

Spoken Word and Printed Page: G. W. M. Reynolds and 'The Charing-Cross Revolution', 1848

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He raised himself upon his left arm, and once more looked around.

Great God! Was it possible?

That ominous blackness — that sinister square was the mouth of a yawning gulf, the trap-door of which was raised.

A fetid smell rose from the depths below, and the gurgling of a current was faintly heard.

The dread truth was in a moment made apparent to that unhappy boy — much more quickly than it occupies to relate or read. He started from his supine posture, fell on his knees at the feet of those merciless villains who had borne him thither.

'Mercy, mercy! I implore you! Oh! Do not devote me to a hideous death! Do not — *do not murder me!*'¹

In this opening episode from G. W. M. Reynolds's best-selling serial narrative *The Mysteries of London* (1844–48), published in penny weekly instalments to huge success for two series, orality and literacy are already closely intertwined.² The passage relies for its drama on oral effects: the onomatopoeia of 'yawning', 'fetid', and 'gurgling'; the alliteration ('Great God!', 'sinister square', 'Do not devote me to a hideous death'); and sibilance ('He started from his supine posture'). Reynolds makes use of the

I am grateful to Louis James for his advice on this article.

¹ G. W. M. Reynolds, *The Mysteries of London, Series I & II*, 2 vols (London: Vickers, 1846–48), I, 7.

² It was followed by *The Mysteries of the Court of London* (1848–56). For estimated circulation figures, see G. W. M. Reynolds, *The Mysteries of London*, ed. by Trefor Thomas (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996), p. xv; and Anne Humpherys, 'An Introduction to G. W. M. Reynolds's "Encyclopedia of Tales"', in *G. W. M. Reynolds: Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Politics and the Press*, ed. by Anne Humpherys and Louis James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 123–33 (p. 126).

oral convention of parallelism to structure his sentences, while the exclamations and repetition of ‘Do not’ recall the phrasing of stage melodrama, itself drawn from an oral tradition of popular ballads and storytelling.³ That Reynolds recognizes his debt to — and participation in — an oral tradition is present in the text: his character realizes his likely fate ‘more quickly than it occupies to *relate* or read’ (emphasis added). Reynolds must have been aware that many who enjoyed his tale did not access it on their own: Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) records how ‘[the costermongers] are very fond of hearing anyone read aloud to them, and listen very attentively. [...] “Of all London, Reynolds is the most popular man among them. They stuck to him in Trafalgar-square and would again”.’⁴

This reference to Trafalgar Square, however, highlights how Reynolds was not content with merely drawing upon oral effects to address his readers in print. In March 1848, Reynolds came face-to-face with some of the very people he hoped were his readers when he took a step out of the editor’s office and onto the speaker’s platform during what one periodical mockingly dubbed ‘The Charing-Cross Revolution’. Reynolds stood up in front of a protest meeting in Trafalgar Square, and turned the issue of the day away from taxation and towards revolution. In that critical year of revolutions across Europe, Reynolds praised the recent French uprising which had deposed King Louis Philippe, called for a fair wage for a fair day’s work, and declared solidarity with the French people on behalf of ‘the English nation’.⁵ Five minutes’ walk away in Whitehall and Westminster, the British government was already uneasy about the turmoil on the continent and the presence of so many radical political refugees in London.⁶ As Reynolds over-optimistically put it:

Republicanism is the ‘order of the day’; and there is not a throne in Europe that is worth twenty years’ purchase [...] — and from the banks of the Thames to the confines of Asia — from the cheerless regions of the North to the sunny shores of

³ Richard Nemesvari, *Thomas Hardy, Sensationalism, and the Melodramatic Mode* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 4–7.

⁴ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols (London: Griffin, Bohn, 1861–62), 1: *The London Street-Folk* (1861), 25.

⁵ ‘The Open-Air Meeting in Trafalgar-square’, *The Times*, 7 March 1848, p. 8.

⁶ These included Louis Blanc, Giuseppe Mazzini, A. Ledru-Rollin, Louis Kossuth, and Karl Marx, all of whom came to London during this period. See E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975; repr. London: Sphere, 1985), p. 37.

the tideless Mediterranean, the prevailing sentiment is adverse to the antiquated, useless, oppressive institutions of Monarchy. (II, 199)

Later, Reynolds spoke to a crowd from the balcony of the *Reynolds's Miscellany* office, which was just down the Strand from Trafalgar Square. Reynolds's actions on that spring afternoon earned him immediate prominence in the Chartist movement, a place on the platform at the 'monster meeting' (II, 202) at Kennington Common on 10 April, the status of a radical celebrity, and a government file.⁷ The disorder after the meeting continued on and off over several days.⁸

Reynolds inserted accounts of his own oral performance onto the printed pages of *The Mysteries of London*. His sprawling tale mixed melodrama with radical polemics in the belief that fiction was a legitimate means of promoting radical politics.⁹ This article argues that the insertions of his 1848 speeches attempted to connect the imagined readers of urban fiction to real protestors on London's streets by linking the printed page of urban fiction to oratory within urban space. Reynolds's speech-making on that March afternoon extended his outbursts in his London fiction onto the London streets; he hoped that the combined work of both would push forward his political agenda. His imagined readers became actualized as real protestors, some of whom Reynolds hoped had read his work, or might now go on to do so, gathered in the square and below his balcony to hear him bring his political comments in *The Mysteries of London* to life. At the same time, Reynolds's insertions of his speeches into *The Mysteries of London* drew the crowds off the streets and into his fiction. Reynolds's speeches also enabled him to overcome the barrier of illiteracy, to reach those he liked to call 'the industrious millions' (I, 245). The space of the London streets, and the space of the printed page, became overlaid and interlinked. If real readers could become real protestors, then true

⁷ See Ian Haywood, 'George W. M. Reynolds and "The Trafalgar Square Revolution": Radicalism, the Carnavalesque and Popular Culture in Mid-Victorian England', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 7 (2002), 23–59; Rohan McWilliam, 'The Mysteries of G. W. M. Reynolds: Radicalism and Melodrama in Victorian Britain', in *Living and Learning: Essays in Honour of J. F. C. Harrison*, ed. by Malcolm Chase and Ian Dyck (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996), pp. 182–98 (p. 184).

⁸ Rodney Mace, *Trafalgar Square: Emblem of Empire* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976; repr. 2005), pp. 137–38.

⁹ On the relationship between nineteenth-century radical discourse and popular melodrama, see Wylie Sypher's pioneering essay 'The Aesthetic of Revolution: The Marxist Melodrama', *Kenyon Review*, 10 (1948), 431–44.

change, and even revolution, in London might be possible. *The Mysteries of London* reveals the links for Reynolds between fiction, the spoken word, radical politics, and urban space. His experience of writing *The Mysteries of London* gave melodramatic wings to his oratory on the platform.

Readers and listeners

The ‘Charing-Cross Revolution’ offered the possibility that urban space could present the continuation, and even the implementation, of radical demands made in print, and could bring radical storytelling vocally to life in a way which could connect readers and protestors. Reynolds called for non-violent agitation for the People’s Charter (whose demands included votes for all men over twenty-one, secret ballots, and salaries for MPs) and, like his middle-class hero Richard Markham, there was a certain amount of paternalism in his attitude towards those described in the quotation below as ‘the industrious classes’. Reynolds the republican believed that political revolution could turn even the dishonest poor into happy and productive citizens, epitomized in *The Mysteries of London* by the citizens of the fictionalized Italian state of Castelcicala once Richard becomes its ruler:

The industrious classes were all cheerful in looks and neat in attire; and instead of the emaciated women, and the pale, sickly children observable in such appalling numbers in the British metropolis, the wives of the working-men were all comely and contented, and their offspring ruddy with the hues of vigorous health. Oh! It was a blessed, blessed thing to behold those gay and happy multitudes — rendered thus gay and thus happy by means of good institutions, honest Ministers, and a Parliament chosen by the entire male adult population! (II, 375)

The streets of Castelcicala’s capital of Montoni become the fictional double of London’s streets here. If the vast readership of *Mysteries* could be mobilized to emulate the Trafalgar Square protestors, then real change could occur in London, too.

The cross-fertilization of Reynolds’s journalism and Reynolds’s fiction, including within *The Mysteries of London*, is an accepted tenet of

Reynolds scholarship.¹⁰ The Chartist meetings at which Reynolds was frequently a star speaker post-1848 turned radical politics into popular spectacle, and brought to vibrant life the leader articles which he wrote after 1848 for *Reynolds's Political Instructor* and *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, as well as his frequent outbursts within the text of *The Mysteries of London*.¹¹ Reynolds became a celebrity for radicals across the country after 1848; notices in *Reynolds's Political Instructor* advertised his presence at meetings up and down the country.¹² But Reynolds's oral speeches given in London have received much less attention than his political journalism. The only sustained discussion of the Trafalgar Square event is Ian Haywood's consideration of Reynolds in terms of the visual culture of the period.¹³ In this article, I am interested in developing Haywood's point about the 'discursive relations' which already existed between Reynolds and his readership to examine how Reynolds stitches together oral and print cul-

¹⁰ See Michael Diamond, 'From Journalism and Fiction into Politics', in *G. W. M. Reynolds*, ed. by Humpherys and James, pp. 91–98; Helen M. Hauser, 'Miscellaneous Blood: G. W. M. Reynolds, Dickens, and the Anatomical Moment' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2008); Ian Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature: Politics, Print and the People 1790–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 162–91, 218–42; Anne Humpherys, 'Popular Narrative and Political Discourse in *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*', in *Investigating Victorian Journalism*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Aled Jones, and Lionel Madden (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 33–47; Louis James, 'The Trouble With Betsy: Periodicals and the Common Reader in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England', in *The Victorian Periodical: Samplings and Soundings*, ed. by Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 349–66; Andrew King, 'A Paradigm of Reading the Victorian Penny Weekly: Education of the Gaze and the *London Journal*', in *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities*, ed. by Laurel Brake, Bill Bell, and David Finkelstein (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 77–91, and 'Reynolds's Miscellany', in *G. W. M. Reynolds*, ed. by Humpherys and James, pp. 53–74; Michael H. Shirley, 'G. W. M. Reynolds, *Reynolds's Newspaper* and Popular Politics', in *G. W. M. Reynolds*, ed. by Humpherys and James, pp. 85–86.

¹¹ For a discussion of Reynolds's role in Chartism and in radical politics generally after 1848, see McWilliam, 'The Mysteries of G. W. M. Reynolds'. For a discussion of the importance and popularity of Reynolds's speaking tours, see Haywood, 'George W. M. Reynolds and "The Trafalgar Square Revolution"', pp. 43–45.

¹² See, for example, 'Political Meetings in the Country', *Reynolds's Political Instructor*, 23 March 1850, p. 154; 'National Charter Association', *Reynolds's Political Instructor*, 9 June 1850, p. 5.

¹³ Haywood, 'George W. M. Reynolds and "The Trafalgar Square Revolution"'. See also Haywood, *The Revolution in Popular Literature*, pp. 174–81.

ture to link urban space and the printed page, building upon his experience of writing *The Mysteries of London* as a whole (*Revolution in Popular Literature*, p. 176).

The way Reynolds inserts his 1848 speeches into *The Mysteries of London* is more than standard newspaper reporting of a political speech; its equivalent would be one of Dickens's speeches to the working men's institutes turning up in the text of *Bleak House*. Indeed, the entire chapter in which these insertions appear, chapter 157, is dedicated to the subject of his Trafalgar Square speech about the superior political will of the 'glorious' French (II, 202). Reynolds's great rival, Dickens, was of course well known for his apostrophes to his readers, and Dickens's later reading tours turned fiction into theatre. (Indeed, Helen Small likens Dickens's public readings in the late 1850s and 1860s to Chartist rallies of earlier decades.)¹⁴ But Reynolds's insertion of accounts of his own speeches in chapter 157 of *The Mysteries of London* link a very specific London event to this very particular piece of London fiction. Reynolds tries to drive his readers onto the streets by suggesting that some of their number are already there.

In seizing his chance to address the crowd directly in Trafalgar Square, Reynolds was building upon the direct addresses to his readers that were already a key feature of *The Mysteries of London*. Reynolds built upon the orality of much penny-issue fiction — based as it was upon much older forms of ballads, chapbooks, storytelling, pulpit oratory, and popular entertainment and melodrama — an orality which had already made its presence felt on the pages of *The Mysteries of London*. Oral effects permeate the tale, and not only in the passage already analysed. *The Mysteries of London* opened in 1844 with a prologue that is strongly rhetorical, with its emphasis on the contrasts in living conditions and life chances within one city in particular:

Amongst these cities there is one in which contrasts of a strange nature exist. The most unbounded wealth is the neighbour of the most hideous poverty; the most gorgeous pomp is placed in strong relief by the most deplorable squalor; the most seducing luxury is only separated by a narrow wall from the most appalling misery. (I, 1–2)

¹⁴ Helen Small, 'A Pulse of 124: Charles Dickens and a Pathology of the Mid-Victorian Reading Public', in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. by James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 263–90 (p. 284).

Reynolds deploys all the rhetorical tactics of public oratory here: the list of three, the building up of paralleled clauses, and the deliberate withholding of information that the reader has already begun to guess: that the city in question is London. In common with other Chartist and radical writers, Reynolds uses the melodramatic contrast between Good and Evil to political effect, contrasting the ‘industrious millions’ with the crimes and vices of the idle rich (I, 245). ‘Alas! How appalling are these contrasts!’ Reynolds declares to the reader.¹⁵ The narrative contains several chapters entitled ‘New Year’s Day’ where Reynolds breaks off to deliver Chartist sermons which, although printed, are inseparable from his own speaking voice:

How long, O Lord! Wilt thou permit the few to wrest every thing from the many – to monopolize, accumulate, gripe, snatch, drag forth, cling to, the fruits of the earth, for their own behoof alone?

How long shall there exist such spells in the privilege of birth? [...]

In England men and women die of starvation in the streets.

In England women murder their children to save them from a lingering death by famine.

In England the poor commit crimes to obtain asylum in a gaol.

In England aged females die by their own hands, in order to avoid the workhouse. [...]

The lowest step on the ladder is occupied by that class which is the most numerous, the most useful, and which ought to be the most influential. [...]

Is this reasonable? is this just? is this even common sense? (II, 179–80)

Oral effects contribute to his melodramatic descriptions of London’s streets and London locations; his description of Newgate is asking to be read out loud:

¹⁵ See Harmut Ilsemann, ‘Radicalism in the Melodrama of the Early Nineteenth-Century’, in *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of the Genre*, ed. by Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopolou (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 191–210. See also Ian Haywood’s comparison of Reynolds’s fiction with the writing of Ernest Jones in *Chartist Fiction, Volume 2: Ernest Jones, ‘Woman’s Wrongs’*, ed. by Ian Haywood (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. xxix–xxxiv.

Newgate! What an ominous sound has that word.

And yet the horror exists not in the name itself; for it is a very simple compound, and would not grate upon the ear nor produce a shudder throughout the frame, were it applied to any other kind of building [...]

At the mere mention of this name, the mind becomes filled with [...] the clanking of chains, the banging of doors, oaths, prayers, curses, and ejaculations of despair!

Oh! (II, 375)

Reynolds chooses his vocabulary here for the purpose of creating a cacophony of ominous sounds and alliterative clankings, designed to appeal to listeners as much as to readers.

That readers and listeners could be linked, and that the printed page of urban fiction and oratory in urban space could work together and permeate each other, turning readers into protestors, is suggested by Mayhew's *London Labour*. As many critics have noticed, the costermongers use their communal acts of interpretation of Reynolds's fiction to define themselves against the wealthy:¹⁶

'Here all my audience', said the man to me, 'broke out with — "Aye, that's the way the harristocrats hooks it. There's nothing o' that sort among us; the rich has all the barrikin to themselves". "Yes, that's the b— way the taxes goes in", shouted a woman.' (Mayhew, I, 25)

What is striking about this incident in the context of Reynolds's own narrative insertions is the way in which these listeners interject their political opinions into the narrative, like listeners at a rally might shout 'hear, hear!' Fiction, here, provokes protest. As Michael H. Shirley puts it, 'Reynolds's reliance on melodrama [...] proved to be in harmony with the assumptions of his readers'; Reynolds's fiction reinforces what they feel they know about the organization of the city, and of the country.¹⁷ Real readers (and real listeners) can become real protestors.

¹⁶ See, for example, Stephen James Carver, 'The Wrongs and Crimes of the Poor: The Urban Underworld of *The Mysteries of London* in Context', in *G. W. M. Reynolds*, ed. by Humpherys and James, pp. 185–212 (p. 151).

¹⁷ Shirley, 'G. W. M. Reynolds, *Reynolds's Newspaper* and Popular Politics', p. 86. See also Humpherys, 'Popular Narrative and Political Discourse'.

The Trafalgar Square meeting

When Reynolds stepped out of his editor's office on 6 March 1848, he came face to face with the very people whom he hoped were his reading public. Reynolds's 'finest hour', as Dick Collins has described it, began at around one o'clock in Trafalgar Square, the new public space in front of the National Gallery at the end of the Strand.¹⁸ Political unrest was in the air: a few weeks previously in Paris, King Louis Philippe had been deposed after a popular uprising, while Britain was feeling the effects of the economic and social hardship that gave the decade the moniker 'The Hungry Forties'. The Trafalgar Square protest over taxation brought these tensions to the centre of London itself. The *Times*, reporting on the meeting, focused its ire on the resulting disruption to Charing Cross, where the Square meets the Strand: 'For several hours the peace of that busy thoroughfare was interrupted, business suspended, the shop-windows closed, and the passengers along the streets, whether on foot or in conveyances, put to considerable inconvenience, and even personal hazard.'¹⁹ For the *Times*, the crowds used space incorrectly, and so were 'out of place'; streets were to be used for business and shopping, not demonstrations. The demonstration was a precursor to the disorder that followed, when the crowd laid rowdy claim to a significant area of the city. Despite the large mass of people still gathered in Trafalgar Square, it seemed likely that events might end peaceably, with the resolution to hold a larger Chartist meeting at Kennington Common in a few days' time.²⁰ However, at about three o'clock the police attempted to break up the crowd.²¹ When a small unit of police moved in on the crowd, they

took stones from the building work around the base of Nelson's Column and pelted both the police and the column itself with them. When this supply of stones ran out, they tore down the palisades around Nelson's Column to replenish their arsenal and set fire to the contractors' sheds. At the

¹⁸ 'George William McArthur Reynolds: A Biographical Sketch', in *The Necromancer*, ed. by Dick Collins (Kansas City: Valancourt, 2007), pp. vii–lvii (p. xxxi).

¹⁹ 'The Open-Air Meeting in Trafalgar-square', *The Times*, 7 March 1848, p. 8.

²⁰ The *Times* reported that there were 'nearly 15,000 persons' still in the square at this point ('The Open-Air Meeting in Trafalgar-square'); the *Freeman's Journal* reported between 10,000 and 12,000 ('Abolition of the Income Tax', *Freeman's Journal*, 11 March 1848, p. 3).

²¹ 'Meeting in Trafalgar-square', *Daily News*, 7 March 1848, p. 4.

height of the affray, a cry went up 'To the Palace! Bread and Revolution!', and a large section of the crowd moved off towards St. James' Park, smashing street lamps and the windows of the Reform Club on the way. (Mace, p. 137)

According to the *Times*, the excited crowd smashed shop windows, stole bread from bakeries, and demanded ale from publicans ('The Open-Air Meeting in Trafalgar-square', p. 8). The report insists on the effectiveness of police action in controlling the riots. However, as Rodney Mace points out, the several days of disorder that followed were enough to ensure that the authorities made extremely stringent preparations for the next, even bigger, Chartist demonstration at Kennington Common. Trafalgar Square itself continued to be occupied on and off for three days (Mace, pp. 137–38). Some policemen and protestors needed hospital treatment, and several arrests were made. According to Mace, between 6 and 8 March, the police arrested 103 people 'in or around Trafalgar Square', of which 73 were convicted (p. 138).

That Reynolds's big moment, reported in *The Mysteries of London*, took place in the afternoon was significant, and the timing of the original meeting may well have been carefully judged. By one o'clock, most of London was awake and on the move, from the poorest street-seller to the wealthiest lady. The streets of London were open for business, and that business was shopping. As *Knight's Cyclopaedia of London* put it in 1851, 'almost endless would be the task of enumerating the fine and elegant shops presented to view in the streets of London, and the dazzling array of commodities displayed in the windows'.²² Afternoon was the time of day when all manner of Londoners mingled in busy streets like the Strand. In a piece from *Sketches by Boz* (first published in the *Evening Chronicle* in 1835), Dickens describes how, as morning draws to a close,

a new set of people fill the streets. The goods in the shop-windows are invitingly arranged; the shop-men in their white neckerchiefs and spruce coats, look as if they couldn't clean a window if their lives depended on it; the carts have disappeared from Covent Garden; the waggoners have returned, and the costermongers have repaired to their ordinary 'beats' in the suburbs; clerks are at their offices, and gigs, cabs, omnibuses, and saddle-horses, are conveying their masters to the same destination. The streets are thronged with a vast concourse of people, gay and shabby, rich and poor, idle and in-

²² Charles Knight, *Knight's Cyclopaedia of London* (London: Knight, 1851), p. 761.

dustrious; and we come to the heat, bustle, and activity of NOON.²³

The multiple semicolons in this passage reinforce the sense of crowding, as clauses jostle up against each other like pedestrians on the pavement. During an afternoon in the key thoroughfares of Westminster and the City, like the Strand, ‘the pavements are crowded with busy people, and the road is literally crowded with vehicles of every description’.²⁴ This crowding and mingling meant that the Strand and its surrounding streets were particularly susceptible to disruption that afternoon, as the *Times* registers indignantly. For Reynolds’s purposes, however, it also meant that he was more likely to encounter real or potential readers. It meant that he could make — and exploit — the connection between his oral performance and his printed works.

This tactic of Reynolds’s was noticed by the periodical press. *Puppet-Show*, an anti-republican satirical periodical set up as a rival to *Punch*, reported on ‘The Charing-Cross Revolution’ in a gloriously mock-heroic style (*Fig. 1*).²⁵ They mocked participants in the event, but also newspaper reporting, for over-dramatizing what was, for *Puppet-Show*, a rebelliousness that needed to be deflated by humour. But also they associated Reynolds with his fiction, and with his desire for readers:

A dreadful rumour prevailed that MR. G.J.M.N.O.P.Q.W. REYNOLDS contemplated reading a chapter of his *Mysteries of London* to the populace! The military have been summoned to prevent this catastrophe.

And:

Our worst fears have been confirmed. MR. G.J.M.N.O.P.Q.W. REYNOLDS spoke! [His speech was] a violent attack on the institutions of this country (including its grammar); and concluded with a pathetic reference to the fact — that his journal, in which his speech would be reported

²³ ‘The Streets — Morning’, in *Dickens’ Journalism: Sketches by Boz and Other Early Papers 1833–39*, ed. by Michael Slater (London: Dent, 1994), p. 54.

²⁴ Max Schlesinger, *Saunterings In and About London* (London: Cooke, 1853), p. 72.

²⁵ For more on satires of the Trafalgar Square protests and riots in the periodical press, particularly in *Punch* and *The Man in the Moon*, see Haywood, ‘George W. M. Reynolds and “The Trafalgar Square Revolution”’, pp. 26–35.

verbatim, cost only a penny. His friends the rabble escorted him home.²⁶

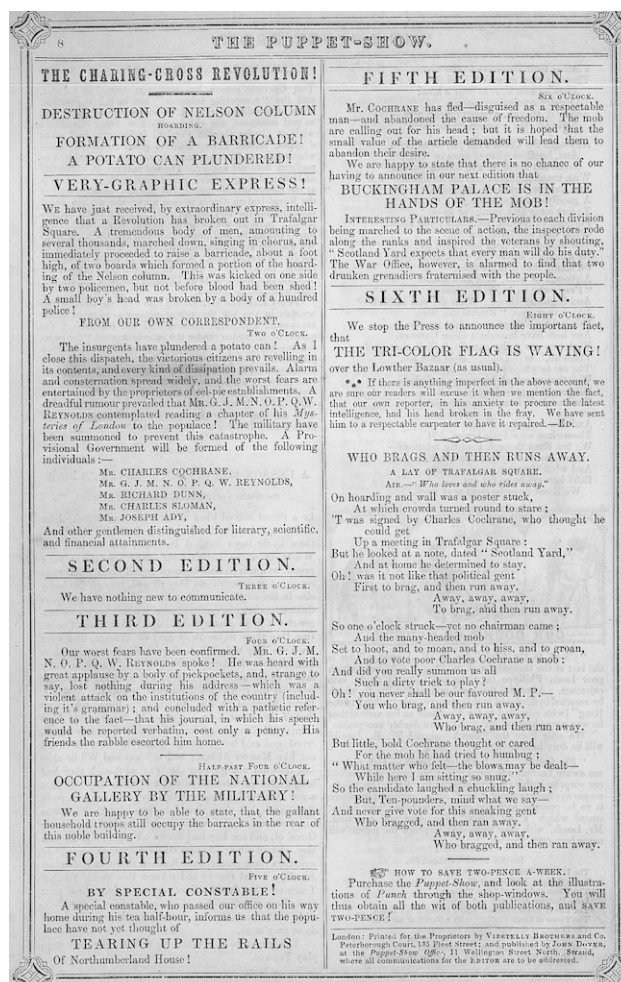


Fig. 1: 'The Charing-Cross Revolution!', *Puppet-Show*, 18 March 1848, p. 8. Reproduced with the permission of Senate House Library, University of London. PR [Z-Puppet].

The facts of how Reynolds came to speak at the meeting are as follows. The Trafalgar Square meeting was organized by Charles Cochrane, representative for Paisley at the Chartist convention, to protest about the new income tax (Collins, p. xxxi). However, Cochrane was informed by

²⁶ 'The Charing-Cross Revolution!', *Puppet-Show*, 18 March 1848, p. 8.

the commissioners of the police that he could not hold such a meeting so close to Westminster. This was due to the so-called ‘Sidmouth’s Gagging Act’, passed in 1817 in response to increased rioting after the first French Revolution (1789–99), and more properly entitled ‘An Act for more effectually preventing seditious meetings and assemblies’ (Mace, p. 139). Hansard, the record of parliamentary debates, records that ‘Mr. Cochrane accordingly abstained from attending the meeting himself, and put up placards informing the people that the meeting could not be held, and calling upon them to disperse’.²⁷ Disperse, of course, was exactly what those present did not do. Reynolds took charge of the meeting and delivered an impromptu speech, which denounced the income tax, and praised the newly reinstated French Republic. According to a reporter for the *Times*:

At last 1 o’clock struck, and from the centre of the north terrace a gentleman, who announced himself as Mr. Reynolds, stated that in the absence of Mr. Cochrane he had constituted himself, or been constituted, chairman. He stated that he was an author, and that his works were, no doubt, known to many among his audience. He said much about the glorious French Republic, the tyrannical Louis Philippe, and the great Parisian people, whom he advised not to take the leading articles of aristocratic newspapers, nor the opinions of the west end oligarchy, as the expression of what the English nation thought of them. (‘The Open-Air Meeting in Trafalgar-square’, p. 8)

By moving from declaring himself to be an author, to praising the French Republic, Reynolds connected fiction and politics. He made an implicit claim for fiction as just as legitimate a medium for the discussion of radical politics as ‘newspapers’, because he was a fiction writer taking to the political platform. Crucially, Reynolds’s actions mapped his urban fiction onto the street theatre of political demonstrations: ‘his works were, no doubt, known to many in his audience’.

Reynolds explicitly paralleled the disruptive productions of the radical print community with the disruption of urban space by protestors on 6 March 1848. Reynolds’s Trafalgar Square speech, according to the *Times* report, staked a claim to space in London. According to Reynolds, the

²⁷ ‘The Riot in Trafalgar Square’, HC Debates, 7 March 1848, vol. 97, §§ 312–13, *Hansard Online 1803–2005* <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1848/mar/07/the-riot-in-traffic-square>> [accessed 9 May 2014].

‘west end oligarchy’ does not share the opinions of ‘the English nation’. Politics is aligned with urban space: the ‘west end’ of London here evokes Parliament, Whitehall, and the gentlemen’s clubs around Pall Mall. This is provocative, given that Trafalgar Square was positioned as a kind of gateway to all of these locations.²⁸ Trafalgar Square was begun as recently as 1840, as part of urban improvement works, to provide a more dignified frontage to the new National Gallery as well as a memorial to England’s naval victory and a reminder of the might of the burgeoning British Empire.²⁹ The *Illustrated London News* reported on the completion of Nelson’s Column, and presented it as a patriotic reminder to all residents and visitors.³⁰ Trafalgar Square, therefore, was a particularly provocative stage for Reynolds’s speech of praise for the French nation, given that he was standing under the shadow of a memorial to Britain’s naval victory over the French at Trafalgar, and was about to speak again from the balcony in a street named after Wellington, who defeated the French army at Waterloo. Reynolds used the public stage of urban space for a continuation and an articulation of political comment in his printed fiction, in order to come face-to-face with people he hoped were his real readers and to reach those who were illiterate. If imagined readers became real protestors, then revolution might actually occur.

Urban space and printed page

This aim is made clear by Reynolds on the pages of *The Mysteries of London*. Reynolds’s speech in Trafalgar Square, and his second speech later from his office balcony, were delivered as he was five months away from completing the second series. Using the editorial ‘we’, Reynolds writes his

²⁸ The 1848 demonstrations set a precedent for several protests throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The student demonstrations of 2010, in setting off from outside King’s College London and processing down the Strand to Trafalgar Square, were following in this tradition.

²⁹ Mace, p. 45. Work on clearing the site started as early as 1829. The square transformed the Charing Cross end of the Strand; several well-known buildings of Dickens’s youth were knocked down. Nelson’s Column was finally erected in November 1843, although the bas-reliefs around the bottom of the column were only finished in 1854, and the famous lions were finally put in place in 1867. However, from the end of 1843, Trafalgar Square was in a form that would be recognizable to us now (Mace, pp. 69, 90, 107–08). See also Michael Paterson, *Voices from Dickens’s London* (Cincinnati: David & Charles, 2007), pp. 28–29.

³⁰ ‘The Nelson Column’, *Illustrated London News*, 18 November 1843, p. 331.

moment of triumph into the text of his story as a footnote, at a point where he has digressed to praise ‘the grand work of moral agitation for the People’s Rights’:

At the ‘monster meeting’ in Trafalgar-square, on Monday, March 6th, we were called upon to preside in the absence of Mr. Cochrane. The *London Telegraph* contained the ensuing sketch or outline of the speech which we delivered on that occasion, and which we now transfer to the pages of ‘THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON’ simply for the purpose of convincing our readers that we are not afraid to proclaim in all possible ways the opinions which we have for years promulgated though the medium of our writings. (II, 202)

Further on, Reynolds quotes from another *London Telegraph* report of the meeting held later that day at Clerkenwell Green. According to the report, ‘Mr Reynolds, at some length, very ably and forcibly dwelt on the evils of class-legislation, and showed, from his writings, that he had ever been the friend of the working-men’ (II, 202). In the footnote, Reynolds is keen to show that his opinions given on paper in his fiction, and his opinions given orally, are the same, and work towards the same goals. In these insertions, the printed page of his melodramatic fiction, and his melodramatic oratory in urban space, are elided.

The same elision occurred during Reynolds’s Trafalgar Square speech, where radical speech-making appeared as a spectacle which brought the printed page to life on the streets, and continued the work done by radical storytelling. Reynolds’s speech presented radical politics as a crowd-pleasing show that made able use of urban space, given that it was near the heart of the West End theatre district. Someone from the crowd asked Reynolds if he would kill the French King Louis Philippe if he could. Reynolds replied ‘that he certainly would not’, but would ‘put him in Woombles Menagerie and exhibit him at sixpence per head’, as just another public spectacle on show in London (Mace, p. 137). However, this is a spectacle in which the audience, too, are the actors: Reynolds urged the crowd to ‘shew the police and the Government-spies in plain clothes’ that ‘though met to demand their rights, they knew how to conduct themselves’ (II, 202).

Reynolds’s second appearance on 6 March, from his balcony outside the *Reynolds’s Miscellany* office, also used oral speech-making as a continuation of radical fiction. Once Reynolds had spoken in Trafalgar Square, he ‘introduced several other speakers to the crowd, by whom res-

olutions condemnatory of the tax were successfully proposed'.³¹ Three cheers were given to the French uprising, and somewhere between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, Reynolds headed back to his office. The cheap press described the scene jubilantly: if these reports are to be believed, it must have been as if his Chartist sermons on the pages of *The Mysteries of London* had been suddenly brought to life.³² *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, a two-penny publication owned by Edward Lloyd and published from Salisbury Square, just off Fleet Street, reported that 'Mr Reynolds then quitted his position on the terrace, and having had a vote of thanks tendered to him, retired, accompanied by several hundreds of persons, who followed, cheering him along the Strand'.³³ The Chartist *Northern Star*, edited by Reynolds's close associate Julian Harney, reported that

the meeting gave thundering cheers for the brave Parisians, and the People's Charter, and the meeting was peaceably dissolved, on which Mr Reynolds was cheered up the Strand to his residence in Wellington-street, where he addressed the people from the balcony of his house.³⁴

The *Lancaster Gazette* and the *Dublin Freeman's Journal* both copied a report from the *Sun*:

Mr. Reynolds, who is the author of the 'Mysteries of London', and several other works, then proceeded down the Strand, followed by some two or three hundred persons, whom he exhorted to commit no act of violence, crying out 'Bravo, Reynolds!' They followed him to his residence, in Upper Wellington-street, from the balcony of which he addressed them for some time.³⁵

It is Reynolds's status as author of *The Mysteries of London* (whose 'works were, no doubt, known to many among his audience') that he uses to invest himself with extra authority to speak to the crowds. He recognizes

³¹ 'Disturbances in Trafalgar Square', *Daily News*, 8 March 1848, p. 3.

³² Collins remains somewhat sceptical of these accounts (p. xxxi).

³³ 'Serious Riots in the Metropolis', *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, 12 March 1848, p. 3.

³⁴ 'The Great Open-Air Meeting in Trafalgar-Square. — Brutality of the Police', *Northern Star*, 11 March 1848, p. 8.

³⁵ 'Abolition of the Income Tax', *Freeman's Journal*, 11 March 1848, p. 3.

that he is only known through his ‘works’, but this still allows him to connect the imagined community of his readers with the real crowds in front of him, to connect the audience of his speech with the readers of his fiction, and to connect urban space with the printed page.

This meant that the relationship between real crowds in the streets listening to a speech, and his imagined readers of his printed fiction, worked in both directions for Reynolds: rather than speech-making working simply as a continuation of ideas expressed in *The Mysteries of London*, Reynolds used the pages of his narrative to expand upon his speech. When he included the account of his afternoon in the spotlight as a footnote in the second series of *The Mysteries of London*, he also repeated and expanded upon his speeches within the main text itself. Reynolds declares: ‘We cannot do otherwise, on reaching this point in our narrative, than avail ourselves of so fitting an opportunity to notice the grand and glorious struggle that has so lately taken place in the capital of France’ (II, 199). Through what becomes a lengthy digression in the narrative, the printed page is used to relive and to continue his successes within urban space. Reynolds’s digression within the body of the narrative mirrors the report of his Trafalgar Square speech, as quoted by him in the footnote. Both digression and report emphasize the need for ‘moral force’, not violence: in the digression he decries the ‘pitiable wages’ of the workers, while in the report he is said to have called for ‘fair wages’; in both there is criticism for the establishment newspapers, and for the sympathy shown towards Louis Philippe by Queen Victoria, as well as praise for the ‘glorious’ French (II, 200, 202).

Unfortunately for Reynolds, the only political revolution that occurs in *The Mysteries of London* takes place far away from London, in the fictionalized state of Castelcicala; only on the printed page can he revel in the results of successful change. Reynolds must rely upon the imagined network of readers, not urban protestors, to achieve his political aims. The power of readers, however, is limited. As Reynolds prepares his reader for his account of one character’s life as a poor seamstress, he instructs his reader on their appropriate response:

We have already warned our reader that he will have to accompany us amid appalling scenes of vice and wretchedness:— we are now about to introduce him to one of destitution and suffering — of powerful struggle and unavailing toil — whose details are so very sad. (I, 167)

The promise of ‘vice and wretchedness’ appeals to desires for melodrama and sensation; the warning of ‘destitution and suffering’ calls upon the reader’s compassion. But this use of direct, personal address to the audience has its limitations, if an invisible crowd of imagined readers (or indeed of real protestors) are being addressed as if standing before you in a city square, where you cannot possibly know the effect of your words upon each individual. As David Marshall has shown, appeals to sympathy can be highly problematic when the sufferings of others are presented as ‘scenes’ for our entertainment.³⁶ There is no guarantee that every person in that crowd will respond to your appeals and directions as you might wish.

At the end of the first series of *The Mysteries of London*, the Epilogue declares: ‘If, then, the preceding pages be calculated to engender one useful thought — awaken one beneficial sentiment, — the work is not without its value’ (I, 424). Reynolds aims to move the reader emotionally in a way that manifests itself physically, so that ‘the tear of sympathy will be drawn from the eye’, but this assumes that the eye of every reader works in the same way, and sees the same thing. Reynolds’s use of affect is there to create proliferation: he asks the reader to tell others to ‘peruse, ere you condemn!’, and so widen his audience. He uses his perceived power to move the reader to justify the proliferation of his narrative into a second series:

And if, in addition to considerations of this nature, we may presume that as long as we are enabled to afford entertainment, our labours will be rewarded by the approval of the immense audience to whom we address ourselves, — we may with confidence invite attention to a SECOND SERIES of ‘THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON’. (I, 424)

Yet for all Reynolds’s strong political beliefs, reading registers its failures here: he does not suggest that he will move his audience to political action, only to sympathy, sentiment, and the sensation of having been entertained.

However, the melodramatic power of the printed page remains potent for Reynolds when combined with oral effects. After the ‘Charing-Cross Revolution’, Reynolds’s experience of oratory made its way into the main narrative of *The Mysteries of London*, not just in chapter 157. In the actions of his hero, Richard Markham, now ruler of Castelcicala, Reynolds

³⁶ David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 48.

relives (and embellishes upon) his own triumphant reception in a number written after the Trafalgar Square chapter. Richard (now known as Ricardo) tells the Parliament of Castelcicala that he will resign his crown voluntarily:

During several parts of his speech, Ricardo had been frequently interrupted by outbursts of enthusiastic cheering: but when he reached this solemn and important climax, the whole assembly rose and greeted him with the most joyous shouts — the most fervent applause that ever expressed the unfeigned admiration of a generous patriotism. The ladies in the galleries absolutely wept in the excitement of their feelings: for never — never was seen so sublime a spectacle as this of a mighty Prince casting his crown, his sceptre, and his titles at the feet of the Goddess of Liberty! (II, 377)

In the heightened drama of this description, we hear not only a melodramatic version of Reynolds's experience, but a recognition that this is a 'sublime spectacle' which will probably never be seen outside the pages of fiction. Nevertheless, the printed page allows Reynolds to recast London as the fantasy world of Castelcicala, and to offer a fairy-tale vision of what the spoken word and the printed page might achieve when used together. The streets of London and the streets of Montoni become overlaid, the two urban spaces interlinked by the close proximity — within the pages of *Mysteries* — of the accounts of Reynolds's speeches in London and Ricardo's speeches in Montoni. Buoyed up by the dual success of his radical London speeches and his radical London fiction, in spring 1848 Reynolds's hopes were high. As Reynolds reportedly declared in Trafalgar Square to loud cheers: 'let them listen to the shout that they would now hear from thousands of people met to express their adhesion to the principles of liberty' (II, 202). The real protestors who gathered below Reynolds's balcony offered him the possibility that the crowd either contained real readers of his fiction and his journalism, or that they would expand his readership by becoming so. If Reynolds's imagined readers could all become real protestors, then not only would Reynolds have a growing market for his fiction, but he would have succeeded in bringing radical fiction to life. The novelist and the orator shared a common inspiration.