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## ***In a Cottage of Content: Work, Leisure, and Gender in Popular and Radical Thought, c. 1830-c. 1860***

By the end of the eighteenth century, popular recreation in England was assailed from every side: by middle-class evangelicals who abhorred its hedonism and excess, by moral and social reformers of every stripe who attacked its atavism and degradations, and by employers who wanted their work people sober, productive, and disciplined-not the rorty, recalcitrant crew they were inclined to be. Much of this opposition came from the upper and middle classes, but there were also elements among the labouring masses who had their own concerns about the manner in which the people spent their scarce leisure time. These, scholars suggest, were far more influential than any others in transforming popular culture. In common with other leisure reform groups of the period, Chartists, Owenite Socialists, and working-class religious non-conformists shared a seriousness of purpose and intolerance of the careless pleasure-seeking associated with popular recreation that set them foursquare against many of its customary practices and attitudes. And in the first half of the nineteenth century they helped to construct an alternative model of leisure, one which was consonant with the emerging social and economic order, one which was respectable and 'rational'.

Scholars have tended to see rational recreation simply in terms of an early nineteenth-century exercise in upper- and middle-class control or hegemony. In this paper I argue that rational recreation also mediated and shaped gender relations among working people in the same period.

At the heart of the working-class rational recreationist's vision of popular leisure was the humble but happy home and family, headed by a decently paid workman who could support himself and his family in a "cottage of content." The exemplary wife of this domestic idyll was supposed to manage the home and family, and provide cheer and comfort to sustain her husband in his labours. This ideological construct of working-class

life was crafted by radicals and other working men, primarily in the 1830s and 1840s. By the late Victorian period it was a central plank in a patriarchal, capitalist order in which working-class women's lives were crucially circumscribed.

The paper looks at a range of popular and radical writings from the early to mid-Victorian period—including the political press, autobiographies, religious writings, and literary genres such as dialect poetry—to elucidate the main elements of this model of popular recreation.