

# NINETEENTH-CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

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## Gender and Class in Two Chartist Short Stories

By [Ronald Paul](#), University of Gothenburg

<1>In this article I want to compare and contrast two short stories by writers who sought to place their literary talents at the service of the Chartist movement: Mary Hutton's "The Poor Man's Wrongs" (1839) and Ernest Jones's "A London Doorstep" (1848).<sup>(1)</sup> Hutton came from a working-class background, Jones an aristocratic one. Meagan Timney nevertheless notes the close connection between the two, not least as poets:

We can read Hutton as a Chartist poet who blended a commitment to justice with quasi-religious notions of the poet's prophetic role. Her choice of simple diction and political subject matter aligns her strikingly with the poets of Chartism, including A.M.P. and Ernest Jones. (142)

<2>Ian Haywood describes Hutton as "the only named female author of Chartist fiction" (20). Also, uniquely, despite his upper-class background, Jones was not only one of Chartism's most prominent leaders, he was also a prolific writer of novels, poems, short stories and political journalism. According to John Saville, Jones's "success as a poet of Chartism was quickly established; thousands of people heard the poems sung or recited at meetings all over the country, and during his lifetime and after, many testified to their power and influence" (Saville, *Jones* 20). His most recent biographer, Miles Taylor, describes Jones as "England's outstanding contribution to the gallery of nineteenth-century romantic populists" (vi).

<3>Both stories are very short. "The London Doorstep" is two pages long while "The Poor Man's Wrongs" is four. There is therefore little or no room for much character or plot development. Jones's narrative is somewhat more dramatic, not least because he subtitles it "A True Story" (Jones, *London* 195). Apart from an

extract of autobiographical poetry, Hutton's story basically remains a political discussion between two men who are supporters of the Chartist cause. The stories are therefore primarily agitational set pieces with a strong moral message that attacks the privilege of the rich and the plight of the poor, while promoting the need for parliamentary reform. In Hutton's narrative, the focus is on a destitute old man and his working-class host. In Jones's there are a homeless and impoverished wife, baby and husband trying to seek work in London. The response to their treatment by the state also forms a gendered subtext of passive (female) acquiescence and active (male) protest. In both cases, the reader is clearly meant to be drawn into questions of shame, solidarity and struggle. Through a close reading of the stories, I aim to show that while they share a sense of moral outrage at the widespread oppression of working people, they reveal differing political perceptions of how to address it.

<4>The first thing that strikes the reader in this context is the contrast in narrative voice. In Jones's story the main characters rarely speak. Instead, it is the London streets that bear witness to the events, reflecting an awareness that is both political and partisan: "Oh! Those London door-steps – could they speak, what tales they could tell of the feet that tread over them, the forms that rest on them" (195). This act of testimony is articulated by a radically intrusive narrator who guides the reader through the story. We are only once made privy to the thoughts of the unemployed husband when he compares his own desperate condition to that of the rich: "'Oh! If but one of you would put down *one* of your fat horses, its costs would make happy a whole family of human beings!' and his tears started to his eyes as he thought of his poor wife and little baby" (195). Similarly, his wife remains inscrutable throughout, except for one occasion when we are told she is going to London. It is the first and last time she makes any real decision of her own in the story:

Meanwhile the wife, buoyed with hope, had been awaiting anxiously, in Leicester, tidings from her husband. Not hearing, she made up her mind, towards the close of April, to follow him to London, and, accordingly, without means and with a heavy heart, she took her baby in her arms and set out for the metropolis. (196)

<5>In contrast, the male characters in Hutton's narrative, Albert, the host, and his Chartist visitor are both notably articulate. The visitor is also what he himself calls a 'ryhmster'(sic) who recites his own poetry. The two men are clearly politically radical in their views. Like the family in Jones's story, they are certainly affected by the social and economic inequalities of the system, the workings of which they express a much more critical awareness, a point I will return to later.

<6>The opening scenes of each story are similar, but their differences are more significant. In Hutton, it is a freezing cold evening when an old man is found outside Albert's cottage. He is brought inside and given food and shelter. Jones's mansion doorstep is also a place of potential refuge, but one where the comforts inside remain unavailable to the outcast. Although the owner is aware of the woman and her baby, he deliberately misconstrues her condition and demands her removal: "John, do you see that drunken woman on the door-step – send her about her business – what does she mean by lying there?" (196). This rejection is one of the key moral pivots around which not only the question of personal and political responsibility revolves. There is also a further connection between individual and collective that recurs throughout the story. While the woman is only trying to relocate her husband so they might start a new life together in the capital, the owner of the mansion dismisses her as part of an underclass of beggars whose distinct personal histories are of no consequence.

<7>Another significant expression of this theme is the separation between urban and rural in the two stories, which is also both spatial and moral. Despite its opulence, London is an unforgiving place, where there is a tangible social difference between house and street, the latter offering a precarious shelter. In contrast, Albert's rural cottage represents the "neat and beautiful" home of a worker and his family (whose surname is 'Freeland') and a sanctuary for the old man (186). Hatton's pastoral image seems also to pre-empt the popular aspirations of the Chartist Land Plan launched a few years later to provide an alternative livelihood for factory workers: "Life on the land, in your own cottage and smallholding, was presented as the life of freedom, where a man need ask no employer for wages and no landlord for a roof. It would be a way out of the ills of the new industrial society" (Hadfield 16).

<8>Cities are where workhouses are located and there is a direct reference in both stories to these much-hated institutions. In Jones's case, they are described as 'Bastiles' (sic), an epithet that echoes the French revolution. In London, however, even these pauper prisons are full up, forcing people back onto streets that are strictly policed:

Meanwhile, even the Bastiles closed their accursed gates against him [the husband - RP] – they were overgorged – the door-step, and the park, and the arch of the bridge were forbidden ground; the houseless outcast was not even allowed to lie on the cold bed that God had smoothed – the hard wet ground – the inhospitable stones – for the 'move on' of the policemen broke the rest of the exhausted beggar. (195-6)

<9>The workhouse is also perceived as an existential threat in Hutton's story, although one that can be challenged. While both stories dramatize the Victorian discourse on poverty, Hutton, unlike Jones, avoids reducing the old man to just one more hapless victim of circumstance:

I am from England; and the New Poor Law Bill, – the cruel effects of which you must have heard of, – has sent me a tramping in my old age. There is no relief out of the workhouse, and I could not go in. I do not like imprisonment and water-gruel diet; besides, I have never been stained with crime to be thus punished. I have toiled hard all my life, and no political economist could have been more careful; yet, the whole course of my existence has been a continued and constant struggle for existence. (188)

<10>The mention of a 'political economist' in the same context as the New Poor Law Bill of 1834 is most likely a reference to Thomas Malthus, the population theorist who initiated the debate about the 'feckless' poor who should be punished for their inability to fend for themselves. The ultimate deterrent was the workhouse. The characterization of the poor as 'deserving' or 'undeserving' remains another of the political and moral concerns of the two stories. In both cases, the government is condemned for its arbitrary attempts to contain and coerce people according to highly questionable social categorizations of poverty and the poor.<sup>(2)</sup> Moreover, while the ruling class claimed to represent the pillars of society, it is clear their position of privilege and power is fundamentally undeserved. Indeed, in one of the most remarkable passages of the whole story, Jones caricatures them as redundant degenerates, whose litany of moral crimes includes their indifference towards the homeless. Martha Vicinus notes that Jones's narrative strategy of "piling indignities upon the poor victim" follows a literary and moral "convention" (*Industrial* 117). While this is certainly true, Jones also creates a cast of privileged grotesques whose very existence represents a powerful indictment of the whole social, economic and political fabric of Victorian society. If the doorsteps could speak,

they would tell of lust prowling to its morning lair – of dissipation staggering from its midnight orgies. They would tell of the hard speculator returning with a harsh, firm, step from the side of his ruined victim. They would tell of the fluttering footfall of the female gossamer of fashion – the cold tread of the un pitying statesman, the snake-like gliding of the successful lawyer. Of the bloated trader, purse-proud and vulgar, returning from his city shop to his west-end *apery*; of menial insolence, and area theft – of greater robberies by greater robbers – they

could unveil the clock-work of that vile machinery, that crushes human nature in its workings, and smoothes its wheels with the blood of fellow beings. (195)

<11>Although not as bitterly sardonic, the two working men in Hutton's story are nevertheless remorseless in their condemnation of the government for its corruption and violent repression: "'There is an awful responsibility,' said Albert, 'resting upon the heads of these incapables, who have brought their country to ruin and disgrace, and who have wantonly and recklessly shed the blood of the people by the sword, and destroyed them by famine'" (189). However, while both narratives condemn the abuses of Victorian society, Jones's response is more contradictory in its radical censure of class oppression on the one hand and an uncritical reproduction of conservative gender norms on the other. I want to turn therefore to these assumptions about femininity and masculinity on which each narrative is based.

<12>As has been noted, Hutton maintains a focus on two male characters. At the beginning of the story, the cottager is portrayed as a patriarchal figure reading to his family from the Bible. No mention is made of his wife, only the fact that they have an "eldest son". In his turn, their old visitor refers in his poem to his own "loved ones" who now lie in "their bloody grave" (187). The cause of their death is not explained. He does reveal, however, that he has "lost two dearly-beloved grandsons in the accursed and disgraceful contest which has long laid waste the brightest provinces in unhappy Spain" (188). This is a critical reference to Britain's colonial involvement in the power struggle between two factions of the Spanish royal family, which led to civil war in 1833:

'Their spirits were broken through privation and suffering,' replied the old man. 'They could get no employment in their native land, consequently they were reduced to this necessity of embracing any measure that promised temporary relief, however they might despise such a measure; and that they both of them heartily despised it at the very time they embraced it, I was well convinced; but there was no alternative. We had no means of existence left for any of us. They were both killed; but death by the sword or the musket is preferable to the lingering one of starvation.' (188-9)

<13>In Jones's narrative, the woman and her baby are at the center of the moral argument about her condition and that of society. While she is repeatedly misrepresented by men, it is nevertheless important that the reader perceives her as worthy rather than depraved. This begins with the description of her physical

appearance which, despite her destitution, is that of a respectable woman: “Her dress was wretched, but her hair was neat, shewing that poverty, and not idleness, was the source of her raggedness” (195). Her face and body are also described in terms of an attractive woman whose femininity has been affected by hunger not immorality: “Traces of emaciated beauty still lingered on her face – her tattered shawl and ragged gown clung loosely to her form. For famine had shrunk her frame from its natural proportions” (195). The fact that the woman is also a devoted wife is shown by her decision to take their baby and seek her husband in London. In a final note of gender distinction, Jones reiterates her adherence to traditional female roles: “A faithful wife, a kind mother, with every virtue that adorns a woman” (196). These attributes are not only meant to expose the male prejudice of the politician who owns the mansion, they are also in complete contrast to those of his frivolous wife. Despite their class difference, it could, nevertheless, be claimed that the feminine characteristics of these women make up two sides of the female Victorian stereotype in the story:

[S]he sat there and thus – while the man within had £15,000 per annum, a seat in Monmouthshire, and another in Notts, a title and a place under Government. His wife that morning had been busy issuing directions for a nocturnal *fête*, and was at that moment reading one of the most obscene novels of *Paul de Kock!* (196)

<14>The dramatic eviction of the mother from the doorstep comes after her baby has fallen from her grasp. This image is certainly reminiscent of the satirical etching by Hogarth, “Gin Lane”, in which a drunken woman is portrayed with her baby slipping from her naked breast down some stone steps. In Jones’s version we are shown a similarly disturbing scene in which the mother and her baby are manhandled by a policeman who presupposes her inebriated condition:

The policeman saw in this prisoner nothing but a drunken prostitute – not his fine feeling to take more casual notice of her – and, little removed from the brute by nature, he dragged the child up by its arm, and shook his mother till consciousness returned; when the latter, roused at the faint shrieks of her child, snatched it from his arms, and staggered after her captor. (196-7)

<15>There is also a direct parallel here to her husband’s assault by another policeman whom he tries to stop beating a woman on Blackfriars Bridge. The husband is, like his wife, wrongly apprehended in the street, in his case as a Chartist “rioter” (196). There is therefore a recurring trope of criminalization on the basis of

class in the narrative. Moreover, the attacks on both husband and wife are not seen as mere accidents. The reader is clearly meant to feel a complete lack of trust in representatives of the state – from politicians to policemen. Despite this systematic persecution of the poor, there nevertheless remains a fundamental divergence between the two narratives as to the political conclusions to be drawn, both of which are connected to the question of working-class agency. Moreover, there is a cultural consideration in this context that can be linked to the different social backgrounds of the two authors.

<16>Despite their shortness, the two stories have clearly literary as well as political ambitions. In Jones's case, he devotes his own considerable powers of satirical expression towards attacking the upper classes, to which he himself belonged. Hutton in contrast directs her attention to revealing the literary talents of the old Chartist 'ryhmster', whose autobiographical poem takes up almost a quarter of the whole story. Thus, while Jones makes a recurring effort to demonstrate his own rhetorical flair for words, Hutton seeks to show the intellectual cultivation, radical consciousness and verbal eloquence of her working-class characters.

<17>Another related aspect of the differing cultural connotations in the stories are the contrasting references to real writers, which are not arbitrary, but which act as literary and political pointers. In Jones's case, the wife of the politician is clearly an avid reader of Paul de Kock, whose novels are characterized as "obscene" (196). Moreover, her choice of reading matter is certainly meant to reflect the questionable moral values of the woman. However, the (equivocally sounding) surname of the writer might have more to do with this than the actual literary reputation of de Kock, who was a popular social novelist in France at the time. He was perhaps not as morally reprehensible as Jones seems to suggest. Karl Marx, for example, who was a close friend of Jones, appears to have been much more appreciative of de Kock's work:

We know that Marx himself devoured Paul de Kock's novels in his leisure-hours; he clearly found them useful as well as entertaining, for they mirrored the confusions of the readers who so eagerly bought them and to whose requirements they were tailored. (Prawer 319)

<18>It could also very well be claimed that Jones was more influenced by de Kock's writing than he himself might have admitted, with its combination of sentimentality and satire.<sup>(3)</sup> There is moreover in Jones an element of literary sensationalism in his depiction of lower-class lives, especially when it comes to women, something Haywood characterizes as Jones's "voyeuristic male gaze" (30).<sup>(4)</sup> For example,

there is a mixture of both moral outrage and lurid fascination with the idea of an innocent young woman being placed in a prison cell together with condemned prostitutes: “She was classed with the ‘drunk and disorderlies,’ and placed for the night with the most unhappy outcasts of creation, who, though sinners, learned their sin at the hands of society” (197).

<19>Hutton’s story also mentions the names of some famous authors – Robert Burns, Walter Scott and the Ettrick Shepherd (James Hogg) – all of whom belong to the Romantic tradition of writers who depicted the lives of ordinary people. Moreover, both Burns and Hogg were themselves from peasant backgrounds and held radical views about society. Since the old man is himself something of a poet, it is clear that these writers are seen as a source of inspiration, both when it comes to their literary subject matter and the example of their lives: “In a land that will ever be blest, and enlightened, and glorified, by the heartcheering and spirit-stirring strains of a Burns, a Scott, and an Ettrick Shepherd” (187). There is also a line in the old man’s own rhymes that echoes Burns’ famous poem, “Such a parcel of rogues in a nation”, where Burns attacks the union between Scotland and England:

We are bought and sold for English gold,  
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation.  
(552)

<20>In the old man’s poem there is a similar reference to the economic and political betrayal of English people who are ‘bought and sold’ by the ruling class:

Cause England’s poor have long been bought and sold!  
White slaves, in fact and falsely named the free –  
Why, men of England, suffer such to be?  
(187)

<21>The mention of these poets is also linked to the strategy in Hutton’s story of giving working class people a voice, something that is also linked to their capacity for independent thinking and action. Even when he lies prostrate outside in the rain, the old Chartist still manages to compose lines of a poem in his head. It is the confessional account of the struggles of a working man who, although a Christian, does not place his faith in God to avenge society’s wrongs:

Why bow your heads in silence and dismay,  
Whilst petty tyrants mark you for their prey?  
But liberty, though slow, makes glorious way;  
Yet I shall never see that blessed day

When thinking millions rise in power and might,  
And peacefully assert an equal right  
To eat their daily bread in Christian love.  
(187-8)

<22>Throughout Jones's narrative there is a similarly class-conscious enumeration of the moral shortcomings of the rich. However, when it comes to the collective response of the working class, there is only one brief reference to a political fight back in the form of the Chartist demonstration on Kennington Common on the tenth of April 1848. The encounter between the husband and this iconic demonstration appears purely accidental, however. Like his wife, he remains irretrievably lost in the big city. Moreover, his lack of personal direction seems to be a sign not only of his own sense of physical and mental disorientation, but also of the failed political presence of the Chartists:

The days wore on – it was the tenth of April – and the weary outcast had gazed on the magnificent pageant of Kennington Common – we will not describe his feelings when he saw the hundreds of thousands, with the seal of REVOLUTION, stamped by oppression on their foreheads – we will not say with what feelings he returned towards the bridges – but he returned peaceably, unarmed, and exhausted. (196)

<23>Thus, Jones shows that even though the husband might be impressed by the Chartist 'pageant', any spark of individual rebellion is quickly extinguished. When he is moved to stop a woman being hit by a policeman, the consequences of his actions are calamitous. Once again, the implication is that resistance to the force of law is futile:

[H]e saw an assault made by the police on a group of unoffending persons, and a woman struck with a truncheon – as the blow was about to be repeated, he mechanically imposed his feeble arm: 'Down with the – rioter!' cried a sergeant of police, and with a fractured skull the helpless victim was dragged to the nearest hospital, where he died three days after. (196)

<24>I would argue therefore that there is more than a symbolic connection between the political events of the day and the personal misfortunes of the couple. While the meeting on Kennington Common was meant to be a show of Chartist strength, the reality was that it ended in complete defeat. This was mainly due to the government mobilizing thousands of special constables and troops to break up the gathering. It

was therefore a final blow to the reformist ‘moral force’ Chartists who sought to persuade Parliament through peaceful petitioning of the justice of their democratic demands. Jones was himself one of the leaders at this demonstration, after which he was arrested and sentenced to two years hard labor in prison. Aspects of his biography could therefore be relevant to an understanding of the ultimate political message of the story. Since it was first published in 1848 in *The Labourer*, Jones must have written “The London Doorstep” in the immediate aftermath of the political *débâcle* on Kennington Common. David Jones sums up the impact of the decisive failure of this last great Chartist manifestation:

The events of 1848 – ‘one huge monument of misfortune’ (McGrath) – ended hopes of a Chartist revolution [...] The exasperation of Chartists in this situation betrays their inward tension. For radicals in 1848 experienced not only another round of self-examination but a more debilitating crisis of confidence. (*Chartism* 167-8)

<25>The concluding, capitalized exclamation of Jones’s narrative is therefore not a repeat of his initial appeal for political “REVOLUTION” (196), but for a more muted moral condemnation of the individual politician as “A SOCIAL MURDERER!” (197). The death of the husband in hospital and that of his wife in prison, the incarceration of their baby in a workhouse where he will grow up to become “a young thief” (197), all symbolize the collective retreat of the movement.(5) It seems that the only option left, politically and personally, was to try and stir the conscience of those in power by shaming them for their moral failings:

Such is the true history from a London door-step. Had the proud aristocrat been a Christian – instead, he would have invited the poor Pariah to his house. He would have shared, ay, even a mere trifle of his ill-gotten wealth with that wretched victim – he would have become the founder of happiness and virtue in an honourable family, instead of being, as now, A SOCIAL MURDERER! (197)

<26>In contrast, the tone of Hutton’s story is much more radically assertive. We see working-class people actively discussing their own situation. It also poses the question if these people would not only be capable of voting in elections but of also running the country themselves. Still only men and not women, however, even though Hutton does speak of the demand for ‘Universal Suffrage’.(6) Historically well informed, the two men refer back to the Reform Bill of 1832 and the high expectations it gave working people of gaining the vote. However, the limited result

of this reform, which basically gave only middle-class men the franchise, nevertheless represented an important stage in the political education of the working class:

‘I once entertained some hopes from the Reform Bill, – at least, I thought that the condition of the labouring classes might be ameliorated by that measure – but the Reform Bill has made the condition of the labouring population ten times worse than it was before; for now the non-electors are the slaves of the ten-pounders, who have little else but impudence and ignorance to bear them through; yet I have often seen that those, accompanied with that very useful article money, will carry a man through the world very respectably.’ (189)

<27>Hutton’s story was published in 1839 when Chartism was still on the rise, giving hope of a working-class reform movement no longer controlled by an unreliable middle-class leadership. 1839 was also the year of the first great Chartist petition handed in to Parliament. Its rejection triggered an armed rising of ten thousand Chartists in Newport, Wales, one of the worst outbreaks of political violence of the whole Victorian period.<sup>7</sup>) Hutton was clearly writing against a dramatic background of burgeoning working-class struggle.

<28>When their discussion turns to reform or radical change, the old Chartist argues for the necessity for working people to formulate their own political demands. This consciousness of class he sees being forged in their everyday fight in the factories for better wages and conditions. As Cole comments: “Hunger and hatred – these were the forces that made Chartism a mass movement of the British working class” (1). Thus, the fatal harassment of a family at the hands of their masters in Jones’s morality tale is transformed in Hutton’s radical male encounter into a collective political lesson, articulated by an old Chartist, about the need for organized resistance:

[R]edemption for enslaved millions is approaching – the working classes are now capable of thinking and reflecting for themselves, and they will no longer submit to the petty tyranny of insolent and overbearing taskmasters who daily brand them as being too mean and contemptible to exercise the elective franchise with honesty and discretion. I would tell those who thus brand them, that there are men amongst the working classes as honest and high-souled, and as sensible and intelligent as any duke, lord, or squire in the kingdom. (189)

<29>If Hutton's text reflects the growing political maturity of working people at this time, it could also be read as an expression of her own personal experience of poverty, oppression and struggle.<sup>(8)</sup> Significantly, there is no appeal for Christian charity, Hutton's workers will become the instruments of their own emancipation:

'National enthusiasm is at length awakened – the decree has gone forth – matters are come to a crisis – and Universal Suffrage is the beacon-star that will lead the working classes of England into a haven of rest; and may happiness, contentment, religion, and liberty for ever-more reside in the dwelling of every honest man!' (189)

<30>When "The London Doorstep" was reprinted in his journal, *Notes to the People*, in 1851, many things had changed for Ernest Jones, not least his own political standpoint after his release from prison. There is a discernible shift in his later writing towards a more militant understanding of the oppression of working people, as can be seen in a piece entitled "Class War and Class Friendship", published in the same volume of *Notes to the People*. It is as if the short story and article came from the pen of two different writers:

There are some who wish to fraternize all the world, but forget that with some portions of society fraternization is impossible, because of the innate hostility of their social position. It is a NECESSITY that some classes should be enemies. This is a melancholy truth – but it is a truth nevertheless. It is injurious to create a false impression for the sake of writing with ink made of rose-water [...] that the capitalist class, for instance, should say – all that we have done is wrong and criminal – our power was got by oppression, our riches were obtained by robbery – we are determined to make ourselves comparatively powerless and poor. (708)

<31>In her turn, Hutton also broadened both the political and poetic range of her writing through her awareness of the complex challenges that faced working people everywhere, not least the slaves in America. According to Timney, Hutton represented therefore a distinctive female voice within both the early Chartist and Abolitionist movements:

Hutton blends 'labouring class' satiric and moralistic traditions with 'working class' invocations of working-class solidarity and revolutionary change. Her continual appropriation of the terms and images contained within the dichotomized *topoi* of slavery and liberty,

capitalism, and patriarchy sets her poetry alongside the discourses of both abolitionism and industrialism, and by extension aligns her with the poetic representations of the working class as constructed by the Chartist poets in the 1830s and 1840s. (142)

<32>One could perhaps claim that there was nevertheless a certain ideological convergence between Hutton's preoccupation with race and class and Jones's increasingly radical commitment both to the anti-colonial struggle (9) as well as to the fight for women's rights. In *Notes to the People*, he began serializing his novel, *Woman's Wrongs*, the title of which seems to indicate almost a writing back at Hutton's story ("The Poor Man's Wrongs"). Here Jones explores the lives of women on four different levels of society: "The Working-Man's Wife, The Young Milliner, The Tradesman's Daughter and the Lady of Title" (515). In this novel, Jones seeks, moreover, to address much more systematically the structural discrimination of women in patriarchal society:

What gross injustice! For society counts woman as nothing in its institutions, and yet makes her bear the greatest share of sufferings inflicted by a system in which she has no voice! Brute force imposed the law – and moral force compels her to obey it now.

I propose, therefore, to lift the veil from before the wrongs of woman – to shew her what she suffers at her own home-hearth – how society receives her – what society does for her – where society leaves her. (515). (10)

<33>Thus, Jones begins to argue for the need for the Chartist movement to incorporate the fight for the political emancipation of women as part of their own democratic struggle. In *Notes to the People* Jones comments for instance on a meeting of the Chartist *Women's Rights Association* in Sheffield, who thanked him for his support for their demand to move Chartist meetings out of pot-houses (pubs) and into safer venues where women (and children) could participate more freely and actively. This seemingly simple request was in fact profoundly radical in its challenge to the male norm of female exclusion. In his reply, Jones draws fundamental political conclusions about the indispensable role of women in the struggle for a truly democratic society:

[T]he voice of woman is not sufficiently heard and not sufficiently respected, in this country. The greatest test of enlightenment and civilization among a people is the estimation in which women is (sic) held, and her influence in society. Woman has an important mission in

this country, and our fair friends in Sheffield shew themselves worthy of the task. (Jones *Notes*, 709)

<34>The political transformation of the Chartist movement in a more revolutionary direction, for which Jones agitated, was accompanied by a clearly expressed concern with promoting the rights of women. Thus, in another contemporary Chartist journal, *The Red Republican* (later *The Friend of the People*), briefly co-edited by Jones together with his friend and political ally, George Julian Harney, they not only published the first English version of *The Communist Manifesto* (1850), but also serialized a translation of George Sand's feminist novel, *Consuelo* (1850).<sup>(11)</sup> Without doubt, Chartism was in process of changing the public discourse in Britain.<sup>(12)</sup> For instance, working-class politics and literature became fused in radically new ways that questioned the boundaries of both class and gender. As part of this, there was, according to Haywood, an upsurge of more complex literary representations of working-class women that was not only unique to the Chartist movement, but also to English literature in general:

Taken together with Ernest Jones's *Woman's Wrongs* (1850) and G.W.M. Reynolds's penny novel *The Seamstress: Or, the White Slave of England* (1850), [...] these stories about independent, urban, and vulnerable working women opened up new social territory to English fiction. What is more, their radical form and message, combined with their popular appeal, make them unique cultural responses to the 'woman question'. (20)

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<35>Chartism was one of the world's first independent working-class political parties. It also gave rise to an astonishing range of pioneering working-class writing in Britain: autobiography, fiction, poetry, popular songs and political journalism. Two important writers in this context were Mary Hutton and Ernest Jones. Coming from opposite social backgrounds, as well as different stages in the development of the movement, they were nevertheless united in their support for Chartism, not only as a campaign of political reform but also as an alternative way of life. As Dorothy Thompson reminds us: "[A]t its height, Chartism was a movement which incorporated whole communities. Families took part, men, women and children demonstrated shared values" (Thompson *Outsiders*, 120). Both Hutton and Jones were writing within this popular context of political activism. As this article has tried to show, their work can therefore be viewed as contrasting literary interventions in

the wider Chartist debate about how Victorian working-class people lived, but also how they might live.

## Notes

(1)The two stories have been reprinted in Haywood, *The Literature of Struggle*, 1995. There is nevertheless very little in the way of sustained critical discussion of either of them. In his full-length biography of Jones, Miles Taylor does not mention “The London Doorstep” at all. There is however a short descriptive paragraph devoted to the story in Martha Vicinus’s study *The Industrial Muse* (1974) as well as in her later article ‘Chartist fiction and the development of a class-based literature’ (1982). In both cases, she identifies a lack of transformative political impact on the reader: “Jones’s story simply confirms what his readers already know; he does not need to tell them how necessary it is to change the contemporary social situation” (Vicinus, *Chartist*13). In his very brief introduction to the reprint of the story, Haywood notes in passing: “A more tragic tone colours Ernest Jones’s ‘The London Doorstep’ (1848), written in the aftermath of 10 April” (20).(^)

(2)For a deeper discussion of these differing categorizations of the Victorian poor, see Gareth Stedman Jones (2013).(^)

(3)For a comprehensive discussion of Jones’s relationship to popular melodramatic fiction, see Sally Ledger (2002).(^)

(4)See further the recurring scenes of domestic violence, sexual abuse, criminality and prostitution in Jones’s serial novel, *Woman’s Wrongs* (1851-2), in particular, the first part dealing with ‘A Working-Man’s Wife’.(^)

(5)The retreat of the Chartist movement also affected its female activists, as Jutta Schwarzkopf notes: “[T]he definite defeat of Chartism left women doubly disempowered. Not only had their Chartist aspirations been foiled, but in the course of campaigning for them, women had also lost out with regard to their scope of action and their ability to bring pressure to bear in public” (4).(^)

(6)For a comprehensive discussion of the active participation of women as Chartists, see Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement*.(^)

(7)See further David Jones. *The Last Rising*.(^)

(8)For an account of the hardship and poverty of Hutton’s life, see Meagan Timney.(^)

(9)See further Ronald Paul (2001).(^)

(10)Haywood also mentions another connection in which the title “pays tribute to Mary Wollstonecraft’s radical fable *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria, A Fragment* (1798). Jones’s intervention in this tradition reflects the minor but significant undercurrent of feminist sentiment in the Chartist movement” (30). More critically, Dorothy Thompson writes: “Even Ernest Jones, who was always concerned with women’s rights, and who belonged to organizations among the Manchester middle classes in his last years there which supported women’s suffrage, has very little to say on the question in his Chartist journalism. This was certainly not because he was unaware of the question” (*Chartists*, 98). Miles Taylor also questions Jones’s lack of depiction of women as part of the work force: “There is very little about women’s place in the economic system in the four books of ‘Women’s Wrongs’” (158).(^)

(11)For a discussion of the political collaboration between Jones and Harney, see G.D.H. Cole (1965).(^)

(12)The impact of Chartism on the national debate about the ‘Condition-of-England Question’ is documented in F.C. Mathers ed. *Chartism and Society* (1980). For further discussion, see also Saville, *1848: The British State and Chartism* (1990).(^)

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