

AN UNDERGROUND HISTORY OF EARLY VICTORIAN FICTION

How does the literature and culture of early Victorian Britain look different if viewed from below? Exploring the interplay between canonical social problem novels and the journalism and fiction appearing in the periodical press associated with working-class protest movements, Gregory Vargo challenges long-held assumptions about the cultural separation between the “two nations” of rich and poor in the Victorian era. The flourishing radical press was home to daring literary experiments that embraced themes including empire and economic inequality, helping to shape mainstream literature. Reconstructing social and institutional networks that connected middle-class writers to the world of working-class politics, this book reveals for the first time acknowledged and unacknowledged debts to the radical canon in the work of such authors as Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle, Harriet Martineau, and Elizabeth Gaskell. What emerges is a new vision of Victorian social life, in which fierce debates and surprising exchanges spanned the class divide.

Gregory Vargo is Assistant Professor at New York University. His published essays have appeared in *Victorian Studies* and *Victorian Literature and Culture*. He has held fellowships from the Fulbright program, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation. With Rob Breton, he is the creator of *Chartist Fiction* (<http://chartistfiction.hosting.nyu.edu/>), a bibliographic database of several hundred reviews and stories that appeared in more than 25 Chartist periodicals.

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background”, feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.

AN UNDERGROUND HISTORY OF EARLY VICTORIAN FICTION

*Chartism, Radical Print Culture, and the Social Problem
Novel*

GREGORY VARGO

New York University



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To Kim, Clara, Jonah, and Nalo

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Abbreviations

CWH	<i>Champion and Weekly Herald</i>
NP	<i>Notes to the People</i>
NS	<i>Northern Star</i>
PMG	<i>Poor Man's Guardian</i>