing on his patrons’ intemperance the landlord is stripping away the artifice and performance of society. By encouraging the participants to drink he is directly responsible for disrupting the meeting. And yet, he takes no part in the discussion nor does he have any allegiance and is therefore free to analyse and comment on the proceedings.

Story’s novel exploits many different narrative techniques but, like nearly all of his work, *The Chronicles of the Swan* is predominantly autobiographical. Based on real events that unfolded in Story’s local tavern during 1833, his novel writing is primarily a form of self-writing and self-expression. He combines satirical and comic prose to expose the conceit and hypocrisy of local administrators and their parishioners, all of whom he knew personally. Where Story gives his characters satirical names, their identity can easily be cross-referenced in his manuscripts by their occupation. The novel’s protagonists include ‘Old Screw’em, the Overseer; Rate’m and Sly, Churchwardens; Hum, the Parish Clerk; Strideit, and Guessit, valuers; Hey and others, Ratepayers; with Old Bellows, the Blacksmith.’<sup>50</sup> We know from his unpublished life-writing that he is almost certainly basing his plot on his experiences of a meeting that occurred during 1833: ‘Hum the Parish Clerk’ is a Conservative and local poet. The title ‘Hum’ implies Story’s musical associations and invokes his humble background. The

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<sup>49</sup> Story, *Chronicles of the Swan*, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Story, *Chronicles of the Swan*, p. 4.

character's autobiographical provenance raises two key questions: *The Chronicles of the Swan* is written by a labouring-class writer but to what extent is it a labouring-class novel? Moreover, if Story's manuscript can be categorised as a labouring-class novel what exactly defines it as such?

These questions are, of course, complex and not easily answered but Story's novel undoubtedly offers us contemporary insight into the alcoholism that ruined many labouring-class poets, including his friend John Nicholson.<sup>51</sup> Story's character Hum hints at how drunkenness and excess were accepted associations in the cultural formation of the self-taught tradition.<sup>52</sup>

I must mend the next glasses, otherwise the meeting will break up. It is only to retrench when the steam is falsely up, and when they hardly know gin and water from water without. Hum's glass in particular must be attended to, else we shall have no rhyme—I say nothing of reason; and indeed I never yet found the latter a very profitable commodity. It may do for the sumphs of Teetotalism, and to them I resign it. Where it causes one glass to be drunk, rhyme causes ten. Ergo—ten to one in favour of rhyme, though it be doggerel.<sup>53</sup>

Being paid for his services by having his glass constantly filled, Hum shows how easy it was for provincial labouring-class poets to fall into bad habits. The title and setting of *The Chronicles of the Swan* illustrates how Story's writing practices were inseparable from the idea of conviviality. While the author was by no means one of the 'sumphs of Teetotalism', there is no real evidence to

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<sup>51</sup> John Nicholson (1790-1843). For Nicholson's alcoholism and the intemperance of other self-taught poets see Maidment's *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 181.

<sup>52</sup> For masculinity and class-consciousness see Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Classes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> Story, *Chronicles of the Swan*, p. 7.

suggest that he suffered from alcoholism.<sup>54</sup> Story embraces the cultural association of intemperance and his character works to fulfil the expectations of his audience. Story's narrative however highlights how associations with intemperance obstructed provincial self-taught writers in their pursuit of legitimacy. Where the character seeks cultural recognition from his peers, the landlord debases his poetry and reduces it to 'doggerel'. The juxtaposition between 'rhyme' and 'reason' devalues empirical knowledge in favour of Hum's pursuit of literary culture. The landlord's motives are clearly immoral: the cultural status of the self-taught poet is devalued and reduced to the amount of glasses his recital will produce. As both a parish clerk and a self-taught poet, the character, Hum offers irony and comic self-parody; he symbolises how the role of a self-taught poet was largely undervalued and misunderstood.

*The Chronicles of Swan* as a labouring-class novel is also revealing in its linguistic strategy: Story presses his claims for singularity and independence as a self-educated working man by defining Hum's eloquent vocabulary and perfect diction against the strong parochial accents of the other characters. He even

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<sup>54</sup> John James commented extensively on John Nicholson's problems with alcoholism; when occasionally hinting at Story's excessive drinking habits, his descriptions are always framed within the poet's sociability and his desire to entertain. Story also maintained his daily routine at Somerset House up until his death in 1860. However, there is the following account in Samuel Bamford's diaries of Story drinking '...at bottom of Oldham Street stumbled on Robert Story the Northumberland poet whom I had supposed to be London at his work as usual. He was about "three sheets in the wind", as I could see; as was also his nephew, "doctor Story", as he calls himself. They were going to a party of Scotchman, or North Countryman at least, at the Blue Bell in Mill Street, and would have had us with them but we excused ourselves...' Although Bamford's account is reliable the tone and language he uses to describe Story, and his nephew, suggests his disapproval of the writer. Despite both working at Somerset House there was a certain amount of rivalry between the two poets and elsewhere in his diaries Bamford makes reference to their political differences. Samuel Bamford, *The Diaries of Samuel Bamford*, ed. by M. Hewitt and R. Poole (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000), p. 14.



speaks Latin.<sup>55</sup> Story uses his command of the English language to distinguish and separate himself from the colloquial speech of others.

Hum. I second that motion. Hands up—for; left hands—against. It is carried, gentleman, mem. con.

Bellows. (to Hum) Talk English, thou fuil. Cush!

Hum. Bellows, thou shalt be blown up tonight. Fill Bellows' glass.

Bellows. Who pays?

Hum. O, Screw'em pays for all.

Bellows. Out of his awn pocket? Cush!

Hum. Out of the rates, my dear fellow.

Bellows. Eeod, if I did'nt think sae! Hey and thee wadna been so ready wi' yer orders, and getting them carried non. But I shall object to the Town's money being ta'en at a'. Let every ane pay for what he ca's for. Is'nt it a shame to sit here, guzzling at other folks' expense?<sup>56</sup>

Hum's language outstrips that of any of the other characters regardless of their class or economic background. This opposition to dialect is perhaps not what we would expect from either a labouring-class writer or a labouring-class novel; and yet, the strategy is explicitly political. It is not the high status characters who possess the power of language but the poet Hum. The author's mastery of language presupposes his cultural status, prepares the way for his ascendancy as a self-educated man and hints at his desire for social mobility. The way in which the form and content of Story's novel work to elevate his social status reflects the purpose of his overall writing practices. The actual act of writing the novel and its content are both polemical in that they set him apart and offer him social distinction.

Other characters see how Hum is directing and orchestrating the meeting and resent the poet's differences. Demanding that he 'talk English', the blacksmith undermines and obstructs Story's attempts at elevating social standing through

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<sup>55</sup> For classical self-education see the research project *Classics and Class*, <[www.classicsandclass.info](http://www.classicsandclass.info)> [accessed 19 Nov 2017]

<sup>56</sup> Story, *Chronicles of the Swan*, p. 4.

language. Where the poet seeks to use his cultural status to separate himself from others, Bellows' response hints at how, as a provincial labouring-class writer, Story existed on the margins of his community.<sup>57</sup> Hum appears to speak an entirely different language from the rest of the village: his position is one of division and alienation. The character's address to the blacksmith, 'My dear fellow', appears awkward and out of place. The comic dialogue between the two labouring-class characters is a form of self-parody but also shows how Story was extremely aware of how, as a writer, he was unable to align himself with either the novel's higher status characters or the Blacksmith. Hum's detachment parallels Story's identity as an outsider in Gargrave and more widely reflects the isolation experienced by many self-taught poets.<sup>58</sup>

The extent to which *The Chronicles of the Swan* can be considered a labouring-class novel, then, is measured in the way its narrative form works to foreground Hum's differences. He constantly corrects the inflated language and grammar of the novel's higher status characters:

I object to the word factiously. It may give offence in high quarters' and 'I move that the words "ordered and impowered" be transposed', and that the phrase be "imposed and ordered". It is absurd to order a man to do a thing, until you have impowered him to do it.<sup>59</sup>

Hum strips away the authority of the village hierarchy and reveals its performative nature. The character is undoubtedly a form of self-writing; in this sense the character must be polemical. As a self-taught poet, language is Story's

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<sup>57</sup> For labouring-class poets and their 'personal isolation and distaste of their peers' see Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse*, p. 151. For more recent work see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983)

<sup>58</sup> For Romantic isolation and labouring-class writers see Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 99 and John Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Story, *Chronicles of the Swan*, p. 6.

jurisdiction and he is using his cultural identity as a self-taught poet to influence and assert his superiority over the novel's other characters.

Story's polemical voice is also explicit in the novel's indirect and direct references to contemporary political events. By using the stage of the parish meeting to ridicule local systems of bureaucracy, it is in fact satirising the current state of national government. Events unfolding in the Swan are a microcosm of parliament: the decision to spend the rates on brandy and rum reflects the ineptitude and mismanagement of public funds in Westminster.

But is not the debate and its result an emblem of what every-day takes place in the world—in parliament, for instance? A Member is returned by a reforming Constituency—he enters the House brimfull of Patriotism—he carps at the expenditure, and threatens the Minister, it may be, with the displeasure of all the wealth, all the respectability, all the intelligence—he says nothing of all the venality—which he represents, unless a more rigid retrenchment shall take the place of the present extravagance. A sophism—a little blarney—a spice of humbug—a hint that he has merits that deserve to be, and must be, rewarded—an assurance, delicately insinuated, that he shall share in the pickings—melt down the ice of his virtue, and the iron. Mr Bawler is metamorphosed with the same care as the equally Hon. Mr Bellows!—But Hark! That is Screw'em's voice.<sup>60</sup>

Story is unable to resist the opportunity to share his political views: his authorial voice can be clearly heard above that of his characters. These are his words and a relatively reliable representation of his views on parliament. In singling out a 'reforming' minister he is stripping away Whig hypocrisy; and yet the novel's lesson in morality is that all power corrupts. He is making an observation about human nature and, though at the time of writing he was in the full flow of his Conservatism, Story's satire attacks corruption on all political sides. Where we

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<sup>60</sup> Story, *Chronicles of the Swan*, p. 5.

would perhaps expect him to be championing the Tory cause we find him adopting remarkably radical rhetoric. Story questions and challenges the way in which the country is being governed in general. The fact that it is Screw'em's voice that interrupts the landlord is no coincidence. The character's name, like his petty misuse of the local rates, symbolises the deception of ministers exploiting their privileges in parliament. Moreover, Story argues that there is a descending order of preconditions to becoming a politician. With 'wealth' sitting at the top, followed closely by 'respectability' and 'intelligence', his sliding scale mirrors the parish officials and local systems of government. There, of course, are also commercial incentives to factor into Story's strategy. In directing his satire across the political spectrum he is writing a novel that will appeal to the widest range of readers. And yet, in reducing and diminishing the nation's political infrastructure to the size of the Swan Inn, Story's satirical mode is distinctly Swiftian.

It seems that no matter what form he experiments with during this period, Story cannot help but include a strong political element to his writing. The novel's subtext provides the reader with the author's contemporary account of the current reform crisis in Parliament. It also highlights the scrutiny that Story endured in his village for his support of the Conservative Party.

Hum is a Tory, and avows it—which it requires, some courage to do in this year of our lord 1833, when Whiggery is in the ascendant. I neither understand nor care much about politics, but I can see as far into a millstone as my neighbours and I foresee that these Whigs will soon lose their popularity—because it is founded in delusion, upon promises, upon expectations which can never be—. The people may wait patiently for a year, or even years; but they will at last tire; and their sense of disappointment will express itself in rage and exertion. Then, look at their annual remission of taxes with a sinking revenue! That is, making

glasses better, as your customers get fewer, or less able to pay—in other words, when demand is less! Was there ever such folly? Conduct the State indeed! They are not fit to conduct the Swan! But Cush! As Bellows says. My landlord supports the Whigs, and I must be mute; for though these Liberals profess to allow every man to think for himself, it would be Treason to speak and high treason to act, against their wishes. Cush them!<sup>61</sup>

In ‘avow[ing]’ his allegiance to the Tory party Story asserts his right to a political voice. He is also making a direct reference to the Whig magistrates who persecuted him relentlessly for his Conservatism. While the Whig reformers supposedly promoted free thinking, Story’s novel tells us that experiences of ‘Whiggery’ in the West Riding were completely different. His criticism of Whig fiscal policy and their commitment to the remission of taxes hints how the final part of the manuscript was possibly partly written towards 1841 rather than ‘year of our lord 1833’. ‘1833’ is the date of the fictional manuscript and not necessarily the novel itself. Brougham defeated the rise of income tax in 1834 but due to the remission of taxes he left a seven million pound deficit when leaving his office in 1841, forcing Peel to introduce the Income Tax Act (1842).<sup>62</sup> Unless he was remarkably astute it appears that Story is describing events retrospectively, with the benefit of hindsight. He predicts the decline of the Whigs in 1841 and their mismanagement of the economy through the remission of taxes. If he is describing past events, Story is using the form of his novel and his narrator to reaffirm his political beliefs and justify his allegiance to the Conservatives. *The Chronicles of the Swan* is a cultural space through which he can frame his political voice.

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<sup>61</sup> Story, *Chronicles of the Swan*, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> See Story’s poem ‘The Income Tax’ appearing in Story’s *MS Poems in Manuscript*, pp. 221-222, also published in *The Standard*, 30 April 1842.

Story was clearly experimenting with form and, partly out of necessity, combined different literary genres. His use of speech in all three of the pieces examined in this chapter, suggests he drew on the popularity of dialogue in both melodrama and the novel. Although his texts are neither polyphonic nor dialogic in a Bakhtinian sense, his work is characterised by its formal hybridity. He uses dialogue as a way of mapping out his cultural identity as a self-taught poet. His reasons for creating fictional characters in his life writing are undoubtedly complicated. But Story uses dialogue in ways that work to emphasise both his background and his distinct cultural identity. This array of complex narratives and intertextual relationships makes *Love and Literature*, and these other prose pieces, essential texts for mapping out Story's writing life and recovering the radical potential of the working-class aesthetic.

## Chapter 7

### *The Outlaw: Balladry and Romantic Melodrama*

#### Introduction

This final chapter places Story's 'closet drama' *The Outlaw* (1839) centre stage with the aim of recovering and mapping out the writer's seemingly contradictory assertions of cultural identity.<sup>1</sup> Poised between narrative verse and Romantic lyricism the play's formal hybridity manifests both Story's desire for shared communal experience and his search for individual subjectivity. For Story popular literary culture and Romanticism were not necessarily competing modes of writing. The play's balladry and romantic lyricism, the way it blends traditional and contemporary form, is evidence of a transgressive, or at least progressive, valence in his approach to literature. Extending this idea of hybridity, this chapter then traces *The Outlaw* to romantic melodrama. Existing scholarship has successfully assigned these theatrical modes to the eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century radical tradition of popular protest writing; this study proves melodrama was later adopted by labouring-class Conservatives

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Story, *The Outlaw; A Drama In Five Acts* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co, 1839), first serialised in the *Halifax Guardian* 16 August to 13 December 1834 and then published by subscription in 1839. For *The Outlaw's* publication in the *Halifax Guardian* see Christopher Heywood, 'A Yorkshire Background for *Wuthering Heights*', *The Modern Language Review*, 88.4 (Oct 1993), pp 817-830 (p. 821). For this chapter's focus on literary culture and labouring-class identity see Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Kirstie Blair, *Class and the Canon Constructing Labouring-Class Poetry and Poetics, 1750-1900*, ed. by K. Blair and M. Gorji (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), Kirstie Blair's essay, "'He Sings Alone": Hybrid Forms And The Victorian Working-Class Poet' in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37.2 (2009), pp. 523-541, John Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation In Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Brian Maidment, *The Poorhouse Fugitives: Self-taught poets and poetry in Victorian Britain*, ed. by B. Maidment (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1987).

like Story.<sup>2</sup> The writer enters into a dialogue with his audience that again challenges conventional delineations between popular literary culture and the aesthetics we now associate with High Romanticism. These formal boundaries, according to Story, were neither fixed nor stable. His migration between melodramatic performance and Romantic interiority is evidence of the writer's heterogeneity. Finally the chapter interrogates Story's Conservative social conscience. I ask to what extent are the writer's themes of patriarchal deference, and his nostalgia for a medieval organic society, a challenge, albeit a reactionary one, to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. I also consider the ways in which the play engages with, and contributes to, contemporary discourses on the Condition of England. This chapter, then, recovers the wider implications of *The Outlaw's* formal hybridity with a view to questioning the assumption that Story was, at least in cultural and literary terms, a reactionary and non-radical labouring-class writer.

In addition to *The Outlaw's* connection to balladry and the popular revival of Robin Hood (examined later) this chapter recovers two other important sources of intertextuality: Thomas Dunham Whitaker's *The History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven* (1805) and the early sixteenth-century ballad 'The Not-

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<sup>2</sup> For melodrama and radical politics see Sally Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Elaine Hadley, *Theatrical Dissent in the Marketplace 1800-1885* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), David Worrall, *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality 1787-1832* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance 1790-1820* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993). For Melodrama in popular culture see Michael Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965) and Juliet John, *Dickens's Villains Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).



browne Mayd'.<sup>3</sup> Both these sources trace the sixteenth-century union of the Clifford and Percy families; Henry Clifford (1493-1542) is the leader of Story's band of outlaws whose marriage to Margaret Percy (1508-1540) eventually leads to the character's redemption.<sup>4</sup> Story's plot follows Henry's pursuit of Margaret and the subsequent bloody conflict fought out between his band of outlaws and Margaret's entourage. As in all of Story's work, the form and content of *The Outlaw* is driven by a desire to assert his cultural identity. These particular texts hold significance for the author in that they recover an historical alliance between two noble houses originating from his native Northumbria and his adopted home in Yorkshire.<sup>5</sup> He uses Whittaker's historiography and 'The Not-browne Mayd' to bind his cultural identity to two separate regions. By not limiting himself to one place or locality he consciously structured his play around a narrative that enabled him to claim communion with multiple landscapes and customs. There is also evidence to suggest how this strategy

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<sup>3</sup> In a letter to William Gourley (1820) Story writes: 'I have lately finished reading the History of Craven, and was glad to find myself in a land of romantic associations. All the district was at one time divided between the Cliffords of Skipton Castle, and the Percys of Northumberland. Gargrave formed part of the Percy fee. With me this is no emotionless circumstance, and I am already doing something with it in a poetic way.' John James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems Of Robert Story, With A Sketch Of His Life by John James, F.S.A.* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, And Roberts; Henry Gaskarth, Bradford, 1861), p. 39. Matthew Prior paraphrased 'The Nut Brown Maid' in his poem 'Henry and Emma' (1709). Story loosely refers to this in his letter but although undoubtedly influenced by Prior's adaptation he traces his own source material to the sixteenth-century and the original ballad: 'You have probably seen a romantic poem, of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, among Prior's works, entitled: —"The Nut-brown Maid." I daily perambulate the scenery of it.' James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. 40 'The Not-Browne Maid' is also included in Thomas Percy's, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 3rd edn (London: J. Dodsley, 1775), pp. 303-314. Thomas Dunham Whitaker, *History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven in the County of York* (London: Nichols and Son, 1805).

<sup>4</sup> See Whitaker's footnote in *History of Craven*: 'I hope it will be thought no extravagant conjecture, that Henry Clifford was the hero of the "Not browne mayd"'. That beautiful poem was printed about 1521... and what is more probable than that, this wild young man, among other feats, may have lurked in the forest of the Percy family, and won the lady's heart under a disguise, which he had taken care to assure her concealed a knight. That the rank of the parties is inverted in the ballad may be considered as nothing more than a decent veil of poetical fiction thrown over a recent and well-known fact...' Whitaker, *History and Antiquities*, p. 229.

<sup>5</sup> Story adopts this same strategy of moving between Yorkshire and Northumberland in his Epic poem *Guthrum the Dane: A Tale of Heptarchy* (London: Longman, brown, green, & Longmans, 1852).

offered a number of commercial advantages. In 1842-1843 he was able to increase the sale of *Love and Literature* substantially by exploiting these same heterogeneous regional identities and promote his autobiography across three separate counties.<sup>6</sup>

### **Ballad, Song, and Popular Culture**

In arguing that Story's search for subjectivity in *The Outlaw* is predicated on shared experience, this chapter owes much to Anne Janowitz and her groundbreaking study *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*.<sup>7</sup> According to Janowitz the communitarian aspect of romantic lyricism was gradually eroded by contemporary nineteenth-century critics and has therefore been overlooked by modern scholarship. This conventional historiography of Romanticism, with its emphasis on individual interiority, works to disinherit labouring-class writers. 'The lyric', Janowitz claims instead, 'is a site for insisting upon the connections amongst people above the assertion of the inwardness of a single subject.'<sup>8</sup> Janowitz recovers the communitarian provenance of romantic verse forms by retracing its lyrical aspects to song, balladry, and oral narrative. This revision destabilises the supposition that romantic aesthetic ideals were almost entirely predicated on identities of individualism. It also works to restore the cultural legitimacy of labouring-class poets who adopted romantic lyricism as their primary mode of writing. In this chapter I deploy Janowitz' methodology in the new arena of labouring-class drama and argue that *The Outlaw* was a stage for

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<sup>6</sup> Facing financial ruin in 1842-1843 Story decided to gamble everything. Giving up his failing schoolhouse in Gargrave, he toured Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Northumbria, promoting the sale of his new publication.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. Cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour*, p. 8.

performing alternative ideas of subjectivity that did not necessarily conform to existing expectations of self-taught writers or their work.

Story's life writing validates Janowitz' précis that labouring-class poets asserted their cultural and 'personal' identity 'through ballad and song'.<sup>9</sup> Story dedicated a whole chapter to balladry in his autobiography, *Love and Literature* (1842).

The communitarian form of the ballad appears embedded in both Story's psyche and his play. His friend and biographer John James tells us that 'every page' of *The Outlaw* is 'clothed in musical and choice versification'.<sup>10</sup> We need look no further than the opening lines of its protagonist, Henry, to recover at least one obvious instance where Story's narrative intersects and overlaps with a popular ballad.

They do us wrong, my Brothers of the night  
And of the forest, blithe and brave as e'er  
Sung catch or shot a deer in merry Sherwood,  
When Robin Hood was the bold Monarch there—<sup>11</sup>

Here, the writer foregrounds the ballad's archaic representation of speech and dialect as a primary measure of its authenticity: 'I have listened, on a winter's evening, for hours together, to the singing of *Chevy Chase*, *Gill Morice*, and other ballads of similar length and character, not only without weariness, but with exquisite delight.'<sup>12</sup> Story's adverb 'together' hints at the ballad's relationship to communitarian experience. The communal setting of the fireside, and his verb 'listened', clearly invoke the labouring-class literary traditions of

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<sup>9</sup> Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour*, p. 33. Also see Katie Barclay's essay, 'Composing the Self: Gender, Subjectivity and Scottish Balladry', *Cultural and Social History*, 7.3 (2010), pp. 337–53.

<sup>10</sup> James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Story, *Love and Literature; Being The Reminiscences, Literary Opinions, And Fugitive Pieces Of A Poet In Humble Life* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1842), p. 56.

song and oral narrative. The writer again links the ballad form to the experiences and customs of rural working people and goes on to praise the archaic ballad of ‘Robin Hood’ for the ways in which it reproduces the ‘diction’ and ‘spoken’ word of the ‘English Yeomanry’.<sup>13</sup> These archaic verse forms add gravitas to Story’s narrative of cultural identity and act throughout as the locus for self-affirmation.

Story distinguishes and separates ancient balladry from the popular nineteenth-century broadside ballad; in so doing he alludes to, and participates in, existing literary discourses that rejected the broadsides peddled by ballad mongers as doggerel.<sup>14</sup>

Among my pleasures of boyhood I reckon the ballads of the renowned outlaw, Robin Hood; and I read them with pleasure still, for they are charming compositions. I don’t allude to vulgar, and evidently modern ballads, connected with his name, but the metrical Romance—for a Romance it is, and of a high order too—which occupies four *fittes* in Ritson’s collection.<sup>15</sup>

When Story specifies that he was reading Joseph Ritson’s collection of ballads he is adopting a particular aesthetic position.<sup>16</sup> Dismissing ‘modern’ adaptations of the ballad as ‘vulgar’, he aligns himself with Ritson and other seventeenth and

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<sup>13</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> For eighteenth-century discourses on the bifurcation of traditional or popular balladry and the introduction of more doggerel broadside ballads see *Ballads and Broad­sides in Britain 1500-1800*, ed. by P. Fumerton, A. Guerrini and K. McAbee (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2010), pp. 36-39. On the comparatively universal accessibility of ballads in relation to intellectual property see William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Story, *Love and Literature*, p. 57.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Ritson (1752-1803) was an antiquary and collector of ancient ballads. For Ritson’s rivalry with the literary commentator and ballad enthusiast, Thomas Percy (1729-1811), see Paula McDowell, *The Invention of oral Print Commerce and Fugitive Voices in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: The University of Chicago Press 2017). Joseph Ritson, *Robin Hood: A Collection of all the Ancient Poems, Songs and Ballads, Now extant, Relative to that Celebrated English Outlaw, to which are prefixed Historical Anecdotes of his Life* (London: T. Egerton and J. Johnson, 1795).

eighteenth-century ballad collectors such as, Thomas Percy, and Samuel Pepys. Story was also familiar with Scott's own collections and his essays on balladry.<sup>17</sup> Although Ritson neither acknowledged the relationship between balladry and labouring-class literary culture, nor advocated these forms for popular audiences, he privileged the ballad in its original archaic form. Ritson's framework for the ballad held contemporary relevance for a labouring-class writer, especially one originating from the Scottish borders.<sup>18</sup> These literary commentators are significant for Story and other labouring-class writers, because of their privileging by association of song and oral narrative over print culture. This cultural strategy enabled Story to ascribe the ballad a higher literary status. Secondly, it offered him the opportunity to reposition minstrelsy as the cornerstone of ancient balladry.

Predicated on Ritson's eighteenth-century literary discourse, or earlier, Story's aesthetic position may be wrongly categorised as being reactionary or obsolete: a strategic turn that looked back rather than forward. Yet when writing his play Story ignores Ritson's conservative framework for the ballad and it would have been unlikely that if the collector had read *The Outlaw*, he would have approved of its modern dramatic reworking of ballad form. What matters to this chapter, is that Story's relationship to the ballad precipitated his direct intervention into other genres and modes of writing. He was not passively structuring and framing

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<sup>17</sup> Sir Walter Scott, 'Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad' found in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 4 vols (Edinburgh, Robert Cadell, Houlston & Stoneman, [London], 1830) IV, pp. 1-78.

<sup>18</sup> Many of Ritson's examples of the Robin Hood narrative are different from other representations in that the hero not only steals from the ruling classes but also gives his plunder to the poor.

his identity through these archaic forms, but was experimenting with existing frameworks and narratives and then lending them to other genres of literature.

Drawing attention to the play's absence of 'stage-effect' in his dedication, Story appears to drain *The Outlaw* of its performative aspects; however, his claims to the private sphere are instantly undone in its opening scene. Story immediately realigns the drama with popular print culture. Beginning his drama in song, and staging it within a 'hostelry', he liberates the text from the 'closet' and relocates it within the shared communitarian space of the local tavern.

Mine Host of Kilnsey keeps good ale,  
But then 'tis charged a plack the pot;  
The Skipton Brewers seldom fail,  
But then, the churls, they give it not.  
The knave may keep their cellars shut—  
A holier gust is yours and mine:  
We liberals like a liberal butt,  
The butt that holds the Abbot's wine...<sup>19</sup>

Story's opening tavern scene echoes the self-taught tradition and hints at his own customary practice of reciting verse to locals in the Swan inn.<sup>20</sup> The very final line of his drama also points to this being a self-conscious re-enactment or staging of cultural identity. The writer's comic aside to the audience and his pledge of 'nightly levying willing CONTRIBUTIONS!' hint that the text's subordinate value can be found in the pecuniary reward paid by locals for Story's own abridged recitals.<sup>21</sup> From start to very end the writer attempts to frame *The Outlaw's* plot through scenes of conviviality and popular literary culture.

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<sup>19</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> For other instances of the Swan appearing in Story's work see his autobiography *Love and Literature* (1842) and his putative novel *The Chronicles of the Swan* (c.1833).

<sup>21</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 174.

Moreover, his protagonist leaves a series of linguistic clues that suggest *The Outlaw's* close proximity to the ballad. The Middle English noun 'Churl' is listed in Percy's popular anthology of ancient ballads.<sup>22</sup> The idiom 'Butt' or 'Buttes' is another archaic term found in the same glossary.<sup>23</sup> The ancient scotch coin 'plack' can be traced back to the Scottish ballad 'Jenny's Bawbee', also located in Percy's text. This final turn of archaic dialect is inconsistent with *The Outlaw's* Yorkshire setting and its prominence suggests how Story's existing cultural identity as a balladeer seeped into his dramatic modes of writing.

Where the language Story appropriated from Percy's collection only signposts *The Outlaw's* relationship to ballad and song, his characters openly discuss their dependency on these customary modes of writing. They frequently draw attention to the ways in which they themselves navigate the cultural landscape between dramatic dialogue and communitarian verse forms. Calling a 'truce' to his opening 'song' and confessing that his 'voice is out of tune', Story's protagonist, Henry, polices the formal boundaries of the play.<sup>24</sup> His self-reflexivity works to emphasise *The Outlaw's* formal inconsistencies; he appears to be interrogating its author's strategy of saturating his work in ballad and song. Declaring a 'truce' to song and returning to dramatic dialogue, the character surrenders to literary convention and momentarily readdresses Story's transgressions. And yet, even in blank verse he continues to question the idea of the play being a closed or autonomous cultural space, separated from other literary forms. Both Henry's and the audience's introduction to the play's

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<sup>22</sup> The categorisation churl is also often assigned to a non-servile peasant or a 'clown, a person of low birth, a villain'. Percy, *Reliques*, p. 545.

<sup>23</sup> A 'butt' is a shooting target associated with archery. Percy, *Reliques*, p. 545.

<sup>24</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 10.

heroine, Lady Margaret, is a gentle parody of poetic invocation and *The Outlaw*'s self-knowing distortion of the classical muse again emphasises the play's dependency on existing cultural forms:

Fair indeed  
Must be the maid thou talk'st of, since her charms  
Have kindled in thy cranium—where till now  
Idea ne'er was bred that deeper reached  
Than spirit-vault, or higher rose than board  
At which thy toppers congregate—a flash  
So very bright that it might half illumine  
A Poetaster's page!—But for the project,  
What wouldst advise?<sup>25</sup>

Henry's question resonates with *The Outlaw*'s experimental nature. The character is unsure how to proceed with blank verse and reflects the writer's own anxieties. He also signifies the play's formal departure from ballad and song. Dislocated from these existing poetic frameworks he is undecided how the play's heroine, Lady Margaret, should act or speak and, not without irony, calls out for guidance. Henry's introduction to Lady Margaret is also mediated through the innkeeper. This narrative framing forces the character into the same position as the audience. The play's narrator appears to be unreliable and where the innkeeper ritualises Margaret, Henry immediately sees through this and concludes that she is, after all, just a 'flash' of literary inspiration. Henry's scepticism, then, subverts the idea of poetic transcendence and he deconstructs the connection between Lady Margaret and the classical muse.<sup>26</sup> The direct reference to Ben Jonson's satirical play *The Poetaster* (1601) also undermines any pretence of poetic ambition. This type of self-reflexivity or metatheatre

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<sup>25</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> In this instance Lady Margaret's connection to the muse is not necessarily linked to the ballad form and her classical association situates her within a more general framework of poetic invocation.



works to foreground the play's formal heterogeneity. Story's cross-generic play is a way of exploring his own cultural identity as a self-taught writer. He asks what it means to be a dramatist rather than a poet and uses the play's intertextuality to destabilise the hierarchy between popular literature and so-called 'high' culture.

Story's freedom, and ability, to go beyond his original source material supports the claim he was an ambivalent and contradictory writer. Janowitz argues convincingly that ballad and song played an integral role in the way labouring-class writers structured their identities. While it might therefore appear that the self-taught tradition was restricted or bound by these archaic literary forms, I suggest it is more helpful to think of the ballad as the means through which labouring-class poets could access other modes of writing. *The Outlaw* was not Story's first attempt at reworking 'The Not-browne Mayd: ' we can clearly define at least three separate stages to the play's formal development. His experimentation began in 1826 with 'The Hunting in Craven'.<sup>27</sup> Describing this early attempt at balladry as his 'magnum opus' Story suggests that, at that time, imitation was the pinnacle of his cultural ambition.<sup>28</sup> And yet, he almost immediately adapted the piece into a fictional prose serialisation for *The Newcastle Magazine*, titled *The Outlaw; a Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (1827). Story eventually settled on the dramatic form and the blank verse found in *The*

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<sup>27</sup> 'The Hunting in Craven' was the lead poem in Story's collection Robert Storey, *Craven Blossoms: or, Poems Chiefly Connected with the District of Craven* (Skipton: J. Tasker, 1826), pp. 9-34.

<sup>28</sup> 'I regularly translate a page of Latin every night. And I continue at intervals my true Magnum Opus.' Robert Story, 'Letter to William Gourley', June 1825 in James' *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. 39.

*Outlaw; a Drama in Five Acts* somewhere between 1834 and 1838.<sup>29</sup> He is not only repurposing his work: this stepped progression demonstrates his formal experimentation and adaptation of his work to suit a provincial audience.

*The Outlaw's* development reveals how all the while the writer was attempting to thicken and add gravitas to the narratives he appropriated. Influenced, no doubt, by reading Ritson and Percy, Story recovers the provenance of 'The Not-browne Mayd' through Whittaker's historical study of the area. Janowitz corroborates this didactic element to the ballad narrative, stating that the form was culturally significant as both 'a poetic practice' and 'an object of study'.<sup>30</sup> Story, however, was doing much more than researching and reproducing ballads. The historical events he describes in *The Outlaw* took place directly after the 'The Not-browne Mayd' ends. That is to say his play was a dramatic sequel to the original ballad and a theatrical reimagining of what happened next to its protagonists.

*The Outlaw's* characters are aware of how they themselves evolve out of this popular ballad. Gently mocking her travelling companion, Lady Emma implies that Margaret's love for Henry is more suited to ballad and song. The character is symbolically dislocated from the play and resituated within the original narrative of 'The Nut Brown Maid'.

Indeed! O, then the name will fairly sound  
In a sad ballad chanting forth the loves,  
The high, mysterious loves, and piteous fate  
Of Henry and of Margaret, sung by—  
Hold!

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<sup>29</sup> In marked contrast to 'The Hunting of Craven' the literary press universally praised the play. James considers it as one of Story's most successful publications.

<sup>30</sup> Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour*, p. 33.

Thou endless jester. I am not just now  
In mirthful mood.<sup>31</sup>

This intertextuality between Story's drama and the original ballad is partly an attempt at humour. These social aspects challenge us in defining *The Outlaw* as a distinctly labouring-class piece of writing. Crucially, I suggest (with the support of Janowitz' claims for romantic lyricism), that Story's drama is the locus for both communitarian forms of identity and Romantic interiority. If, as Janowitz argues, romantic lyricism was founded in song, and therefore related to communitarian forms of identity, it is fair to say that predicted on an existing ballad narrative Story's drama can be traced back to labouring-class experience. By dressing *The Outlaw* in ballad and song the writer invokes subjectivities related to community and shared experience.

Significantly, like Henry before her, Lady Margaret fights against this intertextuality: Story's heroine actively resists her connection to the ballad and communitarian literary forms. She represents a fracturing of subjectivity; and, yearning for a more complex identity, personifies Story's formal experimentation with less archaic depictions of Romantic individualism. His rendering of individual and collectivised structures of identity is (like his characters) neither fixed nor stable. He is, however, not ready to dispense with his existing customary modes of writing: there are formal tensions in the text that cannot be concealed. Story's solution is to exposes these inconsistencies and foreground the text's experimental nature. If his characters are openly aware of their connection to ballad and song then it is an association that the writer intended the

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<sup>31</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 59.

audience to recognise. The fact that his characters are conscious of his repurposing, indeed pursue this process themselves, is further evidence that Story was surveying and mapping out the unfamiliar cultural space of drama and adapting it to his own unique perspective as a self-taught poet.

Both ‘The Not-browne Mayd’ and Whittaker’s topography of the area were primary influences on Emily Brontë; indeed, Christopher Heywood has argued persuasively that Story’s drama itself was one of the probable sources for *Wuthering Heights*.<sup>32</sup> It is not surprising that two provincial writers came together in this way. Moving within a limited cultural space convergence points between writers were inevitable. As members of a Bradford didactic circle Story and Branwell Brontë were also in close dialogue with each other and regularly met at a number of hotels during the late 1830s and early 1840s.<sup>33</sup> Another connection between the writers was Frances Mary Richardson Curren.<sup>34</sup> As a Patron to both Story and Emily Brontë she almost certainly offered access to her famous library at Eshton Halls. The Brontë family read and contributed to the *Halifax Guardian*, in which *The Outlaw* first appeared in serialisation (1834).<sup>35</sup> Moreover, ‘The Not-browne Mayd’ and Whitaker’s *History of Craven* simply held popular cross-class appeal. These texts were desirable for provincial writers because they were accessible and fulfilled a specific requirement of the literary marketplace. There are, however, crucial differences, at least ideologically, in

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher Heywood, ‘Appendix C Family Histories’ in Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* ed. by C. Heywood (1847, Ormskirk: Thomas Lyster Ltd, 2002), pp. 468-486 (pp. 472-473). Also see Christopher Heywood, ‘A Yorkshire Background for *Wuthering Heights*’, *The Modern Language Review*, 88.4 (Oct 1993), pp 817-830.

<sup>33</sup> John James’ brief description of the Bradford circle places *The Outlaw* at the very heart of these meetings. James, *The Lyrical And Other Minor Poems*, p. 52.

<sup>34</sup> Frances Mary Richardson Curren was Probably the source of Charlotte Brontë’s pseudonym, Curren Bell.

<sup>35</sup> Heywood, ‘A Yorkshire Background’, p. 821.

the way these writers approached their primary source material. Staying much closer to ‘The Not-browne Mayd’, and Whittaker’s historical study of local customs, Story ensures that his dramatisation retains both the communitarian and folkloric character of the original ballad whilst attempting a modern adaptation of its narrative for a contemporary nineteenth-century audience. His strategy, I argue, not only singles him out as being a progressive writer, it is also evidence of his construction of a distinctly labouring-class literary identity.

### ***The Outlaw in context***

*The Outlaw*’s publication was a defining moment in Story’s literary career. Written for the most part in 1834 and serialised in the same year, it was not published as a book until after the unprecedented success of his party ballads: ‘I wrote nearly the whole drama in 1834; but it was not published till 1839 when my political songs had invested me with some little celebrity.’<sup>36</sup> Depicting the piece as ‘An adventure in a walk of literature hitherto untried by me,’ he was clearly using his newly established reputation to develop new cultural forms. The author’s dedication to his patron, Frances Mary Richardson Currer, reflects both his literary ambition and his uncertainty: the project was ‘very different, too, from that in which I have been cheered by some public favour,—I have misgivings as to its reception which it were vain to disguise.’<sup>37</sup> In voicing his ‘misgivings’ Story appears to follow the formulaic narrative of humble subservience adopted by many labouring-class writers. However his concerns cannot be defined solely by cultural hegemony or class consciousness. Moving away from political verse and heading towards the uncharted territory of

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Story, *The Poetical Works of Robert Story* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, And Roberts, 1857), p. 134.

<sup>37</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, (Dedication), pp. iv-v.

historical drama, *The Outlaw*'s publication was a genuine risk to his newly acquired status. Story's 'misgivings' become even clearer when situated in the context of his outstanding debts.<sup>38</sup> In 1838 the writer stood on the brink of financial ruin. Both he and his family had been teetering on the threshold of the Workhouse for a number of months and *The Outlaw* was his primary means of appeasing his creditors.<sup>39</sup> His entire future was dependent on its success. His decision to publish was not defined by the looming presence of Mount Parnassus; it was shaped, rather, by the shadow of the Workhouse.<sup>40</sup> Story was not, of course, the first self-taught playwright, but publishing at a time of extreme financial crisis suggests his approach to literature was neither conservative nor reactionary. It is more appropriate to think of him in these circumstances as both pragmatic and self-reliant. These events occur at the high point of opposition to the Poor Law which add weight to the play's political context.

The social and economic conditions in which the text was published in 1839 are vastly different from when it was produced. Story's admission that *The Outlaw* was written for the 'most part' in 1834 dislocates the text from its date of publication, resituating its production squarely within the political and cultural context of the Poor Law Amendment Act.<sup>41</sup> At the time of writing Story's salary from teaching was still relatively secure and he still exercised his right of

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<sup>38</sup> *The Outlaw* was published with the direct purpose of appeasing Story's creditors after he borrowed a large sum of money to buy and develop a number of properties in Gargrave. See chapters 1 and 5 in this thesis.

<sup>39</sup> As a measure of the writer's desperation see in his unpublished manuscript details of how he raised £10 by the sale of his library in order to publish *The Outlaw*, p. 118.

<sup>40</sup> See Maidment's categorisation of Story as a Parnassian in *The Poorhouse Fugitives*, p. 144.

<sup>41</sup> James is slightly inaccurate here: he states *The Outlaw* was written in 1835. This inconsistency of approximately one year between accounts makes little difference to the play's political and cultural context.

enfranchisement as Parish Clerk.<sup>42</sup> As this chapter subsequently suggests, there is direct political significance of this contextual alteration. But first it is worth considering the ways in which these circumstances shaped the play's cultural turn towards popular literary forms. In considering this complex question, it is helpful to consider Story's own evaluation of dramatic form and his expectations for *The Outlaw*:<sup>43</sup>

Though it bears the form and the name of a Drama, I presume not to think that it will suit the theatre—having had no opportunities of studying stage-effect, upon which, I am told, almost everything in the acted drama depends. My utmost expectation will be realised, if, in these pages, I have produced a series of connected scenes, capable of giving pleasure in the closet,—by their liveliness of dialogue, by their development of character, and by their pictures of landscape and manners.<sup>44</sup>

By 1834 Story's reputation was built on ballad and song which explains why he returns to this tried and tested formula by introducing popular cultural forms into his drama. His assertion that *The Outlaw* should be read purely for 'pleasure' tells us he is pursuing a similar popularist strategy. Story even warns us against thinking of the drama in conventional theatrical terms. In adapting his form to suit the contemporary tastes of a popular audience he was drawing on his recent experiences of the literary marketplace. Story is applying the same communitarian schematic to drama as Janowitz later assigns to romantic lyricism. That is to say, in grouping 'landscape and manners' together in his dedication, he symbolically binds the play's romantic depictions of nature to

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<sup>42</sup> Prior to the 1832 Reform Act the right to vote was a requisite given to the position of parish clerk. Although Story continued to vote for some time after the bill was passed his name was eventually removed from the register as a consequence of voting for the Conservative candidate in the 1835 West Riding by-election. See chapters 1 and 5 for events surrounding Story's disenfranchisement.

<sup>43</sup> Although the dedication to 'Miss Curren Richardson' was probably written at a later date, forming part of Story's process of repurposing, this self-reflection is useful in evaluating his earlier work.

<sup>44</sup> Story, *The Outlaw* (Dedication), pp. iii-iv.

local customs and traditions. Indeed, the cultural glue he uses to fix communal experience to landscape is ballad and song. It is a mistake to think that Story's approach to drama was in anyway arbitrary. His treatment of form was highly self-conscious: there is, in fact, very little that can be considered haphazard or accidental in his work. He was deliberately blending different cultural forms. This is not to suggest Story was doing anything that could be considered truly unique or that *The Outlaw* should be read as some sort of postmodernist deconstruction of traditional form.<sup>45</sup> Story was following a pre-existing framework and his popular scenes of conviviality, for instance, are undoubtedly influenced by melodrama and Shakespeare's representation of the bawdy.<sup>46</sup> And yet, in combining romantic and popular modes of writing he was playing with cultural hierarchies and, at least to some extent, testing the boundaries of literary decorum.

### **Romantic Melodrama**

Story's recommendation that *The Outlaw* should be read rather than performed is unintentionally misleading. Although he is correct in describing it as a 'closet drama', his modes of writing are distinctly theatrical and clearly linked to popular performance. The play's overall aesthetics are, in fact, located within what Juliet John calls 'romantic melodrama'.<sup>47</sup> John makes a crucial distinction between the melodramas that developed from Gothic romance and those (like

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<sup>45</sup> See Augustine's aesthetic objectivity and hierarchy of forms. Story also transgresses all three of Aristotle's unities and his approach to dramatic form can again be traced back to the eighteenth-century and popular discourses of neoclassicism attributed to Dryden, Pope and Samuel Johnson. Despite its 'connected scenes' the events of *The Outlaw* take place over a timeline of five days and in multiple locations. The writer disrupts the unity of action further by appropriating and patching together elements of tragedy, comedy, history and romance.

<sup>46</sup> See Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare for the People Working Class Readers, 1800-1900* (Scotland: University of St Andrews, 2010 and Rohan McWilliam, 'Melodrama and the Historians', *Radical History Review*, 78 (2000), pp. 59-62.

<sup>47</sup> John, *Dickens's Villains*, pp. 55-61.



Story's) influenced by, and emerging out of, the work of Sir Walter Scott. Having already claimed that *The Outlaw* questions the aesthetics of identity associated with High Romanticism there is a need to be clear here. John uses the term 'romantic' as an adjective to describe those attributes of melodrama that are connected to Scott's 'adventure' narratives.<sup>48</sup> Above all others Scott was the pinnacle of Story's cultural ambition and his veneration of the author through imitation has been well documented in this thesis.<sup>49</sup> When approaching dramatic form Story unsurprisingly turns towards Scott's romances. More importantly, he purposely draws attention to these intertextual connections: 'You know the song of Duncan I bethink me / How the old Minstrel's tears mixed with his harp strings.'<sup>50</sup> The assumption by Story's heroine, Lady Margaret, that her attendant Cathleen already knows 'the song of Duncan' signposts the play's cultural links. Tracing its formal development to Scott, Story is attempting to orientate his publication within an existing marketplace and pitch *The Outlaw* to a popularist audience. There are, however, areas where Story's play diverges from Juliet John's framework for romantic melodrama. Whilst she traces the provenance of romantic melodrama to the popularity of Scott's adventure novels, Story's play develops out of metrical romances such as *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and Scott's collection of ancient ballads, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. These variances, however, can almost certainly again be ascribed to Story's preference for ancient balladry and the cultural influence in Scott's verse rather than prose.

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<sup>48</sup> John suggests that romantic melodrama evolves out of Scott's novels; however, there are hints in Story's play of the metrical romance, *Lay of the Last minstrel* and even Scott's collection of ballads *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*.

<sup>49</sup> For Story's imitation of Scott and his critical appraisal of his own poem 'Harvest' see chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>50</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 151. Reference to Sir Walter Scott's metrical romance, *The Lady of the Lake*, (1810).

*The Outlaw's* lead protagonist, Henry, possesses many recognisable tropes that clearly overlap and intersect with romantic melodrama. As both a noble lord and the leader of a band of outlaws, the character fits perfectly within John's rubric for these modes of writing. 'The stereotypical romantic villain' she tells us is essentially 'heroic'.<sup>51</sup> 'He is a criminal in the eyes of the law, but often justifies his crimes by what could be called a nineteenth-century Robin Hood.'<sup>52</sup> According to John he also possesses 'genteel status'.<sup>53</sup> Henry's transgression often appears benign. By foregrounding the dispossessed English peasantry against the gluttony and impiety of the sixteenth-century Church, his inversion or reversal of traditional hierarchies is Rabelaisian and carnivalesque in style.<sup>54</sup> Whether these modes of comic satire contain any political agency is debatable. Framed within a narrative of romantic adventure, Henry's theft of the Church is legitimised and, when he repents these transgressions at the play's conclusion, the existing social order is restored. *The Outlaw's* subversion can be found in the way that Story destabilises the legitimacy and heroic status of his protagonist. Henry's gallantry is constantly offset by the unintentional but tragic consequences of his actions. Not least of these mistakes is his decision to relinquish control of his band of outlaws and leave them leaderless, vulnerable to the manipulation of the less ambiguous villain of the play, Henry's second in command, Norton. In abandoning his responsibilities, Henry is also indirectly responsible for the death of the labouring-class character Fanny Ashton and the near fatal injury of her father, who plays the part of gamekeeper.

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<sup>51</sup> John, *Dickens's Villains*, p. 56.

<sup>52</sup> John, *Dickens's Villains*, p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> John, *Dickens's Villains*, p. 60.

<sup>54</sup> For Carnival see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by H. Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984).

These moments of crisis and instability force the protagonist to turn inwards and recognise his own ‘inconsistencies’.<sup>55</sup> This is where Henry’s desire for a more unified subjectivity, his search for interiority, intersects and overlaps with the traditional melodramatic villain. John claims that ‘Such villains valorise the private self against which melodrama defines itself. Less obviously perhaps, such actor villains draw attention to the element of performance upon which melodrama, in practice, depends.’<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, the protagonist in melodrama (not just romantic melodrama) becomes a villain when he reveals the transparency and immediacy of a play’s theatricality; the protagonist is no longer the hero when he exposes melodrama’s limited rendering of subjectivity.<sup>57</sup> In several spectacular displays of metatheatre Henry draws back the curtains of the theatre hall and threatens to step off the stage:

Farce, friend, a wretched farce,  
In which I’ve played the part of chief buffoon,  
But shall no more. A nobler stage awaits me,  
A nobler part demands my energies.<sup>58</sup>

Henry is the mouthpiece for contemporary discourses that conflate the boundaries between popular literature and so called high culture. The character’s views are of course very different from Story’s aesthetic position. Categorising the play as a ‘farce’ Henry is denigrating its popularist links and consigning its aesthetics of identity and performance to comic exaggeration. Story is satirising Henry’s elitist attitude and the character’s belief that a more appropriate ‘stage

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<sup>55</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 25.

<sup>56</sup> John, *Dickens’s Villains*, p. 49.

<sup>57</sup> For the politics of performance in relation to identity see also Booth and Ledger *Op. Cit.*

<sup>58</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 16

awaits' appears both petty and indulgent. The author uses Henry's complaints as a way of gently teasing out the character's sense of entitlement. Henry's pretentious repetition of the adjective 'nobler' suggests how Story pursues a rhetorical strategy here: his ridicule of the high status character hints at his own egalitarian attitudes towards popular literary culture.

### **The Labouring-Class Ophelia**

Story uses his depictions of working people to accentuate and underline his own social and economic background. Where *The Outlaw's* high status characters interrogate their links to popular cultural forms, its labouring-class characters embrace their relationship to the communitarian literary space and therein reflect Story's aesthetic sensibilities. An explicit example of this cultural mirroring occurs when Lady Margaret's attendant, Cathleen, recites in full Story's own ballad 'Sweet Beaumont-Side'.<sup>59</sup> Its appearance in *The Outlaw* is again much more than the writer conveniently repurposing his existing work. Lending her voice to the song, Cathleen's recital is a literal and symbolic illustration of the shared cultural experience associated with communitarian verse forms. 'Sweet Beaumont-Side' is the locus for commonality through which the writer aligns himself with the play's labouring-class characters and stamps his identity onto the text.

Fanny Ashton is another of Story's characters who embodies the writer's collective approach to labouring-class representation. She is a labouring-class

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<sup>59</sup> Robert Story, 'Sweet Beaumont Side', *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 1st edn (Liverpool: printed by C. Ingram, and sold by Whittaker & Co., London; Grapel, Liverpool; Sowler, Manchester; Clarke & Addison, Preston; Heaton & Sons, Bolton-Le-Moors; Tasker, Skipton; Inkersley, Bradford; and Ramsay, Berwick-Upon-Tweed; 1836), pp 106-107.

Ophelia who illustrates Story's consistent attempts to link his lower-status characters with the monoliths of English literature. After being spurned by Henry, Fanny descends into a madness that ultimately leads to death. Story had, one presumes, read *Hamlet* prior to the publication of *The Outlaw*.<sup>60</sup> According to an unpublished manuscript account, he had also seen at least one live performance of Shakespeare when visiting London in the summer of 1836. In his diary entry, July 13<sup>th</sup>, he writes: 'In the evening went to the Haymarket Theatre. Saw Miss Ellen Tree. The Opera just opposite.' The actress Miss Ellen Tree, otherwise known as Ellen Kean (1805-1842), was well known for her performances of Ophelia. A critic in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* notes in 1841 that 'Miss Ellen Tree appeared as Ophelia, and was most effective' but adds 'for the cruel and subtle Lady Macbeth she is too gentle and innocent.' Although the records for the Haymarket theatre suggest that it was likely that Story attended a performance of either *As You Like It* or *The Merchant of Venice*, the same tragic and shattered innocence of Ellen Kean's Ophelia is found in *The Outlaw*'s hopeless Fanny Ashton: 'I'm sure she's crazed. She would not else have talked / So like a player-girl.'<sup>61</sup> If Story did not directly base his labouring-class heroine on the actress' performances, or reviews, the character still echoes popular theatrical discourses.

If we consider Fanny Ashton to be an experimental or even political rewriting of Shakespeare's character Ophelia then her illicit desire for, and devotion to, a high status character is problematic in that it reinforces existing social and class boundaries. Her relationship with Henry, however, is explicitly theatrical and

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<sup>60</sup> For Shakespeare's influence on working-class culture see Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare for the People Working Class Readers, 1800-1900* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>61</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 94.

needs to be understood first within the context of popular culture. John tells us that the ‘seduction of lowly maidens by their social superiors’ was a common trope of melodrama.<sup>62</sup> Story again engages in a popularist strategy to fulfil the expectations of his audience. His character too demonstrates ‘the simple thought of a woodland girl’.<sup>63</sup> And yet there is evidence that Story was bending and twisting this tried and well-trodden narrative to fit a more complex purpose. As former suitor to the noble Henry, Fanny is, at least to some extent, coerced into despising her humble background: ‘The cottage girl, / Cuthbert the Ranger’s daughter, may not hope / To be his final choice’. Moreover, there is an extra psychological dimension to Fanny Ashton’s seduction. When the outlaw Henry suddenly throws off his disguise and comes out as the son of Lord Clifford, he adopts more than a new social status: he leaves Fanny stranded between her labouring-class identity and romantic interiority. It is this displacement that fragments the character’s sense of self and causes her madness. Her movement between weeping and singing symbolises her liminal position on the margins of both Romantic interiority and shared labouring-class experience. Fanny Ashton’s death is as much about class alienation as it is a sign of Henry’s inaccessibility.

One of the central questions running through Story’s play is how can contemporary nineteenth-century society begin to bridge the class-divide without first addressing the dearth of labouring-class subjectivity in literature and art?<sup>64</sup> Story uses the pathos of Fanny Ashton’s death to cut through the Romantic

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<sup>62</sup> John, *Dickens’s Villains*, p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 49.

<sup>64</sup> For labouring-class representation also see Simon J White’s *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007).

depictions of labouring-class experience and the aesthetic ideals of the Picturesque and Pastoral poetry that preceded it. Romanticism has a tendency to deprive working-class people of any real social or cultural characteristics, but Story gives them ‘*hearts*’ in an attempt to bring his labouring-class characters to life: ‘And she will weep—like me. Poor girls have *hearts*, man, / And they can feel! Dost think they cannot, Henry?’<sup>65</sup> Moreover, although the play’s other labouring-class characters see Fanny’s constant singing as a sign of transgression, ‘Sing? Weep and sing? The woman’s mad!’, Lady Margaret misreads her sorrow for happiness: ‘A pleasing scene! One that would suit Arcadia, / When it was in the pink of simple usage.’<sup>66</sup> Her utopian vista of provincial labouring-class life is clearly predicated on the existing literary treatment of working people that renders them empty signposts in the landscape:

O, nature is the same  
 In high and low; and in some instances  
 I deem the low our masters. Their displays  
 Are not overlaid with pomp, their mirth not checked  
 By ceremony.—Would I were a cot-maid!  
 She feels no sorrows, or she finds such play  
 As this, a compensation for them all.<sup>67</sup>

The recurring theme of cultural misrepresentation in *The Outlaw* is a constant reminder of class division. Lady Margaret’s flawed judgement is a parody of existing genres and literary modes of writing that romanticise the lives of working people. She begins by feigning parity with Fanny Ashton, pretending to disregard the social differences between ‘high and low’. The irony is that Fanny has supposedly been sent mad by her ‘love and grief’ for Henry, whom Lady Margaret herself has unknowingly taken away from her. The audience is always

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<sup>65</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 93.

<sup>66</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, pp. 71, 96.

<sup>67</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 96.

aware that her utopian depiction is founded on a glaring misconception and she is infantilising the play's labouring-class protagonist. Story, then, purposely sets out to subvert Lady Margaret's assumptions and in the following scene forces her to recognise her mistake and review her initial assessment of Fanny's state of mind:

What a lovely creature!  
And to be thus! See, Emma, how deceived  
May be our judgements. I but now did envy  
The bliss of cot-maids!—<sup>68</sup>

Although Lady Margaret seeks redemption, in calling Fanny a 'creature' she is still unable to see the character as her equal. Her symbolic failure to recognise the play's labouring-class characters as entirely human is a form of 'Othering': her categorisation serves to remind us of the social boundaries that exist between classes. Story's heroines may share the same stage but Margaret's misreading always obstructs their line of sight and conceals their proximity to each other. Story's ironic juxtaposition of disparate class positions mirrors the cultural frameworks that obstruct and impede class relations.

There is at least one other major character in *The Outlaw* who can lay claim to labouring-class experience; surprisingly this is Henry's father, Lord Clifford, who sits at the very top of the play's social hierarchy.<sup>69</sup> Story's interpretation again relies heavily on Whittaker's historical account. When Clifford's father was killed in the War of the Roses his mother, fearing further retribution, sent her seven-year old son to live with his nurse. The child was allegedly raised tending sheep on the Cumbrian hillsides and lived in total ignorance of his noble

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<sup>68</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 98.

<sup>69</sup> Also known as Henry Clifford 10th Feudal Baron of Skipton.



birth for nearly twenty years.<sup>70</sup> The unusual circumstances surrounding Clifford's childhood had obvious appeal for the poet whose first verse lines were written whilst tending sheep on the hillsides of Northumbria. It is precisely this liminality and displacement that Story finds so attractive and seeks to exploit. Story's partly fictionalised Lord Clifford tells the audience '...I deemed / Myself the peasant boy that others thought me'. He also goes on to say 'That what the boy has been, the man will be.'<sup>71</sup> In asserting Clifford's labouring-class identity, the high-status character is a way of bridging the social divide and mapping out and rediscovering an Edenic society where classes can coexist.

Moreover, Story ritualises the communitarian experiences of Henry's youth. The scenes described by the character sound uncannily like Story's early poetic descriptions of his native Northumbria; indeed, the character's cadence and his invocation of prelapsarian pastoral imagery could be mistaken for any number of provincial self-taught poets. Recalling his dreams, for example, he depicts a distinctly labouring-class landscape; the character's childhood connection to nature appears to have penetrated his subconscious: 'My dreams are of the mountains, where my youth / Did pass so happily, in sweet communion / With Nature—unacquainted with all pomp'.<sup>72</sup> There is, then, a contradiction of sorts here. *The Outlaw's* high-status character, Lord Clifford, is both a symbol of patriarchy and labouring-class identity.

Story emphasises Lord Clifford's reputation as an autodidact as a further way of imprinting his own cultural identity onto the character. The audience is first

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<sup>70</sup> See Whittaker's *History and Antiquities of the Deanery of Craven*.

<sup>71</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, pp. 138, 145.

<sup>72</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 148.

introduced to the protagonist in the library of Barden Town where the stage is suitably strewn with ‘papers, books, and mathematical instruments’.<sup>73</sup> His first lines suggest that the play itself is an unwelcome distraction from his studies: ‘Alas, lord Prior, we must interrupt / the pleasant course of our most loved researches!’<sup>74</sup> Foregrounding the character’s early reading experiences, Story binds him to the self-taught tradition: ‘But not before I was of age to learn / The faith my fathers cherished. Oft she read’.<sup>75</sup> Lord Clifford’s recollections of listening to his mother read the bible are almost an exact match for Story’s own manuscript account of being read to by his father.<sup>76</sup> Although there is historical evidence for this figure being a self-educator, Story exploited Whittaker’s existing account to fit his own narrative of labouring-class subjectivity.

### **Melodrama, Political Satire and Story’s Social Conscience**

Story’s presentation of Lord Clifford is linked to the writer’s political social conscience and shows how he was navigating contemporary popular discourses concerning the condition of England. At its conclusion the play’s nobility are returned to their rightful position; in this respect the protagonist’s labouring-class background was a way of legitimising *The Outlaw*’s patriarchal deference. What saves Story’s drama from descending into a dogmatic narrative of Tory propaganda is the character’s connection to communitarian forms of identity. Although Story’s deferment of power is still, of course, reactionary, he sweetens the contract by stipulating that genuine knowledge of provincial labouring-class life is an essential requirement for legitimate government: ‘The woes of

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<sup>73</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 142.

<sup>74</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 142.

<sup>75</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 147.

<sup>76</sup> See chapter 1 in this thesis.

thousands round you—power which ought / To be the sweeter, since yourself have felt / The very ills that ask your aidance...'<sup>77</sup> It is no coincidence that the play's rightful heir, the exiled outlaw Henry, has also lived at least part of his life in close proximity to shared labouring-class experience.

*The Outlaw's* opposition towards the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 and its interrogation of the dehumanising effects of Malthusian political economy can again be contextualised and traced back to its roots in popular culture. This political turn is a common trope of melodrama. Sally Ledger stresses that theatrical modes of writing can often be defined by their '*imaginative critique*' of the new workhouse legislation.<sup>78</sup> Story's play surfs the great tide of popular protest literature that swept across the country during the 1830s and early 1840s. This political sentiment, according to Ledger, washed away existing barriers to create a popular movement. Ledger maps out and defines a number of key ideological differences bridging political divides:

The Chartists defended the interests of the poor and the dispossessed threatened by Malthusian political economy; whilst to the Tories the New Poor Law was an attack on traditional relations between rich and poor that had hitherto been based on patronage and charity.<sup>79</sup>

While Tories criticised the New Poor Law legislation for undermining existing hierarchies of paternalism, Chartists and labour radicals fought Malthusian political economy on the précis that it demonised the poor. As Story was both a Conservative and distinctly labouring-class writer this raises the question of

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<sup>77</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, 144.

<sup>78</sup> Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination*, p. 103.

<sup>79</sup> Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination*, pp. 90-91.

which side of Ledger's political spectrum does he fall? We learn here that the answer is both:

Other measure  
Must be dealt out to them! It cannot be  
That human life should fall like autumn leaves  
Unnoted and unvalued. Gentlemen,  
The law, that with an equal eye beholds  
The guilt of rich and poor, or if it leans,  
Leans on the rich with just severity,  
As having ampler means to know their duty—  
That law, long set at nought, demandeth now  
Augmented vengeance.<sup>80</sup>

*The Outlaw's* political commentary foregrounds the popular Tory dichotomy between rich and poor.<sup>81</sup> The writer clearly believes that the New Poor Law undermines the traditional axioms of paternalism. His accusation of 'guilt' suggests he regards the legislation as a dereliction of duty that breaks the moral contract between classes. At the same time he rejects the Malthusian moralising that places the guilt for disease and poverty at the feet of the poor. Lord Clifford's desire to find an alternative punitive 'measure' for the outlaws is anti-Malthusian and a direct challenge to a political economy predicated on its utilitarian disregard for human life. His personification of the poor as 'falling leaves' also suggests the laissez-faire attitudes towards the welfare of the labouring classes. The natural conclusion to this metaphor is, of course, that if

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<sup>80</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 163

<sup>81</sup> See also Story's 'The Rich and the Poor' in *Songs and Poems* (1836), pp. 30-31 and later footnote to the poem in the third edition (1849) in which he praises the replacement of the Poor Law Commission by the Poor Law Board in 1847 but suggests that the measure does not go far enough. Robert Story, *Songs and Lyrical Poems*, 3rd edn (London: Longman Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1849), p. 164.

the tree loses enough foliage it will wither and die.<sup>82</sup> Lord Clifford even goes on to warn the audience directly against, ‘enterprise, that would not pause to learn / The lessons of a stern economy’.<sup>83</sup> Here again we can see his fear that the inhumane methods of Malthusian politics will trigger the fragmentation of class relations.

Sally Ledger reveals the undercurrent of popular protest in *Oliver Twist*; close analysis of Story’s play shows these same undercurrents of opposition appearing in the contemporary work of labouring-class writers. Having met Dickens in person three years previous to *The Outlaw’s* appearance in 1839, Story would, at the very least, have been familiar with the serialisation prior to the final publication his own work. And yet, the two texts are too dissimilar in their overall form and content to suggest Dickens had a direct bearing on Story’s development. Rather both Dickens and Story are exploiting an earlier radical tradition which Ledger claims has provenance in the eighteenth-century. The new custodians of these popular cultural forms are not only the illustrator George Cruikshank and authors such as William Hone and later Dickens, but labouring class writers such as Story.<sup>84</sup> Offering cross-class and cross-party appeal, discourses of popular protest would offer obvious commercial benefits for a provincial poet situated on the margins and seeking to exploit the widest possible audience. Who better to write an anti-poor law text than Story whose primary

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<sup>82</sup> The Oak tree is the traditional symbol of Toryism and it is possible that Story’s simile emerged from Edmund Burke’s pamphlet, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In this political context Story’s symbolism would suggest he believed that Tory support for the Poor Law would undermine popular support for the party.

<sup>83</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 166.

<sup>84</sup> Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination*, pp. 1-9.

purpose was, as already pointed out, to put distance between himself and the workhouse.

A further political aspect of the play to be addressed is the fear that political economy and injustices of the workhouse would lead to a radicalisation of the labouring classes. It is no coincidence that *The Outlaw* was published in the same year as Carlyle's *Chartism* (1839).<sup>85</sup> I have already traced the play's patriarchal deference to contemporary discourses on the condition of England, but there is further evidence to suggest that its band of outlaws are a symbolic reminder of the dangers of further parliamentary reform. Their lawlessness and impulsive lack of restraint embodies the contemporary discourses of fear brought about by class conflict and social unrest. Although Story carefully avoids the direct polemical language of his party ballads, the writer leaves his political footprints embedded in the play's narrative. The radical association of the outlaws is first hinted at in the affected way that their leader, Henry, distances himself from Story. When Margaret asks him 'Art thou not the author / Of this day's work' he replies 'so help me Heaven, no!'<sup>86</sup> What exactly is it about Margaret's question that elicits such a violent response and why does Henry separate himself from the author in this way? The answer again lies within his opening song. Where these cultural associations connect Henry to communitarian forms of identity, Story is almost certainly using his line 'We liberals like a liberal butt,' to connect the outlaws to the Libertines and the liberal

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism* (London: James Fraser, 1840). First appeared as a pamphlet in Dec 1839.

<sup>86</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, 127.



Although they share the same provenance in song, there is a contradistinction, between Henry's political rhetoric and the Conservative propaganda found in Story's party ballads. When, Story mimics, or at least foregrounds, a radical voice in *The Outlaw*, he is in fact ridiculing the political discourses of the Whig party and emphasising the threat they pose to the country's institutions. If *The Outlaw* reconciles Story's labouring-class background through ballad and song then, at this juncture of the play, he appears to cast suspicion on these cultural forms and their links to radical political protest. In echoing the ballad's existing relationship between popular literary forms and protest writing the writer, one suspects, is revealing the dangers of working people being influenced and politicised by the ruling classes. The outlaws are symbolic of a radical movement that, roused by the Whig Party, can no longer be controlled.

Whilst the historical distance of Henry's radical discourse appears to bleed the play of any direct agency, in its final pages Story is no longer able to resist his own political impulses. The writer dislocates *The Outlaw's* political narrative from the sixteenth-century and resituates it within the historical context of the 1830s. We can hear the unmistakable sound of the author's Conservative voice breaking the surface of the play when, at its very end, Henry requests that a document detailing his lawlessness is kept as a warning to future generations:

No keep it father. Lay it in the archives  
Of our old House. Perchance a future age  
May find it, and thence learn, that there was once  
A CLIFFORD who exemplified the truth—  
That 'tis a perilous experiment  
To raise a LAWLESS POWER, what'er the end  
We mean to reach by it. 'Tis a machine



Which he who made it, finds hard task to guide;  
But should he leave it, RASH or WICKED hands  
May seize the wheels, and urge their speed to RUIN! <sup>89</sup>

There are hints here that Story's political ire is moving away from the Whig Party and beginning to bend towards the labour radicals of the late 1830s. Story's language is distinctly Carlylean. It is not possible the author would have missed the significance of the noun 'hands'; and his 'RASH or WICKED hands' are in fact city labourers or factory workers. Story's underlying imagery of industrialism and mechanisation connects this LAWLESS POWER to urban labouring-class agitation. When we peel back its layers the 'truth' lying at the heart of *The Outlaw*, what makes it beat, are Story's concerns around the condition of England and his opposition to the Chartist Movement.<sup>90</sup> Story's body politic of a mechanised vehicle careering out of control, symbolises the fragmentation of nineteenth-century society and the splintering of human relations. The writer's position is that, while falling short of universal suffrage, Whig support for parliamentary reform created a vehicle and political momentum that has now been commandeered by the Chartists. Shifting his attention from Whig reform to Chartism is another reminder that, though he began writing *The Outlaw* in 1834, it was not published until 1839. Story was almost certainly amending his manuscript right up to its publication and, ultimately, concludes his play within the reactionary discourses associated with popular Toryism.

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<sup>89</sup> Story, *The Outlaw*, p. 172.

<sup>90</sup> Again see Carlyle's *Chartism*.

In conclusion, the near absence of Story's work in the growing pantheon of labouring-class writing brings us back to Janowitz' original argument. Where existing scholarship disinherits nineteenth-century labouring-class writers, by whittling away the connection between Romantic Lyricism and the ballad, the overwhelming tendency to trace the cultural assertion of shared experience to Chartist writing works to disenfranchise Conservatives such as Story. Story laid claim to the same labouring-class literary inheritance and his treatment of communitarian forms of identity is evidence for how self-taught writers from both sides of the political spectrum can be considered experimental or progressive in their cultural attitudes.

## Conclusion

Due to the extraordinary richness of its primary source material the focus of this study has shifted considerably. My initial intention was to explore Story's aesthetic choices through the comparative frameworks of an established literary canon and traditions of labouring-class writing. This proved an awkward task. The more I read his unpublished manuscripts the more it became clear that he was not a representative case study. It has been difficult to leave out even minor details, which, when combined, reveal the complexity of Story's writing life. Comparative analysis revealed where he conformed to expectations but was less successful in recognising the tensions and conflict running just beneath the surface of his work. A literary study of Story became subordinate to mapping his political, social and cultural context. The fact that he was extremely self-aware and conscious of his own cultural inequality was, in isolation, not unusual; however, the shadow of this knowledge was a constant presence in his writing.<sup>1</sup> It pursued him relentlessly, shaping his cultural strategies and influencing his use of forms and models. In this sense his work was always political.

I am of course being intentionally provocative here. And yet, this thesis has repeatedly shown that while Story was required to show humility, he resented, and challenged, the conventions assigned to him by the polite realm of literature. Occasionally these ripples of protest were more pronounced and clearly visible in the satire of publications such as the *Critics and Scribblers*. At other times they

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Robert Story [written under the Pseudonym ORTESY], 'The Mind a Barometer; or, The Moods of a Day', *The Newcastle Magazine*, May 1826, collected edn January to December 1826, 10 vols, (Newcastle Upon Tyne: W. A Mitchell, 1826), V, pp. 195-197.

are only hinted at, as in his attempt at constructing a canon for rural self-taught poets or the formal experimentation of *The Outlaw*. There are many examples where he was knowingly conforming to expectations but even here, when Story was exploiting the contemporary marketplace, his acquiescence belied a fundamental discontent and ran counter to his overall cultural aims. Much of the analysis of this thesis concludes that when it came to literature and poetry he valued independence and ownership over adherence and deference.

How, then, do we begin to reconcile Story's progressive cultural values with his vehement opposition to parliamentary reform? This has been one of the many questions that drew me to the project. Although Story's contradictions have at times proved more challenging than first thought, the previous chapters have made his reasoning clearer. Story's political alliances and his desire for cultural advancement, in fact, make perfect sense when placed in context. To fully understand his Conservatism we must first acknowledge that his party ballads offered him the type of success that would otherwise have been out of reach. Story was a Conservative, undeniably, but it is my opinion that his desire for poetic recognition exceeded his political interests. Story's formal choices point towards a popular audience and it is therefore highly likely that his lyrics were, at least to some extent, commercially motivated. The freedom to worship the word of God through the King James Bible, for example, was extremely well received by Story's readers regardless of their social or economic status.

It is, however, quite possible that Story's political sentiments were entirely genuine. Indeed, efforts have already been made to trace popular symbols of

national emancipation to labouring-class identity.<sup>2</sup> His assertion that he was a ‘conservative—in the legitimate sense of the word’ fixes his political beliefs to the Constitution and the desire to protect the perceived freedoms it afforded.<sup>3</sup> The Conservative Party appealed to the aspirations of many working people who, despite their background, maintained that they possessed the ability and determination to succeed in life. Furthermore, Story did not trust the Whigs or their promise that parliamentary reform would necessarily lead to the social and economic emancipation of the poor. Instead he pursued cultural independence and the transformation of nineteenth-century society as a whole through the proliferation of literature and poetry.<sup>4</sup> His solution was undoubtedly Carlylean in essence and anticipated the attitudes of literary commentators such as Matthew Arnold. It was, from hindsight, also extremely naive to believe that he could change the existing conditions of society through literary culture alone.

Story’s party ballads attest to the significance of labouring-class poetry in nineteenth-century political cultures but not in ways we have perhaps come to expect.<sup>5</sup> Whether we dismiss his Conservatism as opportunism or naivety, his ability to have his voice heard within the political arena undoubtedly exceeded the expectations of most self-taught poets. By 1836 he had established his reputation as the ‘bard of Conservatism’ despite his peripheral position on the

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<sup>2</sup> See Linda Colley’s, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Story, *Songs and Poems*, 3rd edn (London: Longman Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1849), p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> For the role of literature in improving in the lives of nineteenth-century working people see chapter 2 of this thesis and its critical engagement with Vincent and Rose. David Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa Publications Limited, 1981). Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life Of The Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press).

<sup>5</sup> Scholarship on political labouring-class poetry has overwhelmingly focused on Chartist and Radical writing.

margins. He was also a forerunner for others. Story ruthlessly exploited the eighteenth-century radical tradition of protest writing and also anticipated the later cultural strategies, if not the political sentiment, of the Chartists.<sup>6</sup> The extreme pressure placed on Story to abandon his support of the Conservative Party and defect to the Whigs is again important.<sup>7</sup> The persecution he and his family endured in the West Riding area, suggests that labouring-class histories of the struggle for political self-expression during the period of reform was not restricted to Radicals and should be rewritten to include Conservative writers.

Lastly, this study has been a project of recovery and preservation. Kirstie Blair, in her introduction to *Class and Canon*, acknowledges those labouring-class writers who have previously been dismissed as ‘Parnassian, derivative, or as less relevant to our concerns because of their apparent lack of political force and biographical reference.’<sup>8</sup> Story deserves to receive the same critical attention as the many Chartist or Radical writers that form the focus of most scholarship. In the past there has been a tendency to either emphasise his reliance on a ‘borrowed culture’ or suggest his writing lacked political agency.<sup>9</sup> This study began by recognising that self-taught poets were assigned a set of literary codes that either inadvertently or deliberately worked to suppress labouring-class cultures. My research reveals that Story possessed the ability to transcend these dominant political social and cultural boundaries. Indeed, he often defined

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<sup>6</sup> For two groundbreaking studies into Chartist and Radical political cultures see Ian Haywood’s, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> See chapter 1 of this thesis for an account of the attempts made to coerce Story into supporting Lord Morpeth by wealthy landowner and local magistrate, Matthew Wilson.

<sup>8</sup> Kirstie Blair, *Class and the Canon Constructing Labouring-Class Poetry and Poetics, 1750-1900*, ed. by K. Blair and M. Gorji (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), p. 168.

himself against established poets and the literary genres and forms they represented. Story's writing life, then, was as much about his struggle to overcome the wider cultural conflict of early nineteenth-century society, as it was an account of his political Conservatism.

Robert Story was alert to his own place in literary history: themes of legacy are a prominent feature of his life writing. It was the relative success of his epic poem *Guthrum the Dane* (1852) that encouraged Story to begin work on his second autobiographical manuscript, *Life of Robert Story*: 'In connection with my lyrical and other effects, it [*Guthrum*] may carry my name to posterity. And if it should so carry it, posterity may wish to know something about its author.'<sup>10</sup> Although Story had begun preserving his legacy by recording and cataloguing his life's work, it was actually the historian, and Story's friend, John James who carried out his wishes by placing this autobiographical piece along with many of the poet's other manuscripts in the Bradford archives. In building an archive for future posterity, both Story and James can be seen as anticipating recent attempts to identify and celebrate a labouring-class canon.<sup>11</sup> Story's endeavours at memorialising his experiences as a labouring-class poet were inseparable from his life-long pursuit of what John Goodridge describes as a 'writerly community'.<sup>12</sup> More than this, as one who pursued and contributed to his own cultural space and the development of others, Story's ambition went beyond that of the many Parnassian Poets who preceded him or who came after. Although

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Story, *Life of Robert Story*, Holograph MS, 1 volume, (c.1853), WYASB, MS DB3/C59/2, Preface.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Thomas Murphy, *Toward A Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals 1816-1858* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> John Goodridge, *John Clare and the Community* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 3.

there has been a vast amount of interest in nineteenth-century labouring-class writers, Story proves that there is still much left to be said of literary culture and the role it played in the lives of working people.



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## **(iii) Works transcribed in Story's MS *Poems in Manuscript*, DB3/C59**

Many of the poems cited below were published in newspapers and periodicals or can be found in Story's later collected works; however, a significant number of pieces remained unpublished and can only be found in this manuscript.

### **1829**

'Roddam Dell Revisited', *The Newcastle Magazine*

### **1830**

'Sweet Beaumont Side', *Berwick Warder*

'The Vision', *Leeds Mercury*

**1831**

'Stanzas Written in March 1831', *Leeds Intelligencer*

**1832**

'The Spotted Dog', *York Courant*

'The Spring Moon'

'Fragment' [Lines on hearth and home]

'The Return of Spring'

'To the Heroine of a Juvenile Poem Entitled "Harvest"', *The Borderer's Table Book* ('Written during harvest time in Craven')

'The Devil at the Village Church: A Poem'

Sonnet ('Addressed to the majority that threw out the Reform Bill in the House of Lords', 'printed on cards by Tasker')

**1833**

'Journal of a Pedestrian Tour of Keswick in 1833' [Travel narrative recording Story's trip to the Lakes in 1833 to see Southey and Wordsworth]

'Wethercote Lane', ('Visited in July 1833')

'My Country' ('Written in Silverdale')

'Cam Scar near Malham', *Leeds Mercury*

'The Man and a Monkey: A satire'

'I was a Peasant Born!', *Leeds Mercury*

'Winterburn Lane', *Leeds Mercury* ('Written whilst collecting Easter Day in April 1834')

**1834**

'I Was a Peasant Born!' ('Part Two')

'I know Thou Lov'st Me', *Leeds Mercury*

'Dids't Thou Quail?', *Liverpool Standard*

'The Isles Are Awake', *The Standard*

**1835**

'Speech given by Story to Conservative Association in Skipton', *Liverpool Standard*

'Hurrah For the Blue' ('Printed on blue paper in every town in the West Riding')

'Church of Our Fathers', *The Times*

'To the Yellow Poets Especially to Mr Francis Scowley of Skipton Bank' ('Electioneering squib, published by Tasker during the election')

'To Mr Francis Scowley Who Had Complained of the Proceeding Attack' (Published by Tasker during the election)

'The Craven Gathering' ('Published in *The Times* and the Conservative Press during the General Election of 1837, and published again July 28th 1841. Published by Tasker during the election 1835').

'Sir Robert Peel' ('Published in every Conservative print in England')

'A Chaplet for Lord Morpeth', *Leeds Intelligencer*

'The Blue', *Leeds Intelligencer*

'1835', *Leeds Intelligencer*

'Dirge'

'Impromptu on Revisiting Gisburn Park', *Leeds Intelligencer*

'An Atheist', *Leeds Mercury*

'The Whig Radical Gathering at Wakefield on Monday August 1835', *Liverpool Standard*

'Birthday Song'

'Keep the Old faith!', *Berwick Warder*

'She Departs'

'King John's Barons', *Liverpool Standard*

'King John's Barons' ('Variation')

### **1836**

'Sonnet, extempore on seeing a statue of Napoleon in a public house in Liverpool Jan 2nd 1836', *Liverpool Standard*

'She is Falling by Grief' ('Composed on top of a coach between Lancaster and Settle, June 6 1836')

'Fragment of a Song'

'Thank God! We have Peers', *Lancaster Gazette*

'The Chief of Waterloo' ('And additional stanza')

'Come Dwell with Me'

'I was Bred in a Cot'

'Tis Sweet on this fair Boat 1836 ('Written extempore off the coast of Essex on the morning of July 10th 1836 during voyage to London.')

'Notes of a Journey to London in 1836' [Diary account of publishing trip to London]

'George the Third', *Frazer's Magazine*

'Would I were Nearer Thee' ('Not published')

### **1837**

'To a Gentleman / R. Alexander whose motto is 'I dare' ('Not published / couplet published')

'The Hills of My Birthplace', *Berwick Warder*

'We're far away from Bonnie Tweed Side', *Berwick Warder*

'Impromptu written in my Brother's House at Styall Cheshire'

'On a Notorious Scamp'

'Spring'

'Epitaph for a mother in-law and five children buried in our grave'

'The Union Workhouse'

'I saw her in the Violet Time' ('Written on the death of Miss Hogarth's second daughter') [Dickens' Sister in-law, Mary Hogarth]

'Followed by an additional stanza written at the request of Mrs Hogarth'

'The Rose of the Isles' ('Written at Carlisle', July) [Written while working for the *Carlisle Patriot* and the Conservative candidate Lord Graeme]

'Ye Green Banks of Eden!' ('Written at Carlisle')

'Ye Green Banks of Eden!' ('Written at Carlisle')

'The Gallant Graeme' ('Electioneering Song written at Carlisle')

'High Welcome to Wortley!' ('Electioneering song')

'Lament on the Death of Mrs Roddam of Roddam'

'Not yet! Not yet!' ('On hearing of the alarming illness of William Busfield Esq. of Milners Field'), *Liverpool Mail*

### **1838**

'A Health to Burdett' ('Intended to be sung at Leeds Operative Conservative Association', 7 March)

'Lines enclosed in the foundation stone of my new cottages laid May 29, 1838'  
[The poem was buried underneath the foundation stone of Story's newly built cottages that he had purchased to regain his right to vote]

'An Englishman's Wife' ('Written for Mr Fawcett's Bazaar Volume')

'Impromptu in Mr Cronhelm's Parlour during his absence July 26th 1838'

'The Double Fall of the Leaf and the Ministry', *Liverpool Mail*

'The Radical Demonstrations', *Liverpool Mail* ('In reply to a question asked by Gourley in a late letter "What think you of the present Radical Demonstrations"')

'The Lifting of the Orange Banner' ('These lines were reprinted in the Prentice Boys of Londonderry, and posted over the walls of the city'), *Liverpool Mail*

'To Mr Franklin a Lecturer in Astronomy' ('Extempore')

### **1839**

'Myself and the Sheriff', *Leeds Intelligencer* ('A letter done into Rhyme')

'Sweet was the Dawn'

'The Summer Comes', *Wakefield Journal*

'Our British Heart are Loyal Still', *Liverpool Mail*

'I Blame thee not World!', *Liverpool Mail*

'Impromptu on Receiving a Goose from Mr Fester of green Close', *Lancaster Gazette*

### **1840**

'Raise the Standard!' ('Written for the *Scottish Standard* a new journal started in Edinburgh by my friend Mr Ramsay late of the *Berwick Warder*')

'Supposed to be Spoken over the Grave of Wildman' [Wildman owed Story a relatively large sum of money]

'I'll Suffer as Becomes a Man', *Hubbard's Yorkshire Magazine*

'14 Lines I dare not say, a sonnet'

'Tomorrow', *Liverpool Mail*

'Ingleborough Cave'

'To John Stobbie' [Close friend of Story]

'December 3rd 1840' ('I wonder what will be thought of the following lines. They are the production of very great mental suffering. Do they express it?')

'Epitaph' ('On the road-Hay, later vicar of Rochdale, one of the Manchester Magistrates in the days of "Hunt and Liberty"')

'To Mrs Wilson of Eshton Hall'

'To Mr Dunn of London' ('On his marriage to Miss Eliza Mason of Gargrave')

#### **1841**

'Extempore' ('On Mr Tenant's marriage to one of the Miss Wilsons of Eshton Hall')

'To the Northern Breeze'

'On Miss Curren's Illness', *Leeds Mercury*

'Banns of Marriage', *Leeds Intelligencer*

'The Whig Blacklegs', *Leeds Intelligencer*

'To the Memory of Mrs Hudson of Bradford', *Leeds Intelligencer* ('One of my most zealous friends')

'A Curse was Upon Us' (*The Standard* thence transferred to the columns of every Conservative newspaper in the three kingdoms') [Goes on to quote the review]

'Lord Francis Egerton' ('On reading his Lordship's address to the electors of South Lancashire in which he alluded to the infirm state of his health')

'The King of the Dales', *Leeds Intelligencer*

'Epigram' ('On hearing that M W- Esq. of Eshton Hall had declared that he would have nothing more to do with politics')

'At last they are out!', *Liverpool Mail*

'Our True British Queen', *Frazer's Magazine*

'There's nane like my ain wife'

### **1842**

'A Happy New Year'

'The Spring of my Country', *The Standard*

'The Income Tax' ('Impromptu on hearing some persons exclaiming against its imposition')

'On Miss Batty's Death'

'Away to the Mass', *The Standard*

'Calder Fair'

'He shall be a son of the sea' ('Written in a steam packet during my passage to London Nov 1842 on seeing a very fine child the son of a ship owner and one of the passengers')

### **1843**

'Lines Written in the certainty of very soon receiving a letter which was likely to bear momentously on my future fate'

'Sweet Buds, ye are bursting', *The Standard*

'The Melting of the Waters Rotha and Dee'

'On the Death of Nicholson the Airedale Poet'

'I would not pass from earth'

'O! Wherefore assert ye that Englishmen hate?', *The Standard* ('Written in London')

'I come to meet thee Ellen' ('Mostly composed at sea as I was going down to Yorkshire to meet my family')

7 September 'Studley Park', *Leeds Mercury*

'Had Song brought the name', *The critic*

'The Moon in London', ('Mainly in extempore and sent in a note to Hudson')

### **1844**

'The Spring in London' [Reference to Chaucer and Poet's Corner]



'Where is he now?' *The Standard* ('Written on hearing of the death of R. B. Wilbraham?')

'The world has not grown old!'

'The Thames'

'Lanton Hill'

'It ne'er was spake"

'The Chain is Broken' *Tyne Mercury*

'The Landing of his Majesty Louis Philippe in England', *The Standard* ('These lines were transmitted to the King through M. Gurzat. And the following returned by the immediate command of His Majesty') [Reply from Louis Philippe I is missing]

'On the Death of my best friend William- Hudson', *Bradford Observer*

#### **1845**

'My Heart is Still Young', *Sailor's Magazine*

'The Confession' [Long narrative poem tracing the author to a fictional murder]

'Dreaming of the departed'

'To the Right Hon Sir Robert Peel 1845, *The Standard*

#### **1846**

'Addition to my song 'the verses thus hast spoken'

'To Miss Lindo on receiving a copy of her *Hebrew and English Lexicon*', published in *Voice of Jacob, or, The Hebrews' Monthly Miscellany* [Abigail Lindo, relative of Benjamin Disraeli]

'The Man of the Day'

'My William'

'Fragment on the same'

'To Mr Geller on his portrait of Miss Woolgar' [Actress]

'Lines on the election of Lord Francis Egerton to the Peerage'

'Lanton Hill Revised and Enlarged'

'The Auld Scottish Tongue'

'O ask me not, as I was wont'

**1847**

'The Rich and the Poor', *Howitt's Journal*

'To the owner of the album in which the lines were written'

'My Blessing on Bradford'

'O! Weep ye for Erin', *The Standard*

'Winter a Fragment'

'Sleep, My Mary!'

'The Wars are all Over'

'Song for the Kew banquet held in 1847' ('Set to music by Thirlwall Aug 1847')

**1848**

'My cot was low'

'My own native land!'

'My Queen and my Country!' ('Extempore, printed in *The Standard* April 11')  
[Includes review dated 13 April, *The Standard*]

'Epitaph on my old friend Mr Parker'

**1856**

'Forgive me, o my native hills'

**1857**

'The Thames' ('Written for a brochure on sanitary reform')

'Fragment' [The subject of the poem was the Duchess of Northumberland. Story tore out the pages on the advice of Mr Dickson, Clerk of the Peace for Northumberland]

**(iv) Work Published Anonymously**

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**(v) Selection of serialisations, articles and poems, published under pseudonym in the *Newcastle Magazine***

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## Appendix

**Transcript of Robert Story's *Critics and Scribblers of the Day: A Satire by a Scribbler***

**Published anonymously by Henry Washbourn, 1827 [British Library, General Reference Collection, T.1248.(15.)**

THE  
**CRITICS**  
AND  
**SCRIBBLERS**

*OF THE DAY:*

*A Satire.*

---

**BY A SCRIBBLER.**

---

And must it be so? Shall an author fear  
To render back his critic sneer for sneer?  
To tell the world, in satire sharp and just,  
How mean the censors in whose word they trust?  
No! ere beneath their flat high we droop,  
Let us at least unmask the awful group;  
Trace, if we can, the hidden springs that move  
Their wills to lash, be silent, or approve;  
And shew them ever in an honest song,  
Right but by chance, by taste and nature wrong!

*Page 8.*

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LONDON:  
HENRY WASHBOURN, 4, BRIDE-COURT, NEW BRIDGE-STREET.

1827.

## *Preface.*

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WHEN an author, on giving his first production to the world, distinctly states that he wishes it to be considered as *a specimen of his ability*—invites the decision of candid criticism—and promises to abide by that decision, whether it go to encourage or depress him,—such a one, I conceive, has a RIGHT to have his claims examined, and a verdict pronounced, by those who style themselves the Arbiters of literary Taste. If, from whatever cause, he is treated with contempt—without any reason being assigned—in one quarter; and dismissed without a word in every other; he has questionably, suffered INJUSTICE. If, again, the work thus used has, in the writer's own district, obtained the applause of all whose applause is worth having, as well as the spontaneous and unbought praise of several Provincial Journalists, the injustice becomes still more apparent,—and he may, as he pleases, either sit down quietly under his wrongs, or endeavour to revenge himself on his injurers.—The above has been exactly my own case; and the ensuing pages will discover which alternative I have thought proper to adopt.

But though this trifle is confessedly the offspring of individual resentment, there are few but will allow that the present state of Poetry and Criticism is such, as greatly to require a satirist. Effectually to do good, however, he should have a good knowledge of the springs—the internal machinery, as it were—of criticism, which I boast not of possessing. I have noticed such abuses only, as are, or may be, observed by every eye; and I have scrupulously confined my strictures to those periodical works, which I am in the habit of seeing. The others, I hope, are conducted in a manner much less exceptionable. As to my brother scribblers, it seemed proper that I examine into their claims to that distinction which had been denied to me. This I have done freely; yet I am sure the unprejudiced reader will admit, that I have not suffered my discontent to blind my discrimination—that if I have been liberal of censure, I have by no means been parsimonious of praise.

I now consign it to its fate, caring little what that may be. I would only add, that some of my friends charged me with having, in my previous publication, imitated the manner of SIR WALTER SCOTT—A perusal of its successor may, perhaps, convince them that I am not limited to one model.

Nov, 30<sup>th</sup>, 1826.

THE

## CRITICS AND SCRIBBLERS

*OF THE DAY:*

### A SATIRE.

---

SUN-GLEAMS along the Mountains! Bright and strong,  
Flashed from betwixt the clouds that eastward throng,  
Showing, in passing light, the hill-rock stern,  
The heath deep-waving, and the dark-green fern.  
Sun-gleams along the Valleys! soft and fair,  
As of ethereal creatures wandered there,  
Invisible to mortal eye, and known  
But by the glory round their motions thrown.  
SPRING is abroad! and Earth and Air confess  
Her mighty power to renovate and bless:  
Sounds the green land, of happy voices full,  
And decked with flowers that court the hand to cull:  
Dark discontents with Winter's glooms depart,  
And the pulse quickens of the coldest heart!

Not cold, but yet depressed—*mine* feels the thrill  
Of former springs,—it wakes to rapture still;  
Maugre the critic's sneer, the world's neglect,  
And—more—my almost vanished self-respect,  
My heart flings off the stupor, felt so long,  
Hears the old call, and rushes into song!

What wonder?—E'en in boyhood's careless time,  
My ear delighted, drank the flowing rhyme;  
E'en then I tried,—uncensored, unapproved,—  
To form an echo of the strain I loved;  
E'en then, like POPE, not yet a fool to fame,  
"I lisped in numbers, and the numbers came."  
Whence came the impulse?—In mature days,  
With none to estimate, and none to praise,  
The impulse strong, from whencesoe'er derived,  
Ruing o'er brain and bosom, still survived;  
Bade feelings, passions vent themselves in verse;  
Became, by turns, a solace and a curse,  
As Fame—my spirit's leading Star—withdraw  
In clouds, or burst in beauty on my view!  
Yet no—the word is harsh, and I but wrong  
My heart's experience by a term so strong.  
Amid dejection, and the world's rude strife,  
Song raised my spirits, and endeared my life.  
No, no; in pleasure as its stern reverse,  
Song was my solace, but was ne'er a curse!  
Then whence the impulse? Or, if this appear  
A question vain, why lit that impulse *here*?  
Were there no breasts but mine, its home to be?  
Why pass ten thousand fools to single me?  
Answer me, critic! For the part is thine  
To prose on axioms. 'Tis as least not mine.

My friends have answered. G—the profound  
Allowed my numbers sense, as well as sound;  
And M—, graced with all a critics lore,  
Read, and commended. Need I mention more?  
Or say how many, partial it might be,  
Who worshipped SCOTT and BYRON, lauded me?  
Enough, I published—surely no great vice;  
My book, if poor in wit, was poor in price;  
Nor drew, if it deserved them not, the gains  
Which pay more favoured bards for *longer* strains.  
This let me say, in justice to myself,  
I sung not—never shall I sing—for pelf;  
Whate'er my powers, I boast a nobler aim,  
To sing in Virtue's cause, and sign for fame!  
But fame comes not. The simple Wreath I culled,  
Must fade away, like summer roses pulled;  
Not Beauty's tear, not Taste's approving smile  
Can bid it live, if NICHOLS sneer the while;<sup>1</sup>  
If NICHOLS sneer, and BLACKWOOD silence keep,  
In vain shall Taste approve, or Beauty weep!

And must it be so? Shall an author fear  
To render back his critic sneer for sneer?  
To tell the world, in satire sharp and just,  
How mean the censors in whose word they trust?  
No! ere beneath their fiat high we droop,  
Let us at least unmask the awful group;  
Trace, if we can, the hidden springs that move  
Their wills to lash, be silent, or approve;  
And show them ever, in an honest song,  
Right but by chance, by taste and nature wrong!

Born in the country, bred by dale and down,  
Not mine to pierce the dark cabals in town.



Yet as in acts the actors oft are shown,  
So by the bards they laud are critics known.  
Stand forth, then, mighty men of blank and rhyme,  
In magazines dubbed idols of the time,—  
And pardon if my feeble pen essay  
To draw your *real merits* into day—  
Perchance more broadly than ye kindly use  
To paint each other when ye write reviews.<sup>ii</sup>

A time there was—nor hath it vanished long—  
Ere BYRON ceased his bosom-searching song;  
Ere SCOTT, the minstrel of departed times,  
Exchanged for facile prose romantic rhymes;  
Ere SOUTHEY, smit with church-supporting views,  
Forsook his matchless Roderick and the muse:  
Then, though the reader many a blemish met,  
Which darker looked, perhaps, so richly set,—  
Still in those bards, howe'er by critics drawn,  
All felt a something which forbade to yawn.  
In one, misanthropy might censure claim;  
The other's carelessness provoke our blame;  
The third, by some prosaic page, give pause  
To the long sigh which Admiration draws;—  
But still there was excitement—a high spell  
Of power intense attention to compel—  
An interest, genius-born, pervading, deep;  
We wondered, blamed, or praised—but could not *sleep*.  
Behold the change! The bards to whom we bow—  
Whom each sage critic idolizes now—  
Are of milder stamp. So mild, indeed,  
They have not heart to wound their hearts that read.  
Unlike their barbarous predecessors, skilled  
To pain, transport, or melt us as they willed,  
And using still their power without remorse,—

These gentler bards pursue a gentler course.  
His unimpassioned lay each poet leads,  
Smooth as the smoothest rill that cheers the meads,  
And like, that rill “inviting sleep sincere,”  
So softly meaningless it meets the ear;  
Which yet to criticise may seem like wrong,  
Since scarce a fault, save dullness, mars the song.

          In front of this mild, milk-and-water band,  
Behold great ALARIC, as its leader, stand!<sup>iii</sup>  
A name that carried terror, once, and doom  
To the proud heart of everlasting Rome,  
But joined to WATTS—alas! It *falls* to be  
A theme for sport to EDWARD BAINES and me.<sup>iv</sup>  
Yet BAINES would own “Poetic Sketches” sweet,  
Nor oft defective in their chimes and feet;  
That faults in Syntax they betray but few,  
And sometimes vaunt a thought that’s *almost* new.  
And justice bids me add—In borrowed plumes  
To hop from twig to twig this jay presumes.  
Abstract each pilfered quill, with which before  
The eagle, BYRON, has been known to soar,  
And the stripped fop, not e’en on twig upborne,  
Shall with congenial poultry shrink from scorn!  
Is this severe? Let such as deem it so,  
A single flower in ALARIC’S garden show,  
Which not before, with lovelier form and hue,  
In BYRON’S bloomed,—and I’ll confess it too.  
Till then, illustrious scribbler! take one praise  
Due to thy brazen craft, if not thy lays:  
Thou hadst the sense to know that BYRON’S fame,  
Which long had ris’n, would far outshine thy name;  
Th’ attempt was therefore prudent, that less dim<sup>v</sup>

Might seem thy rising, first to darken him.  
Vain fool! attempt as well to blot from sight  
Yon Sun triumphant in his march of light—  
The pure effulgence of his noon-day blaze  
Shall flout each cloud thy maniac spleen may raise!

What youth is this, so delicate and trim,<sup>vi</sup>  
With coat of drab, and hat of ample brim?  
'Tis BARTON,—he who, *kindly* as I think,  
Contrives to give his lines the final clink,  
Else the good reader, erring, might suppose  
The poet's stanzas neither blank nor prose.  
Yet every month's review on BERNARD'S lays,  
Exhausts the terms of puffery and praise,  
While his dull rhymes, in every New-Year toy,  
Rival the cuts in pleasing girl or boy.  
High be his pride, as high his present fame!  
Another age will never see his name;  
Or find it in some old "Gazette" bepraised,<sup>vii</sup>  
Itself neglected as the name it raised.  
—Bard of a sect that ne'er had one before,  
But now, we hope, to witch the world with more,  
Oh! if next age another shall produce,  
With twice thy genius, and with twice thy use,  
And if each following, ne'er without its star,  
Still show a bard to foil the last as far,—  
Posterity may look upon, perhaps,  
—And ere a thousand ages quite elapse—  
A Quaker-Poet, justly styled divine,  
Almost a MILTON in a garb like thine.

Nay, shrink not thus behind, nor turn so pale;  
Art thou not he of "Slaughden"'s lovely "Vale"?<sup>viii</sup>  
It not becomes thee in my gripe to quake,

Read by the world, and praised by NATHAN DRAKE.<sup>ix</sup>

'Twas right, good youth, to dedicate thy stuff  
To one so well prepared thy strain to puff:  
Bards should make friends of critics—woe to thee,  
That 'twas not thought of to propitiate *me*!  
One word, at most one supplicating tear  
Perchance had kept thy name unpilloried here.  
But still, despite this ign'rance or neglect,  
JAMES BIRD! I bear thy youth so much respect,  
I curb the rising of allusions foul  
That would connect thy music with the owl;  
I'll only say—and truth shall this allow—  
If not an owl, no *singing bird* art thou.

“Ends the list here?” Ah, would it did! but no;  
Still stands of scribblers an unnumbered row.  
“Proceed then, sound their merits, too, abroad;  
Describe.” As well describe the London Road!  
There every stock and stone and hedge-row green,  
Mere counterparts of those already seen,  
Would ask no terms but terms before employed,  
And make description flat and unenjoyed.  
E'en so these bards, reciprocally like,  
With scarce a fault to shock, or charm to strike,  
Would make my satire, like their rhymes, inane;  
For satire that repeats itself, in vain.  
Hence, shall thy works—unread by friends and foes—  
O WIFFEN, keep their undisturbed repose;  
Though ALARIC'S “Magnet” at thy glory stands,<sup>x</sup>  
And TASSO groans beneath thy murderous hands.  
Hence, too, ye DELTAS, gnat-flies of a day!  
Soon to be brushed by Eve's cold wing away—  
Unharm'd by me, your little hour enjoy;  
Pity itself forbids me to destroy!

And hence, ye HERVEYS, RICHARDSONS, and NEELES,  
(Names, which may stand for scores the Muse conceals)  
Not at my gentle satire shall ye chafe;  
So like your friends—in kindred dullness safe!  
I turn—but hark! what lyre of softest strings  
Wild on the breeze its lavish music flings?  
Who wakes that lyre of love's mellifluent swell?  
'Tis MOORE in petticoats—or L.E.L.<sup>xi</sup>

I love the sex; and oft, in passionate youth,  
When song was in my heart's breath, I wished, in sooth,  
A lover who to charms of shape and face  
Should add the dearer intellectual grace,  
To feel, with me, the Muse's sacred fire,  
And wake to tones of love the melting lyre.  
What happiness! remote from haunts of men,  
To roam with such by mountains or by glen,  
Thought echoing thought, and lay to lay replying,  
Love—holy love, and vows, and amorous sighing.  
Then, when blest Hymen—for *sans doute*, the god  
Must stand for marriage in my SAPPHO'S ode—  
Should tie the noose that breaks not but with life,  
How sweet! to find my poetess and wife  
Labouring at once to form her tuneful line,  
And to assist me in continuing mine;  
Lulling our first-born, in her gentlest tone,  
By some sweet song, and that sweet song her own;  
Or, forced at times to vulgar cares to fly,  
Quitting a poem till she makes a pie.  
But these were youthful dreams; and soberer views,  
Were it my fortune to have still to choose,  
Should guide the selection now.—Discreet, though young,  
Love in the heart, but seldom on the tongue;  
Romantic, but not concious of romance;

Rating as heaven her mate's approving glance;  
Based on esteem, Affection that shall last  
When all the gaud and glare of youth is past;  
With just enough of taste to know my rhyme  
Worthy of any bard of any time;—  
Such were my wife, if yet my hand were free,  
And what my EMMA is, my choice should be!

But what to thee, or to thy writings chaste,  
Pure L.E.L. is my old-fashioned taste?  
Nothing, MISS LANDON!—Still, in my despite,  
Give ladies' maids and love-lorn youths delight;  
Still weave thy songs, like gossamer-lines o'er dew,<sup>xii</sup>  
As fine in texture, and as flimsy too;  
Still spread thy colours, glowing, deep and gay,  
As skies of summer at the close of day,—  
But which, too well resembling tints of eve,  
Fade from the memory as the sight they leave;  
Write book on book; tis nought for me—for I  
Hold fast my purse-strings, and refuse to buy.  
But if thy friends, too warm to be discreet,  
Placard and trumpet thee in every street—  
If JERDAN, careless what he puffs or whom,<sup>xiii</sup>  
Vote thee a garland of perennial bloom—  
If CAMPBELL, won by beauty or by bribes,  
In thy behalf rouse all his monthly scribes—  
If BLACKWOOD, critic of the tender soul,  
Forget in praising thee his wonted growl,  
And prosing NICHOLS, marked by heaven a dunce,<sup>xiv</sup>  
Surprise the world with liveliness for once—  
If rival rhymsters compliment thy lays,  
If simple BARTON whine his note of praise—<sup>xv</sup>  
If ALARIC grasp the panegyric pen,

In hope thou'lt do as much for him again;  
 I cannot choose, though Gallantry turn blank,  
 And False Refinement cry my sin is rank,  
 But tell the truth and say—though fair the print,  
 And fair thy hot-pressed page, “there’s nothing in’t,”  
 Nothing the world’s calm suffrage to enrage,  
 When past the spurious taste that mars the age.  
 Now is thy time, and now thy voyage make,  
 With MILLS and IOLE to grace thy wake;<sup>xvi</sup>  
 The sun is bright, the favouring breezes play,  
 To waft thy pinnace on the watery way,  
 But soon shalt thou—the transient triumph o’er—  
 Drop thy last anchor on Oblivion’s shore.

Hark! yet another lyre; and, truth to own,  
 Of ampler compass, and of mellower tone;  
 BYRONIAN Harp! but which, more lightly spanned,  
 Betrays the airier sweep of a woman’s hand.  
 FELICIA HEMANS! If my present mood<sup>xvii</sup>  
 By aught could now be softened or subdued,  
 The rich, deep charm that marks thy briefer lays,  
 Might work the wonder, and command my praise.  
 And *shall* command! Sweet melodist, as long  
 As Spring shall yearly come “with light and song,”  
 So long beneath th’ enchantment of her “Voice”  
 All eyes shall glisten, and all hearts rejoice.  
 Not e’en *her* flowers—though Morn arise to gild  
 Their dews and drops from moonlight mists distilled—  
 With fresher beauties meet that early shine,  
 Have sweeter perfumes, brighter hues than thine!  
 But rest thee here—by scattered lays like these,  
 Brief, bright, and beautiful, secure to please.  
 If more ambitious, thou essay to soar  
 In regions winged by BAILIE’S muse before;

Or BYRON'S glory tempt thee on to tell  
Tales of dark deeds, of blood, and battle fell;  
The charm is done—the lately potent wand  
Waves a vile reed, Enchantress! In thy hand.  
“Bring flowers, pale flowers” from gloomiest cave or  
    copse,<sup>xviii</sup>  
And strew them o'er her blighted, buried hopes!

If such the bards, so passionless and tame,  
Who claim high wreaths, and get the wreaths they claim,  
What term of scorn, what phrase of deep contempt  
Shall brand *their* foreheads, from all shame exempt,  
Who palm (and half succeed) upon the times,  
As stirling gold, the tinsel of their rhymes?  
If thus insipid is each famous bard,  
Say, what the critics who the fame award?  
WICKED or DULL they must be—and whiche'er  
They prove, it drags them from the judgement-chair;  
Wicked or Dull—your fate, ye censors, choose;  
Here whirls a rope's end, and there bobs a noose—  
“Hold, hold!” some friend may whisper, “what if I,  
In their behalf, your consequence deny?  
Critics may puff a strain that lulls to sleep,  
Nor yet in Dulness, or in Guilt be deep;  
For sheer good-nature may their judgement clog,  
And pity 'twere for that to hang or flog.  
No doubt, though of weak bards they praise a few,  
They make amends, by praising great ones too.”

Ha! do they so? To this let WORDSWORTH speak;  
A bard as Prophet sage, Apostle meek.  
Deep as his lakes, transpicuous as their rills,<sup>xix</sup>  
And solemn as his star-o'ersparkled hills,



Whose strain, to such as read with “thinking hearts”  
 A love, unbounded as his own, imparts—  
 A fervent, an enthusiastic love  
 Of all that blooms below, or shines above.  
 Nor stops he here, nor impiously gives  
 The work sole wonder while the Artist lives;  
 But consecrates with piety his lay,  
 And fools that read to mock, desist to pray.  
 Yet search, from JEFFREY’S famed but faded page<sup>xx</sup>  
 Down to the poorest *weekly* of the age;  
 By paragraph, by line, the search maintain;  
 For praise of WORDSWORTH you shall search in vain.  
 His name that, linked with MILTON’S, yet shall be  
 A purer age’s deep idolatry,  
 Is now a term synonymous with all  
 That childishness and drivelling we call!

If, unconvinced, for further proof you cry,  
 The bard of Ettrick shall that proof supply.  
 —“Alas, poor Yorick!” was the epitaph  
 Of one whose humour raised the table’s laugh;  
 When thou shalt need a monumental line,  
 “Alas, poor HOGG!” dear Shepherd, shall be thine.  
 Thee Heaven with more than common powers endues  
 To court the English as the Scottish Muse.  
 In thy brief melodies, to Borderers dear,  
 A bard that all but equals BURNS they hear;  
 To tales of Chivalry when sounds thy Iyre,  
 Who but SIR WALTER can surpass its fire?  
 While thou hast beauties, rich—and all thy own—  
 To peasant and to baronet unknown.  
 For thee shall bloom, perhaps *shall* bloom, a wreath,  
 While Ettrick’s mountains blush with native heath.  
 But what thy *present* meed? The scribes, we see,

That puff all scribblers, scarcely mention thee;  
And Tales and Poems few could write so well,  
Though praised by BLACKWOOD, yet but slowly sell.<sup>xxi</sup>  
Thee the world deems—nor more shall deem thee soon—  
As BLACKWOOD'S merriman, a hired buffoon!

Blest were the genius who should pour along  
Green CRAVEN'S dales the charm derived from song;  
Recall the past; bid Bolton's hallowed fane  
Rise, and be peopled with its monks again.  
Bid lord and prior, wakened from the urn,  
This to the altar, that the chase return;  
And do for Malham's Lake and Gordale's cave,  
What SCOTT has done for Katrine's nountain-wave.  
Ah no! if hangs the poet's bliss on praise,  
Such themes attract none in these tasteless days.  
Witness "De Clifford"'s high Romance and pure;<sup>xxii</sup>  
Though sweet, untasted; and though bright, obscure;  
The modest author lives without the fame  
His song should yield; and none enquire his name!

A critic, worth the title, not alone  
Should place acknowledged merit on the throne;  
But be to *rising* parts, what sun and shower  
Are to the bursting bud and tender flower—  
Call out the shrinking beauty, bid it dare  
The winds of heaven, and bloom forever there.  
Not thus our censors will their task perform;  
Youth dreads them as a mildew or a storm.  
—With hand unpractised, but with heart on fire,  
Precocious MITCHELL struck, by Tyne, his lyre.<sup>xxiii</sup>  
Harsh were its tones; but yet at times there came  
Notes of surpassing sweetness from its frame;  
And promise of high deeds in future day

Full greenly flourished in that early lay.  
But critics praised not; and, to silence flung,  
Few know that Harp so forceful e'er was strung.

But why—since it but pains the heart—persist  
In following out this wrath-awakening list?  
Why point to CUNNINGHAM, so famed of yore,<sup>xxiv</sup>  
But who, the “London” dished, is famed no more?  
To CLARE, forgot with head and conscience clear,  
“And passing rich with forty pounds a year”?  
See laurelled SOUTHEY and his burning lays  
Sneered at, while BARTON’S cockney-rhymes have praise!<sup>xxv</sup>  
See SCOTT’S immortal offspring scorned for brats  
Brought forth with anguish by the Muse of WATTS;  
While not the tomb’s deep shade can sacred keep  
Lamented BYRON’S everlasting sleep!

Such are the bards our critics slight or blame!  
And such the scribblers they commend to Fame!  
Ye gods!—Her rage no more shall Satire stint  
To innuendo, or to broader hint;  
But where those critics lurk shall wing her way,  
And pounce at once upon the shivering prey.

And first for *thee* (thy love hath earned the grace  
In aught of mine to have the foremost place)<sup>xxvi</sup>  
What adverse star, or foe’s prevailing prayer,  
Enthroned thee, NICHOLS! in the critics chair?  
A literary bat, whose feeble sight  
Is dimmed, is dazzled when the sun is bright—  
When the high genius of the present day  
Throws round the world its brilliancy of ray;  
And is least weak when twilight mist or rime  
Hangs o’er the landscape of the olden time,

Where 'tis the joy, in that congenial gloom,  
 To hover round a ruin or a tomb,  
 With not one ray, from Genius sent, to shine  
 —Like glimpse of moonlight—on research of thine.  
 When the sleek mole o'erleaps, in his surveys,  
 His 'customed inch's *radii* of gaze,  
 And sees, with rapture, bursting on his eye  
 A glorious world of earth, and main, and sky,—  
 Then will I own (to own before were wrong)  
 That thou canst taste and judge of modern song.  
 Yet sage was thy conjecture, passing sage,  
 When two poetic Nobles claimed thy page;<sup>xxvii</sup>  
 Well did the thought thy musing forehead strike,  
 Equals in rank must be in *parts* alike;  
 And so much difference only couldst thou mark  
 As lies betwixt an Eagle and a Lark!

But this is not thy field, or should not be;  
 And I allow some merit e'en to thee.  
 Dull as thou art, thy antiquarian lore  
 Hath heaped together much unknown before,<sup>xxviii</sup>  
 Chaotic heap! but whence to latest time,  
 May Genius draw to "build the lofty rhyme."  
 For this thou hast thy hire; a nobler claim  
 We yield thee not—the builder earns the fame.  
 Thus him that fells the grove, or brings from far  
 The quarry's produce in his rolling car,  
 We pay, but praise not. We reserve our praise  
 For him who can, from these materials, raise  
 A fabric grace and majesty adorn,  
 The gaze and pride of ages yet unborn!

Critic, farewell! thy merits far too long  
 From thy Miscellany have kept my song.

—Reader, if thou, with hasty hand, canst draw  
 Some Cottage walled with mud, and roofed with straw,  
 Which, though to live in it one loathes to think,  
 Yet looks not much amiss when done in ink;  
 Some falling Church—thy hamlet’s long disgrace;  
 Some House built for the ease of all thy race;  
 Some rusty Coin, by chance or avarice saved,  
 Not worth a farthing—till it be engraved;—  
 Or if thou hast an eye, sagacious, keen,  
 For Abbey walls, or Tomb-stones mouldered green,  
 And canst restore to our admiring view  
 Antique inscriptions—never read when new;—  
 If thou canst string three sentences of prose  
 And know’st a Latin phrase to interpose;  
 Or three of verse, where Reason scorns to meet  
 With Rhyme that halts on such unequal feet;—  
 For NICHOLS write, secure to find a place  
 In his Miscellany of old and base—  
 With trash, like its conductor’s head, replete,  
 A lumber-room of all that’s obsolete!

Scorning of Magazine the lowly name,  
 See, next, the “Monthly” prouder title claim.<sup>xxix</sup>  
 ’Tis a Review, and all its scribes, of course,  
 Most sage REVIEWERS, filled with fire and force;  
 But, if the satirist to truth must keep,  
 ’Tis fire that shines not—force that forces sleep.  
 Still changing, still unchanged, their stale Review;  
 And each New Series brings us nothing new.  
 Yet as, of old, responses, deemed divine,  
 Were heard with awe from Delphi’s idol-shrine,  
 Though, were truth told, some doating priest or dame  
 Had racked their head the god’s reply to frame;  
 Thus o’er these nameless scribes a mystery rests,

Which with a charm their heavy work invests;  
And critics, in St. Giles' or Grub-street bred,  
Are thus as oracles received and read!

Enough of such; yet must I not forget  
To yield due praise to JERDAN'S famed "Gazette."<sup>xxx</sup>  
JERDAN, the Prince of Pirates! Who exists  
By daily plundering whomsoe'er he lists—  
JERDAN, who hath the golden secret hit,  
Which, at small waste of industry or wit,  
A weekly treat enables him to cull,  
Worthless, but yet too various to be dull;  
Drawn from each source the teeming press bestows;  
Scraps of maimed verse, and mutilated prose;  
And these condemned or puffed in such a style  
As boys might scrawl—or NICHOLS—by the mile.  
Such is that thing, of "shreds and patches" made,  
The auctioneer and organ of the *Trade*;  
Lauding all works (but still at random, mark,)  
Not from the country, or by HUNT and CLARKE.<sup>xxx</sup>

"My Public!" (as said HORACE SMITH—whose throat  
Can ape all tunes without one native note,<sup>xxxii</sup>  
My Public! where thy boasted judgement now?  
If such thy guiding critics, what art thou?  
Still will thy guilty apathy permit  
These brainless Monarchs o'er the realms of wit?  
Still take as truth the *dicta* they dispense,  
Whose in-born dullness is their best defence?  
Then marvel not that their decisions raise  
The weak and worthless to the height of praise;  
'Tis fit. If better bards their puffs advance,  
They keep their nature, and are right by chance.

But not all critics, not all Magazines,  
 Can plead their dulness in excuse for sins.  
 See BLACKWOOD'S monthly, o'er the world diffuse<sup>xxxiii</sup>  
 Wit keen as lightening, sparkling as the dews,—  
 Humour that shakes the sides, and frees the soul  
 From mists that Care and Thought around it roll,—  
 With satire, like the levin-bolt that falls,  
 And the false patriot's shrinking heart appals!  
 Long mayst thou flourish, NORTH! with just applause,  
 A faithful guardian of our Church and Laws!  
 But since thy cause is good, and cannot die,  
 Except with British Freedom's latest sigh,  
 Dare thou to act as one who feels and proves  
 Th' immortal nature of the cause he loves.  
 Since to no party genius is confined,  
 But burns in Tory, and in Whig hath shined,  
 And e'en in Radical a struggling ray<sup>xxxiv</sup>  
 Through cloud opaque may find its doubtful way;  
 Do thou, henceforth, impartially bestow  
 Justice on every friend—and foe.  
 Give, though a Whig, a poet's praise to MOORE,  
 And, though a Tory, own that WATTS is poor.

With this great Shade let CAMPBELL rank—a name<sup>xxxv</sup>  
 Dear to a thousand hearts, and dear to fame.  
 Who but remembers, as a gem in time,  
 That moment when the song of "Hope" sublime  
 First reached his ear? Or "Getrude"'s tender tale  
 Lapped him in dreams of Susquehana's vale?  
 Let hackney critics style "Theodric" tame,  
 And talk of sinking powers and fading fame—  
 Too dull to know that genius pure and high,  
 Like the fair Regent of the nightly sky,  
 Hath periods when to wax and when to wane,

And ne'er is darkened but to shine again;  
 Spite of one failure, CAMPBELL still shall be  
 The bard of "Gertrude" and of "Hope" to me.  
 But if, regarding more his master's pelf<sup>xxxvi</sup>  
 Than what is due to glory and himself,  
 He lend his weight and genius to bepraise  
 Each flimsy work for which his master pays;  
 If, mindless of the land from whence he sprung,  
 And friends beloved when life and fame were young,  
 He meanly sneer, the southern taste to please,  
 Or let his heartless HAZLETTS sneer at these;  
 And if in fine, *his* goal of glory won,  
 He eye with scorn the Muse's every son,  
 Nor cheer the racer when he needs it most,  
 Unless he starts from COLBURN'S starting-post;  
 His deep degeneracy the world shall scan,  
 And though they love the bard, condemn the man;  
 The bays around the poet's temples spread,  
 Shall shrink and wither on the critic's head!

What now remains? "The London." Ye, by whom  
 That monthly bore delays its certain doom,<sup>xxxvii</sup>  
 Though in my song alluded to but once,  
 And then no writer stigmatized a dunce,—  
 Oh, not for that, I do beseech, decree  
 One line of compliment to verse by me!  
 Less would it irritate to see my rhyme  
 Held forth by JERDAN as the true sublime—  
 Or into CAMPBELL'S close-print vilely crammed—  
 Or praised by NICHOLS—or by BLACKWOOD damned—  
 Less would it move my spleen, provoke my rage,  
 Than word of favour in your ribald page!

Since thus one critic from sheer dulness errs,



A Tory one, and one a Whig prefers,  
 While smiles or frowns a fourth, as authors do,  
 Or do not, scribble in his own Review,—<sup>xxxviii</sup>  
 Where shall he turn to breathe his doubtful claim,  
 The young and ardent candidate for fame?  
 Shall he to JEFFREY'S proud Review apply,  
 Or LOCKHART'S, quite as proud? Alas! Too high,  
 On pinion strong, they wing their eagle-flight,  
 To see, or e'en to mangle aught so slight;  
 Though works as slight may have their pens employed,  
 Sanctioned by MURRAY, CONSTABLE, or BOYD.  
 Try then these publishers, or such as these;  
 To LONGMAN write: Too gracious to displeas,  
 He, by next post, a smooth reply shall drop,  
 And with polite evasion blast your hope.  
 Or COLBURN'S scrawl, if COLBURN'S aid you seek,  
 Shall more politely, and as falsely, speak.

From these repulses if you learn despair,  
 Turn to the country—what awaits you there?  
 May not some lord, in ancestral fame  
 Rich, and himself an honour to his name,  
 Stoop to exalt an unassisted bard,  
 And feel the action a sublime reward?  
 Ah, no! If not himself a judge, the fear  
 Of the world's ridicule repels the peer;  
 He dares not praise, for less his influence lend  
 To bard that none have puffed, and few commend.

Yet one resource remains; which, let me hint,  
 The best have practiced—By subscription print.  
 But let them tell, who have the canvass tried,  
 How uncongenial with the throb of pride  
 Which swells the breast of Genius—to descend,

And court each sordid wretch to be your friend;  
 To ask the paltry sum (by *you* so judged,)
   
 And yet to know that trifle will be grudged;  
 To bear the taunts of birth-proud fops, and feel  
 Yourself the nobler, yet that thought conceal!  
 Nor ends the misery here. The *few* may prize  
 Your labours, but the many will despise,  
 Led by some village ZOILUS, with a skull  
 Of scraps—not books, conceit—not wisdom, full;  
 Himself a scribbler, but whose verses pall,  
 And pass as *balaam*, if they pass at all.<sup>xxxix</sup>  
 And e'en the few who feel, and dare assert  
 Your sterling merit, soon become inert,  
 And drop your cause—when Magazines condemn,  
 Or echo not opinions formed by them.

Thus cruelly depressed on every side,  
 And deeply bleeding with insulted pride,  
 The glorious visions, by your fancy drawn,  
 Fading like brilliant dreams at morning's dawn,—  
 Of two sad exits choose: Or quit all ill  
 By suicide, like Scotland's TANNAHILL;<sup>xl</sup>  
 Or, if too good to risk that daring part,  
 By KEAT'S tardy cure—a broken heart!  
 But no; rejecting both, be you a man,  
 Nor yield such triumph to the critic clan;  
 To all superior, bear aloft your brow,  
 And lash, and laugh at them—as I do now.

“And who art thou?” A man. Not College-bred,  
 Yet with some gleams of learning in my head.  
 To me her graces OVID's muse reveals,  
 Nor VIRGIL his majestic charms conceals;  
 Obscurer HORACE glimmers on my eye

Like flowery dale whence morning's vapours fly;  
And though I vaunt but little skill in Greek,  
I might contrive, in some propitious week,  
To furnish forth an essay, learned and long,  
On the *first line* of HOMER's epic song,<sup>xli</sup>  
And win the Royal prize.—But, jest apart,  
The Muse, from childhood, hath engrossed my heart.  
Song, for itself, I loved; and tried to gain  
The poet's laurel—but I tried in vain.  
Nor forced to scribble for my daily bread,  
Like many now alive, or lately dead,  
I meditated, when I failed to please,  
A calm retirement blest with love and ease;  
Yet—human still—I could not think to yield,  
Without a blow, my long-selected field;  
And, this achieved, no more I murder time  
In counting syllables, and tinkling rhyme.

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## NOTES.

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<sup>i</sup> *If Nichols sneer the while;*

John Nichols is editor of the Gentleman's Magazine, of *whom* and *which* more hereafter.

<sup>ii</sup> *Perchance more broadly, &c.*

That the *authorlings* in and about the metropolis are in the habit of complimenting each other into notice, I have often seen asserted, and never disproved.

<sup>iii</sup> *Behold great Alaric, &c.*

A. A. Watts, author of "Poetic Sketches," and if fame speak true, editor of the "Literary Magnet." Alaric has scribbled in every Magazine from Land's End to John o' Groats' House, and is therefore naturally and properly puffed by all.

<sup>iv</sup> *A theme for sport to Edward Baines, &c.*

Never while Mr. Watts lives, will he forget Edward Baines. In the grasp of his Herculean Whig, the dwarfish Tory was crushed into "air—thin air," and was never seen afterwards to walk the streets of Leeds.

<sup>v</sup> *The attempt was therefore prudent &c.*

*Vide* Literary Gazette for (if I mistake not) the year 1821, in which charges of the grossest plagiarism against the late Lord Byron, are shamelessly brought forward, and ridiculously enforced, by the same Mr. Watts,—whose own volume, published a year or two after, contains, notwithstanding, a series of palpable pilferings from his lordship.

<sup>vi</sup> *What youth is this, &c.*

Bernard Barton is a rhymester of the school of Watts. Less polished and more prosaic than his Master, he seldom attains to mediocrity, and still more seldom rises above it. Being, however, the first and only poet of his sect, he is mightily cherished by the broad-brims. *Esto!*

<sup>vii</sup> Or find it in some old "Gazette," &c.

I had the Litterary Gazette in my eye.

<sup>viii</sup> *Art thou not he of Slaughden's lovely Vale?*

<sup>ix</sup> *Read by the world, and praised by Nathan Drake.*

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James Bird, author of a very poor poem entitled the “Vale of Slaughden,” and subsequently of something else—I neither know nor care what. He dedicated the former volume to Dr. Drake, who, as was right, repaid him by puffing it in his “Winter Evenings”.

<sup>x</sup> *Alaric’s Magnet, &c.*

The Literary Magnet, a cheap and very fair periodical as times go, embraces every opportunity to laud the Translator of Tasso’s “Jerusalem Delivered,” Mr. Wiffen, who, be it whispered, is the *editor’s brother-in-law*. As to the translation, the newspaper *jeu d’esprit* recommending the transposition of a comma, and the title to be read “The Jerusalem, delivered of Tasso by J.H Wiffen,” appears to express the general opinion of critics respecting it.

<sup>xi</sup> *’Tis Moore in petticoats—or L.E.L.*

That is, Miss Landon, This lady is, after all, a very pretty poetess; but the outrageous puffs which her poetry has received, betoken more gallantry than taste—and perhaps more of mercenary motives than either.

<sup>xii</sup> *Like gossamer-lines o’er dew  
As fine in texture, and as flimsy too;*

This is a beautiful and appropriate comparison—but it is not mine. The line,

*“Fine as a cobweb, and as flimsy too,”*

has been heretofore applied to her poetry, and is quoted in the “Literary Magnet” as worthless. My opinion is different—let the reader judge between us.

<sup>xiii</sup> *If JERDAN, careless what he puffs or whom  
If CAMPBELL, won by beauty or by bribes  
<sup>xiv</sup> And prosing NICHOLS, marked by heaven a dunce*

JERDAN—CAMPBELL—NICHOLS. These are all editors of periodical works; the first, of the Literary Gazette, the second of the New Monthly Magazine, and the third *ut supra*.

<sup>xv</sup> *If simple Barton, &c.  
If Alaric grasp, &c.*

Mr. Barton addressed a copy of verses to L.E.L. and Mr. Watts, in the Leeds Intelligencer, praised her with all his might, a favour which the grateful lady took care to return, on the appearance of “Poetic Sketches.”—*A-propos*, the “Leeds Intelligencer” has now, it is evident, a conductor very superior to A.A.W.

<sup>xvi</sup> *With Mills and Iole, &c.*

For a puff of Miss Mill’s “Sibyl’s Leaves,” see L. Gazette for July 1826.—Iole (a fictitious signature) scribbles in the L. Gazette after the manner of L.E.L.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Felicia Hemans! &c.*

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Mrs. Hemans is a woman of unquestionable genius, and has produced several most delightful minor poems, at the head of which stands the "Voice of Spring." As a writer of tales *à la Byron*, she is successful; and fails decidedly when she attempts dramatic composition.

<sup>xviii</sup> *"Bring flowers," &c.*

These words form a sort of chorus or burden of a sweet poem of this lady's.

<sup>xix</sup> *Deep as his lakes, transpicuous as their rills.*

In this imperfect attempt to do justice to the much-culminated Wordsworth, it is proper to state, that I had the "Excursion," and that alone, in my eye. His "Lyrical Ballads" I have never seen. The "Excursion" is, in every sense, a noble poem, and without being ostentatiously religious, will send a man sooner to his knees, than any thing that Barton or Bowring ever wrote.—As that acute detector of plagiarisms, Mr. Watts, may possibly honour my satire with a perusal, it may be well to say, that a line in the text was designedly imitated from the well-known line of Goldsmith,

*"And fools that came to scoff, remained to pray."*

<sup>xx</sup> *For praise of Wordsworth you shall search in vain.*

The only exceptions to this assertion are the "Literary Magnet," whose praise is not of the greatest importance; and "Blackwood's Magazine," where, with reprehensible inconsistency, he is sometimes lauded one month, and decried the next.

<sup>xxi</sup> *—yet but slowly sell.*

I should be sorry to learn that Hogg's manifest decline in popularity, and his works' having remained so long stationary in the catalogues, are attributable to anything else but his being continually before the public in caricature—as the *clown* of the "Noctes Ambrosianae."

<sup>xxii</sup> *Witness "De Clifford," &c.*

"De Clifford, a Romance of the Red Rose," abounds in poetic beauties; yet it has scarcely ever been noticed in the Magazines!

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Precocious Mitchell, &c.*

This Gentleman, at the early age of nineteen, published a metaphysical treatise, to prove that there is no original, or innate difference between any one mental capacity and another—a work which displayed such astonishing acuteness of reasoning, with such force and neatness of expression, as to form, in itself, an almost decisive argument against the proposition it was meant to establish. At twenty-one, he published his "Thoughts of One that Wandereth," a poem which deserved better of the critics than to be—neglected.

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xxiv Cunningham—Clare  
xxv Barton's cockney-rhymes

Honest Allan was a great man in the "London Magazine," during the proprietorship of Taylor and Hessay. So was Clare. They are now seldom heard of, and would be forgotten, but for their annual appearance in Mr. Watts's "Literary Souvenir," in which flash publication *I* mean to have a piece next year.—Cockney-rhymes are morn with dawn, war with saw, &c.

xxvi —thy love hath earned the grace.

The editor of the "Gentleman's magazine," in a notice of my former publication, distorted the obvious meaning of my preface, and dismissed my poetry with a sneer. I cannot be ambitious of praise from such hands, and to censure me he shall again be welcome—provided he allow my verses to speak for themselves, by extracting the passages which relate to *him*, and to the work he edits.

xxvii *When two poetic Nobles, &c.*

These were Lords Byron and Thurlow. The latter never could write a stanza of *poetry* in his life. Yet the author of "Childe Harold" and he were reviewed in juxtaposition, and the editor congratulated himself and the world on the combination of two such illustrious names on his page. Lord Byron he denominated an *eagle*, and Lord Thurlow a *lark!* See *Gent. Mag.* for (I think) 1812.

xxviii *Thy antiquarian lore  
Hath heaped together much, &c.*

In his "Literary Anecdotes," "Royal Progresses," &c.

xxix *See, next, the Monthly, &c.*

The "Monthly Review."

xxx *Jerdan's famed "Gazette."*

The "Literary Gazette" is, it must be confessed, a *melange* pleasant enough to lounge over; but fortunately to be sure for Mr. Jerdan, requires very little talent in its editor.

xxxi *Lauding all works, &c.  
Not from the country, &c.*

I cannot remember having seen a country publication noticed in the *L. Gazette*; or one, published by Hunt and Clarke, without a mark of reprobation.

xxxii *My Public! as said Horace Smith*

*Vide* "Rejected Addresses."

xxxiii *See Blackwood's, &c.*

"Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine," is, beyond all question, the most spirited, and most uniformly interesting periodical in the world. Its faults I have glanced at in the text.

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> *And e'en in Radical, &c.*

A perusal of a No. or two of the "Westminster Review" convinced me (hard to be convinced) that there may be talent even among radicals.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *With this great Shade let Campbell rank, &c.*

Of course I mean as an *editor*. I am not aware that old Christopher pretends to be a poet; and should even call in question his *taste* for poetry, were I to judge of it from his allowing *Delta* to be his laureate. By the way, this Delta should have had a note to himself, above, but, as Dominie Sampson says, "I was oblivious," and shall not now stop to repair the omission.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *But if, regarding more, &c.*  
*Or let his heartless Hazletts, &c.*

"The New Monthly Magazine" is certainly conducted with a laudable regard to the interests of its publisher; while Mr. Campbell's northern friends (Sir Walter Scott among the number) are frequently treated with unmerited obloquy.—Hazlett is the most contemptible of all the scribblers of Cockney-Land.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> *That Monthly bore, &c.*

The "London Magazine" is evidently in a galloping consumption. And radical as it is in politics, and infidel as I believe it to be in religion, the sooner it is gathered to its rest the better.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> *As authors do,*  
*Or do not, scribble in his own Review.*

Much of the present system of puffing is attributable to the fact, that periodical works are supplied with matter by incipient authors and authoresses, whose productions, as a thing of course, are praised by the periodicals they write for.—Jeffrey and Lockhart are the supposed editors of the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews.

<sup>xxxix</sup> *And pass as balaam, &c.*

To the readers of Blackwood this word will want no explanation; to others it may. In a Magazine, when all the good articles have been inserted, and there is still space unoccupied, any rubbish that can be found to fill up the vacancy, is termed *balaam*.

<sup>xl</sup> TANNAHILL—KEATS.

The former of these, author of many delightful Scottish Songs, put a period, if I have been rightly informed, to his own existence. Keats died, it is said, of the disease mentioned in the text—the poet of "Lamia" allowed himself to be killed by a criticism! On this subject Blackwood has disgraced himself, by speaking with indecent triumph.

<sup>xli</sup> *On the first line of Homer, &c.*



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The first line of the Greek Iliad was lately proposed as the subject of a prize essay, by the Royal Society of Literature. At least so said the Newspapers. I hope it was merely a bit of wagery at the expense of the very respectable members.

Since the trifle now offered to the world was put into the hands of the printer, an event has occurred, which, had it taken place six months ago, would certainly have prevented its being commenced; and which, had it happened *one* month ago, would probably have prevented it being finished. I allude to the death of John Nichols, late editor of the "Gentleman's Magazine." When the news arrived, I could still have withdrawn the manuscript; but when I considered the deep and deadly wound the deceased had wantonly inflicted on me; when I looked on the words of insult he had applied to my unassuming volume—words which were seared into my brain as if by characters on fire!—when I reflected, besides, that nothing I have written relates to *personal*, but solely to *literary* character, and that consequently the maxim, *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, could in this case suffer no infringement,—I will honestly confess that I felt myself unable to relinquish the pleasure of laying before the public the retaliation I had prepared. I trust my readers will be satisfied with this statement, and leave it the surviving "Critics and Scibblers" to take advantage of a solitary, and, I hope venial delinquency.

JANUARY, 1827.

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