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The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and
the People, 1790-1860 (review)

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Reviews

IAN HAYWOOD, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Print, Politics and the People, 1790–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. xii + 332. £45 hardback. 0 521 835461 1.

The strength of Ian Haywood's new book, *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, is its chronological span. He charts the rise of popular print culture from the 1790s and Paine's *The Rights of Man* to the 1840s and 1850s, and the phenomenal success of G.W.M. Reynolds, who symbolized the union of radical politics and commercial acumen. The story of radical print culture, as Haywood notes in his introduction, traditionally begins with the unprecedented circulation of *The Rights of Man* and ends with the 1830s and the so-called 'war of the unstamped', the burgeoning of cheap papers in response to the various stamp acts designed to control and curtail the popular political press. The 1830s acted as a convenient watershed, but equally relevant is the fact that the story has often been in the hands of Romanticists, whose own interests do not extend much beyond the thirties.

The point of Haywood's subtitle, '*Print, Politics and the People, 1790–1860*', is that the narrative does not stop conveniently with the Reform Bill or the activities of the unstamped press. Rather, the battle for the 'common reader' was only just getting under way in the 1830s. *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, established in 1832, closely followed by Charles Knight's *Penny Magazine* later the same year set out to attract the newly literate, mainly urban, readership of the large towns, and covertly to win them away from radical political papers and the supposedly corrupting influence of cheap fiction which formed an important part of those publications. The publishing

campaigns of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, and the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge were yet another stage in the development of cheap literature, followed in the forties by the Chartist press, and then by the family-orientated magazines of the late 1840s and 1850s, the so-called journals of 'popular progress'.

Haywood's argument is that rather than a battle for the heart and mind of the common reader, conducted by the radical press on the one hand and the liberal establishment's improving literature on the other, the growth of cheap literature from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century was a complicated story in which the battle lines were less clearly drawn. There were, as he describes them, 'a series of overlapping popular readerships' which made up the market for a variety of cheap forms of print culture. The various genres operated with a degree of cultural independence, but they all subscribed 'to a common metanarrative of "progress" and enlightenment, and they constantly appropriated and recycled each other's aesthetic practices'. The central figure in Haywood's argument is the controversial G.W.M. Reynolds, publisher, author, editor and radical politician, celebrated and despised in equal measure for his phenomenal commercial success, and viewed ambivalently for his politics. Reynolds' provision of radical politics mixed with sensational fiction was enormously attractive. It was a lesson that Charles Knight and other providers of cheap literature designed to educate and improve the common reader, were to learn to their cost.

Haywood has read his way through an enormous amount of popular literature, from the 'miscellany-cum-anthology' of the 1790s through the *Cheap Repository Tracts* of Hannah More and her colleagues,

to Cobbett's *Weekly Political Register*, Wooler's *Black Dwarf*, the *Northern Star* and less well known Chartist papers, and the periodicals of social progress of the 1840s and 1850s. He concentrates of necessity on periodical literature and popular fiction, to the exclusion of poetry and melodrama, while acknowledging that a comprehensive history of popular literature must include the latter categories. One of the most valuable aspects of his study is the scrutiny of little known texts: More's popular tracts, 'The Death of Mr. Fantom' and 'The Delegate', both written in 1817, Harriet Martineau's 'The Rioters', Thomas Martin Wheeler's famous novel about Chartism *Sunshine and Shadow* (1849–50), plus issues of Lloyd's and Reynolds' popular titles. Individual tales are deftly summarized, and carefully chosen illustrations reinforce the vital connections between image and text in all of these mass circulation publications.

Realist fiction by women provides a common thread throughout the book, from Edgeworth's *Popular Tales* and More's tracts, to through Harriet Martineau's serialized fiction, to the 'seamstress' narratives of Elizabeth Stone, Eliza Meteyard ('Silverpen') and Camilla Toulmin. Haywood is at his least convincing in his attempt to retrieve Hannah More from what he sees as the wrong-headedness of critics like Marilyn Butler, Kathryn Sutherland, and Anne Mellor who present her, very convincingly, as a counter-revolutionary 'feminist'. He is blinkered too, in his treatment of Harriet Martineau, presenting her as remorselessly and patronizingly making the case for political economy to her inferiors, while failing to acknowledge her own brand of compassionate feminism and the breadth and variety of her journalism.

Haywood's most important contribution to the study of popular literature is to link the period of radical print culture, the 1790 through to the 1830s, to the commercialism of the 1840s and 1850s, and to point up the continuities. The unstamped 'war' of the thirties paved the way for the Chartist literature of the forties, and the commercial triumphs of Edward Lloyd and Reynolds. The key was the heady mixture of politics and fiction, which Reynolds and the earlier Chartists had learned from the unstamped press.

The mass readership of the 1840s and the 1850s were not divided along class lines, as has sometimes been suggested. *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, *Howitt's Journal*, and *Eliza Cook's Journal*, despite variations in price, were

competing for the same readers as Lloyd's and Reynolds' publications. They were all, as Haywood points out, courting the 'respectable artisan reader' as well as his or her middle-class counterpart. Equally, *Household Words*, established in 1850 and priced at 2d, was targeting a wide social spectrum of artisan as well as middle-class readers, as were the temperance publications of John Cassell, with whom Haywood ends his account.

Haywood's prose is not easy, and the links between chapters and sections occasionally show the signs of earlier publication as articles. Nevertheless this well-researched book makes us better able to recognize a continuum from the radical press of the late eighteenth century through the unstamped papers of the 1830s to the Chartist press of the forties, and the family magazines of the 1850s.

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JOEL PACE AND MATTHEW SCOTT (eds), *Wordsworth in American Literary Culture*, with a foreword by Stephen Gill (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. xix + 247. £45 hardback. 1 4039 0133 3.

The defined point of origin of the eleven essays in this collection is Stephen Gill's remark in *Wordsworth and the Victorians* that 'the book waiting to be written' is on Wordsworth in America. Like Wordsworth under sentence of *The Recluse*, however, the contributors here have taken their own distinctive paths towards, or around, that grand project. Many important links and persuasive readings emerge over the course of the volume, as well as many intriguing evocations of Wordsworth: Theodore Parker's 'dear old poetical Betty'; Thoreau's embodiment of 'a simple pathos and feminine gentleness'; the champion of 'the real language of men' supporting Owen Wister's 1895 essay 'The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher'. For many American writers, Wordsworth seems to have served as a substitute for the image of nature offered in some of his own poems: restorative, sustaining, nutritional (William James's father describes him 'feeding upon' Wordsworth). In many ways, however, the most significant questions the collection raises are about scholarly methodology. Two sets of ideas are central: the viability of Bloom-derived models of influence, and the more recent approaches offered in studies of 'Transatlantic Romanticism'.

In their introduction, Joel Pace and Matthew Scott begin to 'worry' (their elision) the intersections of