



# The Literary Form and Revolution: The Politics of Melodrama in Late Chartist Literature

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**Abstract**— *The period of late Chartism beginning in the late 1840s coincided with the transformation of the British press as a reaction to the advancement in industrial capitalism and the changing character of the public sphere to which it contributed directly. The resultant emergence of the British press in the mid nineteenth century from a political discourse to print journalism had direct political implication on the working class/Chartist press as well as their political agitation and plebeian public sphere. This paper will explore the effect of the ‘popular’ (both the press and culture) on the Chartist Press and literature and how the Chartist writers and editors including Ernest Jones and George W.M. Reynolds appropriated the emergent notion of the popular for radical political propaganda. I will argue that the staple rhetoric and dominant form of nineteenth century melodrama and sensationalism were used by these authors to create a distinctive class-conscious readership. Melodrama became, in the Chartist press, both an emotional reaction to the liberal capitalist economy’s classificatory politics as well as formed a resistance to the same creating a distinctive working class public sphere that publicized the private in political terms.*



**Keywords**— *Chartist Literature, Radical Press, Political Economy, Melodrama, Public Sphere, British Journalism.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The failure of the third Chartist petition in 1848 for the demands of the charter that included political rights for the working class, the Chartist agitation retreated from active political public platforms to the press. Although the late 1840s saw a decline in the mass agitation on a public space as compared to the early period of Chartism, politically the period witnessed a re-radicalization and move further towards the left. The Chartist movement adopted a socialist agenda with their declaration of ‘Chartism and something more’<sup>1</sup>. Having repudiated the mass platform, the Press became the site where the new class politics against the state were to be waged. Beginning from the

1840s in Britain saw a proliferation of Chartist press, as newspapers, journals and Sunday newspapers which along with the ‘popular press’ and ‘quality’ press competitively sought to assert themselves in the public sphere. The mass-circulated literature created an ‘urban literary subculture’, a ‘fiction for the working man’ which along with the press created “radical enclaves” that resisted the dominance of liberal political economy<sup>2</sup>. The distinctive feature of the Chartist press, especially since its growing significance after the demise of the ‘political phase’ of the movement needs to be scrutinized in its socio-economic aspects and in its relationship with the dominant popular press. This relationship, I shall argue in the chapter, is not one of

<sup>1</sup> The left wing shift of the Chartist movement was a reaction to the French and continental revolutions of 1848. Radical socialists Ernest Jones and George Julian Harney took the leadership of the movement and were also responsible for the socialist, internationalist and anti-colonial stand the movement espoused.

<sup>2</sup> Finn, Margot C. *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics 1848-1874*. Cambridge University Press, 2003. Haywood, Ian. *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790-1860*. Vol. 44. Cambridge University Press, 2004.

binary opposition but a cooption of the themes and appropriation of the dominant rhetoric.

As Margot C. Finn argues, unlike the radical press of the early nineteenth century, which was adamantly radical and functioned as an educative influence in creating a politically conscious working class, the mid-nineteenth century Chartist press anchored its arguments for change in the working-class social life. George Julian Harney, editor of the newspaper the *Red Republican* boldly asserted that,

The work of real reformers is...to establish the sovereignty of the people expressed through the suffrage; and further, while seeking that great political revolution, to prepare the masses for a social revolution. The Charter, the means, and the democratic and social republic- the end- such is the 'programme' of the Red Republican. (Red Republican, 26 October 1850; C. Finn, 2003)

The socialism and republicanism espoused by radical leaders such as Harney and in similar fashion by others meant a reformulation as well as a continuing tradition of the older radical press which now became the site for the performance and agitation of their social and political demands. Finn also notes a change in the plebeian public sphere which tried to bring together domestic issues with internationalist politics<sup>3</sup>. Ernest Jones' short running paper *Notes to the People*, which was published from the year 1850-1852, is an example of her argument which sought to educate the masses not only about domestic politics, history and economy but also included the reports from the international movements in continental Europe<sup>4</sup>.

Given the change in the political scenario of the movement, it seems contradictory that the literature and press of late Chartism was increasingly influenced by the melodramatic and sensationalist rhetoric and journalism of the nineteenth century. The change in both the language and form of the Chartist press must be understood alongside the transformation in British press in general and the analysis of the melodrama as primarily a working class emotional resistance. How the chartist press appropriated the melodramatic during its transformative period and used

it for its political ends will be the focus of this chapter. For the purpose I shall read Ernest Jones' serialized novel *De Brassiere: A Democratic Romance* and George W.M. Reynold's *The Mysteries of London* as literary works that employs the melodramatic for progressive politics. Thus these works fundamentally diverges itself from the socially reactionary uses of melodrama both in the early and later part of the nineteenth century.

The changing nature of the British press from the early to the later part of nineteenth century is summed up by Raymond Williams in three points as:

...first, the emergence of an independent popular press, directly related to radical politics; second, the direct attack on this, and its attempted suppression, in the period leading upto the 1830s; and third the direct attack, by absorption but also by the new kinds of commercial promotion, which aimed not at suppressing the independent popular press but at replacing it, in fact by the simulacrum of popular journalism that we still have in such vast quantities today (Williams 1970).

The third aspect of William's summary of the press which begins in the 1840s and after the reduction of the stamp duty on newspapers reaches at a period of commercialism and industrial capitalism where print was a lucrative business. In his autobiography of Ernest Jones, Miles Taylor explains the Chartist leader's return (after his release from jail) to political activism through print media primarily because of the commercial success it guaranteed. Taylor writes that many of the radical leaders of the previous decade's activism found commercial success in newspapers and magazines who found no difficulty in "combining the seriousness of the political sermon with the sensation of the latest scandal"<sup>5</sup>. The overtly radical press of the early nineteenth century, the 'unstamped press' that was targeted to a working class audience, thrived despite facing the repression from the state. Their 'illegal' nature made it more political and crated an alternative culture that functioned as a 'sort of working class intelligentsia' (Haywood). The reduction of stamp duty not only made these newspapers and journals legal but also put them in direct competition with its liberal counterpart.

Jean K. Chalaby's work on the transformation of British press makes the distinction between pre-

<sup>3</sup> Finn writes about the public celebration of the returning revolutionaries and rebels such as John Frost which gave the associational life of the working class circle a new radical and internationalist dimension after the February revolution.

<sup>4</sup> These included serialized essays on the British democracy, history of Florence, Rome; reports about the British colonies as well as columns on Ireland, Belgium, France and other European nations.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, Miles. *Ernest Jones, Chartism, and the romance of politics 1819-1869*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

journalistic and journalistic press where he identifies the abolition of stamp duty period as the historical moment of the 'invention' of journalism<sup>6</sup>. Chalaby describes the fundamental characteristic of the British press prior to the abolition of stamp duty as 'publicists' that was directly involved in politics. Both the liberal and the illegal unstamped press represented a social class and tried to popularize the political ideology and economic doctrines of their respective class. As explained in the first chapter the working class press of this period played a significant role in disseminating the anti-capitalist political economy and creating a plebeian public sphere. The repeal of the stamp duty along with the advancements in printing technology and railways made it possible for the newspapers to be sold for cheaper rate to a larger audience making more profit than before. In the face of competition the radical press of the previous decade had to incorporate the new elements of a commercialized press. The mass readership replaced the earlier public with a distinct socio-economic and political identity. The transformation in the characteristic of the readership also had cultural implication in the understanding of the notion of the popular. It lacked the clear social identity of the radical popular press of the previous decades which was described by E.P. Thompson as the "great heroic age of popular radicalism"<sup>7</sup>.

"What differentiates journalism from the earlier forms of discourse produced by the press is that the texts which form journalism are the products of conflictual relations of production" (Chalaby). While the popular press claimed to be delivering to representing the people, the people as a distinctive category with social identity lost meaning in the notion of the popular. The popular press builds itself on the normative discourse of the popular culture and targets people "emotionally, economically and politically, claiming to speak on their behalf"<sup>8</sup>. Popular culture as the hegemonic ideological articulation of the class in power exists as a negotiated space between the elite class and the lower orders<sup>9</sup>. Gramsci defines hegemony as the power struggle between two unequal groups where the ruling class has its ideological dominance on the subordinate class. Popular culture is a key area where this struggle takes place between the interests of two sections of society: those with direct access to power and capital and those without that direct access. Popular culture thus becomes a process of resistance and affirmation. Martin Conboy asserts that

inclusivity is the strategy which the popular press employs to maintain a relationship which is hegemonically negotiated in favour of the dominant power structures within society while keeping its readers relatively happy that their views and interests are represented<sup>10</sup>.

The popular press was not an analogous category but contained different 'types' each borrowing its theme and content from the other (Conboy). These different types included sensational writings, popular entertainment, and political propaganda. The characteristic feature of the popular press was its contradictory nature of combining sensational content with politics. As Williams notes, it was the replacement and not the repression, of the radical press with the emergent popular press of commercial competition that blurred the social identity and political edge of the working class press. While the working class press such as the *Reynold's Weekly*, *Notes to the People* and *Bell's Penny Dispatch* continued the political radicalism and rational enlightenment of the earlier decades they also included the sensationalist reporting, narratives and used the expression of melodrama. These conceptual and thematic changes within the press alter the definition of the 'popular' (Williams 1970). Within the popular press of commercial journalism that employs simplistic language Williams makes the distinction between politically radical writing from the other, the radical style is one of "genuine arousal" and the commercial style is of "apparent arousal"<sup>11</sup>. He cites George W.M. Reynolds as an example of the former who combined radical politics with scandalous sensationalism. Williams specifies three approaches to the radical press in the era of the advent of journalism.

Three reactions are then possible: the maintenance of the opposition and underground press, come what may, in the hope of extension; the combination of opposition and underground policies with elements of the commercial popular culture- certain kinds of featured sport or featured sex; or the parallel or sometimes separate permeation of the respectable press, which of course includes some radical elements..(Williams 1970).

Ernest Jones' and Reynolds' approach embody the second alternative to sustain in the competitive market as articulated by Williams by combining the political with the

<sup>6</sup> Chalaby, Jean. *The invention of journalism*. Springer, 1998

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, Edward P. "The making of the British working class." *New York: Pantheon* (1963).

<sup>8</sup> Conboy, Martin. *The press and popular culture*. Sage, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Hall, Stuart. "Notes on deconstructing 'the Popular'.

<sup>10</sup> This inclusivity is maintained through simplistic language and thematic concerns of the popular.

<sup>11</sup> Williams, Raymond. "Radical and/or Respectable." *The press we deserve* (1970): 14-26.

popular. The popular press thus has been able to adapt to its cultural and political environments and sometimes provide the dynamism for a radical departure from them. The success of the Chartist press owes to this dynamism they offered in their content. The popular press both create and represents the changing everyday lives of the people excluded from political power. Williams articulates the changing notion of popular culture with the transformation in the press. In the mid-nineteenth century the popular cannot be separated both from the commercialization of industrial capitalism and those aspects of mass culture left out of the liberal public sphere.

One of the reasons that forced the rupture of a politics, such as Chartism, which sought to include ordinary people actively in a representative democracy, and popular journalism is the fact that the lived experience of the mass of the people, particularly in their leisure activities, was much more varied than such a monologic voice or such a narrow view of the political experience of the working classes could encompass (Conboy).

The Chartist Sunday newspapers including *Lloyds Weekly News*, *Reynold's News*, the *Weekly Dispatch* and the *Weekly Times* managed a combination of radical rhetoric and the elements of popular cultural continuity, 'all radical, all catering for sensation, all containing stories and illustrations'. The ability of these newspapers to provide such a 'heteroglossic mixture' highlights the point that these papers were not only a popular venture, incorporating the views of the general public, but also a commercial triumph. How did the Chartist press and literature combine popular cultural elements for their radical political agenda will be the focus of the remaining chapter. I will argue that the Chartist press achieved this through the rhetoric of melodrama which was associated with the familiar traditions of popular theatre in the early part of the nineteenth century.

The features of melodrama include exaggerated or strong emotionalism; polarization of morality into good and evil; extreme states of being, situation and actions; sentimentality; the punishment of vice and villainy; and the final reward of virtue. Peter Brooks' in his work on the melodramatic imagination locates the origin of melodrama

within the context of the French Revolution and its aftermath<sup>12</sup>. He writes,

This is the epistemological moment which it illustrates and to which it contributes: the moment that symbolically, and really, marks the final liquidation of the traditional sacred and its representative institutions (Church and Monarch), the shattering of the myth of Christendom, the dissolution of an organic and hierarchically cohesive society, and the invalidation of the literary forms- tragedy, comedy of manners- that depended on such a society... We may legitimately claim that melodrama becomes the principle mode for uncovering, demonstrating, and making operative the essential moral universe in a post-sacred era (Brooks 1976).

Although Brooks' argument about the origin of melodrama as a reaction to the loss of the older social order is placed within the context of France in the late eighteenth century, similar analyses can be made in the context of Britain where the influence of the French revolution was seen in a radicalization of its socio-political sphere beginning in the 1790s. In a similar fashion to Brooks, Elaine Hadley argues that the melodramatic mode emerged in the early and mid-nineteenth century as a response to the social, economic, and epistemological changes that characterized the consolidation of market society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially the varied effects of the classificatory procedures instituted by English bureaucracies, such as the New Poor Law act of 1834, or, later in the century, the Contagious Diseases Act<sup>13</sup>. For Hadley the melodramatic mode respond to the dominant discourse of the political economy, law and liberalism. She argues that its emergence lies in the emotional reaction to the classification of English society during the period where industrialization and liberal political theories of economy were displacing an older feudal hierarchical order of patriarchal benevolence and deferential relations.

<sup>12</sup> Brooks, Peter. *The melodramatic imagination: Balzac, Henry James, melodrama, and the mode of excess*. Yale University Press, 1976.

<sup>13</sup> Hadley, Elaine. *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885*. Stanford University Press, 1995. Hadley's work offers a cultural analysis of the treatment of prominent manifestations of melodrama in public life. She argues that melodrama which emerged as an emotional resistance to the economic structure defined the public sphere of the century.

Hadley places melodrama as a dissenting voice within the heterogeneous forms of dissent against the emergent social relations that tried to create its own meaning. She locates the emergence of the melodramatic mode in the theatre of the early nineteenth century where the supporters of the old price in the battle known as Old Price Wars who protested against the creation of classification based on economic class in melodramatic form<sup>14</sup>. As Habermas argues this was the period where western society began to demarcate separate spheres as public and private associating distinct behavior for both<sup>15</sup>. In the evolution of this distinct bourgeois public sphere the marginal sections of the society were excluded from and devoid of participating in the public sphere. The 'Old Price Faction', Hadley asserts, dissented against this classification and the alienating market culture. The melodramatic form as an emotional response to this culture of market economy that replaced the differential culture with classes opposed the liberal conception of the public sphere with its demarcation of the private and the public. This, they did by bringing the private matters to the public scrutiny, by publicizing it to protest against the dominant system. This collective voice of the early melodrama which emphasized on the emotive, the visual became a site where class distinctions were openly staged and interrogated.

The New Poor Law Act of 1834 under the influence of the new economic theories of Malthus invoked resistance and opposition to the same<sup>16</sup>. The literature produced in response to the poor law, which included newspaper reports, pamphlets, public speeches, and prose, all contained the features similar to stage melodrama such as exaggerated emotions, good and evil, sentimentality and physical torture<sup>17</sup>. Hadley writes,

The melodramatic mode used by the anti-Poor Law movement, rather than

signaling the movement's philosophical depletion and political ineptitude, furnished it with a powerful critique of this new law's transfiguring domestic policy and articulated a viable, if ultimately unsuccessful, alternative to the new society envisioned by Poor Law reformers (Hadley. 79).

As a reaction against the classificatory relations of the new mode of production and economic policies, the melodramatic mode, Hadley claims was a socially reactionary form (although not necessarily a politically reactionary one) because it emphasized on the need for a nostalgic going back to the pre-industrial time of deferential social hierarchy that functioned on the feudal patriarchal idea of benevolence even when it opposed the culture of the emerging free market. While Hadley's argument regarding the socially reactionary mode of the melodramatic that persisted in the nineteenth century maybe true it does not take into account the heterogeneity of the opposition. The Chartist press and literature while indulged and engaged itself in the melodramatic mode to reach to its working class audience it did not envision a future society that went back in time to the feudal patriarchal social ties and relationships based on mutual obligation. Instead, as discussed in the first chapter, the politically conscious movement with its awareness of an alternative working class political economy constructed a public sphere through its press and literature that offered an alternative to the liberal political economy of laissez-faire policies. Thomas Doubleday's *The Political Pilgrim's Progress* which was written in reaction to the New Poor Law Act uses melodrama to assert its utopian political vision of an egalitarian society.

The melodramatic mode as a theatrical response to the market forces staged in the public also resisted the romantic poetry's interiorization of the subject and rejected its notion of a self-controlled subject which was a precursor to the liberal capitalist conception of the modern individual<sup>18</sup>. However, the relationship of the relationship of the melodramatic to the relations of industrial capitalism was not one of direct opposition.

The melodramatic mode should not be seen as some sort of essentialized or anthropomorphized force in pure opposition to market society. Always already entangled with the market practices it rejects, the melodramatic

<sup>14</sup> This rise in ticket prices occasioned what was soon known all over London as the Old Price Wars. "Spectators seated in the pit, sporadically joined by those in the dress boxes and gallery exercised what they considered their ancient right to express approbation and disapprobation in the theatre" (Hadley).

<sup>15</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. MIT press, 1962.

<sup>16</sup> The New Poor Law Act of 1834 severely restricted the accessibility of the poor to state's welfare programmes. The Act which was passed in the influence of the Malthusian theories of political economy which saw excess population as the sole reason for the economic problems facing the society, established the nineteenth century conception of the poor as amoral and criminal. Chartism as a working class political movement evolved partly in response to the act.

<sup>17</sup> Hadley argues that the melodramatic mode had a more socially and politically significant role outside of the theatre.

<sup>18</sup> Makdisi, Saree. *Romantic imperialism: Universal empire and the culture of modernity*. No. 27. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

mode should be seen instead as a productive friction, a creative disjunction within the dominating practices that were becoming most strongly associated with the capitalist system, the resistant energy of the melodramatic mode thus emerges from what Jonathan Dollimore calls the “inevitable incompleteness and surplus of control itself” (Hadley 10).

The melodramatic mode as part of this plebeian popular culture complicates and is compromised by the market forces that produced them as well opposes them. The heterogeneous mode of the melodramatic mode could thus be used to both subvert and adopt the emerging values and culture of industrial capitalism. Unlike romanticism which emerged as a response to the changing social order brought about by the change in the modes of production, the melodramatic mode publically staged this change through public performances, protests, pamphlets, press and literature. The exaggerated emotions and the polarization of moral sentiments and the depiction of amoral figures as despots and tyrants who oppress the masses were in response to the otherwise dehumanizing and bureaucratized statistics that influenced the new Poor Law Act that did not give space for the emotive.

The popular press post stamp duty employed the rhetoric of melodrama for its commercial value (Conboy 82). Melodrama’s deep influence on the public consciousness as a cultural form was marketed for commercial interests. As heterogeneous forms both the popular press as well as its melodramatic rhetoric dependent, for its political commitment and significance, on the way it was used and appropriated. The Chartist editors and authors Ernest Jones and George W.M. Reynolds appropriated the melodramatic mode to cater to the popular culture while retaining the radical political vision and ideas.

Ernest Jones’ shift to the popular melodramatic form of writing during the 1840s also marks a shift in his political commitment “from a broad commitment to the constitutionalist aims of the Charter to a more Marxist-inspired socialism based on the desire for a transformation in property relations”<sup>19</sup>. The London Chartist Convention of March 1851, where Jones took the leadership, produced a remarkably radical program that demanded “state-funded universal education, land nationalization, a liquidation of

the national debt, the separation of church and state, repeal of the game laws, state support for workshops and cooperatives, unemployment benefits, and democratization of the armed forces” (Ledger). Jones’ association with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1850s is thought to have permeated his ideological shift towards socialism.

*Notes to the People* differed radically in structure and content than the other Chartist newspapers Jones had edited including the *Northern Star* and the *Poor Man’s Guardian*. It appropriated what was in fashion in the popular press during the period and also added political commentaries and essays aimed at educating the readership. The paper carried histories of Sparta, Rome, and Florence, a series on the superstitions of different races, journalistic reporting, poetry and novels. It was in this journal that Jones serially published his novel *De Brassier: A Democratic Romance* which used all the conventions and rhetoric of popular melodrama, the sensationalist, sentimental plot, the exaggerated emotions, the aristocratic, capitalist villain and the character of the good man Chartist<sup>20</sup>. De Brassier tells the story of Charles Dalton, a factory worker and a Chartist, and his seamstress younger sister Agnes. Dalton is fired by his employer for participating in political activism for the demand of the vote and has thus fallen on hard times. Simon De Brassier is introduced as the charming yet conniving and despotic aristocrat who like Dalton’s ex-employer is a tyrant against the interest of the working class. The story revolves around the betrayal of the working class movement by the despotic De Brassier who becomes the evil villain in the story who sends the good man Dalton to prison, tries to harm Edward (who is a mechanic, socialist and the lover of Dalton’s sister Agnes) and tries to take advantage of Agnes who is left in the care of Edward by her brother who is sent to prison.

While the novel uses the rhetoric and language of melodrama in using heightened emotions and sentimentality it differs from the popular melodramatic mode by having a clear political purpose and vision. Throughout the novel Jones makes reference to various political issues trying to put them in the center stage of public debate. He criticizes the new Poor Law and the inhuman conditions of the workhouses by describing its condition in melodramatic language. When faced with either starvation or the workhouse, Dalton declares, “We

<sup>19</sup> Ledger, Sally. "Chartist Aesthetics in the Mid Nineteenth Century: Ernest Jones, a Novelist of the People." *Nineteen Century Literature* 57.1 (2002): 31-63.

<sup>20</sup> De Brassier began to be published from 10 May 1851 as ‘The History of a Democratic Movement, Compiled from the journal of a Democrat, the Confessions of Demagogue, and the Minutes of a spy’, which was later titled as ‘De Brassier, A Democratic Romance’. The publication was met with immense public enthusiasm and it quickly became one of the most popular novels in circulation at the time.

won't go to the workhouse- we'll die first". Although the novel is a publicized dramatization of the private lives of Dalton and his family, Jones highlights the political situation or system which has eventually led to their status. Jones points to the state policies and the dominant political economy as responsible for the destitution of people like Dalton.

The ending of Jones' novel breaks the conventions of melodrama by refusing to punish the villain and rewarding the virtue and righteousness embodied by the hero. At the ending of the novel, De Brassier is able to get away with his treacherous behavior without being punished for it. Jones rejects individual betterment and through that insists on the necessity of wider social and economic change to improve the condition of the working classes. In withholding catharsis Jones was trying to invoke political enthusiasm amongst his readership. After the escape of De Brassier, Jones narrates directly to the reader, "Return we now to the movement. Once more we behold De Brassier in the sea of policies". The alternative to the dominant discourse is shown by Jones in socialist politics embodied by the character of the young mechanic Edward and he spends chapters trying to educate the mass about the concept of socialism and how it is better than simply voting rights or liberal rights. Melodrama could be thus adapted by radicals such as Jones in order to produce a subversive, critical political aesthetic.

George W.M. Reynolds was one of the most popular writers of mid Victorian England even overshadowing Dickens. As a Chartist and editor of popular Sunday newspapers his role in the development of popular press and literature is remarkable. His most famous novel *The Mysteries of London* which began publishing in serialized form in *Reynold's Weekly* was a best seller selling 250,000 copies a week. A murder mystery involving sensational plot, Reynold's novel is the adaptation of the French novel *Les Mysteres de Paris* written by Eugene Sue. The novel catered to the popular taste of sensationalism, suspense, criminal horror, and heightened drama. In effect it was an example of the new kind of popular that emerged during the time to which it contributed.

The prologue of the novel introduces London as a "city of strange contrasts," in which the greatest civilization also has the greatest vices. The novel, a gothic romance about the lives of two brothers and their lovers, incorporates the familiar themes of melodrama while describing the horrible living conditions of the working class in London. In the story Reynolds constructs two contrasting worlds between the capitalist/aristocratic and the proletariat and describes capitalist exploitation is

responsible for the crime and violence in the city. London becomes a metaphor for the two opposing public spheres caused because of the laissez-faire economic policies of the state<sup>21</sup>. The characteristic of the novel is typical of Reynolds' editorial journalism that combines both political radicalism with more popular themes and contents which appealed to working class readership. As part of his political activism, Reynolds occasionally communicated with the readers directly and educated them about the French Revolution and Chartism in his *Mysteries*<sup>22</sup>. Reynolds incorporates the contemporary political issues, events and concerns in his novel disrupting its narration as a way to alert the reader of the pressing issues that concerns them.

The countering of the existing dominant bourgeois ideology to create a subaltern hegemony does not require a complete replacement of the former. Instead, the new hegemony is created from the elements of the working class ideology that exists in the capitalist ideological discourse<sup>23</sup>. Paul Costello argues that the dominant ideology is not a homogeneous but a heterogeneous discourse that contains within itself elements that are antithetical and proletarian in character<sup>24</sup>. This contradictory nature of the bourgeois ideology and culture can be utilized for developing a radical socio-political sphere.

The essentially sterile and sectarian nature of most left ideological practice is such that it treats bourgeois ideology and culture as one reactionary mass and abandons the entire ideological field to the bourgeoisie. Meanwhile, in splendid isolation, left groups put on their own ideological and cultural affairs, totally divorced from the ideological structures and representations within which the working class perceives and experiences its world (Costello).

<sup>21</sup> Humpherys, Anne. "The Geometry of the Modern City: G. W. M. Reynolds and 'The Mysteries of London.'" *Browning Institute Studies*, vol. 11, 1983, pp. 69–80. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/25057739](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25057739).

<sup>22</sup> Haywood, Ian. "George W. M. Reynolds and 'The Trafalgar Square Revolution': Radicalism, the Carnavalesque and Popular Culture in Mid-Victorian England." *Journal of Victorian Culture (Edinburgh University Press)*, vol. 7, no. 1, Spring 2002, p. 23. EBSCOhost

<sup>23</sup> Ramos, V. "The Concepts of Ideology, Hegemony, and Organic Intellectuals in Gramsci's Marxism." *Theoretical Review* 30.3-8 (1982): 34.

<sup>24</sup> Costello, Paul. "Ideology: Ideological Practice & Cultural Criticism". *Theoretical Review* No. 10, May-June 1979.

Costello criticizes the dominant Marxist reading of popular culture as reactionary while ignoring that formulation of a radical ideology can only be possible if it is through the “language of popular consciousness”. The nature and characteristic of the audience, he asserts, is significant to the language and mode that is to be employed for the purpose of creating a counter-hegemonic consciousness. Costello argues that a reductive analysis of popular art forms as the product of capitalist ideology limits the understanding of the same. He says, the role of the Marxist critique is to analyze what the writers were intending to do rather than the origin of the work itself. He asserts that the inter-connection between the artist, art and audience which is marked by contradictions is important to analyze the radical potential of any work of art.

In the final analysis, Marxist cultural criticism must view all these elements – the cultural worker, the audience, and the cultural product (in its form and content) – not simply in terms of each other and ideology but in the broader context of the class struggle – the class struggles of which each is the product, and the contemporary class struggle in which we all live (Costello).

The radical potential of Chartist fiction in the works of Ernest Jones and G.W.M. Reynolds is in its association with the political struggle of the working class with whom they have associated themselves. Through their fiction and the structure of their newspapers they have bridged the gap between the author and the reader, giving space for the opinion and participation of the working people. The Chartist press of the mid nineteenth century attempted to create a radical politically conscious readership by articulating a counter-hegemonic discourse in the language of popular consciousness, melodrama.

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