

Tom Maguire: “An Under-Paid Agitator” in the Late-Victorian Socialist Press

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WHOM THE GODS LOVE DIE YOUNG, and thus are they insured of everlasting youth. The idea is full of beauty were it not that this weary old world so much needs those on whom the Gods have bestowed their choicest gifts.¹ So wrote Keir Hardie, Britain’s first Independent Labour Party Member of Parliament, in his preface to *Machine-Room Chants*, a volume of posthumously published poetry written by Tom Maguire and printed by the *Labour Leader* in April 1895. Maguire, a working-class Leeds socialist, poet, journalist, and labor organizer, died on 9 March 1895 at the age of twenty-nine. In his short life he contributed significantly to the rise of socialism in late nineteenth-century Britain, and his contributions were both literary and organizational.

While still in his early twenties, Maguire was a leader in instigating the tide of New Unionism—the effort to broaden the scope of organized labor to include unskilled and semi-skilled workers—that swept Leeds in a number of important strikes from 1889 to ’90, including strikes by dyers, gas workers, tailoresses, builders’ laborers, and bricklayers. From 1885 to 1895 he also published a great deal of poetry, songs, fiction, and journalism in radical papers such as *Commonweal*, the *Labour Leader*, and the *Yorkshire Factory Times*, as well as his own socialist paper, the *Labour Champion*. Interestingly, many of his poems feature working-class women speakers, reflecting his experience in organizing Leeds tailoresses, and his journalistic writing is also notable for its play in voice, persona, and perspective. But aside from *Machine-Room Chants* and another posthumous volume (*Tom Maguire, A Remembrance*, published by the Manchester Labour Press in 1895), Maguire’s work exists almost exclusively in the archives of the radical press. Even these two volumes—*Tom Maguire* and *Machine-Room Chants*—reprint verse and prose that originally appeared in socialist newspapers.² In publishing their work, nineteenth-century working-class writers were especially likely to be limited to periodical venues; because volume

publication has mainly been the privilege of the wealthy or well connected, critics interested in class critique have learned to pay heed to newspapers and magazines, revaluing the Victorian periodical as a poetic medium.³ As is the case with so many working-class writers, to rediscover and appreciate Maguire's career we must rediscover and appreciate the periodical context in which he published.

In 1880s Britain, the socialist movement was in an early, inchoate phase encompassing a wide variety of socialist perspectives and persuasions, from anarchist to parliamentarian in politics, from fervently religious to rigorously scientific in mood. Most of the major early organizations were based in London, yet were eager to make footholds in the industrial North, which was everywhere recognized as fertile ground for socialist agitation because of labor conditions and because of the North's radical legacy, which abided in local movements such as co-operativism. Maguire was the son of a working-class Irish Catholic family from what his friend Edward Carpenter called "the dingy wilds of East Leeds," a neighborhood that Tom Steele describes as a "densely populated slum" housing "an enormous immigrant Irish population, possibly 20,000 strong. . . . The crowded courts and alleys where disease and pollution were widespread, were the breeding ground for socialists like Tom Maguire." Responsible for his mother after his father's death, Maguire, according to Carpenter, "earned what living he could" as "errand-boy, then as photographer's assistant, and photographer."⁴ At eighteen, he was drawn to socialism after coming across a copy of the *Christian Socialist* at the Secular Hall bookstall (the seeming inconsistency of the venue and the magazine perfectly illustrates the unfussy bedfellowism of 1880s socialism). He was an early adopter, for at this date, 1883, the organized socialist movement in England had barely begun. A year later, in 1884, Maguire helped set up a Leeds branch of the Social Democratic Federation—England's first socialist organization, Marxist in orientation, which was led by H. M. Hyndman and published the socialist journal *Justice*. In 1885, British socialism underwent a key early schism when William Morris, Eleanor Marx, and other important leaders split from Hyndman and the Social Democratic Federation to form the Socialist League and its newspaper, the *Commonweal*. Maguire followed Morris and launched a Leeds branch of the Socialist League. Later, in the early 1890s, after the collapse of the League, Maguire played a key role in forming the Leeds base of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Unlike the Social Democratic Federation or the League, the ILP was not a revolutionary organization, but was focused on winning socialist parliamentary representation, and its roots were in the North rather than in London. To E. P. Thompson, "if we must have one man who played an outstanding role in opening the way for the

I. L. P., that man was a semi-employed Leeds-Irish photographer in his late twenties—Tom Maguire.”⁵

In discussing the life of Maguire, Thompson observes, “provincial leaders are commonly denied full historical citizenship.”⁶ Maguire was a key provincial leader in early British socialism, but he was one of its key early writers as well; a general bias against the provincial—in literary as well as historical studies—has contributed to his eclipse, as has the general lack of attention to literature published in periodicals. Leeds was not London, nor even Manchester, but it was an important base for late-Victorian socialist literary activity. This context has been partly recuperated by Tom Steele’s study of the Leeds Art Club, an “advanced” group formed in 1903 by Alfred Orage and Holbrook Jackson, who went on a few years later to edit the *New Age*, a socialist journal that became a crucial seedbed for literary modernism. As Steele describes it, at the turn of the century the Leeds Art Club “became one of the most interesting sites of radical thought and experimental art outside of London. It popularized the introduction of Nietzschean thought, cradled the early formation of Guild Socialism, [and] exhibited impressionist and post-impressionist painting.” The group was able to take root in this provincial city, Steele notes, because of Leeds’ “heightened political consciousness” due to the “sudden blossoming of political societies in the 1880s and 1890s, in local branches of the Social Democratic Federation, the Socialist League, the Fabian Society . . . and ultimately the Independent Labour Party.” Maguire was instrumental in planting such groups in Leeds. Thus, if we imagine literary influence from a sociocultural and not just an aesthetic perspective, we can say that British modernism’s “youthful guerilla culturists,” as Steele calls them, emerged from a cultural and political infrastructure that had been built by the young, working-class Tom Maguire.⁷ More directly, his literary influence can be felt in the plethora of Northern socialist papers that began to proliferate after 1890, papers like the *Clarion* and the *Yorkshire Factory Times*, which gathered large audiences of readers and printed a great deal of socialist literature.

In the 1880s, most literary socialists who published fiction and poetry in the socialist press were middle or upper class—Edward Carpenter, William Morris, Edith Nesbit, George Bernard Shaw—but many hoped that in the wake of the 1870 Forster Education Act which universalized public education, and in the context of a new socialist imagining of classlessness, talented new writers of working-class origins would emerge as literary leaders in the movement. As Peter Keating remarks, “in an age of self-conscious democracy, emergent Socialism, and Board School education, there were frequent claims that within the working class there was a large, dormant literary talent that universal literacy would awaken,” to “give expression

to experiences which had been neglected for centuries.”⁸ Maguire was one such promising young writer, and some of his earliest published work was printed in the *Commonweal*, the newspaper of the Socialist League edited by William Morris. The *Commonweal* was the most significant socialist journal of the era from a literary point of view, and could afford to be relatively choosy about which poems and articles it would publish.⁹ In its pages first appeared Morris’s *News from Nowhere*, *A Dream of John Ball*, and his epic poem of the Paris Commune, *Pilgrims of Hope*. Other literary socialists such as J. L. Joynes also published frequently in the paper, and Chartist and Romantic-era writers were reprinted as well.¹⁰

In terms of politics, Maguire was more pragmatic and less of a purist than many in the Socialist League, and his writings for the *Commonweal* reflect this. The League’s official position on trade unionism, for example, was that it was a palliative preventing more comprehensive social and economic change. Maguire, by contrast, recognized that the New Unionism, which extended trade unions from the so-called “aristocracy of labour” to the unskilled trades, had the potential not only to make major improvements in the lives of workers, but to radicalize them as well, paving the way for greater advancements down the road. Moreover, perhaps because of his own working-class origins, Maguire’s writing for the *Commonweal* shows an awareness of and attention to the question of how to appeal to a working-class audience, which many other writers in the paper appear not to have grasped. His article “The Yorkshire Miners and Their Masters,” published November 1885, uses the techniques of New Journalism to interest a national audience of socialist readers in the lives and trials of Northern miners. Written in the form of a first-person narrative, the report on the miners’ strike takes readers along on a journey to visit the miners:

Desirous, during the dispute, of knowing and seeing somewhat of the facts of the situation, I, in company with a few comrades paid a visit to Middleton, a neighbouring mining district some three miles away from Leeds, where the men were holding out against the exactions of their masters. . . . Imagine us in the back parlour of a wayside inn, surrounded by a score of committee men—the executive of the strikers—who are met to dole out the scanty supply of bread and pennies collected during the day from the sympathizing public.¹¹

In contrast to the dull, impersonal strike reports that so often filled the pages of the radical press, Maguire employs classic features of New Journalism as it was emerging in the 1880s: he puts himself into the story, effects a “human interest” tone, and constructs the piece in terms of a narrative arc, inviting readers to imagine the “back parlour of a wayside inn.” W. T. Stead had shown earlier that same year, in his “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” series that ran in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in July 1885, just how powerful a

form of activist literature the New Journalism could be. The series provoked a firestorm of reaction when Stead demonstrated that for £5, a wealthy man could buy a poor, thirteen-year-old girl in England for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Matthew Arnold had coined the term “New Journalism” to describe popular journalism that he considered “feather-brained,” evidence of the democratic lowering of the press. Maguire’s piece reminds us, however, that the activist quality of New Journalism that Stead tapped into was a legacy of its roots in the working-class popular press.¹² Unlike many writers for 1880s socialist papers, Maguire realized that employing some stylistic features of the popular press could make a powerful political impact on working-class readers.

“Yorkshire Miners” is also typical of Maguire in its intermittently sarcastic tone; this is a quality of all his writings, and, it seems, of his personality too. As Edward Carpenter admitted in his preface to *Tom Maguire*, “occasionally in private as well as in the clubs he was a little keen and satirical when thwarted or opposed,” though “ready enough to make up for these sallies at the first opportunity.”¹³ Carpenter also notes that “Goldsmith and Sterne and the eighteenth century writers generally were perhaps his favorites in literature,” a somewhat unusual preference among socialist writers of the era, which suggests his interest in satire’s political edge.¹⁴ In “Yorkshire Miners,” Maguire uses his turn for sarcasm to stir up readers’ indignation against the owners of the mines: “it may be interesting to remark that during the few weeks which have elapsed since the colliers went back to their slavery, not less than 200 lives in the north of England alone, have been profidentially sacrificed by explosions”—here, “profidentially” may be a pun on “profit,” or a spelling variant. He describes the mine owners as “reducing men down to the level of the Indian coolie. . . . No matter. Civilisation is peremptory. Ten per cent must come off this starving family’s back or we have dead-lock in the capitalist world and civilisation cannot go on.”¹⁵ The features of Maguire’s journalistic voice that we see in this article—sarcasm, first-person voice, the New Journalism, and, less admirably, appeals to racial pride—all appear to a heightened degree in his own paper, the *Labour Champion*.

The *Labour Champion* was short-lived even by the standards of late-Victorian socialist newspapers: it lasted for only five issues from October to November 1893. Printed at the Leeds and County Co-Operative Newspaper Society, the paper was edited by Maguire and crystallizes features of his authorship evident across his literary work. The paper’s title design depicts a jester sitting cross-legged, a worker fighting a dragon, and a poor woman holding a baby (see figure 1). The tagline “*semper eadem*”—everything the



Figure 1: The *Labour Champion* (1893)

same—suggests the condition of economic and political stasis that the paper militates against. While the mother and child, the fighting worker, and the medieval-esque dragon were utterly standard in socialist iconography of the era, the jester is unusual, and points to Maguire’s use of humor, sarcasm, and irony as political tools. An article titled “The Municipal Show,” for example, effects the voice of a sideshow barker: “Walk up! Walk up! Ladies and gentlemen. The municipal candidates are about to perform. . . . Be in time, gents, and see the two recently captured Liberal Labour Chameleons—positively their last appearance in public. A prize of one penny is offered to anyone who can tell their true colours.”¹⁶ As with the jester in the title design, the implication is that British politics have become so absurd they can only be discussed in the language of fools, clowns, and circuses.

“Edited by Tom Maguire” was announced prominently beneath the title design, an editorial distinction unusual among socialist papers; this suggests how the wielding of authorial and editorial personality, in the manner of New Journalism, would be central to the paper’s ethos. Indeed, the paper offered an oblique defense of this style in its attacks on the mainstream capitalist press. The editor’s column on 11 November 1893 describes

the partisan working man, who looks up to his yellow or blue paper [Liberal or Conservative] with an ignorant worship and a blind faith which has only its equal in the fetish worship of the savage, if, indeed, that be not a libel on the savage. . . . And yet if he would but look back over the last few months, and remember the position taken up by these party organs throughout the three great industrial battles which have been fought . . . surely he would begin to see that these papers, capitalized and run by the very men whom he has to fight . . . cannot be supposed to in any sense represent his opinions. But the workingman has a memory that is short in these matters. To him the word “Editor” is fraught with wondrous power and deep mystery, and the editorial “we” is so chock-full of wisdom as to be absolutely beyond the pale of argument and must be blindly accepted as the truth.¹⁷

Maguire offers this analysis, ironically, in the context of an editor's column; yet his analysis of the folly of blindly believing editors demonstrates the distinctions between his own mode of editorship and the "editorial 'we'" of his critique. Readers of *Labour Champion* would have known Maguire, likely, from his speaking, organizing, and writing for the local cause, and would recognize his perspective, whereas the editorial "we" projects a sense of anonymous consensus.

The column goes on to draw further distinctions between the *Labour Champion* and the mainstream press: "Still, after all, the workman likes this kind of thing, 'he wants a lot for his money, he does;' all the latest society scandal. . . . Add to this some betting news . . . and the British workman is satisfied. Labour papers are not in his line. . . . Labour matters and the economic position of the worker are such dreary reading after a dose of society and racecourses." Despite the sarcasm here, Maguire did draw on the resources of the popular press in an effort to make his paper appealing; a few issues earlier, for example, the paper had made fun of its own concessions to commercial publishing style in a humorous account of a fictional meeting between writer and editor: "It was last Friday. The editor came in, and his cigarette was not lit. . . . Then he sat down, pulled out last week's paper and eyed it sadly. . . . 'What we want is not this,' he continued, ' . . . we want something lighter' . . . 'Light and chatty and merry,' the editor said."¹⁸ And so the paper would be, though intermixed with the sporting news and the joking tone was urgent political protest.

In many ways, the style of *Labour Champion* can be compared to the *Clarion*, Robert Blatchford's successful socialist newspaper launched in Manchester in 1891, which achieved a much wider readership than other socialist papers by using elements of popular mass-press journalism to present socialist material. Its weekly circulation, according to Deborah Mutch, "peaked around 90,000 and averaged between 40,000 and 50,000."¹⁹ The *Clarion* generated an entire social movement of "Clarionettes," who joined Clarion Cycling Clubs and Choirs, visited Clarion Cafés, and worked together for the cause. The *Clarion* tended toward New Journalism, playing up the personalities of the paper's staff and running lots of human interest stories; it also ran advertisements, a mode of revenue that was categorically rejected by many 1880s socialist papers; it ran sporting news and at times emulated the language of the sporting press (Blatchford had gotten his start at *Bell's Life*). Moreover, Blatchford tended (increasingly over the years, to the paper's detriment) to strike a nationalistic tone in an attempt to appeal to workers' sense of race. Maguire's paper employs all the same features—New Journalism, advertisements, football news, nationalism—

but his political commentary was much sharper and more aggressive than the *Clarion's*.²⁰ The *Labour Champion* made an effort to employ the stylistic features of the popular press to garner a wide audience, but also wanted to push that audience into political action in a far more direct and confrontational way than Blatchford's *Clarion*.

To take a small example, while each issue of the *Labour Champion* did run a full page of football news, written by a contributor nicknamed "The Howler," the paper also attacked sports betting, so popular a feature of most working-class papers. The article "Straight Turf Tips" presents sports betting as utterly irrational: "The average Johnnie who planks his bob in the 'booky's' palm . . . has unlimited faith in his own luck. The other fellows keep the bookies, and the other fellows are equally cock-sure that they are not the 'mugs.'" The piece depicts sports betting as a systematic fraud, a microcosm of capitalism:

It is estimated that about a million of money changes hands every day during the racing season. Bookmakers obtain a much larger income than our leading scientists, professors, and engineers. The best paying papers are the sporting ones, and the whole system is built on the thievish principle of getting something for nothing. . . . I have elaborated a safe system by which the sporting workman may, if he likes, put money in his pocket. . . . Every time you fancy you have "a cert" in hand and wish to "put a bob on," toss up. If it comes down "head," drop it through the most convenient sewer-grate. If it comes down "tail," keep it in your pocket until the race is over. At the end of the racing season make a calculation and—though I don't bet myself—I am willing to lay odds you will be something in pocket.²¹

Maguire called workers out for participating in sports betting, and also impugned them for supporting the capitalist press. An article titled "The 'Yorkshire Post' and the Miners" avers that the widely read *Yorkshire Post* presents the miners, "now in the throes of the greatest industrial struggle on record," as "selfish, stubborn, unreasonable." "A bolder declaration of class hatred was probably never penned," yet workers continue to read the paper. "How long our stupid, unseeing brethren will continue to pay their ha'pence for snubs and kicks heaven alone knows! They, themselves, are responsible for the engine that destroys them."²²

Maguire makes plenty of confrontational attacks on working-class complacency, which, one imagines, he felt justified in doing because of his own origins and status; but his paper also offers praise for workers willing to resist, and political direction for workers wanting to act. The editor's column on 21 October 1893 describes the ongoing miners' struggle as "the most important of modern Labour battles" and claims, "words of ours would fail to do justice to the patient, enduring heroism of the miners and their wives. . . . Trade Unionists and Labour men owe much to this well-disciplined body of workers. They have shown that a real, fighting federation of labour

is possible, besides which they are pioneers in Labour politics.” In the same issue, Maguire offers direct political intervention on the question of an upcoming municipal election: “Is there a Labour vote in the North Ward? If so, it should be used to send Mr. C. H. Wilson to the right-about. There is no more persistent opponent of Labour reforms on the City Council than the supremely self-satisfied gentleman who does the city the honour of playing clown to Alderman Scarr’s pantaloons at the monthly meetings of the Council.”²³ Again, in references to the Alderman “clown” and to the “Pantalone” character of *Commedia dell’arte*, politics are represented in the language of satire, absurdity, and nonsense. This was an ongoing motif of the *Labour Champion*.

In addition to his prose writing for the paper, Maguire also published a great deal of poetry in the *Labour Champion*, and it was here that he initially developed the poet persona “Bardolph,” who would go on to publish some fifty poems in the pages of the *Labour Leader* from 1894 to ’95.²⁴ Bardolph’s poetry, typical of late-Victorian newspaper poetry, tends toward the light and topical, and as with many socialist papers of the era, poetry served in the *Labour Champion* to comment on the news in familiar and pleasing linguistic forms. “An After-Song for Electors,” for example, in the 4 November issue, plays on the old Guy Fawkes Day nursery rhyme: bemoaning the results of a 1 November election, the poem entreats readers to “Remember, remember!”—“Municipal treason, / And all round un-reason / Should ne’er be, by workers, forgot.”²⁵ Another Bardolph poem, “A New Nursery Rhyme,” draws on common popular verse to make an argument against aristocratic privilege: “Isn’t it a dainty dish / To lay before the Queen?”²⁶

“The Animal Man,” also by Bardolph, is a more complex poem targeting the base materialism of the capitalist class:

The animal man is a wonderful chap,
He has settled how things should be;
You’d never believe he was suckled on pap,
Or bounced on a feminine knee;
You’d think he was dropt, in a thunder-cloud wrapt,
And let out like a lightning streak,
Full-grown, full-blown, with a will of his own,
And a liberal allowance of cheek.²⁷

The poem retains the simple ballad meter and rhyme typical of Bardolph’s bouncy verse, but the irony is that the materialists it targets—the profit-mongers who care not for ethics or ideals—deny their own status as human, imagining themselves as godlike, above their fellow men, when in fact they are subhuman. The interplay of materialism and idealism in the poem appeals to both a Marxist materialist critique of capitalist dehumanization

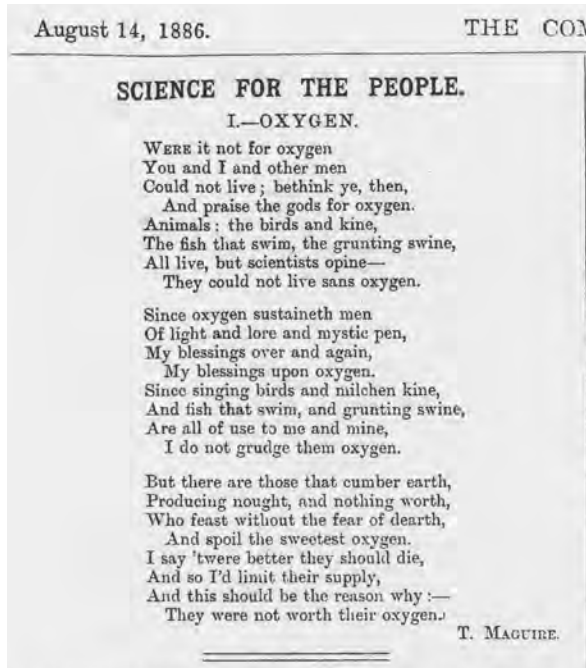


Figure 2: "Science for the People. I. Oxygen"

("His heart is a kind of mechanical trick") and an ethical socialist critique of capitalism as immoral and anti-Christian ("His soul is a matter of doubt"). The division between "scientific socialism" (based in Marx or, for the Fabians, political economists such as Jevons and Wicksteed) and "ethical socialism" (evident in groups such as the Labour Church, the Christian Socialists, and the Fellowship of the New Life) was a key feature in the landscape of early socialist culture, but Maguire wrote for both sides, sometimes in the same poem. As he wrote in a letter to a friend, "I want to get [socialism] away from your damned party politics and silly quarrels. . . . People call themselves Socialists, but what they really are is just ordinary men with Socialist opinions hung round, they haven't got it inside of them."²⁸ Maguire was a secularist, interested in science and political economy, but also thought socialism was a matter of feeling, and that poetry and song were means of producing such feeling.

A few years earlier, Maguire had published some of his first poems in the socialist press in the Socialist League paper *Commonweal*, and already here we see his poetic humor and his interest in using the poem as a ve-

hicle of materialist analysis. His poem “Science for the People. I. Oxygen” was published on 14 August 1886 when Maguire was twenty (see figure 2). While its title “Science for the People” alludes to working-class educational schemes along the lines of “rational recreation” and auto-didacticism, the poem humorously suggests that violent revolution is a more useful “lesson” for the people than the human respiration system. It begins, “Were it not for oxygen / You and I and other men / Could not live; bethink ye, then, / And praise the gods for oxygen.” A few stanzas later, he adds:

But there are those that cumber earth,
Producing nought, and nothing worth,
Who feast without the fear of dearth,
And spoil the sweetest oxygen.
I say 'twere better they should die,
And so I'd limit their supply,
And this should be the reason why: —
They were not worth their oxygen.

The poem parodies the tradition of “self-culture” that was so crucial to Chartist literary ideology forty years earlier; Maguire suggests that a socialist movement must go beyond the autodidactic, self-cultural terms of the Chartist era, to promote collective action rather than individual improvement.²⁹

Maguire’s poem “A Victim (Whose Name Is Legion),” in the 30 June 1887 *Commonweal*, is perhaps his first written in the voice of a female speaker, which became a common feature of his later poetry. The poem depicts a factory girl tempted by the twin transgressions of prostitution and suicide: either one looks more attractive than her life as it is. “O! I am tired of factory toil,” “The factory air is choking close,” “It is not so in the streets without, / Where all are free to go gaily about.” “’Tis but a step from the factory door / To the streets—to laughter and song and wine, / To the sullen river but one step more, / And there is an end to this life of mine.” The poem is somewhat unremarkable in its sympathetic articulation of the ugly alternatives that drive young women into prostitution, and the common assumption that prostitutes meet their end by drowning themselves in the river. But the poem does cast light on the particular situation of the female factory worker, who must, for example, endure “the factory bully, that comes and goes, / Has never a word—save a curse—to greet.” In his later poems written from the perspective of working-class women, Maguire is not always as sympathetic toward women workers as he is here, but these later poems also demonstrate his growth as a poet and his years of experience in organizing workers, some of whom were apparently averse to being organized.

In his collection *Machine-Room Chants* (which Maguire himself put together, though it was not published until after his death), nearly every poem deals with the lives and labors of working-class women, and many are spoken in the voice of factory girls. His poem “Unspoken Confidences (Not Known of the Lady-Visitor),” which originally appeared in *Labour Leader* 9 February 1895 and was reprinted in *Machine-Room Chants*, is a rewriting of the earlier poem “A Victim (Whose Name Is Legion)” that appeared in the *Commonweal*, but here the working-class female speaker is married and searching for an escape from her home as well as the factory. The poem voices her private thoughts, unshared with the ladies who call on her out of charity:

Oh! I am tired of factory life,
Tired, tired, as you would be—
I fain would be a rich man's wife,
Or any man's wife but a poor man's wife,
For I am sick of the worry and strife,
As you would be if you were me.

Maguire promoted women's equality within the socialist movement, and strongly backed efforts to organize women workers—as Carpenter put it, “his views regarding the position and future of women were unusually advanced as were also his sympathies with them”—but many of Maguire's poems express frustration with women workers who saw marriage, not unionization, as their sole avenue of access to a better quality of life.³⁰ In “Unspoken Confidences,” as in “A Victim,” the street offers freedom from the factory prison, but here it also offers release from the prison of marriage:

Drear is the lot of the poor man's spouse,
Drear, drear and dull, ladye,
A prison-cell is the poor man's house,
And what of the rights the law allows?
There is no rest for the poor man's spouse,
There are not rights for such as she.

Marriage, the poem suggests, is not the solution to the problems of factory women, and in fact may produce additional constraints; the implication is that systematic reform of women's labor is the only proper response—a collective rather than individual solution. Here, marriage does not save the speaker from the contemplation of prostitution and suicide that also concluded “A Victim”: “Tis but a step to the streets, and the roar / Of life. . . . Only a step from the factory door, . . . and but one step more / To the sullen river—when all is o'er—/ And there is an end to my shadow and me.”

Maguire's poem "An Under-Paid Agitator" best encapsulates the kind of response from women workers that he is writing against in "Unspoken Confidences." "An Under-Paid Agitator" was printed in *Labour Leader* 29 December 1894 and reprinted in *Machine-Room Chants*, but draws on Maguire's experience in organizing the Leeds tailoresses' strike of October 1889. Maguire, with Clementina Black and Isabella Ford, led 1,000 seamstresses to unionize and strike at Arthur & Co. tailoring works, and they were so successful that "the strike fund had been receiving nearly £100 a day from public donations as a result of the campaign for fair play led by Maguire."³¹ Regrettably, the strike collapsed after six weeks, with the women returning to work under unchanged conditions (though a few months later Arthur & Co. granted some of their demands).³² "An Under-Paid Agitator" is written from the perspective of a factory girl in favor of unionization, though her co-workers are resistant:

It's cruel to cut things so fine—
 It's strange that the girls will not learn
 To fall into line, and boldly combine
 To keep up the wages they earn.

 And first when I entered the work-girls' union,
 I put it to Sarah Anne Lee;
 But she laughed in my face and called me a "lunny 'un,"
 "No union but marriage for me!" Says she.

Again, the marriage "union" is the agitator's main impediment to unionizing women workers. The next stanza addresses some of the particular indignities the seamstresses at Arthur & Co. had gone on strike against:

It's shameful to put us on "piece,"
 And fine us at times if we're late,
 When the work in the shop has come to a stop,
 And there's nothing to do but to wait.

 And I put it to Sarah Anne Lee, that the union
 Said fines such as them shouldn't be;
 But she snapped, and declared I was always a "moony 'un,"
 "The tight marriage union for me!" Says she.

Sarah Anne Lee goes on to marry, but as in "Unspoken Confidences," she must continue to work in the factory because of her husband's low wages. Eventually, her husband abandons her, and she and her baby die in childbirth: "The union buried them free." The verse's final stanza puts the lesson to readers directly: "But the work-girl wife still toils for dear life, / And attends to her home-work as well" (which feminists now call the "second shift"),

We bend to our slavish lot,
 And pile up the wrong, till our prince comes along,
 When we go, arm-in-arm, straight to pot.
 You proud women-snobs, who sneer at the union,
 What fools in your hearts are ye!
 Vain, self-loving slaves! you are bidding for graves
 Like that which holds Sarah Anne Lee—Rent free.

The direct attack on recalcitrant women workers here—“You proud women-snobs,” “Vain self-loving slaves!”—has an exceptionally deprecating tone, even threatening women readers with the grave. But as we’ve seen elsewhere in Maguire’s writing, blunt accusation of working-class readers was part of his confrontational literary style, whether speaking to women or men.

Maguire sought to disabuse working-class women readers of the *Labour Leader* of the idea that marriage would be an escape from the oppressive conditions of factory labor. So, too, did he attack other conventionally feminine means of escape, such as novel reading. In the poem “The Novelette Reader,” originally published in the 5 January 1895 *Labour Leader* and reprinted in *Machine-Room Chants*, a young seamstress drowns out the toil of her labor by absorbing her imagination in romantic novels about “the loves of high-born dames.” “Then will I laugh and cry with them for love of their hero-men, . . . All the din of the Singer machine forgotten by me its thrall—/ Bread and tea and the foreman, and the early morning call.” Maguire does not blame such fiction for corrupting women, as other nineteenth-century critics of the novel were wont to do. The third stanza, which moves from first-person to third-person voice, states: “it’s not lies in a novelette that lead work-girls astray, / But the hard-faced fact of a life in one long joyless rut.” He does, however, depict such novels as sources of mystification, which present the conditions of life as fated and fixed rather than malleable:

Lord! how I loathe the guardian who plots against his ward;
 Great as I hate the villain—marked to fall at the hands of fate.
 Pure is the lovely heroine, of origin obscure,
 He is noble who wins her—she an heiress proves to be.

 To my story of sorrow and love I turn and weep anew,
 Until all things come right in the end, as, at least, in tales they do.

Such fiction, in Maguire’s view, ideologically retards the fundamental socialist principle that conditions of life can be changed.

For all Maguire’s humor and light verse, then, his writing could also be stern, accusatory, and demanding of and toward working-class women readers. But the predominant strain running through the poems collected

in *Machine-Room Chants* is outrage at the exploitation of women workers. Again reflecting the influence of New Journalism that we see in his prose, Maguire's poem "The Minotaur," originally published in *Labour Leader* 15 December 1894, presents women's factory labor in the garment trades as a form of abuse akin to what W. T. Stead uncovered in the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" scoop for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Stead used the mythological figure of the Minotaur to depict the buying and selling of girls as a form of primeval human sacrifice of virgins in the modern metropolis. As Judith Walkowitz notes, "Stead drew on an ancient fantasy of human blood-sacrifice . . . the myth of the maidens and youths sent as tribute from ancient Athens to perish in the Labyrinth of Crete, victims of a devouring Minotaur;" one of the villains of Stead's series was "a retired doctor, called the London Minotaur, 'who devotes his fortune to the 'ruin' of three maids a night.'"³³ Following Stead, Maguire's poem presents female factory workers in the clothing trade as a "tribute" to the "factory Minotaur," echoing the language of Stead's piece: "Clothes are cheap in the world to-day— / Cheaper the women are, / And mournfully they their tribute pay / To the factory Minotaur." While Stead's series produced a thunderclap of shock across the country, Maguire suggests that readers should be equally shocked by the legal exploitation of women's labor.

"The Minotaur" illustrates the unsanitary conditions of the garment trade, presenting the Leeds factories as cesspits for the dregs and contaminants of Continental cast-offs:

Cholera rags, diptherical [sic] tags,
 Are bundled to England in bales and bags,
 Worn-out stockings, and socks, and pants,
 Shirts and bodices, blouses from France,
 Cast-off singlets and derelict rugs—
 The whole lot seething with alien bugs;
 In short, all wear that has reached its last level,
 Is forwarded Yorkshire—*via* Leeds—to the "devil."
 The rags are cast in the "devil's" wide maw,
 He tears them to tatters with steel tooth and claw:
 From tatters he rends them asunder to shreds,
 Till nothing remains but manure and fine threads;

 And thus are the sheddings of every poor body
 Reclaimed from the gutter and made into Shoddy.

Focusing on the utilization of clothing rags as material in Yorkshire textile manufacturing, the poem emphasizes the health threats to young women workers surrounded by "alien bugs." In Maguire's references to French underwear, we again see the appeal to nationalism—complicated by his

Irish heritage—that often manifests in his socialist literary work. “The Minotaur” also emphasizes, however, the underlying cheapness, shoddiness, and repulsiveness of the products being manufactured in England: the “fine threads” interwoven with “manure” and “the sheddings of every poor body.” Capitalist textile manufacturing in Leeds entails the human sacrifice of young women’s bodies for the production of fabric that is, in the end, putrid and poor.

Not all of Maguire’s work is this denunciatory; counterbalancing poems like “The Minotaur,” Maguire, who was by all accounts a great lover of music, also published many songs—songs that celebrate the joy of group expression and work to prompt collective spirit rather than collective outrage. Alf Mattison, a Leeds socialist, recalled the influence of Maguire’s songs among the workers he organized: when Maguire spent several months “organising a strike of the Jewish workers in Leeds—some 3000 in number,” “a great feature of the strike was a song written by Maguire, entitled ‘The Song of the Sweater’s Victim’—the singing of which by several hundred Jews in their broken English may be better imagined than described.”³⁴ Because of Maguire’s work organizing Jewish garment workers, historians such as E. P. Thompson and Sheila Rowbotham have considered him an “internationalist” socialist, despite the appeal to nationalism evident at times in his literary and journalistic work. “The Song of the Sweater’s Victim” indeed expresses an internationalist vision:

We hope with best of all good men
Better days yet to see,
When hand in hand all over the land
United we all shall be.
Every worker in every trade,
In Britain and everywhere,
Whether he labour by needle or spade
Shall gather in his rightful share.³⁵

Discussing Maguire’s relation to nationalism and internationalism, Anne Kershner notes that he “spoke out in favour of controls on pauper alien immigration,” but “was sympathetic to the cause of those who, having settled in England, were then used and abused by middlemen and masters.”³⁶ Many Jewish tailoring workers who benefited from Maguire’s organization would later join his funeral procession.³⁷

Edward Carpenter printed two songs by Maguire, “Hey for the Day” and “March, March Comrades All,” in his widely influential song collection *Chants of Labour*. Carpenter compiled the collection, as Sheila Rowbotham puts it, to sustain an early socialist movement “packed with would-be musicians, artists, and poets . . . and each little group was sprouting a culture of

clubs, cafés, halls, and institutes, where, amidst all the talk, there would be social gatherings with recitations, songs and music.”³⁸ “Hey for the Day,” which took pride of place as the first song in Carpenter’s collection, used the conventional socialist trope of the dawn as symbol of the change to come:

Darkest is night,
 We do not fear;
 Dawning is near—
 Soon we shall see
 Morning all bright
 Burst into sight

 Then hey for the day!³⁹

“March, March Comrades All” like “Song of the Sweater’s Victim,” makes an internationalist appeal to workers of the world:

Lo! we gather a valiant throng
 Over the world of nations.
 We shall triumph o’er wealth and wrong,
 Ranks and creeds and stations.
 March, march, comrades all,
 Onward ever boldly.⁴⁰

By way of Carpenter’s collection, these two songs by Maguire also made it into American socialist songbooks, such as *Socialist Songs with Music* compiled by Charles Kerr in 1901.⁴¹ Carpenter had intended *Chants of Labour* as a showcase of socialist literary and musical creation, especially by working-class socialists: the songs are, he said in the preface, “for the use of the people, and they are mainly the product of the people.” Many have “the merit of being genuinely accepted and in use among Socialist bodies of workmen—some too composed by hearty and active members thereof. Thus the book is in no sense (as the index shows) a merely ‘literary’ production—but emanates rather from the heart of the people. May it help to give voice to those who have so long been dumb!”⁴² To this end, Carpenter published the occupations of the authors alongside their names in the table of contents, listing Maguire as a “photographer.”

Maguire’s song “The Watches of the Night,” the last verse in *Machine-Room Chants*, perhaps best expresses the hopeful register his voice would take when working in the medium of song rather than poetry or prose. It was originally published in the 27 October 1894 *Labour Leader*, under the title “Watchman, What of the Night?” Here, the figure of the bride rather than the dawn is representative of the change to come:

I had waited, mutely waited,
 Unmarried and unmated,
 Till my very soul and senses had grown numb;
 And I wondered if the bride,
 I had dreamt of in my pride,
 Would from out the murky, dusty, hidden future ever come.

But she's coming, coming,
 I hear the fife and drumming,
 Heralding her happy way—
 Turning night to light and day;
 She's coming, coming,
 The air around is humming
 With the music of silvery feet
 Of Socialism coming.

Oh! the wide outlook was dreary,
 And my eyes were tired and weary,
 For my hopes were burnt to ashes cold and white;
 My heart was sick and faint,
 And I felt the deadly taint
 Of the dull despair that hovers round the watches of the night.

But she's coming, coming,
 I hear the fife and drumming,
 Heralding the happy way
 Turning night to light and day;
 She's coming, coming
 The air around is humming
 With the music of the silvery feet
 Of Socialism coming.

In the end, Maguire became worn out waiting to hear the fife and drumming; he died alone, impoverished, and in a state of depression and alcoholism. As E. P. Thompson describes, "his early maturity seemed to be giving way to a premature middle-age. . . . Not yet 30, he was to be found more and more often drinking in the Leeds Central I. L. P. Club, telling stories of the 'old days.'"⁴³ Impoverished and sick, Maguire contracted pneumonia, and was found in his home without food or fuel; he died shortly after. But his funeral offered one more chance for Maguire to assemble a vast crowd to join together in song: over 1,000 mourners joined the procession, singing together.⁴⁴ It was, in J. Bruce Glasier's memory, an "unusual, almost an imposing procession of his comrades in Leeds and neighbouring Yorkshire towns." They "followed his body, borne shoulder high, to the grave."⁴⁵

Since his death, Maguire has popped up in historical studies here and there for his remarkable work in socialist and labor agitation, but his literary work has been largely forgotten. Following the posthumous publication of *Machine-Room Chants* and *Tom Maguire: A Remembrance* in the months

following his death, a few socialist papers took the opportunity to remember Maguire's poetry. A review in the 2 November 1895 issue of *Clarion*, for example, written by the socialist novelist C. Allen Clarke, says that Maguire's poems are "all as spontaneous as a sunrise, a lark's song; and, occasionally, as the terrible eruption of a volcano." He calls Maguire "a powerful word artist," and comments on his "vivid word-pictures," his skillful use of assonance, and his "sharp, slashing satire."⁴⁶ But while Clarke exhorts readers to remember Maguire's poetry, it was, in fact, little remembered, even in the socialist press, after 1895. For this reason, we must return to the context of the 1885–95 radical press, where Maguire's work originally appeared, to shed light on a nineteenth-century literary and political context in which working-class writers like Maguire represented the hope of a literature—and society—to come.

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NOTES

- 1 Keir Hardie, Preface to *Machine-Room Chants* by Tom Maguire (London: Labour Leader, 1895), 7.
- 2 All of the verse in *Machine-Room Chants* originally appeared in the *Labour Leader*. As for the Labour Press volume, Bessie Ford reported in a letter to the *Clarion* (13 July 1895): 221, "Many of the verses are quite new to the general public, having been found in MS. after [Maguire's] death; the others and the prose pieces are collected from Socialist newspapers."
- 3 Florence Boos, "The 'Homely Muse' in Her Diurnal Setting: The Periodical Poems of 'Marie,' Janet Hamilton, and Fanny Forrester," *Victorian Poetry* 39 (2001): 255, notes that "critical attention to working-class poetry as a genre has suffered for many years from a tendency to ignore these works' original publication history. It is easy to comment once again on the stereotypical qualities of a few readily accessible volumes of verse, but difficult to canvass thousands of un-indexed pages of long-expired and barely extant periodicals, in search of working-class poets' original audiences, contexts, and modes of expression."
- 4 Edward Carpenter, "Memoir," *Tom Maguire, A Remembrance: Being a Selection from the Prose and Verse Writings of a Socialist Pioneer. With Memoirs* (Manchester: Labour Press Society, 1895), ix; Tom Steele, *Alfred Orage and the Leeds Arts Club, 1893–1923* (Aldershot, England: Scolar Press, 1990), 26.
- 5 E. P. Thompson, "Homage to Tom Maguire," *Essays in Labour History*, ed. Asa Briggs and John Saville (London: Macmillan, 1967): 279. For background, see *Tom Maguire, A Remembrance*; John Battle, *Tom Maguire: Socialist and Poet* (Leeds: Ford Maguire Society, 1997); "Tom Maguire," *Labour Annual* (London: Labour Press, 1896), 211; Anne J. Ker-shen, *Uniting the Tailors: Trade Unionism amongst the Tailoring Workers of London and Leeds, 1870–1939* (Ilford: Cass, 1995); and Sylvia M. Barnard, *To Prove I'm Not Forgotten: Living and Dying in a Victorian City* (Manchester U. Press, 1990).

- 6 Thompson, "Homage," 277.
- 7 Steele, *Alfred Orage*, 1, 13, 16.
- 8 Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875–1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), 313.
- 9 The League's archives, held in the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, are full of rejected poems sent in by hopeful readers.
- 10 For more on the literature of the *Commonweal* and other socialist papers, see my articles "Literature and the Late-Victorian Radical Press," *Literature Compass* 7 (August 2010): 702–12, and "William Morris, Print Culture, and the Politics of Aestheticism," *Modernism/modernity* 15 (2008): 477–502.
- 11 Tom Maguire, "The Yorkshire Miners and Their Masters," *Commonweal* (November 1885): 98.
- 12 For more on New Journalism, see Joel H. Wiener, ed., *Papers for the Millions: The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1988), esp. Deian Hopkin's "The Left-Wing Press and the New Journalism," 225–41.
- 13 Carpenter, "Memoir," xii.
- 14 Carpenter, "Memoir," xi. Most socialist writers preferred the Romantic poets. William Morris, for one, had a strong distaste for eighteenth-century writers. For Morris on the eighteenth century, see, e.g., E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon, 1955), 659.
- 15 Maguire, "Yorkshire Miners," 98.
- 16 *Labour Champion* 2 (21 October 1893): 2.
- 17 *Labour Champion* 5 (11 November 1893): 4.
- 18 "Quips and Quiddities," *Labour Champion* 2 (21 October 1893): 1.
- 19 Deborah Mutch, "The Clarion," *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland*, ed. Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Ghent: Academia, 2009): 583.
- 20 The *Champion's* most egregiously racist article is in the second issue (21 October 1893) and refers to the "Canoe Indians" (a misspelling of "Canu") as the "Ugliest People on Earth" (5). Such nationalist appeals to race, here and in the *Clarion*, were likely intended to shore up a sense of racial community among working-class, white, British, and Irish-British readers. Most other socialist papers of the era, however, were more internationalist in scope. Socialist campaigners such as Henry Salt and Annie Besant felt that the cause of oppressed races should be taken up as part of a worldwide socialist campaign.
- 21 *Labour Champion* 2 (21 October 1893): 4.

- 22 *Labour Champion* 5 (11 November 1893): 3.
- 23 *Labour Champion* 2 (21 October 1893): 4, 2.
- 24 See Deborah Mutch, *English Socialist Periodicals, 1880–1900: A Reference Source* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005), for lists of Tom Maguire’s and Bardolph’s contributions to a select group of socialist periodicals.
- 25 *Labour Champion* 4 (4 November 1893): 1.
- 26 *Labour Champion* 5 (11 November 1893): 1.
- 27 *Labour Champion* 2 (21 October 1893): 1.
- 28 Quoted in Carpenter, “Memoir,” vi.
- 29 Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884–1914* (Manchester U. Press, 1990), 165, has argued that late nineteenth-century socialism was impaired by its continuing reliance on Chartist notions of self-culture: “What passed as an emergent socialist culture in Britain can be viewed as the last gasp of an earlier nineteenth-century autodidact tradition.” Maguire’s literary work sought to move beyond this model.
- 30 Carpenter, “Memoir,” xiv–xv.
- 31 Battle, *Tom Maguire*, 9.
- 32 For more on the tailoresses’ strike, see Katrina Honeyman, *Well Suited: A History of the Leeds Clothing Industry, 1850–1990* (Oxford U. Press, 2000), or Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors*.
- 33 Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992), 97, 99.
- 34 Alf Mattison, Memoir in *Tom Maguire, A Remembrance: Being a Selection from the Prose and Verse Writings of a Socialist Pioneer: With Memoirs* (Manchester: Labour Press Society, 1895), xvii.
- 35 Song reprinted in Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors*, 68.
- 36 Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors*, 67.
- 37 Thompson, “Homage,” 314.
- 38 Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London: Verso, 2008), 112.
- 39 Edward Carpenter, ed., *Chants of Labour: A Song Book of the People with Music* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1888), 1.
- 40 Carpenter, *Chants of Labour*, 15.

- 41 Charles H. Kerr, ed., *Socialist Songs with Music*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1902).
- 42 Carpenter, *Chants of Labour*, vi.
- 43 Thompson, "Homage," 314.
- 44 Barnard, *To Prove I'm Not Forgot*, 91.
- 45 J. Bruce Glasier, preface to *Machine-Room Chants*, 9.
- 46 C. Allen Clarke, review of *Tom Maguire: A Remembrance*, *Clarion* 204 (2 November 1895): 346.

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