

The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language, and Class in the 1830s and 1840s

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Who are compelling women and tender babes to procure the means of subsistence in the cotton factories—to be nipt in the bud, to be sacrificed at the shrine of Moloch? They are the rich, the capitalists. [Speech by Mr. Deegan, Chartist, at Stalybridge, 1839]¹

A [Malthusian] pretended philosophy . . . crushes, through the bitter privations it inflicts upon us, the energies of our manhood, making our hearths desolate, our homes wretched, inflicting upon our heart's companions an eternal round of sorrow and despair. [Letter from George Harney to Yorkshire Chartists, 1838]²

Toryism just means ignorant children in rags, a drunken husband, and an unhappy wife. Chartism is to have a happy home, and smiling, intelligent, and happy families. [Speech by Mr. Macfarlane to Glasgow Chartists, 1839]³

Chartist political rhetoric was pervaded by images of domestic misery typified in these quotes. Historians have traditionally understood this stress on domesticity as a simple response to the Industrial Revolution's disruption of the home, either denigrating it as inchoate

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¹ *Northern Star* (June 1, 1839).

² *Northern Star* (October 13, 1838).

³ *Scottish Patriot* (December 14, 1839).

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proletarian rage or celebrating it as a heroic defense of the working-class family.⁴ But domestic discontent was nothing new in the 1830s, for drink, wife beating, and sexual competition in the workplace had plagued plebeians for decades—if not centuries.⁵ Why then did it become such a potent political issue in the 1830s and 1840s? Following Gareth Stedman Jones, the question must be answered by analyzing Chartist domesticity not just as a reflection of social and economic changes, but as a trope that performed specific political functions in Chartist language.⁶

Chartist domesticity aimed both to heal the sexual antagonism within working-class culture and to defend working-class morality in the larger political context. By evoking domesticity, Chartists could uphold working-class manhood, appeal to women, and extract concessions from the state. These strategies could be contradictory in the long term. But Chartism did not embody one consistent, coherent ideology. Instead, it is helpful to analyze Chartist language as rhetoric: the art of persuasion, in which many different tactics can be used. Chartists debated socialist and constitutionalist ideas, but as Paul Pickering and James Epstein have pointed out, they also expressed their beliefs through symbolic politics: vivid, emotional imagery, stirring songs, bands, and processions.⁷ For political rhetoric has two functions: first,

⁴ Neil Smelser, *Social Change and the Industrial Revolution* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1959), p. 264; Craig Calhoun points out that his timing was off in directly linking unrest in the 1830s to changes in factory families; see his *Question of Class Struggle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 191–96. For “heroic defense,” see Jane Humphries, “The Working-Class Family: A Marxist Perspective,” in *The Family in Political Thought*, ed. Jean Elshtain (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 204–13.

⁵ See Anna Clark, “Womanhood and Manhood in the Transition from Plebeian to Working-Class Culture: London, 1780–1845” (Ph.D. thesis, Rutgers University, 1987), for development of this theme. It will be explored further in Anna Clark, “The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class” (work in progress), which will compare workers in Glasgow, London, and Lancashire. Working independently, Patricia Seleski came to similar conclusions about plebeian domestic confusion—see her “Women of the Laboring Poor: Love, Work and Poverty in London, 1750–1820” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1989), pp. 262–326.

⁶ In this I am following Gareth Stedman Jones, who has repudiated the reading of Chartist rhetoric as a simple reflection of economic discontent; instead, he declares, we must regard it as a political language, embodying a rational political analysis rooted in traditions of radicalism rather than working-class experience. See Gareth Stedman Jones, “Rethinking Chartism,” in his *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 90–95.

⁷ Jones has been criticized for treating Chartist language as intellectual history, although he criticizes John Foster’s *Class Struggle in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1974) for its socialist dogmatism. See Paul A. Pickering, “Class without Words: Symbolic Communication in the Chartist Movement,” *Past and Present*, no. 112 (August 1986), pp. 144–62; Robert Gray, “The Deconstructing of the English

to mobilize its adherents, and, second, to combat its opponents.⁸ To accomplish the first, orators often “fuse” political analysis with powerful metaphors and motifs that emotionally resonate with their audience’s experiences but also promise to transcend them.⁹ To accomplish the second, an effective strategy can be to manipulate the dominant discourse to one’s own ends: for instance, demanding domestic privileges enabled Chartists to evoke middle-class guilt about female factory work.

Chartist rhetoric drew on an eclectic variety of idioms, ranging from Painite radicalism, constitutionalism, and Owenite socialism to Scripture and dialect literature, but here this article will concentrate on melodrama because it enabled radicals to politicize domestic issues. By the 1830s, the dominant meaning of domesticity was the middle-class ideology of separate spheres. There, men struggled in the public sphere of work and politics, while women sheltered in the private sphere of the home.¹⁰ But Chartist rhetoric used domesticity not in the sense of a rigid ideology but as an image of home that could carry several meanings. Chartist domesticity differed from the sentimentality of middle-class moralists. In Evangelical narratives, individual sin, especially feminine indiscipline, poisoned the happy home.¹¹ But Chartists, following radical tradition, preferred to draw on melodrama, which blamed familial disruption on an outside villain—the aristocratic libertine, symbolizing capitalism and corruption.¹² For working people,

Working Class,” *Social History* 11 (October 1986): 363–73; James Epstein, “Understanding the Cap of Liberty: Symbolic Practice and Social Conflict in Early Nineteenth-Century England,” *Past and Present*, no. 122 (February 1989), pp. 75–118.

⁸ For rhetoric, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 206; Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 342, 353; V. N. Volosinov’s, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), is thought to be in part by Bakhtin and presents a more social interpretation of language in context.

⁹ John D. Schaeffer, “The Use and Misuse of Giambattista Vico: Rhetoric, Orality, and Theories of Discourse,” in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), p. 97; Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1950), pp. 43, 45, 86.

¹⁰ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 30.

¹¹ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 252.

¹² This plot acquired radical connotations in Jacobin novels of the 1790s; see Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 29–50; and Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). For melodrama, which originated as a theatrical form during the French Revolution and then became a working-class popular genre in Great Britain, see James C. Smith, *Victorian Melodrama* (London: Dent, 1976); Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man* (Har-

domesticity originally meant domestic industry, when families worked together under one roof. It was a nostalgic vision of independence in an era of factory labor, although cottage industry had degenerated into the misery of sweat shops.¹³ Melodrama could condense working people's diverse experiences of family economies into one potent narrative of a past golden age, present domestic misery, a wicked villain, rescue by heroic Chartist manhood, and a future of domesticity brought about by manhood suffrage.

Surprisingly enough, Chartists also used domesticity to bring women into the movement. Feminist historians, such as Joan Scott and Deborah Valenze, have suggested that by focusing on political citizenship, Chartists defined the working class as male, whereas earlier popular politics, based on the community, were more accessible to women.¹⁴ Yet the importance of domesticity revealed that Chartism potentially embodied a larger notion of politics than just citizenship. Furthermore, one should not assume fixed meanings for citizenship and community. While London artisans focused their community life around male workshops, Chartists tried to appeal to women by transforming working-class communities, promising to substitute domestic responsibility for violence and drunkenness. Yet they faced tensions between their notions of citizenship as a basic human political right available to women or a status to be earned as patriarchal head of household. Chartists also demanded the vote to insure the rights of labor—but was labor a property of skill, as men wished, or was it alienated work exchanged for a wage, as the female factory worker experienced it? The Owenite socialists of the early 1830s had begun to explore these issues, exposing the miseries of patriarchal marriage and organizing women workers along with men.¹⁵ However, the Chart-

mondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp. 171–72; Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 44; Martha Vicinus, "Helpless and Unbefriended: 19th Century Domestic Melodrama," *New Literary History* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 143; Anna Clark, "The Politics of Seduction in English Popular Culture," in *The Politics of Romance*, ed. Jean Radford (London: Routledge, 1986), pp. 47–72.

¹³ On domesticity as independence, see Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 211.

¹⁴ Joan Scott, "On Language, Gender and Working-Class History," in her *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 53; Ruth L. Smith and Deborah M. Valenze, "Mutuality and Marginality: Liberal Moral Theory and Working-Class Women in Nineteenth Century England," *Signs* 13, no. 2 (1988): 288.

¹⁵ Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Pantheon, 1983).

ists turned away from Owenite egalitarianism, not only because economic difficulties made their strategies untenable for working people but also because events of the early 1830s put them on the political defensive about morality.

Domesticity was an important subtext in Chartist language because in the politics of the 1830s gendered notions of virtue demarcated the working class as different and inferior to the middle class. The working class first began to be defined in the 1830s, not by its own volition, but through a process of exclusion from the privileges of participation in the state, through the 1832 reform act, the failure of factory reform, and the 1834 New Poor Law.¹⁶ The discourses behind these events were separate spheres, Malthusianism, and political economy. First, debates about extension of the suffrage concerned domestic morality. For instance, the conservative *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* justified giving the vote to the middle class but not the working class by contrasting the middle-class man's "self-denial" in supporting his family with the "sensual indulgence" of excessive drinking, bastardy, and wife desertion by working men.¹⁷ The middle class also justified their claims to the suffrage in Lockean terms; they were propertied heads of households who represented their subordinates.¹⁸ This explains the middle-class attachment to "household suffrage." Second, Malthusians provided a more theoretical justification for these prejudices by claiming that working people brought their misery on themselves by overbreeding and by warning that working men were wrong to marry unless they could support a family on their own wages—an impossible goal for most.¹⁹ Malthusianism partially influenced the New Poor Law of 1834, which mandated the confinement of paupers in prison-like workhouses that separated husbands from wives and mothers from children.²⁰ Third, political economists com-

¹⁶ Laclau and Mouffe argue that the meaning of class was developed within political contests that drew lines of difference between the classes rather than in relation to economic struggles around the modes of production. See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Toward a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 67–88.

¹⁷ "The Chartists and Universal Suffrage," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 187, no. 46 (1839): 296–97.

¹⁸ Davidoff and Hall, p. 19.

¹⁹ Quoted in Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Knopf, 1984), p. 123.

²⁰ For political economists, see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (London: Rinehart, 1944), p. 114, 123–25; for the Poor Law, see Great Britain Commissioners for Inquiry, *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiry into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws* (London, 1834), pp. 59, 64, 77, 88–89; Anthony Brundage, *The Making of the New Poor Law* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1978), p. 20; Ursula Henriques, "Bastardy and the New Poor Law," *Past and Present*, no. 37 (1967), pp. 111–12.

bined these notions to argue that higher wages and factory reform would hamper laissez-faire capitalism. They actually approved of female and child labor as necessary to industry and blocked efforts to limit their hours.²¹ The middle class did not impose domesticity on the working class from above; instead, they denied its privileges to them.

In response to these discourses and actions that negatively defined working people as a class to be excluded, Chartists had to create a positive working-class identity. To begin with, they united working people around the demand for manhood suffrage, which they derived both from a constitutionalist tradition and Thomas Paine's egalitarian notion of the vote as a "universal political right of every human being" rather than as a privilege of property.²² The political focus of Chartism also enabled it to transcend the sectionalism that had continued to plague the trade union movement, for they asserted all working people deserved rights, not just skilled men.²³

Chartism also derived much of its ability to mobilize huge numbers of disparate working people from its theatrical processions and richly symbolic rhetoric. When William Lovett and his colleagues later repudiated the "foolish displays and gaudy trappings" of early Chartism, Trowbridge Chartists wrote that this "passionate invective . . . first aroused [many working men] to a sense of their degradation, their rights, and their strength."²⁴ Whereas in the past radicals combined earthy satire against their rulers with sentimental melodrama, in Chartism melodrama predominated as a style, for this time working people were on the defensive.²⁵ Not only was melodrama particularly effective as a style that combined the elevated language beloved of the self-improving Chartists with instant accessibility, but it was also particularly useful in evoking family misery and combating attacks on working-class morality. The task of defending working-class morality

²¹ Nassau Senior, *Three Lectures on the Rate of Wages* (London, 1830), p. 8; Kirkman Finlay, *Letter to the Right Hon. Lord Ashley on the Cotton Factory System and the Ten Hours Factory Bill* (Glasgow, 1833), pp. 4–9; R. H. Greg, *The Factory Question* (London, 1837), p. 58.

²² "Petition Adopted at the Crown and Anchor Meeting" (1838), in *The Early Chartists*, ed. Dorothy Thompson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), p. 62; James Epstein, "The Constitutionalist Idiom in Radical Reasoning, Rhetoric, and Action in Early 19th Century England," *Journal of Social History* 23, no. 3 (1990): 565.

²³ John C. Belchem, "Radical Language and Ideology in Early Nineteenth-Century England," *Albion* 20, no. 2 (1988): 255.

²⁴ Quotes are from the *Northern Star* (May 1, 1841), in the context of Lovett and Collins's "New Move," which broke away from Feargus O'Connor and the National Charter Association.

²⁵ Anna Clark, "Queen Caroline and the Sexual Politics of Popular Culture in London, 1820," *Representations* 31 (1990): 51.

was very delicate, as Chartists acknowledged the chronic problems of drinking and marital disruption that plagued working class culture.²⁶

Melodrama portrayed a past of family harmony disrupted by aristocratic libertines (symbolizing industrialism and the New Poor Laws), blaming domestic misery not on working-class immorality but on upper-class oppression.²⁷ Chartist Thomas Ainge Devyr firmly believed melodramatic romances would inspire men to chivalrous deeds against aristocratic tyrants in order to win "woman's smile."²⁸ Gerald Massey, a Chartist working-class poet, encapsulated the narrative neatly in this verse:

Our Fathers are Praying for Pauper Pay
Our Mothers with Death's Kiss are white;
Our Sons are the rich man's Serfs by day,
And our Daughters his Slaves by night.²⁹

The vision of the golden age enabled Chartist orators to condense the disparate family experiences of artisans, factory workers, and laborers into one potent image. Massey proclaimed in his poem, "The Chivalry of Labor," "We'll win the golden age again."³⁰ However, while several historians have accepted this "golden age" at face value, as a happy time when families worked in harmony,³¹ it is important to recognize that there was little contemporary evidence for this harmony and that the golden age actually functioned in the melodramatic narrative as a rhetorical foil for the miseries of the present.³²

²⁶ *Chartist Circular* (November 2, 1839), p. 22.

²⁷ For examples of this rhetoric, see *Northern Star* (April 7, 1838); *Scots Times* (January 27, 1841); *Bronterre's National Reformer* (January 21, 1837); McDouall's *Journal* (April 3, 1841), quoted in Neville Kirk, "In Defense of Class: A Critique of Recent Revisionist Writing upon the Nineteenth Century English Working Class," *International Review of Social History* 32 (1987): 21; and David Jones, in *Chartism and the Chartists* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), p. 113, for this motif in Chartist poetry.

²⁸ Thomas Ainge Devyr, *The Odd Book of the 19th Century, or Chivalry in Modern Days* (New York, 1882), p. 40; he emigrated to America in 1840 to flee prosecution for Chartist activity (see Thompson, ed., p. 271).

²⁹ Gerald Massey, *Poems and Ballads* (New York, 1854), p. 147. Another classic narrative could be found in a tale, "English Life," from the *Northern Star* (June 5, 1847), in which a happy family is evicted from a cottage and must move to a factory town. The son is crippled in the army, while the beautiful daughter is seduced by the factory master, deserted, becomes a prostitute, and dies.

³⁰ Massey, p. 76. For other examples of golden age rhetoric, see the *Northern Star* (May 16, 1840) letter by Feargus O'Connor; the *Northern Star* (June 13, 1840) address from J. Lomax; the *Northern Star* (January 9, 1841) poem by William Hick, "My Five-Acre Cottage that Stands by the Green."

³¹ Kirk, p. 21; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963), p. 12.

³² Leonore Davidoff, Jean L'Esperance, and Howard Newby, "Landscape with Figures: Home and Community in English Society," in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 159.

Orators often used parts of the melodramatic narrative as threads that could connect the symbolism of popular literature with the social context of industrialization.³³ Simply citing fragments of melodrama evoked the emotional impact of the whole narrative. The melodramatic narrative also functioned as a framework on which different political analyses could be hung; for instance, in the quotes that opened this article, orators variously represented the villain as Malthusianism, capitalism, and Toryism. While authors such as Jones explain Chartists' continuous use of terms such as "factory lords" or "millocracy" as their inability to let go of the notion of Old Corruption to confront capitalism, this might also be understood as using melodramatic metaphors in order to make a new analysis more accessible to working people.³⁴ Contrasting the "bacchanalian orgies" of the palace with the poor man's hovel made much better copy than using the industrialist's parlor as a foil. For instance, an address to the queen for the Charter on behalf of the General Convention of the Industrious Classes declared, "The light laugh, the costly feast in the gorgeous hall, still waft the idle hours of the rich ruler away; the father's sigh and mother's sob o'er their ruined hopes and wretched condition intrude not there."³⁵

Furthermore, to counter Malthusian attacks on their right to bear children, and manufacturers who regarded them as animalistic neutered "hands," Chartists asserted sexual difference in order to affirm their own humanity.³⁶ Now, Chartists declared, we are "treated like beasts of burden—mere animated machines, without hearts, without minds of our own, whose only privilege is to labor and to die."³⁷ When the manhood of political power and the femininity of domestic seclusion were seen as class privileges by working men denied the vote and unable to support their families, stressing sexual difference was a way of representing themselves as fully human rather than animals or machines.

³³ Victor Turner, "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 144. Turner notes that in social dramas, rather than fiction, the narrative structure is implicit and often alluded to in terms of these metaphorical threads that connect the drama with the social situation.

³⁴ G. S. Jones, "Rethinking Chartism" (n. 6 above), p. 153.

³⁵ *Southern Star* (January 19, 1840); see a similar motif in the anonymous poem *The Doom of Toil* (Sunderland, 1841), p. 10. Also see the contrast of upper-class immorality to the virtue of the poor in the *Northern Star* (January 27, 1838) speech by Mr. William Thornton at a Halifax anti-Poor Law meeting. Also see the *Northern Star* (October 6, 1838); a similar speech in the *Northern Star* (September 29, 1838) by Mr. Beal, at a Sheffield demonstration; and an editorial in the *Northern Star* (February 17, 1838).

³⁶ For anti-Malthusian rhetoric, an affirmation of humanity, see the *Scottish Patriot* (August 31, 1839; February 1, 1840); see similar rhetoric in the *Chartist* (May 16, 1839); *Northern Star* (February 17, 1838; February 16, 1839).

³⁷ *Northern Star* (December 8, 1838); see similar rhetoric in another *Northern Star* (January 2, 1841).

By signifying manhood in opposition to childhood, Chartists also repudiated the paternalism of Tory radical leaders such as Richard Oastler. The Tory paternalists used melodrama to express the melancholy of a lost paternalist past, but working men wanted to be the heroes of their own dramas, not impotent victims. To the pathos of melodrama's images of broken homes, they added a new vision of domesticity redeemed by working-class manhood.

But Chartists soon began to debate manhood's nature and negotiate the vision of domesticity they saw as the happy ending to their struggle. These debates can help to explain disputes between physical and moral force Chartism. Recent historians have refuted the traditional picture of moderate moral force London artisans, who relied on persuading the middle class, and "irrational" physical force men, deskilled factory workers who discredited Chartism by threatening violence,³⁸ by demonstrating that the debate could not be broken down sociologically. The mainstream majority of the movement preferred to concentrate on moral reform, but they refused to repudiate physical force as a last resort against state repression and at times engaged in arming and drilling. Their motto was "peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must."³⁹ While both sides agreed on one thing—the prevalence of domestic misery among working people, and the necessity for the vote to ameliorate it—they differed in their visions of the source of masculine authority.

The moral force Chartists never gained the adherence of more than a minority of Chartists partially because in order to gain middle-class support they regarded suffrage not as a right but something that had to be earned by proving moral virtue. The moral force London Working Men's Association admitted as members only those men who

³⁸ This originated with R. G. Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement, 1837–1854* (1894; reprint, New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969); Renee Sofer, "Attitudes and Allegiances in the Unskilled North," *International Review of Social History* 10, no. 1 (1965): 429–54; J. T. Ward, *Chartism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 111–42.

³⁹ Clive Behagg, *Politics and Production in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 212; Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Wildwood House, 1984), p. 58; James Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 239. However, the fact remains that this was an important debate in Chartism, although it often concerned notions of organization and authority rather than the question of violence. For evidence of this debate, see *Northern Star* (January 27, 1838; March 24, 1838; June 23, 1838; September 28, 1838; July 7, 1838; November 17, 1838; November 3, 1838; October 13, 1838; December 29, 1838; December 22, 1838); Alexander Wilson, *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970), p. 101. Robert Sykes points out that there was an overlap in tactics between the two wings; see his "Physical Force Chartism: The Cotton District and the Chartist Crisis of 1839," *International Review of Social History* 30 (1985): 211.

“possess the attributes and characters of *men*; and little worthy of the name are those who . . . forgetful of their duties as fathers, husbands, and brothers . . . drown their intellect amid the drunken revelry of the pot house.”⁴⁰ Moral force men advocated a new vision of patriarchy. William Lovett emphasized the duties of husbands to instruct their wives in political affairs, so that they would not be “mere domestic drudges, and ignorant slaves of our passions” but, instead, “our equal companions in knowledge and happiness.”⁴¹ However, this was not an egalitarian vision. The paterfamilias should impart his greater wisdom to his wife at home so that the domestic circle would be happy, but Lovett did not envision an independent political role for women or believe they should work outside the home. Lovett’s vision was closer to the middle-class sentimental ideal of domesticity, for he blamed working people for their own familial misery. His notion of masculinity was middle-class as well, for he stressed a masculinity based on rationality and self-control, rather than the “pugilistic skill” on which many working-class men still based their honor.⁴²

Not surprisingly, Lovett’s opponents complained that he was too beholden to middle-class men such as Edward Swaine, an anti-Corn Law activist who told working-class men, “If you are careless of personal decency and domestic comfort, you cannot be believed, if you profess concern about national improvement.”⁴³ Mainstream Chartists argued that they did not want to wait to persuade the middle class that they deserved the vote. The only power working men had, they argued, was numbers—and without the vote, they could only exercise that power through the threat of physical force as a last resort if moral force failed. They scorned the moral force men as toadies to the middle class. Physical force men vaunted a vigorous, even violent manhood that had its roots in pugilist and pub culture.⁴⁴ They took over meetings of the Anti-Corn Law League by force of fisticuffs to declare that the Charter was the first political priority over any other cause.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Address and Rules of the Working Men’s Association, for benefitting politically, socially, and morally the useful classes* (London, 1836), p. 2.

⁴¹ “Address from the London Working Men’s Association to the Citizens of the American Republic” (1837), in *Life and Struggles* by William Lovett, (London: Bell, 1920), p. 137.

⁴² William Lovett, *Social and Political Morality* (London, 1853), p. 83.

⁴³ Edward Swaine, *The Political Franchise a Public Trust, demanding an intelligent and virtuous care for the public good* (London, n.d.), p. 28.

⁴⁴ This was a form of rough yet radical manhood discussed by Iain MacCalman in *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 149.

⁴⁵ David Goodway, *London Chartism* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 45; Christopher Godfrey, *Chartist Lives: The Anatomy of a Working-Class Movement* (New

However, the violence of physical force Chartism was more often a rhetorical than a real threat, taking the form of a “language of menace” that was intended to intimidate opponents and incite the fervor of its adherents.⁴⁶ Eschewing Lovett’s sentimental, self-blaming domesticity, his opponents espoused a melodramatic and biblical narrative that blamed familial misery on the forces of evil—capitalism, the New Poor Law, and the aristocracy. This rhetoric enabled working men to assert the masculinity of which they felt oppression had robbed them. One of their journals, the *London Democrat*, often referred to the “manly virtues” of working men and opposed the *Charter* newspaper because its “dandy cockney politician” editor did “not represent the straightforward, manly political sentiments of the working men of this country.”⁴⁷ They insulted their moral force opponents as “old women” and “kitchen maids.”⁴⁸ Working men were especially enraged at their loss of control over women, as the Reverend J. R. Stephens made clear when he proclaimed to a meeting, “God cursed woman as well as man . . . that she should be in subjection to her own husband, her desire should be unto her husband, and he should rule over her [hear hear] and not the millowners [tremendous cheering] nor the coal pit masters [continuous cheering]—not the Poor Law Commissioners.”⁴⁹ Stalybridge Chartist Mr. Deegan echoed this sentiment when he argued that English men want their wives and children in happy cottages, not “polluted by lickspittles” in the mines and factories.⁵⁰ In fact, Stephens explicitly linked physical force to familial issues when he proclaimed “if society cannot be renovated [so that] every industrious, virtuous man should have a home, and the blessings of home . . . then, I say, ‘Cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war!’ [Loud cheers] Revolution by force—revolution by blood!” The favor-

York: Garland, 1987), p. 119, for disruption of an anti-Poor Law meeting; see the *Glasgow Constitutional* (November 7, 1840) for disruption of a meeting about a house of refuge; the *Glasgow Constitutional* (December 5, 1840), for a meeting to celebrate the queen’s birthday; see the *Glasgow Constitutional* (December 25, 1839), for an interruption of an anti-Corn Law meeting.

⁴⁶ Thomas Milton Kremitz, “Approaches to the Chartist Movement: Feargus O’Connor and Chartist Strategy,” *Albion* 5 (1973): 57–73; William Henry Maehl, Jr., “The Dynamics of Violence in Chartism: A Case Study in North-east England,” *Albion* 7 (1975): 102.

⁴⁷ *London Democrat* (May 11, 1839).

⁴⁸ *Northern Star* (October 16, 1838; December 22, 1838).

⁴⁹ Speech at Wigan Chartist meeting in *Northern Star* (November 17, 1838); see also D. Jones (n. 27 above), p. 115.

⁵⁰ *Northern Star* (June 1, 1839).

ite slogan of his followers was "For child and wife, We will war to the knife!"⁵¹

But this patriarchalism was different from the old artisan misogyny. Previously, trade unionists had excluded women from their occupations simply by defending them as men's jobs, or alleging that the women were prostitutes, rather than claiming the breadwinner wage or women's place in the home. In response, employers upheld the right of poor women to earn a living and claimed that workmen would just spend their higher wages on drink.⁵² Indeed, in the past, a man could be a rough, drunken wife beater but still be respected by his mates for his skill, independence, politics, and loyalty.⁵³ Stephens's followers drew on a new, and much more rhetorically clever, technique of citing the notion of domesticity to claim they wished to exclude women in order to protect and support them.⁵⁴ As part of this transformation, even the more militant Chartists advocated temperance and education, lending credibility to their domestic rhetoric.⁵⁵

But not only did the Chartists have to convince Parliament and employers that they were sincere in demanding the breadwinner wage and exclusion of women in order to protect women, they also had to persuade women themselves. When a southern orator proclaimed at a Newcastle meeting, "If I had a wife I would fight for her, I would die for her," a working-class woman in the audience muttered to her neighbor, "He disen't [*sic*] say he would work for her."⁵⁶ Chartists

⁵¹ *Northern Star* (May 18, 1839). While Stephens's support of universal suffrage was ephemeral, fading by 1840, he had very strong support among the Chartists in the first years of Chartism. See D. Thompson, *The Chartists* (n. 39 above), p. 265.

⁵² Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within Words: Structures of Life in Sixteenth Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 38; for comparative perspectives, see Jean Quataert, "The Shaping of Women's Work in Manufacturing," *American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985), p. 1135; Martha Howell, *Women, Patriarchy and Production in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 161; L. D. Schwarz, "Conditions of Life and Work in London, c. 1770–1820, with Special References to East London" (D.Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1976), pp. 68, 70; Clark, "Womanhood and Manhood" (n. 5 above), chap. 8; Sonya Rose, "Gender Antagonism and Class Conflict: Exclusionary Strategies of Male Trade Unionists in Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Social History* 13, no. 2 (1988): 191–208; for some examples of artisan misogyny, see *Trades Free Press* (October 28, 1827), disapproving of women's attendance at political meetings; and *Trades Free Press* (December 30, 1827), advocating wifely submission.

⁵³ Behagg (n. 39 above), p. 130; MacCalman, p. 28.

⁵⁴ *English Chartist Circular* 1 (1841): 166.

⁵⁵ D. Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 259.

⁵⁶ Robert Lowery, "Autobiography," in Robert Lowery, *Radical and Chartist*, ed. Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis (London: Europa Publications, 1979), p. 141.

desired women's support because they feared that if women remained uneducated they would deter their husbands from participating in politics or even drag down the movement.⁵⁷ Apparently wives often saw Chartist meetings as just another excuse for men to go to the pub.⁵⁸ A fictitious Stockport couple in a Chartist magazine "spent a very fractious and uncomfortable life, since that plaguey Charter, as Betsy termed it, came up."⁵⁹

To attract women, Chartists promised to transform the old marital misery into happy domesticity. Domesticity was therefore not only a rhetorical tool to demand concessions from the government but a vision used to appeal to women. Acknowledging the chronic problems of working-class marriage and promising to solve them were key means of gaining women's adherence. For instance, Mr. Macfarlane of Glasgow proclaimed that good government would lead to "good government at home. . . . Instead of the old Tory system of the husband coming home drunk to his family, we will have him sober, contented, and happy."⁶⁰ Two years later, the Scottish *Chartist Circular* detected that this promise was being fulfilled: "our fair countrywomen . . . acknowledged the change for the better in the 'guidman', as he comes home on the Saturday evening to read his *Circular*, and watch over the interests of his family."⁶¹ For women whose husbands drank all their wages, this rhetoric spoke to their experience and promised a better life.

Temperance, very popular among both branches of Chartism, was crucial in solving the problems of working-class marriage. Looking at temperance in this way makes it clear that it was not an emulation of false middle-class ideals of respectability but a practical response to the ravages of alcoholism on the ability of men to be good husbands and good Chartists.⁶² This was a change from the old trade-union response to accusations of domestic mistreatment that a workman's pri-

⁵⁷ *Chartist Circular* (December 9, 1839), p. 35.

⁵⁸ D. Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 144.

⁵⁹ Feargus O'Connor and Ernest Jones, eds., *The Labourer* (London and Manchester, 1847), 1:44–49.

⁶⁰ *Scottish Patriot* (December 14, 1839).

⁶¹ *Chartist Circular* (September 18, 1841), p. 433.

⁶² Foster (n. 7 above), p. 221, tends to portray temperance as part of "liberalization" and the co-optation of the working class. For another view, see Brian Harrison, "Teetotal Chartism," *History* 58, no. 2 (1973): 193–203. Temperance had been advocated in the 1820s for political reasons by trade unionist John Gast; see Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 216.

vate life was not a political issue.⁶³ Robert Lowery declared, "I hate a pot-house politician, who, to satisfy his own desires, robs his wife and family of those comforts he ought to administer to them; such are not the men on whom we must depend."⁶⁴ A writer observed in the Chartist *Lifeboat* that drunken men who were brutal to their wives did not deserve the name of Chartist.⁶⁵ Temperance was therefore a way of obliquely attacking wife beating in working-class homes.⁶⁶ Drinking rituals promoted solidarity among workmen and often defined masculinity, but they also siphoned off resources from the family.⁶⁷ Temperance therefore directly addressed the problem of unequal resources within working-class marriage. T. B. Smith wrote that "destructive selfishness" tainted working men's homes. "Look at the tattered gowns of your wives, at the frockless and shoeless children who are crawling on the floor, at the almost coalless grate, and the nearly breadless cupboard, and then look at the well-filled tobacco pouch, and the flowing pint, and blush for your own delinquencies." However, in many trades and times wages were so close to subsistence that even very moderate drinking and smoking could deprive wives and children of food. Smith actually promised a redistribution of income within the working-class home, pointing out that, if a husband gave up his pint a night and tobacco, he would "buy your wife two gowns, a bonnet, shoes, shawl, stockings, and petticoat, and same for children as well as a pig and extra coals."⁶⁸

Yet Chartist domesticity potentially differed from its bourgeois counterpart. Instead of a rigid separation between home and work, public politics and family privacy, Chartists politicized family life, defending it against attack and drawing on the family as a political resource. The division of the world into the public and private was rela-

⁶³ See *Trades Newspaper* (October 30, 1825; August 28, 1825) on domestic mistreatment.

⁶⁴ *Carlisle Journal* (October 6, 1838), quoted in Harrison and Hollis, eds., p. 33.

⁶⁵ *Lifeboat* (December 9, 1843).

⁶⁶ *True Scotsman* (April 25, 1840); Henry Vincent and others, *An Address to the Working Men of England, Scotland and Wales* (London: Five a Penny Tracts for the People, [1840]).

⁶⁷ Perhaps this is what Hans Medick means when he writes, "The long-term needs of the household had a relatively low priority in the monetary sphere. By contrast, the demand for public consumption in the monetary sphere was extraordinarily high." See "Plebeian Culture in the Transition to Capitalism," in *Culture, Ideology and Politics*, ed. Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 91.

⁶⁸ *English Chartist Circular* 1 (1841): 160.

tively foreign to working people, for working-class women had long been out in public, laboring for wages and drinking in public houses. Women rioted, organized, struck, demonstrated, and petitioned in the anti-Poor Law and factory reform movements, as well as for anti-slavery.⁶⁹

Chartists needed to draw on this female experience for their tactics of mass demonstrations, gathering signatures for petitions, strikes, and exclusive dealing—that is, boycotting shopkeepers who refused to support Chartists. One way they tried to do this was by creating a more disciplined, orderly public sphere. As an alternative to the pub, they had tea parties, soirees, and processions attended by whole families.⁷⁰ Unlike most trade unions, Chartists thus provided a political role for women in the larger community. But women also acted independently, forming over a hundred flourishing female Chartist associations.⁷¹ In Bradford, for instance, the Female Radical Association was a “quasi-autonomous group of five branches with six hundred members.”⁷²

Yet male Chartists expressed ambivalence about women’s activities. In 1839 the radical *Scottish Patriot* lauded the new Gorbals Female Universal Suffrage organization for supporting their brothers and husbands but noted, “we lament the necessity that exists for drawing the female mind from employment more congenial to the close and retiring habits of the women of this country, than the arena of politics.”⁷³ John Collins proclaimed that it was not Chartists who “drag women from their proper sphere” but the “aristocracy . . . who drag

⁶⁹ For an overview, see Dorothy Thompson, “Women and Nineteenth Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension,” in Mitchell and Oakley, eds. (n. 32 above), pp. 112–19; Louis Billington and Rosamund Billington, “‘A Burning Zeal for Righteousness’: Women in the British Anti-slavery Movement, 1820–1860,” in their *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800–1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 82–111; and the forthcoming book by Clare Midgely on women and antislavery.

⁷⁰ For the working-class public sphere, see Geoff Eley, “Rethinking the Political: Social History and Political Culture in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Britain,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 32 (1981): 451; James Epstein, “Some Organisational and Cultural Aspects of the Chartist Movement in Nottingham,” in *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830–60*, ed. James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 221–68; James D. Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 73.

⁷¹ Thompson, *The Chartists* (n. 39 above), p. 134; other general surveys of women and Chartism include David Jones, “Women and Chartism,” *History* 68, no. 1 (1983): 1–21; Jutta Schwarzkopf, “The Sexual Division in the Chartist Family,” *British Society for the Study of Labor History Bulletin* 54, no. 1 (1989): 12–14.

⁷² Theodore Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban-Industrial Society: Bradford, 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 504.

⁷³ *Scottish Patriot* (September 14, 1839).

women to the factory.” Yet he went on to say that as politics has interfered with women, so women should interfere in politics.⁷⁴ A Leeds speaker declared that women must take the part of men in the Chartist struggle but also hoped they would remain delicate and domestic.⁷⁵ In Scotland, Chartist men at first usually defined women’s role in subordinate terms and in many areas tightly controlled women’s meetings by taking up the time with long speeches by male visitors. They preferred females to remain as decorative symbols of working-class virtue. When the militant female Chartist Mary Anne Walker spoke at length before a mixed meeting, the *Northern Star* reporter rhapsodized about her “very graceful bust” before alluding to her political views.⁷⁶

In response to this ambivalence, Chartist women fashioned a political identity for themselves as mothers, workers, and activists that differed in important ways both from the middle-class ideal of domesticity and from male Chartists’ notions of women’s role.⁷⁷ First, it must be acknowledged that their stress on domesticity was in part a rhetorical gesture to answer vitriolic attacks on their activities by the middle-class press. As Epstein notes of an earlier period, radical women sometimes used rhetoric describing themselves in modest, self-effacing terms, but their actions contradicted their words.⁷⁸ But it was also that their notion of domesticity was different from that of the middle class, as Catherine Hall has pointed out.⁷⁹ Chartist women developed what I would call a “militant domesticity,” justifying their actions in stepping outside the home by defining the responsibilities of motherhood, not just as nurturing children in the home, but laboring to feed them and organizing to better their lives.⁸⁰ Mrs. Lapworth, a Birmingham reformer, compared her hunger after childbirth with the luxury of “hundreds around her, of her own sex, who had never labored, and did not know how to labor, and were enjoying all the com-

⁷⁴ *True Scotsman* (September 26, 1838).

⁷⁵ *Northern Star* (June 9, 1838).

⁷⁶ *Northern Star* (December 10, 1842).

⁷⁷ As women had developed a dignified political role for themselves in the Queen Caroline affair. See Clark, “Queen Caroline” (n. 25 above), pp. 60–62.

⁷⁸ Epstein, “Understanding the Cap of Liberty” (n. 7 above), p. 103.

⁷⁹ Catherine Hall, “The Tale of Samuel and Jemima: Gender and Working Class Culture in Early 19th Century England,” in *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, ed. T. Bennett, C. Mercer, and J. Woollacott (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986), p. 87.

⁸⁰ Similar to “republican motherhood” of the American Revolution. See Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

forts of life.”⁸¹ The female Chartists of Manchester maintained “we have a right to struggle to gain for ourselves, our husbands, brothers and children, suitable houses, proper clothing and good food.”⁸²

Some female Chartists also wished to transform domesticity into a more elevated sphere. Chartists claimed factory labor deprived women of an education that would enable them to transcend “the dull round of their household duties.”⁸³ Other Scottish women called for their sisters to “enlarge their thoughts beyond the domestic circle.”⁸⁴ An “Admirer of the Female Character” approved of female Chartist activity by refuting those who thought that women “are created for nothing but the domestic circle, and would give you no other education than housewifery.”⁸⁵

It is instructive to note how women’s own addresses differed subtly from the flowery rhetoric of the Chartist men who objected to female factory labor. For instance, Ashton’s Rev. Stephens presented a lurid picture of female millworkers who “don’t care whether their children live or not—when they don’t care whether they have husbands or not.”⁸⁶ Stephens was admittedly extremely popular among Chartist women, and counterbalanced his criticism of millworkers by blaming their faults on the system. Yet when the Ashton female Chartists wrote their own address in the same month, they presented themselves as griefstricken, rather than indifferent, to the “desolat[ion]” of their homes. Instead of depicting factory girls as immoral, they declared “our daughters, are considered, by haughty and iniquitous capitalists, as only created to satisfy their wicked desires.” In contrast to Stephens’ patriarchalism, they demanded the franchise for themselves as well as men.⁸⁷

The process of participating in Chartist activity enabled some women to change their conceptions of themselves as political actors. Most Chartist women began by defining themselves as auxiliaries in the struggle for the rights of their husbands and brothers. The Scottish Chartist women of Glasgow initially spoke with great hesitance and modesty (in large part due to vitriolic attacks on them by local dignitar-

⁸¹ *Birmingham Journal* (July 18, 1838), in Place Collection, British Library, London, set 56, July–December 1838; see also the London Female Democratic Association in the *Northern Star* (May 11, 1839) for very similar sentiments.

⁸² *Northern Star* (July 24, 1841), quoted in Ruth Frow and Edmund Frow, eds., *Political Women, 1800–1850* (London: Pluto, 1989), pp. 199–200.

⁸³ *Scottish Patriot* (December 21, 1839).

⁸⁴ *True Scotsman* (October 20, 1839).

⁸⁵ *Scots Times* (March 13, 1840).

⁸⁶ *Northern Star* (February 16, 1839).

⁸⁷ *Northern Star* (February 2, 1839).

ies and newspapers) but soon developed a more militant stand by defining themselves as heroines and not just as victims to be rescued. They “improved their habits of thought” through readings and producing essays on various topics.⁸⁸ Agnes Muir, their spokeswoman, while at first apologizing for her (illusory) oratorical inadequacies, refuted the notion that it was indelicate for a “starving woman to say she is in want,” and cited a long list of heroines as precedents for Chartist women.⁸⁹ Miss M’Kay went even further when she declared that “I offer no apology for appearing before you this evening, nor do I require to prove to you that the sex to which I belong has rights, and that these rights have been unlawfully taken from us as from the other sex.”⁹⁰ The women of Dunfermline, Scotland, defended themselves against criticism for organizing a meeting by declaring that, “until woman becomes an independent creature, not the subservient slave of man, but a fit companion and assistant in all his undertakings,” the constitution could never be reformed.⁹¹

However, Chartists rarely addressed the problem of male tyranny in marriage directly, as had the Owenites. This was in part because of their strong patriarchal emphasis. But it was also because Owenite critiques of marriage had to be abandoned in the new defensive politics. Radicals could not attack marriage when they reviled the New Poor Law for separating husbands and wives in workhouses.⁹² One exception was found in the *National Association Gazette*, which refuted the notion that husbands represented wives by declaring, “Woman stands in the same relationship to a man, as the subject of a despotic government to his monarch.”⁹³

A few women demanded the vote for themselves on the basis of natural rights, and a few men supported them.⁹⁴ A “plain working woman” of Glasgow, a weaver, argued in 1838 that women could reason as well as men and therefore deserved the vote.⁹⁵ According to Chartist logic, there was no reason women should not have the vote. Because working men lacked property, and often, households, Chart-

⁸⁸ *Scots Times* (May 1, 1840).

⁸⁹ *Scots Times* (November 18, 1840).

⁹⁰ *Scots Times* (December 30, 1840).

⁹¹ *True Scotsman* (December 22, 1838).

⁹² Mary Grassby, a Yorkshire agitator, was attacked by the *Globe* newspaper for her critique of workhouse marital separation on the grounds that she herself was separated (quoted in the *London Dispatch* [April 1, 1838]).

⁹³ *National Association Gazette* (April 30, 1842; see also February 5, 1842).

⁹⁴ D. Jones, “Women in Chartism” (n. 71 above), pp. 2–3; D. Thompson, *The Chartists* (n. 39 above), p. 126.

⁹⁵ *Northern Star* (June 23, 1838).

ists could not demand the vote on a Lockean basis of the male householder but, instead, resorted to the Painite tradition of the inherent individual right to representation.

But female suffrage was difficult to reconcile with domesticity. For instance, R. J. Richardson in his pamphlet *Rights of Women* used a Painite language of rights and citizenship to show that women should participate in political affairs because they were subjected to the laws of the state, paid taxes, and worked. Yet Richardson also proclaimed women were formed to “temper man” and should “return to [their] domestic circles and cultivate [their] finer feelings for the benefit of their offspring.”⁹⁶ The solution to these contradictions was for the suffrage to be granted only to single women and widows, for married women were represented by their husbands. Feargus O’Connor opposed the vote for any woman, thundering that it would cause dissension among families.⁹⁷ These arguments continued as late as 1846–47, when Owenites continued to support female suffrage, but the majority opposed it as creating “domestic unhappiness.”⁹⁸ Although working men repudiated the middle-class idea of household suffrage, they therefore still linked, on an emotional level, domestic patriarchal authority and political rights. *Northern Star* editorials denounced household suffrage because it would subsume radical sons’ wishes under conservative fathers’ votes, but they did not see the contradiction in excluding wives from the vote in order to “preserve harmony” in the family.⁹⁹ Yet opponents of universal manhood suffrage could point to women’s votes as the *reductio ad absurdum*: if everyone has the inherent natural right to vote, why not women? This was brought up especially in the 1842 debates in the House of Commons over Sharman Crawford’s motion to extend the suffrage. The *Times* stated, “Were they consistent with themselves, they must at least give the franchise to women.”¹⁰⁰ Chartists could only answer lamely that it was “paltry twaddle” to argue that working men should be denied the vote unless women were included as well.¹⁰¹ By subsuming women under their husbands, the rationale for universal suffrage as a natural right was lost. Chartists could avoid these contradictions, however, when draw-

⁹⁶ R. J. Richardson, *The Rights of Woman* (1840), in D. Thompson, ed. (n. 22 above), pp. 115–27; Taylor (n. 15 above), p. 269.

⁹⁷ Taylor, pp. 270–72; also D. Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 126.

⁹⁸ *Northern Star* (October 26, 1846; October 30, 1847).

⁹⁹ *Northern Star* (September 19, 1840; January 2, 1841).

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in the *National Association Gazette* (April 30, 1842), p. 141.

¹⁰¹ *Scottish Patriot* (August 3, 1839); the *Southern Star* quoted Cobbett, who said that women’s feminine duties disqualify them from the suffrage (January 19, 1840).

ing on a constitutionalist tradition for suffrage that unlike Painite radicalism, did not allow for women's claims to the vote.¹⁰²

However, while the constitutionalist tradition of the vote was based historically on property rights, Chartists interpreted it in terms of working men's property in their labor. Of course, females worked as well—but the Chartists did not apply this principle to women. This blind spot, it could be argued, limited the democratic potential of their notion of labor. Despite their appeal to all working people, not just artisans, the Chartist notion of labor derived from an artisan conception of the property of skill and control over labor—including control over the labor supply and subordinates.¹⁰³ Men regarded their labor as a source of pride and independence (even if the reality was different), while for women labor was an alienated cash nexus. Chartist women did not seem to regard labor as a right or a source of pride but as an unpleasant necessity of getting enough to survive.¹⁰⁴ The Manchester Chartist women continued by bemoaning that "we can scarcely get sufficient to keep body and soul together, for working twelve or thirteen hours per day."¹⁰⁵ The Newcastle women declared that "because the husband's earnings could not support his family, the wife has been compelled to leave her home neglected and, with her infant children, work at a soul and body degrading toil."¹⁰⁶ This did not mean that working women were not capable of union organizing, as their activities in the early 1830s had proved.¹⁰⁷ Although females were at least half of the cotton textile work force¹⁰⁸ and well represented in sweated trades such as shoemaking and tailoring, Chartist men, with a few notable exceptions, such as Bronterre O'Brien, found it difficult to

¹⁰² Epstein, "Constitutionalist Idiom" (n. 22 above), p. 565.

¹⁰³ Here I differ from Behagg, who argues that workplace democracy produced Chartist ideas of democracy by showing that workplace gender hierarchy limited Chartist democracy. See Behagg (n. 39 above), pp. 57, 146, 157; for gender hierarchy in the workplace, see William Lazonick, "Industrial Relations and the Case of the Self-Acting Mule," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 3, no. 3 (1979): 233.

¹⁰⁴ See Mary Freifeld, "Technological Change and the 'Self-Acting' Mule: A Study of Skill and the Sexual Division of Labour," *Social History* 11, no. 3 (1986): 33, on "discontinuities in the female craft tradition."

¹⁰⁵ *Northern Star* (July 24, 1841), quoted in Frow and Frow, eds. (n. 82 above), pp. 199–200.

¹⁰⁶ *Northern Star* (February 9, 1839).

¹⁰⁷ Malcolm I. Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, *Women in Protest, 1800–1850* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982), pp. 72–78.

¹⁰⁸ Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), p. 76; Per Bolin-Hart, *Work, Family and the State: Child Labour and the Organization of Production in the British Cotton Industry, 1780–1820* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1989), p. 54.

acknowledge women as laborers, let alone organize them.¹⁰⁹ They preferred to depict mothers slaving in the factories but rarely acknowledged that most working women were single women who labored for their own subsistence and sometimes wished to organize to better their conditions. For instance, in 1838 the Chartists called a public meeting in Newcastle extending an invitation to the female glassworkers of Cookson's Plate Glass factory. The women in the factory had gone on strike over a change in the payment schedule, but the Chartist speakers did not allude to their grievances, instead proclaiming that the Charter would bring a day when "the working man should not be looked upon as a mere tool of the capitalists" and celebrating the "manly conduct" of male trade unionists.¹¹⁰ Rather than developing an analysis of proletarianization, the Chartists wished to recreate artisanal independence and control over women by putting female factory workers back into the home.

In the short run, manipulating the notion of domesticity was a powerful tool to claim concessions from the government, as we can see from an examination of the factory question. By claiming that working men needed the vote in order to protect domesticity, Chartists turned middle-class domestic ideology against itself, asking why manufacturers could keep their wives in idleness and seclusion while working men were forced to send out their daughters to factories. Robert Blakey wrote, "I see no reason why working men, whose labor creates every necessary and luxury of life, should be denied the pleasures and comforts of home."¹¹¹ The Chartist rhetoric of manhood and domesticity also exposed the contradictions between the doctrines of political economy and separate spheres, both central to middle-class identity. Separate spheres was based on Evangelical principles that home life was the root of morality. But the impossibility of domestic life for the poor in manufacturing cities clashed with the universalizing moral claims of Evangelicalism and produced social unrest that threatened the political order. Yet political economists believed the state should do nothing to remedy the situation, both on laissez-faire principles and because they viewed working people as neutered hands—cheap female labor was simply seen as advantageous to manufacturers.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Bronterre O'Brien, editorial in the *Northern Star* (September 8, 1838).

¹¹⁰ Speech by Mr. Lowry, *Northern Star* (December 8, 1838).

¹¹¹ Robert Blakey, *The Political Pilgrim's Progress, from the Northern Liberator* (Newcastle, 1839), p. 5.

¹¹² Maxine Berg, *The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 296.

Chartists were able to exploit this contradiction as the problem of female and child labor in the factories and mines became a political issue in the early 1840s, arousing the sympathy of Tory paternalists and sanitary reformers. But this issue also allowed working-class morality to return to the center of political debate. Chartist claims that female labor undermined the manhood of working-class men and *demoralized communities were a double-edged weapon*. On one hand, Chartists saw working-class domestic misery as a symptom of the ravages of industrialism, and their organizations worked to overcome it through moral education and political action. On the other hand, middle-class observers could displace attention away from the roots of working-class misery by blaming it all on female labor and depicting working-class people as degraded, passive, and immoral rather than as people determined to better themselves. For instance, Ralph Grindrod claimed that factory girls' lack of domesticity was "the one great and universally prevailing cause of distress and crime among the working classes."¹¹³ Chartist journals began to merge the old melodramatic narrative of domestic misery caused by industrial evil with the sentimental and sanitary reformers' versions of domesticity that blamed family unhappiness on women workers themselves. They monotonously complained that factory work made girls insubordinate, selfish if not immoral, and deprived them of the opportunity to learn domestic skills.¹¹⁴ The *Chartist Circular* cited approvingly a call for the gradual abolition of all female labor on the grounds that women's work "deprives the poor man of a virtuous wife" and "degraded and contaminated" female workers.¹¹⁵ Radical journals repeatedly cited Joseph Corbett's testimony before the commissioners on women's and children's work in which he remembered that "after the close of a hard day's work, [his mother would] sit up nearly all night for several nights together washing and mending of clothes." His concern here was not her labor, but how housework disturbed his father: "My father could have no comfort here . . . and sought refuge in an alehouse." The *English Chartist Circular* noted that "wives and daughters are made to perpetuate the contamination of the laboring classes."¹¹⁶ The language of "contamination" was odd for working-class journals to use

¹¹³ Ralph Grindrod, *The Wrongs of Our Youth* (London, 1843), pp. 25–26.

¹¹⁴ *Poor Man's Guardian and Repealers Friend* (London, 1843), p. 15; MacDouall's *Chartist Journal and Trades Advocate* (September 18, 1841), p. 196.

¹¹⁵ *Chartist Circular* (February 3, 1842), p. 519.

¹¹⁶ *English Chartist Circular* (1842) 2: 225; same passage is later cited in Samuel Smiles, "The Condition of Factory Women—What is Doing for Them," *People's Journal* 2 (1846): 259; and in the *Ten Hours Advocate* (1846), p. 123.

to describe their own class. It displaced the blame for factory misery on women's work rather than on the employment relationship itself. In January 1842, when the Chartist-influenced West Riding Short-Time Committee demanded the gradual withdrawal of all females from the factories, they declared that the "domestic unhappiness" caused by the factory system's "inversion of the order of nature" was "fraught with danger to the State. Disaffection and discontent must be engendered among parties so situated."¹¹⁷

Several months later their prediction came true, when the "Plug Plot" riots erupted in Lancashire in August 1842. Unemployment had shot up during an economic slump, and when manufacturers around Ashton-under-Lyne and Stockport tried to impose a 25 percent wage cut, workers went on a general strike, demanding the Charter as a solution to their economic ills. Women played a notable role among the crowds who marched from factory to factory demanding workers turn out and attacking workhouses. They struck for higher wages, stoned mills, and attacked pawnshops. "Thousands of defiant women . . . poorly clad and not a few barefoot" confronted the military and "dared them to kill them if they liked."¹¹⁸ Their actions frightened many middle-class observers who saw them as further proof of working-class degradation exemplified by the breakdown of sexual difference as women entered the public sphere. The Commissioners on Women and Children in the Factories declared, "The girls of some of our manufacturing districts are . . . wearing the garb of women, but actuated by the worst passions of men, in every riot and outbreak the women are the leaders and excitors of the young men to violence."¹¹⁹ By stressing the immorality of female factory work, and calling for its total abolition, Chartists allowed the governing classes to see their movement as a symptom of the degradation of womanhood, to be solved by protecting women rather than by giving rights to men.

The 1842 riots had paradoxical results. In the short term, the Chartists gained a great deal of support from trade unionists who saw the vote as the solution to their economic ills.¹²⁰ However, by the time of the trials of alleged Chartist rioters, the government took a more conciliatory approach and pushed for factory acts limiting the work of

¹¹⁷ *Northern Star* (January 8, 1842).

¹¹⁸ D. G. Wright, *Chartist Risings in Bradford* (Bradford: Bradford Library and Information Service, 1987), p. 31; Mick Jenkins, *The General Strike of 1842* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980), pp. 213–17; Frow and Frow eds. (n. 82 above), pp. 186–89.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Anna Jameson, *Memoirs and Essays Illustrative of Art, Literature and Social Morals* (London, n.d.), pp. 201–2.

¹²⁰ D. Jones (n. 27 above), p. 118.

women and children.¹²¹ Working people were therefore able to manipulate the rhetoric of domesticity in order to gain concessions from the state and, by limiting women's and children's work, also began to limit the hours men labored. But government concessions also took the wind out of Chartist sails.¹²² As Jones notes, Chartist rhetoric about the state could not cope with state concessions such as the factory acts, sanitary reform, and banking changes that fostered prosperity, and to this he attributes the subsequent moderation, decline, and eventual failure of Chartism. However, as John Saville points out in stressing state repression as the main reason for Chartist failure, few of these reforms made an impact on working people's lives until decades later—with the exception of the mines and factory acts.¹²³

And here, one could argue domesticity was a key factor in moderating Chartism. Chartists had succeeded in using the rhetoric of domesticity to defend their morality and gain concessions from the state. But it also made them vulnerable. As Maxine Berg notes of another context, by defining women's and children's work as a problem of social morality rather than economics, Whig reformers could "protect political economy from the criticisms of its methodology and its doctrines on industrialization."¹²⁴ Trade unionists increasingly followed a modified version of political economy resembling that espoused by Francis Place, who believed working men should control the labor supply through legislation and strikes to keep unskilled men, women, and children out, or, as in textiles, control their labor. As Tony Dickson and Tony Clarke point out, "focussing on the excess supply of labor rather than the relationship to capitalism . . . tended to mitigate class tension."¹²⁵ Furthermore, this trade union strategy perpetuated the existence of a pool of low-paid, female labor always available to undercut men.¹²⁶

Domesticity also made working men vulnerable to the paradigm of household suffrage that the Chartists had long resisted. While the remaining Chartists and most trade unionists resolutely supported manhood suffrage in the 1850s and 1860s, O'Connor, and also the

¹²¹ Jenkins, p. 255.

¹²² Sally Alexander, "Women, Class and Sexual Difference: Some Reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History," *History Workshop Journal* 17 (1984): 138.

¹²³ John Saville, *1848: The British State and the Chartist Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 218.

¹²⁴ Berg (n. 112 above), p. 296.

¹²⁵ Tony Dickson and Tony Clarke, "Class and Class Consciousness in Early Industrial Capitalism: Paisley, 1770–1850," in *Capital and Class in Scotland*, ed. Tony Dickson (Edinburgh: John Donald), p. 47.

¹²⁶ Rose (n. 52 above), p. 208.

Glasgow Trades Council, espoused household suffrage in order to ally with middle-class Parliamentary Radicals.¹²⁷ As Richard Cobden argued, "I ask, what danger is there giving the franchise to householders? They are the fathers of families; they constitute the laborious and industrious population."¹²⁸ This paradigm persisted and may account for the long delay in attaining universal suffrage for all men, let alone women, until 1918. Working men remained vulnerable to claims that they did not live up to the ideal of the breadwinner and therefore did not deserve the vote.¹²⁹

Indeed, after 1842 Chartists concentrated on self-help efforts to better the condition of working people, such as continuing temperance societies, cooperative stores, schools, the land plan, and mechanics' institutes. In fact, O'Connor's land plan was in part an effort to recreate the golden age by enabling mothers to withdraw from the factories and stay with their families.¹³⁰ However, women were expected to educate their children, do their housework, and also to swing pick-axes on the land, an impossible task. The land plan itself failed amid bankruptcy and acrimony.¹³¹ While these moral reforms often were originally intended in part to draw women into the movement, by the 1840s they pushed women out, leaving a vision of the working class strictly divided into male public and female private spheres, in which only the former had any political importance. As Dorothy Thompson notes, women withdrew from a movement that spoke less and less to their concerns.¹³²

To be sure, working men developed their own notion of masculinity that transcended the old plebeian confusion without kowtowing to the middle class. As Trygve Tholfsen pointed out, while the middle

¹²⁷ Frances Elma Gillespie, *Labor and Politics in England, 1850–1867* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1927), pp. 30, 90, 264; Tony Dickson, ed., *Scottish Capitalism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980), p. 228.

¹²⁸ From debate in Parliament July 6, 1848, quoted in Patricia Hollis, *Class and Conflict in Nineteenth Century England, 1815–1850* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 354.

¹²⁹ For instance, the journal the *British Workman* (1855) tried to persuade men to reform their domestic habits before claiming the vote.

¹³⁰ O'Connor and Jones, eds. (n. 59 above), 1:44–49.

¹³¹ *Northern Star* (May 8, 1847; July 10, 1847), where O'Connor celebrates both women's domesticity and skills with the pick-axe. Thomas Martin Wheeler pointed out that "mothers could not attend to their children and allotments at the same time" in 1847. See William Stevens, *A Memoir of Thomas Martin Wheeler* (1862, reprint, Westport, Conn.: Garland, 1986), p. 40; for an overview, see D. Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (n. 27 above), p. 137.

¹³² D. Thompson, *The Chartists*, (n. 39 above), p. 131.

class continued to expect working-class men to be deferential, working-class manhood on the contrary stressed independence.¹³³ What was new was a stress on the domestic virtues of sobriety and supporting one's family, a significant departure from the old artisan ideal and one that benefited women and children when it was honored.

But the impossible dream of creating a sexually integrated autonomous working-class political culture that could take advantage of female activism, ameliorate domestic tensions, and preserve male dominance could not be realized. Chartist men faced continual tensions between their advocacy of domesticated manhood and the necessity to build on the public strength of masculine trade organizations and the solidarity of pub culture. In a world divided by the middle class into public and private, the domestic sphere was the private and powerless sphere. Working men therefore remained suspicious of efforts to push them out of their pubs and clubs back into the home.

The attempts by Chartist women to broaden domesticity into a justification for political action or even a sense of themselves as reasoning beings faded as the Chartist public sphere was redefined as the domain of working men. The *Ten Hours Advocate*, for instance, contained poignant tales of wives pining away in domestic monotony as their husbands neglected them for political meetings and mechanics' institutes.¹³⁴ Domesticity remained an illusion for most; few working men could support their wives on their wages alone, so with the exception of textile workers most wives had to make do with poorly paid washing and charring, struggling to keep up the appearance of domesticity and often facing violence from discontented husbands if they did not.¹³⁵

The ideal of domesticity as an idyllic ending to the melodrama of the working-class struggle remained a chimerical rhetorical strategy. The defensive politics of the 1830s and 1840s may have required working-class radicals to draw on the melodramatic rhetoric of domesticity, but it eventually entrapped them. To be sure, the argument that the working class became deferential by the 1850s has been over-

¹³³ Trygve Tholfsen, *Working-Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p. 17.

¹³⁴ *Ten Hours Advocate* (1846–47), pp. 177, 293.

¹³⁵ Ellen Ross, "Fierce Questions and Taunts: Married Life in Working-Class London, 1870–1914," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 3 (1982): 575–602; Nancy Tomes, "'A Torrent of Abuse': Crimes of Violence between Working-Class Men and Women in London, 1840–1875," *Journal of Social History* 11, no. 2 (1978): 238–345; Jan Lambertz, "The Politics and Economics of Family Violence, from the Late Nineteenth Century to 1948" (M. Phil., Manchester University, 1984).

stated.¹³⁶ Chartism bequeathed to the mid-nineteenth century working class a vivid populist political rhetoric, and labor militancy continued to spark bitter strikes. But it also left them with a narrow vision of class: skilled working men organizing for their own political rights, occupational privileges, and patriarchal power. Domesticity had promised to open up working-class family life, but it imposed a new rigidity instead.

¹³⁶ Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984), p. 113; for a critique of Joyce on deference, see Neville Kirk, *The Growth of Working Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), pp. 1–32.