



What's in a Name?

Mr. and Mrs. Lovett and the Politics of Penny Fiction

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Abstract

Scholars of the most famous penny fiction title, James Malcolm Rymer's *The String of Pearls: A Romance* (1846–7) have speculated about the significance of the name of its villain, Sweeney Todd, but nothing has yet been said about the name of Todd's accomplice, Mrs. Lovett. Victorian readers would have known it as the name of the London Chartist leader William Lovett (1800–78). Primary author of the *People's Charter*, Lovett opposed the policies of the National Charter Association and its charismatic leader, Feargus O'Connor. Rymer's Mrs. Lovett is not a perfect allegory for Lovett the Chartist, but Rymer's constant invocation of the name Lovett contributes to a sophisticated critique of organised Chartism. Like Feargus O'Connor and William Lovett, *The String of Pearls's* Todd and Lovett engage in a mutually destructive dance that turns into an object lesson on solidarity and on the interdependence between nonviolent activism and violent rebellion. *The String of Pearls's* characterisation of Mrs. Lovett works to affirm the need for reform and to critique what many contemporaries saw as Chartism's biggest weakness: its lack of national-level solidarity. Rymer's characterisation of his "Lovett" suggests that he trusted penny fiction's working-class family target audience to read critically.

Keywords

Penny Fiction; Sweeney Todd, Chartism; William Lovett; James Malcolm Rymer; Feargus O'Connor; Edward Lloyd

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What's in a Name? Mr. and Mrs. Lovett and the Politics of Penny Fiction

Rebecca Nesvet

Scholarship on one of the most enduring titles in the penny fiction canon, *The String of Pearls, a Romance* (1846–7), written primarily by publisher Edward Lloyd's regular writer James Malcolm Rymer and issued from Lloyd's Salisbury Square firm, frequently speculates that Sweeney Todd's first name is meaningful in relation to English perceptions of Irishness, migration, and alterity in the 1840s.¹ The Irish legend of *Suibhne Geilt* ("Sweeney the Mad; Sweeney the Wild Man"), for example, has been convincingly posited as an important origin of Todd's first name (Mack 2007: 115). More recently, Todd has been read as a fictional "monstrous" Irish migrant and representative of the Other (Wester 2015: 156), but no critics comment on Rymer's choice of name for Todd's accomplice, Mrs. Lovett. In the immediate sources of the legend, such as "Joddrel the Barber" (1841) or "The Murders in the Rue de la Harpe" (1824), the pastry-making accomplice has a different name, or no name at all. In the 1840s, however, "Lovett" was a widely recognisable name. In fact, it was unequivocally associated with a prominent, controversial public figure that penny fiction authors expected their readers to know about: the Cornish-born, London-based labour leader and political activist William Lovett (1800–78), the primary author of the *People's Charter* (Chase 2007: 8). In March 1841, Lovett founded the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People, which opposed the policies of the National Charter Association, then led by the Northern leader (and *Northern Star* publisher) Feargus O'Connor, creating a "schism" (Vargo 2018: 127). The two factions were distinguished by a tactical and ethical disagreement, with O'Connor promoting "physical force Chartism," which did not exclude violent resistance as a potential means of obtaining the Charter, and Lovett advocating for the far less popular, less violent, London-centric "moral force Chartism" (Thompson 1984: 24).

¹ Although throughout most of the twentieth century *The String of Pearls* was attributed to Thomas Peckett Prest or to Prest or Rymer, Helen R. Smith (2002) demonstrates that Rymer was the primary author responsible for it. I have shown that the attribution to Prest is traceable only to an item of gossip circulated by George Augustus Sala, which Sala never intended to be received as literary history, and which is unverifiable Nesvet (2020).

The String of Pearls's depiction of the duo's toxic dynamic suggests that the distinction between moral force Chartism and physical force Chartism is illusory. Both movements pursued the same goals – and Rymer implies that they are more methodologically similar than they were willing to admit. It is now known that penny fiction authors, including Lloyd's employees, wrote for a radicalised public, had to acknowledge radical discourse, and often participated in it as well, albeit largely because they aimed to end up on “the right side of history” (Breton 2021: 3-4). Rymer's creation of “Mrs.” Lovett and her tonsorial collaborator is a prime example of this phenomenon. Read in this cultural context, the name of *String of Pearls* character Mrs. Lovett would have invoked the figure of William Lovett. Rymer's Mrs. Lovett is not a perfect allegory for Lovett the Chartist, but she plays a provocatively overdetermined role in Rymer's serial, drawing attention to her surname. I argue that Rymer's constant invocation of the name Lovett contributes to a sophisticated critique of organised Chartism that has thus far eluded scholars. Like Feargus O'Connor and William Lovett, *The String of Pearls's* Todd and Lovett engage in a mutually destructive dance that turns into an object lesson on solidarity and on the interdependence between nonviolent activism and violent rebellion. Via this discourse, and like much of the rest of the contents of Lloyd's *People's Periodical and Family Library* (hereafter abbreviated to *PPFL*), *The String of Pearls's* characterisation of Mrs. Lovett works to affirm the dire need for political reform and to critique what many contemporaries saw as Chartism's biggest weakness: Chartism's lack of solidarity at the level of national leadership. Rymer's characterisation of his “Lovett” suggests that he trusted the working-class family target audience of the *People's Periodical* to detect political allusion and tried to teach that audience to evaluate its political leaders critically – a prerequisite, as the historical William Lovett and other nineteenth-century radicals contended, for well-utilised suffrage.

Mr. Lovett

In November 1846, Lovett's moral force Chartism had few adherents outside London, but he was a major figure in the national news, and likely well known to the radicalised working-class public that Lloyd targeted with the *PPFL*. A ropemaker from Cornwall, Lovett came to London in the 1820s in search of employment. He found it as a journeyman cabinet-maker, and via introductions made by other cabinet-makers, particularly one named Todd, became involved in radical politics. Intriguingly, Lovett called the “journeyman by the name of David Todd, a native of Peebles ... one of the most intelligent, kind-hearted, and best-disposed men I ever met with (Lovett [1870] 1920: 69). Todd mentored Lovett in cabinetry and radical politics “with all the benevolence and anxiety of a father” (69). However, the public might not have known of this relationship in the 1840s and it is unclear if Rymer did. It has come down to us via a memoir that Lovett published two decades later.

Very well known, on the other hand, was Lovett's radicalism. By the early 1830s, Lovett was declaring himself opposed to any kind of alliance between workers and the middle classes (Wiener 1989: 23). In 1836, he founded the London Working Men's Association and served as its leader. In 1839, he wrote most of the People's Charter. On 4 July 1839, a major Chartist demonstration at Birmingham's Bull Ring happened despite laws barring public assembly. Lovett and fellow Chartist John Collins were convicted of sedition and imprisoned for a year, during which time they composed the influential pamphlet *Chartism, a New Organization of the People* (1840). This made them villains to much of the middle-class press but heroes in the Chartist media. Before Lovett's release from prison, however, he had been eclipsed in the eyes of the Northern, industrial Chartist majority by his rival O'Connor. After his political downfall, Lovett strenuously advocated for working-class

education as a means of liberation and demonstration to the electorate of working-class suitability for suffrage and his book *Chartism* contains one of the most detailed theories of education produced by the movement's members (Vargo 2018: 125). Lovett's advocacy of this plan, therefore, made radical pedagogy central to moral force Chartism.

One of the spaces in which working-class people obtained learning was the coffee shop. Lovett was for a time the proprietor of a shop that disseminated radical self-education and dialogue alongside food and drink. Many metropolitan eateries and public houses served as spaces of political discourse, beginning in the seventeenth century with coffee houses that functioned as "penny universities," offering reading material, print and oral news, and spontaneous conversation along with the coffee (Cowan 2005: 87). By the 1790s, public houses of various kinds fostered a decidedly radical "plebeian counter-public sphere" (Haywood 2004: 6). For instance, the London Democratic Association, founded by the Chartist George Julian Harney in 1838, "drew its inspiration from the 'Jacobin' political tradition of the 1790s" and in keeping with that tradition met in taverns, including the Crown & Anchor Tavern in the Strand and the White Conduit House tavern in Islington (Wiener 1989: 42). Following this trend, in 1827, Lovett opened the London Co-operative Society's First London Co-operative Trading Association in Greville Street, Clerkenwell (Wiener 1989: 14). While this name makes the establishment seem more like a grocery store, Lovett served meals, drinks, and radical reading. In 1833, he took out an advertisement in the firebrand Henry Hetherington's *Poor Man's Guardian* touting his "coffee and reading-room," where guests might "converse freely on all subjects" while eating snacks and reading newspapers, from five in the evening until eleven (Haywood 2004: 129). The advertisement is worth reprinting in full, to reveal the outwardly radical nature of this coffee shop:

LOVETT'S COFFEE HOUSE. 19, Greville Street, Hatton Garden.

W. LOVETT begs to inform his Friends and the Public, that he has opened, as Coffee and Reading Rooms the above Premises, lately occupied by the First London Co-operative Society. In addition to the Papers, and Periodicals of the Day, they will have access to a Library, containing most of the Works of Godwin, Owen, Bentham, Paine, Thompson, Cobbett, Carpenter, Ensor, Say, Voltaire, A. Smith, and a variety of other popular writers. Refreshments to be had at the usual prices.

N.B. – The *Time*, *Chronicle*, and *True Sun*, to be disposed of the day after publication, at half-price, also, *Cobbett's Register* on the Thursday.

("Lovett's Coffee House" 1833: 316)

Not only did Lovett's coffee house provide working people with a nearly-free library. The advertisement lists several texts that were essentially the emergent radical canon, including sometime Jacobins and anarchists, inspirations to French and American revolutions, rebels against the "taxes on knowledge" such as William Carpenter, and key figures in the era of Reform.² Lovett fed the masses with victuals and ideas, sometimes served together.

It is perhaps worth pointing out that William Lovett was not the only Lovett who operated a coffee house that made the news during the Chartist era and had incendiary associations. In June 1840, while William Lovett was serving the final month of his year-long sentence for sedition and his wife was running his co-operative concern, a mentally ill

² The coffee shop was not Lovett's only intellectual business venture. In 1847, he went into partnership with middle-class reformer William Howitt as the publisher of *Howitt's Journal*, with the explicit purpose of liberating workers from various forms of tyranny. Founded partway through *The String of Pearls's* serial composition, *Howitt's* was briefly (1847–8) one of Lloyd's direct competitors for the people's pennies.

young man, Edward Oxford, attempted to assassinate Queen Victoria. It soon transpired that he had invented a wholly fictitious reactionary secret society, “Young England,” of which he insisted he was an associate – and that he had spent time on the morning of his assassination attempt in an establishment known as Lovett’s coffee house. It seems this was not *William* Lovett’s coffee house. In the index of the definitive modern popular history of Victoria’s eight attempted assassinations, the coffee-shop proprietor is identified only as “Lovett, Mr.” (Murphy 2012: 53). Had he been William Lovett the Chartist, not only would Murphy likely have deduced that, but, back in 1840, the mainstream media would have had an absolute jubilee.

The press reported on Oxford’s movements without disambiguating the two coffee-serving Lovetts. The *London Times* and, reprinting the *Times* report, the *Morning Standard*, state simply that the café was “kept by a person called Lovett” (“Attempt to Assassinate the Queen” 1840: 4); surely, William Lovett was too famous to be described as an indefinitely article “person.” The *Morning Chronicle* provides more detail, but no first name for its Lovett:

Oxford had been in the habit of using Mr. Lovett’s coffee house, in the London-road, for the last three weeks, and that he told Mr. Lovett that he was looking after a situation, and it was his invariable practice to look over the advertisements in the Morning Advertiser ... On Wednesday, the day upon which he made the diabolical attempt, he called at Mr. Lovett’s at three o’clock, and remained there reading the newspapers until half-past three o’clock, but Mr. Lovett observed no peculiarity in Mr. Oxford’s conversation or manners, and did not observe that he had pistols in his possession, although, from the testimony of his sister, he must then have had them about his person.

(3)

Rymer probably paid attention to contemporary reports on Oxford’s assassination attempt, trial, and incarceration. These events are discussed in an article credited to the Scottish Society of Solicitors that Rymer printed in his short-lived 1842 shilling monthly *The Queen’s Magazine*, titled “Why is the Queen’s Life Attempted?” and, in 1845–6, Oxford is recalled in the second series of George W.M. Reynolds’s bestselling penny serial *The Mysteries of London*, in the character of the impressionable would-be assassin Henry Holford. Rymer may have realised that the Lovett’s coffee house that entertained Oxford might be confused by the unscrupulous reader with the establishment once kept by Mr. Lovett the Chartist agitator, the Mr. Lovett more often noticed by the papers. In early 1840s, Lovett’s shop, whichever Lovett that phrase connoted, was a politicised space.

Chartism in Salisbury Square

At the same time, Lloyd was profoundly ambivalent about Chartism. It is a critical commonplace that Lloyd at some point in his life identified as a Chartist (Thompson 1971: 10; Winston 2006: 122).³ Certainly, he had professional links with Chartism. Carpenter, a radical journalist jailed during the 1830s over his resistance to “taxes on knowledge” and later the editor of the newspaper *The Charter* (1839–40), also edited *Lloyd’s Penny Weekly Miscellany* in 1844, as his application to the Royal Literary Fund application states (Carpenter 1861). However, with Lloyd’s periodicals more widely available on account of the digitisation revolution, critics have redefined Lloyd’s relationship with Chartism.

³ The incalculable loss of the petitions on which millions of Victorian Britons inscribed their commitments to the ideals enumerated in the Charter make it difficult to tell for certain whether some figures of that era consciously identified as Chartists, and, if so, precisely when.

This recent “redefinition” of Lloyd’s politics includes the facts that, from 1842 onward, Lloyd’s major journalistic venture, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, championed political liberalism, the ideology that conceded a need for reform without endorsing the Chartist programme; accused leading activists such as O’Connor of making undeliverable promises and aggrandising himself; and claimed that the periodical’s *String of Pearls* endorsed liberal and not radical politics (McWilliam 2019: 206-9).⁴ Lloyd’s serial as also been interpreted as an opportunistically pro-labour fable in which workers are exploited only by their immediate employers, not the entire socio-political system, and that the 1850 expanded version *The String of Pearls, or the Barber of Fleet-Street* certainly does not seek to achieve structural social reform (Breton 2021: 99).

Close-reading the contents of the *People’s Periodical and Family Library* reveals that it was indeed a liberal paper that envisioned political reform without seriously challenging middle-class privilege. It supported *some* of moral force Chartism’s goals but condemned revolutionary action. A considerable amount of the *PPFL*’s content was reprinted from American periodicals and lauded the United States for its supposedly democratic government. One such piece, “Industry and Integrity,” asserts that a “freeborn American” needed no “high blood” because, by virtue of America’s laws, he was “a sovereign and a prince,” and “[t]here is nothing possible to man which industry and integrity will not accomplish,” as America was on its way to being “the mightiest, most powerful” nation and was already “the freest land beneath the circle of the sun” (“Industry and Integrity” 1846: 174). This piece genuflects to British radicalism via its rejection of the aristocratic principle of “high blood” and of monarchy, but then berates Lloyd’s working-class reader with the liberal bootstrap narrative that, in making individuals responsible for the prosperity or lack thereof, denies the power of structural inequities.

The *PPFL*, then, was above all conciliatory, an attitude that is evidenced in the short article on “Quarrels,” (1846: 5) that counselled against quarrelling with people, which appeared in its first number. Also conciliatory is the following commonplace, a very much abridged extract from the Elizabethan theologian Richard Hooker’s book *On the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1597):

Lewd and wicked custom, beginning perhaps at the first amongst few, afterwards spreading unto greater multitudes, and so continuing from time to time, may be of force even in plain things to smother the light of natural understanding, because men will not bend their wits to examine, whether things, wherewith they have been accustomed, be good or evil, and thus by progress of time, wicked custom prevails, and is kept as a law. The authority of rulers, the ambition of craftsmen, and such like means thrusting forward the ignorant and increasing their superstition.

(61)

At first glance, this passage seems radical. A generation earlier, Percy Bysshe Shelley had railed in various radical poems against the Tyrant Custom. When “lewd and wicked custom” is enshrined in “law,” the law requires reform. However, by equating monarchic tyranny with “the ambition of craftsmen” in late 1846, the *PPFL*’s pseudo-Hooker critiques Chartism, a movement fuelled by artisans’ (or craftsmen’s) desire for political enfranchisement. Also, that Chartism, particularly under O’Connor’s leadership, promoted rule by the ignorant or the mob was a familiar anti-Chartist canard.

⁴ This newspaper underwent a few slight name changes throughout its long history; scholars usually denominate it by the abbreviation *Lloyd’s Weekly*.

Equally telling of the *PPFL*'s politics was its representation of the French Revolution, a frequent topic of its historical coverage. The short sentimental sketch "The Aristocrat's Proof of Gratitude," set in Lyons in 1791, features a beautiful French aristocratic woman who is caught in the street without her identity card, arrested, and threatened with imprisonment and, implicitly, immediate execution. A revolutionary guard, of aristocratic background but estranged from his illiberal father and "educated" to respect human rights, saves her, falls in love with her, and loses her, retaining only her signet ring. The revolutionaries are no more sympathetic than those of *A Tale of Two Cities* or even *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. A mindless mob bent on committing vengeful violence under cover of state policy, they say things like "politeness is an aristocrat's virtue and we are *sans culottes*" ("Aristocrat's Proof" 1846: 95). They debate "the question of massacring the lukewarm revolutionists," who are "lukewarm" because they will not execute Marie Antoinette (94). The revolutionaries' apparent lack of humanity compromises their ethical position. To Lloyd's family audience, such lack of sympathy for a tragic woman and mother of young children might have seemed perverse.

Lloyd's authors probably had slightly more leeway to explore their own political outlooks than they have thus far been given credit for, but the corporate voice of the *PPFL* generally distrusted historical revolutions. Its contributors frequently praised the United States, but were ambivalent towards the French and Haitian Revolutions. The paper includes a story, "The Settler's Home, or War Abroad," set during the Revolutionary War, in which that conflict is introduced by the third-person omniscient narrator as "that unhappy war in America" ("Settler's War" 1846: 102).⁵ This tale involves lovers from opposite sides of the war who end up happily married because they manage to reconcile their factionally opposed families.⁶ A regular feature of the *PPFL* that illustrates its anti-revolutionism is a "Chronology" which showed historical events that happened in the week of the number's publication. Many of these events are revolutions. For instance, in 1791, "The National Legislature decrees that all the Bourbons shall quit France in three days" ("Chronology" 1846: 168) or "1791. Insurrection of 35,000 negroes in the Island of St. Domingo, when upwards of 500 whites were massacred" (104). That this insurrection was the Haitian Revolution, which led to the founding of a country that by 1846 was very much here to stay, goes unmentioned. So, too, does the fact that these revolutionaries rose up to free themselves from literal slavery. Lloyd's paper treats English rebels in the same way, saying of the Luddites: "1811. Serious riots at Nottingham, occasioned principally by the journeymen weavers destroying articles of machinery, which diminished the demand for labour" (104). What conditions "occasioned principally" the workers' despair are not mentioned. The style in which the "Chronology" feature reports on natural disaster (104) makes human misery seem random, not the result of political design.

A particularly problematic example of the *PPFL*'s conciliatory politics is the story "Her Mother's Child," credited to one Julia A. Fletcher. Published in the week of 19 December 1846, at the height of Ireland's Great Famine, this sentimental story concerns rural Irish agricultural workers. On the surface, Fletcher promotes sympathy for the Irish and outrage at anti-Irish racism, but subsequently veers in a disturbing direction. Hero Dennis O'Flane is "a genuine Irishman" who is brave, generous, enthusiastic, and hard-working – exemplifying the so-called Protestant work ethic (Fletcher 1846: 167). The point, apparently, is that work

⁵ For a similar point about Reynolds's views distinct from those of his contributors, see Stephen Basdeo and Mya Driver (2022: 111).

⁶ William Thackeray utilises the same premise in a later work, *The Virginians: A Tale of the Last Century* (1857–9).

makes people healthy – even in the context of the Great Famine.⁷ More outrageous is Fletcher’s claim that the O’Flane family’s “frugal fare was sufficient for their real need, nor did they wish for more” (167). Tempted to emigrate to America, Dennis O’Flane resolutely remains in Ireland. In this alternate Ireland, even the Great Famine is a problem that can be solved by working-class industry, humility, and good will. Its structural causes, much less any revolutionary response to them, occupy no place in Miss Fletcher’s world-view, which Lloyd, editing the paper, proved happy to publicise.

Lovett and O’Connor in Lloyd’s Journalism

Not only did Lloyd attempt to defuse the outrage and anger that Chartism provoked, he critiqued elements of radical political culture, including Lovett and O’Connor’s projects, though not in the *PPFL*, which seems to have carefully avoided direct representation of contemporary politics. During the same decade, *Lloyd’s Weekly* commented at length upon the issues of the day, usually in anonymous editorials implicitly associated with Lloyd as the paper’s showcase figure.⁸ One particularly telling *Weekly* piece, an 1844 letter-to-the-editor complaining about O’Connor’s Land Plan, represents William Lovett as the dupe of O’Connor. The letter writer indicates this by demanding a refund from O’Connor for a share in the Land Plan and signing the letter “William Wish-I-May-Get-It,” of Lambeth (“Chartist Mousetrap” 1844: 9). In 1846, the year in which *The String of Pearls* began its serialisation, the *People’s Periodical* featured a letter from the Chartist Thomas Cooper that attacks the “unbounded confidence in O’Connor” that the people entertain and Cooper all but accuses O’Connor of embezzlement from the Land Plan. “Remember that he has purchased the Herrings gate estate in his own name, with your money, and without asking your leave,” Cooper states. He asks the “good, kind, confiding people” who have invested in the land scheme:

Where is your money? None of you know. It has been paid to O'Connor... he has got an estate with part of it: another part of it he uses to carry on the *Northern Star*.
(“Land Society” 1846: 5)

By October of 1847, some months after the serial run of *The String of Pearls* concluded, another editorialist, signing his name as Joshua Hanson of Shoe-Lane, Fleet-street, informed the readers of *Lloyd’s Weekly* that O’Connor’s National Land Company is

an illegal partnership, which renders every member of it individually liable... for all the debts and liabilities that may be contracted for or on behalf of the concern ... you have received moneys without keeping accounts or giving receipts.
(“National Land Company” 1847: 5)

In Lloyd’s view, as indicated by his decision to publish this letter, neither Parliament nor the enfranchised exploited the working-class people who paid into the Land Plan as insidiously as O’Connor and his subordinates did.

⁷ During the Great Famine, the conviction that even useless work is a moral good informed the forced building of the “Famine Roads,” or roads to nowhere, by Irish paupers. The Famine Roads became one of the Victorian era’s clearest symbols of wasteful, irrational policy. See Fegan (2016: 54).

⁸ Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston discuss the nature of the “showcase editor” (2003: 19).

Besides critiquing Lovett and O'Connor, Lloyd found their juxtaposition within the Chartist movement dangerous – because they jeopardised Chartism's goals. In November 1844, *Lloyd's Weekly* carried an editorial that states that given Chartism's "spirit of opposition, or reform" of "avarice" and "corruption," it is unsurprising that those "then in power" have tried to infiltrate and weaken it ("Independent Chartist Essays" 1844: 4). The enfranchised would go to "cruel and bloody" lengths to "silence the advocates" of change that threaten their monopoly on political power (4). This was not an unusually conservative perspective: in the same year, the committed radical Reynolds (*A Sequel to Don Juan*) critiqued Chartism for having supposedly lost its way (Basdeo and Driver 2022: 77). Lloyd, having caught the committed Chartist reader's sympathy, argued that Chartists should behave themselves in public. While judicious Chartists should act within the law, certain leading members had damaged the movement by splintering into factions which idolised their respective leaders, neither of whom were very admirable. This was not an anti-Chartist position, because Chartists themselves levelled the same critique about their movement's dissensions. For instance, the Chartist Robert Gammage did; his history of the Chartist movement, first composed in 1845 and updated in the 1890s, established in the British public consciousness an analeptic vision of the Chartist movement in which its factionalism is its Achilles' heel (Sanders 2009: 88). Ultimately, Lloyd's editorialist concludes, the only beneficiary of the Chartist movement's internecine chaos was the government, knowing that "Chartism can never be permanently injured except by the Chartists themselves" ("Independent Chartist Essays" 1844: 4). With this rhetoric, *Lloyd's Weekly* condemns O'Connor and critiques Lovett, but does not jettison the Chartist movement or its essential goals, working class suffrage and the improvement of working-class living conditions. Rather, Lloyd declares himself more a true Chartist or friend of the Chartists than either of them.

Lovett, O'Connor, and *The String of Pearls*

Lovett and Todd's relational dynamic seems central to this project of Lloyd's. In *The String of Pearls*, the juxtaposition of Lovett and Todd as a fatally disorganised joint concern suggests well-circulated images of the Chartist leaders Lovett and O'Connor, implying that these men's Chartisms do not provide effective solutions to workers' problems. The character of Lovett the pie-seller is central to the premise of *The String of Pearls*, and from the beginning of the 1846–7 *People's Periodical* version of the serial she reveals a backstory that links her with the cataclysmic radicalism of late Enlightenment Paris. Although neither Lovett nor her shop are seen until the fourth chapter of *The String of Pearls*, in the first chapter, Tobias mentions the shop for the first time. When Todd orders his young servant Tobias not to divulge anything he sees in the shop, on pain of death, Tobias swears "I wish sir, I may be made into pies at Lovett's in Bell-Yard if I so much as says a word" (Collins 2010: 4). From the beginning of the serial, then, it seems that "Lovett's" is a prominent local institution. Like William Lovett's shop, Rymer's Lovett's is famous not just for the food, but for conversation. "The counter at Lovett's pie shop was in the shape of a horse-shoe," Rymer explains, "and it was the custom of young bloods from the Temple and Lincoln's-Inn to sit in a row upon its edge while they partook of the delicious pies, and chatted gaily about one concern or another" (Collins 2010: 26). The conversation overwhelms: "the din of tongues was prodigious" (26) and as these young men are law students, law clerks, and lawyers, surely their conversation touches upon politics. In 1786, the American revolution is accomplished and the French revolution is in the immediate

future, about to break out. People on both sides of the Channel are reading radical French philosophy. One of those people is a young middle-class lawyer named Maximilien Robespierre. Meanwhile, in Britain, radicals including ‘Citizen’ attorney Joseph Ritson were also visiting coffee shops (Basdeo 2021). By the 1820s, the coffee shop was widely recognised as a space where radical talk took place, including between large groups seated at long communal tables (Parolin 2010: 5; Barrell 2004: 205-7).

This context might seem coincidental but for the fact that Rymer explicitly associated Mrs. Lovett with pre-revolutionary French philosophical culture, the kind of culture that 1790s radicals recreated in London coffee shops and taverns. Confiding in Todd, Lovett pines to take the money that she had made from the shop and return “to the saloons of Paris” (Collins 2010: 241). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the words “saloon” and “salon” were interchangeable, both suggesting a spacious room and both connoting urbane stylishness, with “the grand saloon” a recognisable phrase (*OED*). The “saloons of Paris” therefore shaped the cosmopolitan monster Mrs. Lovett. She has a material impact on jurisprudence, too, acting as a kind of Circe of the legal community. She distracts the lawyers so that they miss their court dates:

To eat one of the Lovett’s pies was such a provocative to eat another, that many persons who came to lunch stayed to dine, wasting more than an hour, perhaps, because of precious time, and endangering – who knows to the contrary? – the success of some law-suit thereby.

(Collins 2010: 26)

This Lovett is a disruptive Frenchified influence upon the heart of the English legal system – or, at least, she has taken on this role in order to make a neat profit. Furthermore, her cannibal pie-making would have reminded some metropolitan English readers of the Reign of Terror. Robert L. Mack persuasively discusses Rymer’s likely sources for this idea, including the pseudo-historical Scottish cannibal Sawney Beane, whom another Lloyd publication mentions, and Dickens’s *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843), with its solitary reference to the urban legend that there are London “streets where ... countrymen are murdered” and “made meat pies of” (Dickens [1863-4] 1968: 649, discussed in Mack 2007: 152-3).⁹ But what would original readers have made of Tobias’s odd oath, and the gossip that underpins it? Early nineteenth-century caricature repeatedly associate cannibalism with Jacobinism. James Gillray’s cartoon *Un Petit Souper à la Parisienne, or, a Family of Sans-culotts [sic] Refreshing after the Fatigues of the Day* (1792) depicts *sans-culottes* in revolutionary peaked caps eating the head of a guillotined aristocrat, while a *sans-culotte* woman roasts a baby on a spit, under a wall decorated with political graffiti. In 1798, William Wadsworth’s pamphlet *The Cannibal’s Progress, or, the Dreadful Horrors of French Invasion, as Displayed by the Republican Officers and Soldiers, in their Perfidy, Rapacity, Ferociousness and Brutality, Exercised towards the Innocent Inhabitants of Germany*, illustrated by Anthony Aufrer, inaccurately accused Napoleon’s officers of committing cannibalism in Swabia. William Cobbett published 25,000 copies (Daniel 2010: 352). In the following year, the periodical *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* reinforced this image. Its Paris correspondent reported that the sixth anniversary of the “Murder” of Louis XVI “was celebrated at Paris with all the savage joy of Republican Festivity,” including speeches characterised by “cannibal sentiments” (“Paris” 1798: 460). All this made the French Revolutionary cannibal a viral image in London political discourse.

⁹ “The revolting history of Sawney Beane” is mentioned in passing in the tale of “Grimes Bolton, the English Cannibal,” in Lloyd’s *Lives of the Most Notorious Highwaymen, Footpads, and Murderers* (1837: 1). As an “English” cannibal with a henchwoman, Grimes Bolton anticipates Sweeney Todd more closely than the Scottish Beane does.

Although Rymer's Mrs. Lovett is arguably a proto-Jacobin *salonnière* displaced to London, or at least has commercialised some aspects of that vocation, she departs from the British stereotype of the Jacobin on account of her professed, hypocritical aversion to violence – the definitive characteristic of Lovett's moral force Chartism. She never personally, manually kills anyone, not even the pie-maker trapped in her cellar who makes it clear that he conspires against her. Instead, she relies upon Todd to commit all the violence that makes her business a success, and to do it out of her sight (Collins 2010: 237). Todd recognises her nonviolence and praises her "philosophic mode of settling the question" (243). A Paris-style revolutionary and London victualer who professes a philosophical commitment to nonviolence, Lovett shares some key characteristics with the coffee-house keeper and "moral force" agitator William Lovett. Like Lovett, she believes in the power of education to effect self-liberation and to combat tyranny. Mark Ingestrie is unusual among her pie-makers because he is a law education dropout, as we learn from one of Todd's victims, Mark's uncle Mr. Grant. Lovett tells Todd that she fears Ingestrie's discontent: he is "the most dangerous" of her series of captive workers because he is "the most educated" (Collins 2010: 237). Also, the dynamic of her relationship with Todd somewhat suggests that of William Lovett and O'Connor. In the world outside Mrs. Lovett's cellar, she has no more interaction with the violent Todd than William Lovett seemed to have with his political rival Feargus O'Connor. Todd and Lovett are never seen together, but his willingness to commit the violence that she eschews advances their shared goals. Moral force Chartism depended for its efficacy upon the threat of political violence inherent in physical force Chartism, as both O'Connor and the mainstream, anti-Chartist press emphasised (Vanden Bossche 2010: 34). Crucially, it was understood, from Thomas Carlyle's *Chartism* (1840) and other sources, that the moral force Chartists could pursue their aims only by threatening to withhold violence if they were taken seriously by Parliament, a threat that relied for its credibility on the physical force Chartists. Mrs. Lovett similarly depends upon Sweeney Todd's violence to stock her larder and control her staff.

If readers are expected to free-associate from the passive murderer Mrs. Lovett to the nonviolence promoter Mr. Lovett, Todd might suggest Feargus O'Connor, the gruff Irish proponent of physical-force Chartism, who dominated the movement from c.1840 onwards, quarrelling with and then marginalising Lovett. Notably given Sweeney Todd's name, O'Connor was reputed "vain of his half-mythical descent from Irish kings" (McDonagh 1888: 85). Rymer might have known that "Sweeney" was an Irish king because the first modern translation of the *Buile Suibne*, or "Mad King Sweeney," by the Dublin academic John O'Donovan, was published in 1842 (Sailer 1998: 116). Todd also shares with O'Connor an association with the North of England. O'Connor represented a constituency in the North of England and published the *Northern Star* in Leeds; in Rymer's 1850 expansion of *The String of Pearls* states, Todd is "a native of the North of England" (Rymer 1850: 555). By itself, this detail is inconsequential, but an ancestrally Irish representative of "the North of England" who leagues with Mrs. Lovett to kill mostly lawyers acquires a whiff not only of Shakespeare's Jack Cade, but of the more modern activist O'Connor.¹⁰

¹⁰ Shakespeare's Jack Cade famously approves of the rebel Dick the Butcher's plan to "first... kill all the lawyers" (2 *Henry VI* 4.2 line 68). Some of the earliest histories of the Jack Cade rebellion were produced after the advent of the Robin Hood phenomenon, and so may have been shaped by "the specter of Robin Hood... the outlaw who fights for the common good of the people" (Kaufman 2009: 175-6). In many medieval accounts, beginning with John Benet's *Chronicle*, Cade is the champion of "the people" and the enemy of oligarchy (Kaufman 2019: 17-18). The 1840s saw Jack Cade and Wat Tyler lionised and demonised as antecedents of the Chartists (Basdeo 2018: 116-17).

Mrs. Lovett and Sweeney Todd find nonviolence unprofitable or impossible, but *The String of Pearls* emphatically endorses nonviolent protest, a key tenet of moral force Chartism, but only – again, as in Lloyd’s journalism – as part of a philosophical outlook that is far more liberal than radical. When Mark Ingestrie, the captive pie-maker and indicative exploited worker (Breton 2021: 1999), realises that Mrs. Lovett and an unknown accomplice plot against his life, he considers raising violent rebellion against them. He shouts for “his enemies” to appear and fight with him, exclaiming “[i]f I am to die, let me die with some weapon in my hand, as a brave man ought, and I will not complain” (Collins 2010: 161). He reiterates the conviction that bravery consists in physical struggle. “What can I do?” he asks himself:

I am in her power, but shall I tamely submit? No, no, not while I have my arms at liberty, and strength enough to wield one of these long pokers that stir the coals in the ovens. How foolish of me not to think before that I had such desperate weapons with which perchance to work my way to freedom.

(247)

This dialogue initially seems to imply that Mark plans to attack Mrs. Lovett with a poker, but by the end of the sentence (“work”) it is clear that he sees the “weapons” only as tools. Ultimately, he uses the poker to tunnel through the wall. That the poker *could* be used as a weapon, not a tool, Rymer repeatedly emphasises, for instance by calling it “javelin-like” and comparing it to a “battering-ram” (248). Mark, however, does not think of tools as potential weapons. This is an important detail of his characterisation, as mainstream media criticism of Chartists often described them as dangerous working-class revolutionaries who wield the tools of their various trades as offensive weapons. This does not even occur to Mark. Instead, by wielding the poker, he manages to discover a secret “door” to the diabolical larder (248). By rejecting violence against people, even tyrants and murderers, he finds a way out of his prison.

Later, armed with his knowledge of the horrors behind the larder door, Mark protests Mrs. Lovett’s tyranny by emerging theatrically onto the shop floor under a tray of pies to announce that “truth” is always good, and the “truth” is that “Mrs. Lovett’s pies *are made of human flesh!*” (emphasis Rymer’s; Collins 2010: 257). He does not attack her. He does not need to. The mob tries, of course, but she is arrested for aiding and abetting Todd and dies of the poison that he added to her brandy. Nonviolence and trust in the rule of law creates justice. In reading this episode, it is useful to recall Gregory Vargo’s observation that Chartist fiction “imagine[s] alternatives to middle-class plots of self-making and upward mobility” (Vargo 2018: 96). Ingestrie’s individual effort literally propels him upward through Mrs. Lovett’s shop floor to freedom. His story is a liberal narrative that goes against Chartist identification of systemic obstacles to plebeian prosperity. Adhering to the ideological standards of Lloyd’s *People’s Periodical*, Rymer endorses the conciliatory liberalism that we have seen throughout other components of the *People’s Periodical* running synchronously alongside Todd and Lovett’s adventures.

There is also in Todd’s machinations against Lovett possibly a hint of Lloyd’s allegations about O’Connor’s land plan. We have seen that Lloyd’s journalism of 1846–7 consistently attacked the land plan, primarily accusing O’Connor of monopolising the Land Plan subscribers’ hard-earned money. Todd takes his employees and associates’ money. He keeps Tobias’s pennies for him, telling him that when he withdraws them he will be a “rich man”; of course, Todd does not keep tabs on this cash and has no intention of returning it to Tobias. This sounds very much like the marks system invented by carceral reformer Alexander Machonochie, master of the dreadful Australian penal colony at Norfolk Island,

wherein prisoners paid in marks could claim their accumulated pay when freed, and Rymer, the brother of a forger transported to Van Diemen's land in 1839, would have had reason to read 1840s accounts of Maconochie's ideas. However, Todd's behaviour to his supposed confederates throughout *The String of Pearls* carries resonance for original readers who had followed or invested in the Chartist land plan. For instance, Todd steals Mrs. Lovett's profits while claiming to have banked them (Collins 2010: 241). He refuses to give Lovett the money, claiming that he has taken on all the "risk" (241). At the same time, he plots to run off himself, with all the profits (241). She protests his unwillingness to give her even an "account" of her financial affairs (242). Rymer makes Todd's duplicitous appropriation of Lovett's money considerably more elaborate in the 1850 expanded version of *The String of Pearls*. These crimes are precisely those of which Lloyd's journalism essentially accuses O'Connor in the matter of the Land Plan. By allegedly cheating his fellow Chartists, he betrays Chartism's ideals.

At the resolution of *The String of Pearls*, Lovett and Todd, like the historical Lovett and O'Connor, see their joint goal slip out of sight because they quarrel with each other instead of presenting their enemies with a united front. In the serial, their double-crossing reaches its peak while Mark tunnels through the walls, Johanna spies on Todd in disguise, and the magistrate Sir Richard Blunt closes in on him. The point is the same as in Lloyd's paper's editorials on quarrels and Chartist factionalism. "Oh, Todd, what an enemy you have been to me!" Lovett rails (Collins 2010: 243). Just as Chartism, in Lloyd's view, is liable to being "permanently injured ... by Chartists themselves" (4), the weak spot in Todd and Lovett's project is their mutual sabotage. The downfall of Rymer's villains seems less a critique of the Chartists' desire for more agency and better lives for working people than it is a cautionary tale for would-be reformers in the necessity of solidarity, effective communication, and well-defined goals.

Ultimately, Rymer's appropriation of William Lovett's memorable family name informs *The String of Pearls*'s critique of the notion that reform can be achieved without violence and without physical force. With the Chartists, Rymer agrees that workers need more agency and better life circumstances, but his serial concurs with Lloyd that Chartism in its mid-1840s form is not the answer to those problems. In making this argument, Rymer did not attempt to change fashion so much as he tried to follow it. The mid-1840s prior to the Great Famine and the French Revolution of 1848 saw something of an uptick in the standard of living for many British working people, making Chartism's objectives appear less urgent (Lee 1994: 97). That *The String of Pearls* joins this liberal swerve complicates the critical assumptions that Lloyd was a Chartist who lost his way, and that penny fiction, Lloyd, or *The String of Pearls* avoided direct engagement with Chartism or other kinds of 1840s radical discourse.

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