

Chapter One

Approaches to Chartist Political Culture

The subject of ‘political culture’ now has a wide currency in many academic disciplines.¹ It would be impossible to go over all the understandings that have evolved in various fields, but it is necessary to consider some of the different approaches that have been used in Chartist and other pertinent scholarship. Whilst the ‘social’ and ‘political’ character of the movement has been much debated of late, little reflection has been given to changing perceptions of ‘Chartist culture’ over the past twenty-five years or so. Historians have certainly recognised the importance of the ‘movement culture’ created under the auspices of the National Charter Association, the first independent working-class political party.² This understanding of culture as a range of independent or oppositional social, religious, educational, temperance and co-operative *activities*, however, sits rather uneasily with the basic precept of the linguistic turn – that culture is essentially synonymous with the entire range of ways political *meanings* were made. This chapter thus critically examines some of the quite divergent ways Chartist historians have deployed concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘political culture’ in their research.

In various discussions of Chartist historiography, much has been made of the commonsensical materialism sometimes apparent in earlier interpretations.³ One the

¹ For an overview of some approaches see J. Street, ‘Political culture – from civic culture to mass culture’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 4 (1994), pp. 95-113 and (more generally) J.B. Thompson, *Ideology and modern culture* (Cambridge, 1990), particularly ch. 3.

² Compare Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists*, ch. 1; J. Epstein, ‘Some organisational and cultural aspects of the Chartist movement in Nottingham’ in J. Epstein and D. Thompson, eds., *The Chartist experience: studies in working-class radicalism and culture, 1830-1860* (London, 1982), pp. 221-68; E. Royle, *Chartism* (London, 1996), pp. 85-9; Finn, *After Chartism*, ch. 3.

³ Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’; T. Wyborn, ‘Chartism, language and human agency’, *Melbourne Historical Journal*, 23 (1995), pp. 61-88; J. Host, *Victorian labour history: experience, identity and the politics of representation* (London, 1998), p. 35.

whole, however, these accounts were usually cast in the form of traditional political narrative or biography.⁴ Although commonly written from a left-liberal, socialist or Marxist perspective, the dominant actors were always Chartist leaders, and the reasons for Chartism's failure were typically related to leadership style and policy as much as the vicissitudes of the 'hungry forties'.⁵ For example, influential historians such as Mark Hovell and G.D.H. Cole contrasted rationalist, progressive leaders such as William Lovett, and 'autocratic' or 'reactionary' demagogues such as Feargus O'Connor.⁶ The Chartist rank and file, on the other hand, are never more than a rather shadowy collective subject in earlier histories. Only during the 1960s and 1970s did Chartist historians begin to look beyond leadership disputes and the familiar chronology of tactical failures culminating in the final defeat of 10 April 1848. In particular, scholars began to explore Chartism from the bottom up, utilising a thematic approach associated with the new social history.

The study of a distinctively working-class culture, and of Chartism's place in it, owes much to E.P. Thompson's *The making of the English working class*.⁷ This celebrated account of the evolution of a working-class consciousness inspired a generation of social historians, including many Chartist scholars.⁸ David Jones' *Chartism and the Chartists* (1975), for example, can be contrasted with the narrative-oriented interpretation published by J.T. Ward a few years earlier.⁹ Jones explored

⁴ Hovell, *The Chartist movement*; R. Groves, *But we shall rise again: a narrative history of Chartism* (London, 1939); Schoyen, *The Chartist challenge*; G.D.H. Cole, *Chartist portraits* (New York, 1965); J.T. Ward, *Chartism* (London, 1973). An important exception (which also initiated the local study of Chartism) is A. Briggs, ed., *Chartist studies* (London, 1974).

⁵ Host, *Victorian labour history*, pp. 10-13.

⁶ Hovell, *The Chartist movement*, especially chs. 13-14; Cole, *Chartist portraits*, chs. 1, 11.

⁷ Thompson, *The making of the English working class*.

⁸ For Thompson see H. Kaye, *The British Marxist historians* (Cambridge, 1984), chs. 6-7; H. Kaye and K. McClelland, eds., *E.P. Thompson: critical perspectives* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁹ Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists*; Ward, *Chartism*.

relatively unheralded themes such as Chartist journalism, lecturing, the rank and file movement culture and the relationship between Chartism and other movements. Later Jones published one of the earlier essays upon female participation, and his last major work now stands as the definitive account of the Newport rising of late 1839.¹⁰ During the mid-1970s James Epstein's earlier work on the organisational and political significance of the *Northern Star* appeared, as did Martha Vicinius' recovery of literary elements of Chartist culture.¹¹ At a somewhat broader level, significant liberal revisionist interpretations of working class culture were published by Thomas Laqueur and Trygve Tholfsen, both of whom took issue with theses Thompson had propounded so vigorously in *The making of the English working class*.¹²

The influence of Dorothy Thompson, now perhaps the most eminent of Chartist historians, obviously cannot be underestimated when considering the 'Thompsonian' approach.¹³ Apart from pioneering the study of the participation of the Irish and of women, her 1984 thematic account of Chartism is now regarded by many as definitive.¹⁴ The class-oriented approach inspired by Edward and Dorothy Thompson is also ably represented in a number of contributions to *The Chartist experience*, a landmark anthology of essays edited by James Epstein and Dorothy

¹⁰ D. Jones, 'Women and Chartism', *History*, 68 (1983), pp. 1-21; Jones, *The last rising*.

¹¹ J. Epstein, 'Feargus O'Connor and the *Northern Star*'; M. Vicinius, *The industrial muse: a study of nineteenth century British working-class literature* (London, 1974), especially ch. 3.

¹² T.W. Laqueur, *Religion and respectability: Sunday schools and working-class culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven, 1976); T. Tholfsen, *Working-class radicalism in mid-Victorian England* (London, 1976).

¹³ See N. Kirk, 'Setting the standard: Dorothy Thompson, the discipline of history and the study of Chartism' in O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts, eds., *The duty of discontent: essays for Dorothy Thompson* (London, 1995), pp. 1-32.

¹⁴ Thompson, *The Chartists*; D. Thompson, 'Women and nineteenth-century politics: a lost dimension' in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley, eds., *The rights and wrongs of women* (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 112-38; Thompson, 'Ireland and the Irish in English radicalism before 1850'; D. Thompson, 'Seceding from the seceders: the decline of the Jacobin tradition in Ireland, 1790-1850' in *Outsiders: class, gender, nation* (London, 1993), pp. 134-163.

Thompson.¹⁵ Both Epstein's and Eileen Yeo's contributions to this book epitomised the newer kind of research being undertaken on Chartist culture, and will be dealt with in more detail below.¹⁶ Other notable contributions included John Belchem's reappraisal of O'Connor's leadership in 1848, and Kate Tiller's account of late Chartism in the Halifax area.¹⁷ *The Chartist experience* also marked the first appearance of Gareth Stedman Jones' hotly debated revisionist account of Chartism, an essay now widely construed as the defining moment of a new cultural history of politics.¹⁸ Although much could be written about the Stedman Jones debate, the three themes I wish to look at in more detail are his emphasis upon class, language and rhetorical continuity.

II

Stedman Jones' criticisms of the traditional 'social' approach to Chartism, and his reappraisal of the reasons for the movement's failure has become one of the most discussed historical essays of the last twenty years.¹⁹ Unlike many of his forbears, Stedman Jones made political discourse or rhetoric the starting point of his interpretation. Although historians working from a Thompsonian perspective had also recognised the movement's political essence, Stedman Jones' argument differed markedly from research primarily concerned with exploring various cultural activities,

¹⁵ Epstein and Thompson, eds., *The Chartist experience*.

¹⁶ Yeo, 'Some practices and problems of Chartist democracy'; Epstein, 'Some organisational and cultural aspects of the Chartist movement'.

¹⁷ Belchem, '1848'; Tiller, 'Late Chartism'.

¹⁸ Stedman Jones, 'The language of Chartism'; Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism'.

¹⁹ D. Kalb, 'Frameworks of culture and class in historical research', *Theory and Society*, 22 (1993), p. 513; Wyborn, 'Chartism, language and human agency', p. 69. See also Host, *Victorian labour history*, pp. 34-8.

Chartist literature and the Chartist press, or recovering the active role played by women in the movement. To understand the origins of these differences it is necessary to outline the intellectual context from which Stedman Jones' reappraisal emerged.

The divergent approaches taken by Stedman Jones and other contributors to *The Chartist experience* partly reflected theoretical and political divisions that had long beset the British New Left.²⁰ For example, Edward Thompson had been a central figure in a series of protracted disputes over theory, history and the future of a neo-Marxist politics in Britain that dated back to the mid 1960s.²¹ Whilst the detail of these debates cannot be discussed in much detail here, in the mid 1970s the 'culturalist' approach Richard Johnson had (somewhat loosely) associated with Thompson, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Asa Briggs, found an increasingly strident challenge from a younger generation of scholars (including Stedman Jones) who were influenced by Louis Althusser's structuralist reading of the later Marx.²² In essence, the humanist approach epitomised by both Edward and Dorothy Thompson was assailed by a methodology which incorporated an anti-realist epistemology and anti-humanist conceptions of ideology, subjectivity and agency.²³ Some measure of the intensity of this challenge can be found in the rather strident tone

²⁰ See generally L. Chun, *The British new left* (Edinburgh, 1993).

²¹ See T. Nairn, 'The British political elite', *New Left Review*, 23 (1964), pp. 19-25; P. Anderson, 'Origins of the present crisis', *New Left Review*, 23 (1964), pp. 26-53; T. Nairn, 'The English working class', *New Left Review*, 24 (1964), pp. 43-57; E.P. Thompson, 'The peculiarities of the English' reprinted in *The poverty of theory & other essays* (London, 1978), pp. 35-91; P. Anderson, 'The myths of Edward Thompson, or socialism and pseudo-empiricism', *New Left Review*, 35 (1966), pp. 2-42.

²² R. Johnson, 'Edward Thompson, Eugene Genovese, and socialist-humanist history', *History Workshop Journal*, 6 (1978), pp. 79-100; R. Johnson, 'Culture and the historians' in J. Clarke, C. Critcher and R. Johnson, eds., *Working class culture: studies in history and theory* (London, 1980), especially pp. 58-65; Chun, *The British new left*, pp. 159-67. As Chun (p. 163) points out, Stedman Jones' criticisms of empiricist approaches to history can be traced back to 1967. See G. Stedman Jones, 'The pathology of English history', *New Left Review*, 46 (1967), pp. 29-43. For Althusser's influence upon Stedman Jones see the latter's introduction to *Languages of Class* at p. 12.

²³ Perhaps the most controversial neo-Althusserian text was B. Hindess and P. Hirst, *Pre-capitalist modes of production* (London, 1975).

of Edward Thompson's polemical critique of Althusser and his British adherents, and Thompson's lengthy defence of central concepts such as agency and experience.²⁴ Although Althusser's influence diminished spectacularly during the 1980s, recent debate over the 'linguistic turn' often seems to echo earlier arguments over epistemology, subjectivity, agency and the use of class as an interpretative tool.²⁵

In the introduction to *Languages of Class*, Stedman Jones outlines the evolution of his critical engagement with Edward Thompson's account of the development of a working-class consciousness in England.²⁶ In fact, to adequately understand the impact of Stedman Jones' research one has to recognise the magnitude of the sprawling thesis of epochal change that had emerged from the pages of *The making of the English working class*. If one was to speculate upon the essence of Thompson's approach, the concepts of agency, 'experience' and class as a historically observable relationship would surely be amongst the first ideas to come to mind. According to Stedman Jones, however, Thompson's working-class consciousness

²⁴ Thompson, *The poverty of theory*, pp. 193-397. See also K. Nield and J. Seed, 'Theoretical poverty or the poverty of theory: British Marxist historiography and the Althusserians', *Economy and Society*, 8 (1979), pp. 381-416; P. Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London, 1980) and the contributions by Raphael Samuel, Stuart Hall, Richard Johnson and E.P. Thompson in R. Samuel, ed., *People's history and socialist theory* (London, 1981), pp. 375-408.

²⁵ See D. Mayfield and S. Thorne, 'Social history and its discontents: Gareth Stedman Jones and the politics of language', *Social History*, 17 (1992), pp. 165-88; J. Lawrence and M. Taylor, 'The poverty of protest: Gareth Stedman Jones and the politics of language – a reply', *Social History*, 18 (1993), pp. 1-15; J. Vernon, 'Who's afraid of the "linguistic turn"?'; N. Kirk, 'History, Language, ideas and post-modernism: a materialist view', *Social History*, 19 (1994), pp. 221-40; Joyce, 'The end of social history?', *Social History*, 20 (1995), pp. 73-91; M.W. Steinberg, 'Culturally speaking: finding a commons between the post-structuralism and the Thompsonian perspective', *Social History*, 21 (1996), pp. 19-35; G. Stedman Jones, 'The determinist fix: some obstacles to the further development of the linguistic approach to history in the 1990s', *History Workshop Journal*, 42 (1996), pp. 19-35; P. Joyce, 'The return of history: postmodernism and the politics of academic history in Britain', *Past and Present*, 158 (1998), pp. 207-35.

²⁶ Thompson, *The making of the English working class*, especially ch. 16. See also W.H. Sewell, 'How classes are made: critical reflections on E.P. Thompson's theory of working-class formation' in Kaye and McClelland, eds., *E.P. Thompson: critical perspectives* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 50-77.

thesis and his concept of ‘experience’ merely highlighted ‘the problematic character of language itself’:

What this approach cannot acknowledge is all the criticism which has been levelled at it since the broader significance of Saussure’s work was understood – the materiality of language itself, the impossibility of simply referring it back to some primal anterior reality.²⁷

Whereas Chartism predominantly had been seen as a political response to a more fundamental social discontent, Stedman Jones argues that this subjugation of the political to the material is no longer tenable:

We cannot ... decode political language to reach a primal and material expression of interest since it is the discursive structure of political language which conceives and defines interest in the first place. What we must therefore do is to study the production of interest, identification, grievance and aspiration within political languages themselves. We need to map out these successive languages of radicalism, liberalism, socialism etc. ... Only then can we begin to assess their reasons for failure at specific points in time.²⁸

This approach is based upon the premise that political consciousness is ultimately constituted in language, as opposed to the materialist explanatory framework that unites Marxist philosophy and historiography ‘vulgar’ or otherwise. Chartism’s failure could thus be attributed to its increasingly anachronistic rhetoric of parliamentary reform, which Stedman Jones traced back well into the eighteenth century. In his words, Chartism’s decline stemmed from its inability to ‘modify its position to the changed character of state activity in the 1840s’.²⁹

Stedman Jones does not deny that Chartists themselves spoke of class conflict. He does insist, however, that ‘in radical discourse the dividing line between classes was not that between employer and employed, but that between the represented and

²⁷ Stedman Jones, introduction to *Languages of class*, p. 20. For other criticisms of Thompson on this point see J.W. Scott, ‘The evidence of experience’, *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (1991), pp. 784-5.

²⁸ Stedman Jones, introduction to *Languages of class*, p. 22.

²⁹ Stedman Jones, ‘The language of Chartism’, pp. 177-8.

the unrepresented'.³⁰ These arguments have attracted some criticism, including Neville Kirk's able defence of the Thompsonian position. Kirk suggests that the link postulated by Stedman Jones between Chartism's demise and fiscal policies instituted by Peel's Tory administration is somewhat tenuous; Kirk also argues that a set of 'shared anti-capitalist and class-based ideas' can be discerned in the rhetoric of Chartist leaders at both the national and local level.³¹ In contrast to Stedman Jones, Kirk ultimately presents Chartism as an unprecedented phenomenon permeated with a working-class consciousness reflected in the emergence of a radical counter-culture.

Stedman Jones makes few references to the associational culture which characterised much Chartist endeavour in the 1840s.³² He is primarily concerned with the movement's language or rhetoric, which although effective in rousing anti-Whig sentiment in the 1830s, is said to have become a spent force by the early 1840s.³³ Whilst Stedman Jones famously espoused the application of a 'non-referential conception of language' to Chartist discourse, this precept has also attracted considerable criticism.³⁴ Joan Scott, for example, argues that

Stedman Jones uses theories of language which have a far more radical potential, in an essentially conservative manner ... [His] analysis is less informed by a notion of the 'materiality of language itself', than it is by an idea that attention to words people use (rather than how words acquire and construct meaning) provides a way of determining which reality mattered most in a particular historical context ... rather than reversing the direction of our causal thinking, he merely shifts the emphasis from the economic to the political sphere ... Stedman Jones does not

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106. On this point see also I.J. Prothero, 'William Benbow and the concept of the "General Strike"', *Past and Present*, 63 (1974), p. 144.

³¹ N. Kirk, 'In defence of class: a critique of recent revisionist writing upon the nineteenth-century English working class', *International Review of Social History*, 32 (1987), pp. 2-47.

³² Epstein, 'Some organisational and cultural aspects of the Chartist movement in Nottingham', p. 221.

³³ Stedman Jones, 'The language of Chartism', pp. 177-8.

³⁴ D. Thompson, 'The Languages of Class', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 52 (1987), pp. 54-7; J. Foster, 'The declassing of language', *New Left Review*, 150 (1985), pp. 29-46; Pickering, 'Class without words'; R. Gray, 'The deconstructing of the English working class', *Social History*, 11 (1986), pp. 363-73. For another earlier discussion of Stedman Jones' Chartist essays see G. Claeys, 'Language, class and historical consciousness in nineteenth-century Britain', *Economy and Society*, 14 (1985), pp. 239-63.

achieve the conceptual revolution he called for ... because he does not employ a method of analysis that shows how language works to construct social identity, how ideas such as class become, through language, social realities.³⁵

Stedman Jones' apparent reluctance to embrace the Althusserian approach he outlines in the introduction to *Languages of class* is one indicator of the transitional nature of his research. Yet it is also important to recognise that as early as 1981-2 Chartist historians working in the Thompsonian tradition had already begun to equate 'culture' not just with activity, but with the making of meanings.

III

The long-running debates upon Stedman Jones' work have undoubtedly overshadowed other important contributions to British labour and popular political historiography. Craig Calhoun's extended critique of Thompson's working-class consciousness thesis comes to mind, as does James Epstein's detailed re-interpretation of Feargus O'Connor's leadership of the early Chartist movement.³⁶ Whilst aspects of O'Connor's oratory will be taken up in more detail in chapter three, Epstein's roughly contemporaneous discussion of Chartist culture in the Nottingham area remains one of the most searching discussions to have appeared on this theme to date. Epstein contrasts the 'spontaneity' of early Chartist activity with that later sanctioned by the National Charter Association during the 1840s. Now working-class democrats organised:

³⁵ J.W. Scott, 'On language, gender and working class history', *International Labor and Working Class History*, 31 (1987), p. 5.

³⁶ C. Calhoun, *The question of class struggle: social foundations of popular radicalism during the industrial revolution* (Oxford, 1982); Epstein, *The lion of freedom*. For an earlier biography of O'Connor see D. Read and E. Glasgow, *Feargus O'Connor: Irishman and Chartist* (London, 1961).

they formed Chartist schools and democratic chapels, co-operative stores, burial clubs, temperance societies. A constellation of leisure activities was provided locally: regular lectures, debates, newspaper readings, soirees and tea-parties, annual dinners ... This cultural broadening, the creation of what might be called a 'movement culture' was crucial to binding Chartism together in the 1840s. It created a context ... for creating a society based upon alternative social values.³⁷

As this passage intimates, Epstein's Nottingham essay is cast in a Gramscian terminology of hegemony, counter-hegemony and resistance.³⁸ Gramsci's conception of hegemony was often depicted as a step forward from the so-called 'functionalism' of Althusser's concept of ideology, and perhaps this distinction is discernible in Stedman Jones' and Epstein's quite distinct approaches.³⁹ Whereas Stedman Jones' Chartists tend to be passive figures, the inheritors of a doomed popular radical rhetoric, Epstein's subjects are creators and innovators, the makers of a new kind of independent working-class politics.

In a prescient passage at the start of the Nottingham essay, Epstein exhorts his fellow historians to begin to examine 'the content, the meanings with which working class radicals endowed their political and cultural activity'.⁴⁰ Although the birth of the linguistic turn is commonly attributed to Stedman Jones' work on Chartism, Epstein's contemporary research also heralded a number of 'cultural' themes that were to be taken up by other historians in the 1990s. The Nottingham essay, it must be said, is firmly cast in the Thompsonian tradition – witness Epstein's introductory emphasis upon a besieged artisan culture allied to local knitting industries undergoing intense structural upheaval.⁴¹ Yet Epstein also raised some new interpretative themes,

³⁷ Epstein, 'Some organisational and cultural aspects of the Chartist movement', p. 221.

³⁸ For influential discussions of hegemony which appeared in the late 1970s see R. Williams, *Marxism and literature* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 108-14; C. Mouffe, ed., *Gramsci and Marxist theory* (London, 1979). Note also Tholfsen's earlier use of the concept in *Working class radicalism*, chs. 7-8.

³⁹ See G. Turner, *British cultural studies: an introduction* (London, 1990), pp. 31-2, 210-15.

⁴⁰ Epstein, 'Some organisational and cultural aspects of the Chartist movement', p. 222.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 223-32.

particularly his quasi-ethnographic discussion of the symbolic and spatial attributes of the extra-parliamentary 'mass platform'.

A striking instance of Chartist mass-mobilisation in Nottingham, for example, occurred when Feargus O'Connor visited the area in July 1842. Here Epstein traces the relationship between the geography of these demonstrations and the production of symbolic meanings. For instance, after O'Connor arrived at Nottingham by train, he headed a large procession from the market place north to Calverton, where a 'moral fete' was held in his honour. The following day he was met by another procession outside Mansfield, before triumphantly entering the town and speaking at the market-place, intently watched by local magistrates, shopkeepers and contingents of police. At 4 p.m. the Chartist body (estimated at 20,000) left for Sutton-in-Ashfield, where the streets had been decorated with triumphal arches, 'Chartist mottoes, *Star* portraits, flags, garlands, oak-boughs and evergreens'.⁴² According to O'Connor, the parade deliberately traversed every street of the village, whose main thoroughfare he duly re-dubbed 'Charter-street'. In Epstein's words, the 'working class had taken hold of Sutton for one day as a form of symbolic gesture, a prefigurement of Chartist victory'.⁴³

Another important sphere of symbolic contestation which Epstein discusses in some detail is religion.⁴⁴ Like the 'appeal to the ancient constitution, religion served as a powerful source of legitimation for Chartist action'.⁴⁵ 'The Bible is my Chartist manual' proclaimed the Leeds Christian Chartist T.B. Smith in 1841.⁴⁶ 'Theological enquiry is ever the accompaniment of awakened intellect, and strong political

⁴² *Northern Star*, 30 July 1842, pp. 1, 4.

⁴³ Epstein, 'Some organisational and cultural aspects of the Chartist movement', p. 249.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 249-55.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

⁴⁶ *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2), p. 117.

excitement', wrote another.⁴⁷ Whilst an account of the diverse forms of formal religious activities undertaken by Chartists, and the relationship between Chartism, state religion and other denominations had been published as early as 1916, the subject has not been dealt with in much detail by modern scholars.⁴⁸ That said, historians have noted the 'readiness of working men to borrow organisational forms and rituals from Methodism in particular', as Trygve Tholfsen remarked in 1976.⁴⁹ But as Eileen Yeo pointed out in 1981, Chartist historians had 'taken too little account of Christianity, not as the possession of any one group, but as contested territory'.⁵⁰

This claim had many practical manifestations, including the collective excursions made to many English churches following the rejection of the first national petition in the summer of 1839.⁵¹ According to the female democrats of Bristol, Britain was then 'on the verge of the mightiest revolution that ever occurred in the annals of history'.⁵² Whilst other millenarian 'ulterior measures' such as the 'sacred month' (or general strike) were drastically circumscribed, church occupations can be identified in over 30 locations during August and September. Yeo sums up the general features of what might be called 'moral force' intimidation:

The demonstration was agreed beforehand, usually at a public meeting, and announced by placard and press advertisement. The Chartists often submitted biblical texts in advance ... On the appointed day the Chartists usually marched in a body, sometimes numbering thousands, some of the group wearing their work

⁴⁷ *Cooper's Journal*, 16 January 1850, p. 36.

⁴⁸ H.U. Faulkner, *Chartism and the churches* (London, 1970).

⁴⁹ Tholfsen, *Working class radicalism*, p. 66.

⁵⁰ Yeo, 'Christianity in Chartist struggle', p. 124. For another example of Yeo's treatment of Chartist and working-class culture see E. Yeo, 'Culture and constraint in working-class movements, 1830-1855' in E. Yeo and S. Yeo, *Popular culture and class conflict, 1590-1914* (Brighton, 1981), pp. 155-86. For radicalism and religion in the pre-Chartist period see M. Clement, 'True religion: Christianity and the rhetoric of early nineteenth-century English popular radicalism', *The Journal of Religious History*, 20 (1996), pp. 1-19. For infidel culture in the metropolis see also I. McCalman, *Radical underworld: prophets, revolutionaries and pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge, 1988).

⁵¹ Illustration 7 is taken from S. Roberts and D. Thompson, *Images of Chartism* (Rendlesham, 1998), p. 36.

⁵² Yeo, 'Christianity in Chartist struggle', p. 120.

clothes, sometimes singing hymns on the way. They reached the church early and proceeded to fill the pews and seats, which were rented or owned ... To the extent that there was any commotion, it developed before the service, when pew-owners tried to eject Chartists.⁵³

These demonstrations were at once religious contests over the nature of 'true Christianity' and political protests over the place of the established church amongst the tentacles of 'old corruption'. Some visits, like that to hear Parson Bull preach at St James', Bradford, were actually encouraged by sympathetic priests.⁵⁴ Others, like the visits to the prominent evangelical Francis Close's parish church at Cheltenham (which will be taken up in more detail in chapter four) were tension-laden instances of symbolic protest.⁵⁵

The church occupations were also a manifestation of a striking characteristic of Chartist political culture – the tendency to use collective forms of action in invasive, contestatory and intimidatory ways. This feature has been raised in the introduction, and will be taken up a number of times in the chapters that follow. But the subject of Chartist religious practice also points to the impossibility of maintaining a strict dichotomy between contestatory and counter-cultural praxis. As Yeo rightly suggests, religion was a sphere of intense debate and conflict at many levels, whether organisational, theological or symbolic. Yet religion also inspired much 'pre-figural' activity where the primary objectives were Chartist autonomy and control. The *ad hoc* indoor (and family-oriented) network of democratic churches, chapels and temperance organisations which sprang up from the late 1830s were certainly bastions of counter-cultural activity. The Chartist press also had obvious counter-cultural and contestatory

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁵⁵ See O. Ashton, 'Clerical control and radical responses in Cheltenham Spa, 1838-1848', *Midland History*, 8 (1983), pp. 121-47.

functions. The *Northern Star*, for example, was effectively a movement culture communications centre. On the other hand, the paper also voiced Chartist arguments within a wider public sphere of political contention. Despite these caveats, the complexities at the heart of Chartist political culture are worth pursuing because they help us understand the fate of a radical-democratic political inheritance in various (and quite different) colonial contexts. The rationale behind this argument is not merely to identify the existence of Chartist culture at the antipodes. Rather, we need to go a step further and attempt to determine what elements of the political inheritance flourished, which elements fell away, and which were transformed in a new environment.

One way of pursuing these questions is to adopt a cultural approach that owes much to the exploration of political meanings first undertaken by James Epstein and Eileen Yeo in the early 1980s. Despite being overshadowed by the reception of Stedman Jones' Chartist essays, their work should also be considered as a significant contribution to the linguistic turn. Yet if Stedman Jones' exploration of political discourse was not as innovative as some of his critics have argued, then it must be said that earlier Thompsonian research upon the movement culture also at times seems caught between positivist and anti-positivist traditions. For instance, Epstein remarks that the Nottingham movement culture was a 'complementary sphere' that might potentially 'divert radicals away from the central thrust of Chartism'.⁵⁶ This apparent delineation between political and cultural activity, however, stands a little at odds with Epstein's innovative discussion of the symbolic dimensions of the mass-platform. Tellingly, Epstein seems to have discarded the distinction between primary and

⁵⁶ Epstein, 'Some organisational and cultural aspects of the Chartist movement', p. 222.

secondary spheres of political endeavour in his later work.⁵⁷ The move to a much wider definition of ‘culture’, in fact, reflects a disciplinary shift in which ‘social’ history is rapidly being displaced by a ‘cultural’ alternative.

IV

When considering the ‘linguistic turn’ of the 1980s and 1990s, a number of themes immediately become apparent: there has been a continued assault upon the validity of class; ‘language’ and ‘culture’ have almost become synonymous; and lastly, a concern with various forms of cultural continuity is also evident. Whilst much has been written on the first two issues, the third is particularly important to the overall thrust of my argument. Not only does the issue of continuity beg questions of the Thompsonian emphasis upon organisational innovation and the emergence of a working-class identity in England – it would also seem to bear directly upon the very notion of Chartist diaspora. The rest of this chapter, therefore, looks at the ways in which notions of cultural continuity and transformation have shaped relevant forms of interpretation.

Two basic theoretical alternatives can be discerned in the enormous literature that now exists upon Victorian labour history and politics, namely class and populism.⁵⁸ The latter term was initially utilised by Craig Calhoun just as Stedman Jones’ Chartist essay first appeared.⁵⁹ Calhoun’s critique of Thompson placed a good

⁵⁷ For Epstein’s subsequent work on radical political culture see the essays collected in *Radical expression: political language, ritual, and symbol in England, 1790-1850* (New York, 1994).

⁵⁸ Host, *Victorian labour history*, p. 34.

⁵⁹ Calhoun, *The question of class struggle*. For another use of the concept of populism see T.W. Laqueur, ‘The Queen Caroline affair: politics as art in the reign of George IV’, *Journal of Modern History*, 54 (1982), pp. 417-66. See also W.D. Rubinstein’s comparative study of

deal of emphasis upon the traditional or ‘reactionary’ elements of popular radical leadership evident from the 1790s to the Chartist period. Patrick Joyce also emphasised paternalist elements of popular radicalism in *Work, society and politics*, a book which also challenged a number of themes associated with the ‘aristocracy of labour’ explanation of the ‘mid-Victorian consensus’.⁶⁰ In his more recent books Joyce has established himself as the leading proponent of a postmodern critique of class.

Stedman Jones set out to show the ‘interpretative costs’ of the orthodox ‘social’ interpretation of Chartism. He stressed that the movement’s language revolved around exclusion from the political system rather than nascent class conflict. Similarly, Joyce argues that a conflictual economic model does little justice to the ‘extra-economic’ identities which united (and differentiated) working people in nineteenth-century Lancashire.⁶¹ In *Visions of the people* Joyce attempted to reformulate a concept of ‘populism’, which he envisaged as being constituted in a multitude of non-economic and often symbolic cultural identities.⁶² Although *Visions of the people* did not provoke the kind of prolonged debate spurred by Stedman Jones’ Chartist essays, Joyce’s apparent substitution of populism for class has been criticised

British, American, and Australian forms of populism in *Elites and the wealthy in modern British history* (Brighton, 1987), ch. 11.

⁶⁰ P. Joyce, *Work, society, and politics: the culture of the factory in later Victorian England* (Brighton, 1980). Important contributions to the labour aristocracy debates include E. Hobsbawm, *Labouring men: studies in the history of labour* (London, 1965), ch. 15; R. Harrison, *Before the socialists: studies in labour and politics, 1861-1881* (London, 1965); J. Foster, *Class struggle and the industrial revolution: early industrial capitalism in three English towns* (London, 1974), especially ch. 7; A.E. Musson, ‘Class struggle and the labour aristocracy’, *Social History*, 1 (1976), pp. 61-82; R.Q. Gray, *The labour aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford, 1976); H.F. Moorhouse, ‘The Marxist theory of the labour aristocracy’, *Social History*, 3 (1978), pp. 335-56; G. Crossick, *An artisan elite in Victorian society: Kentish London, 1840-1880* (London, 1978); T. Lummis, *The labour aristocracy, 1851-1914* (Aldershot, 1994). See also G. McLennan, *Marxism and the methodology of history* (London, 1981), pp. 206-66.

⁶¹ Joyce, *Visions of the people*, p. 11.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6 and *passim*.

by a number of reviewers.⁶³ And whilst his emphasis upon heterogeneity is no doubt timely, Joyce has since wondered at the utility of pursuing collective subjects at all. He remarks in his more recent *Democratic subjects*, for example, that *Visions of the people* was built upon an illusory ‘nostalgia for collective social subjects and bedrock “experiences”, upon which values and culture could be based’.⁶⁴ This self-criticism appears to have resulted from a continuing engagement with anti-humanist (particularly Foucauldian) critical theory.⁶⁵

Another overtly postmodern contribution to the linguistic turn that has attracted considerable attention since publication is James Vernon’s *Politics and the people*.⁶⁶ A former student and now a colleague of Joyce’s at the University of Manchester, Vernon’s poststructural history of popular politics is also heavily indebted to Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and feminist theorists. Foucault’s influence is particularly evident in Vernon’s argument that the rise of printed forms of communicative technologies, and the implementation of various forms of ‘anti-corruption’ legislation in the nineteenth century, gradually corroded the constitution’s ‘libertarian’ potential. These reforms, which culminated in the introduction of the ballot in England in 1872, ‘privileged the male individual’s private and ironic uses of print, rather than the generally public, collective, and melodramatic uses of customary forms of oral and visual political communication’.⁶⁷ Yet despite emphasising the ‘symbiotic’ nature of political communication, and despite constantly reminding the

⁶³ See the short reviews by H. Kaye, *American Journal of Sociology*, 92 (1992), pp. 221-3; R. Price, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 23 (1992), pp. 338-40 and T. Koditschek, *American Historical Review*, 97 (1992), pp. 1217-18.

⁶⁴ P. Joyce, *Democratic subjects: the self and the social in nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 10-11.

⁶⁵ See Joyce’s comments on Foucault in ‘The end of social history?’, p. 77.

⁶⁶ Vernon, *Politics and the people*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-60 and *passim*.

reader of the ‘play’ of language, Vernon’s argument seems predicated on a strong form of technological determinism. Throughout *Politics and the people* a set of polarities emerge wherein visual, aural and oral political media are repeatedly construed as having a liberating, communal and flexible essence, whilst their printed counterparts tend to be interpreted as rationalist and masculinist forms of cultural domination.⁶⁸ I will argue in chapter three, however, that the liberating functions of print need to be recognised – not least within the confines of a proletarian political culture such as Chartism.

It is perhaps no surprise that Vernon’s engagement with the themes of power, agency and popular political participation appeared in the wake of a number of studies of Chartism and gender.⁶⁹ As noted above, Dorothy Thompson and David Jones pioneered the study of female participation in nineteenth-century radicalism, a theme also touched upon in Barbara Hall’s rediscovery of neo-Owenite feminism.⁷⁰ Women were particularly conspicuous during the first phase of Chartist activity, when a millenarian political atmosphere prevailed and Chartist mass-meetings numbering hundreds of thousands engulfed entire communities in Lancashire and Yorkshire.⁷¹ Earlier attempts at restoring women to the historical record, moreover, have now been

⁶⁸ For a somewhat polemical critique of Vernon’s style and arguments see M. Bentley, ‘Victorian politics and the linguistic turn’, *The Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), especially pp. 894-7.

⁶⁹ S. Alexander, ‘Women, class and sexual difference in the 1830s and 1840s: some reflections on the writing of a feminist history’, *History Workshop Journal*, 17 (1984), pp. 125-49; R. Gagnier, ‘Social atoms: working-class autobiography, subjectivity and gender’, *Victorian Studies*, 30 (1987), pp. 335-63; J. Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist movement* (Basingstoke, 1991); A. Clark, ‘The rhetoric of Chartist domesticity: gender, language and class in the 1830s and 1840s’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 62-88; A. Clark, *The struggle for breeches: gender and the making of the English working class* (Berkeley, 1995); E. Yeo, ‘Will the real Mary Lovett please stand up? Chartism, gender and autobiography’ in M. Chase and I Dyck, eds., *Living and Learning: essays in honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 163-81.

⁷⁰ Thompson, ‘Women and nineteenth-century politics’; Jones, ‘Women and Chartism’; B. Taylor, *Eve and the new Jerusalem: socialism and feminism in the nineteenth century* (London, 1983).

⁷¹ For 1838-9 see Epstein, *The lion of freedom*, chs. 3-4.

complemented by a cultural history of gender and radical politics. Anna Clark, for example, has argued that female Chartists forged a ‘militant domesticity’ in the late 1830s, when bourgeois notions of ‘separate spheres’ were relatively foreign to working people.⁷² During the following decade, however, ‘the public sphere was redefined as the domain of working men’ – a theme echoed by Vernon, albeit from a much broader chronological perspective.⁷³ This process of the marginalisation of women, it must be added, also seems evident in the various Australian contexts considered in section two.

Recent cultural studies of Chartism and gender and Vernon’s account of popular political contention also rely quite heavily on elements of Jurgen Habermas’ account of the formation of a bourgeois public sphere.⁷⁴ In yet another critique of Edward Thompson’s working-class formation thesis, Geoff Eley suggests that Habermas’ historical model has a particular relevance to Chartist culture.⁷⁵ Yet Habermas himself has explicitly admitted neglecting ‘plebeian’ cultures such as Chartism in his increasingly influential study.⁷⁶ And whilst the public sphere is undoubtedly a useful interpretative tool, there has been a tendency to apply it in a rather *ad hoc* fashion. It is not immediately obvious, for example, how Chartism’s rich symbolic repertoire might sit within a theory historically grounded in the rise of printed forms of public opinion. And how does the public sphere illuminate the

⁷² Clark, ‘The rhetoric of Chartist domesticity’, pp. 75-8.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 87; Clark, *The struggle for breeches*, pp. 243-7.

⁷⁴ J. Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (Cambridge MA, 1989). For a recent appropriation of Habermas see J. Plotz, ‘Crowd power: Chartism, Carlyle, and the Victorian public sphere’, *Representations*, 70 (2000), pp. 87-114.

⁷⁵ G. Eley, ‘Edward Thompson, social history and political culture: the making of a working-class public, 1780-1850’ in Kaye and McClelland, eds., *E.P. Thompson: critical perspectives* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 12-49.

⁷⁶ J. Habermas, ‘Further reflections on the public sphere’ in C. Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the public sphere* (Cambridge MA, 1992), pp. 425-6.

counter-cultural functions of the Chartist press? Was not this feature a negation of the very kind of contention Habermas set out to trace? Finally, Habermas' historical model does not give much consideration to the inter-relationship between the oral and printed technologies of communication which so characterised Chartist political culture.

Despite these misgivings, the linguistic turn and conceptual innovations such as the public sphere simply cannot be dismissed, as Miles Taylor has argued.⁷⁷ One particularly misleading perception about postmodern scholarship is that anti-humanist historians fail to deal with questions of agency. Whilst it is true that Patrick Joyce and James Vernon do not conceive of agency in traditional humanist terms, questions of language and power, and thus agency, are central to their work. Vernon even contends that politics ultimately amounts to a discursive struggle 'to create or prevent a sense of agency'.⁷⁸ Accordingly, he stresses the sense of power marginalised and un-enfranchised men and women derived from participating in political parades and open-air meetings.⁷⁹ But despite paying considerable attention to the crowd, the postmodern study of nineteenth-century politics seems fundamentally interested in the cultural mechanics of leadership.

This subject again illustrates the differences between the Thompsonian stress on transformation and the revisionist emphasis on the cultural continuities of popular politics. As we saw in the introduction, Paul Pickering argues that Feargus O'Connor's appearance in a fustian suit at York in 1841 represented a significant symbolic break with the past.⁸⁰ Similarly, Eileen Yeo argued in 1981 that the church

⁷⁷ Taylor, 'Rethinking the chartists'.

⁷⁸ Vernon, *Politics and the people*, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, ch. 3 and *passim*.

⁸⁰ Pickering, 'Class without words'. See also P. Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford* (Basingstoke, 1995), ch. 9.

visits and pew occupations by unshaven, uncombed and unwashed Chartists wearing clogs and aprons amounted to a 'militant badge of class' that 'asserted the value of their labour in the sight of God'.⁸¹ Like Pickering, Yeo identified a symbolic manifestation of the Thompsonian working-class consciousness thesis in Chartist collective action. However, unlike the weight placed upon organisational, cultural and symbolic innovation which unites the work of Dorothy Thompson, James Epstein, Eileen Yeo, Neville Kirk, Paul Pickering and many other Chartist historians, the unifying feature of much revisionist historiography has been a search for older modes of political allegiance, a theme particularly evident in the re-examination of populist leadership.⁸²

It should be noted that forms of cultural persistence have been recognised by historians working from within the Thompsonian tradition. For example, James Epstein's and John Belchem's biographies of O'Connor and Hunt showed how both these leaders drew upon a well-established model of popular political authority not unlike that deployed earlier by John Wilkes or Francis Burdett.⁸³ Revisionist historians working from various (and not necessarily postmodern) interpretative perspectives, however, have since extended this insight well beyond the radical-Chartist period.⁸⁴ Now Chartist leaders such as O'Connor and Ernest Jones have

⁸¹ Yeo, 'Christianity in Chartist struggle', p. 132.

⁸² R. Price, 'Languages of revisionism: historians and popular politics in nineteenth-century Britain', *Journal of Social History*, 30 (1996), especially pp. 234-7; Host, *Victorian labour history*, p. 34.

⁸³ Epstein, *The lion of freedom*; Belchem, '1848'; J. Belchem, '*Orator Hunt*': *Henry Hunt and English working-class radicalism* (Oxford, 1985). For Wilkes see J. Brewer, *Party ideology and popular politics at the accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976). For Burdett see P. Spence, *The birth of romantic radicalism: war, popular politics, and English radical reformism, 1800-1815* (Aldershot, 1995).

⁸⁴ E.F. Biagini, *Liberty, retrenchment and reform: popular liberalism in the age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 7; Joyce, *Visions of the people*, pp. 39-47; Joyce, *Democratic subjects*; Vernon, *Politics and the people*, chs. 7-8; P. Joyce, 'The constitution and the narrative structure of Victorian politics' in J. Vernon, ed., *Re-reading the constitution: new narratives in the political history of England's long nineteenth century* (Cambridge,

become bridging figures, and broadly likened to popular liberal icons such as John Fielden, John Bright and William Gladstone. This emphasis, of course, goes against the traditional delineation between post-war radicalism and post-Chartist popular liberalism. Class-transcendent heroes all, these charismatic politicians emplotted themselves as saviour-like figures in the great constitutional saga of male enfranchisement. As Joyce and Vernon have stressed, narrative forms (particularly, but not solely, romance) endowed the popular political imagination with a sense of movement, purpose and hope.⁸⁵ According to Vernon (here following Fredric Jameson, Hayden White and others), narrative should be considered as a

socially symbolic act designed to realize the human desire for a sense of agency. Pursuing this line it is the way in which social discourse is constructed as a story in which events (both real and imaginary) are endowed with a significance and coherence they would otherwise lack, that enables subjects to make moral sense of the world, and imagine themselves as agents in it.⁸⁶

Despite the considerable value of these insights, the revisionists' stress upon continuity can be rather misleading. Belchem and Epstein have cogently argued that there were a number of significant differences between the intimidatory menace of the radical-Chartist platform and its more tightly policed liberal counterpart in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸⁷ The aura of benevolence, piety and respectability which surrounded leaders such as John Bright or William Gladstone was also quite

1996), pp. 179-203. For a local perspective upon various aspects of cultural continuity see M. Winstanley, 'Oldham radicalism and the origins of popular liberalism, 1830-52', *The Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 619-43.

⁸⁵ Vernon, *Politics and the people*, chs. 7-8; Joyce, *Democratic subjects*, part 3.

⁸⁶ Vernon, 'Who's afraid of the "linguistic turn?"', p. 91; F. Jameson, *The political unconscious: narrative as a socially symbolic act* (London, 1981); H. White, *The content of the form: narrative discourse and historical representation* (Baltimore, 1987).

⁸⁷ J. Belchem and J. Epstein, 'The nineteenth-century gentleman leader revisited', *Social History*, 22 (1997), pp. 174-93. For another critical discussion of the continuity thesis see R.G. Hall, 'Chartism remembered: William Aitken, Liberalism, and the politics of memory', *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (1999), pp. 445-70. For a re-appraisal of Oldham see D. Gadian, 'Radicalism and liberalism in Oldham: a study of conflict, continuity and change in popular politics, 1830-52', *Social History*, 21 (1996), pp. 265-80.

foreign to libertine-like demagogues such as Hunt or O'Connor. This distinction will also become apparent in chapter five, for the O'Connorite romance of the 'Whig Dungeon' was a neo-Gothic and overtly mendacious story which had little in common with liberal narratives of political redemption.

Distinctions in the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of popular radicalism, Chartism and popular liberalism may seem a long way from Stedman Jones' understanding of 'language' as discourse or rhetoric. His chronology of the rise and fall of radicalism has also been revised by historians who have gone well beyond equating 'culture' with activity or rhetoric. The 'long eighteenth-century', it seems, is an ever-expanding entity. Although this thesis has little in common with postmodern revisionism, it also attempts to go beyond Britain, and beyond the traditional watershed of 1848 – that robust fulcrum of the 'age of equipoise'.⁸⁸ 1848, of course, has long signified the death-knell of revolutionary aspirations in Europe, and the birth of a 'mid-Victorian consensus' in Britain. On the colonial frontier, however, such stability is difficult to discern. A neo-Chartist radicalism flourished during the first Australian goldrushes, and during the subsequent political crises Victoria experienced in the mid-to-late 1850s. One of the ways we might move on from the 'impasse' Miles Taylor argues has beset contemporary Chartist historiography, moreover, is to follow some of the more significant elements of Chartist diaspora.⁸⁹ This interpretative journey now commences by establishing some of the key elements of radical-democratic arguments about the constitutional heritage and the land, before exploring some of the ways in which Chartist rhetoric and identity changed in the later 1840s.

⁸⁸ W.L. Burn, *The age of equipoise: a study of the mid-Victorian generation* (London, 1964).

⁸⁹ Taylor, 'Rethinking the chartists', p. 494.

Chapter Two

The Rhetorical Inheritance

With a degree of hindsight, it would appear that perhaps the most enduring feature of Stedman Jones' re-interpretation of Chartism lies not so much in the theoretical issues which have inspired so much debate, but rather in his emphasis upon the continuities between Chartism and the popular radical tradition. Iorwerth Prothero made a similar point in 1969, and Stedman Jones' stress upon rhetorical persistence would not have raised many eyebrows in the 1840s: 'Chartism of 1840 is no more than the radicalism of 1780', asserted one edition of the *People's Charter* published in Glasgow, and similar remarks could be cited from other contemporary sources.¹ The rhetorical presentation of the *People's Charter* within a reformist lineage stretching back to Charles James Fox and the Duke of Richmond was only to be expected, for it gave Chartist demands an historical legitimacy.² The contestation of a much older constitutional heritage is even more explicit in documents such as the thirty-nine point Declaration of Rights 'ACCORDING TO THE ANCIENT LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF THE REALM OF ENGLAND' compiled by the first Chartist Convention in September 1839, replete with copious references to constitutional authorities such as Locke and Blackstone on the right to political representation.³ But although the so-called 'six points' of Parliamentary reform (and the tactic of petitioning) are usually seen as the fundamental tenets of Chartist constitutionalism, a number of other

¹ I.J. Prothero, 'Chartism in London', *Past and Present*, 44 (1969), pp. 85-6; Anon., *The People's Charter* (Glasgow, n.d), p. 1; *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2), p. 189; *English Chartist Circular*, 2 (1842-3), p. 319.

² M. Taylor, 'The six points: Chartism and the reform of Parliament' in O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts, eds., *The Chartist legacy* (Rendlesham, 1999), p. 3. See also Hall, 'Creating a people's history'.

³ See *Northern Star*, 14 September 1839, p. 7; *Chartist Circular*, 28 September 1839, pp. 3-4; *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2), pp. 69-70.

rhetorical themes also demand recognition, particularly when taking into consideration colonial contexts such as New South Wales and Victoria.

At the outset, it is important to recognise that Chartist constitutionalism was always a highly malleable and sometimes ambiguous idiom. As Iorwerth Prothero, John Belchem and James Epstein have pointed out in various essays, constitutionalist and anti-constitutionalist (primarily Paineite) rhetoric often found common expression, or what Epstein calls ‘structured interdependence between these modes of reasoning’.⁴ Feargus O’Connor, Epstein notes, ‘moved with no sense of contradiction from asserting the working man’s natural right to be represented in Parliament to claims that universal (male) suffrage and annual parliaments ... “were formerly a portion of the boasted constitution of this country”’.⁵ Similarly, ‘Revolutionist’ argued in the *Charter* in 1839 that all rational Englishmen untainted by crime had an ‘inherent’ or ‘natural’ right to the elective franchise, before launching into a detailed exposition showing ‘that the constitution of this country, before its overthrow by the aristocracy ... was truly and efficiently a constitution of universal natural right, and UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE’.⁶ Didactic Chartist journals such as the ha’penny *Chartist Circular* argued that universal suffrage was founded not only upon a Lockean theory of political consent, but also the ‘laws of nature’, the ‘revealed Word of God’ and ‘the ancient customs and manners of our forefathers’.⁷ Although Chartists appealed to

⁴ Prothero, ‘William Benbow and the concept of the “General Strike”’, pp. 141-3; J. Belchem, ‘Republicanism, popular constitutionalism and the radical platform in early nineteenth-century England’, *Social History*, 6 (1981), pp. 1-32; J. Epstein, ‘The constitutional idiom: radical reasoning, rhetoric and action in early nineteenth-century England’, *Journal of Social History*, 23 (1989), p. 564; J. Epstein, ‘Understanding the cap of liberty: symbolic practice and social conflict in early nineteenth-century England’, *Past and Present*, 122 (1989), pp. 75-118.

⁵ Epstein, ‘The constitutional idiom’, p. 556. For a typical Chartist justification of annual Parliaments by appeal to historical precedent see *Northern Star*, 1 October 1842, p. 4.

⁶ For ‘Revolutionist’s’ historical arguments see *Charter*, 3 March 1839, p. 85; 10 March 1839, p. 101; 17 March 1839, p. 123; 31 March 1839, p. 149; 7 April 1839, p. 173; 14 April 1839, p. 180; 21 April 1839, p. 196; 28 April 1839, p. 213.

⁷ *Chartist Circular*, 12 October 1839, p. 9.

many forms of political warrant, arguments based upon constitutional precedents carried great weight – particularly the mythology of lost rights associated with the ‘mild and just laws’ of ‘old Saxon government’.

Fredric Jameson has remarked that one of the benefits of culture is the ability to escape one’s ‘biological’ or natural history; culture, in fact raises the possibility of creating a comforting, politically useful past from a multitude of sources, whether factual or fictional.⁸ A good example of this kind of historical appropriation lies in the durability of the ‘Norman Yoke’. Some time ago Christopher Hill traced the survival of this notion well beyond the Chartist period, and it would be fair to say that it was simply part of radical commonsense.⁹ This is a stronger statement than can be found in Hill’s work: he actually sees the Chartist period as a point when emerging forms of socialist rationalism supposedly began to ‘subsume’ romantic concepts of a golden Saxon age.¹⁰ Whilst it may be true that a few Chartists criticised the factual veracity of the myth (or, like Ernest Jones, at least qualified the story), the ‘Norman Yoke’ was an important element of radical agrarian rhetoric.¹¹ On a missionary tour in Devon in late 1845, for example, Land Plan lecturer Thomas Clark ‘traced the origin of landlordism to the Norman Conquest, when the royal bastard plundered the people of England and parcelled out the land’.¹² With typical gusto, Feargus O’Connor declaimed:

THE LAND IS THE PEOPLE’S INHERITANCE ... KINGS, PRINCES, PEERS, NOBLES, PRIESTS AND COMMONERS, WHO HAVE STOLEN IT FROM THEM, HOLD IT UPON THE TITLE OF POPULAR IGNORANCE, RATHER THAN OF ANY RIGHT, HUMAN OR DIVINE. *The Natural right is yours. The human usurpation is theirs.*¹³

⁸ See Jameson, *The political unconscious*, pp. 84-9.

⁹ C. Hill, *Puritanism and revolution: studies in the interpretation of the English revolution of the seventeenth century* (London, 1958), pp. 50-122.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-18.

¹¹ For Jones see *Notes to the People*, 1 (1851-2), pp. 103-14, especially p. 104; Hill, *Puritanism and revolution*, pp. 116-19.

¹² *Northern Star*, 8 November 1845, p. 7.

¹³ *Northern Star*, 17 May 1845, p. 1. Emphases in original.

‘Only let them get possession of the land they had been robbed of’, cried a voluntary lecturer to an expatriate audience in Rouen, ‘and they would soon find that England would be in reality what she now is in name – “Great, Glorious, and Free”’.¹⁴ And as John Saville emphasised in 1968, even Chartist advocates of land nationalisation such as R.G. Gammage reiterated a version of the Norman Yoke in political lectures given during the early 1850s.¹⁵

As mentioned in the previous chapter, James Vernon depicts the eventual introduction of the ballot in 1872 as the culmination of a process of rationalisation of popular politics during the nineteenth century. Although Vernon’s argument often seems to ignore contrary elements of Chartist political culture, a tension between what might be termed romantic and rationalist emphases is discernible between the ballot and the other points of Parliamentary reform. As Miles Taylor has recently pointed out, the commonplace description of the Charter as the ‘six points’ (and the terminology dates from as early as 1839-40) is rather misleading: major Chartist programmes authored between 1838 and 1842 actually contained between five and nine headings; only the national petition of 1848 actually espoused ‘six points’.¹⁶ The secret ballot also stood somewhat apart from other projected reforms. Chartists advocated the ballot strictly in conjunction with the complete reform programme – by itself, of course, the ballot would limit the political power of the un-enfranchised even

¹⁴ *Northern Star*, 26 July 1845, p. 1.

¹⁵ Saville, introduction to Gammage, *History*, p. 20.

¹⁶ Taylor, ‘The six points’, p. 1; Anon., *The People’s Charter*. For the text of the 1839 petition see R.W. Postgate, ed., *Revolution from 1789 to 1906* (London, 1920), pp. 127-9. For the 1842 petition see *Northern Star*, 16 October 1841, p. 4; *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2), pp. 157-8. Abridged versions of the 1839 and 1842 texts can be found in M. Morris, ed., *From Cobbett to the Chartists* (London, 1951), pp. 142-3, 171-3. For the 1848 national petition see *Times*, 6 April 1848, p. 5.

further.¹⁷ A degree of ambiguity over the utility of this particular anti-corruption measure, however, occasionally can also be discerned. Whilst calls for the implementation of the ballot long pre-dated the extended liberal debates on the subject during the 1830s, it also epitomised a rationalist element of Chartist political culture that stood somewhat at odds with the idealised constitutional heritage of the ‘freeborn Englishman’.¹⁸ ‘In discussing the question of the Charter’, wrote Feargus O’Connor in 1846, ‘I have invariably shown that five of our points were based on the old constitution of England, and that the ballot was an offshoot of mere Whig creation’.¹⁹

As is well known, the *People’s Charter* first published in May 1838 was authored primarily by the Owenite Chartist and London Working Man’s Association Secretary, William Lovett.²⁰ In an intriguing article, David Stack has recently shown how Lovett’s scientific and political ideas were closely intertwined.²¹ Some versions of the *People’s Charter* also included diagrams of the electoral machinery envisaged to counter corruption.²² Unlike the potentially riotous environment of the outdoor election hustings, the indoor ballot-place was to be strictly supervised by (regularly elected) returning officers, clerks and constables. A prototype mechanized ballot box (designed by one Benjamin Jolly of Bath) also ensured that only one certified elector

¹⁷ See, for example, *Northern Star*, 15 June 1839, p. 4; *Charter*, 23 June 1839, p. 344. See also B.L. Kinzer, *The ballot question in nineteenth-century politics* (London, 1982), pp. 47-8.

¹⁸ In particular, the ballot was sometimes regarded as ‘un-English’. See, for example, the arguments voiced in an anonymous didactic pamphlet (written by R.G. Gammage) entitled *The Charter: what it is, and why we want it. A dialogue between John Trueman, a working man, and Samuel Timorous, a shopkeeper* (Stoke upon Trent, n.d.), pp. 5-6. Compare the later criticisms made in Charles Kingsley’s *Politics For The People*, 17 June 1848, pp. 142-3. The classic discussion of the ‘Freeborn Englishman’ is Thompson, *The making of the English working class*, ch. 4.

¹⁹ *Northern Star*, 14 March 1846, p. 1.

²⁰ See generally W. Lovett, *Life and struggles of William Lovett in his pursuit of bread, knowledge and freedom* (2 vols., London, 1920 rep.); J. Wiener, *William Lovett* (Manchester, 1989).

²¹ D. Stack, ‘William Lovett and the National Association for the political and social improvement of the people’, *The Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), pp. 1027-50.

²² See, for example, *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2), p. 100.

at a time could cast their vote in privacy. The technologies of writing and print, in fact, were effectively bypassed under this proposal. Instead of recording a vote on a ballot paper, a voter placed a brass ball into the counting machine. As such, the elector's choice could not be retrospectively identified by corrupt or careless agents or officials, a charge made against the use of the ballot in the United States, and an issue which also later arose in demands for the 'perfection' of the ballot in Victoria.²³

Perhaps the most important constitutionalist theme which has been neglected by Chartist historians revolved around the issue of taxation and political representation. As has been already intimated in the previous chapter, and as will be argued in more detail in chapter eight, the recognition of arguments about unjust taxation and political representation is essential to understanding the persistence of Chartist demands on the goldfields. One of the many strengths of Miles Taylor's 1996 historiographical overview is his insight that a concern with inequitable taxation stood 'at the centre of the language of Chartism'.²⁴ Taylor points out that the phases of Chartist mass-mobilisation (1838-9, 1841-2, 1847-8) coincided with 'significant changes in government fiscal policy – rising government expenditure after 1835 ... the reintroduction of income tax in March 1842 [and] a dramatic rise in the rate of income tax together with a slowing-down in the rate of remission of indirect tax in February 1848'.²⁵ 'The increase of taxation', argued Julian Harney in early 1850 in a piece entitled 'TAXATION AND TERRORISM, 'has given birth to a corresponding

²³ For a discussion of the ballot in the USA see *Chartist Circular*, 26 October 1839, p. 21. For Victoria see Quaipe, 'The victory of the ballot in 1856', p. 156; Neale, 'H.S. Chapman and the "Victorian" ballot'. This essay was revised somewhat in R.S. Neale, 'H.S. Chapman, class consciousness and the "Victorian" ballot', *Class and ideology in the nineteenth century* (London, 1972), pp. 75-96.

²⁴ Taylor, 'Rethinking the Chartists', p. 488.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

increase of “popular discontent”.²⁶ One simple pointer to the centrality of arguments about unjust taxation levied upon the unrepresented producers of wealth can be gauged by persistence of this complaint within the prayers to the national petitions of 1839 and 1842.

The constant Chartist use of the constitutional form of petitioning Parliament for redress has been well documented, and was one of the most obvious elements of popular political contestation transplanted to the Australian colonies. Too often, however, the Chartist petitions are treated as inter-changeable, even identical documents. As Miles Taylor argues, it is quite misleading to assume Chartist demands for Parliamentary reform were identical to Hanoverian precedents: earlier reform was primarily concerned with the influence of the *Crown*, whereas Chartism was primarily concerned with the reform of *Parliament*.²⁷ Even the national petitions of 1839 and 1842 reflected discrete and quite different historical contexts. The first was the product of a fragile alliance between philosophic, bourgeois and working-class radicals, and consequently tends to present the interests of capital and labour as one.²⁸ A rhetoric of common interest, however, finds no expression in the introduction to the 1842 preamble, which reflected a very different Chartist movement, and a very different social context.

²⁶ *Democratic Review*, 1 (1849-50), pp. 326-9. See also Harney’s criticisms of indirect taxes entitled ‘LEGAL PLUNDER’ at pp. 367-71.

²⁷ Taylor, ‘The six points’, pp. 3-13. My emphasis.

²⁸ For the Convention and the submission of the first petition generally see Gammage, *History*, ch. 6; Hovell, *The Chartist movement*, chs. 7-10; T. Parssinen, ‘Association, convention and anti-Parliament in British radical politics, 1771-1848’, *English Historical Review*, 88 (1973), especially pp. 521-530; T.M. Kemnitz, ‘The Chartist Convention of 1839’, *Albion*, 10 (1978), pp. 152-70; Epstein, *The lion of freedom*, ch. 4; Thompson, *The Chartists*, ch. 3.

Rejected by Parliament just before the widespread industrial violence of the summer, the 1842 preamble was a plain statement of class-conflict.²⁹ It argued that ‘thousands of people are dying from actual want’, and denounced the ‘unchristian’ and ‘unconstitutional’ poor law. Working conditions and wages were also explicitly condemned:

Your petitioners claim that the hours of labour, particularly of the factory workers, are protracted beyond the limits of human endurance, and that the wages earned, after unnatural application to toil in heated and unhealthy workshops, are inadequate to sustain the bodily strength and to supply those comforts which are so imperative after an excessive waste of physical energy. Your petitioners also direct the attention of your honourable House to the starvation wages of the agricultural labourer, and view with horror and indignation the paltry income of those whose toil gives being to the staple food of the people.³⁰

Other demands made in 1842, such as the repeal of the Act of Union, also find no parallel in the first Chartist petition. Where the 1839 and 1842 preambles correspond, however, is in complaints made about the imposition of unjust taxation. ‘We are bound down under a load of taxes’, Chartists submitted in 1839; ‘taxation must be made to fall on property, not on industry’.³¹ And again, even more explicitly in 1842:

any form of government, which fails to effect the purposes for which it was designed, and does not fully and completely represent the whole People who are compelled to pay taxes to its support ... is unconstitutional, tyrannical, and ought to be amended or resisted.³²

Whilst rhetoric cannot be extracted from discrete historical contexts, the link between the imposition of taxation and the right to political representation was never far from Chartist hearts either in Britain or Australia.

²⁹ See M. Jenkins, *The general strike of 1842* (London, 1980); R. Fyson, ‘The crisis of 1842: Chartism, the colliers strike and the outbreak in the potteries’ in J. Epstein and D. Thompson, eds., *The Chartist experience: studies in working-class radicalism and culture, 1830-1860* (London, 1982), pp. 194-220.

³⁰ *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2), pp. 157-8.

³¹ Postgate, *Revolution from 1789 to 1906*, pp. 127-8.

³² *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2), pp. 157-8.

David Goodman remarks that in Victoria the goldminers' 'grievances and the struggle to break the monopoly on the land fitted very nicely into the old radical paradigm; the idle squatter and corrupt official could simply be interpolated into the position previously reserved for the idle aristocrat'.³³ Aristocrats, at least in the radical imagination, paid no tax; 'nay, more, they profit by taxation', claimed 'Gracchus' in 1839.³⁴ According to R.J. Richardson, the Salford Chartist:

the order of the peerage is like an incubus pressing upon the vitality of the commonwealth ... Industry is a virtue unknown amongst them; and they appear to have no other means of subsistence but what they draw from the labour of others ... the secret of their power lies in their combined fraternity, and in the thousand and one modes they possess of preserving their order from contamination and their influence over the land being weakened.³⁵

A decade later overtly republican Chartists such as Joseph Barker and G.W.M Reynolds were denouncing aristocratic influence in similarly conspiratorial terms, just as the 'squattocracy' were subjected to popular abuse in Australian contexts. A number of other elements of the Chartist constitutionalist heritage could also be 'interpolated' on to the colonial environment.

Anti-centralisation has a long association with conservative thought in Britain, and this relationship may account for the way the Chartist critique of centralisation has been somewhat neglected by historians. Antony Taylor has recently noted that the National Charter Association itself was a highly de-centralised (and somewhat *ad hoc*) apparatus from its inception.³⁶ Although somewhat estranged from the O'Connorite mainstream by 1843, Bronterre O'Brien's condemnation of the 'infernal system of centralisation' gives a good idea of Chartist antipathy:

³³ Goodman, *Goldseeking*, pp. 120-2.

³⁴ *Charter*, 31 March 1839, p. 149.

³⁵ *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2), pp. 37-8.

³⁶ Taylor, 'Modes of political expression', p. 56.

over government is gradually drawing within its vortex every remnant of our ancient legal rights and liberties, parochial, municipal, educational, ecclesiastical or otherwise. It has now its hand, or rather its cloven foot in everything. Schools, bridewells, religions, factories, distilleries, hop-grounds, debtors prisons, constables, magistrates, everything and everybody are now got within its clutches.³⁷

‘*Local Power* is the key to general power’, advised the *Star* in recommending the ‘NECESSITY FOR THE CHARTISTS ACQUIRING LOCAL POWER’.³⁸ The enduring interest in municipal politics (and considerable power was occasionally wielded by radical alliances in cities such as Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield) was certainly one practical manifestation of anti-centrism.³⁹ As Gregory Claeys has pointed out, other prominent ‘independent’ Chartists such as W.J. Linton were ill-disposed to forms of political and administrative centralisation.⁴⁰ Care must be taken, however, when dealing with thinkers such as Linton. His ethical republican programme of the early 1850s, for example, explicitly included the state appropriation of ‘crown lands, church lands, waste-lands, streams and mines; and all of roads, railways and canals’, not to mention the ‘Centralisation and regulation of banks for the benefit of the whole nation’.⁴¹

The most obvious manifestation of the widespread Chartist antipathy to centralisation was the often vehement opposition to the ‘foreign’ police forces introduced into the Chartist heartlands under the County Constabulary Act of 1839. This particular reform was widely portrayed as an unconstitutional or ‘Continental’

³⁷ *Poor Man's Guardian* (1843), p. 10; see also p. 58. For O'Brien see A. Plummer, *Bronterre: a political biography of Bronterre O'Brien, 1804-64* (London, 1971).

³⁸ *Northern Star*, 29 October 1842, p. 4. Emphases in original.

³⁹ For Leeds see Harrison, ‘Chartism in Leeds’, pp. 86-93. For Manchester see Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford*, ch. 4. See also D. Frazer, *Urban Politics in Victorian England: the structure of politics in Victorian cities* (Leicester, 1976).

⁴⁰ Claeys, ‘Mazzini, Kossuth’, pp. 238-40.

⁴¹ *English Republic*, 1 (1851), p. 88.

mode of stifling political dissent and facilitating surveillance.⁴² R.J. Richardson also viewed the police as a means for forcefully implementing that other conspicuous element of the Whig ‘great betrayal’, the new poor law:

This *law* destroys the republican right of the inhabitants of every parish in England and Wales to elect their officers, and controul, in parish vestries their own parochial matters connected with the relief of the poor’.⁴³

Apart from diluting existing parochial powers, Richardson noted that the burgeoning networks of railways greatly facilitated police operations.⁴⁴ These fears had some foundation in relation to the more riotous episodes of poor law protest. For example, flying squads of metropolitan police had been used to quell demonstrations in Huddersfield in 1837 and at Dewsbury in 1838.⁴⁵ Along with Newport, Sheffield and Bradford, Dewsbury had also seen abortive Chartist risings in late 1839 and early 1840.⁴⁶ The pre-meditated assassination of the new police was an objective of Sheffield insurgents, and similar objects may have been entertained by Confederates and Chartists in Ashton-under-Lyne when a police officer named Bright was killed in the ‘Black Monday’ affray of August 1848.⁴⁷ Like the need to acknowledge the question of taxation as fundamental Chartist grievance, the opposition shown towards policing reforms is also important when gauging the breadth and significance of the

⁴² See, for example, *Charter*, 3 February 1839, p. 21; 10 March 1839, p. 105; 14 July 1839, p. 385.

⁴³ *Northern Star*, 9 March 1839, p. 7. Italics in original. See also R.D. Storch, ‘The plague of blue locusts: police reform and popular resistance in northern England 1840-57’, *International Review of Social History*, 20 (1975), p. 68.

⁴⁴ *Northern Star*, 9 March 1839, p. 7.

⁴⁵ J. Knott, *Popular opposition to the 1834 poor law* (London, 1986), pp. 149-161 and 203-6.

⁴⁶ For Newport see Williams, *John Frost*; Epstein, *The lion of freedom*, ch. 5; Jones, *The last rising*. For Sheffield see *Times*, 17 January 1840, p. 7; 18 January 1840, p. 6; 21 January 1840 p. 6. For Bradford and Dewsbury see *Times*, 14 January 1840, p. 6; 15 January 1840, p. 5, 16 January 1840, p. 5.

⁴⁷ For Sheffield see *Northern Star*, 21 September 1839, p. 8; For the ‘Black Monday’ episode at Ashton see *Northern Star*, 23 August 1848, p. 8; *Times*, 16 August 1848, p. 8, 17 August 1848, p. 5. See also *Ashton Chronicle*, 12 April 1849, pp. 4-5 for an account by Joseph Ratcliffe, one of the Chartists accused of Bright’s murder.

Chartist inheritance in colonial Australia. Whilst pre-meditated violence against (armed) police rarely seems to have been contemplated upon the Victorian goldfields (although defensive arming certainly was) widespread complaints made against ‘digger hunting’ had identifiable antecedents in Chartist rhetoric.

The swearing-in of tens of thousands of special constables to meet the Chartist threat during the Spring of 1848 has become part of the lore of nineteenth-century political historiography.⁴⁸ Preparations made by the state to meet the Chartist threat during March and April 1848, however, also raised some interesting conflicts, particularly when attempts were made to swear in Chartist employees as special constables. Two days before the 10 April meeting on London’s Kennington Common the Marquess of Salisbury wrote to the Home Secretary, Earl Grey:

I sent two magistrates to ... establishments of workmen for the purpose of swearing them in as special constables. The report I have received from these gentlemen are not at all satisfactory as to the feeling of this class of persons. They almost to a man refused to be sworn in except for the protection of their master’s property. Some have refused to be sworn in at all and have avowed themselves to be Chartists.⁴⁹

A month or so earlier, Chartists employed by the Lancashire and Yorkshire Rail Company faced a similar conundrum. After about 700 employees had been sworn in, protest meetings were held to denounce the obligation. An anonymous government informant commented:

It further appears that many of these men are known Chartists and that some of the best informed Engineers, Engine Drivers are holding well paid and respectable situations are good speakers ... certainly these individuals did take that opportunity of speaking and some Cheers were given for the Charter.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ On the Chartist mobilisation see generally Saville, *1848*; Belchem, ‘1848: Feargus O’Connor and the collapse of the mass platform’; D. Goodway, *London Chartism, 1838-48* (Cambridge 1982), pp. 68-105, 129-49.

⁴⁹ Public Record Office, Home Office (HO) Disturbance Papers, Class 45, Box 2410E, Salisbury to Grey, 8 April 1848.

⁵⁰ HO 45/2410D.

At another protest meeting held in Miles Platting it was resolved to protect property ‘providing the middle class do pledge themselves to protect our capital, namely, our labour’.⁵¹ The workmen added ‘that the present distress of the working classes arises from class legislation’, and pledged ‘themselves to offer no resistance to any body of men’ engaged in the struggle for political representation.⁵²

This use of the public meeting as a mode of political contention was central to Chartist political culture. Eileen Yeo has suggested that amongst local authorities during the first phase of Chartist activity a ‘kind of political schizophrenia developed over the public right to occupy public space and exercise public speech’.⁵³ Article 19 of the Chartist Declaration of Rights – a ‘monument of our ancestral rights’ – drawn up in mid 1839 stated that

it is the undoubted constitutional right of the people of the United Kingdom to meet freely, when, how, and where they choose, in public spaces, peaceably, in the day, to discuss their grievances, and political or other subjects, or for the purpose of framing, discussing, or passing any vote, petition, or remonstrance upon any subject whatsoever.⁵⁴

A similar demand was included in the 1842 national petition.⁵⁵ In the months leading up to the sittings of the first Convention, torchlit Chartist meetings had been curtailed by local authorities acting under instructions issued from the Home Office. These demonstrations had initially been called to protest at bans being imposed upon Lancashire operatives from attending a Kersal Moor (just to the north-east of Manchester) mass-meeting on a Monday. As James Epstein remarks, ‘if employers

⁵¹ *Northern Star*, 25 March 1848, p. 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Yeo, ‘Will the real Mary Lovett please stand up?’, p. 165.

⁵⁴ *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2), pp. 69-70.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

took possession of the day, Lancashire factory hands took possession of the night, torches and pistols in hand'.⁵⁶

As we saw earlier, in their recent collaboration John Belchem and James Epstein have questioned the tendency to draw lines of continuity between radical-Chartist leaders like Hunt and O'Connor, and popular liberals such as Bright, Cobden and Gladstone. 'Of particular significance', they argue, 'is the shift in the nature of the mass-platform and the public meeting itself, the context within which the responsible individual replaced the assertive, previously riotous, free-born Englishman as the emblematic figure of popular politics'.⁵⁷ In the context of this extended chronology, Chartism perhaps represented a point where 'customary' forms of protest stood side by side with more rationalist methods of contesting politics.⁵⁸ The intimidatory meetings by torchlight in late 1838 may have pushed ultra-constitutionalism 'beyond the limits of Whig tolerance' – as, obviously, did the local insurrections a year later.⁵⁹ Chartist activity at the local level, however, was often based around the constitutionalist practice of convening a public meeting. R.G. Gammage, himself a prominent Chartist lecturer, recognised the unprecedented nature of working men mounting platforms and speaking in public. Of Chartist interventions at Anti-Corn Law League meetings, Gammage remarked:

There was ... something heroic in the attitude assumed by working men on this question. It was a battle of the employer and the employed. Masters were astonished at what they deemed the audacity of their workmen, who made no scruple of standing beside them on the platform, and contesting with them face to

⁵⁶ Epstein, 'The constitutional idiom', p. 559.

⁵⁷ Belchem and Epstein, 'The nineteenth-century gentleman leader revisited', p. 176.

⁵⁸ On this theme generally see also C. Tilly, *Popular contention in Great Britain, 1758-1834* (Cambridge MA, 1995).

⁵⁹ Epstein, 'The constitutional idiom', p. 562.

face their most cherished doctrines. Terrible was the persecution they suffered for taking this liberty. Loss of employment usually followed.⁶⁰

The characteristically ‘heroic’ contestation of politics by various Chartist leaders, replete with various themes of persecution, will be taken up in later chapters. The last theme of Chartist constitutionalist rhetoric having particular relevance to the Australian colonial context, however, was the right to bear arms, which principally derived from the Bill of Rights of 1688.

Article 18 of the Chartist Declaration of Rights of 1839 stated that ‘it is the undoubted constitutional right of the people of the United Kingdom to have, use, carry, practise, and train in the use of arms, for their individual and mutual security, so that the public peace be not thereby disturbed’.⁶¹ Whilst historians traditionally differentiated between the adherents of ‘moral’ and ‘physical’ force (particularly Lovett and O’Connor) this often simplistic approach has been rightly criticised in recent years.⁶² ‘The right to arm in defence of the constitution’, James Epstein suggests, ‘is a rather good example of how a radical rendering of English political history ... could provide legitimation for insurgent action’.⁶³ If we turn again to a didactic organ such as the *Chartist Circular*, we can see this process of historical contestation at work in the creative citation of legal authorities such as Locke and Blackstone.⁶⁴ What these Chartist appeals to history tended to omit, however, was the fact that the right to arm had been legally circumscribed by a number of Acts of

⁶⁰ Gammage, *History*, pp. 216-17. See also D. Thompson, ‘Who were “the people” in 1842’ in Chase and Dyck, eds., *Living and Learning: essays in honour of J.F.C. Harrison* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 126-7.

⁶¹ *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2) p. 69.

⁶² For the orthodox depiction see Hovell, *The Chartist movement*. Compare Wiener, *William Lovett*, pp. 60-2; Epstein, *The lion of freedom*, pp. 116-23.

⁶³ Epstein, ‘The constitutional idiom’, p. 559.

⁶⁴ *Chartist Circular*, 25 January 1840, pp. 70-1. For similar arguments see R.J. Richardson’s speech to the national convention, *Northern Star*, 13 April 1839, p. 1; *Charter*, 14 April 1839, p. 188; the letter by ‘REFORMATOR’ in the *Charter*, 30 June 1839, p. 364; and the editorial in the *Northern Star*, 7 August 1839, p. 3.

Parliament (including various game laws and the ‘six acts’ of 1819).⁶⁵ Once again, this example of the selective appropriation of the past reminds us of Fredric Jameson’s insight into the freedoms bestowed by culture itself. And whatever rhetorical ingenuity may have lain behind Chartist appropriations of the constitutional heritage, arguments propounding the constitutional right to arm in order to resist tyranny were to be reiterated upon the goldfields of Victoria.

II

Feargus O’Connor informed his readers in 1845 that the ‘whole question of agriculture, of political economy, of wages, of representation, and of existence itself is bound up in the question of the Land’.⁶⁶ ‘This being the question of questions’, stated another Chartist some four years later, ‘it should be thoroughly studied by every man calling himself a reformer’.⁶⁷ Yet until comparatively recently, the widespread debates over agrarian issues have not been reflected in the historiography of the movement. This neglect is particularly obvious in the treatment of O’Connor’s Land Plan, which boasted at least 70,000 members at its peak, and which arguably held Chartism together in the mid-to-late 1840s.⁶⁸ Whilst the corporate structure of the experimental scheme was undoubtedly seriously flawed, approximately 230 families were

⁶⁵ Epstein, ‘The constitutional idiom’, p. 559.

⁶⁶ *Northern Star*, 26 July 1845, p. 1.

⁶⁷ *Northern Star*, 22 September 1849, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 303; M. Chase, ‘Chartism, 1838-58: responses in two Teesside towns’, *Northern History*, 24 (1988), pp. 164. Precise membership figures cannot be established, but appear to have been at least 70,000 at the end of 1847. See First to sixth reports of the select committee on the National Land Company (1848), *British Parliamentary Papers*, Agriculture, XIII (Shannon, 1969 rep.), para. 1446, evidence of P. McGrath.

eventually located upon five Chartist communities.⁶⁹ As is well known, many settlers found that their new lives failed to live up to idealised expectations.⁷⁰ But despite the litany of practical problems encountered by the original settlers located in cottages on small farms of between two and four acres, the Land Plan did represent the pinnacle of the mature Chartist movement culture. And notwithstanding significant differences in scale, the radical ideal of the independent smallholding was particularly important in the Australian contexts which will be examined in section two.

As noted above, earlier historians invariably portrayed the Land Plan as a backward-looking, almost pathetic response to industrialism. Mark Hovell went as far as suggesting that the Plan was ‘not a real Chartist scheme’.⁷¹ However, historians have come to recognise the failings of earlier interpretations, particularly the anachronistic assumptions about the ‘forward march of labour’. As John Saville stressed in 1969, what ‘historians have missed in their analysis of the Land Plan is the flood of discussion and debate concerning land questions during the 1830s and 1840s’.⁷² The Land Plan is now seen as epitomising the artisanal ideals of independence, and the desire for control over the timing of work.⁷³ Yet there is still a tendency to divorce the Chartist experiment from the context of wider agrarian debates and schemes in the 1840s. ‘Independence’ was a highly contested ideal, and

⁶⁹ Chase, ‘We Wish Only to Work for Ourselves’, p. 134. In addition to research upon the Plan already cited, see W.H.G. Armytage, ‘The Chartist land colonies, 1846-1848’, *Agricultural History*, 32 (1958), pp. 87-96; P. Searby, ‘Great Dodford and the later history of the Chartist land scheme’, *Agricultural History Review*, 16 (1968), pp. 32-45; K. Tiller, ‘Charterville and the Chartist Land Company’, *Oxoniensia*, 50 (1985), pp. 251-66; M. Chase, *The People’s Farm: English radical agrarianism, 1775-1840* (Oxford, 1988); A. Adams, ‘Charterville and the landscape of social reform’ in T. Carter and B.L. Herman, *Perspectives in vernacular architecture*, IV (Columbia, 1991), pp. 138-145.

⁷⁰ For a general narrative account of the fate of each of the communities see Hadfield, *The Chartist land company*.

⁷¹ Hovell, *The Chartist movement*, p. 32.

⁷² Saville, introduction to Gammage, *History*, pp. 50-1.

⁷³ See Malcolm Chase’s discussion of the characteristics of radical agrarianism in *The People’s Farm*, ch. 1.

we can only get a sense of conflicting meanings by revisiting Chartist arguments over various modes of obtaining access to the soil.

John Revans, who investigated the Plan on behalf of the government in 1848, noted in his evidence that ‘many, many men have a great desire to go upon the land’.⁷⁴ An urban land hunger was also reflected in the Parliamentary investigations conducted in 1843 into the provision of allotments.⁷⁵ Whilst historians have recently begun to consider the arguments voiced for and against allotments, there has been little discussion of the intense political debate they also spurred.⁷⁶ Conventional political economy decreed that both allotments and peasant proprietorship (the basis of the O’Connorite agrarian ideal) were inimical to efficient agriculture. As David Martin points out, J.R. McCulloch’s essay on the cottage system, which contained forcible criticisms of allotments, was reprinted for 35 years in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* after its initial publication in 1819.⁷⁷ Similarly, Joseph Hume argued in the Commons in 1845 that the provision of allotments would reduce England to the condition of Ireland.⁷⁸ This orthodox position was reiterated by John Revans in his generally

⁷⁴ Reports of the select committee on the National Land Company, para. 3363, evidence of J. Revans.

⁷⁵ Reports from the select committee on the labouring poor, allotments of land, *British Parliamentary Papers*, Agriculture, IX (Shannon, 1968 rep.). During 1843 the provision of allotments in rural areas was also investigated in the Reports of special assistant commissioners on the employment of women and children in agriculture (1843), *British Parliamentary Papers*, Agriculture, VI (Shannon, 1968 rep.).

⁷⁶ See D.C. Barnett, ‘Allotments and the problem of rural poverty, 1780-1840’ in E.L. Jones and G.E. Mingay, eds., *Land, labour and population in the industrial revolution* (London, 1967), pp. 162-83; B. Moselle, ‘Allotments, enclosure, and proletarianization in early nineteenth-century southern England’, *Economic History Review*, 48 (1995), pp. 501-35; J.E. Archer, ‘The nineteenth-century allotment: half an acre and a row’, *Economic History Review*, 50 (1997), pp. 21-36. For a more politically attuned discussion see Bronstein, ‘Under their own vine and fig tree’, pp. 53-62.

⁷⁷ See D. Martin, *John Stuart Mill and the land question* (Hull, 1981), pp. 4-5; J.V. Beckett, ‘The debate over farm sizes in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England’, *Agricultural History*, 57 (1983), pp. 308-25.

⁷⁸ *Northern Star*, 8 March 1845, p. 8.

disparaging evidence to the Parliamentary select committee.⁷⁹ Generally speaking, liberals stressed the need for a mobile labour supply dependent primarily on the wage contract, and employed in large-scale, mechanized agriculture. Renting farmers, too, were generally ill-disposed towards allotments. Their opposition seems to have been largely based on a fear that allotments would induce an unwanted degree of ‘independence’ amongst agricultural wage-labourers.⁸⁰

Paternalist exponents of allotment provision, on the other hand, explicitly lauded the ‘feeling of independence and self respect’ bestowed by agricultural leisure.⁸¹ Not only did allotments minimise the burden of parish relief; they were thought to facilitate moral improvement, piety, domestic harmony, temperance, ‘rational recreation’, and tended to blunt the labourer’s supposed instinct towards crime. ‘Many striking instances have been stated’, emphasised the 1843 committee, ‘where the possession of an allotment has been the means of reclaiming the criminal, reforming the dissolute, and of changing the whole moral character’.⁸² But the form of ‘independence’ envisaged by organisations such as the Labourers’ Friend Society, or paternalist Parliamentarians such as William Cowper, William Ferrand and Lord John Manners had distinct material limitations. The 1843 select committee, for example, recommended that access to land be strictly limited:

it is desirable that the profits of the allotment should be viewed by the holder of it in the light of aid, and not of a substitute for his ordinary income accruing from wages, and that they should not become an inducement to neglect his usual paid labour, the allotment should be of no greater extent than can be cultivated during the leisure moments of the labourer and his family. The exact size which would

⁷⁹ Reports of the select committee on the National Land Company, paras. 3368, 3806-9, evidence of J. Revans.

⁸⁰ Moselle, ‘Allotments, enclosure and proletarianization’, p. 494. See also Reports from the select committee on the labouring poor, paras. 691-2, 696, evidence of G.W. Gent; para. 778, evidence of F. Thynne; paras. 1236-43, 1250-2, 1268-9, evidence of J. Dumbrell.

⁸¹ Bronstein, ‘Under their own vine and fig tree’, pp. 55-6.

⁸² Reports from the select committee on the labouring poor, p. iv.

meet this condition must of course vary ... but a quarter of an acre is the size usually adopted, and best suited to the average cases.⁸³

Although agreements governing access to rented plots of land typically included strict guidelines concerning social behaviour, the timing of work, and the mode of cultivation (invariably spade-husbandry) allotments seem to have been rarely provided in accordance with a formal lease.⁸⁴ John Brookes, a schoolmaster ‘in training’ from Hinckley who gave evidence before the 1843 committee, admitted that no member of a scheme he administered locally had any permanent security in the land. Rather, there was simply ‘an understanding’ that while ‘he continues to be a good member of the society, and while he keeps his land in good order’ a member would not be ‘turned out’.⁸⁵

The strict control over access and tenure exercised by landowners and agents extended to the social sphere. Allottees typically had to agree to limit their labour to leisure hours, excluding the Sabbath, when no work could be done at all.⁸⁶ Church attendance was also sometimes required of participants.⁸⁷ James Orange, a minister and travelling Secretary of the Midlands Counties Artisans’ Labourers’ Friend Society based in Nottingham, told the committee of an instance where a rector gave stockings access to land in the parish of Lambley.⁸⁸ Orange remarked that the weavers had been ‘generally given to the discussion of political subjects’ and that their religious observance was so ‘irregular’ that the rector’s church was ‘nearly

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ See Barnett, ‘Allotments and the problem of rural poverty’, p. 170; Reports from the select committee on the labouring poor’, appendix 1.

⁸⁵ Report from the select committee on the labouring poor, paras. 1579-80, evidence of J. Brooks.

⁸⁶ Barnett, ‘Allotments and the problem of rural poverty’, p. 170.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ For Orange see R.A. Church, ‘James Orange and the allotment system in Nottingham’, *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 64 (1960), pp. 74-80.

empty'.⁸⁹ Yet after the allotments were taken up, 'the Church filled'.⁹⁰ Although Orange claimed that the Lambley weavers had also become less interested in politics, it is probable that the land was made available on the condition that allottees attend the religious services provided by their benefactor.⁹¹ Another witness, a Captain Scobell of Somerset, believed that allotments maintained a 'kindly feeling towards landholders', and labourers thus provided could be depended upon in the case of a riot.⁹² John Brookes also equated access to land with political quietism:

one of the lecturers of the Chartists, from Leicester, came there a week or two ago, and made a great noise, but none of the allotment tenants visited him; instead of going to the meeting, they went with their spades on their shoulders to their gardens.⁹³

As Jamie Bronstein has argued, in 'its early days the Labourer's Friend Society's main task was to explain how allotments could benefit the poor, while still maintaining, and even enhancing, a hierarchical system of social relations'.⁹⁴ Although allotments were repeatedly commended on the grounds that they would foster a degree of independence amongst the 'productive classes', this was construed primarily as independence from parish relief.

Whilst historians have thus noted the significance of the Labourer's Friend Society, which through royal sponsorship, the publication of the *Labourer's Friend* and numerous didactic tracts, was the most influential advocate of allotments in the 1840s, few have commented upon Chartist attempts at gaining access to the land via allotment initiatives. One problem here is the lack of primary material available on

⁸⁹ Report from the select committees on the labouring poor, paras. 1667-71, evidence of J. Orange.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, paras. 303-8, evidence of G.T. Scobell.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, paras. 1529-30, evidence of J. Brooks.

⁹⁴ Bronstein, 'Under their own vine and fig tree', p. 55.

small-scale experiments undertaken by radical democrats. For example, little is known about the intriguing waste-land recovery activities carried out by Christian Chartists at Chat Moss, a notorious marsh east of Manchester, for more than a decade in the 1830s and 1840s.⁹⁵ As the Land Plan began to be publicised in earnest in 1845, however, evidence of practical agrarian activity becomes increasingly evident. In November a cutler from Sheffield wrote to the *Star* wanting to join the Land Plan. He told of his knowledge ‘of what the land will produce when properly cultivated’, and was keen to show his allotment to ‘any friend’ in the vicinity.⁹⁶ On the other hand, Robert Wild of Mottram, gave an account of his exclusion from a local scheme set up by John Tollemache, an M.P. for south Cheshire. Wild claimed he had been discriminated against by Tollemache’s agent ‘for promulgating ... revolutionary doctrines’:

Said he, ‘Your Charter, I tell you, will be *your ruin*. Your Charter is opposed to the *Queen and constitution*, and aims at nought but revolution ... those who hold such inflammatory doctrines as yours are enemies to their country, and must not be encouraged with allotments ... I have scratched your name out, you must have *no land*.⁹⁷

‘O dear!’, concluded Wild in the melodramatic strain so characteristic of Chartist public discourse, ‘I am cut off for *ever* from the soil’.⁹⁸ Three years later a similar story was told by another group of democrats who were involved in an allotment scheme administered by a ‘respectable and benevolent man occupying a farm under Lord Vernon’ at nearby Stockport. When Vernon’s agent (a ‘bloated menial of a feudal baron’) got word from an informant that the land was being worked ‘upon Mr. O’Connor’s plan, and for themselves too’, he swiftly ejected the Chartists without compensating them for the improvements they had made.⁹⁹ Clearly, the stringently

⁹⁵ See Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford*, pp. 117-19.

⁹⁶ *Northern Star*, 8 November 1845, p. 4.

⁹⁷ *Northern Star*, 11 January 1845, p. 4. Italics in original.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* Italics in original.

⁹⁹ *Northern Star*, 18 March 1848, p. 6.

administered recreational allotment offered radical democrats little in their search for self-sufficiency.

It is thus important to distinguish between the idea of ‘independence’ implicit in paternalist commendations of ¼ acre allotments and radical-democratic understandings manifest in the ideal of peasant proprietorship. The potential for confusion here, it must be said, is considerable: not only were the Land Plan smallholdings of two, three and four acres commonly referred to as ‘allotments’. Instances can also be cited where O’Connor warmly commended allotment schemes such as that initiated near Keithley by the Yorkshire Oastlerite, W.B. Ferrand.¹⁰⁰ Care also needs to be taken when using a term like ‘paternalist’ in this context.¹⁰¹ One of the best known philanthropic providers of allotments in the 1840s was actually the Leeds industrialist, free-trader and radical M.P., James G. Marshall. Among the wealthiest manufacturers in Britain, Marshall had close ties with the Anti-Corn Law League, and in 1840 helped found the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association, which espoused household suffrage and included working men on its committee.¹⁰² Yet in 1842 Marshall can also be found attempting to convince Chartists of the value of the Labourers’ Friend Society, as well as his own urban experiments at Holbeck and Headingley.¹⁰³ These projects were discussed in some depth at the 1843 select committee, where Marshall’s agent and land manager, George Bolls, gave evidence.¹⁰⁴ Whilst reluctantly commending these initiatives, the *Northern Star* argued,

¹⁰⁰ *Northern Star*, 6 September 1845, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ For paternalism see D. Roberts, *Paternalism in early Victorian England* (London, 1979), especially pp. 3-8.

¹⁰² L. Brown, ‘The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League’ in Briggs, ed., *Chartist studies* (London, 1974), p. 357; N. McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 1968), pp. 78-9; Epstein, *The lion of freedom*, pp. 264-5.

¹⁰³ See *Northern Star*, 25 June 1842, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Reports from the select committees on the labouring poor, paras. 2063-2295, evidence of G. Bolls.

We advocate ... a quite different occupancy of the soil, from that which obtains under Mr. Marshall's auspices ... The *small* allotment system is but an *eking-out* of the slender means of the underpaid operative. It is *because* he cannot earn LIVING wages in return for his daily toil, that the *small* allotment is made him; in which he can spend the time which he ought to have for recreation, and for the instruction of his family ... *It betters his condition*, we grant. *It is a good* as far as it goes, we readily admit. But it does not place *the man or the family*, in an independent position!¹⁰⁵

Ultimately, continued the *Star*, 'we shall always quarrel' with 'the system' which had made the Marshall family amongst the richest in England, but required their workers to cultivate twenty rods of land simply to exist.¹⁰⁶

O'Connor himself went to great lengths to distinguish his 'small farm system' from part-time allotment schemes.¹⁰⁷ The latter, he consistently argued, did not encourage true independence, or make any impact upon unemployment in the 'artificial labour market'; rather, they would ultimately produce a 'kind of hermaphrodite society of half agricultural labourers and half manufacturing slaves'.¹⁰⁸ O'Connor also criticised the considerable rents typically payable on recreational allotments.¹⁰⁹ 'My land plan is to make you independent of your masters to give you the full and entire benefit of your labour, and to place in such a situation that you will think it worth your while to demand your full share of legislation in a country in which you have, in truth, a "STAKE in the hedge"', he wrote in late 1845.¹¹⁰ As stated in the original rules adopted by the Chartist Convention of April 1845, the objects of the Plan were to 'demonstrate to the working classes of the kingdom ... the value of the land, as a means of making them independent of the grinding capitalist; and

¹⁰⁵ *Northern Star*, 14 January 1843, p. 4. Emphases in original. See also 21 January 1843, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Northern Star*, 14 January 1843, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ See F. O'Connor, *A practical work on the management of small farms* (Manchester, 1847), pp. 129-30.

¹⁰⁸ *Northern Star*, 22 November 1845, p. 1. See also 5 April, 1845, p. 1; 7 June 1845, p. 1; 26 July 1845, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Northern Star*, 26 July 1845, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ *Northern Star*, 1 November 1845, p. 1.

secondly, to show them the necessity of securing the speedy enactment of the “People’s Charter”¹¹¹. In theory the Plan offered members a smallholding and functional cottage ‘leased for ever’ at annual rent of £5, a lump sum to aid relocation, whilst shares could be paid off in small weekly instalments.¹¹² The inevitable trade-off, of course, lay in the potentially long wait for selection via the ballot system, a democratic feature which led to continual legal problems for the Plan’s promoters.¹¹³

Despite the manifold deficiencies of the scheme’s corporate machinery, the radical-democratic idea of independence mobilised around the Land Plan differed greatly from that espoused by the Labourers’ Friend Society. Jamie Bronstein recently has suggested that there was ‘a great deal of philosophical overlap between O’Connor and the conservative proponents of allotments to the poor’, here echoing the old orthodoxy upon the Land Plan.¹¹⁴ Whilst O’Connor no doubt had read the *Labourer’s Friend* (as Bronstein notes, his cottage designs may well have been lifted from this source) the aggressive rhetoric of independence preached by O’Connor and Land Plan lecturers such as Christopher Doyle, Paul McGrath and Thomas Clark has to be distinguished from paternalist appropriations of the idiom.¹¹⁵ Consider Christopher Doyle’s colourful comparison of a relocated Chartist and an operative subject to factory discipline such as the ‘silent system’ deployed at John Fielden’s Todmodern factory:

I need not say that the rules in factories are tyrannical and unjust. I need not say that they are made without the consent of the workpeople – I need not say that every person who is compelled to obey them ... is nothing more than a miserable and degraded slave ... Now let us look at the position of a man upon two acres of land, with a good cottage, at £5 a year rent, under our Land scheme. In the first place, he may get up when he like, work when he likes, and go to bed when he

¹¹¹ Appendix to reports of the select committee on the National Land Company, p. 49.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 49-52.

¹¹³ MacAskill, ‘The Chartist Land Plan’, p. 311; Hadfield, *The Chartist land company*, p. 208.

¹¹⁴ Bronstein, ‘Under their own vine and fig tree’, pp. 54-9.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

likes. Again, at any hour of the day, he may visit his friend and neighbour, and freely converse with him for any length of time, without running the risk of losing a sixpence. In a word, he is his own master – master of his land and cottage ... Again he may venture to a public meeting, called for the purpose of devising the best means of emancipating the working classes from the foul domination of the tyrant land lords and money-lords. He may, at that meeting, boldly and honestly express his opinions, and return home, sleep soundly, get up in the morning, enter upon his field, and no man can turn him off.¹¹⁶

‘DAMN THE FACTORY BELL’ cried a fictional Chartist farmer, relocated from Stockport.¹¹⁷ This melodramatic rhetoric of democratic independence was typical of the language used to promote the Plan.¹¹⁸ We would do well to remember just how much these words would have shocked most advocates of recreational allotments. ‘Independence’ thus evoked a whole spectrum of meanings, some of which were quite contradictory.

Another connection Bronstein makes between O’Connor and paternalist proponents of allotments was their common advocacy of spade husbandry.¹¹⁹ Yet an argument could be made that O’Connor’s arguments on this subject reiterated Robert Owen’s position that the spade represented a cheap, practical, efficient and scientific mode of intensive agriculture.¹²⁰ ‘Our association’, Feargus boasted in late 1845, ‘will have the advantages of certainty of tenure, and the light of new science’.¹²¹ The rhetoric of practicality, science and progress mobilised around the Land Plan has been almost completely ignored by historians.¹²² One of the most obvious failings of the Plan, on the other hand, was the confusion which arose over the form of tenure

¹¹⁶ *Northern Star*, 11 October 1845, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ See ‘THE CHARTER AND THE LAND’, *Labourer*, 1 (1847-8), pp. 44-8.

¹¹⁸ For another example see *Northern Star*, 13 September 1845, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ Bronstein, ‘Under their own vine and fig tree’, p. 58. For O’Connor’s arguments upon spade husbandry see *A practical work*, pp. 40-6.

¹²⁰ For a summary of Owen’s views on spade husbandry see G. Claeys, *Machinery, money and the millennium: from moral economy to socialism, 1815-60* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 45-6.

¹²¹ *Northern Star*, 8 November 1845, p. 1. See also 15 November 1845, p. 1

¹²² But see MacAskill’s remarks in ‘The Chartist Land Plan’, pp. 305-6.

actually vested in its ever-changing rules.¹²³ Even before the first community had been built near Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, a number of members voiced concerns that two acres would not provide the kind of complete self-sufficiency that Chartists sought. Samuel Goat, a Norwich activist, was firmly

of the opinion it would be much better to have four acres; believe me, I am thoroughly sick of the stinted means which has too long been my lot, and if I ever reach my hoped for farm I should like to show the world a happy family, earning what they enjoy, and enjoying what they earn. I am persuaded two acres will not produce wheat, barley, potatoes, turnips, flax and the many other things requisite for a family, with cattle sufficient to make manure to ensure a succession of crops; and if the Land is not fed, it cannot long feed its occupier.¹²⁴

These words were to prove prophetic. Few Chartist families attained the ideals of landed security, self-sufficiency and domestic tranquillity which promoters of the Land Plan espoused in the heyday of the scheme.

As the culmination of the Chartist movement culture, the Land Plan was predicated upon co-operative association. Although the scheme has not been seriously analysed by historians of Owenism and co-operation, it arguably deserves to be seen as one of the most significant co-operative experiments undertaken in the nineteenth century. This theme (which goes well beyond the scope of this thesis) could be pursued from a number of perspectives: the significant debt O'Connor owed to Owenite political economy, despite his obvious disdain for communitarian association; the Plan's co-operative corporate structure; the role of various Owenite Chartists (particularly Thomas Martin Wheeler) in the design and supervision of the scheme; and finally, the co-operative forms of association at the local or branch level which can be discerned from the 'Intelligence' columns of the *Northern Star*.¹²⁵ Of

¹²³ Hadfield, *The Chartist land company*, pp. 71-4, 162-9.

¹²⁴ *Northern Star*, 15 November 1845, p. 5

¹²⁵ As Gregory Claeys notes in *Citizens and saints: politics and anti-politics in early British socialism* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 245, O'Connor 'seems to 'have ingested a strong dose of social (meaning Owenite) logic'. Note the earlier explicit contrast between O'Connorite and

course, such an exploration begs questions about the apparent contradiction between the culture of mutuality and the belligerent rhetoric of democratic independence associated with the Plan. And whilst the radical agrarianism that resurfaced in New South Wales and Victoria in the post-1848 period had much of the militant quality of its Chartist forbear, the co-operative forms of association which underpinned the Plan seem to have dissipated in Australia.. Edward Hawksley's pleas in the *People's Advocate* to resurrect the co-operative model certainly aroused nothing of the millenarian hopes O'Connor had inspired in Britain a few years earlier.¹²⁶ The colonial catchcry of 'a farm, a rifle and the vote', however, did come from the heart of Chartism's rhetoric of agrarian independence.

III

One of the main reasons why Australian historians have underestimated the breadth and persistence of Chartist political culture in colonial contexts lies in an inadequate understanding of the evolution of the movement. From 1848 republican and socialist voices began to vie with Chartism's traditional language of radical constitutionalism, and this change was also reflected in the democratic inheritance which subsequently informed Australian radical politics. As stressed in the introduction, late-Chartism is a subject which has only recently drawn the extended attention of historians. Whilst a

Owenite ideology in G.D.H. Cole, *A century of co-operation* (n.p., n.d.), p. 38, a theme recently echoed (with some caveats) by Malcolm Chase, 'We Wish Only to Work for Ourselves', pp. 139-40. For Wheeler see G. Stevens, *A memoir of Thomas Martin Wheeler ...* (New York, 1986 rep.). Intriguingly, Stevens claimed (at pp. 25-6) that Wheeler was the joint-author of O'Connor's book on small farms, and was the originator of the Land Plan. See R. Faherty, 'The memoir of Thomas Martin Wheeler, Owenite and Chartist', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 30 (1975), pp. 11-13.

¹²⁶ See M. Chase, 'The concept of jubilee in late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain', *Past and Present*, 129 (1990), pp. 132-47.

detailed account of late-Chartist identity also goes beyond the scope of this thesis, it is necessary to outline some of the ways in which the Continental revolutions of 1848 spurred a new kind of movement amongst a new generation of radical democratic activists.

Historians have generally portrayed Chartist republicanism as an intellectual inclination held by leaders such as George Julian Harney, who championed internationalist causes such as the Fraternal Democrats.¹²⁷ For example, F.C. Mather has argued that

Chartists displayed little concern to upset the institutional structure of British government. The Rev. Joseph Barker's plea for the 'entire abolition of the present constitution' was atypical of the movement. Chartist republicanism remained, for the most part, academic and historical.¹²⁸

More recently John Belchem has reiterated this position, albeit in the language of the 'new political history':

Recast as popular melodrama on the radical mass-platform of the early nineteenth century, the nation's 'master narrative' of constitutional liberty became a people's history of a lost golden age, a heroic struggle against privilege, faction and 'Old Corruption' ... Lacking such a narrative framework, natural rights republicanism was seldom propounded from Chartist platforms.¹²⁹

Yet was Chartist republicanism always simply 'academic and historical'? Was it merely 'the ascetic creed' epitomised by Richard Carlile's 'temples of reason'?¹³⁰

Whilst it is undeniable that the 'constitutionalist idiom' always prevailed, during and after 1848 Chartist identity becomes particularly complicated. Since the 1790s a significant number of radicals had found themselves encamped outside the

¹²⁷ For Harney's involvement with various *émigré* groups see Schoyen, *The Chartist challenge*, ch. 6. See also P. Brock, 'Polish democrats and English radicals, 1832-1862: a chapter in the history of Anglo-Polish relations', *Journal of Modern History*, 25 (1953), pp. 139-56; B. Porter, *The refugee question in mid-Victorian politics* (Cambridge, 1979); Weisser, *British working-class movements and Europe*, chs. 3-4; Finn, *After Chartism*, chs. 2-3.

¹²⁸ Mather, *Chartism and society*, p. 23; Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 6.

¹²⁹ Belchem, 'Nationalism, republicanism and exile', pp. 123-4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-3.

pale of the constitutional heritage. The Paineite legacy, of course, has received considerable attention from historians.¹³¹ A classic natural rights rhetorical tactic was simply to deny the legitimacy of the constitution. In 1841 an anonymous writer in the *Chartist Circular* stated that

many well-informed persons actually entertain doubts as to whether there be a British Constitution or no. At what epoch did this constitution make its appearance? *Who* made it? It is said, indeed, to have been the gradual work of ages. Then must history present abundant traces of this stupendous undertaking ... But on searching assiduously through all manner of histories, from the venerable Bede and Holing, the lighter lubrications of Turner, Hallam and Palsgrave, I found ... that we live under no constitution at all, but under a system of things which dates from the Norman conquest.¹³²

This polemic could have been written by Paine himself. Yet notice how the critique of the constitution's legitimacy actually turns upon a recasting of constitutional sources. Both constitutional and anti-constitutional claims about political justice, then, could be made by appealing to the warrant of history.

Feargus O'Connor, like Daniel O'Connell, supported an hereditary monarchy. 'Give me the power behind the throne greater than the throne itself', O'Connor wrote, 'and I care not what you call, or how you elect, him who sits upon the throne'.¹³³ Unfortunately, Epstein's biography of O'Connor does not deal with the post-1842 period in any depth, although Epstein does comment that the latter phase of O'Connor's career was 'more problematic' than the first.¹³⁴ It is clear, however, that O'Connor's carefully cultivated gentlemanly demagogic persona was losing some of its gloss in the later 1840s. In her work on late and post-Chartist radicalism, Margot Finn contrasts O'Connor with a disparate group of leaders in terms of their attitudes to

¹³¹ Belchem, 'Republicanism, popular constitutionalism and the radical platform'; Epstein, 'Understanding the cap of liberty'; Epstein, 'The constitutional idiom'.

¹³² *Chartist Circular*, 18 November 1841, p. 445. Italics in original.

¹³³ *Northern Star*, 27 February 1841, p. 3; 1 August 1840, p. 4.

¹³⁴ Epstein, *The lion of freedom*, p. 4.

continental political traditions and culture. Finn suggests that nationally known leaders such as Julian Harney, G.J. Holyoake, W.J. Linton, Bronterre O'Brien, G.W.M. Reynolds and Ernest Jones 'continued to proclaim the fundamental identity of English and continental politics, remaining true to the international sympathies born in earlier decades and consolidated by the events of 1848'.¹³⁵ 'FRANCE HAS A REPUBLIC, ENGLAND MUST HAVE THE CHARTER', demanded the *Star* in the wake of the establishment of the provisional government, and the visit of a Chartist delegation (Harney, Jones and Philip McGrath) to Paris.¹³⁶ In a sense, the revolutionary upheavals in Europe left the 'People's Champion' behind: increasingly marginalised, O'Connor made overtures to the bourgeois National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association, to the chagrin of close former allies such as Harney and Jones.¹³⁷ Whilst historians traditionally have dwelt upon the decline of Chartism following the events of April 1848, it is likely that the travails of the Land Plan weighed more heavily upon O'Connor and his 'Old Guards' in the following months.

This famous O'Connorite appellation, however, was no longer an inclusive badge of allegiance: 'there ought to be no distinction made between Chartists of old standing and new converts ... all your letters should be addressed to the Chartist body generally, and not the "Old Guards"', remonstrated one group of Westminster activists in 1849.¹³⁸ Although Finn's estimation of the rigidity of O'Connor's approach to foreign politics may be a little exaggerated, Julian Harney reluctantly relinquished his editorship of the *Star* because of differences with O'Connor over the coverage of

¹³⁵ Finn, *After Chartism*, p. 83.

¹³⁶ *Northern Star*, 18 March 1848, pp. 4-5.

¹³⁷ Saville, *Ernest Jones*, pp. 43-5; Schoyen, *The Chartist challenge*, chs. 8-9; Read and Glasgow, *Feargus O'Connor*, p. 137; A. Taylor, 'Modes of political expression', pp. 75-7, 137; M. Taylor, *The decline of British radicalism*, p. 168; Pickering, "'Glimpses of Eternal Truth'", p. 62.

¹³⁸ *Northern Star*, 28 April 1849, p. 7; Pickering, "'Glimpses of eternal truth'", p. 56.

European politics.¹³⁹ After the June Days O'Connor continued to distance himself from the republican (and increasingly socialist) ethos of a new generation of Chartists inspired by Ledru-Rollin and Louis Blanc. Those on the republican left, on the other hand, took offence at the more polemical manifestations of O'Connor's constitutional instincts. As some 'Republicans of Nottingham' replied to one of his polemical attacks on republican government in March 1849:

We have advocated the principles of the Charter ... some of us at the cost of our personal liberty; Many of us are as old as Mr. O'Connor ... We have not gathered our opinions from him, and will not, therefore, hold ourselves responsible to him ... THE WORLD IS OUR COUNTRY AND TO DO GOOD OUR RELIGION ... he tells us there is not a particle of difference between a Republic and a Monarchy with the Charter. If he really thinks so, his letter of last week is a mere string of words.¹⁴⁰

Not only did O'Connor's rhetoric fall on death ears in this case. The demotic medium of his open letter (which will be taken up in more depth in the following chapter) had also evidently begun to lose its authoritative stature.

James Epstein has explored the 'rituals of solidarity' bound up in the Chartist social calendar, particularly the symbolism of the toasts invariably recited at radical gatherings and commemorations.¹⁴¹ The ideological shifts that characterised late Chartism were also reflected in what Margot Finn terms the 'club life' (or the movement culture) of post-1848 radicalism.¹⁴² Consider the tenor of the toasts given at a 'social and democratic banquet' held in early 1849 by Nottingham activists celebrating the release of a Chartist prisoner from Kirkdale prison:

¹³⁹ Schoyen, *The Chartist challenge*, pp. 185-6; Finn, *After Chartism*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁰ *Northern Star*, 10 March 1849, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ Epstein, 'Rituals of solidarity: radical dining, toasting, and symbolic expression' in *Radical expression*, pp. 147-65. See also F. O'Gorman, 'Campaign rituals and ceremonies: the social meaning of elections in England, 1780-1860, *Past and Present*, 135 (1992), pp. 79-115; P. Brett, 'Political dinners in early nineteenth-century Britain: platform, meeting place and battleground', *History*, 81 (1996), pp. 527-52.

¹⁴² See Finn, *After Chartism*, pp. 106-41.

the company were amused and edified with many social and democratic songs, speeches, recitations and toasts. Among the toasts were the following; ‘Doctor McDouall, and the rest of the victims of Whig tyranny’. ‘To the memory of the brave men of Paris, who died defending the social and democratic republic, the insurgents of June’. ‘Frost, Williams and Jones’. ‘Louis Blanc, Raspail, and the rest of the social and democratic republicans of France, and may their principles be speedily established throughout the world’. ‘Mitchell, Smith O’Brien, and the rest of the Irish patriots’.¹⁴³

The chair at this gathering was taken by William Dexter, who was also one of the Nottingham republicans who reprimanded O’Connor. Dexter later emigrated to Victoria, and was closely involved in the red-ribbon protest which will be examined in chapter eight.¹⁴⁴ As he had spent some time working in France as a porcelain illustrator, the internationalist, republican and socialist sentiments evident at the social gathering are not surprising. These toasts can actually be seen as a kind of microcosm of the ‘*democ-soc*’ ideals of late-Chartist political culture. Apart from the obligatory mention of the Newport leaders, then in their ninth year of exile in Van Diemen’s Land, the convivial symbols chosen on this occasion effectively represented a new ‘martyrology’ built on various revolutionary heroics, rather than the traditional patriotic defence of constitutional liberty.

Frederick Engels claimed in the mid 1840s that the ‘English Chartist is politically a republican, though he rarely or ever mentions the word, while he sympathizes with the republican parties of all countries, and calls himself in preference a democrat’.¹⁴⁵ As this comment suggests, it is often difficult to pin down what Chartists actually meant by terms such as ‘republic’ and ‘republican’. Dorothy

¹⁴³ *Northern Star*, 13 January 1849, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ For Dexter generally see Morgan, *Folie à deux*; M. Watson, ‘William Dexter: “Forget him was impossible”’, *Art in Australia*, 24 (1976), pp. 378-82.

¹⁴⁵ F. Engels, *The condition of the working class in England* (St Albans, 1969 rep.), p. 255.

Thompson has argued that it is also rare to find direct Chartist criticisms of the monarch, because the

circumstances of Victoria's accession, combined perhaps with the image of a young mother, to some extent disarmed radical republicanism in the turbulent early decades of her reign ... Although most Chartists would have declared themselves to be republicans, they did not identify the throne as a seat of reaction or even a serious threat to reform.¹⁴⁶

Whilst Victoria herself may not have been the object of Chartist condemnation, her coronation was decried by the *Star* as a 'farce' attended by 'gaping idlers'.¹⁴⁷ William Hill, the paper's first editor, also occasionally berated the 'German beggar' Prince Albert.¹⁴⁸ As Antony Taylor points out, the higher echelons of the aristocracy were repeatedly lampooned in the Chartist press, and the pomp and ceremony of royal marriages, births and christenings were typically juxtaposed with the plight of a starving people.¹⁴⁹ The appearance of a royal child in 1846 was simply announced in the *Star* as the 'BIRTH OF ANOTHER ROYAL TAX-EATER'.¹⁵⁰

On these occasions defiant protests were sometimes made at public constitutional forums such as county meetings.¹⁵¹ According to Thomas Cooper, the real reason behind William Ellis' sentence of twenty-one years transportation meted out at the Staffordshire Special Commission in 1842 was not due to Ellis' alleged participation in a riot at Hanley, but his usurpation of the chair at such a meeting.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ D. Thompson, 'Queen Victoria, the monarchy and gender' in *Outsiders*, p. 176. For a comparative discussion in a post-Chartist context see also A. Taylor and L. Trainor, 'Monarchism and anti-monarchism: Anglo-Australian comparisons c. 1870-1901', *Social History*, 24 (1999), pp. 158-73.

¹⁴⁷ *Northern Star*, 30 June 1838, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ See Hill's ironic note to Prince Albert inserted in the 'READERS AND CORRESPONDENTS' column of the *Northern Star*, 10 October 1840, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ A. Taylor, 'Republicanism reappraised: anti-monarchism and the English radical tradition, 1850-1872' in J. Vernon, ed., *Re-reading the constitution: new narratives in the political history of England's long nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 156-7.

¹⁵⁰ *Northern Star*, 30 May 1846, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ For 'manly and spirited' Chartist protests at County meetings held in Staffordshire and Suffolk after a royal birth see *Northern Star*, 20 November 1841, p. 1; 24 December 1841, p. 5.

¹⁵² *English Chartist Circular*, 2 (1842-3), p. 371.

The 1842 national petition also contrasted the income of various members of the royal family with that of the ‘Producing Millions’: ‘Your petitioners have heard with astonishment, that the King of Hanover daily receives £57 10s., whilst thousands of the tax payers of this empire live on 2¾d. per head per day’.¹⁵³ Comparisons were also commonly made between the expenditure of the royal household and economical republican government in the United States. ‘The president of the Great Republic of America is content with one or two saddle horses’, remonstrated one Chartist in an open letter to Prince Albert exhorting him to give up his stables and dogs and embrace reform.¹⁵⁴ Later numbers of the *Circular* itself were emblazoned with the emblem of the American eagle, the motto ‘E PLURIBUS UNUM’, and figures such as George Washington were included in the pantheon of English, Scottish, Irish and European radical heroes.¹⁵⁵ Gregory Claeys has discussed the changing place of an idealised America within British radical rhetoric, arguing that the utopian image propagated by Paine had ‘become tarnished’ between 1820 and 1850, when a ‘negative model’ was popularised by Owenite, and later, Chartist critics.¹⁵⁶ Capitalism and slavery were the main points of contention. ‘America, in the true spirit of the word, is not a Republic’, argued the *Star*, ‘because its government sanctions a trade in human flesh’.¹⁵⁷ Whilst leaders such as O’Connor pointed to discrepancies between the ideals of republican democracy, and existing slavery, land ownership and ‘class tyranny’, the virtues of

¹⁵³ *English Chartist Circular*, 1 (1841-2), p. 157.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁵⁵ A nine chapter hagiography of Washington was published in the *English Chartist Circular* between 1841 and 1842. See also *Chartist Circular*, 9 November 1839, p. 27.

¹⁵⁶ G. Claeys, ‘The example of America a warning to England? The transformation of America in British radicalism and socialism, 1790-1850’ in Chase and Dyck, eds., *Living and learning*, pp. 67-80. On this theme see also J. Bronstein, ‘From the land of liberty to land monopoly: the United States in a Chartist context’ in O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts, eds., *The Chartist legacy* (Rendlesham, 1999), pp. 147-70.

¹⁵⁷ *Northern Star*, 27 February 1841, p. 3.

thrift and propriety so often associated with the American Presidency itself do not seem to have been tainted as this discursive shift took place.¹⁵⁸

‘France never approximated towards Republicanism’, continued the *Star* in its February 1841 discussion upon the meanings of a Republic, ‘because it held states, as colonial possessions, which should be free’.¹⁵⁹ The first French revolution, of course, had long been the subject of Jacobin inspiration. The Marseillaise Hymn was commonly sung at Chartist gatherings, and the cap of liberty and *tricolore* were nearly always to be seen at demonstrations. The French revolutionary heritage also became the source of intense contention between Chartists and their opponents. Consider the dialogue between one ‘Dick Dudgeon’ and ‘Farmer Steady’ in an anti-Chartist pamphlet published in 1839:

Dudgeon. The Chartists are the friends of the people.

Farmer. So they *tell* you; I judge by their conduct. Their meetings by night are to plot deeds of darkness that must end in mischief and misery.

Dudgeon. What the People’s Charter?

Farmer. Very fine words, Dudgeon; I’ve read, and often heard my father tell about the ‘Friends of the People,’ that some forty or fifty years ago, tried to make Old England like Young France. The French Democrats of that day used to talk and write like your Chartists about the Tree of Liberty, the Cap of Liberty, the right of all men to be equal. Their Tree of Liberty proved to be the gallows; the Cap was put on by the hands of the executioner; and they made tall men like you equal to short, by chopping their heads off with an instrument called the guillotine ... Aye, Dudgeon, you may well stare with astonishment; but you may read it all, and much more, in any good history of the French Revolution.¹⁶⁰

Confounded by Farmer Steady’s wisdom, Dudgeon eventually sees the folly of his enthusiasms, and cries: ‘No more of the People’s bloody Charter for me, but OLD ENGLAND FOR EVER’.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ For O’Connor see *Northern Star*, 3 March 1849, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Northern Star*, 27 February 1841, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰ Anon. (P.F. Aiken), *The People’s Charter; and old England forever* (London, 1839), p. 2. Italics in original. For a typical post-1848 defence of French ‘Red Republicanism’ see letter of ‘A CHARTIST’ in *Reynold’s Political Instructor*, 16 February 1850, p. 114.

¹⁶¹ Anon., *The People’s Charter*, p. 12. Emphasis in original.

It is unlikely that Steady's recommended narratives included the revolutionary defences written by Julian Harney or Bronterre O'Brien.¹⁶² 'I know nothing in literature like them' commented Alexander Somerville of O'Brien's 'politico-poetical maledictions' – he was 'a Chartist with a pen dipped in molten brimstone'.¹⁶³ Joseph Barker recalled hearing anti-Jacobin warnings in his youth:

Democracy was represented as the bloodiest of all powers, as the most murderous of all principles. The leaders of the Revolution were represented as devils incarnate ... The impression that was made on my own mind in early life, by the tales which I heard respecting the French Revolution, was, that Hell with all its horrors had been let loose, to revel in blood, and to torture mankind ... The same impression was made on the minds of millions ... I have, since then, read the history of the French Revolution ... I am especially indignant that I should have ever been led to join with the defamers of Democracy, and the advocates of the mis-named enlightened and constitutional government of England.¹⁶⁴

This evolution was reflected in Barker's conversion to Chartism, following a stormy career as a charismatic independent Methodist preacher, radical Unitarian and Owenite controversialist.¹⁶⁵ Although F.C. Mather implies that Barker and others only garnered an ephemeral influence, the overtly republican *People* appears to have gained substantial sales in 1848.¹⁶⁶ Barker also cuts a particularly interesting figure in terms of late-Chartist identity.

'I have a large double crown bill printed', the Salford newsagent George Smith informed Barker in 1848, 'in which I style you, as indeed I think you are, the "English

¹⁶² J.B. O'Brien, *The life and character of Maximilian Robespierre* (London, 1838). For Harney see Schoyen, *The Chartist challenge*, p. 62.

¹⁶³ A. Somerville, *Somerville's diligent life in the service of public safety in Britain* (Montreal, 1860), p. 217.

¹⁶⁴ *People*, 1(1848-9), p. 328.

¹⁶⁵ J.T. Barker, ed., *Life of Joseph Barker, written by himself* (London, 1880). See also Brook, 'Joseph Barker and *The People*, the true emigrant's guide'; Roberts, 'Joseph Barker and the radical cause, 1848-1851'.

¹⁶⁶ Brook, 'Joseph Barker and *The People*, the true emigrant's guide', pp. 375-6; Roberts, 'Joseph Barker and the radical cause, 1848-1851', p. 64. Barker, *Life*, p. 288 claimed that the *People* had a circulation of more than 20,000 per week in 1848.

Mitchel”, and that your work is the “*Boldest work of the Day*”¹⁶⁷ Tiverton Chartists informed their brethren later in the year that Barker’s journal was read aloud to their meeting, giving ‘much satisfaction, it being considered by those present that this publication was a valuable co-worker with the NORTHERN STAR in the great and glorious cause of justice and truth’.¹⁶⁸ As Steven Roberts points out, Barker declined to join the National Charter Association, although he did join William Lovett’s almost comatose People’s League.¹⁶⁹ ‘There are a great many take in your writings here’, wrote a ‘Young Chartist’, ‘But Sir, let me tell you, there are some Chartists here that think yours is the middle class move, for ... when you speak about any of the leading men, you never mention Thomas Slingsby Duncombe or F. O’Connor’.¹⁷⁰ In earlier numbers of the *People*, Barker had already been obliged to clarify his position:

I am ... fully convinced ... that nothing less than the whole Charter can secure good government ... But I cannot ... take part in opposing and annoying those who think the four points out of the six would answer the purpose ... I myself go farther in opinions than some Chartists go. I am myself a REPUBLICAN ... as EXTRAVAGANT a REPUBLICAN as can be found in France or America ... But do I therefore oppose the Chartists? No such thing ... I do not hesitate to avow myself a Chartist. I am not ashamed to be called a Chartist lecturer.¹⁷¹

Some of Barker’s correspondents were less bothered by such niceties: ‘I am an out and out Chartist, or Republican, or whatever you choose to call it’, one wrote, ‘but I expect little good from mere *political* changes’.¹⁷²

The association between republicanism and a form of ultra-Chartism in 1848 is particularly evident in emotionally-charged, oral and quasi-insurrectionary contexts.

¹⁶⁷ *People*, 1 (1848-9), p. 26. Italics in original. Smith also informed Barker that he had sold ‘16 or 17 dozens’ of the paper in one week.

¹⁶⁸ *Northern Star*, 23 September 1848, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ Roberts, ‘Joseph Barker and the radical cause, 1848-1851’, p. 65.

¹⁷⁰ *People*, 1 (1848-9), p. 54.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 64. Italics in original.

A government informant present at a meeting of about 500 people at the People's Institute, Manchester on 6 April 1848 reported that

Mr. Rankin ... advised them to be prepared for the worst, as their Convention was determined not to have the House of Commons without the Charter, or a Republic ... Mr. O'Dea 'Moved that a resolution be forwarded to their Convention to the effect that they would hold a meeting here at the same time that their Petition was presented in London, and to continue that meeting until they knew whether the Charter was granted, or if they must have a Republic.'¹⁷³

Six weeks or so after the humiliating rejection of the national petition in April, and upon hearing that Ernest Jones had been imprisoned, Halifax Chartists conducted a torch-lit meeting 'on their highest mountain', and threatened to 'erect barricades and ... if necessary proclaim the republic of Yorkshire and Lancashire'.¹⁷⁴

On the other hand, Joseph Rayner Stephens deployed a weary tone when recalling the Ashton rising of August 1848, when a police officer named Bright was killed by rioters:

On the fourteenth of August last there was a most out-of-the way, clumsily got up outbreak of lads and young fellows armed with pikes and pop-bottles, for the purpose of dethroning the queen and making one Jack Lattimore the president of the republic of Ashton.¹⁷⁵

Some months prior to these events Thomas Leigh, himself one of Ashton's new borough guard, had anticipated the outcome – albeit in rather different terms. Nor did Leigh have any doubts as to the source of renewed Chartist inspiration:

What must men such as myself *think*, as we take the oath and the truncheon, when magistrates, chief managers boast of signing the charter ... Nay, so daring have these *French republicans* become, under the patronage and support of local authority, that the constitutional shop-keeper who refuses to sign for the charter, and pay for the '*points*' or '*pikes*' is threatened and *booked*. Sunday meetings of tens of thousands, with bands of music playing through our streets in service time,

¹⁷³ HO 45/2410D.

¹⁷⁴ *Halifax Guardian*, 17 June 1848, cited in Thompson, *The Chartists*, p. 328.

¹⁷⁵ *Ashton Chronicle*, 17 March 1849, p. 5. For Stephens see T.M. Kemnitz and F. Jacques, 'J.R. Stephens and the Chartist movement', *International Review of Social History*, 19 (1974), pp. 211-27; M.S. Edwards, *Purge this realm: a life of Joseph Rayner Stephens* (London, 1994).

– town halls let for the avowed purpose of what the government regards as covert, incipient, revolution.¹⁷⁶

Interestingly, reports reprinted in the *Star* of the affray in which Bright died refer to the insurgents in quite different ways: the *Manchester Examiner* speaks of an uprising of Chartists, whilst the *Daily News* identifies the protagonists as Irish Confederates.¹⁷⁷

Events at Ashton in August, in fact, bring us to a political nexus that is quite important to understanding colonial democratic radicalism in the decade after 1848 – the precedent of close co-operation between Mitchelite Confederates and militant Chartists in London, Lancashire and the West Riding. ‘From all that has taken place in and around Manchester there is every reason to believe that some extensive arrangements had been made for a general and simultaneous movement amongst the Chartist and Repealers in this neighbourhood’, suggested a *Times* correspondent.¹⁷⁸ The disputes between O’Connor and O’Connell, and the Manchester street battles that took place between O’Connellite Repealers and Chartists in the early 1840s are well known.¹⁷⁹ Recently, however, historians such as Dorothy Thompson and Paul Pickering have pointed to the problems of demarcating between Irish nationalist and Chartist allegiance.¹⁸⁰ In 1843 Bronterre O’Brien had commenced a short-lived journal based around the twin issues of Chartism and Repeal (the *Poor Man’s Guardian and Repealer’s Friend*), and in 1848 two similar ventures were started by

¹⁷⁶ *Ashton Chronicle*, 15 April 1848, p. 7. Italics in original.

¹⁷⁷ *Manchester Examiner*, 15 August 1848, *Daily News*, 16 August 1848, both cited in the *Northern Star*, 19 August 1848, p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ *Times*, 19 August 1848, p. 8. See also Lowe, ‘The Chartists and the Irish Confederates: Lancashire, 1848’; Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford*, p. 96.

¹⁷⁹ See J.H. Treble, ‘O’Connor, O’Connell and the attitudes of Irish immigrants towards Chartism in the north of England, 1838-48’ in J. Butt and I.F. Clarke, eds., *The Victorians and social protest* (Newton Abbot, 1973), pp. 33-70.

¹⁸⁰ Thompson, ‘Ireland and the Irish in English radicalism before 1850’, pp. 139-42; Pickering, *Chartism and the Chartists in Manchester and Salford*, ch. 5.

Irish Chartists in the Manchester area.¹⁸¹ As Rachel O'Higgins acknowledged in 1961 (and Epstein reiterated in 1982) Feargus O'Connor repeatedly attempted to unify nationalists and democrats, despite his battles with O'Connell.¹⁸² In Dublin O'Connor's ally Patrick O'Higgins also made similar appeals to Repealers and Chartists.¹⁸³

The abuse directed at working-class democrats by O'Connell and the more patrician elements of Young Ireland, however, also took its toll.¹⁸⁴ At the Leeds Chartist Convention in August 1846, for example, the issue of co-operation between democrats and Repealers aroused some barely disguised antipathies:

Mr. Julian Harney ... was sick of appealing to the people of Ireland; still he thought an address which should set forth the real principles of Chartism, in reply to Mr. O'Connell's calumnies, would be well timed and advisable. He cautioned the delegates against supposing that the Young Ireland party would be likely to join the English democrats. Smith O'Brien and his friends were no advocates of democratic principles, all they wanted was an Irish middle class supremacy dignified by a national flag.¹⁸⁵

Harney's fears were well founded, as the address subsequently formulated by the Convention was haughtily rejected. 'We desire no fraternization between the Irish people and the Chartists', proclaimed the *Nation*, 'because some of their five points are to us an abomination'.¹⁸⁶ After the emergence of the Irish Confederation in early 1847, O'Connell's death, Feargus O'Connor's renewed exertions on Irish issues in the Commons, and the revolution in France in early 1848, however, enmities began to

¹⁸¹ These were the Stalybridge Chartist Bernard Treanor's *Truth-Teller* and George Archdeacon's *English Patriot and Irish Repealer*.

¹⁸² R. O'Higgins, 'The Irish influence in the Chartist movement', *Past and Present*, 20 (1961), p. 90; Epstein, *The lion of freedom*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁸³ See, for example, O'Higgins' address to Repealers in England in the *Northern Star*, 17 May 1845, p. 6.

¹⁸⁴ For Young Ireland generally see R. Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin, 1987).

¹⁸⁵ *Northern Star*, 8 August 1846, p. 5.

¹⁸⁶ *Nation*, 15 August 1846, cited in the *Northern Star*, 29 August 1846, p. 4.

dissipate.¹⁸⁷ In March 1848 O'Connor and Confederate delegates Thomas Meagher and Michael Doheny appeared on the same platform at large meetings held in Manchester and Oldham.¹⁸⁸ Back in Dublin, John Mitchel publicly admitted that 'we have been guilty of sad injustice in our abuse of the English democracy'.¹⁸⁹ Finally, following the arrests of most of the Confederate leadership (and, in particular, Mitchel's conviction and transportation under the newly legislated Crown and Government Security Act) came the joint insurrectionary conspiracies in London and Lancashire.¹⁹⁰

As John Belchem remarks, one of the ironies of the alliance of 1848 was that it undercut the legitimacy of the renewed policy of constitutionalist intimidation being pursued by Chartist leaders:

Refusing to distinguish between the Chartist platform and violence on the streets, *Punch* portrayed Chartism transmogrified into Irish rapine, pillage and massacre. *The Times* was appalled by 'that extravagance of wild sedition which, for want of any other adjective, must be denominated "Irish"'.¹⁹¹

Nevertheless, it should be noted that a hitherto dormant Irish Chartist movement also revived in 1847-8, before forming another alliance with Confederates.¹⁹² Although historians have generally asserted that Irish Chartism died in 1848, O'Connor made

¹⁸⁷ For Liverpool see L.R. Bisceglia, 'The threat of violence: Irish Confederates and Chartists in Liverpool in 1848', *The Irish Sword*, 14 (1981), pp. 207-15.

¹⁸⁸ These were held on St Patrick's day at the Free Trade Hall Manchester and at a camp meeting at Oldham Edge the following Sunday. See *Northern Star*, 25 March 1848, p. 1, 5; Gammage, *History*, pp. 297-8.

¹⁸⁹ *Nation*, 25 March 1848, cited in K.B. Knowlan, *The politics of repeal: a study in the relations between Great Britain and Ireland, 1841-50* (London, 1965), p. 185. See also Mitchel's *United Irishman*, 24 February 1848, p. 41; P. Pickering, "'Repeal and the Suffrage": Feargus O'Connor's Irish "mission," 1849-50' in O. Ashton, R. Fyson and S. Roberts, eds., *The Chartist legacy* (Rendlesham, 1999), p. 123.

¹⁹⁰ For Mitchel's experiences between his arrest in 1848 and his escape from Sydney to the United States see J. Mitchel, *Jail Journal* (Dublin, n.d.).

¹⁹¹ Belchem, 'Nationalism, republicanism and exile', p. 130; Belchem, *Popular radicalism*, pp. 91-4; *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 14 (1848), p. 240; *Times*, 10 April 1848, p. 4; 8 July 1848, p. 5. More generally see R. Swift, 'Heroes or Villains?: the Irish, crime, and disorder in Victorian England', *Albion*, 29 (1997), pp. 399-421.

¹⁹² Pickering, "'Repeal and the Suffrage'", pp. 123-4.

two little-known promotional trips to Ireland in 1849-50 in an attempt to 'regain the place among the leaders of Irish nationalism that he had forgone fifteen years before'.¹⁹³ On his second visit he attended the inaugural conference of the Irish Democratic Association, a radical organisation whose significance arguably has been neglected by historians.¹⁹⁴ In sum, it is clear that the burgeoning links between militant nationalists and democrats in both England and Ireland following O'Connell's death have been considerably underestimated.

Internationalist sympathy, the last element of late-Chartist identity with particular relevance to colonial radicalism, was also given much impetus by the revolutions of 1848. Whilst Chartism clearly declined steadily in Manchester after about 1842, in London the movement retained a significant presence well into the 1850s.¹⁹⁵ Here mass protests over the right to meet in public at Bishop Bonnor's Fields (which, as James Vernon has pointed out, had rich historical connotations as a place where Protestant heretics were executed) were accompanied by the Kossuth welcome demonstration of 1851.¹⁹⁶ The latter celebration, it should be remembered, probably dwarfed the famous Kennington Common demonstration of 10 April 1848.¹⁹⁷ The Chelsea Chartist H.R. Nicholls' participation has already been noted, and his description of the gathering gives an idea of its fervour:

Some said that there were 150,000, others twice that number, but all I remember was that there appeared to be a solid half mile of people. In all directions banners were visible above the sea of heads. Some were trade banners ... others were ferociously democratic with Chartist mottoes, whilst others were inscribed with legend that showed sympathy for Hungary and all other down-trodden nationalities

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-46. For the orthodox view see O'Higgins, 'The Irish influence in the Chartist movement', p. 89.

¹⁹⁵ For a comparative analysis of London and Manchester see Taylor, 'Modes of political expression'.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-66; Vernon, *Politics and the people*, p. 213.

¹⁹⁷ A hostile but remarkably evocative account of the London Kossuth demonstration can also be found in the *Times*, 4 November 1851, p. 5.

... To this enormous mass of people, who seemed to be swayed by one impulse, Kossuth made one of his famous speeches.¹⁹⁸

Mingled symbols of labour, democracy, and international fraternity; monster meetings, radical rhetoric and the persistence of Chartist organisational structures. This was the cultural inheritance Nicholls and thousands of other emigrants took with them to the Australian colonies. Radical-democratic politics did not lose its relevance or vitality once the British emigrant began the long journey southwards. Rather, it formed a rich inheritance – a ready set of arguments and political tools that could be applied to a range of contentious issues in colonial contexts.

In the first number of Julian Harney's *Red Republican* (1850), 'Howard Morton' argued that

CHARTISM in 1850 is a different thing to Chartism in 1840. The leaders of the English proletarians have proved that they are true Democrats, and no shams, by going ahead so rapidly within the last few years. They have Progressed from the idea of a simple *political reform* to the idea of a *Social Revolution*.¹⁹⁹

As A.R. Schoyen has argued, Howard Morton was probably Helen Macfarlane, the feminist radical who translated the first English publication of the *Communist Manifesto*.²⁰⁰ Whilst Morton's identity remains a mystery, it is indisputable that Chartist rhetoric and identity changed considerably over the 1840s. Although republican voices had always been part of Chartist political culture, they became more urgent in the post-1848 period. Other elements of Chartist rhetoric were also aggressively contested by a new generation of leaders. Just as O'Connor's sanity began to waver – and just as the Land Plan was being wound up in the Court of Chancery – the National Convention of April 1851 formally announced its celebrated

¹⁹⁸ Nicholls, *Chartist memoirs*, pp. 24-5.

¹⁹⁹ *Red Republican*, 22 June 1850 cited in Saville, *Ernest Jones*, p. 37. Italics in original.

²⁰⁰ Schoyen, *The Chartist challenge*, pp. 202-4; Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist movement*, pp. 197-8.

proto-socialist policy of land nationalisation.²⁰¹ Yet the agrarian language manifest in Victoria in the 1850s bore little resemblance to the new socialist proposals which Julian Harney had labelled ‘the Charter and something more’.²⁰² Rather, it was the more primal ideals of landed independence and security in the soil that gave colonial agrarianism its vitality. However, only by accounting for some of the complexities of ideological persistence *and* change can we begin to explore the Chartist rhetorical inheritance in colonial Australia.

²⁰¹ For O’Connor see L.M. Geary, ‘O’Connorite bedlam: Feargus and his grand-nephew, Arthur’, *Medical History*, 34 (1990), pp. 125-43. For the 1851 programme see *Times*, 23 April 1851, p. 7; Saville, *Ernest Jones*, pp. 257-63. Amongst other proposals, the programme called for the establishment of a Board of Agriculture; the restoration of poor, common, church and crown lands to the people with compensation to outgoing tenants for improvements; the repeal of the game laws; an empowerment of the state to purchase private land to enable tenants to be located either ‘individually, or in association’; and finally, the ‘complete Nationalization of the land ... as rapidly as existing interests can be extinguished by law, by death, by surrender, or by any means accordant with justice and a generous treatment of all classes’.

²⁰² *Democratic Review*, 1 (1849-50), pp. 349-52.