Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens

95 Printemps | 2022
Victorian Popular Forms and Practices of Reading and Writing (Colloque SFEVE Paris Est Créteil, 29-30 janvier 2021) ; Renaissances (atelier SFEVE du Congrès Tours, juin 2021)

‘Gall and wormwood’ – *The Compositors’ Chronicle* (1840–43) as Collaborative Journal

« Fiel et aigreur » — The Compositors’ Chronicle (1840-1843), un journal collaboratif

Françoise Baillet

Electronic version
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/cve/11036
ISSN: 2271-6149

Publisher
Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée

Brought to you by Université de Caen Normandie

Electronic reference
Françoise Baillet, “‘Gall and wormwood’ – *The Compositors’ Chronicle* (1840–43) as Collaborative Journal”, *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* [Online], 95 Printemps | 2022, Online since 01 March 2022, connection on 01 April 2022. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/cve/11036

This text was automatically generated on 1 April 2022.

Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

‘Gall and wormwood’ – *The Compositors’ Chronicle* (1840–43) as Collaborative Journal

« Fiel et aigreur » — The Compositors’ Chronicle *(1840-1843), un journal collaboratif*

Françoise Baillet

1 With the repeal of the Combination Laws in Britain in 1824, trades and professions became more organised in their defence of workers. As printing evolved from an artisan craft to a mechanised, large-scale industry, workers’ organizations also evolved from office-based ‘chapels’ and local typographical societies to regional unions (Greenwood 18). Across the United Kingdom and elsewhere, publishing houses and printers constantly had to adapt to new techniques if they wanted to keep up with a particularly volatile and competitive marketplace. In printing offices, operations became increasingly specialised and compositors and pressmen became separated branches of the business, each with their own unions.[1] Compositors, also called typesetters, were the workers in charge of assembling individual type letters in the composing stick while pressmen were in charge of operating the press to produce the printed page. All adult workers were referred to as journeymen, and the whole office was supervised by a master printer, and sometimes also by an overseer. In London, typesetters were mostly supported by the London Union of Compositors, an organisation founded in March 1834 as a result of the amalgamation of the London Trade Society of Compositors (1816) and the London General Trade Society of Compositors (1826). By 1837, the LUC had an office in Fleet Street (Bouverie Street) and a paid ‘office keeper’, R. Thompson. As the costs of press production decreased, especially after the reduction of the stamp duty (1836), many of these emerging unions backed the launch of trade journals across Britain.

2 *The Compositors’ Chronicle* (1840–43) was launched in September 1840 and existed until August 1843. It was printed and published by Thompson, the office keeper of the LUC, and appeared as a monthly, priced at two pence.[2] At a time when many print workers

faced the prospect of unemployment, the journal intended to protect its readers and trade members from the ‘misconduct and tyranny’ of some ‘unfair’ houses and master printers.[3] ‘To these petty tyrants’, the opening address pledged, ‘the *Chronicle* will be gall and wormwood; and, by occasionally giving them a friendly hint, we shall endeavour to make them more considerate rulers, if not better men’ (‘Address’). To that end, cooperation and networking were deemed essential. Open to ‘all correspondents whose aim is to promote the interests of the profession—to the secretaries of the various societies in England, Ireland, and Scotland, and to the literary effusions of the members of the trade upon all subjects’—the collaborative columns of the short-lived *Compositors’ Chronicle* provided print workers with a space for political and social debate at a time when many remained outside the scope of the political nation. By eliciting literary contributions from its readers, the journal also ‘constituted direct evidence that nothing was to be feared from extending the franchise in their favour’ (Blair 2016, xvi).

3 This paper investigates the *Chronicle* as a cooperative medium seeking to support and sustain the development of a shared professional trade identity. It will provide three successive highlights on different fields and modes of expression present in the *Chronicle*, paying attention to the connectedness of printers, within and outside the editorial structure of the journal. The *Chronicle* will first of all be considered in its attempt to unite typesetters and pressmen across Britain in the fight against perceived threats to their working conditions and status, like the growing presence in printing offices of apprentices and women. However, and beyond immediate trade interests, wider ideological networks also nourished the *Chronicle*. Like many early Victorian trade societies, the LUC was strongly influenced by the various movements for the improvement of the moral and social condition of the working classes and in the pages of the journal, utilitarian connections were apparent, in particular through the journal’s treatment of educative and social subjects. Finally, the collaborative columns of the *Chronicle* were also instrumental in the creation of a distinct trade identity. At a time when many print workers remained outside the scope of citizenship, Thompson’s journal offered them a space in which their literacy, sociability and respectability could be showcased through a virtual and actual community.

4 In its very first address to its readers, the *Compositors’ Chronicle* made its objective clear: ‘But our principal object is to promote a better understanding in regard to the general interests of the trade, and to ensure a more perfect and sincere co-operation on the part of its members, whether in town or country, or whether connected or disconnected with societies’ (‘Address’). In September 1840, when this text was printed, the ‘general interests of the trade’ were indeed the subject of much concern. Social and economic constraints considerably impinged on the condition of journeymen and frequent recessions meant that many found themselves unemployed while a growing number of apprentices joined the trade, further increasing competition on the labour market. Despite the existence of typographical societies inherited from the old guild regulations in nearly all the chief cities of the United Kingdom, particularly in Lancashire where journeymen printers were strongly organised, British print workers lacked cohesion (Musson 84). On the occasion of their second meeting, in January 1836, the London Union of Compositors had noted the ‘prosperous condition’ of the newly created (1830) Northern Typographical Union, which consisted largely of local associations active in the Midlands and the North Country and included the well-established Manchester Typographical Society (Howe 242). By 1840, the Northern

Union indeed gathered 44 member societies, representing more than 1,000 members. New societies had also been formed in many towns like Bristol, Cambridge, Oxford, or Brighton. In Scotland and Ireland, compositors had also established unions for the protection of their interests. In the early 1840s, however, as the *Chronicle* was launched, no official agreement yet existed between these societies and the LUC. Throughout 1841 and 1842, regular columns of the periodical were thus devoted to appeals if not for a general trades union (a union of all workers of all trades), but for a national printers’ organisation which would be able ‘to protect the working man from the aggression of avaricious and unjust employers’ across the country (‘Union of Compositors and Pressmen’). Many of the articles devoted to these topics were unsigned editorials meant to represent the union’s views. There is no absolute certainty as to the authors of these editorials, but it seems reasonable to suggest that figures like R. Thompson did not limit their role to the printing and publishing of the magazine. Other pieces were letters sent by *Chronicle* correspondents from across the country, particularly representatives from the various regional unions and committees. Typically, these columns would fill the first three or four pages of the *Chronicle*, depending on the issues and the topicality of the subjects tackled, with articles sometimes split into different parts and continued in the same or in subsequent issues. Two major grievances recurrently filled the columns of the *Chronicle*: the so-called ‘tramping’ system, and the introduction of new machinery.

5 Especially vulnerable to seasonal and cyclical unemployment, journeymen printers commonly travelled across the country to find work. Defined by Eric Hobsbawm as ‘the very backbone of union’, this system was called ‘tramping’ and was in use among most crafts by the mid-nineteenth century (Hobsbawm 305). ‘It was not unusual for a tramp’, Albert E. Musson explains in his volume devoted to *Trade Unions and Social History*, ‘to perform a “grand tour” of the three Kingdoms, particularly in periods of depression, when employment was nowhere to be found’ (Musson 107). In such situations, journeymen would receive ‘tickets’ or ‘tramp cards’ and a travelling allowance, which they had to return if they came back within a specific period.

Figure 1—A "tramp card" or "ticket" issued by the London Union of Compositors (LUC). Image retrieved from *Jeremy Norman's* Historyofinformation.com.



Image retrieved from Historyofinformation.com. https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=4724. Last accessed 27 July 2021.

6 The tramping system, David Finkelstein notes in *Movable Types*, 'acted as a method of circulating workers across space and time' (Finkelstein 19). Passing on information about local wage-rates, travellers acted as a link between the different areas, forging connections between the various printing societies nationwide. The system, however, was far from satisfactory, especially in the 'black years' of 1841–42, when some typographical unions relieved about five times as many travellers as they had members (Hobsbawm 311). Moreover, and as a unionist explains in a series of articles published in the *Chronicle* in October and November 1841, the considerable hardships endured by these men on the move made them extremely vulnerable, allowing employers to use them as strike breakers: 'TRAMPING MAKES RATS. Many an office has been closed by the individuals who worked in it preferring to give in to the unjust demands of a master rather than be thrown out of work and have to tramp' ('The Tramp System'). Instead, this correspondent suggested providing regular weekly allowances to print workers out of a job or on strike: 'Every member should contribute a certain sum weekly, a portion of which should be expanded in the relief of individuals out of employment, the remainder to be devoted to the other objects of the union' ('Tramping – Its Evil Results and Its Remedy'). Periods of major economic depression indeed led to a change in the tramping system which gradually became a method of relief rather than of finding work. Quoting the *Typographic Protection Circular,* Hobsbawm notes that by the end of the decade, the printing trade was 'maintaining a local poor law' under which 'pauper aid was dispensed to its casual poor, the rate-payer being the employed and the Guardians thereof the Society's officers' (Hobsbawm 306). The large space regularly devoted to these questions in the *Compositors' Chronicle* testifies to this concern.

7 Another topic that efficiently united the readers of the *Chronicle* was their opposition to the introduction of machinery. Over the three years of the journal's existence, concerns mostly focused on the Young and Delcambre machine, which, many thought, could ultimately replace compositors. Invented by James Hadden Young, a Scottish businessman, and Adrien Delcambre, a French industrialist, this typesetting machine operated like a piano, letting the printing characters fall in the composing stick at the touch of a keypad. The types had then to be assembled in lines (Jarrige 2016, 176). The 'pianotype' had been patented in September 1840 as 'An Improved Mode of Setting up Printing Types' and greeted with enthusiasm by the specialised press which noted that henceforth 'the operation of "composing" [was] thus rendered a very simple affair' (*Mechanics Magazine* 1840, 317). It was on permanent display at the offices of Young and Delcambre in Chancery Lane, generating mixed reactions from printers, many of whom denounced its high price and difficult handling (Jarrige 2007, 197). Between September 1841 et May 1843, no less than a dozen pieces, letters, essays, were printed on the subject in the *Compositors' Chronicle*, expressing the continuing and widely-shared concern of the profession about 'the infernal machine' ('The "Infernal" Machine'). Common to all articles was the representation of the machine creators as frauds. The article entitled 'New Composing Machine' thus questions the terms in which the device is advertised:

> The calculations that [Young and Delcambre] have given forth in their prospectus are totally false; . . . The prospectus states that by this machine a compositor may deposit 15,000 types per hour in the stick. Now I ask, is it possible that a man, keeping his *mind* constantly on the copy, can mechanically carry his hand from one key to another, giving it the requisite force to move the spring 15,000 times in an hour? Make the same motion with your hand, without reference either to key or copy, and you will find it barely possible to do so, and that 10,000 is much nearer the number. . . . The gentlemen have really made a sad mistake in this. Their real object appears to me, not to be an increase of speed, but an increase of the immense number of boys already employed in the printing business ('New Composing Machine').

8 Instead of a single worker who would handle the whole composing process, the Young and Delcambre machine indeed required three workers: one sitting at a keyboard, pressing the keys to compose the text, another one who justified it before placing it in the *forme,* and a third one for distribution. The process thus did not eliminate labour but allowed the substitution of a cheaper workforce in place of experienced compositors who had undergone long apprenticeships (Jarrige 2007, 203). Boy labour had the merit of being very cheap, and was also regularly used by employers to break strikes, as had been the case in Dublin when Thom and Folds had hired apprentices to break their pressmen's action ('Meeting of London Delegates'). For the *Chronicle* and its readers, it was therefore vital to prevent an excessive recruitment into the trade which, many felt, threatened professional printers' status and livelihood.

9 As a traditional male craft, the printing trade was also particularly concerned by the growing introduction of cheap female labour into the composing room, a peril which the 'pianotype' also seemed to materialise. The Young and Delcambre machine was used and regularly advertised by two London publications, both of which employed women. The *Family Herald* (1842–1940), a journal owned and edited by James Elishama Smith (known as 'Shepherd Smith') was the first publication worked entirely by female labour on the pianotype, an image of which featured in the masthead of the journal. Such was the case also of the weekly *London Phalanx*, a small circulation magazine

founded and edited by Hugh Doherty, translator of Abel Transon’s *Charles Fourier’s Theory of Attractive Industry and the Moral Harmony of the Passions* (1841). In the *Compositors’ Chronicle*, a March 1842 editorial quoted the editor of the *Phalanx* as saying: ‘It is the beginning of a new era in the art of printing, which, with a very little practical experience, will render the art of composing type so simple and elegant, that ladies may sit down, as to a piano-forte, and set up in type *their own sweet effusions*, with as much ease as they can commit them to writing’ (‘Composing and Distributing Machine’). In the specialised press, the accounts given and images circulated closely identified the device with the feminine sphere, picturing it operated by neatly-dressed bourgeois-looking female workers (*Mechanics’ Magazine* 1842, 497).

Figure 2— The Young and Delcambre composing machine. Patented 1840. Image retrieved from St Bride Library @stbridelibrary.



Image retrieved from @stbridelibrary. https://twitter.com/stbridelibrary/status/1293464741508026368. Last accessed 27 July 2021.

10 These depictions, Melissa Score points out, exacerbated male printers’ fears: if the ‘art of composing’ became ‘simple and elegant’, skilled workers’ future was definitely at risk (Score 282). Data from the 1841 and 1851 censuses however only partly corroborate these threats. During the 1840s, the proportion of printers under the age of twenty was indeed on the rise, going from 23.5% in 1841 (4,269 out of 18,160 male printers in activity in Britain) to 29.3% (7,560 out of 25,802) (Census 1841, 40, Census 1851, cxxxii). This 6% rise could have been linked to an increase in younger, non-apprenticed child labour in the industry. The increase of female activity in the industry, however, was insignificant: during the same period, the proportion of women in printing rose from 0.84% (153 out of 18,313 printers in activity in Britain) to . . . 0.85% (222 out of 26,024) (Census 1841, 40, Census 1851, cxxxii, cxlii). In her study of gendered practices at work through industrialisation, Katrina Honeyman accounts for this exclusion, observing

that, at a time when workplace conflicts between men and women became more pronounced, skill was increasingly constructed as a male preserve, as opposed to 'dexterity, flexibility and sound powers of concentration . . . which were associated with women and were defined as natural attributes rather than skills' (Honeyman 63). Honeyman also notes that, as a traditional male craft, the printing trade was particularly effective in its maintenance of gender distinctions in the workplace. Until the 1870s, she writes, employers' attempts 'to reduce the level of skill required for printing work and to weaken the craftsmen's grip on the work process' were 'successfully countered by the largest group of printers, the compositors, who restricted entry to the trade society and to the compulsory seven-year apprenticeship' (Honeyman 67).

11 It seems, therefore, that if the *Chronicle* supported the principle of a united front of printers, this alliance was not meant to extend to apprentices and women whose presence was widely felt as threatening the status of journeymen. As a specialised publication, the *Chronicle* represented the interests of compositors and pressmen as opposed to masters, of course, but also to other categories of print workers. Neither was this intended unity meant to support a 'grand union' scheme: typographical societies had remained quite distant from both Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union in 1833–34 and Chartism, which an 1842 article referred to 'the mummery of 1838' ('To Correspondents'). For all that, political views were constantly expressed in the *Chronicle*, not only in editorials, essays or letters, but also in other sections of the journal such as histories, short stories and poems, revealing some of the wider ideological networks that nourished the publication.

12 Like many early Victorian typographical societies, the London Union of Compositors was strongly influenced by the various movements for the improvement of the moral and social condition of the working classes. In a context in which the parliamentary reform of the 1830s had left most British workers outside the pale of the constitution, it was felt that the 'instability and ignorance' of the masses, as the union described it in its Annual Reports of 1834 and 1836, could result in widespread popular protest and disorder (Musson 125). 'Improving' and 'enlightening' the working classes could be, many typographical societies believed, one of the possible ways in which to avert such a danger. The idea of using the press as a tool against political subversion was not new. In the early 1820s, and under the editorship of Joseph C. Robertson (1787–1852), the *Mechanics' Magazine,* a scientific weekly aimed at industrial artisans, had tackled subjects like chemistry, physics, astronomy, engineering and other branches of science. Sold each Saturday for 3*d.* (4*d.* stamped) and in monthly and annual volumes, the *Mechanics' Magazine* carried the motto 'knowledge is power' and quickly achieved a circulation of 16,000 per number in 1824 (Magee and Maidment 405–06). In October 1823, Robertson and Thomas Hodgskin (1787–1869), a socialist writer and journalist, had proposed to found a London Mechanics' Institution whose purpose would be to impart the elements of scientific knowledge to working men through classes, lectures, and libraries. One of the strongest voices relaying this concept was Henry (later Lord) Brougham (1778–1868), a lawyer and journalist who had helped found the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802. A complex and changeable political figure, Brougham had been introduced to Jeremy Bentham, whose educational theories, as expressed for instance in *Chrestomathia* (1816), were based on the doctrine that the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the guiding principle of conduct. By teaching 'useful

knowledge'—subjects such as mathematics, physical science, modern languages, economics, law, and music—rather than classical languages or religion, British schools could safeguard the country from social anarchy and economic turmoil (Rosen, *ODNB*). Once he saw the rationality of the economic and social laws dictating his living and working conditions, every man would support laissez-faire economics and dangerous political theories would be eliminated. In 1811, Brougham had helped James Mill and others to found the Royal Lancastrian Society, which aimed to provide cheap education for working-class children in London (Seville 52), and fifteen years later he had spearheaded the creation of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) whose principal object was 'to elevate the minds of the people, and draw them from sordid and sensual pursuits and pleasures, to the cultivation of the pure gratifications of the mind' (*Times,* 19 May 1828).

13 In the pages of the *Compositors' Chronicle*, these utilitarian connections were apparent, and the name of Lord Brougham was a recurrent reference. Throughout the early months of 1841, the journal had published a series of articles expressing concern about the new Copyright bill that proposed to extend the term of copyright to the author's lifetime plus seven years, providing this was not less than forty-two years in total (Cooper 662). For Lord Brougham and the radicals, this text was a further hindrance to the expansion of a British press already hampered by the so-called 'taxes on knowledge'. The *Chronicle*'s issue for June 1842 thus quotes 'a somewhat lengthy conversation in the [H]ouse of [L]ords' during which Brougham 'alone appeared to view the measure in its right light, as affecting the public interest' ('Copyright Bill'). During this debate, which had taken place a few days before (May 26, 1842) as the bill reached committee stage, Brougham had drawn the attention of the Lords on 'the defective state of the law in respect to works of great value, great and general usefulness, and of great importance to the public;' ('Copyright', *Hansard* col. 792).[4] Catherine Seville notes that Brougham's motivations might have been less clear than expected, and partly dictated by his animosity against Macaulay who had been actively involved in the new copyright bill (Seville 59).

14 The same Benthamite connections transpired through the *Compositors' Chronicle*'s treatment of the new poor law. Passed by the Whig government of Earl Grey, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 had replaced earlier legislation and attempted to change the poverty relief system in England and Wales. Reactions to this text largely focused on the institution of the workhouse, which many described as a 'Bastille' only meant to deter paupers from seeking help. The *Chronicle's* take on the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was expressed through a series of extracts from John Lash Latey's *Letters to the Working-People on the New Poor Laws* (1841). A printer-poet originally from Devon, Latey was a regular contributor to the *Chronicle* and took part in fundraising events for the benefit of elderly print workers (Finkelstein 139). In the issue of July 1841, Latey is quoted as 'an impartial spirit' determined to 'speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth' about the new poor law, which otherwise might be 'misunderstood by the mass' because 'wilfully misrepresented by the designing few'; for the *Chronicle,* the priority was therefore for the 'honest industrious classes' to determine whether 'the New Poor Law [was] better or worse than the Old Poor Law' ('Poor Laws'). The two extracts presented respond to the major criticisms by listing the 'evils' of the old legislation while prudently clarifying the terms of the new text. Latey in fact clearly supported New Poor Law, and so did the *Chronicle* whose readers were advised to remain outside the 'senseless clamour' of opposition to the scheme ('Poor

Laws'). *Letters to the Working-People* had been published by Charles Knight (1791–1873), the official publisher of the poor law commission and a hearty supporter of the text. Knight was also the owner and editor of the *Penny Magazine* (1832–45), a cheap mass-circulation miscellany aimed at the working and lower middle classes and sponsored by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.[5] Through a close friend, Matthew Davenport Hill, he had met in 1826 Lord Brougham who had expressed interest in his project of publishing a 'national library' of cheap and informative abridgements of important works (Mitchell, *ODNB*).

15 Thus, a complex web of utilitarian associations seems to have sustained the *Compositors' Chronicle* which accordingly devoted significant printing space to educational purposes. A typical issue of the journal would include several informative pieces classified under different headings: historical essays, didactic texts, short stories and poems. Taken together, these histories formed a serialised and continuous narrative meant to expand the printers' culture, but also to elevate their minds. Throughout the year 1842, for instance, a series of columns signed under the pseudo 'Cephas'—that is Peter, the Apostle—lectured the readers on the moral benefits of reading and warned them about the dangers of a misplaced ambition, or the risks posed by indifference to others ('Indifference—Essay VIII'). Beyond their didactic purposes these pieces clearly meant to associate the *Chronicle*'s readers to the love and support of national institutions, the most important of which was the family. In the February 1842 issue, an unsigned column entitled 'Home' praised domestic life as a pillar of the social body, defining artisans and mechanics as 'the foundation which supports the whole body politic' ('Home— Essay VI'). Biographies of famous figures in the printing trade were also part of this construction. In December 1841, the *Chronicle* devoted six columns to the complete transcript of a lecture on 'The Life and Character of Dr [Benjamin] Franklin' delivered in Liverpool by the influential Reverend M'Neile as part of an event organised by the Printers' Pension Society.[6] The long edifying speech reconstructed the American scientist's early career as a printer, insisting on his moral qualities. Franklin is described as having 'habits of temperance' which 'greatly improved' his intellectual capacities. His activity as a printer is told along ethical lines involving his 'unwearied industry', 'morality of living' and 'magnificent benevolence' ('Lecture on the Life of Dr Franklin'). The same rhetoric suffuses the two-column biography devoted in May 1842 to William Blake, which describes the artist as being 'always at work' or 'maintaining himself respectably' while his wife, Catherine, becomes a prefiguration of Patmore's angel in the house: 'She set his house in good order, prepared his frugal meal, learned to think as he thought . . . and became, as it were, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh' ('Biography—Blake the Artist').

16 These carefully worded representations of printers and artists involving domestic bliss, self-respect, discipline and success were meant to provide the *Chronicle*'s readers—and possibly their families—with models of Victorian respectability within their own trade. In those years when printers—apprentices but also journeymen—were still commonly described as improvident and disreputable, this rhetoric allowed them to receive, but also to project a renewed and more proper image of themselves. The concept of identity certainly nourished the *Compositors' Chronicle,* which, the last part of this paper will show, thrived as a cooperative medium seeking to support and sustain the distinctiveness of the early Victorian compositor.

17 In his foundational volume, Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an ‘imagined political community’. ‘It is *imagined*’, Anderson writes, ‘because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion’ (Anderson 6). From the eighteenth century, Anderson explains, novels and newspapers provided the technical means for re-presenting the imagined community of the nation, allowing their readerships to partake in the ‘extraordinary mass ceremony’ of the ‘simultaneous consumption of the newspaper-as-fiction’ (Anderson 35). Early Victorian trade journals played a significant part in the creation of imagined communities of print workers. Brought together in the journal’s columns, a virtual society of working-class authors, editors, publishers and readers developed a sense of identity through a common and shared language. From the outset, the *Compositors’ Chronicle* encouraged contributions from readers, opening its columns to ‘all correspondents whose aim is to promote the interests of the profession—to the secretaries of the various societies in England, Ireland, and Scotland, and to the literary effusions of the members of the trade upon all subjects’ (‘Address’). To this invitation, readers responded enthusiastically, showing through their ‘literary effusions’ remarkable skills and a taste for poetics. Andrew Hobbs has shown the ubiquity of poetry in Victorian periodicals, counting an average of two poems per week in the publications sampled and estimating at five million the number of individual poems published in the English provincial press (Hobbs 488). This average certainly corresponds to the *Chronicle*’s output: over the 36 months of its existence, the journal published no less than 64 compositions emanating from countless authors. The nineteenth-century press tradition of anonymity and pseudonymity does not make it easy to attribute these poems to their authors, but like other trade journals, the *Chronicle* published both original and reprinted poetry. The philosophical and moralistic pieces of ‘Cephas’ and ‘Philo’, both regular contributors, could either be full-length essays, or a mixture of prose and verse. In such compositions, the poetry could be original or reprinted, as in this example from the issue of May 1843, which borrowed from William Hazlitt’s ‘On the Ignorance of the Learned’, itself quoting a stanza by Samuel Butler.

18 Mike Sanders has documented the ‘active and primary’ role played by Chartist poetry within the movement. By ‘exposing the working-class autodidact to new ideas’, Sanders writes, poetry achieves a ‘transformation of consciousness’ which, in turn, allows ‘the affirmation of shared values and aspirations, the articulation of the movement’s collective identity’ (Sanders 11–13). The verse published in the *Compositors’ Chronicle* covered a variety of themes and subjects: classic sentimental poems could thus follow political, or social pieces. Borrowed from John Critchley Prince’s *Hours with the Muses,* which had run into three successive editions in 1841–42 and attracted attention in London as well as Manchester (Sambrook, *ODNB*), ‘The Pen and the Press’, for instance, reminds the reader of the almost constitutional role of the press as a defender of the citizens’ rights:

> The Pen and the Press, blest alliance! combined
> To soften the heart and enlighten the mind;
> For that to the treasures of Knowledge gave birth,
> And this sent them forth to the end of the earth;
> Their battles for truth were triumphant indeed,
> And the rod of the tyrant was snapped like a reed;
> They were made to exalt us, to teach us to bless,

> Those invincible brothers, the Pen and the Press.
> ('Pen and the Press')

19 As scholars of the Victorian press have shown, the printed page is a complex textual environment in which individual component articles are set alongside others in a composite object (Mussell 30). This poem acquired all the more significance as it was part of an issue largely devoted to the hardships of the unemployed printers at a time of great economic distress. '[W]hen placed within the context of a newspaper column and located within a specific community of readers', Kirstie Blair remarks, '[these poems operated] as sophisticated and often politically charged reflections upon current events, as well as upon the practice and purpose of poetry' (Blair 2014, 91). This was certainly also true of 'Victoria, a Political Poem', which was published in the December 1840 issue of the *Chronicle*. Its author, a compositor presented as 'R. Wemyss' is said to be 'an aspiring poet' who will 'by patient perseverance, attain no mean station in the walks of poesy' ('Victoria, a Political Poem'). The poem addresses the condition of the poor in a post-Reform context, criticizing the persistence of inequalities in Britain:

> Then lordlings fell—their ill-used power destroy'd—
> Their places lost, which were too long enjoy'd.
> But still their power—the hateful power of gold—
> Is felt 'mongst voters, as it was of old;

20 Oppressed and deprived of the means to support themselves, the poet writes, poor workers remain condemned to ending 'their dreary days' at the workhouse '[w]here pining hunger and corroding care/ Shall drive the unhappy inmate to despair'. This unambiguous denunciation of an oppressive government only disposed to bestow 'scanty alms' to its working class was published, as specified by the *Chronicle*, by Effingham Wilson, a familiar figure in radical circles, who had assisted William Hone in preparing his defence libel trial of 1817 and had published Jeremy Bentham's *Church-of-Englandism* (1818) and the 'unpublishable' *Elements of the Art of Packing* (1821).

21 In spite of their long working days, many nineteenth-century printers versified, considering the writing of poetry as an elevating and highly regarded pursuit. As David Finkelstein points out, these literary skills could then be displayed to the community on various occasions. 'Many of the poems reproduced in typographical journals', Finkelstein writes, 'were originally performed in public for key events in the print trade, such as annual soirees, wayzgooses and trade dinners, launches and unveiling of trade spaces and buildings, fundraisers for individuals or print related causes, and social gatherings to mark departures and retirements' (Finkelstein 137). In such contexts, the community was no longer virtual and working-class poetics could attract local, regional and sometimes national recognition. This output was such that only a few months after the launch of the *Chronicle*, a tongue-in-cheek appeal was launched to readers to try again if their pieces were not published right away.[7] This appeal is accompanied by a short composition by 'T. Bodkin' whose name evokes the 'Tammy Bodkin' character later popularised by the Scottish writer and editor William Duncan Latto.

22 The *Compositors' Chronicle* ceased publication in August 1843. As the 'Advertisement' to the volume publication of the magazine explains, this was due to heavy financial difficulties:

> To proceed as we have hitherto is impossible, and the plan we have sketched for our future conduct a few words will explain. We purpose to suspend our labours for one month. Should the sale of our stock and the payment of our outstanding

> accounts during that period be equal to our wishes, we shall resume our labours on the first of October; and to meet certain objections which have been raised to our title, our Miscellany will in future be entitled 'THE PRINTER or, Compositors' and Pressmen's Chronicle'. ('Advertisement')

23 Behind the *Chronicle*, the London Union of Compositors was collapsing. Rumours of dissolution of the union had begun to circulate in 1842, as many unemployed members became crippled by dispute payments and began to fall into arrears. The Bouverie Street office was closed, the LUC dissolved and reorganised as the London Society of Compositors, affiliated to the South Eastern District of the National Typographical Association, which had been formed the previous year. The collapse of the National Typographical Association in 1848 led to the breakaway and re-establishment of the London Society of Compositors, joined in 1853 by the London Daily Newspaper Compositors. The Society was registered in 1879 and by the end of the century moved to St Bride Street, where it remained until the 1950s (Marsh and Smethurst 43–46). It was during the mid- and late Victorian period that London compositors, facing tremendous changes in all aspects of the trade, negotiated significant agreements with master printers, agreements which were to prove significant to the printing industry. Meanwhile, the British political landscape had changed considerably, gradually becoming more representative, especially after the Third Reform Act (1884–85). However, large sections of the working class remained deprived of the suffrage which only became universal in 1928. In printing offices and elsewhere, compositors and pressmen continued to write poetry and prose. Literacy, respectability, craft pride and sociability were key areas in which they projected a sense of identity meant to distinguish them from other workers. David Finkelstein notes that when the London-based *Typographical Circular* was launched in 1854, contributions from readers were to be welcome because, the *Circular* wrote, 'it is the epitome of such men—thoughtful, studious, and well-informed which generally sway the decisions of the Trade Delegates in chapel and are of more importance than the windy speech of windy orators' (Finkelstein 112).

24 The Pen and the Press, therefore, remained brothers, perhaps not invincible, but powerful.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources:

The Compositors' Chronicle. An Epitome of Events Interesting to Printers, from September, 1840 to August, 1843. Printed and Published by R. Thompson, 1843.

'Address'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 1 (Sept. 1840): 1.

'Advertisement'. *The Compositors' Chronicle*. General preface. 1843.

'Biography – Blake the Artist'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 21 (May 1842): 166.

'Composing and Distributing Machine'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 19 (March 1842): 145.

'Copyright Bill (The)'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 22 (June 1842): 173.

'Home – Essay VI'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 18 (Feb. 1842): 143–44.

'Indifference – Essay VIII'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 24 (July 1842): 190–91.

'"Infernal" Machine (The)'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 27 (Oct. 1842): 212.

CEPHAS. 'Knowledge – Essay XIII'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 34 (May 1843): 266–67.

'Lecture on the Life of Dr Franklin'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 16 (Dec. 1841): 121–23.

'Meeting of London Delegates'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 1 (Sept. 1840): 2.

'New Composing Machine'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 13 (Sept. 1841), 99.

'Pen and the Press (The)'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 17, (Jan. 1842): 131.

'Poetry'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 13 (Sept. 1841): 100.

'Poor Laws'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 11 (July 1841): 87.

'Tramp System (The)'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 14 (Oct. 1841): 110.

'Tramping – Its Evil Results and Its Remedy'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 15 (Nov.

1841): 114.

'To Correspondents'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 17 (Jan. 1842): 132.

'Union of Compositors and Pressmen'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 1 (Sept. 1840): 1.

'Victoria, a Political Poem'. *The Compositors' Chronicle* 4 (Dec. 1840): 25.

Mechanics' Magazine. Museum, Register, Journal and Gazette. Edited, Printed and Published by J. C. Robertson, Fleet Street, 1824–57.

'Abstracts of Specifications of English Patents Recently Enrolled'. *Mechanics' Magazine* vol. XXXIII (July–Dec. 1840): 317.

'Young and Delcambre's Type-Composing Machine'. *Mechanics' Magazine* vol. XXXVI (Jan–June 1842): 497.

The Times, 19 May 1828.

Census of Great-Britain, 1841, Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Occupation Abstract, Part I. England and Wales, 1841).

Census of Great-Britain, 1851, Population Tables, II. Vol. 1 Ages, conditions, civil occupation (1854).

'Copyright', *Hansard* Third Series, Volume 63, 26 May 1842, cols. 763-813, col. 792. https://parlipapers-proquest-com.ezproxy.normandie-univ.fr/parlipapers/docview/t71.d76.lds3v0063p0-0011?accountid=15558. Last accessed 10 Mar. 2021.

Secondary Sources

ANDERSON, Benedict. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 1983. London: Verso, 2006.

BLAIR, Kirstie. '"A Very Poetical Town": Newspaper Poetry and the Working-Class Poet in Victorian Dundee'. *Victorian Poetry* 52.1 (Spring 2014): 89–109.

BLAIR, Kirstie (ed.). *The Poets of the Peoples' Journal: Newspaper Poetry in Victorian Scotland*. Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2016.

COOPER, Elena. 'Copyright in Periodicals during the Nineteenth Century/Balancing the Rights of Contributors and Publishers'. *Victorian Periodicals Review* 51.4 (Winter 2018): 661–78.

FINKELSTEIN, David. *Movable Types: Roving Creative printers of the Victorian World*. Oxford: OUP, 2018.

GREENWOOD, Emma L. *Work, Identity and Letterpress Printers in Britain, 1750–1850*, unpublished PhD. https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/54576325/FULL_TEXT.PDF. Last accessed 24 July 2021.

HOBBS, Andrew. 'Five Million Poems, or the Local Press as Poetry Publisher, 1800–1900'. *Victorian Periodicals Review* 45.4 (Winter 2012): 488–92.

HOBSBAWM, Eric J. 'The Tramping Artisan'. *The Economic History Review* 3.3 (1951): 299–320.

HONEYMAN, Katrina. *Women, Gender and Industrialisation in England, 1700–1870*. Macmillan Press, 2000.

HOWE, Ellic, ed. *The London Compositor. Documents relating to Wages, Working Conditions and Customs of the London Printing Trade 1785–1900*. Oxford: OUP, 1947.

JARRIGE, François, dir. *Dompter Prométhée. Technologies et socialismes à l'âge romantique (1820-1870)*. PU Franche-Comté, 2016.

JARRIGE, François. 'Le mauvais genre de la machine. Les ouvriers du livre et la composition mécanique (France, Angleterre, 1840-1880)'. *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 54.1 (2007) : 193-221.

MAGEE, David, and Brian MAIDMENT. 'Mechanics' Magazine'. *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*. Ed. Laurel BRAKE and Marysa DEMOOR. Gent and London: Academia Press and The British Library, 2009.

MARSH, Arthur, and John B SMETHURST. *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*, Routledge, 2006.

MITCHELL, Rosemary. 'Knight, Charles (1791–1873), publisher and writer'. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. January 03, 2008. https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy.normandie-univ.fr/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-15716. Last accessed 11 Mar. 2021.

MUSSELL, James. *The Nineteenth-Century Press in the Digital Age*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

MUSSON, Albert E. *Trade Unions and Social History*. 1974. London: Routledge, 2006.

ROSEN, F. 'Bentham, Jeremy (1748-1832)'. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004.

SAMBROOK, James. 'Prince, John Critchley (1808-1866)'. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. September 23, 2004.

SANDERS, Mike. *The Poetry of Chartism. Aesthetics, Politics, History*. Cambridge: CUP, 2009.

SEVILLE, Catherine. *Literary Copyright Reform in Early Victorian England. The Framing of the 1842 Copyright Act*. 1999. Cambridge: CUP, 2003.

SCORE, Melissa. 'Pioneers of Social Progress? Gender and Technology in British Printing Trade Union Journals, 1840–65' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 47.2 (Summer 2014): 274–95.

NOTES

1. The London Union of Pressmen was founded in 1834.

2. The *Waterloo Directory* notes that R. Thompson became the *Chronicle*'s printer in 1843, taking over from J. Campbell.
3. The offices paying less than the recognised rate were condemned as 'unfair' and the men in them as 'rats'.
4. 'The great evil under which publishers and authors now laboured was not the limited extent of the copyright—not the inadequacy of the twenty-eight years which the law now secured to the author, with a further term during his life if he lived beyond the twenty-eight years—but the great evil under which both publisher and author now laboured was-first, the defective state of the law in respect to works of great value, great and general usefulness, and of great importance to the public'.
5. *The Waterloo Directory* notes that Charles Knight owned the *Penny Magazine* between 1832 and 1845, published it under his sole name between 1832 and 1843, and edited it during the same period. During these years, the magazine was printed by William Clowes (1832–34), Charles Knight (1834), and William Clowes and Sons (1835–37, 1845).
6. The Printers' Pension Society had been set up in 1827 to provide relief for elderly and unemployed printers and their widows and complemented the action of the journeymen's unions and associations.
7. 'From the numerous poetical favours we receive, we begin to think that the arts of printing and making poetry are nearly akin. Elegies, sonnets, songs and odes (among the last named we have an "Ode to a Shooting Stick" consisting of about 200 lines), innumerable have been forwarded to us, which we cannot insert, but recommend the writers to "try again"' ('Poetry').

ABSTRACTS

Printed and published by the London Union of Compositors, an organisation founded in 1834 to defend the interests of print workers, *The Compositors' Chronicle* was launched in September 1840 as a monthly and existed for three years. Its main object was to protect printers from their masters' 'misconduct and tyranny': 'To these petty tyrants, the *Chronicle* will be gall and wormwood; and, by occasionally giving them a friendly hint, we shall endeavour to make them more considerate rulers, if not better men' ('Address'). This paper investigates the *Chronicle* as a cooperative medium seeking to support and sustain the development of a shared professional trade identity. It provides three successive highlights on different fields and modes of expression used in the *Chronicle*, paying attention to the connectedness of printers, within and outside the editorial structure of the journal. The *Chronicle* is first considered in its attempt to unite typesetters and pressmen across Britain in the fight against perceived threats to their working conditions and status. However, and beyond immediate trade interests, wider ideological networks also nourished the journal. Like many early Victorian trade societies, the London Union of Compositors was strongly influenced by the various movements 'for the improvement of the moral and social condition of the working classes' and in the pages of the *Chronicle*, utilitarian connections were apparent, in particular through the journal's treatment of social subjects. Finally, the collaborative columns of the *Chronicle* were also instrumental in the creation of a distinct trade identity. At a time when many print workers remained outside the scope of British citizenship, Thompson's journal offered them a space in which their literacy, sociability and respectability could be showcased through a virtual and actual community.

Imprimé et publié par la London Union of Compositors, syndicat des ouvriers de presse fondé en 1834, *The Compositors’ Chronicle* (1840-1843) a été en circulation pendant trois ans, au rythme d’un numéro par mois. Son objectif était de défendre les imprimeurs des excès de patrons quelquefois tyranniques : « Pour ces piètres tyrans, le *Chronicle* ne sera que fiel et aigreur; et si d’aventure il leur adresse quelque signe amical, ce sera pour mieux les éduquer, pour faire d’eux des dirigeants plus attentifs, voire même des hommes meilleurs » (« Address »). Cet article s’intéresse au *Chronicle* en tant qu’outil collaboratif visant à soutenir et à favoriser le développement d’une identité professionnelle commune. Il met en lumière trois domaines dans lesquels s’expriment ces échanges, s’intéressant en particulier aux réseaux à l’œuvre dans l’imprimerie, au sein même comme en dehors de l’équipe éditoriale du magazine. Le *Chronicle* est ainsi tout d’abord envisagé comme vecteur d’union entre compositeurs et typographes à une époque où statut et conditions de travail sont perçus comme menacés. Pour autant, et par-delà les questions syndicales immédiates, le magazine s’appuie sur un véritable maillage idéologique. À l’instar de nombreuses structures ouvrières du début de l’ère victorienne, la London Union of Compositors s’inscrit dans une perspective utilitariste visant à « améliorer la condition morale et sociale des classes laborieuses ». Dans les pages du *Chronicle*, cet engagement se traduit notamment par un traitement spécifique des questions sociales. Mais c’est également un espace d’expression littéraire que le *Chronicle* offre à ses collaborateurs. À l’heure où nombre d’entre eux demeurent exclus de la citoyenneté, le magazine constitue un cadre dans lequel la culture des ouvriers imprimeurs fait d’eux des membres à part entière de la société britannique, les rattachant à une communauté professionnelle réelle autant que virtuelle.

INDEX

Keywords: social history, trade press, unionism, periodical press, women at work, children at work, poetry
Mots-clés: histoire sociale, presse syndicale, syndicalisme, presse périodique, femmes ouvrières, enfants ouvriers, poésie

AUTHOR

FRANÇOISE BAILLET

Françoise Baillet is Professor of British History and Culture at Caen Normandie University, France. Her research generally addresses the role of the periodical press in the shaping of class, gender and national identities in nineteenth-century Britain. She has published several articles in areas related to Victorian cultural history and print culture, taking a particular interest in aestheticized renderings of working-class life in *The Illustrated London News* and *The Graphic*. She is also the author of *Discours culturels de Punch et ordre social victorien (1850-1880)*—forthcoming from PUR, 2022—which examines *Punch* as a discursive and ideological construct, the site of a pictorial (re)configuration of the mid-Victorian social scene. Current projects include work on the development of print networks across Britain as well as print workplaces such as the Bradbury & Evans publishing firm in London.
Françoise Baillet est professeure de civilisation britannique à l’université de Caen Normandie. Sa recherche porte sur la presse périodique victorienne et la façon dont celle-ci a contribué à façonner les identités sociales, nationales et genrées au cours du dix-neuvième siècle. Elle est l’auteure de plusieurs articles portant sur l’histoire culturelle britannique et notamment celle des représentations de la vie ouvrière dans des périodiques illustrés tels que *The Illustrated London*

News et *The Graphic*. Son ouvrage intitulé *Discours culturels de Punch et ordre social victorien (1850-1880)*, à paraître aux PUR en 2022, s’intéresse au magazine *Punch* en tant que construction discursive et idéologique, vecteur d’une (re)configuration de la scène sociale victorienne. Ses projets actuels incluent des travaux sur le développement des réseaux de presse britanniques et sur la maison d’édition londonienne Bradbury & Evans.