

# **‘Sweetness and light belong to us’: *The Maoriland Worker* and Proletarian Poetics**

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What happened before New Zealand literature? The gravitational field of Curnow’s introductions is so strong that, even a half-century on, they continue to draw critical works, oppositional, dissenting and admiring alike, in their orbit. There have been important studies interrogating and unpicking Curnow’s assumptions over the last decades, certainly, from Stuart Murray’s *Never a Soul at Home* (1998) to Nikki Hessel’s work on Robin Hyde and cultural nationalism, but it is striking how, even in these dissenting reports, Curnow’s claims still assert themselves. Other questions remain unaskable so long as details of the search for origins, and the assumption of a point of origin and attendant point of departure, structure and coordinate the field. But of course ‘New Zealand literature’ is not an object but a project (and a problem): an organising hypothesis; a way of gathering texts; a set of instructions for reading. That project, useful and, on its own terms, extraordinarily fecund in the research programmes and ingenious readings it has generated, short-circuits and re-boots when faced with recalcitrant, premature or eccentric material. A decade ago now, Jane Stafford and Mark Williams called for more research on the ‘actual and imagined’ (21) late colonial audiences and reading publics left obscured by the narrative of New Zealand literature. And, in the years since their *Maoriland* (2006) was published, a burgeoning field of scholarship, both in New Zealand and internationally, has developed nuanced accounts of reading communities, book history and canon formation. Literary criticism, bibliography and book history are all in productive conversation, and the digital revolution of our own era draws scholarly attention to the place of book history, editorial decisions, print technology and distribution networks in the production and reception of literary works. Multi-volume series such as the *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain* (1999–2009) and the *Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland* (2007–2009) give some sense of the energy and institutional weight of these directions in literary studies. Our work draws on and, we hope, builds from these developments.<sup>1</sup>

How further, then, to get to imagine this early twentieth-century audience? Franco Moretti: ‘no one has ever found a method just by reading more texts. That’s not how theories come into being; they need a leap, a wager—a hypothesis, to get started’ (‘Conjectures’ 55).

This paper presents initial findings from research we conducted, using the principles of Moretti’s distant reading, in the archive of this actual and imagined late colonial audience. Tracking the *Maoriland Worker* (1910–1924), newspaper of the burgeoning labour and socialist movement, across its digitised repository in *Papers Past*, we aimed to map one reading community in its formation and development, and to trace some of the uses to which literature was put in this political setting. Poetry had a more prominent role in periodicals of all kinds in this period by comparison with what the newspaper reader of today would expect to see in any given issue, and so the *Worker* is not atypical. It is, rather, a useful place in which to scan the materials of a particularly working-class audience and poetic constituency. Was there a proletarian poetics? Our hypothesis: in the largely internationalist, unsettled reading communities of the early New Zealand labour movement, a ‘New Zealand literature’ emerges blending the international and the local towards both cultural and agitational ends. Literature and propaganda had not yet, in this milieu, been severed. Bernard O’Dowd illustrates these connections in the hyperactive mixed metaphors describing the poet’s vocation in his *Australian Plea for the Poetry of Purpose* (1909). The poet is ‘a living catalyst in the intellectual laboratory’ (16), ‘the Baptist of his epoch, preparing in its wilderness the Way of the Lord’ (9) and the ‘permeator of the masses’ with high ideals ‘made emotionally digestible to the people’ (8).

The *Maoriland Worker* appeared between 1910–1924, after which time it was transformed into the *New Zealand Worker* and, as part of the Labour Party’s move towards electoral respectability, lost much of its liveliness and radical energy. The paper appeared under a succession of editors—from Australian agitator Bob Ross to Harry Holland, future leader of the Labour Party, to John Glover, prosecuted for seditious libel when, under his editorship, the paper published poems of Siegfried Sassoon shortly after the end of the Great War. It straddled, uneasily, the revolutionary and reformist wings of the labour movement, with both sides represented in its pages and with different editors favouring different factions. The *Worker* had a circulation of around 10,000 issues per copy, although numbers are necessarily approximate as much of the selling was done on street corners

by volunteer unionist-correspondents. A typical issue would carry a mixture of reprints from international labour journals, reports of meetings across the country, advertisements, both for political events and for commercial ventures from sympathising businesses, and longer articles of analysis and educational pieces on Marxist theory, economics and history. The paper combined the roles of a cultural magazine, a source of news, a platform for political analysis and a place for political gossip, often all in the same column. Its content and appearance could vary from issue to issue. Chronically short of money, and often facing police attention—both Edward Hunter ('Billy Banjo') and Harry Holland were charged with sedition for works in the paper in 1913—the *Maoriland Worker* appeared as eight, sixteen and twenty page broadsheet issues. The paper was printed in Wellington, first on Aro Street and then in a series of Te Aro offices, and distributed to Trades Halls, bookshops, Co-Operatives and socialist branches across the country. The circulation seems, after an initial rapid growth, to have been steady, but the chaotic life its readers and sellers led—amidst anti-conscription activity, say, or industrial action—makes these figures as hard to gauge as its more subjective impact on political views and membership.<sup>2</sup> The literary continuities our article traces are to be found amongst more prominent political breaks and disputes, and the paper was a site of contestation as much as collaboration. All its editors shared, however, an interest in promoting literary culture in general and poetry in particular. Poetry was a regular feature on the paper's front page, and few issues went without some book notices or quotations. There were some book reviews and quotations from prominent literary figures (Carlyle, for instance), but little or no fiction excerpted in the way in which poetry figures in what follows. The *Worker* picks up and continues, then, publishing habits from socialist journals that had come before it—*Commonweal* (1903- 1911), produced by the Wellington Branch of the Socialist Party, for instance, carried similar mixtures of poetic quotation and original publication—while also carrying these into changed political settings.<sup>3</sup>

#### DISTANT READING IN MAORILAND

In the more than six thousand pages of the *Maoriland Worker* digitised and made publicly available online through the *Papers Past* collection,<sup>4</sup> poetry—in the form of epigraphs, adaptation, quotation, original verse, and the wholesale reproduction of canonical works—is a constant and significant presence. But the historical and other disciplinary assumptions which have

informed much of the existing work on this archive has meant that the *Worker's* role as a journal of poetics, as well as the lively domestic literary culture which it registers and for which it acted as a venue, has escaped sustained scholarly attention. If historians have made good use of the *Worker*, literary critics are yet to take its full measure. Our training in the practices of close reading and interpretation, by selecting individual issues or articles from the total archive for closer examination, renders the vast majority of this corpus no less elusive or invisible. By virtue of its breadth, attending to the archive of the *Worker* as a whole and on specifically literary terms demands new and—to scholars trained in the close reading and direct interpretation of a handful of individual texts—potentially estranging modes of analysis.

In *Distant Reading*, Franco Moretti suggests that unlike the carefully-selected body of texts which close reading takes as its object, archives 'are not messages that were meant to address us, and so they say absolutely nothing until one asks the right questions' (165). In coming to terms with the *Maoriland Worker*, the 'right questions' invariably take on broad, quantitative dimensions in addition to the strictly hermeneutic ones familiar to literary scholars: not simply which poets were quoted, and to what effect, but when and how often, and where. Poetry's position on the page gives clues to its importance for editors and readers. The *Worker* gives examples both of poetry rendered prominent, centred on the opening page with articles wrapped around it, and as space-filler in corners sub-editors must have been desperate somehow to fill. Looking in order at each of the 6,367 pages of the *Worker* published between September 1910 and January 1924, we compiled records of the verse contained in each issue, and, where possible, traced quotations and epigraphs to their original source. As a consequence of this process, our study treats the digital archive of the *Worker* as a whole system, whose latent rhythms and patterns can be made available for interpretation through a combination of literary and statistical analysis. Following Moretti, in this quantitative approach to the literary object, distance is regarded 'not an obstacle, but *a specific form of knowledge*'; in this way, a process of 'deliberate reduction and abstraction' can bring the complex relations among individual elements into sharper relief (*Graphs* 1). With this in mind, this study privileges trends over events, and endorses, in the study of periodicals, shifting our critical gaze from the exceptional to the quotidian.

## MAKING PUBLICS

Whom does this archive address? Reading socialist and working-class periodicals at a distance—both temporal and methodological—allows understudied currents of proletarian literary culture in New Zealand to become visible. In an early editorial, the *Worker* is billed as the ‘inspirational, agitational and educational Voice of the insurgent people’ (‘Ourselves’ 4). The terms deployed here make explicit the cluster of affective, revolutionary, and pedagogical ambitions around which the paper’s poetic project was organised. Poetry exists in conversation with other literary forms, and quotation both shapes the paper’s poetics while also being itself appropriated to that poetics. Far from being swamped by news, correspondence, advertising and non-fictional political quotations, the prominence given to poetry in the *Worker*’s design and organisation indicates its political importance. We can read the *Worker*’s poetic production as *both* something usefully indicative of the paper’s wider ‘affective’ mode of politics *and* as a crucial tool in that mode. Walter Grieg, on the front page of the 18<sup>th</sup> February 1920 issue, asks for submissions of original poetry by readers with the aim of promoting the paper’s regular ‘Democracy of Letters’ column as ‘a popular literary medium and educator’:

[T]he interchange of thought and ideas on literary matters is one of the most helpful means of increasing taste and culture in the ranks of the workers. Sweetness and light belong to us by right, and in books are to be found the truest expression of the spirit of democracy. Literature is the great democratiser and makes the whole world kin.  
(1)

This was a regular column through 1919–1920, appearing on the top left-hand side of the *Worker*’s front page each week, and taking up over a quarter of the cover. By locating the ‘spirit of democracy’ in the literary, the writer figures the circulation, reading, and the private production of poetry as a form of political intervention, particularly when the works circulated are by poets, in contributor J.R.H.’s phrase, of ‘unconventional and mass tendencies’ (‘Minstrels’ 1). Grieg’s concern for ‘increasing taste and culture in the ranks of the workers’ (1) foregrounds the paper’s investment in enabling an autodidactic literary culture among readers: early advertising columns often included a ‘Trumpet-Call for the Week,’ a small number of selected lines ‘To be learnt off by heart’. An issue from 1912 told its readers: ‘Democracy is throttled by the ignorance of the toiling masses. Read!’ (‘Milk and Meat’ 2). The *Worker*’s poetic output, then, is underwritten by a belief

in the pedagogical, and by extension revolutionary, potential of literature—education being, for Edward Hunter, ‘the only hope for emancipation’ (18). The objectives of this pedagogical programme are intellectual, but the rhetoric mobilised in order to justify it is emotive. ‘The *Maoriland Worker* will speak to us, will teach us, will unite us,’ wrote Hunter, ‘and we, the workers, will take each other by the hand of love and brotherhood, and move towards emancipation’ (18). Politics here is foremost an affective relation, in which political subjects are interpellated by way of an appeal to common feeling. In this scene of political identification, poetry acts as an important formal mediator between readers as political actors.

‘Sweetness and light’ as a rightful inheritance of the worker-reader indicates, in its ambiguous dissent from the Arnoldian scheme, some of the complex ways literary works were re-written and ideologically re-fashioned in the *Worker*. Grieg both accepts Arnold’s suggestion, in *Culture and Anarchy*, that culture can play a positive role in ‘making sweetness and light to be characters of perfection’ (67) while also distancing this role from the Arnoldian programme of class reconciliation ‘to transform and govern’ (67) as he presents it as part of a specifically Labour programme. Just as Jen Morgan has recently argued that Chartist newspapers in Britain, far from treating Shelley as ‘their bible’ (117) in fact ‘used Shelley’s poetry as a resource in responding to the same political context but in different ways’ (118) and ‘in active and creative reception’ (120), so too did the *Worker* translate and transform the material it reprinted and disseminated. International affinities echoed through this: Shelley, the great favourite of the Chartists in the 1830s, especially his ‘Song to the Men of England’, was reprinted in Robert Hogg’s *Commonweal* (December 1908) before being published seven times in the *Worker*. Quantitative analysis opens possibilities for further study here, but reminds us also of the ongoing importance of close as much as distant reading. This ‘active and creative reception’ can be pursued in individual re-writings and responses by poets publishing in the *Worker*.

Hunter’s emotive register and Grieg’s call for original verse both recall Kirstie Blair’s claim, in her study of poetry in Scottish provincial newspapers, that correspondence columns made the ‘emotional history of members of their own class and community’ available to working class readers—in particular, the emotional history of ‘people they might actually know or meet’ (198). Certainly, the *Worker* played host to a culture of local poetic production and exchange of the kind Blair describes: our data shows

consistent interest in publishing original work, with 155 original poems printed in the newspaper between 1910 and 1924 (see figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

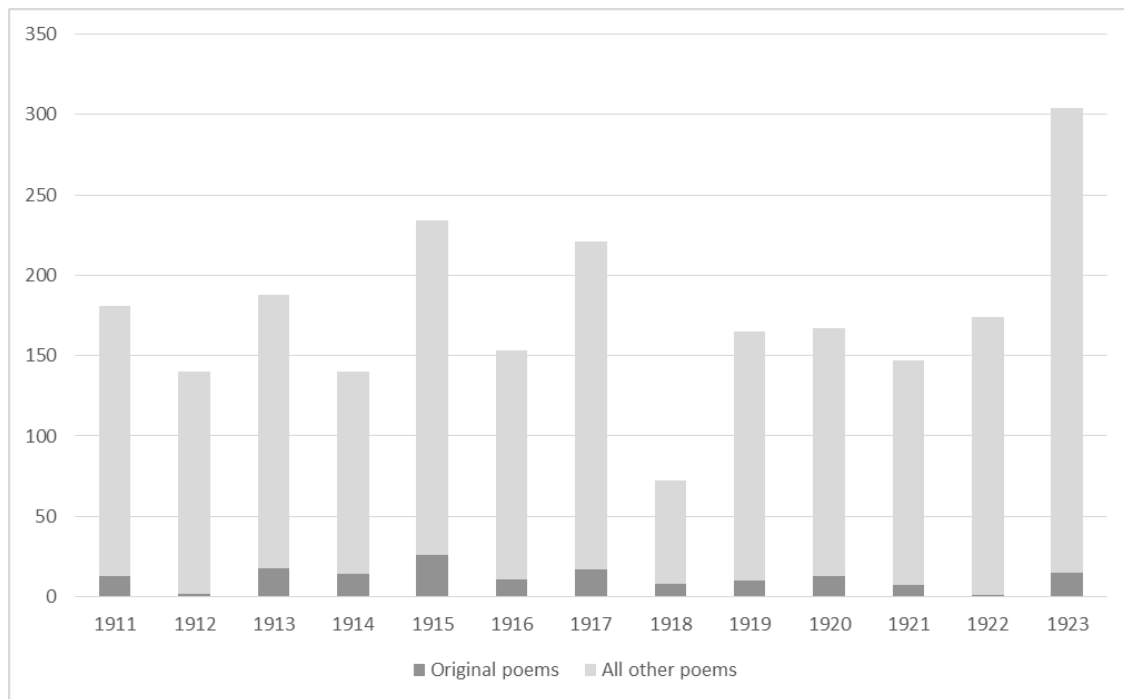


Figure 1: Original poems in proportion to the number of poems overall, by year (1911-1923).

But the intimate public of readers and contributors which Blair outlines does not necessarily follow for the *Worker*, which drew a considerable share of its poetic material from a range of international publications, including the *Australian Worker* (20 poems), the *Sydney Bulletin* (10 poems), the *London Herald* (25 poems), and the *New York Call* (10 poems), among many others. Data gathered in the course of our study tracks only the sources given by the *Worker* itself, since in most cases it is impossible to locate the original referent. Practices of international syndication among the working-class press, and the complex genealogies which this circulation of sourced material generates at the level of the individual text, also suggest the inadequacy of national idioms in forming an account of the *Worker's* participation in global English-language poetry. Its reciprocal modes of circulation and re-circulation involve, instead, what Bruce Clunies Ross has called poetry's 'polycentric devolution' (296). The *Worker* drew on international poetic resources in voicing local- and class-specific concerns. Louis Untermeyer is prefaced in 1917 as 'Written for America, but easily

adapted to the local circumstances of many countries' ('Declaration Day' 1). All international poetic productions are available for this local adaptation. The paper, then, displays an internationalist editorial and reading sensibility, implicitly positioning itself and its readers within a broader literary and proletarian public. This is the kind of public that, in Michael Warner's definition, 'comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation' (66). An article on the *Appeal to Reason* notes the way in which the *Appeal*, an American socialist newspaper, 'circulates right around this blessed globe . . . in fact it would be hard to find a place where the little old 'Appeal' does not penetrate' ('An Appeal' 2). In the context of this global reading public, the *Worker* can be read as a record of the 'international sources of the local' (Stafford and Williams 16) obscured by literary nationalism: one poem, published in the paper in February 1917, is said to have been clipped 'from *Canadian Magazine* lying on Wellington Public Library table' ('News and Views' 1). The *Worker* was fully implicated in an unruly, transnational textual economy, and itself became material to be clipped, disassembled, and put to other uses and other ends. Its poetics relied on a combination of the serendipitous and the programmatic. These working methods have political as well as literary consequences: Perry Anderson's argument that 'the basic situation' of the northern European workers who made up the bulk of Second International party membership 'could be defined as [...] a combination of territorial immobility and social deracination' (13) does not hold for these Antipodean reading communities, formed as they were in the loosest of cultural associations amongst migrant miners, shearers and trans-Tasman political agitators.

Jane Stafford and Mark Williams, in *Maoriland*, point to what they see as a conspicuous lack of archival research on the question of late colonial audiences, both 'actual and imagined' (21). Further, they ask to what extent the 'material circumstances' of publishing and international trade informed reading practices, and whether a New Zealand reading public can be spoken of as distinct from 'an Australasian, British, or imperial one' (21). But the *Worker's* expansive textual public is one in which material sourced elsewhere, including the United States, was not simply circulated and read, but adapted, cut up, rewritten, and pressed into rhetorical and polemical service in new, local contexts. Poems anthologised in socialist song books, newspapers, and pamphlets and subsequently reprinted in newspapers—often in extracts and epigraphs and, more often still, under different titles—together form a transnational if largely invisible network of citation,



reference, and response: a ‘reticulated system,’ to borrow Bruce Clunies Ross’s formulation (297). Far from the difficulty Stafford and Williams identify in demarcating and naming a *reading* public as such, the textual economies into which the *Worker* inserted itself—and which it subsequently helped to create—challenge us to generate more expansive and more historically sensitive models of poetic reception and production—that is, beyond the centre-periphery models frequently mobilised in the study of settler-colonial literatures. They also urge the production of accounts which recognise poetry as positioned within ‘a globally devolved network where influences are dispersed’ (Ross 293). The movement’s Song Books participated in this dispersal of influence. The New Zealand Socialist Party’s first Song Book included songs by William Morris and Ella Wheeler Wilcox alongside the ‘Internationale’ and the ‘Marseillaise’; its contents were derived from an earlier Australian songbook, which had in turn been adapted from a songbook from the United States of the turn of the century. Canons and groupings mutated as they were anthologised and re-anthologised.<sup>6</sup>

#### CANONICAL INTERVENTIONS

In considering the often curious deployment of poetry in socialist periodicals from the period, and in the *Maoriland Worker* in particular, the ‘literary’ itself, as a stable or discrete category of analysis, displays its limitations. Canonical poems are subject to the same kinds of textual interruption, sampling, and rewriting as material gathered from other periodicals. A December 1915 article which narrates the history of the *Worker* does so by way of reference to the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, with Coleridge’s poem refigured as an allegory for the socialist press: ‘In this case the ocean represents the rank and file’ (‘Short History’ 7). Existing texts, then, are not isolated by the serious distance of aesthetic appreciation but are instead made available for interruption and radical reinterpretation. There is no fixed stability or unitary quality to the literary texts, and poems, often, we assume, reassembled from memory, have porous boundaries from one reprinting to the next. They indicate poems ‘in circulation’ as parts of a living, active, and often oral, political tradition. Many of the poems produced in Harry Holland’s unfinished biography of Robert Burns appear with stanzas missing or as confections of one or more poems; reproduction, in other words, is much more creative adaptation than careful fidelity to an ‘original’ or source, and an indication of his working habits as editor of and

contributor to the *Worker*.<sup>7</sup> Again, however, exigency and ambition align, and mere forgetfulness is not always, from this distance, distinguishable from creative rewriting. What the *Worker* bears out at such moments is Moretti's claim that upon entering the archive 'all the usual coordinates disappear,' leaving only 'swarms of hybrids and oddities, for which the categories of literary taxonomy offer very little help' (*Distant Reading* 180). In less inventive moments, canonical poetry was taken broadly as an instructive commentary on a local and contemporary historical moment. The apparent gap between the moment and scene of poetic production, and that of its reception, is acknowledged, but ultimately deemed insignificant: Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* is held to be 'as applicable to rural Britain today, and may become true of this country yet unless things change' ('Goldsmith'). Canonical works, when viewed in this way, become implicated in contemporary socialist organisation, strategy, and analysis, valued not only for their pedagogical utility but for their richness as a resource for political discourse and rhetoric.

But the foregoing claims depend on notions of canonicity assumed to be axiomatic—assumptions which become untenable when we leave individual reworkings of Goldsmith and Coleridge behind, and attend to the record of poetic references in the *Worker* as a whole. The most-cited poets across the *Worker's* publication history (see figure 2) include canonical Romantic poets (Shelley, Byron, Burns) and Victorians (Tennyson, Swinburne, Kipling, Morris). But the data makes no meaningful distinction between these names—so familiar as to require no further explanation—and the lesser-known American poets John G. Whittier, Berton Braley, and Edwin Markham, each of whom enjoyed a considerable presence in the newspaper. This is to say nothing of Harry Holland, E.L. Eyre, Edward Hunter, and 'Hugh Stone,' all of whom, as editors or as frequent contributors, were closely associated with the *Worker*. Ahead of all of these poets are two Americans: Ella Wheeler Wilcox and James Russell Lowell, at 44 and 75 citations respectively. The relative invisibility of Lowell and Wilcox in our own historical moment is suggestive not only of the idiosyncratic character of the *Worker* as a document of reception but of the ways in which reception is embedded in temporal and cultural locations. This is to say that their presence in this corpus reminds us of the far larger number of texts which, even if they do not 'disappear altogether' (Moretti, *Distant Reading* 66), largely escape the attention of a contemporary literary criticism based on close readings of a canon.

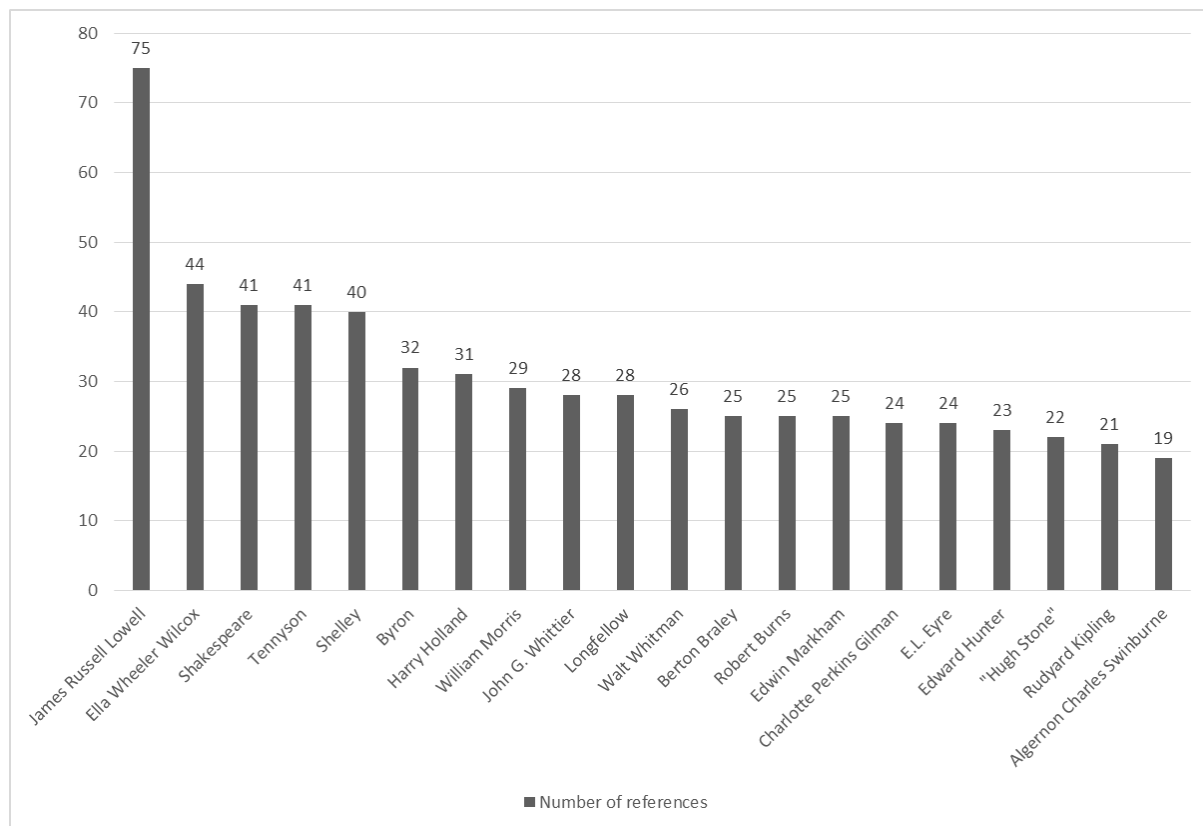


Figure 2: References and quotations, by poet (1910-1924).

The poets included in figure 2—the twenty who were most frequently cited over the *Worker's* history—collectively account for 624, or approximately 27 percent, of the 2339 poetic references recorded. The concentration of references around this small group of poets at once reproduces and undermines the canonical frameworks which structure and organise reading. It undermines these frameworks because the *Worker's* is not a version of the canon we recognise readily. Rather than simply furnishing local, Antipodean evidence for links traced by Jonathan Rose between political radicalism and literary conservatism among British working-class readers (125), it suggests the emergence of negotiated reading practices, and indeed revisions of the canon, from culturally and politically marginal venues. It would be untenable to offer the *Worker*—given its limited readership (circulation was never more than 10,000) and the specificity of its ideological and pedagogical remit—as an adequate sample, much less a representative one, of reading habits in New Zealand between 1910 and 1924. Even the most reliable records of reception, William St Clair notes, ‘can never be, at best, anything beyond a tiny, randomly surviving, and perhaps highly unrepresentative, sample of the far larger total of acts of

reception which were never even turned into words in the mind of the reader let alone recorded in writing' (5). But it is nonetheless possible to detect in this data traces of a larger proletarian literary culture which appropriated and re-worked the poetic material in its vicinity, drawing together bourgeois cultural products and non-canonical working-class verse into the same textual space. In this way, the paper's poetic appropriations serve a political-affective function, laying claim to poetry's Arnoldian 'sweetness and light' (Grieg 1) on behalf of the working class. A juxtaposition of texts canonical, obscure, and original has implications for literary-critical method, too: it recalls Moretti's claim that his goal is not the 'discovery of precursors to the canon or alternatives to it, to be restored to a prominent position' but, rather more radically, 'a change in how we look at *all* of literary history: canonical and noncanonical: together' (*Distant Reading* 66).

POET	POEM	NUMBER OF REFERENCES	% OF TOTAL REFERENCES
Tennyson	'Locksley Hall'	17	41
Lowell	'The Present Crisis'	12	16
Shelley	<i>Queen Mab</i>	12	30
Lowell	<i>The Biglow Papers</i>	12	16
Longfellow	'The Arsenal at Springfield'	11	39
Byron	<i>Don Juan</i>	11	34
Omar	<i>The Rubaiyat of Omar</i>	11	100
Khayyam	<i>Khayyam</i>		
Lowell	'The Day Is Coming'	10	13
Shakespeare	<i>Hamlet</i>	9	22
Lowell	'A Glance Behind the Curtain'	8	11
Burns	'A Man's A Man For A That'	8	32
Shelley	<i>The Mask of Anarchy</i>	8	20
Lowell	'We Will Speak Out'	8	8
Shelley	'Song to the Men of England'	7	18
Barrett	'The Cry of the Children'	7	58
Browning			
Morris	'The March of the Workers'	7	24
Symonds	'These things shall be'	7	78
Byron	<i>Childe Harold's Pilgrimage</i>	7	22

Table 1: References and quotations by poem (1910-1924), and as a percentage of total references to their author.

The distribution of poetic references is subtly but tellingly different when organised by poem instead of poet. These references occur in all manner of contexts, from epigraphs and concluding quotations framing articles to in-text citations and quotations between sections of articles.

A few observations—some obvious—are worth making at this point. None of the poets listed above was a contributor to the *Worker*: significant as original verse was to the poetics of the newspaper and its production of an affective public sphere, no original poem was published or referenced repeatedly enough to appear in the list of most-cited works. Some concentration of references in individual poems explains why Elizabeth Barrett Browning, John Addington Symonds, and *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* appear in this table despite being absent from the list of most-cited poets. Over half of the twelve references to Elizabeth Barrett Browning are to ‘The Cry of the Children,’ a poem valued for its ‘real stuff’ (J.R.H., ‘Minstrels’ 1) and engagement with material conditions. Other aspects of this data provoke more questions: why 41 percent of the *Worker*’s references to Tennyson are to ‘Locksley Hall’ and not to, say, *In Memoriam* (referenced only 5 times in the *Worker*), suggests critical renegotiation of the canon at the level of the text as well as the poet. How was Tennyson read in the world of early New Zealand socialism? The archive is, on this question, tantalizing and evasive.

	ALL POETS	TOP 20	‘CANONICAL’
<b>Unnamed</b>	372	77	45
<b>Named</b>	1962	546	228
<b>Unnamed (%)</b>	16	12	16

Table 2: References and quotations: attribution breakdown

The *Worker* displays uneven practices of attribution. In most cases (around 84 percent), the poet being quoted is named, but poetry was also included without any indication of authorship (see table 2). The lack of a name seems to imply familiarity with both the poems and ways of expected reading. Non-attribution might therefore be read as indicative of the poet’s canonical status, as well as giving a sense of the *Worker*’s implied addressee, and the frameworks of knowledge which the reader was expected to bring to bear on the material. Yet we found only a slight difference in rates of attribution

between the group of twenty frequently-cited poets and the whole corpus. Overall, the twenty most-cited poets (plotted earlier in figure 2) were more often named when quoted: only 12 percent of these references carry no name, compared with the 16 percent of references overall. It is tempting, when confronted with this data, to infer that naming canonical poets in this way was attractive because it conferred legitimacy. But canonicity and obscurity in themselves offer no clear indication of the likelihood of attribution. Even when this group is limited to a strictly ‘canonical’ sample



of poets, the overall difference—at 16 percent unnamed—remains insignificant.<sup>8</sup>

### QUOTIDIAN POETICS

The project of reading *across* a periodical as a critical object requires us to think differently about the temporal dynamics of texts, and to generate critical methods appropriate to the particular temporalities which periodicals, in their indefinite deferral of closure, hold out. This means finding, or learning to find, meaning in ‘small changes and slow processes’ (Moretti, *Distant Reading* 192). A weekly newspaper is, surely, an ideal arena for testing the value of ‘small changes and slow processes’ for literary criticism. Visualisation becomes necessary here: plotting the number of

Figure 3: Total references and quotations, by year (1911-1923).

poetic references and quotations in the *Worker* on a graph promises to make the ‘hidden tempo’ (Moretti, *Graphs* 29) of its system of reference and citation legible. What is worth noting in the number of references when plotted over time on a graph (see figure 3) is less its peaks and troughs—which at first appear significant—and more its relative stability across the period.<sup>9</sup> Two of the most dramatic oscillations in this graph—in 1918 and in 1923—deserve some explanation. *Papers Past* carries no issues of the *Worker* published between April–November 1918, meaning our records lack sufficient data properly to account for that year. In September 1922, the *Worker* adopted a 16-page format, doubling the length of each issue and no doubt contributing to the significant rise in poetry recorded in 1923.

What is hidden in this archive, when read at the close proximity of the individual issue, is the consistency and stability of its poetic output over time. As table 1 partially demonstrates, one of the principal dynamics through which the *Worker*’s poetics operated was repetition: despite a changing cast of editors, the newspaper quoted from or referred to the same poems, like ‘Locksley Hall’ or *Don Juan*, repeatedly between 1910 and 1924. Lowell’s ‘The Present Crisis’ serves as a useful case study in this practice. ‘The Present Crisis’ appears twelve times in the corpus, in contexts as various as a defence of free speech and the 1912 Waihi strike. Often the very same lines were reproduced in multiple issues and in various contexts: references to the ‘The Present Crisis’ tend to be limited to two specific quotations. One passage from the poem (‘New occasions teach new duties, / Time makes ancient good uncouth . . .’) appears four times; another (‘Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide . . .’) is quoted on five different occasions. Editors, correspondents, and contributors evidently found a valuable poetic resource in Lowell’s ‘clarion cry of action here and now,’ as J.R.H. puts it in a column from 1920 (‘Literary Chat’ 1), but their use of Lowell is selective even as, viewed as a broad trend, it seems to be indiscriminate. The stability of the paper’s field of reference was maintained not just in the course of multiple changes in editorship, but in response to a changing, dynamic, and unstable domestic and global environment. The historical moment which *The Worker* records and to which it responded is marked by labour disputes, World War I, and the Russian Revolution, among countless other locally and historically formative events. Dynamic contexts, then, but recourse to static and standard poetic resources: the *Worker* found in certain poems, such as Lowell’s, texts suitable for variegated political contexts.

## CONCLUSIONS

What is the value of this archive? Just as Stafford and Williams in 2006 pointed to Maoriland as the “black hole” in New Zealand’s historical memory’ (14), the proletarian literary culture of which the *Maoriland Worker* was a part remains similarly obscure. There have been attempts—Rachel Barrowman’s unsurpassed study most notably—to reconstruct the cultural world of working-class organisation, but these have too often neglected the specifically literary dimension of the texts that enlivened these spaces. Conversely, the leftist literary practice of rediscovering and championing lost or neglected works from the cultural past—as with the Virago Classics—leaves under-contextualised the historical place of these very texts themselves. Periodical culture, and ways of reading encouraged by periodicals, prompt forms of study that might usefully fuse these two approaches.

Our own experiments here go some way towards tracing the lineaments of one reading culture, in its socialist political commitments and migratory, international formation, as it makes use of existing literary material to negotiate and describe changing cultural and political circumstances. Our time in the laboratory of *Papers Past* reinforces our sense, too, against the more blissfully positivist claims of Matthew Jockers’ *Metanalysis* (2013), that the data cannot, unprompted, speak: quantitative analysis of the kind we begin here prompts further close reading, further encounters between critics and historians and texts embedded in complex, not easily deciphered cultural contexts. This is not historical ‘rediscovery’ then so much as it is a different point of entry to historical reading and research.

*The Maoriland Worker* produced, we suggest, not a precursor to ‘New Zealand Literature’, nor a late colonial variation on global themes but, rather, a local reworking of an internationalist canon. Its proletarian poetics, then, represent not the antecedents of a later history but are instead the pre-history of a present that has not yet come to be.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Wevers and, in the international context, Wilson (2016) and Wilson (2017).
- <sup>2</sup> We draw here on the *Prospectus* of the *New Zealand Worker*, giving a potted history of the papers. It is in the Holland Archive, ANU, P5/7/18.
- <sup>3</sup> See Richardson for a fascinating account of one important figure in this political-cultural milieu.
- <sup>4</sup> *Papers Past*, the National Library of New Zealand's newspaper and periodical digitisation project, covers the period from 1839 to 1948 and, at the time of writing, contains more than four million pages. We consulted this collection from November 2015 through January 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Original poetry is usually marked as 'For the Maoriland Worker.' As such, this is only a partial figure, and the true total may be much higher.

<sup>6</sup> These songbooks circulated internationally also, and would have linked readers in shared performance and reception. Harry Holland, Labour's first leader, owned several from Australian, Scottish and American as well as New Zealand sources. They are now held in his archives at the Noel Butlin Centre, the Australian National University, P5/1596.

<sup>7</sup> Parts of this biography appeared in *The New Zealand Worker*, successor to *The Maoriland Worker*, in January and February 1926, but the biography remained incomplete at Holland's death. Its draft is in the Holland Archive, ANU, P5/7/21. See McNeill for a further discussion of this work, and of Holland's development of the *Worker's* aesthetic in a later political setting.

<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this test, the 'canonical' sample was limited to: Shakespeare, Tennyson, Byron, Longfellow, Whitman, Burns, Kipling, and Swinburne.

<sup>9</sup> Since the archive begins and ends abruptly, 1910 and 1924 have been excluded from figure 3.