

CULTURAL CAPITAL AND THE SCENE OF RIOTING: MALE WORKING-CLASS AUTHORSHIP IN *ALTON LOCKE*

By Richard Menke

IN ITS VERY TITLE, Charles Kingsley's 1850 novel *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography* hints at a set of questions that the novel itself never manages to answer in a very clear or convincing way: what is the relationship between manual and intellectual labor, between industrial and poetic production, between making a coat and writing a poem? How might the early Victorian imagination conceive of a working tailor who is also a working poet — especially in light of the various actual working-class poets who appeared on the literary scene in the first half of the nineteenth-century, complete with occupational epithets, such as Thomas Cooper, the “shoe-maker poet” (a figure who in many ways provided a model for Kingsley's fictional protagonist)? And what if, like a fair number of urban artisans, including Cooper himself, the tailor-poet is also a Chartist — as Alton Locke indeed turns out to be? What is the relationship between the Chartist call for reform and for representation of disenfranchised men in the political realm, and the attempts of a fictional working-class *man* (since the novel's treatment of gender, as I will argue, is crucial to its treatment of politics and culture) to enter the early Victorian field of literary production? Or why, in the first place, should a novel that treats the “social problem” of class in the hungry forties and the appalling working conditions of the clothes trade do so by way of the literary aspirations of its title character, that is, through a fictional construction of working-class authorship?

In *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, Catherine Gallagher highlights the rift between the first-person narrative of *Alton Locke* and the novel's justification for this narrative on the level of its plot — between Alton's voice and Alton's story — a fracture that Gallagher analyzes as a formal symptom of the novel's ambivalence about causality and free will. She argues that by writing this industrial novel in the form of a *Bildungsroman*, Kingsley was trying to reconcile a Romantic faith in the freedom and strength of the self with a recognition that some selves are not as free as others. Instead, according to Gallagher, Kingsley's choice of fictional form inadvertently ended up pointing out the discrepancy between Victorian realism's claim broadly to represent social life and its individualistic focus on characters and their personal struggles; the novel becomes “a narrative about the near impossibility of becoming a self” (90). For Gallagher, the

nebulous, undefined, unsatisfying character of Alton embodies — or disembodies — the contradictions at the heart of early Victorian social fiction. And Alton Locke, tailor and poet, becomes a figure so indistinct, mutable, and purely textual, claims Gallagher, that he begins to seem less a representation of a working-class writer than a figure for writing itself — in particular, for the frantic and contradictory discourses surrounding the “condition of England” problem in the 1830s and 40s, the very discussions that Kingsley has attempted to enter by writing his novel.

Gallagher’s work offers a powerful account of the form and ideology of *Alton Locke*’s narrative. Yet her focus on Alton’s indeterminate self tends to obscure some important aspects of the novel’s plot and politics, including many of the questions raised above. In this essay, I wish to consider the protean Locke and the story Kingsley tells about him not as figures of pure writing but as representations of the relationship between the “condition of England problem” and the sphere of cultural production — specifically, between the social problem of class oppression and what John Guillory, after the French sociologist of culture Pierre Bourdieu, has taught us to call “cultural capital”: in its largest sense, “a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts” (Johnson 7). In particular, I will argue, the novel explores a highly practical aspect of cultural capital, “access to the means of literary production and consumption” (Guillory, *Cultural* ix): for instance — and all of these are problems in *Alton Locke* — *linguistic* access to the correct forms of literary language, *institutional* access to publication or patronage, *material* access to the time and tools necessary for writing literature, *socio-literary* access to the appropriate genres and traditions.

In a breathtaking set of essays included in *The Field of Cultural Production* and incorporated into his recent *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu reads Flaubert’s 1869 *Sentimental Education* as a self-conscious analysis of the structure of the literary field in mid-nineteenth-century France, a field marked by both a submission to far more powerful fields (government, economic capital, the marketplace) and a fervent desire to critique these fields from a disinterested standpoint permitted by the very powerlessness of the literary realm. In *Alton Locke*, too, the central problem turns out to be the relationship between the field of literary production and a set of other fields Kingsley will juxtapose (and ultimately attempt to collapse together). Although I would not claim for Kingsley’s novel either the self-consciousness or the acuteness of Flaubert’s, I will use the model of Bourdieu to explore the relationship between cultural capital and social commentary in *Alton Locke* — between the scene of writing literature and the scene of rioting laborers — and to analyze the ways in which the novel’s putative solution to the acute social questions of the hungry forties turns out to be an imaginative reformulation not of government or politics but of the early-Victorian field of literary production. In fact, I will argue, the novel’s treatment of Chartist politics hinges upon its construction of male, working-class authorship as a resolvable analogue and displacement of the problems raised by radical politics.¹

I. Parson Lot and the Literary Field

IN ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM of authorship in the late 1840s, Charles Kingsley would have found himself in eminent company. The novel’s portrait of a fictional poet as a

young man parallels the fictionalized writerly autobiographies of authors such as Dickens in *David Copperfield* (1849–50) and Thackeray in *Pendennis* (1848–50), novels whose serial publication precisely coincides with the composition of *Alton Locke*. For Mary Poovey, *David Copperfield* reveals an emergent gender- and class-based mid-Victorian alignment of authorship and modern subjectivity. In her account, Dickens's construction of authorship as a form of male, English, middle-class consciousness becomes especially clear when set against several apparently disparate elements of its plot: David's experiences of alienated manual labor as "a little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby"; the novel's formal disavowal of Uriah Heep as a working-class social-climber; and Agnes Wickfield Copperfield's seamless fabrication of a realm of middle-class female domesticity and disciplined male desire (Dickens 136, ch. 11; Poovey 89–125). But as it formulates the ideologies of authorship circa 1850, Poovey points out, even a novel as apparently confident as *David Copperfield* reveals their unstable and incomplete nature:

Precisely because literary labor exposed the problematic nature of crucial capitalist categories [private property, labor, individuality], writing, and specifically the representation of writing, became a contested site during the period, a site at which the instabilities implicit in market relations surfaced, only to be variously worked over and sometimes symbolically resolved. . . .

In fact, just as it was a microcosm of some of the most problematic aspects of capitalist work relations, so writing was a showcase for the restrictions unofficially but systematically institutionalized in class society. (105, 107)

Poovey must tease out the class restrictions on writing in *David Copperfield*, but they will virtually define the problem of authorship in *Alton Locke*, a novel that offers a peculiar but polemical and political translation of the social issue of workers' emancipation into the literary field.

For instance, there is the problem of *habitus* in the novel, the term Bourdieu uses for the system of dispositions, the practical sense developed over a lifetime within a social milieu, that structures our responses to the situations, perceptions, and practices in which we take part every day.² As "a Cockney among Cockneys" who is raised in rigid Calvinism by his mother, Alton must assemble the elements of literary culture from the Bible (his mother prefers the Old Testament), *Pilgrim's Progress* ("my Shakespeare, my Dante, my Vedas"), and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (Kingsley, *Alton* 6, 10, ch. 1; 42, ch. 4). Young Alton knows that he needs more books to complete his education, "[b]ut where to get the books? And which?" (30; ch. 2). Even as Alton becomes familiar with the "rules" of poetry and attempts to write his own verse (81; ch. 7), he must confront issues of the correct subjects and styles for poetry, problems made especially acute by his outsider status and his somewhat haphazard literary education by Sandy Mackaye, a Scots book-dealer who befriends him.

Responding with appalled dismay to Alton's first poetic production, the tale of "a pious sea-rover" in the South Pacific, Mackaye counsels him to write about London life (84; ch. 7). As on his own he reads Tennyson, Crabbe, Burns, Wordsworth, Hood, and Dickens, Alton discovers a democratic spirit in the male canon of modern British literature — and promptly begins to compose what Mackaye dismisses as "mongrels atween Burns and Tennyson." "Mak a style for yoursel," he admonishes. When a perplexed Alton

asks, “how can I, till I know what sort of a style it ought to be,” Mackaye advises him to “[m]ak a style as ye would mak a wife, by marrying her a’ to yoursel” (99; ch. 9) — an association between poetic identity and male, heterosexual object-choice that will characterize the novel’s formulation of the cultural field. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu analyzes the relationship between class habitus and responses to questions such as which subjects would make a beautiful picture (517, 536). In *Alton Locke*, a worker-writer’s (rather selective) lack of the necessary habitus lets Kingsley supply his own answers to problems such as what would make an appropriate poem — and what would make an appropriate poem for a working-class poet to write.

As with *Copperfield* or *Pendennis*, one could stress the autobiographical matrix of *Alton Locke* and the way in which Locke’s situation as a writer parallels and reworks Kingsley’s own, especially since, as Gallagher observes, “the ‘I’ of the narrator is most believable when describing Alton’s problems as a writer. . . . If Kingsley cannot quite become Alton, occasionally he can, through the character’s writing, turn Alton into Kingsley” (105). Charles Kingsley was of course no starving, tubercular “Cockney” workman who knew “Italy and the Tropics, the Highlands and Devonshire . . . only in dreams,” but a Cambridge-educated rector, the son of a well-to-do clergyman, and a man who had in fact been *born* in Devonshire (Kingsley, *Alton* 6; ch. 1). Yet he was also, by the end of the forties, a young man writing to support himself and his family, including an upper-class wife. He was also a writer who, even more than his creation Alton Locke, was conscious of both the possibilities for promoting political ideas in literature and the need to negotiate the system of cultural capital — even when it came to political writing. As early as 1846 Kingsley had written to influential friends to describe his plans for a new journal that would give him and like-minded thinkers a platform from which to co-opt and “Christianise” (as Kingsley put it) a world-historical movement toward democracy which he regarded as inescapable (Colloms 80).

But as he later reported it, what actually crystallized Kingsley’s plan to found a journal was a more-or-less chance first-time meeting with the London barrister John Malcolm Ludlow on the portentous date of Monday, April 10, 1848 (Colloms 92). April 10, 1848 — the very day that the Chartists’ planned demonstration and presentation of the People’s Charter to Parliament had sent England into an uproar over the possibility of rioting, class warfare, and perhaps even the first stage of a revolution like the one France was undergoing — and the very day that, in Kingsley’s influential reconstruction of it, saw the hopes of the Chartists and the fears of the political establishment dissolve in a jumbled, rain-sodden meeting that brought Chartism, and would later bring the novel *Alton Locke*, to a sudden anticlimax.³ As they hurried on their way to view the Chartist rally, Ludlow and Kingsley discussed their ideas about religion and social reform. After they reached Kennington Common and discovered that the meeting had already disbanded, the two men remained together to discuss a plan for a new periodical to promote Christian Socialism. The first number of their paper *Politics for the People* appeared less than a month later.

And in this very issue, the first of Kingsley’s “Parson Lot” “Letters to Chartists” addresses what Kingsley viewed as the problems of Chartism by discussing the problem of Chartist *literature*. Hunting down Chartist writing in a bookshop, Kingsley or “Parson Lot” is roused by the justice of its political claims but upset by its violent language and by the cultural company it tends to keep:

Now, as a book, as well as a man, may be known by his companions, I looked round the shop to see what was the general sort of stock there, and behold, there was hardly anything but “Flash Songsters” and the “Swell’s Guide,” and “Tales of Horror,” and dirty milksop French novels. (*Letters* 1: 162)

In the field of cultural production, Kingsley locates Chartist writing not among the highest, most valued offerings of the literary domain but amid the lowest: ephemera, genre fiction, pornography. To make things worse, in the pages of Chartist papers Kingsley finds infidel works being advertised; Chartist writing occupies a market niche adjacent to atheist literature.⁴ According to Kingsley, Chartist literature expresses legitimate grievances but does so in an improper mode, in an unsuitable section of the cultural field, in the wrong bookstore. He argues that Chartist writing should shun infidelity and sever its ties to crude popular works in favor of another set of references, another arena of cultural positioning already present in the best of its literature:

I opened the leading article of the paper, and there were fine words enough, and some really noble and eloquent words, too, which stirred my blood and brought the tears into my eyes, about “divine liberty,” and “heaven-born fraternity,” and the “cause of the poor being the cause of God;” all which I knew well enough before, from a very different “Reformer’s Guide,” to which I hope to have the pleasure of introducing you some day. (1: 163)

Some day *soon*, as it turns out: in the very next of the Parson Lot letters, Kingsley undertakes just this task of Christianizing Chartism by introducing the Bible as the ultimate manual for spiritual revolution based on equality before God.

Kingsley’s first “Letter to Chartists” offers a characteristic paradigm for the relationship between writing and the condition of England question: social problems (the ones targeted by Chartism) can only be addressed by changes in the cultural production of the protest literature — which turns out to mean the installation of religion at the heart of social writing. Yet the whole shift from the social realm, to the cultural, to the religious, has been suggested in the first place by a problem of the marketplace for writing. It is a pattern that we will also see in the structure of *Alton Locke*, as it represents the social problem of the condition of the poor, treats Alton’s various strategies for assembling the cultural capital necessary to become a writer, and finally attempts to resolve the issues raised by both earlier subjects by introducing the “very different ‘Reformer’s Guide’” Kingsley had urged on the Chartists in the wake of 1848: the Gospel. Parson Lot’s own claims to cultural authority highlight the interplay between Kingsley’s Protestant cultural polemics and his emergent self-fashioning as a literary man; in his biography, the year “1848. . . . marked his public appearance as a literary figure and a Protestant apologist, two roles which were for him frequently indistinguishable” (Uffelman 18).

II. A Subject for a Beautiful Poem

IN THE SERVICE OF KINGSLEY’S POLEMICS, *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet* presents a fictional autobiography loosely based on the lives of working-class poets and political agitators such as Thomas Cooper, the “shoe-maker poet” and Chartist. After reading

Cooper's poetry, Kingsley had sought out and befriended him; as Cooper would recall in his autobiography, Kingsley's friendship later helped convert him from free-thinking Chartism to orthodox Christianity. According to his own account, Cooper himself was much more a poet than a shoemaker, undertaking the shoemaking trade without a regular apprenticeship in order to help his widowed mother as he continued the private studies that would allow him to become a teacher and a writer. Cooper describes his youthful efforts to combine the lives of a worker and a student as intellectually thrilling but, ultimately, physically exhausting; in the story of the sickly Alton Locke, Kingsley emphasizes this aspect of Cooper's experience.

Kingsley knew Cooper's story well, and in several ways Cooper's life provided the model for Alton's, especially for the chapters in which Alton lectures to a group of desperate rural workers and inadvertently precipitates a riot, an act for which he is tried and imprisoned.⁵ But Kingsley adds a dimension to Alton's fictional struggles that is hard to find in Cooper's later account of his own real ones (an account written, it must be pointed out, after Cooper's conversion from diligent Chartist to cheerful evangelist). After he becomes a Chartist, Cooper is fired from the staff of a newspaper in Leicester, but he soon agrees to take over the local Chartist paper, and thereafter finds his writing and his politics largely complementary. Yet Kingsley imagines a fundamental conflict between Locke's desire to become a writer and his belief in radical political reform. Although his Chartism calls for a more egalitarian political system, a republican emancipation of working-class men, Alton's pursuit of authorship emphasizes his *submission* to high culture, a pattern one seldom sees in the real autobiography of the editor, lecturer, and onetime schoolmaster Cooper. From his first exposure to art and literature, Alton is overwhelmed by their sublime power to govern his imagination — to the point that, in *Alton Locke*, being a poet by definition threatens to compromise one's politics.

Perhaps no episode illustrates this better than Alton's first trip to an art gallery, an early turning point in the novel. At the Dulwich College Picture Gallery in London, he finds himself mesmerized by Guido Reni's painting of St. Sebastian, an iconic representation of suffering masculinity turned into spectacle. The image of St. Sebastian pierced by arrows holds Alton rapt and moves him to tears. As the novel's first-person narrative presents the scene:

Timidly, but eagerly, I went up to the picture, and stood entranced before it. It was Guido's St. Sebastian. All the world knows the picture, and all the world knows, too, the defects of the master. . . . But the very defects of the picture, its exaggeration, its theatricality, were especially calculated to catch the eye of a boy awaking out of Puritanism. The breadth and vastness of light and shade upon those manly limbs, so grand and yet so delicate, standing out against the background of lurid night, the helplessness of the bound arms, the arrow quivering in the shrinking side, the upturned brow, the eyes in whose dark depths enthusiastic faith seemed conquering agony and shame, the parted lips, which seemed to ask, like those martyrs in the Revelations, reproachful, half-resigned, 'O Lord, how long?' — Gazing at that picture since, I have understood how the idolatry of painted saints could arise in the minds even of the most educated, who were not disciplined by that stern regard for fact which is — or ought to be — the strength of Englishmen. I have understood the heart of that Italian girl, whom some such picture of St. Sebastian, perhaps this very one, excited, as the Venus of Praxiteles the Grecian boy, to hopeless love, madness, and death. (Kingsley, *Alton* 70–71; ch. 6)

The moment announces Alton's awakening from the "Puritanism" of his strict upbringing into poetry, from artisanship into art. As the text presents it, it is also an initiation into the culture of the interpretive community whose members will make up the novel's audience, into "the world" that already "knows the picture" and reflexively agrees about Reni's "defects" as a painter, at least once it has been discreetly reminded of them by the older, culturally-savvy Alton who supposedly narrates the book. Here is empathy towards the cultural artifact with a vengeance, supplemented by the invocation of a discriminating, art-appreciatory habitus.

In the St. Sebastian scene, the emotion called forth by melodramatic art seems to overwhelm politics, even temporarily to dispel the social reality presented by the text in a suspended moment of proto-Paterian ekphrasis: the paratactic and impressionistic descriptions of parts, the careful alliterations, the grammatical omissions and elisions ("faith seemed conquering agony and shame"), the interrupting post-positional modifiers inserted to lend the description a tone of precision, exquisite and finely wrought. But what may register most strongly for modern readers is the fact that this passionate induction into art occurs not through the vehicle of the "undressed" Venus who has just raised Alton's blushes (70; ch. 6) but by means of a representation of a martyred *male* body undergoing simultaneous physical agony and spiritual transcendence — and not the ascetic body of a crucifixion scene but the "manly limbs, so grand and yet so delicate," of Reni's soldier-saint.

After all, St. Sebastian "became a popular subject" for Italian Renaissance painting in the first place because "he offered artists an opportunity to portray a male nude in an ecclesiastical context" and therefore amounted to a sort of "Christian Apollo" — or "a young Apollo of Popery" as a more dubious viewer describes him to Alton (Wundram 47; Kingsley, *Alton* 72; ch. 6). One of Reni's recent critics traces the homoerotic (and sometimes homophobic) response to his various St. Sebastians from Renaissance commentaries to Yukio Mishima's encounters with the image (Spear 67–76); a few months after the publication of his book he could also have added to his list the cover of American editions of *Violin* (1997), Anne Rice's latest pornogothic novel.⁶ Yet the Reni Sebastian that Alton sees at Dulwich College — the painting that is actually there to this day — is not the famous image Mishima and Rice appropriate of a pained but ecstatic Sebastian facing his destiny in a quiescent, full-frontal pose, but a different image, one dated as a later effort (*Guido* 212).⁷

In the painting that mesmerizes Alton Locke, a "more emotional" Sebastian is turned slightly away "in three-quarter view," his head twisted away from his body, his left leg lifted (Figure 5) (*Guido* 212). This Sebastian is frozen in agitated motion. Placed asymmetrically in the left half of the canvas, he nevertheless gazes up towards the left corner, as if turning his head away from the world pictured in the right half of the painting, a world dominated by a stormy sky (above the tiny figures of what might be Roman soldiers confronting some civilians), and away from the single arrow lodged in his side. A hybrid figure, he combines the sturdy torso, muscled arms and thick neck of a classical hero with the parted lips, flushed cheeks, and long, wavy hair of a pre-Raphaelite Virgin. In contrast to most images of St. Sebastian, including Reni's other versions, the painting seems to hide the saint's bound hands and largely to obscure the tree or pillar to which they are fastened, an element that usually towers over Sebastian's figure as a strong line that emphasizes the fettered verticality of the martyr's body. Alton's Sebastian has his hands pulled behind his



Figure 5. Guido Reni, *St. Sebastian*, c. 1617–18. Oil. By permission of the Trustees of the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London.

back, but the painting omits to show his bindings and only dimly shows the foliage of the tree to which he is bound.⁸ With his left leg raised (presumably in response to the arrow that has just struck his left abdomen), Sebastian seems to have started moving but soon abandoned the effort; in fact his uplifted leg now offers a visual rhyme with the arrow above it, exactly parallel, as if his eyes were averted from the world as his body stepped into martyrdom.

Held in place by hidden fetters and lashed to an almost invisible object, looking towards heaven as he makes a feeble effort to submit to the fate of martyrdom, this Christian Apollo offers a powerful figure for Alton's connection to high culture — and for the erotic and spiritual submission that will define his romance with it. Even after Alton's initial encounter with the painting (“[g]azing at that picture since”), the intensity of his feeling as he looks at the image lets him grasp not only the aesthetic appeal of idolatry but even the feelings of women and boys driven to mania and suicide by passion for such images. The descriptions of both the painting and Alton's fervid response to it are intense enough to provoke the conclusion that when Sebastian's limbs stand out from “the background of lurid night,” an ostensibly neutral ekphrastic word is actually a sort of transferred epithet that describes the emotional register of the passage itself.⁹ “What a beautiful poem the story [of St. Sebastian] would make,” sighs the would-be poet Alton (Kingsley, *Alton* 72; ch. 6).

We can hardly miss the erotic charge of Alton's first exposure to art, even as the narrative nominally dismisses the sexual dimension of this aesthetic encounter by contrasting it to Alton's embarrassed glance at the Venus. But in addition to checking Alton's heteroerotic blushes, the fact that the painting that captures his attention depicts a suffering St. Sebastian rather than a nude Venus allows for a crucial set of novelistic and characterological identifications based on masculine agony. With the simultaneous eruption of sensuality (associated with the young Alton) and disavowal of it (by the older and wiser writing voice) made possible by the novel's retrospective narrative, the St. Sebastian scene itself both affirms and encapsulates a conflict between aesthetic pleasure and a peculiarly English stern factualness that the book will soon touch upon again as it introduces a chapter on the evils of the clothes trade, entitled “How Folks Turn Chartists.” Displacing the fracture between the text's status as social document and as imaginative fiction onto the novel's audience, this preface runs:

Those who read my story only for amusement, I advise to skip this chapter. Those, on the other hand, who really wish to ascertain what working men actually do suffer — to see whether their political discontent has not its roots, not merely in fanciful ambition, but in misery and slavery most real and agonizing . . . may, I hope, think it is worth their while to learn how the clothes which they wear are made, and listen to a few occasional statistics . . .” (100; ch. 10)

What remains implicit here is the identification of the “agony” of Sebastian's martyrdom with the “agonizing” “misery and slavery” of English workers, and the suffering of Alton with both. Like the young Thomas Cooper, Alton suffers bodily for his purchase on culture; as they stint themselves of food and bread to study in the hours not spent making shoes or clothes, their bodies break down, undergoing a sort of physical agony and spiritual transcendence later reiterated in the novel's treatment of the final months of

Alton's life. Even the ekphrastic keywords of the St. Sebastian passage reappear in the description of a dead woman whose husband Jemmy Downes was once Alton's fellow worker and whose fever will soon infect and destroy Alton: "the wasted white *limbs* gleamed in the *lurid* light; the unclosed *eyes* stared, as if *reproachfully*, at the husband whose drunkenness had brought her there to kill her with the pestilence" (331; ch. 35, emphasis added). St. Sebastian, we recall, was the patron saint of plague victims.

The image of Reni's St. Sebastian, exaggerated and theatrical as he admits it to be, provides a proleptic high-cultural correlative not only for Alton's misery but for the ghastly suffering (its representation largely based on Henry Mayhew's journalism) that the novel will uncover in the clothes-trade.¹⁰ But it is also a picture of a disobedient Christian soldier undergoing execution by his emperor which, because of its cultural history as a religious icon, has become a depoliticized image of spiritual elevation brought on by suffering — even, one might say, an image of attempted political murder turned into religious art. "Clearly the passage [that presents Alton's response to St. Sebastian] is meant to delineate a crucial threshold in Locke's life, but the structure of the transition remains unclear" comments James Eli Adams (144). And yet in a rather crudely allegorical sense the passage's meaning is manifest: as a Chartist poet, Alton endorses political action, yet it is a representation of impotent, anguished sainthood that comes to typify his relationship to high culture.

III. *For the Love of Lillian*

THOMAS COOPER RECOVERS from his illness and exhaustion, but Alton continues to find himself "St. Sebastianizing" (as his cousin George wittily but perceptively puts it) — in an attitude of submission to high culture and to the system of cultural production (Kingsley, *Alton* 226; ch. 24). In fact, the art gallery scene ushers in the next phase of his submission. So obvious and so singular is Alton's fascination with the painting of St. Sebastian that he is soon approached by a wealthy and educated group that includes both an intellectual dean and his beautiful young daughter — with whom Alton immediately falls in unrequited love. In an instant he transfers his one-sided passion for culture from the painting that allegorizes his submission before art, to the ravishing Lillian.

"Oh, that's the dodge, is it, to catch intellectual fine ladies?" teases George, "— to fall into an extatic attitude before a picture — But then we must have Alton's genius, you know, to find out which the fine pictures are" (74; ch. 6). For the skeptical George, "Alton's genius" is no transcendent power but an eminently *practical* ability to make aesthetic judgements; one might compare it both to Bourdieu's concept of "cultural competence," and to what Bourdieu calls the "aesthetic disposition," the capacity to experience a work of art in the "socially accepted" way (*Distinction* 28–30). "I must read up that subject, by-the-bye," George concludes in sarcastic admiration (74; ch. 6). A social-climber who views every field of social life as a game, George provides a counter-discourse (which the narrative formally discounts as cynicism) to the novel's invocation of inborn genius.¹¹ For Alton's part, once his aesthetic judgments are confirmed ("Let us hope that your seeing a subject for a good poem will be the first step towards your writing one," responds the dean to Alton's suggestion that the story of Sebastian would make a fine poem), not Sebastian but *Lillian* becomes the object of his cultural proficiency and aesthetic recognition (72; ch. 6). "Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, beyond all statue, picture,

or poet's dream," Lillian nonetheless evokes a unique array of high-cultural references in Alton's physical description of her: "features delicate and regular, as if fresh from the chisel of Praxiteles . . . a skin of alabaster (privet flowers, Horace and Ariosto would have said, more true to Nature) . . . auburn hair, with that peculiar crisped wave seen in the old Italian pictures" (71; ch. 6). Even to recognize and catalogue her beauty is an act that calls out Alton's aesthetic disposition and cultural competence.

Alton falls in love with Lillian on the spot but knows that he may never see her again — although as he extends his encounter with high art, he does at least find "a picture in the National Gallery" in which he sees a resemblance to her (77; ch. 7). Roaming the West End in the vain hope of having another glimpse of Lillian, Alton is tortured by the sight of the kind of men entitled to associate with her merely by virtue of their social station:

Those fine gentlemen who rode past me in the park, who rolled by in carriages, sitting face to face with ladies, as richly dressed, if not as beautiful, as she was — they could see her when they liked — why not I? . . . for who could worship her like me? . . . they had not suffered for her as I had done; they had not stood in rain and frost, fatigue and blank despair — watching — watching — month after month; and I was making coats for them! (77; ch. 7)

"[W]ho could worship her like me?" asks Alton. In his desire to sanctify and adore Lillian, Alton echoes the conventional literary language of romance, yet his words bespeak the desire literally *to worship*, as will become clear by the end of the novel, after Lillian has disappeared from its pages. But love, like literature, is neither a meritocracy nor a redemption that exalts the faithful.

With Alton's frustration at the gentlemen's class-based access to Lillian, the novel comes close to an ironic critique of gentlemanly display, since the impoverished Alton may well be making the clothes the "fine gentlemen" wear. Such outward difference may be especially important given the feebleness of Kingsley's cross-class ventriloquism. As a character, Alton belies his own assertion that, while rich and poor *gentlemen* have the same outlook and deportment, "[a] difference in income, as you go lower" in the social hierarchy "makes more and more difference . . . in education and manners" (21; ch. 2). As critics have observed, Alton never speaks like a Cockney tailor — or as Gallagher points out, like a *speaker* at all (105); he treats London not as a home but as a prison, even before he has journeyed anywhere else (Bodenheimer 138); and he views his own class in the horrified terms of a middle-class sanitary reformer (Childers 140). Underlying all of these characteristics, we could say, is Kingsley's inability — and possibly his disinclination — to characterize his Chartist poet's experience in the terms of an urban, working-class habitus, even a simulated one. After all, Alton believes that God made him a poet so that he "might learn to feel for poor wretches who sit stifled in reeking garrets and workrooms" (6; ch. 1); Alton was born a poet *before* he became a worker, and God placed him among the working-class so that he could bring sympathy for them within the purview of the literary field. In this novel, "working-class culture" would be an oxymoron, so Alton must stay up nights studying Latin and wander the streets of London vainly searching for Lillian.

But Lillian remains out of view and out of reach. Finally Alton cries to Mackaye:

Why have I not as good a right to speak to her, to move in the same society in which she moves, as any of the fops of the day? Is it because these aristocrats are more intellectual than I? I should not fear to measure brains against most of them now; and give me the opportunities which they have, and I would die if I did not outstrip them? Why have I not those opportunities? (77; ch. 7)

Alton has the “brains” to overtake the gentlemen around Lillian but no “opportunities.” This is not the language of erotic love but of competition in an “intellectual” marketplace where chances are manifestly unequal. Mackaye replies sarcastically to Alton’s complaints:

They’ll no break up their ain monopoly; trust them for it! Na: if ye want to get amang them, I’ll tell thee the way o’t. Write a book o’ poems, and ca’ it “A Voice fra’ the Goose, by a Working Tailor” — and then — why, after a dizen years or so of starving and scribbling for your bread, ye’ll ha’ a chance o’ finding yersel’ a lion, and a flunkey. . . . (78; ch. 7)

As Mackaye’s scenario makes clear, flunkeys can only go so far. When the hypothetical worker-poet falls in love with “a fine leddy,” his former patrons cast him off for his presumption (78; ch. 7). But of course Alton is already in love with a fine lady.

Chastened, Alton returns to his tailoring and his writing, until his employer announces that he will convert his establishment from a sweatshop to a showroom with “plate-glass shop fronts and brass scroll work” that will send out piecework to its tailors, cutting their wages and making their employment even more precarious (102; ch. 10). Roused by a Chartist co-worker, Alton quits in protest. Yet Alton seizes the moment not as a chance to seek a living as a political writer (as Cooper had when he was fired for his politics) but as an opportunity to seek out patronage. On Mackaye’s advice, he leaves London for the first time in his life and journeys to Cambridge, where he hopes to enlist the help of George, an undergraduate there, in publishing his poems.

The status-seeking George tenders little except cynical discussions of Cambridge life and lessons in cultivating influential acquaintances, but one of his aristocratic companions, the benevolent Lord Lynedale, offers something more. On the wall of Lynedale’s chambers, Alton “recognis[es], with a sort of friendly affection, an old print of [his] favourite St. Sebastian”:

It brought back to my mind a thousand dreams, and a thousand sorrows. Would those dreams ever be realised? Might this new acquaintance possibly open some pathway towards their fulfillment? . . . [A]t that thought, my heart beat loud with hope. (145–46; ch. 3)

Alton’s thoughts prove prescient, for at Lord Lynedale’s side he finds Eleanor, the cousin of Lillian and her companion in the Dulwich Gallery. Recognizing Alton, Eleanor sends him and his poetry to her uncle the dean, predicting that if his writing proves “fit for publication,” he may help Alton publish his work (149; ch. 13). When he meets the dean in company with his daughter Lillian, Alton can barely respond to the man’s questions, so absorbed is he in staring at her: “I could have fallen down, fool that I was! and worshipped — what? I could not tell then, for I cannot tell even now” (150; ch. 13).

Interested by the sensitive worker-poet, the dean agrees to submit his verse to a publisher. As he does so, he offers a lament that may sound familiar to us in the contemporary academy, a complaint that — out of a desire to reapportion symbolic capital — conflates accusations of sloppiness, careerism, and radicalism: “This haste to rush into print is one of the bad signs of the times — a symptom of the unhealthy activity which was first called out by the French revolution” (153; ch. 13). But the publisher only tells Alton what the dean has already suggested: that to make his poems “fit for publication,” he will have to excise all of their Chartist politics. The “public taste” will not stand for political poetry, reports the publisher (179; ch. 18). And the dean adds: “The poet, like the clergyman and the philosopher, has nothing to do with politics . . . the world may rave, but in the study there is quiet” (180; ch. 18). As a guardian of access to the facilities of literary production and distribution — but also someone who hopes to gratify the “public taste” and make a profit — the publisher shares both the dean’s assumptions about the literary field and his aesthetic disposition for reading verse. The dean’s understanding of what poetry *is* turns out to be identical to the publisher’s notion of what poetry *sells*, presumably because it is the dean and his class who will be buying it.¹²

The political passages in his writing, recalls Alton, “were the very pith and marrow of the poems,”

the very words which I had felt it my duty, my glory, to utter. I, who had been a working man, who had experienced all their sorrows and temptations — I, seemed called by every circumstance of my life to preach their cause, to expose their wrongs — I to quash my convictions, to stultify my book, for the sake of popularity, money, patronage! And yet — all that involved seeing more of Lillian. (182; ch. 18)

Reluctantly, Alton complies, trying to serve the two masters he describes as “God and Mammon . . . or rather, not Mammon, but Venus: a worship which looked to me, and really was in my case, purer than all the Mariolatry in Popedom” (182; ch. 18).

We are on rapidly shifting figural ground here. The cause of the working class was Alton’s God, while Lillian is the Mammon of worldly success . . . no, she is Venus and erotic love . . . no, she is a pure, sanctified Virgin Mary — Alton still worshipping what? — he cannot tell. The allegory and analogy here are so imprecise, the romance plot so unilateral and abortive, that they seem to point to a sort of covert plot that has merely been figured in terms of the youthful romance that the generic conventions of the *Bildungsroman* require. In fact, I believe that the bewitching Lillian largely *becomes* a figure for various kinds of “cultural capital,” most notably, for ideological and material access to the means of literary production — and for the worker-poet Alton’s romance with literary culture. “Alton ‘tears himself in pieces’ for reasons the narrator can never quite formulate,” observes Gallagher in her account of the tailor-poet’s unraveling. “It is for the love of Lillian, but what is the love of Lillian? Only the book’s deepest mystery” (97). Gallagher cites Alton’s first-person bewilderment at his sudden passion for Lillian, a perplexity echoed in most criticism of the novel. Yet the mystery becomes less puzzling once we note the way in which Lillian, both as a plot device and an emblematic figure, from her first appearance offers Alton access to one part of the field in which culture is consumed and produced, to a world of connoisseurship and patronage. Alton’s instant love for Lillian — along with the simultaneously all-consuming and strangely perfunctory

romance plot it launches — begins to seem like a version of a would-be Victorian poet's passionate devotion to high culture, to the objects of the most culturally-valued modes of literary consumption and production.

If his encounter with Lillian and her Cambridge coterie initiates Alton's enmeshment in one region of the literary field — the arena of patrician amateurs, subscribers, and patrons — his experiences in a sort of Chartist Grub Street take him to the antipodes. Before his censored book of poems is published, as its subscriber list slowly begins to fill, Alton returns to London, where he must earn a living by becoming a self-confessed "hack writer": "miserable work . . . only not worse than tailoring. — To try and serve God and Mammon too; to make miserable compromises daily between the two great incompatibilities, what was true, and what would pay" (188; ch. 20). To publish his poetry, Alton had tried to serve God the Charter and the Mammon-Mary of success; now the same allusion covers God the truth and the Mammon of the *Weekly Warwhoop*, a radical paper run by the tyrannical and unscrupulous editor O'Flynn. Moving passively from aristocratic patronage to exploitation as a literary laborer for "the low, novel-mongering press" (83; ch. 7), Alton maps out Kingsley's representation of the literary field. Indeed, with his alternatively indistinct and incoherent characterization, Alton Locke resembles a sort of literary particle caught in the lines of force projected by the various structures and ideologies of the Victorian literary market — without recourse to the sort of masculine, middle-class authorial self-assertiveness Poovey notes in *David Copperfield*.

The combative O'Flynn is a version of the Chartist leader and editor Feargus O'Connor; for several years in the 1840s, Thomas Cooper had earned his living as a correspondent for O'Connor's radical *Northern Star* (Thompson 157). Yet Alton's relationship with O'Flynn diverges sharply from Cooper's connection to O'Connor, for Cooper was no dominated hack but a political writer so enthusiastically in agreement with O'Connor that after his evangelical conversion, the remembrance of the emotional tie embarrassed him (Thompson 98). In contrast, Alton is not a political ally but merely an abused literary laborer. Hearing that Alton has visited Cambridge, O'Flynn demands an indictment of the evils of the universities, threatening to fire him if he refuses. Just as Alton had cut the politics from his poetry for the sake of Lillian and the Cambridge circle, now he supplies political criticism of the university at the request of a radical editor, even though he feels "almost guilty of a breach of trust" toward the people there who have treated him kindly (215; ch. 23). And just as Alton must rewrite his poems in order to publish them, he finds his moderate article rewritten into a crude "rant" for publication (215; ch. 23). On the very morning he reads his alienated words with indignant fury, Alton happens to witness the assembly for Eleanor's wedding to Lord Lynedale — and first notices the shallowness of Lillian's "hazel eye" next to Eleanor's stronger features (216; ch. 23).

When the volume of his self-censored poems at last appears and sells well, Locke becomes well-known in literary society through the dean's continued patronage. The literary field, it turns out, is constituted not merely by books themselves but also by the gatherings and events that Alton begins to attend. As Alton meets authors he has only known from their books, "Lillian [is] there among them, more exquisite than ever; but even she at first attracted my eyes and thoughts less than did the truly great men around her" (237; ch. 26). The imagined male rivals who had a right to see Lillian by virtue of their class, whom Alton dismissed as foolish fops, have been superseded by the eminent literary men who now surround her; the most successful competitors in the literary field, they

outshine even Lillian, whom the text is gradually revealing as an empty, neutral figure for the allure of access to culture. In the company of Lillian and these great writers, Alton finally feels himself a member of “the holy guild of authors,” sitting on “the lowest step of the literary temple” (237; ch. 26). As keen to worship as ever, Alton celebrates his arrival at the “temple” of culture; however, as the end of the novel will be at pains to show, he has reached the wrong chapel altogether.

Alton’s triumph in the literary field sours when O’Flynn publishes an article denouncing him as a lackey of the aristocrats, and he soon finds himself shunned and ridiculed by his Chartist comrades. To prove his devotion to the cause, Alton volunteers to spread the Chartist message to the English poor. But on his first assignment, he journeys to an agricultural district where the workers are hungry, miserable, and so wretchedly dispirited that Alton finds himself departing from his Chartist program: “‘Go, then,’ I cried, losing my self-possession between disappointment and the maddening desire of influence . . . ‘go,’ I cried, ‘and get bread!’” (268; ch. 28). With the soaring, impromptu speech that follows, Locke inadvertently stirs up a riot. “Was it my doing?” he asks as he sees the hay-ricks begin to burn, “Was it not?” (270; ch. 28). The courts at least find it enough of Alton’s doing to send him to prison, where he languishes until the eve of April 1848.

Despite his attempts to exclude them from his poetry, Locke’s politics and his indignation erupt as displaced working-class rage — and Kingsley does not lose the opportunity of presenting the mob violence that ensues, the spectacle that haunted the middle- and upper-class response to Chartism. Yet the novel presents this rioting as the apparent result of Alton’s inability to reconcile the contradictions of the literary marketplace: patronage and hack-work; genius and employment; the Romantic idea of the Promethean author and the real need for material access to the tools of literary production and dissemination; the ostensible meritocracy of high culture and the fact that the class structure of Victorian society renders working-class Miltons largely mute and inglorious. On the personally and politically disastrous tenth of April, Alton witnesses the death of an ailing Sandy Mackaye, the madness of Jemmy Downes after his wife and children die in a pestilential slum, and the sight of the social-climbing George kissing his new fiancée — Lillian. At last “the spell [i]s broken” (327; ch. 35). Exhausted, disillusioned, and infected with fever, Alton collapses.

IV. Saint-Sebastianizing Chartism

IN *ALTON LOCKE’S* CONSTRUCTION of male working-class authorship, the connections between wealthy women and working-class men articulate the relationship of high culture to politics. That the softening power of culture over an economically powerless male author threatens one set of nineteenth-century gender norms is clear not only from Locke’s “St. Sebastianizing” but also from his sense that in order to secure access to cultural production he will have to “emasculate” his poetry by excising its radical politics (183; ch. 18). But Kingsley’s ideological solution to the problem of the worker-poet’s emasculation in the service of culture will only materialize after the novel supplies its most dramatic examples of erotic submission.

Near the end of the novel, suffering from the fever he has contracted in the “lurid” scene of Downes and his dead family, Alton experiences an astonishing sequence of dream visions that today may be the most famous part of the book. The hallucinatory fantasies

of the “Dream Land” chapter rewrite the novel’s realistic storyline as a series of bizarre archetypal scenarios that recapitulate phases of paleontological, racial, and social development, “a vast kaleidoscope . . . [of] fantastic symbols of all that I had ever thought, or read, or felt” (335; ch. 36). In his dreams, Alton is variously the “prey” of the “Hindoo” goddess Kali (336; ch. 36), a colony of one-celled polyps, a Prufrock-esque crab, a remora, an ostrich. Lillian appears as various powerful figures of desire; along with George, she ridicules, hunts, and kills Alton. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer notes, “[t]hese violent and erotic fantasies recast the story of Alton’s social struggle as masochistic sexual fantasy” (148) — but, in light of Alton’s erotic identification with St. Sebastian and his prostration before Lillian and culture, the rewriting of Alton’s story as masochistic phantasmagoria is hardly a psychological stretch.

As his dreams change from zoological to psychological and anthropological fantasies, Alton becomes “a child, upon a woman’s bosom,” in an attitude of infantile dependence: “Was she my mother, or Eleanor, or Lillian?” (343; ch. 36). Or perhaps she is “neither, and yet all — some ideal of the great Arian tribe, containing in herself all future types of European women?” (343, ch. 36). In this dream, the infant Alton finds himself also at the supposed infancy of Indo-European culture, as his people travel “westward, westward ever” to fulfill their divine racial destiny in Europe:

The tribes of the Holy Mountain poured out like water to replenish the earth and subdue it . . . Titan babies, dumb angels of God, bearing with them in their unconscious pregnancy, the law, the freedom, the science, the poetry, the Christianity, of Europe and the world. (343; ch. 36)

But the tribesmen become complacent, giving up their sacred journey at the foot of an apparently impassible mountain, where they begin tilling the land and gradually replace male equality with class difference. Grown to manhood, Alton becomes a “poet and orator” who exhorts his people to reinstate equality and resume their arduous task of digging through the mountain to reach their cultural destiny (347; ch. 36). The rich men of the tribe attempt to bribe him with a beautiful “veiled maiden,” promising that “she shall be thine, if though wilt be like other people, and prophecy smooth things to us, and torment us no more with talk about liberty, equality, and brotherhood. . . .’ And when the maiden’s veil was lifted, it was Lillian” (346; ch. 36). In these dreams, the problem is the “poet’s ambition,” notes Roslynn Haynes; “[t]he conflict is now between Alton’s desire for Lillian, combined with the social position she offers, and his consciousness of a vocation to devote his poetic gifts to the cause of liberty” (33). But at last Alton renounces Lillian and the erotic and social desires she promises to gratify, in favor of true culture: not merely cultural capital in the literary game but “law,” “science,” “poetry,” “Christianity.”

In its last chapters, *Alton Locke* finally reveals Lillian and the cultural capital she represents as inadequate to the problems of class conflict and social inequality. Lillian and high culture become idolatrous obsessions for Alton, just as the Charter had once been for him “an idol in itself” that offered mere outward change as a goal: “Fool that I was! It was within, rather than without, that I needed reform” (110; ch. 10). Sent to the fine gentleman George, the coat with which the mad tailor had covered his dead family has spread its contagion. Typhus kills George and infects Lillian, destroying the “loveliness” that Alton now admits he had “idolized in my folly” (372, 373; ch. 39). But the basic

paradigm remains intact: as Lillian and cultural capital prove to be false and unbeautiful idols, another upper-class woman with a different version of culture comes to the fore. In Alton's final dream, the veiled maiden Lillian is supplanted by a "veiled . . . prophetic" (349; ch. 36). "Surely I knew that voice!" exclaims Alton in the last moment of his fevered dreams: "She lifted her veil. The face was Lillian's? No! — Eleanor's!" (350; ch. 36). His fever broken, he awakens to find Eleanor sitting next to his bed.

At the end of the novel, a moribund Alton, and a moribund Chartist politics, are reformed by the more severe Eleanor, who argues that "real civilisation" comes from God, that at its core all culture is really religion, that Jesus like Alton endured all the "sorrows of genius," including not only the temptation "to use His creative powers for selfish ends" but above all the "agony" of "misinterpretation" by his public (375, ch. 39; 356–57, ch. 37). In the end, the muscular Christian Kingsley points to *religion* as the true source of cultural meaning and to a patiently suffering Jesus as the ultimate artisan-poet — an allegory that is possible because the novel has already established the submission of the artist-radical to culture as its norm. The real issue is choosing the correct version of culture to which to submit: God (which now means neither Chartism nor journalistic fidelity but *God*) or Mammon. By identifying God as the wellspring of human culture, Kingsley provides a Christian model for social activism and political writing that is intended to dispel the specter of the scene of rioting.

The exemplar has changed from St. Sebastian to Christ, from soldier-saint to carpenter-poet, and Alton's final imitation of Christ brings him a revolution from within that transforms him from Chartist literary partisan to Christian cultural artisan. Prostration before Eleanor now supersedes "worship" of Lillian and submission to high culture. After Eleanor reveals the true nature of culture as Christianity, the dying Alton, Saint-Sebastianized into a submission so complete it will prove suicidal, "would have fallen at her feet" but for the recollection of their shared "Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood" before God (387, 386; ch. 41). Nonetheless, taking command, Eleanor prescribes Alton's final literary production:

publish . . . an honest history of your life; extenuating nothing, exaggerating nothing, ashamed to confess or to proclaim nothing. It may perhaps awaken some rich man to look down and take pity on the brains and hearts more noble than his own, which lie struggling in poverty and misguidance, among these foul sties, which civilisation rears — and calls them cities. (387; ch. 41)

That is, before he dies, Alton must write the first-person narrative of *Alton Locke*.

Eleanor hopes that Alton will become "a Tropic poet," one who will leave behind "the old images" of European civilization, "the barren alternation between Italy and the Highlands," and by doing so "infuse some new blood into the aged veins of English literature" (384; ch. 40).¹³ Now Alton's partial lack of an upper-class habitus may prove an advantage; indeed, his very "ignorance of cultivated English scenery, and of Italian art, will enable [him] to approach with a more reverend, simple, and unprejudiced, eye, the primeval forms of beauty — God's work, not man's" (385; ch. 40). Yet scarcely an hour after reaching the tropics (Galveston, Texas, unaccountably enough), Alton Locke dies. Cynically, we might say that St. Sebastian, the brawny but effeminized and wounded Christian soldier, offers an image of the sort of muscular Christianity actually available to

Alton and other working-class Chartists: he has perforce forsaken the hope of attracting the pity of the powerful on earth and embraced a faith in the mercy of the omnipotent in heaven.¹⁴ Like Reni and the representational traditional he typifies, Kingsley has turned political suppression into religious art.¹⁵ The only remaining model of social activism is martyrdom, the fate not only of Alton but also of Eleanor. As we saw in Parson Lot's criticism of Chartist literature, a social problem dissolves into a question of culture, which must then be transformed into a question of religion.

As *Alton Locke* poses its political question of culture, the distinction between cultural capital and capitalism, and between poetry and tailoring, tends to collapse — just as Kingsley reliteralized the tailor metaphor of *Sartor Resartus* but then made his tailor a writer who must cut his verses to suit the gentlemanly fashion, culture becoming homologous with couture. But perhaps we should not be surprised to see the spheres of culture and commerce coming into alignment — and with politics, to boot. The years from 1848 to 1850 made an epoch not only in the history of Chartism but in the life of the Kingsley who first appeared as a literary figure in 1848:

By 1850, Kingsley had established a reputation. He was the author of a blank-verse play, two novels, poems, reviews, and political-theological essays. Foreign visitors had begun to request the opportunity of meeting him, and other writers, . . . [including] Tennyson, had visited Eversley. (Uffelman 21)

Alton Locke's fictional construction of working-class male authorship in the wake of 1848 was also a critical part of Charles Kingsley's construction of his own middle-class male authorship in the Victorian cultural field. The novel helped complete the emergence and self-positioning of Kingsley as an influential literary man, especially as it became an increasingly "open secret" that he was both Parson Lot and the author of the anonymously-published *Alton Locke* (Colloms 133).¹⁶ When a friend praised him for having remained true to his politics in the wake of 1848, Kingsley answered sharply but truthfully: "I lost nothing — I risked nothing . . . I risked no money; 'cause why, I had none, but *made* money out of the movement, and fame, too" (Colloms 134). *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet* made Kingsley's reputation — and earned him 150 pounds.

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NOTES

I would like to thank Stephanie Kuduk and Joss Marsh for their many comments on an earlier draft of this work. I first presented a version of it at "Scenes of Writing, 1750–1850," a conference held at Gregynog Hall in Wales in July 1998; it is a pleasure to recall the encouragement and camaraderie of my fellow participants. I am grateful to the Mabelle McLeod Lewis Memorial Fund for supporting my research on this essay.

1. In part, then, this essay performs the sort of "thematic" reading that Moi identifies as one of the "dangers" of the appropriation of Bourdieu's mode of sociological analysis by literary critics — although I exclude none of the "three major Bourdieuan terms — 'habitus' . . . 'field' . . . 'symbolic capital,'" the principal hazard Moi warns against (506).

Yet I would also point out that part of the function of *Alton Locke* as a text is precisely to thematize quasi-sociological analysis (Kingsley's somewhat simplistic understanding of the class structure informing Chartism, his appropriation of Henry Mayhew's proto-sociological reportage) in the form of a fictional account of a working-class poet's fate in the literary marketplace. And, after Bourdieu, I attempt to investigate the ideology of authorship in a particular socio-historical context — and in a particular text. In contrast to Moi, I view Bourdieu's potential contribution to Anglo-American criticism not as a rebuke to current post-structuralist and new historicist critical practices, but as a challenge to enrich them with sociological thinking.

2. For the clearest explanation of the concept of “habitus” and its significance in Bourdieu's thought, see Johnson 4–6.
3. As Thompson observes, “[a]lthough many textbooks and commentators have dated the end of Chartism as 10 April 1848, this was not at the time seen as a final end to the movement, nor does it appear to be a decisive date” (326). Instead, like Saville, Thompson identifies the systematic prosecution and imprisonment of leading Chartists in the summer and autumn of 1848 as the cause of the movement's dissolution (for a detailed analysis of the trials of British radicals in late 1848, see Saville 166–99).

In fact, Saville singles out *Alton Locke* as “one of the key books of the Victorian era that was to exercise a powerful influence upon public attitudes” toward 1848; in the novel's “Tenth of April” chapter, he argues, “Kingsley helped to confirm the myths of 10 April” — myths about Chartist anticipation, failure, and decline, and about government overreaction — “and they have remained in many history text books to our own day” (200, 201).

4. In an 1850 letter to Ludlow, Kingsley criticized Cooper for “openly preaching Straussism” (the application of historical principles to Christian myth, and the recasting of Christianity as a philosophy of human love) “to the workmen” in his new *Journal* (*Letters* 1: 234). Mary Ann Evans had translated Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* into English only a few years before.
5. In transforming Cooper's experience with radical urban Chartists into Alton's incitement of ignorant, hunger-crazed rural laborers, however, Kingsley was dramatically rewriting a political uprising to make it into a failed expression of desperation — the same emotional register that governs his presentation of the Tenth of April in *Alton Locke*.

The riot, his trial, and a confrontation with lying government informers precipitate Alton's disenchantment with Chartism; yet Cooper's parallel experiences brought him not only the opportunity to publicize his story and redeem himself in court, but also the occasion for writing some of his finest poetry in prison, including the unrepentant *magnum opus*, *The Purgatory of Suicides: A Prison-Rhyme in Ten Books* (1845). For a superb account of the relationship between sedition and epic in Cooper's poem, see Kuduk.

6. As I was making final revisions to this essay, Kaye was kind enough to send me a copy of his recent article on St. Sebastian and Victorian Decadence, which includes several pages on *Alton Locke*. Kaye's fascinating work, in this article and in the larger project of which it forms a part, promises to define the complex and mobile associations of the figure of Sebastian — aesthetic, religious, and sexual — in Victorian and modern culture.
7. Cripps's claim that the picture of St. Sebastian “in the Dulwich gallery is actually a copy of the original at Bologna” is wrong (Kingsley, *Alton* 402 n. 70). In the Bologna *St. Sebastian* (dated to 1639–40), a lithe Sebastian, rendered with the fluid strokes characteristic of Reni's late style, appears loosely tied to a tree *before* he is pierced by the arrows that Kingsley describes — in contrast to either of Reni's earlier compositions, both of which present Sebastian during or after his martyrdom (*Guido* 310–11; Pepper 288). In fact, the novel's mention of the single arrow in Sebastian's side confirms the identity of the image under discussion; the earliest Reni Sebastian has been struck by two arrows, the later one by no arrows at all.

For years, the Dulwich Gallery's *St. Sebastian* was considered a copy "after Guido Reni" (Pepper 234); however, in light of a 1998 cleaning that clarified its autograph status, the painting is now accepted as a genuine Reni, but one in which Reni reworks an earlier composition in his late style (Dejardin). The earlier versions of Alton's *St. Sebastian* exist today in the Prado, the Louvre, and elsewhere (Pepper 288). The photograph included in this essay shows the cleaned painting, but for an image of the Dulwich painting before its cleaning, see Waterfield 35 or Kaye 285. Perhaps only a collation of Victorian renderings would suggest exactly how the Dulwich *St. Sebastian* would have looked in Kingsley's time. I am grateful to Ian A. C. Dejardin, Francesco Nevola, and Lucy Till of the Dulwich Picture Gallery for allowing me to view the painting while it was in storage during the Gallery's renovation.

8. According to Adams, "[t]he discipline incarnated in Sebastian, and in Locke's response to the image, is disturbingly exorbitant; it is no longer instrumental to some external economy, but seems to be its own reward" (145). Yet Adams's comment that this internalization of discipline "threatens to subvert the libidinal economy called into play by the sight of Lillian" seems misleading (145). As Adams's own analysis of masochism in the novel will demonstrate, Alton's desire for Lillian is as hermetic and tortured as Reni's image, and as exorbitant as Alton's response to it.

Kaye has recently disputed some of Adams's analysis. He notes that Alton's identification with the image of Sebastian is in itself "notably lacking in actual associations of self-torment," and he rightly identifies Sebastian as a figure that "signifies a pure aesthetic in its own right" in *Alton Locke* (286, 287). My own argument in this essay would reconcile the views of Kaye and Adams: in the scene at Dulwich Gallery, an aesthetic encounter immediately embroils Alton in the tormenting cultural, material, and libidinal economies represented by his anguished desires for Lillian and high culture.

9. Even with its elision of Sebastian's bindings, the painting also resonates powerfully with Kingsley's private fantasies of bondage and flagellation, an erotic preoccupation graphically revealed in Susan Chitty's 1975 biography.
10. Kingsley also targeted the clothes-trade in "Cheap Clothes and Nasty," a tract written as he was composing *Alton Locke* (Uffelman 20).
11. In fact, George's attitude suggests the sort of game-playing, voluntarist view of the world with which Bourdieu himself is sometimes misleadingly charged (see Guillory, "Bourdieu's Refusal").
12. Compare, along these lines, Bourdieu's use of survey questions about which subjects would make a "beautiful," "interesting," "meaningless," or "ugly" photograph: "a landscape," "a car crash," "a first communion," "a snake . . ." (*Distinction* 517, 536). Alton too takes a sort of survey; for the dean and the publisher, the men with the cultural competence to judge his work and the material power to endow it with cultural capital, Chartist politics would presumably make for "meaningless" or "ugly" verse.
13. As Adams has shown, Kingsley eagerly formulated a vision of "the Tropics" as a potent "stimulus to poetry" for the male poet, a fantasy inspired in part by his reading of Tennyson (121); on the importance of "the Tropics" in Kingsley's discourse of masculinity, see Adams 112–28.
14. Or so it goes in *Alton Locke*. As Finn notes, it was chiefly in the pages of "Kingsley's fiction [that] Chartist dissidents fell rapidly under the sway of Christian nationalist sentiment" (154); in practice, they tended to be far less tractable than Alton Locke — even when like Alton they were not only Chartists but also poets (Thomas Cooper notwithstanding). The infidel Chartist leader Ernest Jones "launched an extended campaign against" Christian socialism (156), and his fellow poet Gerald Massey, compelled to choose between publishing properly Christian-socialist verse in the journals of Kingsley's movement and issuing more

radical poetic salvos in the *Red Republican*, decided simply to adopt “a series of pseudonyms” and continue his radical work (157).

Even when it comes to *Alton Locke*, Rauch surmises that from its first publication the novel’s tendentious ending has left readers unsatisfied because “Kingsley has . . . underestimated the religious skepticism” of his audience (210).

15. Kingsley had argued along similar but more explicit lines in “The National Gallery,” an essay from *Politics for the People*. Here “Kingsley looks to a painting by Bellini for a behavior model, finding in the body of the painting’s subject a proper alternative to the bellicose bodies of Chartists”: a poor old man who “looks as if he has had ‘many sorrows,’” but now waits patiently for death (Hall, “On the Making” 53).
16. For contemporary testimony as to Kingsley’s powerful influence on the generation that came of age in the 1850s and 60s, see Rosen 38–40.

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