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THE LIMITS OF COMMUNITY IN VICTORIAN FICTION

b y

DAVID KRAMER

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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1997

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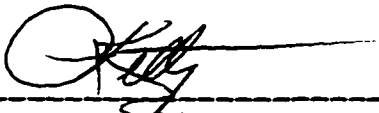
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Abstract**THE LIMITS OF COMMUNITY IN VICTORIAN FICTION****b y****David Kramer****Adviser: Professor Elizabeth B. Tenenbaum**

This dissertation claims a close relation between the outcast figure of the Victorian realist novel and the alienated figure of the High Modernist. Discussing novels by Mary Shelley, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, George Gissing, and Thomas Hardy, the dissertation posits that the growing unease of Victorian writers as to the possibility of finding social connections helps lead, ultimately, to the Modernist disbelief in and rejection of the concept of the traditional community. While World War I has often been identified as Modernism's key event, the historical and cultural forces at work in the nineteenth century were, if not as cataclysmic, at least acutely disturbing, and quite often disillusioning. The theological and economic disruptions that so widely affected Victorian culture, such as the scientific investigations of Lyell and Darwin and the continuing shift in England from an agrarian to an urban economy, helped produce an important strain of the Victorian novel that, while accepting the mainstream Victorian assumption that virtually everyone desires absorption into a community, examines the profound difficulty of joining such communities, reflecting the sense

of dislocation growing in the nineteenth century. The works' socially marginalized protagonists, such as Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, Pip, Rhoda Nunn, Edward Reardon, Tess, and Jude, like their Modernist successors, hold confused, even rebellious attitudes towards traditional structures, learn to feel no tie to their culture, and, to an extent, expose the meaninglessness that lies beneath society's organization. Thus, the climate that produced the radical narratives of the High Modernists had been prepared partly by such works as *Great Expectations* and *Jude the Obscure*, which helped to subvert cultural assumptions in less striking forms.

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CHAPTER 1

MARGINALIZATION AND ALIENATION

The critical tradition concerning Victorian literature has, rightly, ascribed to the novelists of this period a deep concern with the ways in which communities work and their members interrelate, claiming that the novelists made the corresponding assumption that every person naturally desires absorption into a community. As Jerome Hamilton Buckley writes, "Despite the resounding clash of individual wills, there was until late in Victoria's reign a desire for cultural synthesis urgent enough to inspire even from the most rebellious many a concession to an established social morality" (*Victorian Temper* 12). Richard D. Altick echoes Buckley: "The chief preoccupation of the major novelists, as it was a leading one of other prose writers, was the structure, internal movement, and moral atmosphere of contemporary society" (17). Peter Garrett relates this fundamental theme to the forms of the novels, writing that "the large loose baggy monsters mean many things and in many different ways, but one thing they repeatedly mean to do is to transcend the limitations of the individual point of view and envision the life of the whole community" (22). Donald Stone describes "the great subject of Victorian fiction" to be "directing the individual away from egoistic and false heroic aims and towards communal and domestic goals" (10-11). And Andrew Blake makes a similar claim: "The mid-nineteenth-century novelist . . . wrote in a literary context whose concerns closely matched those of the novel: concerns principally with the reproduction of society and with the stable integration of

the different elements within it" (134). Finally, as Joseph Allen Boone puts it, "The impetus towards closed endings that has been noted in the [Victorian] courtship, seduction and wedlock variations on the marriage theme reflects the wish to believe in a stable organization underlying social reality and cultural convention; by rounding off the work's vision into a complete and contained whole, the writer attempts to leave the reader in an unquestioning state of repose and acceptance" ("Wedlock" 69).

But an important strain within Victorian fiction--one that encompasses some of the period's most important authors and their most important works--examines the profound difficulty of joining such communities. While Jane Eyre, for instance, eventually finds both cousins and a husband, she spends much of her narrative in isolation and, considering her narrow escape from certain death as a homeless wanderer, is quite lucky to end her story happily. Pip finds some solace in his partnership with Pocket, but his desired community with Estella may or may not have been achieved, and his own family connections are badly damaged. And Edward Reardon's and Jude Fawley's communities disintegrate altogether. It is my view that the growing unease of nineteenth-century novelists as to the possibility of finding social connections helped lead, ultimately, to the English Modernist disbelief in and rejection of the concept of traditional community.

While English Modernism's link to Romanticism has been well documented, its continuity with Victorianism has not. Most critics, beginning approximately with Robert Langbaum, have recognized that one of the most vigorously affirmed of early Modernism's self-

defining tenets--a rejection of Romantic values--is, to a large extent, misleading. Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition*, which begins with a chapter entitled "Romanticism as a Modern Tradition," asserts that the Romantic and Modernist movements were united in their convictions that the past often stultifies new art and in their identification of the individual, not the social collective, as the source of meaning (11). Later critics have followed Langbaum's lead. Perry Meisel's *The Myth of the Modern: A Study in British Literature and Criticism after 1850* and Ricardo J. Quinones's *Mapping Literary Modernism: Time and Development* classify the Romantic movement, along with the Renaissance and High Modernism, as one of three periods of English modernism (4, 7). Michael Levenson's *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* categorizes early Modernism as "frankly egoistic" and reliant on the "demands of personality" (133), leading to a form of expression which "appears as only an extreme romantic individualism" (135). Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* places Goethe's *Faust* at the beginning of "modern self-awareness" (39).

All of these suggestions that Modernism is to some extent a reiteration of Romantic themes have justifiably led critics to reevaluate the boundaries of these periods, with a resultant blurring of the date of the birth of Modernism. However, these works rarely discuss Victorian fiction, as if the project of Modernism were in hibernation throughout most of the nineteenth century, as far as the novel is concerned. Frederick R. Karl's *Modern and Modernism*, for

instance, which traces the evolution of Modernism's concepts over several centuries, barely, if at all, mentions the major figures of Victorian literature. Meisel's and Quinones's works skip over Victorianism altogether: both ignore the Victorian era in their sequence of Modernist periods, and Quinones on several occasions in his text writes that the work of the Victorians is directly antithetical to Modernism.

A few critics do draw links between Victorians and Modernists, but their works examine debts to Victorian poets and theorists, not novelists. Carol T. Christ, in *Victorian and Modern Poetics*, examines the periods' relations only in terms of poetry. Louis Menand, in *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context*, discusses the influence of Pater's aestheticism on such Early Modern enterprises as Imagism and notes that "one of the interests [Eliot's] writing has for us is that the nineteenth-century cultural values he made such a show of discrediting can be read, so to speak, beneath the modernist ones he made a show of declaring" (5). Meisel, in *The Myth of the Modern*, traces the influence of Pater and Arnold on the Early Moderns. Meisel does discuss Thomas Hardy as an incipient Modern; still, his reading posits Modernism's birth at the very end of the Victorian age and does not include earlier Victorian novelists.

It is my purpose here to place those earlier novelists in the evolution of modernist thought. While Modernism remains a nebulous subject, one can point to a number of related ideas concerning its key characteristics: protagonists "who are in the way-- in the way of history, of progress, of development; people who are classified, and disposed of, as obsolete" (Berman 67); a "defiance of

authority" (Karl xii); "the deliberate flouting of bourgeois conventions and traditions, of proprieties, amenities and responsibilities" (Levenson 59); "a rejection of history" (DeMan 162); "a hostile . . . relationship to history" (Christ 156); a desire to be "dislodgers and subverters of everything except truth" (Ellmann 10); works where "the city occupies a central space" (Bathrick and Huyssen 13). All these can be found throughout the Victorian era, in the many heroes and sympathetic characters who are on the margins of a society that became increasingly hostile to those who needed its support most. Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, Pip, Rhoda Nunn, Tess, Jude, and many others all to some extent reject their assigned roles, the sources of which lie in traditional class, family, and gender structures. To borrow the language of these defining characteristics, Jane Eyre, for instance, is in the way at the Reed's house, she and her fellow Lowood inmates are disposed of, and she has a hostile relationship to the traditional authority of Aunt Reed, John Reed, Brocklehurst, Rochester, and St. John; she refuses to accept passively any situation that would be spiritually unsatisfying. And as I hope to show later, these situations generally hold true for all the characters to be discussed in this dissertation.

The traditional date of the separation between Victorianism and Modernism is the second decade of the twentieth century, as the sense of modern disorientation became overwhelming. Virginia Woolf writes, "On or about December, 1910, human character changed" (96).¹ Paul Stansky has recently followed Woolf's lead:

¹ Her view of this change is in many ways optimistic, as Victorian social injustices have to a great degree been ameliorated, as

"Unexpectedly and perhaps belatedly, England in 1910 entered the story of a modernism that since the turn of the century had had a number of its major events occur on the continent" (1). Some critics ascribed this development mainly to one specific, later event: World War One. Paul Fussell claims "that there seems to be one dominating form of modern understanding; that it is essentially ironic; and that it originates largely in the application of mind and memory to the events of the Great War" (35) and contrasts post-War literature to earlier works: "There was no *Waste Land*, with its rats' alleys, dull canals, and dead men who have lost their bones: it would take four years of trench warfare to bring these to consciousness. . . . One read Hardy and Kipling and Conrad and frequented worlds of traditional moral action delineated in traditional moral language" (23). Walter E. Houghton also blames the beginning of the extinction of Victorian optimism on the world war (36), and is echoed by J. Hillis Miller (*Disappearance of God* 11) and E. J. Hobsbawm (*Empire* 12, 326). But historical and cultural forces present in the nineteenth-century were, if not as cataclysmic, at least acutely disturbing, and quite often disillusioning. It is worth noting that "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," though published in 1917, was written a few years *before*

her comparison of Victorian and Georgian cooks indicates. No longer, for instance, would we need to "consider the married life of the Carlyles and bewail the waste, the futility, for him and for her, of the horrible domestic tradition which made it seemly for a woman of genius to spend her time chasing beetles, scouring saucepans, instead of writing books" (96). But in any case, Modernism, for her, has started well into the twentieth century.

the almost completely unanticipated onset of World War I.² And Woolf's dating of the sea change is pointedly before the war as well. Clearly, fears about the growing disorientation of modern life were in the air before the war. In fact, such fears were present nearly a century earlier. As Houghton himself points out, such events as the Industrial Revolution and the Reform Bills, which attempted to address the problems created by Industrialism, created widespread distress: "The Victorians were utterly unprepared for the radical crisis in thought and society which burst over England in the [eighteen-] thirties and forties. The assumptions of the old order had been bred into the minds of almost all mid-Victorians; and now in the nineteenth century . . . they suddenly began to crumble" (66). Fears resulting from economic crises, including an increasing dichotomization of the rich and the poor (Williams *Culture and Society* 72), and doubts about traditional domestic structures became important parts of nineteenth-century thought.

Alongside the growing ruptures in the fabric of nineteenth-century secular society is the parallel rupture in unifying religious beliefs, accelerated by the reverberations of Darwinism. This rupture is reflected in the religious dilemmas of nearly all of the characters discussed in this dissertation. Victor's monster is portrayed as the victim of an indifferent, if not cruel god; Jane's childhood is partly defined by her injuries caused by, as well as her

² As Hobsbawm notes, even those who feared a war had no idea how widespread or calamitous it would prove to be: "Even during the last desperate days of the international crisis of July 1914 statesmen, taking fatal steps, did not really believe they were starting a world war" (*Empire* 304).

resistance to, the hypocrisy of Reverend Brocklehurst and the Spartan conditions of his school, as well as with the cold, domineering missionary St. John; Lucy's sense of isolation in Villette is exacerbated by her religious orientation, which makes her an outcast in a Catholic country; Pip's struggles are symbolized in the first chapter by his seeing the church turn upside down (37); Edward Reardon and Jude even directly question the existence of God.

Carlyle, for one, linked the secular and religious problems by claiming that Christianity had deteriorated into a spiritually bankrupt system of bartering for absolution (Raymond Williams *Culture and Society* 74). This intersection of religion and economics is, as we shall see, integral to discussions of the period's aesthetics: as nineteenth-century history records the disruption of familiar values and traditional support systems, nineteenth-century fictional protagonists grapple, often unsuccessfully, with the disorienting effects of social, economic, philosophical, and religious changes. The prevalence of isolated heroes who continually experience and confront these schisms indicates that many Victorian novelists were deeply troubled by much of what they saw in society and often posited the iconoclastic values of their rebels and outcasts as replacements for dated standards. Thus, one can say that the strain in Victorian fiction that expresses profound doubts about contemporary society holds a proto-Modernist viewpoint. This leads Altick to write, "the Victorians belonged to a society that in many crucial respects is remarkably (frighteningly?) like our own" (x). It is perhaps useful, then, to describe modernism as a period which began at the latest with the Romantics and developed fairly

continuously--though of course not smoothly--through the Modernists.³

Twentieth-century Modernism itself is not, of course, static. Karl points out a broad shift in ideas: "the Modern's chief direction" is from the "socially outcast toward those who have fallen out of rhythm with their own roles" (12), so that the outcast character is replaced by the alienated. But while Karl intimates that this is a twentieth-century phenomenon, one need only look at the pattern that evolves through such isolated characters as Jane Eyre, Pip, and Jude Fawley to see that the strain of Victorian fiction I am tracing followed Karl's Modern direction: these novels can be seen as precursors to Modernist expression. These characters, who have authorial approval and often reflect the Victorian novelists' outsider's viewpoint, which is critical of the traditions and institutions that govern mainstream society, indicate that Modernist ideas about society are already present in the Victorian literary discourse, and I will thus attempt to fit the Victorian novel into what can be viewed as the uninterrupted development of Modernism from the Romantics to the High Modernists by focusing on the

³ It is perhaps obvious but necessary to state that modernism can take on many incarnations, even simultaneously. As Karl puts it, "All efforts to simplify Modern into a monolithic movement are doomed to failure" (15). But the variety results from differing responses to common concerns. Imagism and Impressionism, to take one example, are different modes of representation addressing the same problem of objectivity. Since I am focusing on the historical shifts to which various writers respond, it is enough, for my purpose, to focus on the problems Modernism addresses, rather than the solutions the Modernists attempt to create.

development of the marginal figure from the outcast Romantic to the alienated Modern.

My concern is thus thematic. Of course, Modernist literature is so striking not only for its content, but also for its radically experimental forms. But I would argue that the Victorians helped create the atmosphere that led to these forms by exploring burgeoning dissatisfactions with the novel's mimetic ability, specifically in regards to traditional closure. The climate for the radical narratives of the High Modernists had long been prepared by such works as *Great Expectations* and *Jude the Obscure*, which subverted cultural assumptions in less striking forms. It seems unlikely that Prufrock could have wandered his half-deserted streets without their first being enveloped in *Bleak House's* fog. As Raymond Williams puts it, discussing the connection between style and content, "Internal disturbances of language and form. . . . are problems of relationship, of essential relationship: to and with other people, other groups, other classes" (*English Novel* 124).

The stylistic experiments of such Modernists as Conrad, Lawrence, Woolf, and Forster reflected formally their belief in the supreme importance of interiority, of their desire to elevate character over plot.⁴ Some Victorian novelists expressed similar beliefs, even if they were unable to create adequate narrative solutions to these concerns. Thus, while the Victorians' use of rather

⁴ See, for example, the discussion of character in Woolf's "Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown" and Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* (Chapter Five).

conventional forms⁵ might seem to indicate a reliance on traditional cultural assumptions and hierarchies, the Victorians at least were implicitly challenging the philosophies upon which comfortable forms rested. Though I will not be primarily concerned with this topic in later chapters, I should point out here the ways in which Victorian writers articulate their challenge.

Even in a writer as formally conservative as Anthony Trollope, we can see a dissatisfaction with Victorian narrative structure. In a long passage near the end of *Barchester Towers*, he ruminates on the insufficiency of traditional methods of closure:

These leave-takings in novels are as disagreeable as they are in real life; not so sad, indeed, for they want the reality of sadness; but quite as perplexing, and generally less satisfactory. What novelist . . . can impart an interest to the last chapter of his fictitious history? Promises of two children and superhuman happiness are of no avail. . . . A late writer, wishing to sustain his interest to the last page, hung his hero at the end of the third volume. The consequence was, that no one would read his novel. . . .

I can only say that if some critic, who thoroughly knows his work, and has laboured on it till experience

⁵ For the sake of clarity, I should list some of these well-documented features: a restraint concerning sexuality, the use of the three-volume scheme often driven by a double-plot structure (see Peter Garrett) and concluded by a nuptials epilogue, and a general reticence about using dates and historical names, the non-realism of which seems to indicate an idealizing world view.

has made him perfect, will write the last fifty pages of a novel in the way they should be written, I, for one, will in future do my best to copy the example. Guided by my own lights only, I confess that I despair of success. (II, 251-252)

While his tone about his critics and the reading public in general is somewhat ironic, Trollope has acknowledged that the repeated use for closure of the timelessness promised in marriage scenes and the births of children is not proper, not realistic, since, as the narrator had earlier asserted, "There is no happiness in love, except at the end of an English novel" (I, 274). This is not even to say that the novel always presents only one of many possibilities; it presents, in fact, a mistaken reading of normative experience. The mid-Victorian novel, this work claims, is bound by constrictive convention, a fact also seen in the reliance on the three-decker form: "A difficulty begins to make itself manifest in the necessity of disposing all our friends in the small remainder of this one volume. Oh, that Mr. Longman would allow me a fourth!" (II, 178). A Modernist might smile at the desire, if it is not ironic, to lengthen the Victorian novel, but Trollope has identified some of the ways in which accepted forms create representational problems.

George Eliot began to experiment with alternatives to Victorian narrative form. Her questioning of closure anticipates Henry James's vigorous encouragement of the breakdown of accepted narrative structure so fully realized by Conrad and Joyce. The "Finale" of *Middlemarch* bears examination, for in it, Eliot acknowledges that

current forms inadequately assess the varied and often chaotic world they represent:

Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending. Who can quit young lives after long being in company with them, and not desire to know what befell them in their after-years? For the fragment of a life, however typical, is not the sample of an even web: promises may not be kept, and an ardent outset may be followed by declension; latent powers may find their long-awaited opportunity; a past error may urge a grand retrieval. (890)

As the Modernists will later argue, history's uncertainty demands that novelists question whether they can fully, definitely close a novel since "real-life" boundaries are not fixed and should not be postulated in fiction. If not, Eliot asks, are not current methods of closure misleading? This concern prefigures that of the seminal Modernist James: "Where does [experience] begin and end? Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue" ("The Art of Fiction" 426). To put it another way:

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they will happily *appear* to do so. He is in the perpetual predicament that the continuity of things is the whole matter, for him, of comedy and tragedy; that this

continuity is never, by the space of an instant or an inch,
broken. (Preface to *Roderick Hudson* 5)

Noting the similar metaphor of the web, we can say that both Eliot and James doubt the viability of the typical ending, as it cannot adequately represent the always-expanding experience of life. Both writers reject the claim of realism that such novels make since they terminate artificially, inaccurately. As "the continuity is never . . . broken," a novelist must avoid imposing a false order on endings, or else surrender any mimetic posture. Eliot's novels might seem to exemplify the problem, but since she herself acknowledged these concerns in her own works, she was certainly aware that typical Victorian endings were insufficient. "Marriage," she writes, "which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning" (*Middlemarch* 890). Her emphasis remains on beginnings, indicating that the outcome of narrated events cannot be fully contained by the manuscript. While Marianna Torgovnick claims that Eliot's arguments are "misleading" since *Middlemarch* does ultimately rely on traditional closure, with its projection forward, condensing the lives of many of the characters (21), the difference between James and Eliot is, in a sense, that between the theorist and the practitioner, since James puts into use new structures that Eliot postulated, but did not fully actualize.⁶ The narrative problems explored by James were clearly in the air long before James began a full-scale attempt

⁶ D. A. Miller, in *Narrative and Its Discontents*, provides convincing arguments that Eliot's closure in *Middlemarch* does approach her theory of open-endedness, as the characters do not settle down into happily-ever-after conventions and the narrator finishes the Finale incompletely (192-194).

to solve them. The Victorians had identified, if not fully addressed, these concerns.

The grounding of these growing dissatisfactions upon mimetic concerns suggests that thematic iconoclasms underlay formal ones. Trollope's passage makes a passing nod to this topic, though he is more concerned with the ability of language to generate emotions than with questions about the mimetic adequacy of fictional biographies. But with Eliot, mimetic questions have grown so important that she seriously questions whether a novel can in fact hope to capture all the resonances of a person's life. If the "web" of "life" implies that no life is neatly bounded, it will also imply that no life is easily understood; it is impossible to gather all the relevant information about a life in a novel.

With the disintegration of Victorian society's governing social, domestic, economic, and religious myths, it became increasingly necessary to reexamine and remake meaning out of a changing experience. The novelist had to represent the disorientation resulting from the realization that what were once viewed as simple goals--family, financial security, communal integration--were now exposed as either rarely attainable or very dubiously rewarding. In *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, Charlotte Brontë showed that attaining employment was not necessarily the crowning achievement of a life, for the labor that secured monetary sustenance was often physically exhausting, emotionally demeaning, and spiritually unsatisfying. In *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*, Charles Dickens showed that the establishment of a family was not necessarily the crowning achievement of a life, for unhappy families are common. The job of

the novelist became increasingly fraught with dilemmas: accordingly, after the last ambiguous meeting of Pip and Estella, it became very difficult in the Victorian novel even to remain confident that marriage *is* a reward. Life does not settle into serenity once one secures a mate, if, in fact, one's spouse can be actually secured; a marriage (ending) does not guarantee happiness ever after. Therefore, the traditional marriage plot is either distorting, as it is for Trollope, or incomplete, as it is for Eliot. In either case, the Victorian novelist's realization about closure necessitated fictional forms that attempted a a more accurate coverage of experience. Traditional representations had to give way to newer ones which adequately incorporated doubts, even if still maintaining hopes, about one's ability to understand experience; these new representations' ambiguities, lacunae, and distortions would mirror the difficulties inherent in reading contemporary life. This dissertation will thus examine how the Victorian novelists' examinations of social breakdowns helped to create the atmosphere of uncertainty and angst that would govern much of High Modernism.

Socially marginal characters, who understandably hold rebellious attitudes towards traditional structures, often reflect and even accelerate social breakdowns. Since much of Victorian literature is peopled by just such characters, they are useful links between the Victorian and the Modern novel--the Victorians' focus on the marginalized will develop into the Moderns' documentation of large-scale disintegration. Tellingly, these marginalized characters are almost always the protagonists of the Victorian works in which

they appear. The outcast and the alienated are the voices of many Victorian novelists, critics of the society these writers chronicle. Jane, Lucy, Pip, Bella Wilfer, the Madden sisters, Rhoda Nunn, Tess, Jude--all react against one structure or another that has hindered their ability to find peace and satisfaction. All, to an extent, expose the hypocrisy and cruelty that lies beneath society's genteel facade. From Charlotte Brontë's lonely governesses and teachers to Charles Dickens's orphans to Thomas Hardy's apostates, Victorian characters comprise a rich variety of figures who fight desperately to create a life of philosophical integrity and economic viability in a world which is increasingly unsupportive and even hostile. If modernism is "a struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world" (Berman 6), then the Victorian novel must be identified as an integral part of that struggle.

CHAPTER 2
MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*: LATE
ROMANTICISM AND THE FAILED ROMANTIC QUEST

William Walling writes that Mary Shelley's "*Frankenstein* . . . provides an enormously useful entry point into some of the central preoccupations of English Romanticism" (105). I have chosen this novel to begin this study not only because it serves as a summary of late Romanticism, but also because it acts as a link to the Victorian period, providing a bridge for topics that will concern both the Romantics and the Victorians. As a late Romantic novel, this work both comments upon its Romantic predecessors and anticipates its Victorian successors, helping to document how the optimism of the High Romantics, whose works detail a quest for artistic vision and a spiritual unity with the natural world, evolves into the anxiety of the Victorians, who engage in an unflinching examination of the social forces and changes hindering the fulfillment of that quest.

One of the Romantic preoccupations noted by Walling is a growing valorization of subjectivity, as objective reality becomes less consensual. Robert Kiely notes:

The primary aim in the romantic novel was not, like that of *Clarissa* or *Humphry Clinker*, to present a variety of opinions about events which everyone agreed had occurred and were of sufficient importance to merit discussion. To a greater and greater extent in romantic fiction the subjective vision *became* the crucial event. Where the author was truly successful, external reality

paled before it or fused with it, but never dominated it.

(20-21)

Frankenstein is one of the most important manifestations of this trend: the text's nested narratives overrule the inherent authority of the primary narrator, if one in fact exists. Walton is the most likely candidate, but Mrs. Saville, whose initials match those of the author, has probably arranged the letters and texts that her brother has sent, as Mary Lowe-Evans points out (30), so she could be considered the primary narrator. But perhaps she never did receive these letters; though Lowe-Evans notes that the siblings have often communicated, there is certainly no external evidence of Mrs. Saville's presenting the letters in this novel to us, so we cannot be sure of her role. We cannot be sure where authority lies. Thus, Fred Botting writes:

The visibility of frames, the framing of frames, . . .
discloses not a naturalness of reading as the perception of
what is there but a form of reading as recognition that
finds what it wants to see as it reconstructs the text.
Framing thus displaces the presumed presence of an
authorial voice as it exposes the work of reading
discourses which project and discover their own
authority. (18)

Indeed, one's reading of the work depends on one's acceptance or rejection of the various interpretations (and interpreters) the novel presents; for Shelley, as a Romantic, subjectivity pervades all judgment.

Such subjectivity will, of course, become central to the Modernists; but the Victorians, who document an erosion of faith in economic, familial, religious, and governmental structures, also begin to rely increasingly on the individual's, rather than society's, interpretation. Just as Shelley and her Romantic counterparts swept away old truths in the wake of the American, French, Industrial, and scientific revolutions, so did the Victorians search for new, individual truths in the wake of the increasing economic problems, class antagonisms, and religious doubts and anxieties that followed in the wake of these earlier disruptions. Many Victorian novelists, recognizing that large groups of people could find no comfortable place within the often chaotic, disorienting, and diffuse world they inhabited, looked for new foundations of meaning and definitions of fulfillment. Shelley's example would serve them well.

But this novel is also a critique of Romantic, or more specifically, High Romantic, themes and ideals. An archetypal Romantic character is the solitary wanderer. Caspar David Friedrich's painting, "The Wanderer Above the Mists," which adorns the cover of the Penguin edition of *Frankenstein*, is, we might say, the very image of an important strain of Romanticism, a movement in which the individual pursuit of vision, knowledge, and creativity has become valorized, even at the price of communication. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" is but one example of this powerful tradition. The personal cost of this quest could be high: as M. H. Abrams writes, the "sense of being an alien in the world which has been made by man's own unhappy intellect also manifested itself in a widespread revival of the traditional plot-form of the wanderings of an exile in quest of the

place where he truly belongs" (172). But for many of the Romantics, this search is not ultimately destructive. Very often, notes Abrams, the journey "gradually leads the wanderer back toward his point of origin. . . . Romantic philosophy is thus a metaphysics of integration, of which the key principle is that of the 'reconciliation,' or synthesis, of whatever is divided, opposed, or conflicting" (193, 182). Abrams summarizes these points in the title of his next chapter: "The Circuitous Journey: Through Alienation to Reintegration." But Romanticism begins to change with the second generation of Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, and the optimism apparent in Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge gradually fades. As Anne K. Mellor and Jerome J. McGann point out, Abrams's view is somewhat distorting in its exclusion of the later Romantics, especially Byron, but also Keats and Shelley (*English* 5-6; 24-27). But despite their differences, all three of these critics, as well as others such as Leslie Brisman and Clifford Siskin, agree that most Romantics are linked by their hopes of finding unity at the end of their quests. Mary Shelley, however, forcefully shows that the journey can be devastating, and that unity is nearly impossible. Not only is there no *reintegration* in *Frankenstein*, but there is rarely any integration in the first place; her central character is born and remains outside society. All the monster knows of integration is what he passively observes. The violence that results is apocalyptic.¹ Since his search for integration

¹ The vanishing of optimism leads George Levine to write, "The novel is, in a sense, about the inevitability of solipsism, the alienation of the self from the world, and the necessity and desperation of the quest to rejoin it" (*Realistic Imagination*, 28). *Solipsism* is too strong,

fails, as do the searches of other characters, we can read the novel as a sobering alternate take on the early Romantics' faith that healing will occur.

Walton, as captain of the boat that discovers Frankenstein in the polar wastes and as frame narrator, is at once the voice of the explorer, the creative mind, the emblem of the destructive power of the quest myth, and an unreliable commentator on the events of novel, as he has learned little from what he has seen and heard. He is about to return home and should be wiser, like Coleridge's wedding guest, but he is hardly pleased to give up his quest and writes to his sister:

I have consented to return if we are not destroyed. Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision; I come back ignorant and disappointed. It requires more philosophy than I possess to bear this injustice with patience. . . . It is past; I am returning to England. I have lost my hopes of utility and glory; I have lost my friend.

(204)

Though the voyage is over, the quest remains compelling to Walton; despite all the contrary evidence he has seen, he has not been convinced of the need to participate in relations--even by the death of his friend--in society, a need which Shelley clearly advocates. While his return home will most likely afford him the opportunity to reestablish connections, his history of solitude is not promising. Indeed, he equates the loss of his only friend with the loss of his

as it denotes an obliviousness of the rest the world, but *alienation* is wholly accurate.

quest, as if friendship could thrive only in these lonely explorations. While Laura P. Claridge points out that Walton "takes the redemptive step that no one else in society has been willing to take, and, magically, calls on [the monster] *to stay*" (24), Walton's disappointment in the voyage's failure is registered in "real" time *after* his invitation to the monster; he does not recognize his own redemptive act. Therefore, not only is the quest unfulfilling and dangerous for all involved, but it still entices would-be Romantics to engage in it. Mary Shelley, like Percy Bysshe Shelley, Byron, and Keats, altered Romanticism, propelling it in a new direction through her revision of its most common plot, by demonstrating that the unity which all humans desire, and which was represented by many Romantics as a fusion with the natural world, can never occur in social isolation. Even a late Romantic text such as, for instance, Byron's *Manfred*, contemporaneous to *Frankenstein*, validates the defiance of its isolated hero; Shelley's novel deeply problematizes such an attitude.²

Shelley's revision of the Romantic *ur*-plot of the isolated quester in part leads to the deep resonance of her work in the fiction to come in the Victorian era. As Emily W. Sunstein puts it, "Her private life, career, and works are a rich resource for [the] historical

² The isolation of characters in several other of her works highlights this theme. Lionel Verney of *The Last Man*, the narrators of "The Mortal Immortal" and "The Parvenue," and the titular protagonists of "Valerius: The Reanimated Roman" and "Roger Dodsworth: The Reanimated Englishman" are not held in worshipful awe, Romantic though their situations might be; they are deeply unhappy, usually tragic figures.

evolution" of the Romantic into the Victorian period, more so than those of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Byron (402). A few critical studies concentrate on *Frankenstein's* influence on later works, most notably Chris Baldick's *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing*. In this study, Baldick notes that Shelley's novel is an extraordinarily flexible and layered story, containing numerous social resonances: "The relationship between Frankenstein and his monster is modelled ultimately upon that between parent and child, and its mythic development embraces the relations between men and women, rulers and ruled, masters and servants, propertied and propertyless" (8). Baldick then traces the imagery of monstrosity through the Victorian and modern periods, describing this story as a useful metaphor for "common and continuous anxieties, . . . genuine causes for alarm in the monstrous and uncontrollable tendencies of the modern world" (9). This view is in accord with that of George Levine, who claims that the monster symbolizes "the aspiration for meaning in reality, thwarted by the injustice experience teaches; he is thus kin to the dreamers of Victorian dreams who are doomed to disenchantment: he is another anomaly, the true image of their perceived deviance into impossible romantic dreams" (*Realistic Imagination* 30). The monster is, then, the archetypal modernist hero: rejected, abused, rebellious. His isolation is a model for a discourse that will include the Victorians' fascination with such outcast groups as the lower classes, orphans, and women. These groups, as portrayed in the novels discussed in later chapters, will attempt to formulate responses to the problems of their contemporary worlds. Rebelling against the vacuous

societies that have rejected them by attempting to construct new understandings of class, economics, gender, and religion, they do not accept their prescribed roles; and their struggles, like the monster's, result in alienation from their societies and, sometimes, from themselves.

Frankenstein's widespread influence, then, results at least in part from the numerous ways in which the novel examines the theme of isolation. The multiple narratives have generated an enormous critical diversity, placing the novel in a wide array of discourses that can overlap unexpectedly. A typical example is the work of Elsie B. Michie, who describes the similarities between Shelley's descriptions of Victor's creative activities and Marx's various writings. But Michie cannot sustain a reading that focuses solely on class issues. Noting that in the "Author's Introduction" Shelley first discusses the "hideous idea" of the novel and then the novel itself as "my hideous progeny," Michie writes, "The shift from idea to progeny suggests that the introduction is documenting the novel's passage from abstract to concrete, from ideal to material, the moment of potential alienation, which Shelley treats in the language of childbirth" ("*Frankenstein*" 98). Unexplained is *why* the language of childbirth is used to describe a class-based issue. This extraordinarily layered novel cannot be reduced to a single discourse. The text contains implications that are by turns feminist, psychological, class-related, and theological, as well as various combinations of these, raising numerous questions about what were increasingly seen as the degenerating social structures of the early nineteenth century: dysfunctional families seem the norm in this

novel rather than the exception; gender roles are the source of real tragedy;³ birth, sexuality, and textuality are fraught with anxiety; cultural constructs are dangerously reductive; and religious foundations are frighteningly inadequate. Baldick's statement that Shelley has supplied the work with "an abundant excess of meanings which the novel cannot stably accommodate, a surplus of significance" (33) is certainly no overstatement. As Levine puts it, "The novel has achieved its special place in modern consciousness through its extraordinary resistance to simple solutions and its almost inexhaustible possibilities of significance" ("Ambiguous" 18).

But there is always one key element that unites all of these readings: in one way or another, they inevitably focus on the isolation of nearly all of the characters, most importantly, the monster. Whether the creature is the passive, dominated female, as in Mary Poovey's criticism, the childlike yet aggressive orphan, as in George Levine's, or the banished Satan/Adam, as in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's, the monster is the ultimate outcast, his very namelessness highlighting his lack of socially bestowed identity and power.⁴ As Aldrich and Isomaki "call him 'monster,' not 'Creature,'

³ Even in Austen the problems of women could be accepted with humor: Charlotte of *Pride and Prejudice* has bartered the possibility of love for security in her marriage to the unappealing Mr Collins. But the comedy in his portrayal undercuts any serious consequences for his wife. He is distasteful, but not oppressive.

⁴ When a stage production of the novel listed the monster as "----" in the *Dramatis Personae*, Shelley wrote to Leigh Hunt: "this nameless mode of naming the unnameable is rather good" (9-11 September 1823).

since [they] want to emphasize his hideousness, not his humanity" (121), so is it a mistake to begin "monster" with a capital letter, as most other critics do. None of the terms used in Shelley's text to "name" the monster is capitalized, emphasizing his outcast status by reducing him to a mere object, rather than a fully realized personality. While Fred Botting claims that the multiple narrative structure precludes a narrative grounding, that the novel has no "transcendent position" (45), the monster is clearly the key character, and the meaning of his story is the transcendent idea: not only is his narration literally in the center of the text, but the persistent thematic doublings and treblings throughout the text always include the monster. Parallels between events and characters always include and illuminate the monster's condition; his representing various persecuted historical groups--women, the poor, orphans--highlights Shelley's insistence on our viewing his plight from every conceivable social angle.⁵ Without him, the tale is unnecessary, impossible. The repeated failure of his attempts to gain a measure of respect and approval lead not only to an indictment of the societal structures that have oppressed him, but also to his final self-alienation. The monster is the great incipient modern character: hopelessly, endlessly alone.

⁵ I shall rely somewhat heavily on other critics' readings throughout this chapter, in order to demonstrate better the various ways in which all types of readings of this novel demonstrate the monster's central position in the text, despite its title, and how these readings cover ground which will be traveled by the Victorians to follow. I am not, I hope, constructing a patchwork of criticism, but noting the link between various interpretations.

A reading that focuses on the family, for instance, inevitably examines the critical breakdowns that plague this domestic structure; of all the novel's victimized children, the monster is the most abused. Shelley gives family tensions a very thorough treatment, examining the sexual anxieties of potential parents, the anguish of birthing, and the difficulties of parenting. Overriding these concerns is her belief that a loving, nurturing family is essential to the well-being of all its members, adults and children alike. The family should bestow not only love, but the self-confidence to learn and communicate, equipping each of its members with the ability to deal with the larger structure of society. It should provide a healthy opening outward of the self and prevent a fatal withdrawal into isolation. As Mary Poovey writes, for Shelley, "As long as domestic relationships govern an individual's affections, his or her desire will turn outward as love. But when the individual loses or leaves the regulating influence of relationship with others, imaginative energy always threatens to turn back on itself" (*Proper Lady* 123).

But the odds of success in finding such relations are long, as Shelley no doubt learned from the well-documented traumas which afflicted her childhood and adult families, from the time of her birth up to her revision of the text.⁶ The novel features a wide array of

⁶ These traumas include the tensions between her and her father and stepmother--Godwin did not communicate with her for over two years after her elopement with Percy--and between Percy and his father, her strained relationship with her stepsister, the suicide of Percy's first wife Harriet, and the deaths of her children Clara and William.

developing and already developed families, and at each stage, the domestic structures either crack or crumble altogether.

One problem is that sexuality and marriage are disturbing to the characters throughout the novel. Victor, the great father of the book, is apparently virginal. He spends many of the years of his narrative fending off his bride, and as numerous critics have noted, his staggeringly obtuse failure to recognize the real meaning of the monster's threat about his wedding night seems an almost willful (or subconscious) sacrifice of his bride. This is perhaps not surprising, since what he so far knows of sexuality, or at least its sublimation in his creation of the monster, is discovered among the charnel houses, burial vaults, and corpses that produce the creature. Frankenstein engages in an asexual procreative act at the expense of a sexual one, reflecting an onanistic, egotistical orientation, the self-absorbed blindness of which will later cause much trauma in his dealings with the monster, as he does not fully understand basic sexual and societal drives. As Mellor puts it, "The denial of all overt sexuality in the surface texture of the novel . . . forces the more powerful erotic desires . . . to erupt as violence" (*Mary Shelley* 56). Had Victor been a sexually experienced husband, he might have sympathized with his creation and granted its wish for a mate, thereby preventing much of the destruction that follows from its refusal.

But Frankenstein is not the only asexual parent in this text. Children are brought into other families in a similar manner, notably Elizabeth and Justine. Their adoptions continue the theme of repressed sexuality. Moreover, as Margaret Homans notes, not only is "normal heterosexual procreation circumvent[ed]," but "each actual

mother dies very rapidly upon being introduced into the novel" (101). Thus, in this novel, the family is unhealthy even before its members interact; the family is damaged from the moment of its formation.

For other critics, the central issue is not fear of sexuality, but the unbalancing of gender roles in the creative process; these readers see Frankenstein's great crime to be a removal of women from sexual contact and childbirth. By procreating on his own, Frankenstein has robbed woman of some of her power and vitality; as Barbara Johnson puts it, he "usurps the female role" (8). Gilbert and Gubar go so far as to say that, because he has borne a child, painfully, he has in fact become akin to the first woman: "Though Victor Frankenstein enacts the roles of Adam and Satan like a child trying on costumes, his single most defining act turns him definitely into Eve" (232). These arguments are somewhat troubling, especially if one reads this novel as a critique of rigidly prescribed gender roles. For one, if Victor's only mistake is that he relieves women of their birthing duties, as Botting points out, he "frees them from one of the ways that a woman's identity is most restrictively fixed as passive and nurturing" (101), a topic which Gissing will take up in *The Odd Women*. And Gilbert and Gubar's defining of Victor as a woman for creating a human being denies the male role in birth; both sexes, surely, are needed.⁷ The problem is that Victor's act makes him *both*

⁷ Such a definition also, oddly, feminizes the one character at whose feet most of the responsibility for the destruction lies. And in their noting of Victor's "Eve-like pride" (233), Gilbert and Gubar reinforce Milton's rather misogynistic reading of Genesis. One

a mother *and* a father; he has removed communion from human procreation.

The tragedy of the novel is that this lack of communication is so exacerbated after the child is born. As Ellen Moers writes, the novel's "emphasis is not upon what precedes birth, not upon birth itself, but upon what follows birth: the trauma of the afterbirth" (93). Certainly Johnson is right to note that the mother is missing, but so, quickly, is the father. The problem is not that Victor is a single, exclusively male parent, but rather that he is an absent, unloving one.

Moers reminds us that birthing is a very complicated event emotionally and claims that Shelley discovers that death is as strong an element in this process as life (96). Johnson concurs when she notes, "The idea that a mother can loathe, fear, and reject her baby has until recently been one of the most repressed of psychoanalytical insights, although it is already implicit in the story of Oedipus, whose parents cast him out as an infant to die" (6). Marc A. Rubenstein demonstrates that the novel views motherhood as confusing both sexually and emotionally and claims that "for Mary Shelley, authorship and motherhood were equivalent aspects of the same urge towards realization and expression of the self" (168). Viewing this urge ambivalently, he argues that "creativity is not always the sacrosanct life-force we would like to think it is" (192), a claim that finds support in Shelley's famous description of her novel as "my hideous progeny." This idea also taps into Shelley's own guilt over

wonders how Victor can both become feminized and at the same time delete the female from this process.

causing the death of her mother in giving her birth, and into her anguish over her own miscarried and dead children: in her own life, birth and death were closely linked.⁸

Following such lines of thought, we might be led to ask with Christopher Small, "[Victor] ought to love the Monster; but how can he when the Monster is so unlovable?" (312). But to ask this is to examine only half the case. If trauma attends nearly every birth, the violence associated with the monster's certainly does not. Echoing Shelley's sense of Godwin's abandonment of her, the novel insists that parents must take responsibility for the children they have created, and Frankenstein's failure to do so sets in motion the events that destroy him. Small's characterization of the creature is shallow, as the ironically blind De Lacey's acceptance of the monster shows: De Lacey's lack of sight prevents his rejection of the creature based on his physical deformities. Even Walton, as noted above, asks the monster to stay. Victor's own biased, fearful perceptions, whose inconsistency is displayed in their radical change immediately upon the monster's animation, form the basis of Small's condemnation of the monster. The monster is, as has often been noted, in many respects the most admirable of the story's characters:⁹ intelligent, as his remarkably fast education shows; creative, judging from his harnessing of fire; generous, as he demonstrates in gathering fuel for the De Laceys; and most important, capable of love, as his desire for a

⁸ See Mellor's excellent analysis of the chronology of the novel, which, she shows, ends two days after Wollstonecraft's death (*Mary Shelley* 54-55).

⁹ See, for example, Harold Bloom, "Afterword" (215).

father, and then a wife demonstrates. The monster is only hideous to those who see but do not feel. Those who can feel, De Lacey and even Walton, recognize his humanity. His unnatural birth has not yet condemned the monster; he is still eager to be accepted in a normal way. Unfortunately, almost everyone else fails him. If Victor does not accept his child, no one will. It might be too much to ask, say, Felix and the farmer not to react with such horror upon first seeing the monster, poised as he is over their loved ones; Victor, however, is given the time to consider his creature's situation and overcome his repulsion, yet he still rejects him. As Claridge writes, "In Shelley's attention to parent-child relationships, she implies a far-ranging application to society at large: if we fail at this primal unit of communication, what hope is there for compassionate interaction within the larger community?" (15). Thematic multiplications assert the wider resonance of this relationship as families, whether they have zero, one, or two parents, break down throughout the novel.

For example, despite Victor's claims to the contrary, his own childhood and familial relations are charged with tension, as are such later families as Charlotte Brontë's Reeds and Charles Dickens's Gargerys. Most obvious, perhaps, is his father's scorn for his studies, which Victor blames for his eventual ruin. Two implications arise. Firstly, Alphonse seems to have had little time for the young Victor, as we see when Victor first brings him Agrippa: "A new light dawned upon my mind, and bounding with joy, I communicated my discovery to my father. My father looked carelessly at the title page of my book and said, 'Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash'" (38). Possessed by

enthusiasm, Victor meets with derision; he is right to complain of his father's cold behavior. Secondly, Victor's blaming his father for later catastrophic events indicates that the son's love for the father is less than perfect. While both incidents are given brief treatment, they hint at deeper divisions. These divisions become more explicit when Victor spends several years away from his supposedly loving, and beloved, family without communicating with them, startling behavior from someone who claims that "My parents were possessed by the very spirit of kindness and indulgence" (37), no matter how terrible a secret Victor holds. As Kate Ellis points out, "The deficiencies in Victor's family [are] dramatized in his inability to bring the Monster home (openly, that is), to deal with evil in the outside world" (140). The kind father Victor claims to have could at least have been approached about the problem. But Alphonse's dry correspondence after years of silence belies a true affection, as it seems to stem more from a sense of duty than love: "I know that while you are pleased with yourself you will think of us with affection, and we shall hear regularly from you. You must pardon me if I regard any interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties are equally neglected" (54). With a tone more appropriate to his career as statesman than as father, Alphonse hints that he is more worried about Victor's performing well in school than an apparent dissolution of filial affection. Equally disturbing is Elizabeth's assumption that Victor does not remember how his "great favourite" Justine "entered [his] family" (63). What domestic ties Victor had could not have been very powerful.

Another disquieting aspect of the Frankenstein family is their treatment of Elizabeth. She is not viewed as a loving daughter, but as a toy, an amusement, a "gift" for Victor. Caroline says, "I have a pretty present for my Victor--tomorrow he shall have it" (35). Elizabeth alone is picked from among the "rude," "vagrant" children with whom she is living because of her beauty (34), presumably since this quality makes her the only valuable gift; the Frankensteins are certainly not motivated by wholly charitable desires. The repeated language of objectification and possession reveals the elder Frankensteins' lack of parental awareness. Their treatment would necessarily stultify Elizabeth's identity, and as her later actions demonstrate, she is a victim of her own learned passivity. Victor also seems to suffer from a lack of model parenting. His inability to deal with his own "child" indicates an ignorance of proper parenting behavior, which he should have absorbed from his own mother and father. The elder Frankensteins' view of children as material possessions has prevented proper growth through two generations, and has prompted their son to view withdrawal as the most efficacious response to problems.

Other families in the novel are similarly dysfunctional. Clerval's father, who "was a narrow-minded trader and saw idleness and ruin in the aspirations and ambition of his son" (44), denied Henry a deserved education. Justine's mother "could not endure her, . . . and treated her very ill," finally abandoning her to the Frankensteins (63). Elizabeth herself reveals some animosity towards Justine, perhaps resulting from jealousy over the latter's being Victor's "great favourite." Elizabeth makes the following subtly

critical observations while ostensibly praising Justine's sense of gratitude: "Justine was the most grateful little creature in the world: I do not mean that she made any professions; I never heard one pass her lips. . . . her disposition was gay and in many respects inconsiderate" (63-64).¹⁰ "Little creature" is especially telling. Safie's mother was a captured slave who was forcibly married, and Safie's father kidnapped her to betray her lover. Walton lacks the good sense to placate his sister, repeatedly reminding her of the peril he faces even though he knows that she has "such evil forebodings" about his journey (15). And, as noted above, Shelley herself calls the novel "my hideous progeny"; though this phrase displaces blame to the offspring, it still helps to prefigure the familial tensions that pervade the text.

But all of these domestic traumas pale before those of the monster, so much so that the others' become thematic parallels of the monsters' problems, rather than central concerns in their own right. Victor, for instance, can at least subconsciously rewrite his family's history to give it a healthy appearance, but the monster's history is far too malignant to afford him such recourse. Victor's parents provide him a home and educate him, while the monster is abandoned at birth, left to wander and learn for himself, a contrast which the monster recognizes (95). Victor has brothers, a sister, and friends to provide companionship and consolation, but the monster

¹⁰ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, *inconsiderate* first came to mean "Without consideration or regard for the circumstances, claims, feelings, etc. of others" in 1842. But the word already could mean "thoughtless, careless." A criticism is implicit in Elizabeth's phrasing.

has only the merest shadow of a friendship with the De Laceys, a relationship which really exists only in the monster's mind; there is no Clerval to accompany him in his wanderings. And while both Victor's and the monster's mates are destroyed, at least Victor knows he was loved; the monster never enjoys any period of happiness with a beloved.

Victor is not, of course, the only figure we can compare to the monster. The orphans in the novel provide other analogies; but they too have at least a modicum of peace. Safie may be betrayed by her father, but she finds shelter and comfort in the De Lacey's household. Elizabeth is orphaned and placed in mean surroundings, and Justine suffers the wrath of a cruel mother, but at least both are rescued by the Frankensteins. While both die painfully, they do not die alone, as the monster will. Walton, though solitary now, has a sister to whom he can return. Even the fiancée of Walton's crew member, though she suffers terrible anguish at possibly having to leave her beloved and marry another man, is saved by the seaman's good will. Of course, no such kindnesses are given to the wretched creature, whose knowledge of the existence of rescue for others torments him further in its immeasurable distance from him.

Inextricably tied to family problems are those of strict gender roles. As Richard D. Altick notes, the changing economics of the early nineteenth century led to a further separation of the genders, as the new men of business increasingly desired their homes and the women who inhabited them to act as refuges from the bustle of the trade world (51). But the passivity that such a female role demanded led to an imbalance that not only stifled the female half of

society, but also inadvertently untethered the male half, who were supposed to become more securely anchored; a marriage of true minds is impossible when the spheres in which they exist are unequal. Shelley's novel examines these implications as it divides the characters into two groups: active, creative, exploring males; and passive, domestic females. The result of such a structure is, of course, disastrous, as many feminist readers have noted. For Gilbert and Gubar, the work is a reinterpretation of the Romantics' greatest influence, *Paradise Lost*, "so as to make it a more accurate mirror of female experience," an action which would encourage women to rebel against male hegemony (220). Ellis sees such hegemony as responsible for the cold, destructive familial relations noted above. Discussing the nested narrative structure, she claims, "The circularity of *Frankenstein* underscores Mary Shelley's critique of the insufficiency of a family structure in which the relation between the sexes is as uneven as the relation between parents and children" (125). Peter Dale Scott sees the problem in reverse, but still as involving direct causality: "[The novel] depicts the tragic consequences of sexual isolation through artificial roles of 'masculinity' and 'femininity,' and (from the experience of Mary's own unnatural childhood) focuses on one-sided parenting, in addition to schooling, as the ultimate source of these roles" (201). These inequities can be seen throughout the text, as women are forced to accept passive roles, starting with Mrs. Saville. She must be a woman of high intelligence--not only her epistolary correspondence, but also her brother's confidence in her ability to empathize with his intellectual cravings demonstrate this, as does her probable role of

outside editor--yet she must remain anxiously at home, while her brother is allowed to explore and wander.¹¹ Her restricted life is echoed by the other women who are proscribed from anything but domestic inactivity. While Alphonse Frankenstein carries on his diplomatic career, Caroline sits at home and performs the acts of local charity that constitute women's work. Elizabeth must also wait at home while her fiancé isolates himself with his science. Though her only fulfillment, i.e., her marriage, is delayed unconscionably, she can do nothing about it.¹² Safie's mother is essentially chattel, kidnapped and sold into marriage, while Safie must flee her country to escape the same fate. Justine is restricted as well. As a governess, she participates in one of the very few careers available to women, a surrogate motherhood that is firmly domestic, an existence whose limitations Charlotte Brontë and later George Gissing will expose more fully. All these women, then, are in a key sense powerless. They have been forced to accept subservient roles and are limited in their freedoms, opportunities, and gratifications.¹³

¹¹ Jane Austen, meanwhile, had already provided, in *Persuasion's* Mrs. Croft and then Anne, two examples of women accompanying men on their travels.

¹² Her powerlessness is curiously highlighted by James Whale's film version, in which Alphonse drags Victor (named "Henry" in the film) to the altar to fulfill his manly duties. Even here, it is the father-in-law, not the engaged woman, who can act.

¹³ This subject is also explored in Perdita and Evadne of *The Last Man*, whose relations with Lord Raymond are marked by their utter dependence on his whims, and in the female protagonists of such tales as "The Bride of Modern Italy" and "The Parvenue," who have little power to guide the course of their romances. The former,

But though the novel recognizes a pattern of dominance, it does not espouse a separation of the sexes or women's breaking away from the family, as a solution. For Shelley, both men and women need to contribute equally to relationships, intellectually and emotionally. This is a belief which she learned from the works of her mother, and which was reinforced by Percy's encouragement of her own writing career. In her novel, Victor's failure to endorse this idea, as he isolates himself from Elizabeth, leads to disaster, both in his protracted solitary studies, during which he creates the monster, and on his wedding night, when his refusal to stay with Elizabeth in the wedding chamber affords the monster the chance to kill her. Had Victor abandoned his solitary studies and consummated his attachment, the very existence of the monster would have been avoided. Ignoring the healthy possibilities of a loving marriage is as dangerous to society as raising children without affection. The violence of the novel could only have been avoided by Victor's embracing male and female unity, symbolized by the possible marriages of Victor and Elizabeth and of the monster and his desired mate. As noted earlier, Poovey points out that domestic relations in the novel have a therapeutic value, preventing a moody, destructive egotism: that is, if the domestic relations are founded on mutuality. As Lowe-Evans puts it, discussing Safie, "she clarifies an important meaning of *Frankenstein*: society must make talented, educated women indispensable to the family and the culture or else it is

though she is the subject of wry narratorial humor about her attitudes towards love affairs, is subservient to her father, the latter to her husband.

doomed" (49). A strongly developed, independent personality is paramount to individual health, but communication, society, personal relations keep that personality stable and sound. A balance is required between the individual and the community. Isolation is not a desirable alternative to domination; equality is.

When social relations break down, or when equality is not achieved, the result in the novel is catastrophic. Not only the isolated women, but also the isolated men are vulnerable. Victor, most obviously, does not understand the value of relations, and his ignorance leads to catastrophe. Alphonse, as we have already seen, is cold and dismissive of his son, no doubt a result of his own solitary pursuits. Walton, the great explorer, bewails his loneliness and displays an inhuman disregard for his crew, which even Victor recognizes as insane: "Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drunk also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me; let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!" (26). And, worst of all, the monster is no Romantic visionary, but a depressed, enraged killer, deprived of communication with a beloved. The happiness of the characters is determined by whether they are united to a love object or are solitary. But where most characters have the opportunity for health, the monster does not. He is single, powerless, self-involved, doomed, and his violence is rage against the injustice of his lot.

A number of critics point out that the creature's violence has resonance in the situations of many nineteenth-century women in traditional families, although for them rage is unavailable, rage is, in fact, monstrous. Bertha Mason, whom one can read as an abandoned

wife, is perhaps the best example: she too is a monster, barely a woman, barely human.¹⁴ Most women, though, were forced to accept their unhealthy situations, exacerbating the pain their roles produced. Some critics, such as Gilbert and Gubar, who see the monster as feminized because of its powerlessness (232), read its violence as a kind of fantasized wish-fulfillment on its part, a sublimated rebellion against helplessness and male domination.¹⁵ This wish-fulfillment will be repeated in Jane Eyre's attack on John Reed, the event that begins her story. The monster becomes, in a way, the central female figure, the clearest demonstration that unequal gender roles are debilitating and, ultimately, dangerous in their fostering of isolation.

Other problems with social structures, most notably a class hierarchy, while not foregrounded in the novel, are also addressed.

¹⁴ Her standing over Jane's bed is reminiscent of the monster's similar pose over Victor's and, later, Elizabeth's.

¹⁵ In an unusual reading, James P. Davis writes the opposite of this, claiming that the monster is a violent symbol of male domination, the source of his rage being misogyny. But besides offering no discernible source for this hatred, this reading also ignores the monster's hatred of Victor. He loathes Frankenstein for his own isolation and is trying to demonstrate the enormity of what isolation means. In addition, this reading does not account for the rest of the murders. The monster kills as many men as women; his first victim is, in fact, a male. Writing that the monster has a "murderous hatred of women" (312) not only states half the case, but distorts it as well. The monster has a murderous hatred of those who possess what he does not: love, society. As Paul Sherwin puts it, "[The monster's] aggression is a by-product of disintegration, not an innate drive that has been cathartically unbound" (890).

The historical context that includes the sometimes destructive bourgeois family also includes such resonating events as the numerous conflicts of the Age of Revolution, as Eric Hobsbawm calls it, and the vast social and economic changes that were concurrent with them. Sunstein writes of the protests marking the period before the composition of the original version: "These uprisings by an inflamed, long-suffering populace . . . would resonate in her monster's rage" (126). The 1818 date of publication places the novel in the social discourse marked by the first real class agitation in England, which, among many other disturbances, included the Luddite riots of 1811-12 and the Skinner Street riot of 1816, as well as the Peterloo Massacre the year after the novel appeared; the revised version coincided with the first introduction of the First Reform Bill into Parliament, which Shelley strongly supported;¹⁶ the Chartist and Corn Law protests were very soon to follow. Connecting the novel's treatment of class to the rise of democracy, Baldick writes, "It was from the area marked out by [the] overlapping of literary and political discourses that the Frankenstein myth was born, as a late product of the controversy generated in Britain by the French Revolution" (17), and he traces the image of monstrosity backwards to these discourses. Indeed, the politics of class do affect several of the novel's characters, subtly perhaps, but Shelley goes out

¹⁶ About the bill she wrote to Trelawny, "The Whigs triumphed gloriously in the boldness of their measure--England will be free if it is carried" (22-25 March 1831). In *The Last Man*, though the democrat, Ryland, is a debased coward, Adrian and Lord Raymond, for their work at helping the poor to raise themselves, i.e., at real reform, are hailed as model leaders.

of her way to include stories of isolation that result from the arbitrary cruelties that are inevitable in a hierarchic class structure.¹⁷ For instance, as mentioned before, the circumstances of Elizabeth's adoption are disquieting, but not only for what they reveal about bourgeois parenting. They also demonstrate the Frankensteins' acceptance of class distinctions, as Victor clearly reveals in his condescending description of the peasant family that previously cared for the orphan: the children, he asserts, are "hardy little vagrants," and Elizabeth "bloomed in their rude abode, fairer than a garden rose among dark-leaved brambles" (34). Elizabeth is adopted by the Frankensteins because she is actually the child of a nobleman, and her contrast to the peasants is important to Caroline. The Frankensteins' selective benevolence seems, on balance, rather snobbish. As Johanna M. Smith puts it, "Class selection determines which women are worthy to enter the upper class Frankenstein family" (281). And Victor's description of Clerval's father as a "narrow-minded trader" reveals not only the familial dysfunction of the Clervals, but also Victor's contempt for the merchant class, an important subset of the increasingly voluminous middle classes. Walton shares this snobbery, as is demonstrated by his description of

¹⁷ Such problems also affect the narrators of "The Parvenue" and "The Mortal Immortal." Both of their love quests suffer due to financial inequalities, as does that of Lionel Verney of *The Last Man*, who never overcomes Idris's mother's objections to their difference in rank. "Recollections of Italy" claims that the English upper-class compare unfavorably with the Italian, who are not afflicted with class biases.

the crew member who gave up his money and bride so that she could marry the man of her own choice:

"What a noble fellow!" you will exclaim. He is so; but then he is wholly uneducated: he is as silent as a Turk, and a kind of ignorant carelessness attends him, which, while it renders his conduct the more astonishing, detracts from the interest and sympathy which otherwise he would command. (20)

Perhaps the most generous act in the entire novel is undercut by the distorting perceptions of its witness: since the agent is not high-brow, since he seems foreign, his feelings do not matter.

The De Laceys contribute to Shelley's examination of class hostilities, having been banished from France and living in impoverished exile. The response of Safie's father to their plight--"When the news reached Leghorn that Felix was deprived of his wealth and rank, the merchant commanded his daughter to think no more of her lover" (120)--seems typical, as the De Laceys apparently have lost all contact with their high-society friends.

Class antagonism is the inevitable result of a divisive hierarchy, though critics have, not surprisingly, interpreted Shelley's intent in quite varied fashion. Warren Montag, for example, writes that Shelley "lends her voice to the voiceless, those who, bowed and numbed by oppression and poverty, cannot speak for themselves" (304). Michie, in the same camp, reads this work as a proto-Marxist text. As noted above, she describes many linguistic similarities between Shelley's description of the production of the novel and Marx's writings. She also connects the creature to Marx's description

of the lower-class worker: "the Creature suffers the misery of and vents the anger of the alienated laborer, and . . . terms from Marx's analysis of alienated labor describe precisely the situation of the Creature" ("*Frankenstein*" 93). Of course, the monster is no laborer; one might say he is the product of the only real labor in the novel. But such parallels help to underscore the monster's helplessness as a being who is shunted aside by the powerful and who is dependent upon the benevolence of those in command, those who control production.

Lee E. Heller, on the other hand, reads the monster as the embodiment of something inherently fearful in the lower classes. He connects the monster to "the eighteenth-century psychological theories of the mind as *tabula rasa*, political theories of the development of class identity and social hierarchy, and historically specific cultural concerns about the violent potential of the rising lower class" (335), as if Shelley is voicing through her portrait of the monster her own worries about the working-class mob. The female monster, according to Heller, provides further reason to worry: "Victor's fears that she will reject him, or that both will be unsatisfied, echo cultural anxieties about the rising lower classes' ability to assimilate to middle-class society. In this the monster is a symbol of the violent potential of social instability" (337). But to write this, besides ignoring Shelley's well-documented support of economic and political reform, is to adopt Victor's viewpoint blindly; since we know the monster far better than does Victor, we know that Victor's fears are baseless. Lee Sterrenburg, who claims that "characters misperceive or half invent the social forces aligned

against them" (159), notes that "Imaginary attacks also take place in Victor's dreams" (160). In fact, the envisioned attacks are imaginary until Victor, as well as his fellow humans such as Felix and the trigger-happy farmer, provokes the monster into making his fearful dreams prophetic. If the monster can be read to stand for the lower classes, any danger he represents can be dissipated by empowering him, Shelley claims; thus, she portrays the threat of the lower classes as misconstrued. The monster's weeping with Safie over the "hapless fate" of the Native Americans (114) is significant, as he deeply identifies with a powerless society, driven beyond the boundaries of inclusion, repressed and exploited. Only the monster can fully recognize the injustice of Safie's father: he calls the Turk "treacherous, . . . a traitor to good feeling and honor" (120) for his class attitudes. When James O'Rourke raises the "paradox of how 'essentially benevolent' beings, when grouped together, become malevolent" (543), we can see that the solution is clear: only the monster is really benevolent; for the most part, the rest are, at best, unenlightened. The lower classes' growing recognition of the artificiality of class divisions has helped turn them from satisfied citizens into disaffected rebels. In this light, the monster's change from generous fuel-gatherer to arsonist to murderer, while not condoned by the narrative, is hardly surprising when his story is made known, and his sympathetic portrayal will resonate in Dickens's examination of Magwitch, as well as the rebellious, if not so violent, impulses of Jane Eyre, Edward Reardon, and Jude Fawley.

Lastly, the novel's religious resonances and implications help to illuminate the monster's desolation. Shelley here draws on the discourse in which what were previously unassailable Christian truths had begun to crack amid advances in geology and biology, as Enlightenment scientists and philosophers relied increasingly on their own rational processes and discoveries, a development which, as Altick notes, began in the mid-eighteenth century (222), and which would continue to be explored by all the novelists to be discussed in later chapters, most notably Gissing and Hardy. The Romantics assimilated this new spirit, summed up by Shelley's future husband's *The Necessity of Atheism*. Altick also notes that the unwavering clerical support of conservative attempts to block social reform fostered increasing ill-will towards the church on class grounds (205). While for some thinkers these changes promoted independence, for many others they represented the destruction of ontological stability, as neither the Church nor Christianity itself could perform its healing function any longer. The tribulations of the monster ally him to this latter group, as he discovers that the Christian myth of salvation does not govern his world. The parent/child relationship of Victor and the monster parallels the relationship of God and humanity, creator and created, as the references to Milton, beginning with the epigraph, demonstrate. And as this novel implicates the bourgeois family, traditional gender roles, and class divisions, so does it indict Christianity's claim to provide a system of justice, a failure which Shelley highlights by drawing parallels between her characters and those of the Old

Testament's creation myth, in order to underscore the lack of control over the events in the novel by a true deity.

In religious terms, the novel's conflict lies in the created's inability to see any fairness in his situation and in the creator's unwillingness to provide a solution to the created's unhappiness, both of which lead to rebellion. The monster is thus analogous to Adam, the fallen man, as the epigraph implies. But his solitude and the venom with which he has been cast out also put the monster in the position of Satan: "I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed" (95). As Gilbert and Gubar point out, he is even worse off than Satan: "this demon/monster has fallen from no heaven, exercised no power of choice, and been endowed with no companions in evil" (237).

Andrew Griffin notes the similarities between the monster's burning of the De Lacey's cottage and subsequent wanderings, and events recounted in Book XII of *Paradise Lost*, in which Eden is destroyed by fire and Adam and Eve become homeless wanderers: "The Monster is more than satanic. . . . he is Adam and the avenging angel rolled into one" (69).

Victor becomes analogous to God even before the monster draws such parallels: "It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn" (37). He aspires to the role of savior--albeit a proud and only narrowly potent one: "What glory would attend the discovery if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (40). His plan for the generation of life echoes the original creation in Genesis:

Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. (52)

Further parallels between the novel's characters and Christian figures enhance Shelley's examination of traditional religion. Walton, like Frankenstein, plays at being God. Writing to his sister, he claims the power of a savior: "You cannot contest the inestimable benefit I shall confer on mankind" (16); "One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race" (26). Shelley herself can be also seen as a god, as her role of creator of the novel would imply, according to Romantic convention.¹⁸ Her acceptance of this role is voiced in a famous passage in the Author's Introduction: "I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper" (xii), which is a grotesque echo of God's command: "Be fruitful and multiply." Other parallels to Biblical figures have been noted by various critics. U. C. Knoepfelmacher, for example, likens the murder of William to a "huge and alienated Cain kill[ing] an Abel who can be sure of his father's support and secure in that father's identity" (102).

¹⁸ Walton, too, mentions his earlier career as a writer in language suggestive of a deity: "I also became a poet and for one year lived in a paradise of my own creation" (16).

But all of these parallels are ultimately ironic, as no character truly embodies the theological identities alluded to: the God of this novel, faulty and inept, does not provide heavenly justice, and Shelley's Adam, the original sinner, is originally innocent. Her Eve, moreover, in the form of the female monster, is destroyed before she ever has the chance to choose between obedience and rebellion. Even Victor's apparently benevolent dreams and actions are not pure; they are, in fact, rather Faustus-like. Pride attends, practically defines, his aspirations, and his plan to banish disease would in its ill-conception inadvertently condemn all of humanity to "violent death." Also like Faustus, and not like God, Walton's efforts are tainted by his desire for veneration and obedience. And though Shelley has certainly achieved her creative goal--to "*think of a story*" (ix)--she is ambivalent to her imperfect, "hideous" creation.

Shelley not only creates a world without an omnipotent deity, but also, reacting against the Romantics' jubilant claim to creative power, exposes the inability of humans to perform the role once allotted to God. The problem for her characters is that a Christian significance is deceptive, as the emptiness of the religious analogies indicates. Justice cannot be achieved because there is no real evil to counteract, merely irresponsibility and selfishness. As Harold Bloom puts it, "Frankenstein's tragedy stems . . . from his own moral error, his failure to love; he *abhorred his creature*, became terrified, and fled his responsibilities" ("Afterword" 217). There are crimes, certainly, but they do not have the mythic grandiosity to support a mythic religious morality; Victor is self-absorbed, perhaps cowardly, but he is not the primogenitor of evil, as is Milton's Satan. The moral

foundation of Milton's story is missing here. Shelley's Satan/Adam figure is outcast not for rebellion and disobedience, but for the "sin" of ugliness, blame for which lies in the bumbling of its creator. The parallels to Milton are ironically drawn in order to emphasize the lack of any real theological signified. As Joyce Carol Oates writes, "No one in *Frankenstein* is evil--the universe is emptied of God and of theistic assumptions of 'good' and 'evil.' Hence, its modernity" (550).

Even the priests are dangerous, as we see when one forces Justine to confess or be excommunicated, leading to her speedy execution. The novel describes an absent Christianity, where the lesser gods that fill the vacuum left by Jehovah's absence quarrel and pay little heed to the flock for which they are responsible. The heroes of Christianity simply do not exist here.

This chapter is by no means meant to be an exhaustive study of the many significances invested in Shelley's novel, nor of the myriad ways in which these meanings overlap. But as a survey of some of the novel's most important themes, it does point to the monster's isolation as central to any reading. No matter the discourse in which this novel is studied, the monster stands as the most aggrieved, and most important, victim of the forces which crash about him. The sufferings of the other characters, even the terrible fates of William, Justine, and Elizabeth, merely reflect upon, amplify, clarify the monster's. Ultimately, the monster, having begun to doubt even his own motivation, becomes not rebellious but self-alienated, as revealed by his self-loathing lament over Frankenstein's dead body, in which he questions the rage that has to a large extent

defined his identity. After rejecting authority, the late Romantic cannot trust even his or her own new beliefs. How, asks Shelley, can one return to a Romantic state of unity with so many cultural dislocations blocking all attempts? Too much of the world seems to isolate individuals, to prevent them from attaining peace. And as the nineteenth century progresses, and traditional sexual roles, economics, religion, and the bourgeois family are relentlessly questioned in the face of more disturbing change, the themes that Shelley discussed, and the implications of those themes for the oppressed and the downtrodden, the outcast and the alienated, will themselves be amplified and expanded. The Victorians' increasing realism will foreground the social questions more explicitly than does Shelley's Gothic myth, and the focus of the nineteenth-century novel will move from the interior mindscape of the deracinated hero to the exterior causes of communal disruptions, leading to a broad interrogation of the structures of mainstream society.

CHAPTER 3
THE DIALECTIC OF SOLITUDE:
CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE* AND *VILLETTE*

Beginning with Harriet Martineau, readers of Charlotte Brontë's fiction have noted, and often complained, that her heroines--and, indeed, Brontë herself--labored under contradictory impulses. On the one hand, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe are fiercely individualistic iconoclasts, some of the first heroines to embody the educational, professional, and relational equalities called for by Mary Wollstonecraft,¹ as they transcend gender and class boundaries--while also decrying religious oppressions--in their attempt to carve out a new life that is not only sustaining but fulfilling. On the other hand, they also seem bound in some ways to tradition, politically rather conservative and, despite their need for independence, desirous of a master. These latter points have offended many critics, especially feminists, initially attracted to the rebellious qualities of Brontë's work. Martineau, one of Brontë's first champions, complained that Lucy's focus on gaining love advocates a constricted life for women. She wrote in her newspaper review of *Villette*: "There are substantial, heartfelt interests for women of all ages, and under ordinary circumstances, quite apart from love. . . . Readers . . . will reject the assumption that events and characters are to be regarded through the medium of one passion only" (qtd. in Gaskell, *Life* 619). As Rebecca Fraser puts it, "For [Martineau], this emphasis

¹ Austen's heroines, for example, have already achieved intellectual and relational equality, but not professional.

on love pointed to nothing but a willing return to the domestic bondage that so many women were trying to escape" (433). Later critics have followed this lead. Francoise Basch, in a chapter entitled "Revolt and Duty in the Brontës," gives perhaps the strongest modern complaint, writing:

As soon as it is a question of love, the intellectual and emotional horizon of the heroine is conspicuously narrowed down. . . . The rest of the world ceases to interest her and her work no longer has any meaning, save to carry out [her lover's] will. Totally absorbed by her passion, the heroine becomes a passive subject of his desires. (164)

Jenni Calder even claims that because Jane's opportunities are limited, "When she finally marries Rochester it is as if she is choosing to live through his past" (62), as if the Brontëan female must still define herself in relation to the male, and not as an autonomous being. Or as Richard Barickman et al. put it, "The resolution of [*Jane Eyre*] is . . . a regression from the rebellious impulses of the novel's opening" (13).

Conflicts in the characters' responses to traditional attitudes concerning gender roles in general have also been noted. Paul Schacht, for instance, writes that Jane, far from rebelling against the ideology of the Lowood school, "eventually adopts and preaches the virtues imposed on her by the Reverend Brocklehurst at Lowood, virtues that merely abet the dominion of property and patriarchy" (425). This echoes the complaints that Mary Taylor made about Brontë's being far too duty-bound to her father and ignoring her own

need for autonomy: Taylor wrote to Ellen Nussey that she "could never think without gloomy anger of Charlotte's sacrifices to the selfish old man" (19 April 1856).² Basch seconds this complaint (167). Several readers, then, found contradictory commitments to revolt and duty central to her fiction.

If, however, we foreground the one essential fact of all Brontë's novels--that their protagonists are outsiders, excluded from society, struggling to construct meaningful connections and, often, to define themselves--we will recognize that these attitudes result not from conflicting impulses or a lack of courage or integrity under great difficulty, but from conflicting pressures created by the heroines' marginal status. For not only must they try to reshape the definitions of themselves with which society at large has burdened them by asserting their self-worth and individuality, they must also strive to form bonds with family and friends to maintain their humanity.

Most of what Brontë's heroines discover about society is unattractive, from the sadism of John Reed and Reverend Brocklehurst to the masochism of Eliza Reed and St. John Rivers, from the vapidness and triviality of Georgiana Reed, Blanche Ingram, and Ginevra Fanshawe to the invasive oppressiveness of Aunt Reed and Madame Beck. Thus, their outsider status affords them a critical perspective on a largely vacuous society; social integration insulates their more conventional counterparts from this liberating isolation.

² Correspondence, unless otherwise noted, is quoted from Thomas James Wise and John Alexander Symington.

As Jane says, "The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself" (344).

But this solitude is also extremely unhealthy--Jane's near death on the moors and Lucy's near breakdowns occur in times of extreme communal deprivation; loneliness deeply wounds the psyche, and these heroines must find not a social sanction, which to them would be empty of real significance, but a sustaining communication, a dilemma that has a source in Brontë's own life. Fraser notes, "As she . . . wrote to Ellen, she did not mind being single, it was the loneliness of the life she found depressing" (336). Brontë's heroines are not inconsistent, but are attempting to cope with the conflicting goals of integration and integrity that have been imposed on them by circumstances, and their growing sense of anomie prefigures the state of Modernism's quintessential protagonists.

Brontë's novels, then, trace how the Victorian dispossessed must navigate a treacherous course. They must avoid isolation not by joining a traditional society that both repels and disgusts them, but by constructing personal bonds to replace integration into this society. Therefore, while Brontë certainly expresses, as do most Victorian authors, the desire to be part of a community, to share values and experiences, to be loved, she is also one of the first Victorians to document the extreme difficulties of achieving these goals. Raymond Williams describes the mid-nineteenth century as, "a period in which what it means to live in a community is more uncertain, more critical, more disturbing as a question put both to societies and to persons than ever before in history" (*English Novel* 12). At this time, gender and class structures began to be examined

very closely, concomitant with the appearance of the first real cracks in those structures. Simultaneously, a rising level of dissatisfaction among people still on the lower rungs of those structures created deep rifts between classes, and Brontë and her heroines are no exceptions. While Michael Wheeler claims, rather surprisingly, that Brontë's works stand outside of and have little relation to Victorian social history (56),³ Brontë's novels, in fact, describe the ways in which cultural forces combined to give large numbers of lower-class and female Victorians the sense of being unwanted, of being on the margins.

All of Brontë's protagonists, like many of their Modernist successors, are outcasts, as is apparent right from the openings of the novels. The famous first chapters of *Jane Eyre* establish several important themes which will resonate throughout the novel, portraying Jane as solitary for numerous reasons. The opening depicts a young orphaned girl utterly alone, powerless and abused. She is outcast because of her class, as John Reed so cruelly points out: "You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma's expense" (42). And her physical abuse by the older and bigger, if cowardly, John has overtones of domestic violence, making her

³ John Kucich (112) and Nancy Armstrong (187) make similar claims, though the latter's argument is that Brontë was aware of history, but that she purposefully "detached the facts and figures of social history" in order to create a personally fulfilling fictionalized self.

gender an early handicap. John would not attack another boy, neither, likewise, would the Reed sisters attack Jane: the power structure is partly a construct of gender difference.

An attempt to retaliate results in Jane's consignment to a terrifying torture chamber, the red room where her uncle had died and lain in state; this lower class female must be put in her place. As this scene is pointedly not marked by shocked surprise on Jane's part, these events appear to be of a piece with, if not repetitions of earlier experiences. Her weary response to Mrs. Reed--"What does Bessie say I have done?" (39)--and her early claim to being "habitually obedient to John" (42), indicate that her angry responses to John and, later, Bessie and Miss Abbot (43, 44) are the explosions of an anger that has been building for some time. This is confirmed when Mrs. Reed comments years later, "You have a very bad disposition . . . and one to this day I feel it impossible to understand: how for nine years you could be patient and quiescent under any treatment, and in the tenth break out all fire and violence, I can never comprehend" (267). Before we even learn the protagonist's first name--which is voiced, significantly, only when someone finally speaks kindly to her--we have seen her scolded, physically attacked, and locked away. This utter lack of identity leads to a self-alienation that is quite powerful, as Jane does not recognize herself in the red room's mirror (46). In this isolated world of self-negation, it is no wonder, as Ellen Moers points out, that Jane "establish[es] her self-conscious 'I'" by saying "no," by defining herself by whom she is not.⁴

⁴ A number of critics make similar points, noting that Jane develops her own identity by contrasting herself to others, by

While *Villette* has a far more subdued opening, Lucy's circumstances are similar to Jane's. Andrew D. Hook claims that "Lucy Snowe is very much at home [with the Brettons]" (145). But though she is a more integrated member than Jane of the household she is describing, she is at first merely a passive observer, commenting on the entrance of her soon-to-be rival with the reserve and objectivity of a laboratory scientist, though these events are narrated with the hindsight of Lucy's wrenching experiences with love, after the full significance of Polly's arrival is known to the narrator. She is, in fact, very much disengaged from the Bretton household. Like Jane, Lucy is not called by name until nearly twenty pages into the text. Again like Jane, the circumstance of the first voicing of her full name is important: in the midst of a family reunion, she writes, "I, Lucy Snowe, was calm" (79); her calm reflects her objectivity, her distance from the scene before her. She has no observable reaction because she has learned to suppress any emotional ties she might have, and for now she is merely looking in at the cosy scene. It is appropriate that while Lucy's last name is "Snowe," that of her rival is "Home." Also like Jane's, her origins are a mystery, a blank--more so, for we never learn them, as we do Jane's. Lucy's tale begins in the middle, as if something very significant has been lost.

And while several critics have complained that Brontë's abandoning the epistolary form after chapter one of *The Professor*

"learn[ing] how not to be" (Chase 78). See also Rosemarie Bodenheimer (389-390), Kucich (49), and Carolyn Williams (64).

reveals an immature narrative style,⁵ such an introduction to Crimsworth is thematically central and accurate. The orphan's story begins with a long-distance communication to a friend who never appears; one of his few emotional outlets is cut off, establishing his solitude in a rather dramatic way.

The widespread use of the orphaned consciousness becomes more and more appropriate as these protagonists suffer from an isolation that results from their social circumstances as much as their spirit of independence. This historical resonance makes Brontë's characters metaphoric. As Gilbert and Gubar put it, "[Jane's] problems . . . are symptomatic of difficulties Everywoman in a patriarchal society must meet and overcome" (339).⁶ As Jane herself says, "Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth" (141).

Brontë's protagonists will not succumb to either their circumstances or the images of themselves that are artifacts of the social machinery. Mrs. Reed's deathbed wonder about Jane's sudden outburst, noted above, is revealing: the story of *Jane Eyre* can only begin when she refuses to bear any longer the burden of the Reeds' prejudice. That is to say, she writes because she rebels, or, perhaps,

⁵ See, for instance, Inga-Stina Ewbank (169) and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (317).

⁶ Cf. also Fraser: "Lucy Snowe was a paradigm for all those single women who lived alone like her, like Ellen, like Mary, like Miss Wooler" (425).

she is enabled to write by her rebellion. David Copperfield, for instance, is more overtly an autobiographical writer--his ultimate occupation is novelist--but Jane too narrates her story to an acknowledged "Reader," whom she repeatedly addresses. She must, however, find her authentic, autonomous voice before she can start. It is difficult to imagine, say, Helen Burns writing her own autobiography. As does the creature in *Frankenstein*, Brontë's heroines need first to survive, then to tell their tales in order to make sense of their search for alternatives to the traditional institutions which have hindered their rise and created in them a feeling of disjunction and disorientation.

One such institution to be examined in Brontë's novels is the network of definitions of, and attitudes towards, gender and gender differences. The social, intellectual, and economic disadvantages of women in nineteenth-century England have been well-documented. The common point among all these handicaps is the suppression of female self-hood, the belief that women either were not or should not be fully realized individuals, that they should be, in Coventry Patmore's phrase, "The Angel in the House." As Basch puts it, many Victorian women were victims of the "feminine ideal . . . of Wife and Mother. [Their] social position was one of subjection and humiliation" (53). Those women who sought out new opportunities were viewed with suspicion as undermining the moral sanctity of domestic life. Altick shows that this situation arose from the realities of the new industrial, capitalist economy: women were seen as guardians of the domestic refuge from the often chaotic business world (53). Whereas mid- to late-twentieth-century feminism is associated with the

political left, Walter E. Houghton notes that because of the Victorian ideal's connection to the rising middle class, the relegation of women to domestic pursuits was reinforced by members of a broader ideological spectrum: "Feminist claims to intellectual equality with man and to the same education and professional opportunity were attacked by liberals--let alone conservatives; partly, no doubt, to forestall competition, but much more to prevent what they honestly believed would mean the irreparable loss of a vital moral influence" (352). That is, liberals believed the domestic refuge would prevent the hegemony of a capitalist profit motive; the home acted as a moral barrier against rampant acquisitiveness. What Brontë shows is that these definitions of female as angel had implications beyond married middle-class women. The "feminine ideal" constrained the poor as well as the middle class (with the rich Brontë was not much concerned), the single as well as the married, the child as well as the adult.

For most of *Jane Eyre*, from her childhood onwards, Jane, as a female, is dependent on the authority figures around her, including Mrs Reed, Mr Brocklehurst, Rochester, St John Rivers, and even John Reed, most of whom treat Jane abominably. Nearly all of these figures are male, and Mrs Reed, by not acting as a nurturing mother figure, seems to embody a largely male perspective.⁷ They all attempt to mold Jane into their own model of femininity, and Jane

⁷ The complexity of nineteenth-century gender roles is reflected in an apparent contradiction here: while Jane reacts against a feminine ideal, Mrs Reed seems to be criticized for abandoning the most typical of female roles.

has few options beyond those they offer her. Moreover, their repeated voicings of Victorian theories about women make Jane representative of the female experience at the time. Society defines her by her obedience or disobedience to the male. John Reed's attacks, as I noted earlier, have a distinct tinge of domestic abuse. His intimidating physical power is noticeable: "John Reed was a schoolboy of fourteen years old; four years older than I, for I was but ten; large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities" (41). And his insistence on his future ownership of the house and its contents, though they are really his mother's, reflects the contemporary division of property rights along gender lines and emphasizes Jane's subordinate status to the ruling male. These children are "playing house" in an extremely realistic, mature way, the violence of which results from the powerlessness of most contemporary women.⁸ Mrs Reed, in her attempt to protect her mamma's boy from the scourge Jane, reinforces these gender distinctions by attempting to silence the girl: "It is only on the condition of perfect submission and stillness that I shall liberate you then [from the red room]" (49).⁹ Rev. Brocklehurst, of course, spends

⁸ As Altick notes: "The law under which everything a married woman possessed or acquired became the inalienable property of her husband was changed only by a series of parliamentary acts in 1870-82" (58). This is some fifteen to twenty-seven years after Brontë's death. In her day, the property laws were representative of the male hegemony.

⁹ John's demise seems based on Branwell's. Though he died one year after the novel's publication, his deterioration was

his career teaching girls docility and endurance; no boys seem to need this lesson. His intimidating aspect, Jane notes, is exaggerated by his maleness (63-64). St John, similarly, believes that the perfect wife is patient and dependent. His missionary work would impose on Jane a loveless, unequal marriage. When Jane recognizes his belief in female submission, she sees that he is not superior to her, and that recognition signals the end of any possible union: "I sat at the feet of a man, erring as I. The veil fell from his hardness and his despotism. Having felt in him the presence of these qualities, I felt his imperfection, and took courage. I was with an equal--one with whom I might argue--one whom, if I saw good, I might resist" (432). No longer governable, Jane will not be a good match for St John; he loses his power over her as soon as he asserts it. Even Rochester, though he and Jane seem destined for each other, must first learn to relinquish control, to treat her as a true partner. His early possessive, objectifying language does not bode well: "'It is your time now, little tyrant, but it will be mine presently; and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I'll just--figuratively speaking--attach you to a chain like this' (touching his watch-guard). 'Yes, bonny wee thing, I'll wear you in my bosom, lest my jewel I should tyne'" (299).

noticeable for some time beforehand. Charlotte's unhappiness with her brother's preferential treatment is well-known (see, for instance, Fraser 314 and Moglen 34), and it is possible that John's profligacy reflects Charlotte's sense of the injustice of the waste of her family's limited resources on her brother, a disparity that resulted from traditional attitudes towards gender.

Lucy of *Villette* is similarly restricted, as she too is victim to the culture's definition of femininity. Her only example of female success is the distinctly unattractive--and masculine--Madame Beck: "Looking up at madame, I saw in her countenance a something that made me think twice ere I decided. At that instant, she did not wear a woman's aspect, but rather a man's. Power of a particular kind strongly limned itself in all her traits, and that power was not *my* kind of power: neither sympathy, nor congeniality, nor submission, were the emotions it awakened." (140-41). Related to the earlier Mrs Reed, Madame Beck demonstrates to Lucy that neither the Victorian version of femininity nor the Victorian version of masculinity is attractive, but only by adopting the latter can she hope to attain autonomy. Indeed, Lucy begins to discover her latent personal power when she plays a male character in a play, a part which, she realizes, puts her in the position of rival to Dr John.

Lucy also suffers from the fact that both men she loves exhibit typical attitudes towards women. As John tells Lucy, "I believe if you had been born a boy, Lucy, instead of a girl--my mother's god-son instead of her god-daughter--we should have been good friends: our opinions would have melted into each other" (410). Since she was not, however, she must assume the passive role he has assigned to get close to him. Though he recognizes her intelligence, he is afraid to experience it in an intimate way; they can only be acquaintances, for her power is too intimidating, free of the constraints of a typical female role. And by specifically mentioning her relation to Mrs Bretton, John implies that Lucy's non-participatory role in the Bretton home was partly gender-based.

Paul, on the other hand, at first views Lucy as delicate, in need of protection from knowledge of adult sexuality, as evidenced by his attempts to censor her art education by moving her away from a picture of Cleopatra. He too distrusts the liberated female: "He did not, however, neglect to glance from time to time my way, in order, I suppose, to make sure that I was obeying orders, and not breaking bounds" (278). He also subscribes to the doctrine of the angel in the house: "He believed in his soul that lovely, placid, and passive feminine mediocrity was the only pillow on which manly thought and sense could find rest for its aching temples; and as to work, male mind alone could work to any good practical result" (443).

Society's reliance upon female mediocrity leads to a very narrow range of professional choices, and both the female protagonists of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* are quite restricted in their opportunities for a fulfilling career. They can only serve as governess or teacher, occupations which are almost wholly unsatisfying to them. These are positions in which Jane and Lucy can find no intellectual stimulus, as the various epithets both women use for their students indicate, and put Jane and Lucy in pointedly inferior positions, which, as Altick points out, is typical for their era: "In either case [teacher or governess], the work was hard and the teacher's social status was as low as her pay; in most homes governesses ranked with the superior servants" (55-56), and which had already received a critical fictional treatment from Dickens, in his portrait of *Martin Chuzzlewit's* Ruth Pinch (see chapter 36).

Not only are these professions unrewarding, they are also isolating, adding to the heroines' sense of dislocation, a situation

which tormented Brontë herself (Fraser 98). In a letter describing her life as a governess, Brontë asks Nussey to

Imagine the miseries of a reserved wretch like me, thrown at once into the midst of a large family--proud as peacocks and wealthy as Jews--at a time when they were particularly gay, when the house was full of company--all strangers, people whose faces I had never seen before--in this state of things having the charge given me of a set of pampered, spoiled and turbulent children, whom I was expected instantly to amuse as well as instruct. (30 June 1839).

Donald Stone's curious comment that Brontë "hated [being a governess], though she made it and teaching the occupations of most of her protagonists" (104), misses the point. She made teacher and governess the protagonists'--and her own--occupations because she had no other choice; she was wholly bound by the limits her culture had already set for her, limits which last at least until the time of D. H. Lawrence, whose Gudrun also suffers in the stifling atmosphere of the lower-class schoolroom. The only other option to appear in either of the novels besides missionary's wife, domestic servant, is at least as bad: the maid at Thornfield leads a very lonely life: "I am so glad you are come; it will be quite pleasant living with a companion. . . . Thornfield is a fine old hall . . . yet you know in winter time one feels dreary quite alone, in the best quarters" (128). Apparently, though, she is unable to change her situation for the better. Lucy follows a similar course to Jane, her nursing Miss Marchmont being akin to governess work, and her teaching at the *pensionnat* similar to

Jane's work at Lowood and Marsh End. These are positions that leave them powerless and isolated.¹⁰ Charlotte and Emily had tried to gain some independence by establishing their own school at the Parsonage, but the attempt was an utter failure, forcing them away from home again to find a salary.¹¹ Lucy's success at founding and running a school, an extraordinary gift from M. Paul--as opposed to the school of the Crimsworths in *The Professor*, which is almost wholly self-made¹²--seems wishful thinking on Brontë's part.¹³

Brontë intends *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* to explode the stereotype of woman as helpless, incapacitated, and non-intellectual. Jane's and Lucy's strength, both physical and mental, is clear in

¹⁰ Thomas Hardy's Eustacia Vye, of *The Return of the Native*, will reject a similar position as companion, a choice that is indicative of her unusual emancipation.

¹¹ Their first voyage to Brussels was for the express purpose of learning something (French, Italian, and German) to teach. Thus, even starting a school at home required a long spell away from home, demonstrating to them that dislocation is inevitable.

¹² Basch's complaint that Lucy's assigning M. Paul all the credit for her success reflects an overdeveloped self-control (156) seems off the mark. The school would never have been started if not for Paul's initiative and capital. Far from suppressing her own identity, Lucy is revelling in her newly-found love, in "a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart" (594).

¹³ In *Henry Hastings*, in the juvenilia, Elizabeth establishes a school, "and in a fortnight's time had raised a class of pupils, sufficient not only to secure her from want, but to supply her with the means of comfort and elegance" (351). While Brontë's writings at this point were clearly moving away from the romance of the early tales towards a realism heralding the themes of her mature novels, an element of fantasy, though of a much different kind, still remained.

several incidents. When Jane first meets Rochester, she supports him and assists him in hobbling back to his horse, though she is far smaller than he. Symmetrically, she ultimately becomes his physical support, his eyes and ears, at the end of the novel. In between, she has the strength to assist the doctor with the bitten Richard Mason and to rescue Rochester from his burning bed. As Anne Elliot impresses Frederick Wentworth with her capacity for action in a crisis, so does Jane impress Rochester. She also has the fortitude to defend herself, as we have already noted, from St John's "despotism" (432). Her precocious intellect is clearly seen at Gateshead, in her ability at only ten years of age to make accurate moral judgments, revealed in her understanding of the hypocrisy of the Reeds, and theological summations, demonstrated in Brocklehurst's catechism of her in the Reeds' drawing room, during which she exposes the harshness of his understanding of Christianity,¹⁴ and in her repartee with Rochester. When she finds him at Ferndean, she is in complete command of the conversation, teasing him about St John as he had teased her earlier about Blanch Ingram. St John also recognizes and is somewhat taken aback by her intelligence, not only in her education, but in her direct and sophisticated conversation; his amazement pleases the iconoclastic Jane:

Again the surprised expression crossed his face. He had not imagined that a woman would dare to speak so to a

¹⁴ In fact, one could say that the great tragedy of these novels is that the heroines lose their childhood: not only have they no memories of their origins, but also they have aged prematurely, a fact made clear by a comparison of the language of Jane and Lucy to that of Adele and Polly.

man. For me, I felt at home in this sort of discourse. I could never rest in communication with strong, discreet, and refined minds, whether male or female, till I had passed the outworks of conventional reserve, and crossed the threshold of confidence, and won a place by their heart's very hearthstone. (400)¹⁵

Lucy's physical strength is not as apparent as Jane's, though her ability, like Jane's, to travel great distances alone¹⁶ and her delight in liberty, also like Jane's, demonstrate a remarkable inner power and courage, as does her ability to control a rebellious classroom, by which even the imposing Madame Beck is impressed. Her interactions with Graham, and especially M. Paul, are reminiscent of those between Jane and Rochester. Like Jane, Lucy is reserved, almost deferential in demeanor, but she does not let either male get the better of her in conversation, as she has come to know her self-worth. Moreover, as noted above, her intellect is clearly visible to Graham (401), and M. Paul is so confident in her abilities that he has her undergo an arduous examination in French in front of strangers (492-96). Thus, while their power is gained under extremely difficult circumstances, it allows them to form new, unconventional bonds with men who come to recognize the value of their

¹⁵ Barbara Gates writes that "Women's words provide them with a source of power over space. . . . On the other hand, women who are or become speechless by allowing men to speak for them, lose entry into the green worlds of their choosing" (42).

¹⁶ Charlotte, in contrast, made her voyage to Brussels with Patrick, Emily, and Mary and Joe Taylor (Fraser 152)

emancipated spirit. Thus, the criticism, noted earlier, that the desire of Brontë's heroines for a strong husband undermines their autonomy and is a sign of weakness is misapplied, for these women are, for their time and place, extremely powerful and independent, certainly among the strongest female characters in nineteenth-century literature, and ahead of their time in their liberated states. One need think only of James Joyce's Eveline or even Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Ramsay to recognize the ground Jane and Lucy break.

Intrinsically tied to Jane's and Lucy's disadvantaged states as women are problems of class and economics, which have already begun to become apparent in this discussion, such as for instance in the letter of 30 June 1839 to Nussey, quoted above, since their career opportunities are limited not only by their gender, but also by their class. But class issues are also disruptive influences in the family. This is central to the love story, as Jane's poverty leads her to doubt her chances of marrying Rochester--she will draw, when she finds herself attracted to Rochester, a "Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain" (190). Others, such as Mrs Fairfax, have similar doubts: "Gentleman in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses" (294).¹⁷ Repeated marginalization leads

¹⁷ To quibble again with Basch, it is not at all surprising that Brontë's heroines call their lovers "sir" (165), for they *are* subordinate in class and social situation, and in Jane's case, as an employee. This repeated usage points to the ways in which these women have been taught to view themselves as inferior, not to an instinctual desire for dependence. As Basch herself points out, even Queen Victoria felt that women were subordinate to men in domestic life, as she wrote to her daughter: "All marriage is such a lottery--the happiness is always an exchange--though it may be a very happy

Jane to ask, when Mrs Fairfax is advising her on class grounds against accepting Rochester, "Why--am I a monster? . . . Is it impossible that Mr Rochester should have a sincere affection for me?" (293). The echo of *Frankenstein* is apt. Paralleling Jane's love quest are Rochester's earlier relationships. His marriage to Bertha was a direct result of his family's desire to increase their wealth and status--Rochester's father "did not like to diminish [his] property by division, and yet he was anxious that Mr Edward should have some wealth, too, to keep up the consequence of that name" (159)--and his proposed marriage to Blanche dissolves when he causes a rumor of his poverty to reach her.

Moreover, the effects of class schisms on the family resonate beyond the love story, as has already been demonstrated in the biases John Reed reveals during his early verbal abuse of Jane. Her situation in the Reed house is, in a way, similar to Heathcliff's in *Wuthering Heights*, since the source of Mrs Reed's animosity towards Jane is class-directed, originating in her mother's "low marriage": "[Reed] would try to make my children friendly to the little beggar. . . . I would as soon have been charged with a pauper brat out of the workhouse" (260). This hostility also finds a victim in her late husband, who was, according to Mrs Reed, unable to play the role of the virile aristocrat: "[Reed] was weak, naturally weak. John does not at all resemble his father, and I am glad of it" (260).¹⁸ Mrs Reed has

one--still the poor woman is morally and bodily the husband's slave" (27).

¹⁸ Her use of the non-endearing "Reed" might also indicate a distancing from her husband, but that seems to have been a common

also prevented a meeting between Jane and the one caring relation she knows (at least at that time), whom Mrs Reed calls a "sneaking tradesman" (124). In her scorn for the lower classes, Mrs Reed employs an apothecary, not a physician, when Jane and the servants are ill (51).

The off-hand class bigotry displayed by Lady Ingram towards Jane, "She looks too stupid for any game of the sort" (212), by Blanche towards the footman, "Cease that chatter, blockhead! and do my bidding" (222), by Lady Ingram towards the Gypsy, "Surely, colonel, . . . you would not encourage such a low impostor" (221), and even, with an element of racism, by the footman towards the Gypsy, "[She is a] shockingly ugly old creature, miss; almost as black as a crock" (221), indicate that class tensions are accepted as normal, and that class considerations govern all aspects of life.

The prevalence of these attitudes is highlighted by the fact that even Rochester holds them, as Jane explains:

I have not yet said anything condemnatory of Mr Rochester's project of marrying for interest and connexions. . . . The longer I considered the position, education, &c., of the parties, the less I felt justified in judging and blaming either him or Miss Ingram for acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood. All their class held these principles. (216)

usage, as for instance with the very happily married Mrs Poyser of *Adam Bede*.

In fact, these childhood ideas and principles resemble Jane's own childhood attitude towards her Madeiran uncle, which prevents her from joining the loving side of her family. When the doctor asks if Jane would like to go live with her "poor, low relations," Jane considers: "Poverty looks grim to grown people; still more so to children: they have not much idea about industrious, working, respectable poverty; they think of the word only as connected with ragged clothes, scanty food, fireless grates, rude manners, and debasing vices: poverty was synonymous with degradation. . . . no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste" (56-57).¹⁹ With even Jane a former holder of these views, it is no surprise later when the poor cottager and, for a time, Hannah, thinking Jane to be an unreformable indigent, refuse to help her in her wanderings on the moors.²⁰

Lucy's economic and class situation similarly affects her relationships. She is afraid in *Villette* to reveal her occupation to the Homes--who are here, significantly, no longer Homes but "the Count and his daughter": "They might choose to vary by some shades their hitherto cordial manner towards me, when aware of my grade in society" (367-68). She must also deal with the irritating Ginevra Fanshawe, the Georgiana Reed/Blanche Ingram of the novel: "She

¹⁹ Lucy, too, holds these views. Discussing, at the end of *Villette*, her own school, she comments, "Pupils came--burgers at first--a higher class ere long" (593). The clear implication is that this change increases her happiness.

²⁰ Her humiliation is complete, ironically, when she is assisted: "'Well, lass,' replied a voice within, 'give it her if she's a beggar. T' pig doesn't want it'" (356).

must have good blood in her veins, for never was any duchess more perfectly, radically, unaffectedly *nonchalante* than she: a weak, transient amaze was all she knew of the sensation of wonder. Most of her other faculties seemed to be in the same flimsy condition" (148). However, though she is utterly vacuous (and though the passage reveals a sort of reverse snobbery on Brontë's part), she is never alone, unlike Lucy. The contrast is, at first, too painful for Lucy to contemplate: upon arrival in Villette, "a whole family of friends surrounded and bore away Miss Fanshawe; I--but I dared not for one moment dwell on a comparison of positions" (118-19). But Lucy must make this comparison, for its implications concerning her chance for communal integration are real, such as when she notices that she is the only female not noticed by members of the opposite sex; her "*presumptions . . .* never once had warrant to intrude" on "the realm of feelings and hopes" (177-78, emphasis added). And Lucy could not have hidden in anonymity; Ginevra notices her own superiority and exults unmercifully in it:

I am the daughter of a gentleman of family, and though my father is not rich, I have expectations from an uncle. . . . I have had a continental education, and though I can't spell, I have abundant accomplishments. I *a m* pretty; *you* can't deny that. I may have as many admirers as I choose. . . . There is *m e*--happy ME; now for *you*, poor soul!

I suppose you are nobody's daughter; since you took care of little children when you came to Villette: you

have no relations. . . . As to admirers, you hardly know what they are; you can't even talk on the subject. (215)

Lucy later sees that her class's acting as a handicap is particularly true with John: after he recognizes her mental capacities, she silently asks, "Had Lucy been intrinsically the same, but possessing the additional advantages of wealth and station, would your manner to her, your value for her have been quite what they actually were?" (401).²¹ Lucy has been robbed of erotic appeal because of her lowly station. As Moglen puts it, "Poverty deprives [Brontë's heroines] of their sexuality, their individuality, and hence of their humanity" (113). Brontë in a way reinforces stereotypes by making her plain heroines poor and their pretty foils wealthy, but Ginevra's point about high and low breeding is important. Those without economic advantages are ignored. Those with them are fortunate to be "suffering as little as any human being I have ever known" (577).

Conversely, when Jane and Lucy become wealthy, or at least self-sufficient, their lives become quite a bit easier, more fulfilling, and, most importantly, more integrated. This is clear even in minor incidents, such as Jane's rushing to Rochester at the end of the novel: "If your postboy can drive me to Ferndean before dark this day, I'll pay both you and him twice the hire you usually demand" (454). Whereas Jane had previously been wandering the moors eating scraps unfit for livestock, she can now reach her beloved with all haste. And though Jane is happier to have found a family than money, her wealth is necessary to free her and her cousins from a

²¹ She also realizes that John would not have loved Polly had she been poor (459).

life of drudgery, much as Virginia Woolf will later acknowledge in *A Room of One's Own* that she could not have become a writer without the economic independence her inheritance provided (37-38). As Rochester exclaims about her uncle's money, "Ah! this is practical--this is real!" (459).

Beyond economic freedom, Brontë's heroines search for work that will provide intellectual satisfaction, but such activity is difficult to secure. Qualls writes that "Self-knowledge is nowhere possible unless the individual can find some work, some activity that will define the self in relation to other human beings. Yet this work amounts to nothing if it enslaves the self, if it so deadens the inner imaginative life that true fellow-feeling becomes impossible. . . . This is precisely Brontë's assertion: work in her novels is a spiritual issue, a way of *sane living*" (45).²² For Jane there never is a possibility of fulfilling work, only economic and intellectual debasement, from which her uncle's bequest has freed her. This is true to an extent in *Villette* as well, as Lucy's independence is only possible with M. Paul's capital, as well as his assistance in securing for Lucy wealthy pupils. She is now in command of her life, and in contrast to Jane, her new upper-class, educated students provide her work that is

²² In this, Brontë figures as a precursor to Joseph Conrad, whose elevation of an adherence to duty is not a reflection of a belief in Victorian social doctrine, but of an idea that work can distract one from an almost existential emptiness. In *The Shadow-Line*, for instance, the narrator explains his return to duty as an acceptance of his only option, to which Captain Giles replies, "Precious little rest in life for anybody. Better not think of it" (132).

enriching in both senses of the word, as these children provide an intellectual stimulation that the girls at Madame Beck's could not.²³

Only, it appears, with economic stability can the outcast enter the fold. When Lucy writes, "The secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart" (594), the circumstances at issue are not only emotional, but economic as well. She is not denying that she has power, as Basch claims, but that her power cannot be engaged without a certain amount of independence, which, ironically, will make her feel integrated into a new society. This is true for John, too, whose growing wealth "proved himself in a position to marry" (531), as well as for Polly, whose risen status seems to have helped increase her beauty (359)--and therefore her desirability as a marriage partner--no doubt because of the ease and health that financial security affords. Relatedly, this also most likely explains at least in part the prettiness of Ginevra, Blanche, and Georgiana. Beauty is tied to health, which is difficult to attain while living in depressed circumstances. The literary myth of the pretty peasant girl, so useful to Wordsworth, is not valid for Brontë.

Schacht writes, "Admittedly, Jane's wealth comes to her, in the end, through inheritance rather than industry. Yet perhaps no other character in Victorian literature who inherits a fortune seems so thoroughly to have *earned* it" (448). But if Jane deserves it, so did Helen Burns. Part of the point of the novels is that their heroines are

²³ See note 19, however.

extremely fortunate to be successful. In fact, on several occasions, the protagonists narrowly escape death. Jane somehow escapes the typhus epidemic at Lowood, and as she is drawn from Brontë's experiences, she seems, from what we know of the Brontë constitution, to be especially lucky to have done so. While a number of critics cite Jane's flight across the moors as evidence of her protection by mother nature,²⁴ Jane very nearly perishes, and as Margaret Homans points out:

Even more striking is the doubt implicit in "Nature seemed to me benign and good; I thought she loved me." This doubt is confirmed the next morning when the evening's relative comfort gives way to exhaustion and hunger. Jane no longer refers to the landscape as a mother, the mother having abandoned the child who may have been deluded in imagining herself protected. (95)

Even her happiness in her position as governess is extremely unusual, as Jane knows (128).

Lucy also experiences extreme danger, most notably in her period of suffering upon leaving the Bretton home. Though the details are omitted, the peril is clear:

Picture me then idle, basking, plump and happy, stretched on a cushioned deck, warmed with constant sunshine, rocked by breezes indolently soft. However, it cannot be concealed that, in that case, I must somehow have fallen over-board, or that there must have been a

²⁴ See, for instance, Nina Auerbach (201), Stone (118) and Wheeler (62).

wreck at last. I too well remember a time--a long time,
of cold, of danger, of contention. (94)

"In that case" reveals that the period of happiness may be hypothetical, an invention by the anxious reader who has pictured her content. Analogous imagery is later used in a simile of a "half-drowned life-boat man" to describe herself, as opposed to the crew of a "stately ship, cruising safe on smooth seas" (254). Upon arrival in Villette, she barely avoids capture by two "dreaded hunters" (125) and only accidentally finds the *pensionnat*. She nearly dies in the street when she collapses after her confession at the Catholic church (236), and Paul does die en route from Guadeloupe. Each woman, then, loses a dear friend to random circumstances, and blind luck saves the heroine in a number of incidents. Brontë thus claims that the good do not always triumph in this hostile world, that the isolated do not always find community, that it is only the fortunate who find happiness (468, 534).

Complicating matters for these heroines is the abdication of responsibility by the Victorian institutions which were supposed to assist the individual to find peace and satisfaction. One such institution to be examined by Brontë is the family. A number of social historians note that the Victorians envisioned the family as a haven from an increasingly chaotic outside world. As Houghton puts it, "[The home] was much more than a house where one stopped at night for temporary rest and recreation--or procreation--in the midst of a busy career. It was a place apart, a walled garden, in which certain virtues too easily crushed by modern life could be preserved, and certain desires of the heart too much thwarted be

fulfilled" (343).²⁵ And while numerous critics have noted the ways in which this utopian rendering of the family in fact put enormous stresses on women and men alike, Brontë's novels make it all too clear that the rendering itself often bore little relation to existing reality, that the home was often not a sanctuary, but a stultifying, if not menacing, environment that instead of drawing people in, tended to cast them out. Though Jane is ultimately rewarded with a home, Brontë's heroines are continually leaving families to which they do not really belong, and as noted above, both Jane and Lucy begin their stories living in houses that are not their homes.

Jane is orphaned, with only a handful of living relatives to shelter her. The only four she initially knows are brutally oppressive. As Jane reflects on a raging storm, her association of the tempest outside with the home life within immediately shatters any notion of safe harbor: "I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed" (39). When she eventually leaves for school, the abuses there seem less a change in behavior than in scenery; clearly, Jane does not have the option of returning home, as did Charlotte and Emily,²⁶ from a terrible experience. Much later, in a distinctly unsentimental turn, to

²⁵ See also Altick (53) and Basch (7).

²⁶ And as do other Victorian protagonists such as, for instance, Martin Chuzzlewit and Mark Tapley.

emphasize Jane's distance from her childhood home, she is not allowed to be reconciled with Mrs. Reed, even at the latter's deathbed.²⁷ There is no hope of ever entering this family, the only one she had known for her entire childhood. She is right to tell Rochester that she has no kin (252) and to declare, much as Conrad's Razumov will, "Not a tie holds me to human society" (349). She does, of course, find more loving relations later, her uncle and the three cousins Rivers replacing the aunt and three cousins Reed, but even the succor there is tempered. Her uncle, most obviously, is dead, symbolizing more a never-fulfilled desire than a real comfort. And even the desire is mostly beyond Jane, since she only knew briefly of his still being alive; she lacks even the possibility of attaining a true father figure. Moreover, the Rivers, while rescuing Jane at a crucial moment and providing her with a real sense of belonging, do not bring unmitigated comfort: St John's pressure to marry leads to a near breakdown, causing Jane once again to fly from the house, at least the fourth time she has done so. Significantly, after Jane is married, she sees her cousins only every six months. Thus, when Basch, discussing Jane's rebellious feminism, writes, "Jane Eyre . . . refuse[s] to remain cloistered in the family sanctuary" (160), one wonders what family she means.

Jane must redefine the family if she is to enjoy the sense of peace it is supposed to bring. Throughout her childhood, her nearest approach to a surrogate relative is Helen Burns, who of course dies too quickly to provide Jane long-lasting companionship. Helen's

²⁷ Unlike in numerous other Victorian novels, such as, for instance, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*.

biographical source is Charlotte's sister Maria, who had acted as surrogate mother to the siblings when Maria Branwell Brontë died, and then died herself while at Cowan Bridge School. But to further emphasize Jane's lack of family connections, Brontë changes the relationship: Helen is not a blood relative, only a friend. A full redefinition of the family comes only in Jane's return to Rochester, which much of society would still have trouble accepting due to their different social origins, and in her effective adoption of the illegitimate Adele.

Lucy faces somewhat similar handicaps, and while her trials involve less violence and passion than those of Jane, there is less optimism in the later novel that the types of problems Jane encountered can be overcome. As noted above, Lucy's origins are even more mysterious than Jane's, as if her parents have vanished from memory. We only hear of Lucy's "kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed [her] permanent residence" (62). Thus, even assuming that Lucy did once live with her parents, the Bretton home is at least her third, and her reference to permanent residences indicates an even more serious level of displacement. Janice Carlisle writes, "As conventional autobiography, these chapters are woefully inadequate" ("Face in the Mirror" 271). This is precisely Brontë's point, as Lucy cannot construct a proper memoir, missing as she is her familial origins. Even little Polly recognizes Lucy's outsider status, noting that she doesn't belong with her godmother or her surrogate brother, later her love object: "'Have you no pain just here' (laying her elfish hand on her elfish breast) 'when you think *you* shall have to leave Graham; for *your* home is not here?'" (92). The

inadequacy of the Brettons as family is later emphasized by their lack of interest in Lucy when she is not with them, both in England, before she lands with Miss Marchmont, and in Labassecour, where the Brettons disappear for distressing periods of time. Of their separation in England, Lucy writes, rather vaguely: "Of Mrs Bretton I had long ago lost sight. Impediments, raised by others, had, years ago, come in the way of our intercourse, and cut it off" (94). In Labassecour, Lucy calls the family "Friends, not professing vehement attachment, not offering the tender solace of well-matched and congenial relationship; on whom, therefore, but moderate demand of affection was to be made, of whom but moderate expectation formed" (251). When they do not call her for several weeks, leaving Lucy in depressing solitude, she worries that they have met with ill circumstances. Lucy learns that in fact she simply was not on their minds, that any real closeness was imagined, or at best one-sided: Mrs Bretton writes in a letter, "It occurs to me to inquire what you have been doing with yourself for the last month or two? . . . I dare say you have been just as busy and as happy as ourselves at La Terrasse" (354). The Brettons' inability to recognize their former ward when she convalesces in their home in Villette under Dr. John's care is, while unlikely, emblematic. Godmother indeed.²⁸ As happens to Jane and Frankenstein's creation, few, if any, will claim Lucy as kin.

²⁸ Gates, analyzing Brontë's use of natural, specifically garden, symbols, writes that the fake flowers on the wall in the Brettons' Villette apartment, which Lucy mistakes for real flowers upon coming to consciousness, are indicative of this family's lack of natural connection to Lucy (41).

Moreover, Lucy will have far more difficulty than Jane in constructing a new family to replace her absent one. In between her writing of the two novels, Charlotte's pessimism about the family's power to provide comfort grew ever stronger, probably due to the deaths of her remaining siblings. Having returned to Haworth from Anne's funeral, Charlotte wrote to Ellen Nussey:

I tried to be glad that I was come home--I have always been glad before . . . but this time joy was not to be the sensation. I felt that the house was all silent--the rooms were all empty--I remembered where the three were laid--in what narrow dark dwellings--never were they to reappear on earth. So the sense of desolation and bitterness took possession of me--the agony that *was to be undergone*--and *was not* to be avoided came on" (23 June 1849).

The sense of the survivor's claustrophobia and isolation is keenly present in *Villette*. In a number of plot parallels between *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, in fact, Lucy fares much worse than Jane. Jane is governess to Adele, who eventually becomes "a pleasing and obliging companion" (475), but Lucy must watch over, during "The Long Vacation" alone, "a poor deformed and imbecile pupil, a sort of cretin" (227), who provides no companionship at all. Instead of on the Rivers' doorstep, Lucy lands in the cramped sick-rooms of Miss Marchmont: "Two hot, close rooms thus became my world; and a crippled old woman, my mistress, my friend, my all. . . . I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, an everchanging sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick-chamber; I was almost content

to forget it. All within me became narrowed to my lot" (97). Jane's uncle finally wills his fortune to her, but Miss Marchmont dies before she can do the same for Lucy, forcing her to leave England for an alien land. When at the end of the novel she receives one hundred pounds of the inheritance, it is helpful but arrives after Lucy is independent. And while Jane is able finally to marry her beloved, Lucy's drowns on his way back to her. It is no wonder that Lucy claims to be "a mere looker-on at life" (211).

Brontë's protagonists are not her only characters to suffer from family losses; there are almost no complete families anywhere in her novels. In *Jane Eyre* Adele was abandoned by her mother and is dependent on Rochester's charity: the identity of her actual father is unclear. Rochester himself, though not technically an orphan, has been ill-used by his family, who saw him merely as a source of income; their abuse results, ultimately, in his enchaining marriage to Bertha. Not only are the Reeds fatherless, their sibling relations are badly damaged, as the barely concealed hostility between the soon-to-be-novitiate Eliza and the frivolous Georgiana demonstrates (263-264). And as Helen explains about Lowood, "All the girls here have lost either one or both parents" (82). Even the Rivers, the healthiest family in the novel, have lost their parents. In *Villette*, Polly has only a father, her mother having died giving her birth, and she is periodically abandoned, as she sees it, by that father: when Mr Home returns, Polly "dropped on her knees at a chair with a cry--'Papa!' It was low and long; a sort of 'Why hast thou forsaken me?'" (79). Conversely, Graham has only a mother, his father having died when John was a small child. Miss Marchmont almost married, but

foreshadowing M. Paul, her fiancé was killed while returning to her, for which she is "condemned, after twelve months of bliss, to undergo thirty years of sorrow" (99). And M. Paul, like Rochester, is sent by what passes for his family to the West Indies in an attempt to make a fortune; their lack of concern for him is highlighted in his death on the voyage.²⁹

In Brontë's world, then, the traditional family is no sanctuary; it rarely exists, and when it does, it is a hostile presence more often than not. A strong family can be helpful, as Diana, Mary, and Uncle John prove to be to Jane. But Brontë exposes the Victorian view of the home as "a refuge from the abrasive outside world" (Altick 53), as, in general, a rather idealistic fantasy. Orphanhood is, in Brontë, a common state of mind; one need not lose one's parents to feel isolation. The family, as in Shelley's novel, cannot and often wants not to protect its members from the difficult, disorganized modern world.

The family is not the only traditional institution that exacerbates the dislocation of the Brontëan heroine: as in *Frankenstein*, religion--its theology, denominations, and clergy--serves the same disruptive function. By the time Brontë wrote her novels, the spiritual crises brought on by the German Higher Critics and such scientists as Sir Charles Lyell, as well as by rifts in the

²⁹ Fraser writes, "Most of the characters in her juvenilia would be orphans, and of the heroines of her adult fiction, only Caroline Helstone was not one" (29). But even Caroline *thinks* she is one, and her rearing by her uncle is shown to be painfully inadequate. At one point in *Shirley*, he does not even realize that she is nearly fatally ill.

Anglican church, were well underway.³⁰ And Brontë, as the daughter of a tenacious Evangelical clergyman, had intimate knowledge of the gloomy religion that casts its lengthy shadow over *Jane Eyre* and informs the reticence of Lucy Snowe.

Far from providing a comforting explanation of suffering, Evangelical theology adds to the misery of these earnest young women. It teaches Jane that as punishment of the soul is inevitable, so is punishment of the body. This lesson is gathered partially from the aptly named Miss Abbot. As Jane is being locked in the hellish red room, Miss Abbot threatens, "God will punish her: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums, and then where would she go? . . . Say your prayers, Miss Eyre, when you are by yourself; for if you don't repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney and fetch you away" (45). That she has learned this lesson is confirmed during Reverend Brocklehurst's catechism of Jane:

"Do you know where the wicked go after death?"

"They go to hell," was my ready and orthodox answer.

"And what is hell? Can you tell me that?"

"A pit full of fire."

³⁰ Lyell's *Principles of Geology* was published by 1833, Mary Ann Evans's translation of *Das Leben Jesu* in 1846. The Oxford movement, responding to what they saw as serious threats to the Anglican Church, began in 1833. And as Altick notes, the reaction by the rising middle-class against the Toryism of the High Church was strong by the time of the First Reform Bill (1832). See Altick (203 passim) for a fuller historical context.

"And should you like to fall into that pit, and to be burning there for ever?"

"No, sir."

"What must you do to avoid it?"

I deliberated for a moment: my answer, when it did come, was objectionable: "I must keep in good health, and not die." (64)

At Lowood, the Evangelical reverend reaffirms the idea of Christianity as torture:

A judicious instructor would take the opportunity of referring to the sufferings of the primitive Christians; to the torments of martyrs; to the exhortations of Our Blessed Lord himself, calling upon his disciples to take up their cross and follow Him; to His warnings that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God; to his divine consolations, "If ye suffer hunger or thirst for My sake, happy are ye." (95)

Spartan and *masochist* have replaced *Christian*³¹--Christ did not say "Man must live without bread," and orthodox theology normally holds that his sufferings were meant to replace ours, not to initiate them--thus it is no wonder that the adult Jane sees the figures in a *pietà* transform from the saints to Judas and Satan (239), or that as an adult she is still very much afraid to die because the afterlife is terrifying to her: "But I feel mine is not the existence to be long

³¹ Such theology also helps to explain St John's suppression of his love for Rosamond.

protracted under an Indian sun. What then? [St John] does not care for that: when my time came to die, he would resign me, in all serenity and sanctity, to the God who gave me" (429). The thought of such a contingency seems hardly comforting here; the tone of "in all eternity and sanctity" is one of incredulity. Without a healing God, this version of Christianity has failed in its one essential purpose, to offer hope of a blissful eternity, and, as for the traditional family, Jane must find a new myth to replace it.³²

This she does in love relationships, in the revivifying effects of human interaction. When she describes such fellowships, the imagery is often religious, usually to point out the contrasts between love and the lifeless Evangelical Christianity. Miss Temple, for instance, is aptly named not only because she provides comfort, but also because she differs so markedly from the other religious figures at Lowood, including the descriptively named Miss Scatcherd and Mrs Harden, the latter "a woman after Mr Brocklehurst's own heart, made up of equal parts of whalebone and iron" (104). When Jane begins to realize the true nature of her feelings for Rochester, she dreams of an isle that seems Edenic: "I regained my couch, but never thought of sleep. Till morning dawned I was tossed on a buoyant but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy. I thought sometimes I saw beyond its wild waters a shore, sweet as

³² Both Robert Heilman and Christine Alexander note that Brontë's use of Gothic conventions helps, in fact, to undercut the supernatural, as the apparent ghosts and ghouls (the Gytrash, the Gypsy's mind-reading, the Spectral Nun, etc.) all have mundane explanations. Unseen forces, even Christian ones, are no longer operating.

the hills of Beulah; and now and then a freshening gale, wakened by hope, bore my spirit triumphantly towards the bourne" (182).

Beulah, which means "wedded" in Hebrew, is a new name for a newly risen Jerusalem (Isaiah 62:4), but in Jane's dream this isle has no actual Christian significance. She is heading towards a secular promised land of wedded bliss. And those who attempt to suppress love commit "Blasphemy against nature!" (204). Eliza, for example, who as a novice is about to enter what should be a center of spirituality, will, in fact, "be walled up alive" (270), since she is cutting herself off from social intercourse. St John, in his rejection of Rosamond for a hoped-for missionary wife, commits the same sin. As Jane points out, St John's proposed religious work should not take precedence over his emotional needs: "Solitude is at least as bad for you as it is for me" (397). His pressuring Jane to marry without love in order to proselytize better is dismissed by Diana as, "Insupportable--unnatural--out of the question" (441); in what sounds like an apt echo of *Frankenstein*, Jane scolds that his proposal is "monstrous" (430).

Rochester, of course, is Jane's real love object, and, though he is surely no orthodox figure, she describes him in religious terms, for love to her is the true religion. Sitting with what she believes is a Gypsy, Jane "wondered what unseen spirit had been sitting for weeks by my heart watching its workings and taking record of every pulse" (228). That unseen spirit, of course, is Rochester. Thus, the climactic scene of the novel echoes Christ's moment of weakness in Gethsemane, as Jane's dilemma becomes a spiritual struggle between the crushing oppression of St John (whose name recalls Jane's first

tormenter) and the liberating passion of Rochester. As Christ asks of God, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by" (Matthew 26:39), Jane implores St John not to force her to accept his mission: "Oh, St John!" I cried, 'have some mercy!'" (427). And echoing ironically Christ's complaints about the disciples, she notes, "My spirit . . . is willing to do what is right; and my flesh, I hope, is strong enough to accomplish the will of Heaven, when once that will is distinctly known to me" (446). That will, she has already begun to realize, having heard Rochester's distant cry, is to abandon St John for Rochester. Unlike Christ, Jane is granted release from a religion that would kill her: "Show me, show the path!" I entreated of Heaven" (444); that path leads back to Thornfield. The cup of religious martyrdom has passed from her hands, and she will find her resurrection in love. In an early scene with Rochester, Jane does in fact physically improve, come to life, because of their burgeoning relationship: "And now I looked much better than I did when Bessie saw me; I had more colour and more flesh, more life, more vivacity, because I had brighter hopes and keener enjoyments" (187).

David Lodge writes that Jane is "Inspired by the sanctity of Helen Burns, and supported and encouraged by the example and encouragement of the teacher, Miss Temple" (116), and Hook writes much the same: "As Jane Eyre believes she should emulate Helen Burns, so Lucy Snowe tries always to learn Miss Marchmont's lesson" (147). Before she leaves Thornfield, Jane, as Chase points out, "chides herself for worldliness" (65): "My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world; almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an

eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol." (302). But Jane ultimately decides not to accept the passive suffering encouraged by such model Christians as Miss Temple and Helen, as well as by St John--Helen might more appropriately be named Helen Fades. Vitality, energy, love are far more important, in fact, far more moral, than acquiescence: "God did not give me my life to throw away; and to do as you [St John] wish me would, I begin to think, be almost equivalent to committing suicide" (439). As Barry Qualls comments, "Brontë refuses to endorse any preoccupation with 'life' after death as an answer. . . . Such an attitude, her novels suggest, constitutes an escape from the duties here. All her novels assert a this-worldly ethic" (45). As Jane comments, "I was no Helen Burns" (98). Instead, having learned more about the destructiveness of Christian passivity, as it accelerated Helen's death and would have killed her if she were a missionary's wife, Jane comes to accept her "idol" Rochester, their new heaven--Ferndean seems quite (secularly) Edenic in its natural seclusion and as the seat of happiness. The missionary life, a possible acceptance of which, as noted above, is couched in the terms of Gethsemane, comes to represent Evangelical Christianity in general, and following St John's Evangelical theology, which demands self-sacrifice, would have, even if not killed her, banished her from the hopes of any real society. Her rejection of this choice of lifestyle is also a final rejection of this theology. As Robert M. Polhemus puts it, discussing *Villette*: "The nun's costume sums up a meaning that Brontë reiterates in passage after passage: love walks in the guise of religion; it takes over religious habits and vocabulary;

it is life even if it takes the form of death; it moves with sacral aspect through the enchanted atmosphere of the novel" (123). Likewise, Rochester accepts a new idol in Jane, who is to him, in a phrase that echoes God's self-description (Revelations 1:8) "the alpha and omega of my heart's wishes" (471). Jane has, fortunately for her, the strength to overcome the deadening, isolating effects of this version of religion.

Faith *per se* is not as big a problem for Lucy as it is for Jane, but she too struggles with fears that God, in his distance from her, does not assist in her efforts to realize a meaningful society. Miss Marchmont is the first in this novel to articulate this problem, when she explains her own suffering in terms of distance from an inscrutable God, "We should acknowledge God merciful, but not always for us comprehensible" (101). This incomprehensibility will become problematic for Lucy as she suffers for no apparent reason and with no aid from her God.³³ Her first crisis of faith occurs when she is left alone in Madame Beck's school during "The Long Vacation":

Religious reader, you will preach to me a long sermon
about what I have just written, and so will you, moralist;
and you, stern sage; you, stoic, will frown; you, cynic,
sneer; you, epicure, laugh. Well, each and all, take it your
own way. I accept the sermon, frown, sneer and laugh;
perhaps you are all right: and perhaps, circumstanced
like me, you would have been, like me, wrong [to be

³³ It also hints at an agnosticism that Hardy will later confront, which will be discussed in my chapter on him.

almost suicidally depressed]. The first month was,
indeed, a long, black, heavy month to me. (228)

Not only has her faith begun to deteriorate, but she lists faith as merely one response to suffering, merely one self-defense mechanism by which people cope with sorrow. Not surprisingly, when Lucy tries to pray, she can only voice a deeply ambivalent sentiment: "From my youth up Thy terrors I have suffered with a troubled mind" (232). And in her blessing of Polly and Graham's union, there is a strong hint that Lucy believes she has been excluded from bliss: "I think it is deemed good that you two should live in peace and be happy--not as angels, but as few are happy amongst mortals. Some lives *are* thus blessed: it is God's will: it is the attesting trace and lingering evidence of Eden. Other lives run from the first a different course" (468); by "other lives" she almost assuredly means her own. She will later repeat that blessing at the end of chapter 37 ("Sunshine"): "God saw that it was good" (533), only to begin the next ("Cloud") with "But it is not so for all" (534). The only lingering trace of Eden for Lucy comes, like Jane's, when she is loved, when M. Paul proposes:

"Lucy, take my love. One day share my life. Be my dearest, first on earth."

We walked back to the Rue Fossette by moonlight--such moonlight as fell on Eden--shining through the shades of the Great Garden, and haply gilding a path glorious, for a step divine--a Presence nameless. Once in their lives some men and some women go back to those first fresh

days of our great Sire and Mother--taste that grand
morning's dew--bathe in its sunrise. (591-92)

However, religion, like the family, does not have the power to provide any lasting happiness for Lucy; the spiritual ease is short-lived, since M. Paul's death demonstrates that her prayers--"God, watch that sail! Oh! guard it!" (595)--are not heeded.³⁴

While Lucy's deteriorating faith is important to her psychological development, the focus in *Villette* shifts to problems of denominational differences. Religion becomes an alienating force to Lucy mostly because she is a Protestant in a Catholic land. The tensions described in the novel mirror similar tensions in England. As Gayla McGlamery notes, despite the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, "Bigotry towards English Papists remained and grew even more vehement toward mid-century as Roman Catholic priests emerged from seclusion to give public expression to their beliefs and, occasionally, to attract a convert from the laymen and the clergy of the English church" (59). Houghton notes that this situation was made worse by the Oxford movement (83).³⁵

³⁴ In a letter quoted by Fraser, Charlotte's own response to suffering, in the death of her siblings, involved a crack in her faith in, if not the existence, then the kindness of God: "She said wonderingly that the strangest thing to her was that 'we are called on to rejoice over this hopeless blank, to receive this bitter bereavement as great gain, to welcome this unutterable desolation as a state of pleasant freedom. Who could do this if he would? Who would do this if he could?'" (392). Miss Marchmont's faith--which certainly wavers--that pain here is recompensed elsewhere, is quite stoic in this context.

³⁵ David Thomson takes the minority view when he writes, "The truth was that discrimination against Catholics had become an

The tables are turned on Lucy in Villette, for here she is in the minority. Lucy's constant lack of privacy, her sense that no one trusts her, is due at least in part to Madame Beck's spying, which she attributes to the school mistress's being a "Little Jesuit inquisitress" (378). Her alienation from her students is also couched in sectarian terms: "The poor girls were tutored to report with Catholic ears whatever the Protestant teacher reported. An edifying consequence ensued. Something--an unseen, an indefinite, a nameless something--stole between myself and these my best pupils: the bouquets continued to be offered, but conversation thenceforth became impracticable" (147). While Brontë most probably shared in Lucy's prejudices,³⁶ the novel does acknowledge that denominational strife is ultimately injurious, greatly exacerbating Lucy's sense of dislocation. On the one side, Catholicism is by no means portrayed wholly as an evil temptation. The famous confession scene, whose source is autobiographical, ends with the following honest praise, despite Lucy's lingering anti-Catholic bias, of the "benign old priest,"

anachronism [by 1807] on both political and ecclesiastical grounds" (61).

³⁶ McGlamery attempts to mitigate criticism of Brontë's views by arguing that her portrayal of Catholicism was mild compared to the vehement rhetoric of many of her contemporaries. However, as McGlamery herself notes, friends such as Martineau were enlightened enough to be offended by her portrayal of Catholics, so the historical context in fact convicts her. In any case, Brontë's casual anti-Semitism and anti-Hinduism, which pepper all of her novels, and which we have already seen in a letter to Nussey (30 June 1839), serve no plot purpose, but only provide stereotypical images of money-lenders and strange exotics, and indicate that her best feature was not religious tolerance.

who has helped her immeasurably in a moment of real crisis: "whatever I may think of his Church and his creed (and I like neither), of himself I must ever retain a grateful recollection. He was kind when I needed kindness; he did me good. May Heaven bless him!" (235). Moreover, M. Paul can love Lucy without threatening her doctrine, as he comes to understand that denominational differences do not matter: "Donnez-moi la main! I see we worship the same God, in the same spirit, though by different rites" (474). On the other side, the Protestants do not escape blame. As Irene Tayler puts it, "British Protestantism, to be sure, Charlotte preferred on principle to Continental Catholicism; but we meet no remarkable Protestants aside from Lucy herself, and her true kindred spirit is the Catholic Paul" (235). Lucy's otherwise tenacious clinging to a vigorous Protestant identity makes it difficult for others to accept her, as we see when M. Paul questions her orthodoxy:

I called myself your brother . . . I hardly know what I am--brother--friend--I cannot tell. I know I think of you--I feel I wish you well--but I must check myself; you are to be feared. My best friends point out danger, and whisper caution. . . . It is your religion--your strange, self-reliant, invulnerable creed, whose influence seems to clothe you in, I know not what, unblessed panoply. (512)

M. Paul's fear of Protestantism is hardly condoned, making him, for Brontë, a problematic commentator, but he has put his finger on the way in which Lucy's vigorous religion has exaggerated her haughtiness. And as we can see from the passage noted above (474),

only when she checks her impulse towards religious bigotry can Lucy engage, in an extremely rare instance, in physical contact and realize that sectarian divisions have clearly negative social implications.

And when Dr John worries that Lucy has become a Catholic (257), we see how petty are the fears about denominational differences that have led him to distrust her.

Moreover, not only do faith, theology, and denominations fail the Brontëan heroines, but the clergy do as well. Brocklehurst is the first clerical failure. Though his function is partly to expose a morbid theology, it is also true that Brontë was raised in a vehemently Evangelical house and that she did maintain an affinity to this sect throughout her life--she eventually married an Evangelical clergyman. This denomination is not dismissed out of hand; rather, we are supposed to view Brocklehurst as a fanatic, an extremist with twisted views. He is part of Mrs Reed's plan to keep Jane "humble" (66), which is a euphemism for silencing her. He takes what amounts to a sadistic pleasure in depriving the schoolgirls of comfort; moreover, he is a hypocrite, as we see when his daughters arrive at the school "splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs" (97), and a coward, as we learn when he flees the school during the epidemic instead of comforting the sick. St John, too, as noted above, becomes a very oppressive figure, trying to mold Jane into his image of a perfect repressed Christian. Jane envisions a marriage to him thus: "But as his wife--at his side always, and always restrained, and always checked--forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry, though the imprisoned flame consumed vital after vital--*this* would be

unendurable" (433). St John comes to resemble Reverend Brocklehurst in his attempt to keep Jane docile and humble.

In *Villette*, Catholic priests exert serious pressure on Lucy in a time of great vulnerability to abandon her creed, thinking more of increasing their numbers than of her easing her sense of isolation. Lucy's thawing attitudes towards Catholicism receive a quick setback when Pere Silas attempts too aggressively to convert her in a badly mistimed and ill-judged move, from which she revolts: "As soon should I have thought of walking into a Babylonish furnace" (235). When she refuses to convert, the clergyman tries to convince Paul to abandon her as a heretic, proving that he does not understand what would bring them happiness, and therefore save them. In addition, Protestant ministers are conspicuous by their absence, perhaps understandably in Labassecour--although Brontë did regularly attend Anglican services in Brussels (Fraser 170)--but also in England, where the church does nothing to offer solace to the solitary Lucy. She has no spiritual guides.

When Jane and Lucy find themselves repeatedly told that they do not belong, when they find themselves repeatedly punished for being true to their own identities, when they struggle alone to escape from the injustices of their harsh worlds, it is no wonder that these women begin to develop a sense of themselves as outlaws and that prisons and imprisonment become important metaphors. Wheeler writes, "Imprisonment--physical, psychological, or spiritual--is a central metaphor . . . in Victorian fiction generally" (10), and that is true, at least to an extent, in Brontë. Perhaps the most vivid scene in all of Brontë is that which opens Jane's narrative: her imprisonment

in the red room. Its key position in the text influences much of our understanding of Jane's personality. Lucy, likewise, is locked in a filthy, vermin-infested attic to learn her part in a play, an event which ironically sets in motion her self-discovery.³⁷ She also talks of her soul returning, at the end of her illness, to its "prison" (237); this is an old metaphor, but here the concept of prison represents not a debased flesh, but a solitary one. The point of the figure is not Lucy's distance from heaven, but her distance from other humans and, in her ignorance to how her reserve hinders her chances for emotional bonds, her distance from herself. We might add that the heroines' dislocations, then, lead to a proto-Modern self-alienation: both Jane and Lucy have trouble recognizing themselves in mirrors, a problem first seen during Jane's early imprisonment.³⁸

But it is equally true that their isolation, while causing a great deal of pain and loneliness, provides, as noted above, an ultimate benefit: it gives them an autonomous perspective. As Pauline Nestor writes, "Charlotte endorsed a fiercely individualistic self-sufficiency which placed the demands of society second to those of self, establishing a particularly important priority for women given the nature of Victorian society's demands upon them" (29). This self-sufficiency, moreover, bestows upon Brontë's heroines the self-

³⁷ Bertha, of course, is imprisoned in the attic at Thornfield, but it seems an overreading, as in Gilbert and Gubar (359-360), to connect her to Jane. No character, especially Jane, invested by the text with any moral authority seeks to mitigate Bertha's conduct.

³⁸ Carlisle points out that Dickens also makes use of this trope in *David Copperfield* ("Face in the Mirror" 283).

confidence and maturity to envision a new society into which they can enter with satisfaction, to enter into relationships that, though not socially sanctioned, are deeply fulfilling. They will never join traditional high society--even if they were admitted to it, they would refuse the company of such vapid treasure hunters as Blanche Ingram and Ginevra Fanshawe, who come to represent for Brontë the monied classes. But Jane and Lucy will, ultimately, find kindred spirits who do not, to a large degree, accept what mainstream society defines as valuable in a companion. They will, that is, construct viable alternatives to traditional society. Jane's outsider status allows her to enter into a real sisterhood with her cousins and a marriage of true minds with Rochester; she can see through the hypocrisy of such people as Brocklehurst and the Ingrams because she is not *allowed* to depend on them. Lucy, similarly, becomes a respected head mistress with far more rewarding students than those at Madame Beck's and wins the love of M. Paul, who, like Rochester with regard to Jane, acknowledges her intellectual equality, because neither Ginevra Fanshawe nor John Bretton will give her the true friendship she desperately needs. At Ferndean and at the school M. Paul has procured, Jane and Lucy are rewarded with the bonds they have forged, with communities that transcend the narrow, debilitating limits that society has placed upon them. Mainstream society would still, to a degree, marginalize them, as they have refused to play the roles it demands, but the love of Rochester and Paul has provided both a bond and a self-validation that are sustaining. Isolation is thus required to mold a stronger self, since, according to Brontë, only in isolation can an individual truly

understand the value of his or her identity, though the inherent obstacles to doing so are thoroughly delineated. Discussing the enormous social difficulties Jane faces before reaching Ferndean, Margaret Blom writes, "*Jane Eyre* traces an individual's desperate struggle against almost insuperable odds to establish and maintain a sense of her own identity and to satisfy the deepest needs of her nature" (87), but it is precisely those odds which enable Jane and Lucy to fully realize their identities. Without these odds, Brontë's novels suggest, they would have become superficial like the popular Georgiana or repressed like the nun Eliza, since an easy confidence would have precluded the need to question their surroundings or beliefs. Therefore, Brontë is, in a sense, Modern without Modernism's anxiety, for though she describes a world of outcasts who can lose sight of their sense of selves, her heroines develop spiritually and emotionally *because* they are outcast. The danger of a lasting self-alienation is surmounted since these characters respond to their social exclusion by embracing their own rebellious authenticity. But Brontë contributes greatly to the eventual full flowering of Modernism's alienated solitaires by showing that established institutions are constraining, if not actively malevolent, and that for many, isolation constitutes a fundamental condition.

CHAPTER 4

CHARLES DICKENS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION:
GREAT EXPECTATIONS AND OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

In an era of socially minded writers and novels, Charles Dickens and his works are perhaps the most socially conscious of all. It is difficult to tell whether his activism and charitable endeavors--most famously his tireless advocacy of educational reforms and his administration of a home for former prostitutes (Kaplan 146-49, 228-29)--were adjuncts of his fiction or vice versa. But while such activities would suggest that Dickens adhered to the typical Victorian faith in progress and justice, one striking aspect of his fiction is an increasing despair as to the possibility of a stable, integrated society. Dickens's career, in a way, acts as a paradigm for this entire study: as in the Victorian age as a whole, in Dickens's works a developing impression that the world has become too fractured, too chaotic leads to an ever-increasing sense of dislocation and alienation. As Donald Stone puts it: "By the time of *Our Mutual Friend* . . . a happy love-filled household had come to seem as rare and wonderful and unreal as something out of a fairy-tale" (278).

Why this is so is not totally clear, though one can theorize. Certainly Dickens came to be disillusioned about the power of reform efforts to make tangible improvements on the lives of the dispossessed, as his discussion of the Poor Law in the postscript to *Our Mutual Friend* reveals:

I believe there has been in England, since the days of the STUARTS, no law so often infamously administered,

no law so often openly violated, no law habitually so ill-supervised. In the majority of the shameful cases of disease and death from destitution, that shock the Public and disgrace the country, the illegality is quite equal to the inhumanity--and known language could say no more of their lawlessness. (894).

Efforts made by Dickens himself also failed. Kaplan notes, for instance, that his work in 1855 with the Administrative Reform Association to support a Parliamentary notion acknowledging the government's culpability in the grim condition of the country was soundly defeated (331). Shortly before, the inefficacy of his efforts to expand the charitable activities of the Royal Literary Fund led to his angry resignation from the fund's committee (332).

In addition, the 1850's and 60's, the period shortly before and during the composition of his last two completed novels, saw the publication of several important scientific and sociological works that shook Victorian society to its core. In 1864, Spencer published *The Principles of Biology*, in which, Hugh Elliot writes, he coined the term "survival of the fittest" (262). Richard D. Altick writes that he used the term as early as 1852 (though he does not say where), and notes that Spencer was, in his day, highly respected (232). Dickens most likely knew of the theory of natural selection; as Ackroyd points out, Dickens reviewed, in 1851, *Social Statics* (657), which discusses ideas central to natural selection as they relate to class and the Poor Law. Though Spencer here is rather optimistic about the perfectability of man (64-65), his argument about the poor rests on an analogy to hunter and prey in the natural world (322 passim). Thus, even if

Dickens did not know this famous phrase, the ideas of the anachronistically named Social Darwinists were well-known to him. He also owned Darwin's *Origin of Species* and Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (an earlier work). He was, almost assuredly, influenced by the ideas contained in these radical works.

His personal life was also shaken in this period. The final collapse of his marriage in 1858 and the deaths of numerous close friends and important acquaintances in the very late 1850's and early 1860's led him to write, "What a great cemetery one walks through after forty" (qtd. in Kaplan 456). His son Walter was also soon to die, and we might surmise that his increasing gloom played a part in the late novels' developing pessimism.

But whatever the reasons, the shift is in the texts. Peter Garrett, taking a popular stance in Dickens studies, writes, "Dickens' plots repeatedly find surrogate families and happy endings for his isolated protagonists, and the intricate networks of connections between plot lines that he reveals can be seen as enlarged projections of the same desire to reestablish relations that define identity" (222). However, especially with regard to the later novels, "desire" is the key word, for many characters only desire, but never achieve, these connections. In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens's last completed novel, the happy ending seems wholly a projection of wish-fulfillment and not the finale of a clear-eyed social examination.

The very social structures that should rescue the isolated are, for Dickens, the villain of the piece. As Murray Baumgarten writes, "For what happens here is 'Nobody's Fault,' the original title Dickens

had thought to use for *Little Dorrit*--that is, the pervasive mystery that insinuates itself into all personal relationships . . . has no discrete cause but is rather the expression of a social and cultural system in which particular events are embedded" (13-14). Mario Praz criticizes Dickens for being "wholly external" (187), but this is part of Dickens's point: especially in the later novels, what damages, what isolates is often not the product of a diseased mind, but the result of social forces and pressures that obfuscate real truth and value and that encourage separation. It is notable that wholly evil, unredeemable characters such as Murdstone largely disappear from the later novels. The later villains are ambiguous: even Orlick has a justified complaint against Pip for getting him fired, and Headstone is right to assert that he is a victim of class prejudice and snobbery. Social conditions lead to isolation, to crime, and to violence.

Dickens echoes many of Charlotte Brontë's concerns in his examination of the Victorian family, class feelings, economic conditions, gender, and religion as elements in the decay of society. All of these factors lead to isolation and disruption, and the move towards Modernism which begins somewhat tentatively in Brontë is accelerated in Dickens: while isolation for Brontë was ultimately educational, for Dickens, especially in the later novels, it can be severely debilitating. In the Dickensian world, isolation is a sometimes fatal obstacle to development, as the individual is handicapped by a lack of spiritual guidance, real friendship, and financial stability and by societal definitions that discourage attempts to construct meaningful, fulfilling lives.

Like Brontë's protagonists, many of Dickens's are born on the margins of society. J. Hillis Miller notes: "Each becomes aware of himself as isolated from all that is outside of himself. . . . The world appears to him as cold and unfriendly, as a 'wilderness' or a 'graveyard'" (*Charles Dickens* 251). Dickens's characters are modern to the degree that they exist in a chaotic world that is often, as I shall show later, physically and spiritually isolating. The protagonists, especially of the late novels, come to question the traditional values that govern their society, come to doubt the power of a benign, governing force, come to doubt the very rightness of existence.

Class issues are integral to the development of this doubt. These have, of course, received widespread coverage in Dickens criticism, but what is important here, and what is often not highlighted, is that tensions between classes not only exacerbate misery and call into question previously accepted economic assumptions, but also lead to the isolation of the members of each class from their own peers.

There are several issues that complicate Dickens' treatment of this topic. The first, which Altick calls "the great phenomenon of nineteenth-century social history" (27), is the rise from below of the middle classes, which accelerated greatly after 1850 (Thomson 100); Dickens's career coincided with this movement's first peak. Attracted to the new opportunities to earn some of the wealth which was flowing into England at ever-increasing rates, many members of the poorer classes were able--at least to try--to escape the squalor of poverty, experienced at least briefly by Dickens himself during his youthful work at the blacking factory. Dickens's progenitors

prefigure this upward movement: his father, a clerk, was the son of a steward and a servant (Kaplan 20). But as Dickens knew too well, from the periodic unsettling moves and financial duress his family underwent, attempts to change class were usually fraught with difficulty and more often than not created sharp discontinuities in the lives of those trying to rise: even if they were successful, they were often alienated from their original community without first being accepted by their new. The ambiguities inherent in such a journey are reflected in his most famous fictional parvenu, Pip.

Pip has often been called a snob,¹ but to view his story as a merely a snob's reformation would be an oversimplification. While snobbery certainly becomes an important part of his make-up, his rejection of his home is understandable for several reasons. For one, his life at the forge is hardly rewarding. Dianne F. Sadoff writes, "Pip apparently should but cannot accept his apprenticeship at the forge" (50), but Pip does not really belong there. In addition to the personal abuse he suffers, he is too intelligent to live what Dickens perceives to be the mundane, unimaginative life of a smith. Tellingly, the "larks" Joe continually promises never materialize, emphasizing the lack of stimulation in this life. Pip's intellectual superiority is clear even at a young age, not only from his quickly outstripping Joe in school, but also from his speech patterns, which are more complicated and grammatical than Joe's, and from his inherent curiosity, apparent in his repeated questioning of his sister and Joe concerning convicts. The rest of the village, filled with the

¹ See, for instance, Angus Calder (20), and John Kucich (242).

pompous and the crass, provides no stimulation either. Pip must search for more fulfilling pursuits.

The forge also provides the barest of sustenance--the dogs that Pip invents in his lies about his visit to Satis House eat far better than do Pip and the Gargerys. Before Pip begins to distance himself from his family, the reader already comes to see his guardians' inability to provide an adequate subsistence as symbolic of the abuse he suffers at the hands of his sister, as the bread laden with pins indicates. He could not but have felt dissatisfied even without great expectations--his discontent is clear before Jaggers's announcement of his impending fortune. Thus, while Pip is not welcome at Satis House in the way he thinks he is, and while his only real friend as a youngster is Joe, it is no wonder that Pip can convince himself that Satis House and its inhabitants are attractive: they represent an escape from the crude, violent, monotonous life of the laborer.

Moreover, even if Pip is a snob, he learns to desire status from the very people he rejects, which further mitigates criticism of him. The value system of the village inhabitants teaches him this, as their ready approval of Pip's fantastic description of the mansion and their considerable excitement concerning his expectations show; they certainly approve of his leaving to find his fortune. Although Pip's condescension towards and rejection of Joe are ugly, they are not outrageous: they have been prepared by all of his surrounding circumstances, which include the fawning sycophant Pumblechook.

But whether or not we empathize with Pip at this point, we can clearly see how his growing class consciousness increases his sense of alienation from the village, a movement from shame to scorn. At

first, Pip is merely ashamed of himself and his origins, as we see in his confusion over the names of playing cards--"I determined to ask Joe why he had ever taught me to call those picture-cards, Jacks, which ought to be called knaves. I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too" (92)--and in his desire that Miss Havisham and Estella never see his home, as it is "coarse and common" (134), a phrase he will repeat to Biddy to describe himself (155). But the shame develops into scorn--his wish about Joe also hints at animosity--as he distances himself from his origins and decreasingly feels a part of Joe's world. Both feelings are evident in his refusal to have a farewell party at the local tavern: "That's just what I don't want, Joe. They would make such a business of it--such a coarse and common business--that I couldn't bear myself" (171). We notice the displacement of the phrase "coarse and common" from Pip to the villagers; he couldn't bear *himself* if he were identified with them. He then tries to convince Biddy that Joe is "backward . . . in his learning and his manners" (175). He will also later walk miles out of his way into the country to avoid meeting Pumblechook. This has two purposes: simply to avoid his company, and to prevent Jaggers from seeing Pip with him. He is partly fearful that his own origin will be viewed as that of a bumpkin, but he is again putting distance, this time quite literally, between himself and his kin. His somewhat derisive nickname for Wopsle, "the celebrated *provincial* amateur of Roscian renown" (273, emphasis added) and the delight Pip takes in his humiliation by the somewhat more sophisticated city audience further reveal his developing scorn for the villagers.

And, of course, Pip reacts with disgust to Magwitch, who in a very real sense is a part of his origin. The attitude exposed in his responses to the returned transport--"He ate in a ravenous way that was very disagreeable, and all his actions were uncouth, noisy, and greedy. . . . he looked terribly like a hungry old dog. If I had begun with an appetite, he would have taken it away . . . repelled from him by an insurmountable aversion" (346)--is of a kind with those of Veneering and Podsnap; as Philip Collins points out, Pip describing Newgate sounds much like Bounderby (*Crime* 17).² This is Pip at his worst, but his reaction arises more from his social conditioning than from internal malice, as his later guilt helps to reveal.

Class feelings also affect Pip's romantic life, separating him from Biddy, the Agnes of this novel, the woman he seems destined for: "She was not beautiful--she was common, and could not be like Estella" (152). His problematic choice of love object (and I use that last word advisedly), and thus his eventual isolation, is the result not of sexual desire alone, but also of a need to construct an image of himself as deserving of the most prized possession. To resolve their dilemmas, Dickens's characters need to build relationships; E. M. Forster's phrase "Only connect . . . " would be apt here. But Dickens

² Pip also famously refers to *Frankenstein*, seeing himself as the "imaginary student pursued by the misshapen creature he had impiously made" (354), with Magwitch as the beast. But Pip has it wrong: Magwitch has created Pip by making him a gentleman.

also understands that the tensions underlying the struggle for social advancement ironically unhinge real social ties.³

All of the bonds, existing or desired, that Pip deals with are problematized by class feelings. The lower-class world was never very kind to Pip to begin with, and after he rejects it, he finds that the upper-class world does not want him either. J. Hillis Miller claims that Pip always remains a creature of the village: "However far he apparently travels from his origin he will still be akin to the mud and briars of the marshes and to the terrible man he met there on the day he became aware of himself as Pip" (*Charles Dickens* 271). But Pip does become educated, he does escape the forge and the "meshes," which Joe certainly cannot: "I'm wrong in these clothes," the latter declares. "I'm wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th' meshes. You won't find half so much fault in me if you think of me in my forge dress, with my hammer in my hand, or even my pipe" (246). Pip is right to assert that he cannot return. His dilemma, however, is that escaping one class does not guarantee entry into another. He rejects the lower class, but in rejecting Magwitch he must also reject any entry into the upper, as he no longer receives Magwitch's money. Thus, having already cut his ties to the village only to realize his failure as a gentleman and the necessity of parting from Herbert, Pip writes, "And now indeed I felt as if my last anchor were loosening its hold, and I should soon be driving with the wind and the waves" (427-28).

³ Social relations, Pip notes, would have made Jaggers much more human (311), but the lawyer would never have succeeded in his profession by being friendly.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens goes one step further: here one cannot even choose between classes, for no class coheres at all. In Dickens's most pessimistic examination of social interaction, members of every apparent community turn on each other in times of distress. The economic troubles which afflict members of the lower class, represented in this novel by characters such as the Hexams and the Riderhoods, create a vicious society where the struggle for financial independence leads to robbery, false accusations of murder, and banishment. Rogue's slanderous claim that Gaffer killed the corpse he supposedly found seems wholly unjustified, except for hints that this would not be the first time such a crime has occurred: Lizzie, in fact, suspects Rogue in this crime, even before he accuses her father (112); and whether or not Gaffer has killed his ostensible find, his spurious morality concerning taking valuables off corpses indicates that this is a world in which, for many, all is considered fair in the pursuit of financial stability, in which crime is rampant and people are concerned only for their own welfare. As the narrator comments, "Gaffer was no neophyte and had no fancies" (47), a claim soon borne out by Lizzie. In a scene that echoes the delicate legal circumlocution between Jaggers and Pip concerning "Provis's" communication with Pip, Lightwood insinuates that Gaffer has stolen items from the body: "Only papers on the unfortunate man, I see," to which Gaffer responds, "Only papers." Lizzie immediately "arose with her work in her hand, and went out at the door" (64). This is no arbitrary detail; Lizzie knows what is being hinted at, that her father has in fact been stealing. At best, Gaffer is a thief and Rogue is the most vicious of slanderers; at worst, Gaffer is a murderer. And the truth, when we

learn it, comes not to matter greatly. The accepted facts about crime in this community shed an ugly light on everyone. The crux is that this is not a helpful, sharing community. The truth about lower-class life, Dickens claims, as Gissing later will, is that, to paraphrase Spencer, only the fittest survive.

But in this novel, the upper class are no better. What Dickens calls "The Voice of Society" turns inward to comment on the hollowness of its own apparent bonds. The Veneerings readily cast off the Lammles when their own veneer is discovered and cut Eugene when he marries, in Lady Tippins's phrase, "a horrid female waterman": "such a ridiculous affair is condemned by the voice of Society. My dear Mrs Veneering, do let us resolve ourselves into a Committee of the whole House on the subject" (888). The latter sentence, in its use of parliamentary terminology, sounds particularly ominous as we have just learned that Veneering himself will soon be banished from the House of Commons, and then

It shall likewise come to pass . . . that Society will discover that it always did despise Veneering, and distrust Veneering, and that when it went to Veneering's to dinner it always had misgivings--though very secretly at the time, it would seem, and in a perfectly private and confidential manner. (887)

Society's coldness is matched only by its hypocrisy. Dickens is not very specific about why and how the Veneerings will be disgraced, but he does not have to be: the clear implication is that this is a normal event, one that has been and will be repeated many times over. The upper class, like the lower, does not take care of its own.

As if to stress the economic distance between the upper and lower classes, there is not much of a middle class in this novel; in fact it mostly consists of outcasts from the other two groups: poor people trying, though not succeeding, to rise (Charley and Headstone, who are hardly the picture of Victorian progress and upward mobility), and people who are really on the outer fringes of the upper class (Mortimer and Eugene). And if we try to classify these characters together, we see how quickly any construction falls to pieces. This might be how Dickens indicates how the nineteenth-century middle class was no single, coherent unit, but a multi-layered structure with its own complex hierarchy; it at least shows how difficult it is to find a stable community. Their violent interactions, in any case, reveal how little any middle class might cohere. Headstone, for instance, commits two of the worst crimes in the novel: he attempts to murder Eugene and, in poetic justice to the false accuser Rogue, tries to frame the lock keeper. Charley, meanwhile, is a much more unsympathetic Pip, rejecting the one person, his sister, who has actually helped him rise and threatening her with violence (343). He seems, in fact, a combination of Pip and Orlick. He is also ashamed of his sister's living with Jenny: "I don't see what you have to do with her, for all that" (277).

Eugene, and, to an extent, Mortimer, pointedly do not identify with their poorer counterparts, and Eugene's snobbery seems much nastier than Pip's, perhaps largely because our reaction to Pip's is at

least partially mitigated by his guilt and his disadvantaging origins.⁴ He must nearly drown to be rid of it. Even after Eugene is rescued, Mortimer worries that this class feeling remains: "And yet, are you sure that you might not feel (for her sake, I say for her sake) any slight coldness towards her on the part of--Society?" (884).

Headstone is right to complain about Eugene's treatment; Eugene almost makes him sympathetic.

Dickens shows that while the poor are justified in trying to rise, they have little or no chance of succeeding, as the dubious justice that is administered to the poor helps to demonstrate (365). The distance between the two classes--which Lizzie recognizes (760), and which almost prevents her marriage--is vast. When Eugene asks Lizzie if she would reject him if they were from the same social class, she responds, "How can I tell you what I should have done, if you had not been what you are?" (762). She cannot even fathom their joining. Dickens has already demonstrated this distance with Joe's inability to talk directly to Miss Havisham; he can only do so through the middleman Pip, appropriately enough, since Pip travels the middle-class road between the poor and the rich, while belonging to neither.

Making a claim for a unified community, Hillis Miller writes, "The characters in *Our Mutual Friend* know about the other characters, even those existing in very different levels of society" (*Charles Dickens* 287). However, "about" is crucial, because they do

⁴ Pip's haughty complaints about Orlick and Trabb's boy to their employers, do, however, hint at the cold disdain of a higher class for a lower.

not truly know each other in any meaningful sense; their connections are superficial at best. In fact, Society knows of the poor only as sensational gossip, a highly amusing dinner story, a news item, brought to their attention by the lawyer Mortimer, who would naturally have access to such a story. High Society's knowledge of the Harmon affair, then, is hardly indicative of a communal feeling. When Society is confronted with a real bridging of the gap between the rich and the poor, such as its attention being drawn, over dinner, to "the circumstance that some half-dozen people had lately died in the streets, of starvation," it recoils in horror; such a connection is not, as Podsnap angrily declares, "in good taste" (187).⁵

With most characters doomed to remain where they are, the effects of poverty become even more ominous. The physical problems caused by the inadequacies of the Poor Law, which Dickens had begun to explore as early as *Oliver Twist*, are well documented--Walter E. Houghton, for instance, calls the poorhouses "bastilles" (57). The emotional effects of this law were just as harrowing. To rely on what relief the law afforded, notes Altick, was to commit the great Victorian sin: "Entering the workhouse branded one a failure, because supposedly only the 'idle,' a damning word in the Victorian social vocabulary, sought that last refuge; the industrious poor somehow managed to cope--or were expected to" (124). This attitude--first seen in Dickens in the beadle Mr Bumble--justified a

⁵ The inability of the rich to connect with the poor is further emphasized by Mrs Veneering's class-hedged acknowledgement that Bella "was really pretty, and (considering her station) presentable" (181).

confrontational situation within the institutions of charity, and Thomson notes "the resentment of the honest working classes against the new tendency of petty officials to browbeat and tyrannize over them under the excuse of 'administering' them" (71). In addition, as Altick notes, "the workhouse required separation of the sexes. A condition of the meager succor it afforded was the breakup of the family" (123-24). The poorhouse, as a result, was often spurned by those who needed it, a dilemma illustrated in Dickens's writing by Betty Higden's "horror of falling into the hands of Charity" (569), as if Charity were some criminal gang.

As Altick notes of the historical English poor, Dickens's fictional poor must try to survive on their own, for the wealthy are not going to help. The narrator notes of Eugene's reaction to Jenny: "He was sorry, but his sympathy did not move his carelessness to do anything but feel sorry" (596). Jenny survives, but others do not. Johnny, a later version of *Bleak House's* Jo, as the similarity in names suggests, is one victim. The description of his death points to Dickens's increasing despair of a solution: "Having now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny . . . left it" (386). This scene hardly seems to have come from the same pen which wrote the death of Little Nell--even Oscar Wilde could not laugh at this. What shocks us is the matter-of-fact presentation: apparently this is not an unusual occurrence, and even the quondam sentimental Dickensian narrator is not shocked. We do not have to go back as far as Nell to recognize Dickens's new grim hardness: contrast Johnny's death with the description of Jo's:

The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead!

Dead, your Majesty. Dead my lords and gentlemen.
 Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every
 order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly
 compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us
 every day. (705)

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens drops the rhetorical flourishes, which have come to seem heavy-handed ("Wrong Reverends"), as if the poors' dying thus around us every day is far too obvious to require articulation.

The frequency of this occurrence is made clear by Betty, who, having already sent her ward Sloppy away from her, as if poor families are better off broken (440), makes her solitary journey to die. Dickens here shows, as has Brontë, that the effects of poverty are not only painful and demeaning, but isolating as well. In what seems like another version of Jane Eyre's wandering on the moors, rejected by the cottagers, the narrator contrasts Betty with the rich:

Those gentlefolks and their children inside those fine houses, could they think, as they looked out at her, what it was to be really hungry, really cold? Did they feel any of the wonder about her, that she felt about them? Bless the dear laughing children! If they could have seen sick Johnny in her arms, would they have cried for pity? If they could have seen dead Johnny on that little bed, would they have understood it? (567)

The narrator stresses the utter separateness of the wealthy and the poor, as he implies that even if presented with the facts of Betty's case, the wealthy would not grasp its meaning. Here, unlike in *Jane*

Eyre, there is no Rivers family, only the River Thames, tempting Betty to end her suffering by suicide: "Come to me, come to me!"⁶ Here there is no rescue.

In an economy based partly on arbitrarily valuable paper--the narrator sarcastically comments of the Veneerings, "Have no antecedents, no established character, no cultivation, no ideas, no manners; have shares. . . . Sufficient answer to all; Shares. O mighty Shares!" (160)--and partly on waste,⁷ in a world where the only way for some to escape despair is obliteration, where the institutions of relief are penal,⁸ where the goal of the rising class is to enter Satis House and the Veneerings', the alienation from society of its most feeling, intelligent members becomes inevitable. Dickens had already shown that organizations such as trade unions (*Hard Times*) and the courts (*Bleak House*), as well as violent rebellion (*A Tale of Two Cities*) were no cure for social ills, but he can suggest no other

⁶ This echoes Jenny's earlier plaintive cry to Riah, "Come up and be dead! Come up and be dead!" (335), which Hillis Miller calls the most important scene in the novel (*Dickens* 314). It is a measure of Dickens's profound pessimism that he should repeatedly portray suicide as attractive. Betty has already expressed her relief at being old: "If I was young, it would all have to be gone through again, and the end would be a weary way off" (439).

⁷ Michael Peled Ginsburg (179) and Kucich (225) read the dust mounds much more optimistically, seeing in them the ability to create usable products out of refuse. But the mounds are the locus of greed and blackmail. An economy based on garbage cannot be viewed by Dickens as healthy. Surely "Golden Dust" is ironic.

⁸ Betty's experiences with the Deputy Parish guard, who extorts her little remaining money, are emblematic of how charitable organizations could prey on their purported beneficiaries.

remedies to take their place, since there seem to be none left. And the physical paralysis of the poor becomes emblematic of the spiritual paralysis of everyone else. This is perhaps most forcefully illustrated by Stephen Blackpool, whose sense of duty, as well as his repulsion from Slackbridge, prevents him from striking his factory to actively improve his condition. He finally lies broken and dying, helplessly repeating his resigned mantra: "Ah, Rachael, aw a muddle! Fro' first to last, a muddle!" (267). This widespread dysfunction leads Grahame Smith to ask, "Can we not detect in this authentic note of a specifically modern disorientation, the despair that cannot find at least some ease in the contemplation of an externally justified social or religious good?" (151).

As in Brontë and Shelley, the roles that Victorian society forced women to accept are shown in Dickens to be a handicap. The traditional view of Dickens, however, is that he embraced the Victorian ideals that restricted women. Mary Poovey, for instance, writes that Dickens participated in "the legitimation and depoliticization of capitalist market and class relations, that the definition (and defense) of the English writer's social role was intimately involved in both, and that stabilizing and mobilizing a particular image of woman, the domestic sphere, and woman's work were critical to all three" (*Uneven Developments* 89). Jenni Calder agrees, bluntly stating, "There is no doubt that Dickens' limited view of women's fulfillment seriously damaged his novels" (100). Such critics find that Dickens usually divides women into two types: the angel and the whore. But Basch's list of the latter (210)--her chapter

on Dickens, "Dickens's Sinners," appears under the rubric "Fallen Women"--unintentionally reveals the disappearance of this type in the late novels; none appears in the last four. The angel, too, will be debunked; in his last period, Dickens has begun to understand how damaging typical roles were for women.

Great Expectations, for instance, shows how Victorian ideals restrict and distort the women who are supposed to be society's saving grace. Estella and her tutor Miss Havisham symbolize one possible extreme of the disjointed family as the Victorians unwittingly shaped it. As Gail Turley Houston puts it, "[Estella] is the nightmare version of the Victorian female bred to have no desires, no appetites, trained to be desired and to be the object of appetite" (15). She has no ambition except to attract and disappoint the male, her sexuality is repressed, yet she is also supposed to have the capacity for passionate love. Dickens's insight is that the suppression of one emotion results in the distortion of many of them. Estella must become cold and calculating; she has nothing left. When her emotions are stripped, the angel in the house becomes alienated and frozen.

Pip contributes to such distortions by viewing Estella as an expectation, as property to be passed to him, as Bella later will actually be passed to John Harmon: Old Harmon's will essentially makes Bella a part of John's inheritance.⁹ This latter heroine more actively resists her role as "the acknowledged ornament of the

⁹ Charley repeats this by essentially presenting Lizzie as a gift to Headstone. This is, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, "the purest form of the male traffic in women" (167).

family" (84), her famous complaint, "I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house" (746), giving Ibsen a title, and contrasting to the earlier Ruth Pinch of *Martin Chuzzlewit*: "No doll's-house ever yielded greater delight to its young mistress, than little Ruth derived from her glorious dominion over the triangular parlour and the two small bedrooms" (513). But Bella too is dominated, as not only her status in Old Harmon's will¹⁰ but also her treatment by John demonstrates. As a number of critics have pointed out,¹¹ John's hiding of the truth from Bella resonates with the angel-in-the-house mentality. This is the same attitude that has already stifled Estella--another similarity in names exists here--as well as Louisa Gradgrind, another ornament of the Victorian family.¹² Dickens shows far too much of the damaging effects of this ideology to be seen as a proponent of it.

It is not true, as Stone claims, that "In the Dickensian woman's case, the exertion of will is always bad . . . and the passive role is held up as the most fulfilling" (281). Lizzie Hexam shows that strength in a woman can be attractive and completes Dickens's move away from praising female passivity. Though she seems at first,

¹⁰ Michael Slater notes, "Dickens shows her keenly alert to the way in which her peculiar situation, 'widowed' before even being married, exposes her to sexist humor" (282).

¹¹ See Richard Barickman, et al., 29; Margaret Flanders Darby, 27; Peter Garrett, 93; and Ginsburg, 182.

¹² Darby points out that Sophronia is also a victim of the separate sphere ideology (33-34); Barickman, et al. make a similar case for Mrs Joe, who has had a family thrust upon her (56).

through her protection of Charley, to be destined for the role of good wife-mother, she is no innocent, domestic creature, as is shown by her participation in Gaffer's work and her aforementioned knowledge of his thievery and suspicion of Rogue. Her rescue of Eugene demonstrates her strength and capacity for action. In *Great Expectations*, the hero in two ways loses the angel: neither Biddy, who marries Joe, nor Estella functions as the typical Victorian domestic icon. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the angel is also lost, but here this is so because she is transformed into a complete human being, and the reward is far more satisfactory. By the time the police inspector articulates the separate sphere theory to Bella (830-31), he has already been proven wrong by Lizzie. Dickens thus ultimately dismissed this stereotype as untenable. It is not surprising that to prove her point about Dickens's toeing the Victorian line, Poovey needed to use *David Copperfield*, a middle-period work.

Another way that Dickens shows the problems inherent in the separate gender roles of Victorian society is his depiction of domestic violence, a result of the unequal division of power in the home.¹³ Not only is spousal abuse common here, but those who perpetrate it are among the most sinister of his characters. Bentley Drummle beats Estella, Compeyson beat his wife, and Joe's father had beaten his wife. Alfred Lammle persuades Sophronia to be an accomplice in his plan in good part by hinting darkly at violence: "To wind up all:—

¹³ The relation of dominance to this situation can be seen in Mrs Joe, one of the few women to wield power in the home. She too is corrupted by unassailable authority. At first comic, she comes to represent real brutality.

You have shown temper today, Sophronia. Don't be betrayed into doing so again, because I have a Devil of a temper myself" (173). In addition, Orlick's menacing pursuit of Biddy, which resembles Drummle's of Estella, and, later, Headstone's of Lizzie, seems to be that of a stalker, perhaps of a rapist (159). Jaggers's characterization of Drummle seems to carry Dickens's authority: "A fellow like our friend the Spider . . . either beats or cringes. He may cringe and growl, or cringe and not growl; but he either beats or cringes" (402). The abusive, dominant male, related here to the coward, is a tyrant, as Georgiana Podsnap's instinctive fear of a sexual relationship would seem to indicate.

Thus, with his increasing understanding of the trauma of being trapped in a narrowly-defined role and with his increasingly grim portrayal of spousal relations, Dickens shows how Victorian women were abused and isolated, as Estella's exile to the continent with her husband--not to mention her imprisonment, Mariana-like, in *Satis House*--and Lizzie's hiding out at Jenny Wren's from Eugene demonstrate. Betrayed by what are supposed to be their supports, these women, like Brontë's, must work out their dilemmas alone to have any chance of happiness.

As we have begun to see, class/economic and gender issues can often wreak havoc on the Dickensian family, sending Pip away from his village and Charley away from his home, fostering resentment in Bella, and promoting violence in marital relations, to name just a few examples. Kevin McGlaughlin's reading of "the threat posed to the institution of the home by the radical disorder of official legal

institutions" as the crux of Dickens's novels (here he is discussing *Bleak House*) does not work for the later texts, nor does the claim that for Dickens, "As in economics and in politics, in novels the home is a source of definition and order" (876). For Dickens, as for Brontë, the family, which is supposed to constitute for the Victorians a safe haven from their harsh world,¹⁴ is inadequate to the task. While the realities of Victorian England gave Dickens ample evidence of the fragile nature of this supposedly stable structure, he needed to look no further than his own family: his own unhappy marriage disintegrated amidst a very public sexual scandal. But his mistrust of this institution arose even earlier. Not only did Dickens resent his parents' inability to provide sufficient financial support, he never forgave them, especially his mother, for forcing him to work at Warren's Blacking while his sister was put through school. At least as a child, he did not benefit from Victorian gender roles. And as an adult, he had to support his parents, who never learned how to live within their means.¹⁵ This lack of an adequate parental role model led Dickens, as Kaplan notes, to picture himself as an orphan (252).

¹⁴ Wemmick's Castle, with its fortifications of moat and cannon, indicates the urgency for Dickens of a retreat from the outside world. Ruth M. Vande Kieft claims that the Aged P. "reaches warmly to the outside world" (332), but his physical isolation, through what is essentially incarceration in the Castle and through his deafness, prevents him from any real communication, as his inappropriate answers to nearly every comment or question directed at him indicate. The consequences of the contradictory needs both for haven and for integration are neatly embodied in Wemmick's home.

¹⁵ Stone cites this as the source for "the children in his fiction who become fathers to their childlike parents" (268).

Commenting on the "theme of orphanhood," Nina Auerbach notes "all the dread it held for [Dickens] and his age" (*Romantic Imprisonment* 74). Robert M. Polhemus writes that *Great Expectations*, "like *Villette* and so many other nineteenth-century novels, seems to grow out of--and to express--an era of orphanhood" (139); Dickens does more than any other writer to construct this image. The sheer number of orphans and near-orphans in his novels is overwhelming. In *Great Expectations*, Pip, Estella, Biddy, Mrs Joe, and Magwitch have lost both of their parents, Wemmick and Clara their mothers (and Bill Barley will die before the novel's end). In *Our Mutual Friend*, John Harmon and Charley Hexam are cast out and disinherited by their remaining parents, both of whom die during the novel; Lizzie Hexam, Jenny Wren, and Pleasant Riderhood also begin the novel with only one parent and end it with none; and even minor characters such as Johnny, Sloppy, and Sophronia are pointedly made orphans. In addition, both Mortimer and Eugene have strained relations with their fathers. And this is not to mention the siblings lost throughout both novels.

Nearly all the families in these novels, then, are partial, fractured, and what we see of them is usually ugly. Pip's childhood household is, of course, very abusive. To name just one of many revealing images, instead of receiving milk from the mother's breast, Pip receives mouthfuls of needles (42). Barbara Hardy writes that "the Gargery household is treated with comedy rather than with the harsh violence which is the medium for the Murdstones" (*Moral Art* 149), but this is true only at first. Tickler, for instance, is treated lightly, as is Mrs Joe's method of preparing dinner, but most likely

because at this point Pip does not know any better. As Pip becomes aware of other household situations and realizes the grimness of his own--after he visits Satis House for the first time--humor no longer softens the violence: "And I soon found myself getting heavily bumped from behind in the nape of the neck and the small of my back, and having my face ignominiously shoved against the kitchen wall, because I did not answer those questions at sufficient length" (95). We begin to feel guilty for laughing at the Tickler and bread-and-butter episodes. Dickens seems to be disavowing his earlier treatment of this theme; its full seriousness is acknowledged. With hindsight, Pip comments, "I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me" (92). His earlier narrative tone seems to belie this, yet even if his claim is false, it *should* be true; we seem to have here Dickens's own voice atoning for his previous comic style. With Pip, we begin to refuse to condone such behavior from the mother-surrogate. When grilled by Pumblechook about his visit to Satis House, Pip comments, referring to a just-received beating: "Whitewash on the forehead hardens the brain into a state of obstinacy perhaps. Anyhow, with whitewash from the wall on my forehead, my obstinacy was adamant" (95). His resentment, we begin to realize, is justified.

With regards to the family, as with regards to class issues, emotional abuse is just as damaging as physical abuse. Pip is made to feel a burden, a barrier to happiness in his own home. As in *Jane Eyre*, the psychological injuries by the mother-surrogate begin almost immediately: "It's bad enough to be a blacksmith's wife (and

him a Gargery) without being your mother" (41). Mrs Joe threatens Pip with imprisonment in the Hulks (46),¹⁶ and Pumblechook, whom Pip is forbidden to call "uncle," as he urges us to note well (55), equates Pip with a swine (58). Later when the sergeant asks, "Anyone here seen anything of [the escaped convicts]," Pip comments, "Everyone, myself excepted, said no, with confidence. Nobody thought of me" (63). This exception is partly due to his youth, but this incident parallels other exclusions. Dickens makes clear to the reader that Pip's intelligence is undervalued, no matter his age. In this house, apparently, Pip is not "anybody," and his description of himself as a baby as a "bundle of shivers" (36), rather than the more common "bundle of joy," is appropriate. His lukewarm reaction to Mrs Joe's death (297), which, in another unsentimental turn, indicates a great emotional distance from his sister, is appropriate.

To further exacerbate his problems in this house, Pip's father figure, Joe, is impotent and unprotective. To be sure, he is a figure of

¹⁶ We see here why Pip begins to identify with criminals. More generally, as Ian Ousby puts it, "Dickens is . . . the most striking . . . example" of writers who "made the criminal a dangerously sympathetic and glamorous figure" (81). Throughout the novel, though more notably at the beginning, Pip is made to feel like a prisoner, as Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe were before him. John Harmon and Lizzie Hexam, as well, in their maintaining hideouts and secret identities, are forced by circumstances to adopt an almost criminal mentality. Magwitch, of course, actually commits crimes as a result, the novel insists, of his mistreatment and abandonment, as Gissing's forger Bob Hewett later will. These episodes reflect, as Collins points out, Dickens's belief that better conditions for the poor, such as housing and education, would reduce crime (*Crime* 9).

morality,¹⁷ whom Pip begins to admire when Joe explains his reasons for not defending himself and Pip against Mrs Joe's attacks (76) and whose concern for Pip resonates later in Pip's reformation. But more urgently for the young Pip, Joe cannot prevent him from being beaten, and he does not have the capacity to devise a compromise between defending his young charge and repeating his own family's violence; one wonders why he could not stop the attacks without being abusive himself. His solution is too simplistic, too one-sided. There is no one to save Pip from his environment.

And as I have noted before, Pip's situation is not unique. The orphaned Biddy, too, has been brought up "by hand" (74), and Estella is raised as a tool, a feelingless weapon of revenge. Her disassociation, her lack of warmth and emotion are the only possible outcome of her domestic surroundings. Tellingly, when Pip asks Herbert what relation Estella is to Miss Havisham, Herbert's response is, "*None*, only adopted" (200, emphasis added). Clara's father is an abusive drunk, hence the last name Barley; Clara will be "happily provided for" only as soon as he is dead and silent (428). And the closest figure to a guardian for Magwitch is the distinctly un-fatherly Compeyson.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, similar partial families create for their children unhealthy, isolating situations. Proposed arranged marriages reveal the dysfunctions of the Harmon family: Old Harmon's daughter dies after living in poverty imposed by her father, since she would not marry her father's choice, and John

¹⁷ His best advice, however--not to lie--is shown to be inappropriate at a climactic event: Magwitch's death.

Harmon lives abroad for many years in reduced circumstances due to his father's tyranny. He, too, must marry his father's choice to inherit, as the father's domination continues even after his death. Charley, often beaten (72), is banished by his father for wanting to improve himself. Jenny, though a child, must act as a mother to her drunken father--he is so embarrassing to her that she would rather deny his paternity; his lack of support leaves her an ill, rather odd creature, almost a freak. Dickens, thoroughly completing his paradigm, even mentions that the mother of the pot-boy at Abby's pub, a very minor character, "had systematically accelerated his retirement to rest with a poker" (114). The estrangement of Mortimer and Eugene from their fathers has already been mentioned. We should notice as well that the violence of one generation gets passed to the next, as we see in Charley's threats to Lizzie (343) and Jenny's disturbingly violent threats--made credible by her later assault on Fledgeby--of what she would do to a drunken husband (294). Her rubbing pepper in Fledgeby's wounds is deserved, but very ominous. Even violence is now permissible when committed for a moral reason, something unthinkable even in a novel as late as *Bleak House*.

The absence of a mother for Lizzie is symbolic of the general lack of guidance, love, and provision throughout the novel. It is a theme introduced in the very first chapter, where Gaffer represents the river as mother figure. He asks Lizzie:

How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie?
The very fire that warmed you when you were a
babby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal

barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another. (45-46)

But he has also just fished a corpse from this river. If the river functions as mother, it also functions as burial ground. As in *Frankenstein*, creation and grave-robbing share the same venue.¹⁸ While Gaffer views the river as a baptismal fount, it is also a grim charnel-house that inters numerous unfortunates throughout the novel.¹⁹

Variations on the theme of the problematic family are, in Dickens, almost endless, and they continue even with the few intact families. The Pockets, for instance, have an eccentric father somewhat like Mr Micawber, who is barely able to provide for his children. His inadequacy manifests itself in his bearing: "Mr Pocket was a gentleman with a rather perplexed expression of face, and with his very grey hair disordered on his head, as if he didn't quite see his way to putting anything straight" (211). Mrs Pocket, meanwhile, is too concerned with the "invented" injustice of not being a baronet's daughter to worry about her children's welfare (212). Thus, "Mr and Mrs Pocket's children were not growing up or

¹⁸ In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens has already portrayed a character, Jerry Cruncher, whose renunciation of earning money from the dead is an important part of his moral reformation.

¹⁹ Some critics, on the other hand, view the river as a way to resurrection. See for, instance, Michael G. Miller (36) and J. Hillis Miller (*Charles Dickens* 323).

being brought up, but were tumbling up" (209). This is somewhat comic, but what we have already seen of Pip's upbringing dampens the humor.

A later version of this family, the Wilfers, takes us further from the realm of comedy. Bella must be taught a lesson and return home, but she is right to complain that her mother is cold, haughty, and pompous and that her father is weak and unprotective; like Jenny, Bella seems to take care of her father more than vice versa. The Boffins, at least, provide a loving household, but this only serves to highlight more sharply the divisions in the Wilfers' household, most clearly delineated in Mrs and R. Wilfer's open regrets about marrying (371, 516-17). The unpleasantness of the Wilfers' marriage is so extreme that it leads the children to wish the union had never occurred (509). Later on John (880) and even the infant Harmon (825) recognize the ugliness of Mrs Wilfer, displaying even further the disharmony of this family unit. Bella's quick adjustment to the Boffins' home is not surprising. A key scene occurs when Bella, somewhat homesick, returns home from the Boffins for a short visit. Her haughty reaction to the impoverished surroundings is criticized, but her family bears the brunt of the blame. The fact that she meets with "Gloomy majesty on the part of Mrs Wilfer, and native pertness on the part of Lavinia, did not mend the matter. Bella really stood in natural need of a little help, and she got none" (365). She may be spoiled, but the blame rests with her parents, who have failed her. Moreover, the Wilfer's situation is perceived as fairly common. This generality is articulated by Pleasant Riderhood:

if she saw "a Wedding in the street . . . she only saw two people taking out a license to quarrel and fight" (407).

Other intact but unhappy families include Joe Gargery's parents, the paradigm of the violent household; the Compeysons, another example of domestic brutality; the Podsnaps, who are blind to the schemers besetting their daughter and who are inculcating her with morals that Dickens surely finds reprehensible; and the Fledgebys, who married to settle a financial debt, providing a very poor example to their son, Fascination. Sophronia has also married Alfred only to escape pecuniary circumstances (170). Jagger's cynical perception of children is grounded upon first-hand observation:

Put the case that he lived in an atmosphere of evil, and that all he saw of children, was, their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction. Put the case that he often saw children solemnly tried at a criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen; put the case that he habitually knew of their being imprisoned, whipped, transported, neglected, cast out, qualified in all ways for the hangman, and growing up to be hanged. Put the case that pretty nigh all the children he saw in his daily business life, he had reason to look upon as so much spawn, to develop into the fish that were to come to his net--to be prosecuted, defended, forsworn, made orphans, bedevilled somehow. (424-25)

While Jagger's outlook is conditioned by his own particular situation, his "business," it aptly conveys Dickens's concern with the way an

economy moving ever more briskly towards an individualist capitalism has, if not created, then greatly aggravated a grave societal failure, seen at least as early as *Oliver Twist*. Moreover, Jagers is describing the experience even of the children with homes. Jenni Calder writes, "Dickens' novels are full of badly organized, unhappy, unsatisfactory marriages, as well as destructive and cannibalistic ones" (118). This claim can be expanded to include entire families. The violence, anger, lack of affection, and instability that characterize Dickens's families drive their members out to fight alone for their own survival.

Like the family, religion is another Victorian institution that was supposed to provide security, or at least a transcendent meaning, to those for whom traditional truths about society were crumbling. For Dickens, however, religion, like the family, often served to disrupt, to confuse, to disorient, especially as he represents it in his later novels. I have already hinted at this evolution in Dickens's viewpoint in a comparison of the death of Jo to that of Johnny; in the latter event, the absence of assumed resurrection is as important as the exposure of class attitudes. Unlike Brontë, Dickens considers the problem to be not denominations,²⁰ but divine ontology, for what seem to be signs of grace, of divine justice, of

²⁰ As Riah says, "Sir, there is . . . too much untruth among all denominations of men" (329), though his Judaism does isolate him, as Lucy's Protestantism did her. Fledgeby remarks, accurately, "Mr Riah's not society" (633), a claim supported by Eugene's anti-Semitism (464) and even Mrs Milvey's (579). My point, however, is that in Dickens this is a minor issue.

benevolence, often reveal themselves to be devoid of significance. Whereas representations of divinity and theology can be menacing in Brontë, in Dickens they are largely absent.

The sight of a church, for instance, which even for Brontë can sometimes be a harbinger of good fortune (*Villette* 108) for Pip represents disorientation. Twice in the first chapter, Magwitch holds Pip by the ankles, and his view of the church is symbolic of the confusion which will plague his development:

When the church came to itself--for he was so sudden and so strong that he made it go head over heels before me, and I saw the steeple under my feet--when the church came to itself, I say, I was seated on a high tombstone, trembling, while he ate the bread ravenously (36).

Two points should be mentioned. First, Pip here withholds describing Magwitch's actions until they are finished so that the church's dizzying revolution confuses not only Pip, but also the reader. Second, when the church "comes to itself," Pip finds himself on a tombstone, still in fear that Magwitch might cut his throat, as if to say that the restoration of the church will do nothing to save him from this frightening beast. Magwitch exploits this fear with a well-known threat: "Say Lord strike you dead if you don't!" (38). And even when the sight of a church seems to predict success, such an interpretation is shown to be mistaken. At the end of chapter 54, Pip interprets the serenity of his view of the London skyline to be causal, or at least emblematic, of his and Magwitch's increasing good fortune:

As I looked along the clustered roofs, with Church towers

and spires shooting into the unusually clear air, the sun rose up, and a veil seemed to be drawn from the river, and millions of sparkles burst out upon its waters. From me too, a veil seemed to be drawn, and I felt strong and well. (444)

But in the next chapter, Magwitch is captured and receives his fatal injuries. The power of the church is a mirage; relatedly, the bible that Magwitch carries is little more than a pagan relic: "The book itself had the appearance of being stolen from some court of justice, and perhaps his knowledge of its antecedents, combined with his own experience in that wise, gave him a reliance on its powers as a sort of legal spell or charm" (349).

Other biblical references are similarly empty. The chapter of *Our Mutual Friend* entitled "Better to Be Abel than Cain" derives its name not from the wrongdoer's condemnation by his creator, but from the mental sufferings that he inflicts upon himself:

Now, too, was he cursed with a state of mind more wearing and more wearisome than remorse. He had no remorse; but the evildoer who can hold that avenger at bay, cannot escape the slower torture of incessantly doing the evil deed again and doing it more efficiently. In the defensive declarations and pretended confessions of murderers, the pursuing shadow of this torture may be traced through every lie they tell. . . . it is a state, too, that tauntingly visits the offence upon a sullen unrepentant nature with its heaviest punishment every time. (776-77).

There is nothing of God here; whatever hell that exists is self-created.

When objects do have a real religious association, it is often melancholy, showing characters that they do not belong, that the world is empty, as when Pip heads towards his bittersweet reconciliation and last meeting with Miss Havisham, who will soon receive her fatal injuries:

The nooks of ruin where the old monks had once had their refectories and gardens, and where the strong walls were now pressed into the service of humble sheds and stables, were almost as silent as the old monks in their graves. The cathedral chimes had at once a sadder and a more remote sound to me, as I hurried on avoiding observation, than they had ever had before; so, the swell of the old organ was borne to my ears like funeral music; and the rooks, as they hovered about the grey tower and swung in the bare high trees of the priory-garden, seemed to call out to me that the place was changed, and that Estella was gone out of it for ever.

(407)

Earlier, Pip had imagined Magwitch looking up at the cold, unfeeling heavens: "And then I looked at the stars, and considered how awful it would be for a man to turn his face up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all the glittering multitude" (80). Dickens's perception of religion is clearly reflected in Pip's account of his arrival into London:

So, I came into Smithfield; and the shameful place,
being all asmeared with filth and fat and blood and foam,

seemed to stick to me. So, I rubbed it off with all possible speed by turning into a street where I saw the great black dome of Saint Paul's bulging at me from behind a grim stone building which a bystander said was Newgate prison. Following the wall of the jail, I found the roadway covered with straw to deaden the noise of passing vehicles; and from this, and from the quantity of people standing about, smelling strongly of spirits and beer, I inferred that the trials were on.

(189)

The great cathedral is little more than another dirty, depressing building in the begrimed city, overshadowed, both in appearance and in importance, by the prison and quickly passed over.

The clergy, too, are notable for their absence, or, when they do appear, by their impotence. In *Great Expectations*, what passes for preaching is Pumblechook's sermon about pork (57-58). The clerk Wopsle leaves the church for the stage. Even though he is made to look ridiculous there, the stage is apparently more fulfilling. The knowing Jaggers is accurate in his questioning of Wopsle's piety: "You may have read the Lord's Prayer backwards, if you like--and, perhaps, have done it before to-day" (162). Religious instruction and guidance are almost completely absent from Pip's education, except for his Catechism, which, he notes, is poorly taught and not understood (73). Not only for the lack of a family must Pip re-christen himself at the beginning of the novel.

Our Mutual Friend contains a more traditional clergyman, a rarity in Dickens, the Reverend Milvey, but he is most notable for his

inability to ease suffering. Dennis Walder is right to note his compassion (206), but one wonders if all that a benevolent clergyman can do is offer sympathy in times of great pain and if so, whether this is enough in the harsh world of this novel.²¹ Milvey is akin to Trollope's Mr Quiverful, who worries about finding a decent living to feed his children; Milvey's fears, however, run deeper, as his discomfort regarding his children reflects not only financial misgivings, but theological ones as well. Even the descriptions of his social concerns reflect his religious crisis, as is demonstrated in the burial service for Mrs Higden:

"WE GIVE THEE HEARTY THANKS FOR THAT IT HATH PLEASED THEE TO DELIVER THIS OUR SISTER OUT OF THE MISERIES OF THIS SINFUL WORLD." So read the Reverend Frank Milvey in a not untroubled voice, for his heart misgave him that all was not quite right between us and our sister--or say our sister in Law--Poor Law."
(577)

That is, because society has failed in its obligations to the poor. But the explanation for his doubt comes after his shakiness is described; the syntax implies a direct connection between the service he is reading and his uneasiness. There seems to be no full comfort that religion can offer.

²¹ Walder also writes that Milvey does "what he can to help his remarkably rich parishioners . . . the Boffins, to find a suitable orphan for adoption" (206). But the adoption fails as the orphan dies before the transfer can occur. The clergy, though well meaning, are unable to fulfill their social duties, as well as their religious.

When the clergy do have any power at all, it is to frighten and sour. As Pip was terrified by his experiences in the village church (54-55), so Mrs Milvey notes that "the clergy and their wives seem to *cause* swelled faces. Whenever I take notice of a child in the school, it seems to me as if its face swelled *instantly*. [Rev. Milvey] *never* makes acquaintance with a new old woman, but she gets the face-ache. And another thing is, we *do* make the children sniff so" (819). This is a comic moment, but a revealing one, as we have already seen Bella's good spirits dampened by a waiter for his resembling an "overcast and reproachful" clergyman (735)--after her marriage, in fact during the wedding dinner, as if piety involves the cessation even of sanctioned enjoyment. Miss Peecher's invocation of Christianity for a dour correctness, seen when she scolds her assistant for using the name "Lizzie"--"Whether there were any Lizzies in the early Christian Church must be considered very doubtful, very doubtful" (394)--partly explains why.

Thus, for Dickens, religion does little to salve the wounds of the sufferer. Even less than Brontë's can Dickens's characters rely on the hope of salvation. They must work to improve the conditions in the here and now, and religion simply does not provide tools powerful enough for the task of social reform. It is the kind, the neighborly, rather than the clerical, who offer helping hands. As noted in my chapter on Brontë, the nineteenth-century Church came under widespread attack from the working classes and their defenders for a perceived lack of social awareness and activity, beginning with its

resistance to the First Reform Bill (Altick 206).²² Dickens was one of the leading voices in the protest. Decrying what he saw as the Church's embroilment in petty sectarian conflicts and unconcern with its true mission of fighting poverty and illiteracy, he wrote to Cornelius C. Felton: "Disgusted with our established Church, and its Puseyisms, and daily outrages on common sense and humanity, I have carried into effect an old idea of mine, and joined the Unitarians, who *would* do something for human improvement, if they could; and who practise Charity and Toleration" (2 March 1843).²³

Podsnap demonstrates the church's aloofness when he distorts the Bible in order to abrogate his social responsibility: "'And you know; at least I hope you know;' said Mr Podsnap, with severity, 'that Providence has declared that you shall have the poor always with you?'" (188). The implications of such a theology are bitterly rehearsed by Magwitch:

Then they looked at me, and I looked at them, and they measured my head, some on 'em--they had better measured my stomach--and others on 'em giv me tracts what I couldn't read, and made me speeches what I

²² Altick also notes that education of the poor was dramatically hindered by the denominational squabbling of the educational societies established by the Anglican and Nonconformist Churches (248).

²³ See also the letter to William de Cerjat dated 25 October 1864 (in Hogarth and Hutton). Noting the increasing power of literature and the arts relative to religious dogma, Carlisle points out that Dickens felt that the theater could perform "the function of the church more effectively than the church itself" ("Spectacle" 170).

couldn't unnerstand. They always went on agen me about the Devil. But what the Devil was I to do? I must put something in my stomach, mustn't I? (361)

He is later (in "real," though not narrative, time) served stolen bread and wine by Pip, as if the sacrament must be taken from the church's hands and performed in the realm of death--this scene occurs in the churchyard--if it is to be efficacious. As the deaths of Jo and Johnny reflect no divine transcendence, hint at no resurrection, and only articulate, as Barbara Hardy puts it, "social anger" (*Forms of Feeling* 76), so the earthly deprivations suffered by Magwitch are relieved by no heavenly comfort.

Though moments of spirituality are still present in these later novels, such as the beams of light which cascade upon the condemned Magwitch (467), the ability of traditional religion to affect salvation remains in doubt from the weighty evidence which threatens to overwhelm the few really transcendent events.²⁴ Even Magwitch's death poses spiritual doubts. As Polhemus asks of Pip's lie about his and Estella's love, "If there is eternal life and judgment, according to Christian belief, and if Pip, Magwitch, Dickens and his readers really have faith in God and afterlife, what good would it do to mislead a dying man who, once beyond the world's border, will quickly know the truth [that Estella does not care for Pip]?" (137). The possibility implied is that there is nothing else beyond that

²⁴ Thus, while Mario Praz is right to point out that events such as the death of Madame DeFarge "were intended . . . to exemplify the intervention of Providence" (162), such divine interest is absent from many others.

border. As Qualls writes about *Our Mutual Friend*, "Death is not envisioned here as the passage from a dunghill world to glory; it is simply an escape from life in a 'hopeless city'" (108).

Perhaps even more important to the development of Modernism than these other social forces is Dickens's setting, for with Dickens, the Victorian novel moved into a Modernist milieu: the city. In Modernism, the city is often figured as a place of alienation, amorality, and selfishness. *Villette* had already explored this theme to a degree, but Lucy's disorientation results in part from Brussels's foreignness (to her); the diminutive, rather derogatory fictional French names that Brontë uses indicate the specificity of this city's degeneration.²⁵ Dickens's city, on the other hand, is the capital of England, and he brings the disorientation home (such as it is): "Such a black shrill city, combining the qualities of a smoky house and a scolding wife; such a gritty city; such a hopeless city, with no rent in the leaden canopy of its sky; such a beleaguered city" (*Our Mutual Friend* 191). This is true of his earlier novels as well, as is demonstrated by the famous opening of *Bleak House*, describing London wrapped in fog, and by the description of the imprisoning

²⁵ As Mark Lilly points out in the notes to the Penguin edition of the novel, *Villette* means *little city*; *Labassecouer* means *poultry yard*, and *Fossette* means *little ditch* (600). Brontë uses "great," as in "the great capital of the great kingdom of Labassecouer" (119), the way Ben Jonson does in "On Don Surly." But neither the name "London" nor Brontë's representation of it conveys such spiritual deprivation (see *Villette* chapter 6).

"labyrinth" of Todger's neighborhood in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (112-13). As Hillis Miller writes,

The 'world' is the totality of all things as they are lived in by all human beings collectively. For Dickens the concrete embodiment of this totality is the great modern commercial city, made up of millions of people all connected to one another without knowing it, and yet separated from one another and living in isolation and secrecy. (*Charles Dickens* xv)

This belief that the city is isolating resonates throughout the early Modernists: the city is the locus of alienation for Joyce, Conrad, Lawrence, and Eliot, to name but a very few.

The disorientation of the Dickensian city is exacerbated by the fact that, as Marilyn Thomas Faulkenberg demonstrates, the city had previously been viewed as a center of spirituality. The medieval city was intended to reflect a spiritual order, so when the city began to deteriorate, religious life was seen, by Ruskin and others, as doing the same (2-4).

A lack of spirituality is the case in Dickens's city as well, but there is no pastoral solution, either; one cannot escape from London or Coketown to a Romantic grove of innocence and beauty. Nature offers no succor. The landscape around Pip's village is sepulchral, and natural objects are unsustaining, dangerous, reflecting and exacerbating his unwarranted guilt: "The gates and dykes and banks came bursting at me through the mist, as if they cried as plainly as could be, 'A boy with Somebody-else's pork pie! Stop him!' The cattle came upon me with like suddenness, staring out of their eyes,

and steaming out of their nostrils, 'Holloa, young thief" (48). The only blooming garden is in Newgate, where "Wemmick walked among the prisoners, much as a gardener might walk among his plants" (280-81). This garden of inmates, of course, thrives. The only retreat is Wemmick's castle, a fortification that promotes a schizophrenic existence for Wemmick, and, as noted above, an isolated one for his father. And as already mentioned, the river in *Our Mutual Friend* is quite often not a symbol of life, but of death and misery. There is no Wordsworthian copse here.

There are no Wordsworthian peasants, either. Unlike Wordsworth's farmers, Dickens has piece-workers, iron workers, corpse retrievers, body part vendors, etc., many of whom are violent and anti-social, whether city dwellers or country. As Wemmick puts it, "You may get cheated, robbed, and murdered, in London. But there are plenty of people anywhere, who'll do that for you" (195). He is quite right, as Orlick will later demonstrate. Partly a reflection of the developing industrial society, these characters not only flee the city's problems, but are also part of the cause of them.

The higher classes figure in this urban problem as well. When Pip is left alone after Magwitch's death, besieged by the creditors who represent for Dickens the preying of society upon itself--like vampires, they come out of a Gothic "vapour" during Pip's sleep--he dreams that he was "a brick in the house wall, and yet entreating to be released from the giddy place where the builders had set me; that I was a steel beam of a vast engine, clashing and whirling over a gulf, and yet that I implored in my own person to have the engine stopped, and my part in it hammered off" (471-72). Stephen

Blackpool had starved in the factory town; in this hallucination, Pip becomes the very factory itself, suicidally grinding himself to pieces.

The uneasiness reflected in this dream resonates throughout *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*, even to the endings, where we might otherwise expect what James describes as "a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks" ("Art of Fiction" 424). Dickens's revision of the closing scene of *Great Expectations* has received much discussion, with various critics preferring either the first ending, where Pip very briefly meets the already remarried Estella, or the second, where the two are apparently reunited permanently. The discussion is deserved, since the later ending casts a more optimistic light on the meaning and future of Pip's journey; the first leaves him utterly alone.

The second ending, however, is far from the typical one James satirizes. Firstly, as Angus Calder notes, Dickens revised the text even after he had accepted Bulwer-Lytton's suggestion to join Estella and Pip. The final clause of the first version of the second ending reads: "I saw the shadow of no parting from her" (496). For the later 1868 version, the clause is changed to: "I saw no shadow of another parting from her" (493). The earlier version, in which the definite article precedes "shadow," is more unequivocal; Pip sees a specific shadow and reads its meaning, that they will not part (though even their joining involves darkness, as the problems of their previous relationship should predict). In the later version, he sees no shadow foreboding misery. But it could be there; he also does not see any omen promising happiness. Estella and Pip could once again

separate. After all, Estella has just said, "[We] will continue friends *apart* (493 emphasis added).

Secondly, resonances in the last sentence of earlier scenes provide further ambiguity. As Bert G. Hornback notes, the word "parting," "take[s] us back through Pip's and Estella's conversation about parting to Joe's great, echoic line, 'life is made of ever so many partings welded together'" (137). And "shadow" harkens back to Pip's meeting Estella outside Newgate: "I was not yet free from the soiling consciousness of Mr Wemmick's conservatory, when I saw her face at the coach window and her hand waving to me. What *was* that nameless shadow which again in that one instant had passed?" (284). "Shadow" does not bode well.

Thus, whether one prefers the first or second ending, the possibility of Pip's happiness is at best uncertain. When one compares the ending of this novel to those of, for instance, *Pride and Prejudice*, or *Coningsby*, or *Barchester Towers*--or, for that matter, to Wemmick's marriage plot, or Joe and Biddy's, or Herbert and Clara's--one can see how far from unmitigated bliss Pip is.²⁶ Having returned from an eleven-year exile to India,²⁷ Pip is left with only

²⁶ In another un-Victorian narrative construction, coincidences in *Great Expectations* do not unify, but disorient: Jaggers's being lawyer for both Miss Havisham and Magwitch leads Pip to his most significant mistake. What seem to the characters to be carefully considered plans reveal themselves to be not the workings of Providence, but merely accidents.

²⁷ He is with Clara and Herbert, good friends to be sure, but the contrast between their domestic situation and his could not have made life any easier; he must feel out of place, the "third wheel."

the chance of love. There is no Victorian certainty of rewards for the deserving, as for Tom Pinch, who never gets to marry, there is no "poetical justice" (655). Reminiscent of the close of *Paradise Lost*, when Adam and Eve leave the burned-out garden, but here without any religious belief to support the wanderers, this final scene is, as Angus Calder writes, only "a cleared site to be built on. Dickens can take [Pip], and us, no further" (29).

The ending of *Our Mutual Friend*, while more conventionally happy, is also rather ambiguous. For here, "The Voice of Society," already exposed as the voice of oppression, gets some of the last words. While Lizzie and Bella get their husbands, and John his money, there has been no fundamental change in the way society operates, and the difficulties that have haunted these particular characters will, the novel implies, be repeated for many another person. Twemlow is reformed, but Society, whose attitudes are deeply ingrained, cannot be. Dickens cannot hope to effect widespread change any longer, as the almost miraculous quality of the truth about Boffin shows.²⁸ One of the great nineteenth-century

And comparing the length of time and distance of Pip's stay abroad to David's reveals a far harder trial for the later hero.

²⁸ Ginsburg points out that Boffin had become suspicious even before he had met "Rokesmith," so that a real change in Boffin towards miserliness is possible. Later, Boffin figures out that Venus is planning to turn traitor on Wegg, prompting the narrator to comment, "It was a cunning and suspicious idea, quite in the way of his school of Misers" (650). If this is misdirection, it also contains truth. See Gregg A. Hecimovich for a useful discussion of the narrative techniques that Dickens uses to confuse the readers about Boffin.

realists must fall back on a *deus ex machina* to overcome the highly convincing social argument he has already constructed. In such a world, the fall of Boffin is hardly surprising; it is practically inevitable.

Moreover, both Lizzie's and Bella's happy endings are made problematic. As for Lizzie, her marriage is not clearly based on love. Eugene decides to marry her "that [his] reparation may be complete" (811). Whether this is a solid foundation for a marriage is dubious; with no epilogue projecting forward, as in so many other Victorian novels, we cannot know how this marriage develops.²⁹ We do know that Mortimer is skeptical (885). And in a small hint that is almost negligible--except it is the novel's final comment on him--Eugene has begun to lose his earnestness and resume "his old airy manner" (886).

As for Bella, we have already seen how John has manipulated her. Moreover, there is some truth to the ugly insinuations Boffin makes, in the guise of miser, about how women are bought in the marriage process: "Those good looks of yours . . . are worth money, and you shall make money of 'em" (527). This is an ethic that Dickens has repeatedly attacked, especially regarding Bella's stated desire to be enriched by marriage. The eventual fulfillment of this desire by John is somewhat troubling. Barbara Hardy writes of *Bleak House*: "We are left with the goodness and cosiness of Esther and Woodhouse, and even the scars of smallpox are transformed: but the book's total exposure leaves the remainder of scars uneffaced, the

²⁹ Compare this ending even to *David Copperfield's* final two chapters.

bleakness of the slums, the terribly bad housekeeping of England" (*Moral Art* 13). This is the case here as well, since Bella gets what she originally wanted, in the way Old Harmon intended. The old man has forced her back into the doll's house, since she has now become the good wife-mother, as if to say that the restrictions of Victorian society are unavoidable.³⁰ The main characters find happiness, but Dickens has left open the larger social questions he has raised.

Still, Dickens can envision solutions to the problems he perceives. If his novels are not *Pride and Prejudice*, they are not *Murphy*, either. He recommends a human connection to eradicate the isolating effects of modern life. Esther Summerson says about Mrs. Pardiggle's house, "We both felt painfully sensible that between us was an iron barrier, which could not be removed by our new friend. By whom, or how, it could be removed we did not know; but we knew that" (159). Arnold Kettle comments, "All Dickens' novels might be described on one level as explorations into the human effects of this iron barrier and the ways of removing it" (214). The way to remove it is through love, in a true, unqualified acceptance of others that is free from the prejudices that society can foster. If the isolated, orphaned consciousness can manage to find a loving relationship, it will be rejuvenated in an almost religious manner. The success of the only selfless monetary actions in the two novels--Magwitch's financial pursuits in Australia, Pip's gift of money to

³⁰ Just why the old man is originally attracted to Bella is unclear, given her behavior. His proprietary treatment might suggest a desire to put the complaining child back in its place, perhaps symbolic of the wealthy's desire to keep the poor in theirs or the men's to keep the women in theirs.

Herbert, and John's well-intended sacrifice of his inheritance to the Boffins--indicates that rewards can come when one helps one's fellows; the problem is that one all too seldom does. Hornback claims that Dickens's "philosophy of love" is "as serious and substantial as Romanticism or Christian idealism" (160). I would add that this philosophy prefigures that of Joyce and Forster, as *Ulysses*, *Howards End*, and *A Passage to India* also envision communities that cross racial and class boundaries. While human connections are difficult to achieve, and some attempts never succeed, at least the hope of a practical salvation is present in Dickens's texts (as the comic tone of many scenes underscores).

In Dickens the quest for integration is often very damaging and should ideally not have been necessary, but some characters will ultimately find the love that is needed to ease the strains of modern, industrialized life. However, Dickens has turned the novel sharply in the direction of Modernism by relentlessly documenting the hollowness and disorientation that attends contemporary life. It is indicative of the pessimism of the later novels that some of the new-found relationships are very short-lived: Pip finally acknowledges Magwitch to be a father figure--Magwitch had called Pip "my boy" when Pip became the first to express sympathy to the escapee (50)--only for Magwitch to die shortly after; Johnny becomes "one of a little family" (384), but this is as he lies dying. Lizzie becomes a mother figure to Charley (71), but only briefly, as Charley's anger with her about Headstone leads to a falling out. Thus, Northrop Frye's comment that "The comic action itself moves toward the regrouping of society around the only social unit that Dickens really

regards as genuine, the family" (63), becomes less accurate in the later novels. Dickens has shown us far too many diseased families to put too much stock in the belief that the family is regenerative. And he balances the apparent happiness of his protagonists with the misery of so many of his minor characters. If there is a hope of reintegration, of salvation, it is beginning to fade.

CHAPTER 5

"A RECLUSE IN THE MIDST OF MILLIONS": GEORGE
GISSING'S *NEW GRUB STREET* AND *THE ODD WOMEN*

The move from Dickens to Gissing is rather a natural one, as Gissing was deeply influenced by Dickens: his composition of *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* as well as a number of other essays, including prefaces to various novels reprinted in *The Immortal Dickens*, attest to his abiding fascination with his era's most adulated novelist. Though he disagreed with Dickens on a number of points, most notably the earlier writer's valorization of many lower class characters, Gissing is indebted to him not only for his milieu--the world(s) of the urban poor and middle classes--but also for the central issues on which his novels focus: the physical and emotional travails of the poor, the hostility between classes, the precarious role of women in a male-governed world, and the instability of the family. Plots and characters of the later author occasionally even appear to echo those of the earlier. The similarities of Dora Milvain's complaint in *New Grub Street*, "But why will you imagine me such a feeble-minded person? . . . I have really no ambition to be a doll of such superfine wax" (494) to Bella Wilfer's in *Our Mutual Friend*, "I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house" (746) include imagery, tone, and authorial endorsement. Likewise, Jane Snowdon of *The Nether World* is another version of Oliver Twist: they are both abused orphans living in Clerkenwell, with long-lost relatives scheming to take control of their inheritance; both even must sleep among coffins. And although Gissing was no

reformer, having lost faith in the power of both government and private society to effect change, he shared with Dickens a profound concern about the ways in which social evils disrupted and often destroyed the lives of sensitive, intelligent individuals.

Gissing's relationship with his first wife attests to this. He felt that Nell, an alcoholic ex-prostitute, was a victim of the impersonal, destructive economic forces governing urban life, and as his biographers note, he seemed to have believed that marrying her would reform her by eliminating the financial hardships that had led her to such work. His stealing from the cloak room at Owens College was also part of this process, a sort of Robin Hood gesture--he intended to use the money to purchase a sewing machine to give Nell a more legitimate occupation. Moreover, his renewed sense of artistic purpose upon her death was clearly a result, as Jacob Korg notes, of the sense of social responsibility that had first attracted him to writing (111). As he wrote to his brother when Nell died, "Well, now it behooves me to get to work. I have a somewhat clearer task before me than hitherto, and one that will give me enough to do for many years. . . . For me there is much work to do, and this memory of wretchedness will be an impulse such as few men possess. . . ." (qtd. in Korg 111). And as he noted in his diary, "But as I stood beside [her death-bed], I felt that my life henceforth had a firmer purpose. Henceforth I never cease to bear testimony against the accursed social order that brings about things of this kind" (1 March 1888).

But although the characters in Gissing's novels face many of the same types of hardships and obstacles as those in Dickens's, the tone

of hopelessness that appeared at the end of Dickens's career is present and fully developed throughout Gissing's. Here, pessimism about the possibility of ever finding happiness is profound, and his novels reflect little hope for a life that offers both independence and integrity. While the orphans in Brontë and Dickens try gradually to work their way towards familial belonging, the seemingly integrated lives in Gissing slowly deteriorate, with dire consequences. Thus, Gissing's characters move in opposite trajectories to those of their predecessors. As Adrian Poole notes, "It is not so much the image of the fall that permeates his work, as the state of *having fallen*. The crisis has already taken place, there are no great expectations to begin with, no illusions to lose" (5). And the injuries suffered by his protagonists are far more ominous: the parvenu Edward Reardon, for instance, is roughly analogous to Pip, but Gissing's protagonist dies after living alone and in squalor; Monica Madden recalls Bella Wilfer, but the later character dies in childbirth after her marriage has collapsed amid hostility and violence. In Gissing's disunited society, most action is doomed to failure. Capturing Gissing's sense of the pointlessness of human action, Gillian Tindall writes, Gissing's works "set out to prove if you pursue your ideal it turns to ashes" (182). Jane gets her Rochester, Pip (ostensibly) his Estella, but Reardon dies a broken man, Monica a tormented wife.

Part of the cause of Gissing's pessimism lies in his view of the various reforms that were implemented during the nineteenth century. Patricia Alden notes that the educational reform movement, for instance, which was supposed to encourage a more democratic work force, "was *the* important brake on upward mobility," as it

comprised "clearly differentiated tracks at the secondary level, with a curriculum for each appropriate to the class it was designed to serve" (6). This system not only did not curb the economic separation between classes, but widened the cultural gap between them. As Richard D. Altick notes, the lower-classes' recently gained minimal literacy led "the overwhelming majority of working people to penny thrillers and sensational newspapers. . . . [I]n the free operation of the cultural market, mediocrity and vulgarity always tend to drive out superior goods" (241-42). Thus, as Korg notes, in the world of *New Grub Street*, "The educational reforms that had increased literacy without cultivating a taste for learning had created a mass market for amusing and superficial reading matter" (161). And as Gissing's own experiences with poverty taught him, reforms that were supposed to address the needs of the poor and of women were having little effect for significant parts of their target population: Altick notes that "toward the end of the century . . . fully a third of the population lived on or below the bare margin of subsistence" (49). The great labor unrest beginning in the 1880's and the expansion of the feminist movement in the 1890's, while indicating a growing belief in the power to effect change, also reveal how little had changed for the less powerful segments of society.¹

Critics have tended to treat Gissing's novels as examinations of discrete social problems. Poole, for instance, discusses *The Odd Women* under the heading "Women and Marriage," while listing *New Grub Street* under "The City, Class, and Culture"; David Grylls treats

¹ See, for example, David Thomson (186-188) and E. J. Hobsbawm (*Empire* 116-117).

The Odd Women under "Women, Feminism, and Marriage" and *New Grub Street* under "Art and Commercialism." Selig divides the novels similarly. This would seem to imply that *The Odd Women* is not about class, or that the problems of gender and marriage are not central to *New Grub Street*. Similar classifications present novels such as *Thyrza*, *The Nether World*, and *Born in Exile* as disquisitions on one or another social question. Katherine Bailey Linehan explicitly posits such a separation: "In the 1890's, George Gissing wrote a series of novels dealing centrally with the problems of marriage and women's emancipation: *The Emancipated*, *The Odd Women*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, and *The Whirlpool*. . . . He has been better known for his novels of working-class life, such as *The Nether World* [and] for his study of aspiring authorship in *New Grub Street*" (358). But such a schema simplifies not only the social world Gissing was examining, but also his treatment of it, for Gissing shows, as do Brontë and Dickens, that these problems are irrevocably entangled.² Certain novels might have a particular emphasis, but one after another attempts to demonstrate that the unfortunate effects of all social problems rebound and multiply off each other, or as the

² Two exceptions to this practice are John Goode and Fredric Jameson, though even the latter claims that it is only in Gissing's later novels that "the conventional novelistic framework of marriage . . . gains an *unaccustomed* class resonance" (204, my emphasis). The wording here is ambiguous, but surely this novelty refers to Gissing: Austen and Brontë are only two extremely obvious examples of this resonance in earlier writers. But I would argue that such a resonance is also crucial to earlier works of Gissing such as *Thyrza*, mentioned by Jameson, *The Nether World*, in regard to Clara Hewett and Sidney Kirkwood's relationship, and *Born in Exile*, in regard to Godwin Peak's failed attempt to marry above his class.

narrator of *New Grub Street* puts it, discussing the collapse of the Yule household, that there are "myriad miseries that result from poverty" (125).

And as we have also seen in Gissing's predecessors, the results of these interlocking traumas are often isolation and alienation. Not only are characters in Gissing's novels pushed away from society, they also begin, like their Modernist successors, to lose faith in the emotional and spiritual patterns that have traditionally been used to organize and make sense of experience.

No matter what the main emphasis of a particular Gissing novel, class and economics will be at the center of the analysis, having a causal relation to the other obstacles besetting the protagonists. It is important to keep clear the distinction between finances and social attitudes, for, while obviously related, these two forces work against the success and integration of the characters in different ways: poverty here is often an impersonal weight, a physical handicap resulting from what appears to be an unreformable economic system, while class attitudes, having an emotional origin, are more insidious. Both the physical facts of poverty and the full weight of class distinctions, as Gissing sees them, need to be established. In Gissing, poverty tends to isolate; class attitudes tend to alienate.

Money, or rather the lack of it, drives Gissing's characters' actions throughout his career, from *Thyrza* to the denizens of the *Nether World* to *Eve Madeley*. What makes their travails important in the context of Modernism is that they are not unified by their suffering, as even *Hard Times*'s Stephen Blackpool, Rachael, and the

members of Sleary's circus are. If Gissing's poor achieve a form of community, it is for the briefest of moments; the deaths of Thyrza Trent and Edward Reardon and the annual epilogic silent reunion of Jane Snowdon and Sidney Kirkwood make the new-found unity the characters have achieved--engagement, reconciliation, or at least understanding--more tantalizing in its frustrated promise than fulfilling. Poverty here is physically debilitating, emotionally isolating, and spiritually deadening.

New Grub Street and *The Odd Women* contain, of course, a broader cast than poor characters only, but poverty and the poor become synecdochic: Jasper Milvain's moral emptiness draws on Edward Reardon's financial. And the pictures of the poor that these novels paint draw on those presented in such earlier novels as *Thyrza* and *The Nether World*, as if the presence of the poor and their attendant difficulties has become Gissing's *donnée*, rather than an assumption in need of proof. Underlying Reardon's fear of the workhouse, whose bells mix with those of the church and seem to beckon to him as he falls asleep (267-68), is his knowledge of the brutal alternative of Clerkenwell, the slum which has already figured as the setting for *The Nether World*. John Halperin notes that "Reardon . . . is living in conditions vastly more comfortable than those in which hundreds of thousands of Londoners lived in the latter decades of the nineteenth century" (150), but this is entirely beside the point. In addition to the fact that Reardon and Harold Biffen really suffer in their wants, the characters *feel* poor; the point is not only absolute finances, but also the separation that comes from relative differences, as the implicit contrasts between Edmund

Widdowson's having "only about six hundred a year" (44) and the Madden sisters' slave wages (11), and between Reardon's meager remunerations and Milvain's and Whelpdale's growing fortunes indicate.³

The worry and degradation that the poor experience is certainly real, from the food that they eat--Harold Biffen consumes his bread with a full complement of dinner utensils to make it seem a more substantial meal, and the Madden sisters live on mashed potatoes and milk, rationalizing this as the diet of "the Irish peasantry . . . physically a fine race" (20)--to the clothes that they wear--the "shabbiness" (383) of Reardon's are indicative, and partly causative, of his fall, as they help to increase the distance between him and his wife. The way in which minor accidents become major disasters, which resonates later in George Orwell's fictionalized description of his own poverty in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (18), demonstrates the fragility of the lives of Gissing's characters. Reardon's cold becomes fatal because he cannot afford train tickets and must walk in bad weather, and then because he cannot afford to treat it. Similarly, Alfred Yule's developing blindness is accelerated by the overwork necessitated by economic instability. The Madden sisters, seemingly having learned this lesson, know that they must

³ Jacob Korg documents the payments Gissing received for various novels, earning at most £150 in a year: "Even at best payment like this meant constant exertion, and for Gissing, with his difficulties of health and temperament, things were seldom at their best" (157-58).

ward off illness, which they would not be able to treat.⁴ Relatedly, Everard Barfoot notices that Miss Wheatley, Micklethwaite's fiancée, "looked much older than Mary Barfoot, though they were just of an age. And all this for want of a little money. The life of a pure, gentle, tender-hearted woman worn away in hopeless longing and in hard struggle for daily bread" (124).

Even successes indicate the tenuousness of the lives of the poor. Biffen's twice nearly losing the manuscript of *Mr Bailey, Grocer*, first in the flames of a house fire and then after accidentally pitching his jacket onto the street in his escape, is directly related to his poverty, since this fire, caused by a drunk passed out on the boarding house steps, would not have happened in wealthier environs. His success in rescuing his work seems pure, rare luck. Eugene M. Baer's statement that Whelpdale's experiences in America as an indigent, solitary writer living for a time on handfuls of peanuts are "irrelevant" filler (16), misses the instructive nature of this episode: even the practical and successful must struggle through periods of abject despair and are fortunate to have triumphed. Whelpdale's survival is akin to that of Biffen's manuscript.

Most importantly, financial distress is, as mentioned above, isolating. This economic condition, moreover, has implications beyond the tensions of class differences: monetary worries cause communication to break down between characters of similar social

⁴ The other side to the dilemma is that only with Monica's new-found money can Virginia embark on a healthy, probably life-saving, diet (122). This hearkens back to Polly's regenerating health when her father becomes a count (*Villette* 359).

standing. The need for employment and the lack of suitable opportunities play an important role in this situation.

Alice and Virginia Madden, for instance, like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe before them,⁵ are forced to live in seclusion, in towns far from their family, Alice as governess and both as companions to elderly women for slave wages (7, 11). Their sister Gertrude has likewise been employed at a shop at some distance from Clevedon, living in virtual squalor (11). Her brief mention in the novel is completely off-stage, as if to emphasize her remoteness. Alice then lives for several months in virtual isolation in London while looking for work (8). Even situations with co-workers are isolating, as there seems to be no common feeling, only tension among the struggling poor: in the draper's shop, Monica is bereft of friendship. Her lack of acceptance is made clear by the other shop girls--who hardly seem unified themselves--when they insult her as she lies in bed, feigning sleep (48): even when they have found a means for subsistence, there is no rest, no shelter, no home for the poor.

Intellectuals, not merely the plodding poor, also suffer in solitude. Rhoda, for instance, has been isolated by her work. Though in somewhat better circumstances than the elder Maddens, she has

⁵ Gissing's considerable admiration of Brontë is demonstrated in a letter he wrote to his sister Margaret: "She is the greatest English woman after Mrs. Browning. George Eliot is poor in comparison with her. No page of her is without genius" (191); and in the *Commonplace Book*: "In no modern writer have I such personal interest as in Charlotte Brontë" (29). Other letters describe his delight at hearing first-hand accounts of her from her publisher (see 10 July 1887 to Algernon Gissing and 3 July 1888 to Ellen Gissing), and she is mentioned similarly in several entries in his diary.

been left nearly friendless by her devotion to her mission. Her inability to form a sexual attachment and the fact that her quarrel with Mary leaves her completely alone indicate the emotional deprivation that has resulted from her immersion in her work. A seemingly minor incident is in fact revealing: when Mary Barfoot receives a surprising letter, "Rhoda, who rarely had a letter from anyone, looked up inquiringly" (76). In *New Grub Street*, Marian's father's career, as well as her own employment as his amanuensis and often ghost-writer, has forced upon her "a youth of all but monastic seclusion" (219), as Reardon's life as a writer makes him, early on, "a recluse in the midst of millions" (90). Alfred Yule, as well, has become somewhat reclusive, in good part due to the very nature of the struggle for existence. His only real moment of communion is with a poverty-stricken doctor, a recovering mental patient--he had witnessed the violent death of his wife and child--but this connection cannot be sustained and brings him crushing news. Biffen's life is one of isolation, ending, appropriately enough, miserably alone after the loss of his only friend. The narrator's comment, "It *seemed* to him that he had never known solitude, even through all the years of his existence" (491, italics added), emphasizes that his loneliness has become, with the loss of his one friend, unbearable. His lack of interest to society is made clear by Jasper's ignorance--due to the latter's being "absorbed in his own affairs"--and then dismissal of his death: "Really, one can't grieve. There seemed no possibility of his ever earning enough to live decently upon" (531). Jasper's coldness is made more shocking in light of his apparently solicitous meeting with Biffen a few pages

earlier (527). It would seem that there is little room in fine society for intelligence wedded to impracticality.

Jerome Hamilton Buckley writes that *New Grub Street* "concerns itself with the artist, the medium, and the aesthetic act; it is essentially a novel about novelists and the writing of novels" ("World of Literature" 232), and a number of critics note the novel's lament of the apparent death of aesthetic values. But literary production in this novel has a broader relevance. In the context of Gissing's other novels, it demonstrates that every profession, even the "purest," has become a trade, degrading, unhealthy, and alienating. Those who engage in it are vulnerable to the same misfortunes attending nearly every occupation, including the most menial: a lack of respect, indecent wages, and inconstant employment.⁶ The solitude pressed upon him by his profession leads Reardon to an affinity with *Our Mutual Friend's* Mrs Higden, who on the way to her death notes her physical proximity to, yet vast emotional distance from, the rich. Reardon comments in a lament much like Mrs Higden's, "If one were as rich as those people! They pass so close to us; they see us, and we see them; but the distance between is infinity" (231). John Yule the younger proves this distance with his simplistic misunderstanding of Reardon: "He might write his two novels a year easily enough, just like twenty other men and women. Look here, I could do it myself if I weren't too lazy. And that's what's the matter with Reardon. He doesn't care to work"

⁶ The economics described in *The Nether World* demonstrate that job security is difficult to find even for the physical laborer, though one thinks of manual work as normally in great demand.

(276). He belies his total ignorance of the incompatibility of economic pressures and high quality artistic creation and does not understand that this once exalted profession has become a menial trade.

Economic pressures, according to Gissing, are divisive in other ways, as well. The home life, for example, is also vulnerable to and rent asunder by the widespread effects of poverty. The disintegration of the Reardon marriage has been well-documented, but the failure is not attributable to class attitudes only, though they certainly contribute to it. Reardon's "shabbiness," mentioned above, is initially startling to Amy partly because it attests to the extent of his economic decline: "All but every woman [sic] would have experienced that shrinking from the livery of poverty" (382). Already, the birth of their child had exacerbated their strained finances; the relationship suffers the more for this because Reardon and Amy have come from differing economic backgrounds and react variously to their problems: "The little boy had come between him and the mother, as must always be the case in poor homes, most of all where the poverty is relative" (157).

The inability of other poor characters, such as *New Grub Street's* Whelpdale and *The Odd Women's* Micklethwaite and Bevis,⁷ to marry because of money problems highlights the destructive

⁷ Bevis, of course, turns out to be a coward, but Monica's assessment that "Probably he could not think of marrying on [his sisters'] account" (170) is reinforced by Mrs Bevis's and Mrs Cosgrove's strenuous efforts to marry them off (172): they are financially dependent on him and infringe on his liberty to start his own family.

relation of economics to home life. Marian Yule, in a corollary, becomes attractive, or at least marriageable, to Jasper when she inherits money--and when a socialite rejects him--but loses her power to hold him when her fortune is reduced and the wealthier Amy becomes available. As he puts it, "I'm afraid of [Marian]. No, it won't do! You understand that I'm a practical man, and I shall keep clear of dangers" (72). Though he is portrayed as callous, Gissing's novels implicitly validate his actions. As *The Nether World* demonstrated, the taking on by the poor of burdens, such as John Hewett's remarrying, often proves to be foolhardy. Thus, when Monica wants to rebuff the tenacious attentions of Mr Bullivant, she is finally able to do so successfully on the grounds of his finances: "How would it be possible for you to support a wife?" (27).

Invocations to money occur throughout Gissing's novels:

Blessed money! root of all good, until the world invent some saner economy (*New Grub Street* 185).

"Independent! Oh, Alice, what a blessed thing is independence!" (*The Odd Women* 15).

"What a blessed thing it is for a woman to have money of her own! It's because most women haven't, that they're such poor, wretched slaves" (*In the Year of Jubilee* 233).

These are clearly not base grovellings to Mammon, but honest, appropriate responses to financial realities, the last of which refers to the Married Women's Property Acts, concluded twelve years before the composition of *Jubilee*. However, the training in cynicism, grasping, and isolation that poverty imposes is, the novels claim, so

thorough that even an amelioration of financial difficulties does not promise social integration, as revealed by the continuing problems of Marian Yule and of the Reardon marriage. Edward is not rescued by Amy's inheritance because poverty wrecks more than one's physical health; it breaks one's spirit as well. The narrator comments about the newly-inherited money: "Ah! if this had happened in the first year of his marriage, what more blessed man than he would have walked the earth! But it came after irreparable harm. No amount of wealth could undo the ruin caused by poverty" (410). Barfoot, discussing the economic fate of unmarried women, proposes a sort of welfare system via marriage: "It is the duty of every man, who has sufficient means, to maintain a wife. The life of unmarried women is a wretched one; every man who is able ought to save one of them from that fate" (93). But this rather bizarre, if inventive, solution would not, of course, work, as Edmund and Monica's marriage demonstrates, as do other Gissing marriages or possible ones, such as Egremont and Thyrza's and Hilliard and Eve's: the difference between the lovers is too great.

Even more quotidian ways of escaping poverty are shown pessimistically. A number of characters, Jasper most notably, make the claim that with more money, they would be better people, which many critics accept.⁸ But we do not get much chance to test this claim: Jasper's only seemingly kind act, his positive review of Reardon, comes after the novelist's death. This is not charity, but

⁸ See, for instance, Irving Howe (123), Tindall (183), and Goode (115). Andre Guillaume also compares him favorably to a similar character, Morris Townshend of *Washington Square*.

part of his plan to seduce Amy; he never helped Reardon sell books when such help would have practically mattered. Moreover, his final heartless, uncharitable dismissal of Marian, who is now suffering in obscurity, belies his assertion: "Poor Marian was only a clever school-girl. . . . I could never help imagining that she had ink-stains on her fingers. . . . Her image is very faint before me . . . and soon I shall scarcely be able to recall it. Yes, you are right; she nearly ruined me" (550). And as Buckley points out, "The very day that the jilted Marian and her father, now blind and broken, leave London, Jasper publishes his calculated eulogy of Yule's old enemy Fadge, to whose post as editor of *The Current* he is shortly to succeed. . . . We could scarcely ask for a more caustic picture of the cad as man of letters" (227). It is probably true that if he had married Marian, "Poverty and struggle, under such circumstances, would have made [him] a detestable creature" (550), but his wealth does not seem to have helped him either. The ironic title of chapter 24, "Jasper's Magnanimity," as well as his snobbery towards Whelpdale, his onetime friend who is now courting his sister Dora (517), speaks pessimistically of his chance for redemption.

Jasper's claim seems even more spurious when one considers that Amy's wholly unattractive mother, one of the wealthier characters in Gissing's works, asserts the very same. Recalling an incident where she "obliged her half-starved dressmaker to purchase material for her, and then postponed payment alike for that and for the work itself to the last possible moment," she reasons:

This was not heartlessness in the strict sense of the word; the woman not only knew that her behaviour was

shameful, she was in truth ashamed of it and sorry for her victims. But life was a battle. She must either crush or be crushed. With sufficient means, she would have defrauded no one, and would have behaved generously to many; with barely enough for her needs, she set her face and defied her feelings, inasmuch as she believed there was no choice. (269)

This is, of course, deeply ironic, as her miserly treatment of her house servants and of her son-in-law demonstrates; what "sufficient means" signifies to her is anybody's guess. This haughty snob's rationalization is merely an excuse for her greed and coldness, and it colors Jasper's statement as well. His own avarice--not merely his desire to sustain himself comfortably--is made clear upon his learning of old John Yule's charity: "Confound his public purposes!" (308).⁹

Moreover, while it is asserted that such characters as Reardon (36), Alfred Yule (69), and Virginia Madden (13) could have been successful and respected if they had lived under more "favourable

⁹ This is not to say that Gissing completely disavowed the desire to fend off financial distress, as characters such as Reardon and Biffen, who also want to be comfortable, make clear. M. A. Makinen makes a useful distinction between the "practical" Milvain and the "realist" Biffen. The latter understands what he needs to survive and pursues it with dignity. The former, however, "has a rational, cold logic which estimates friends by 'Whether [they] could be of any use to me or not'" (9). Milvain's cynical use of a social-Darwinist creed (cf. Mrs Edmund Yule's "crush or be crushed") is roundly criticized by his sister Dora, and, in fact, the structure of the novel, whereas Biffen's struggles are clearly portrayed sympathetically.

circumstances" (36), again a point Virginia Woolf will later make in *A Room of One's Own* (21, 37), only a brief window of opportunity exists in which to cultivate such results. As noted above, the Reardon marriage cannot survive temporary monetary deprivation. As for Alfred Yule, his pathetic, sycophantic attempts to regain his publishing prestige by using Marian for her money, funds which could at least support the family moderately, occur *after* Marian has posited: "As for father, I am all but certain that, if he became rich, he would be a very much kinder man, a better man in every way" (325). His desire for money is not merely realistic, but symptomatic of his pride, and we doubt that money is really enough to make him "better."

A similar claim about a failed opportunity is made by Everard about Rhoda: "If this woman had enjoyed the social advantages to which Agnes Brissenden and those others were doubtless indebted for so much of their charm, would she not have been their equal, or more?" (325). At issue here, then, is not money *per se*, but the graces that a life of ease and connections can instill. The issue, that is to say, is class.

The elder John Yule, like many members of the nineteenth-century upper class, fears that class warfare will result from efforts to educate and raise the lower class, that the lower will try to usurp the position of the upper:¹⁰ "Do you suppose, Mr Milvain, that society is going to be reformed by you people who write for money? Why,

¹⁰ See Walter E. Houghton, who shows that although such a fear existed mainly before 1850, it was certainly alive into at least the late 1880's (54-58).

you are the very first class that will be swept from the face of the earth as soon as the reformation really begins!" (55). There is a specific gibe here (writing for money), but the wider scope of the remark taps into a real fear. However, the novel depicts this fear as unwarranted, as it implicitly claims that the poor will never rise up to redress their wrongs. Gissing's novels are not socialist propaganda not only because he distrusted reform efforts, but also because he recognized the English lower classes as too splintered, too chaotic for real organization.¹¹ In Gissing, as in Shelley, Brontë, and Dickens, class divisions are remarkable not because they pit the members of one class against another, but because they single out and isolate individuals, not only from other classes, but also, and perhaps more importantly, from their own. The sensitive, poor intellectual--the protagonist of most of Gissing's novels--is, to borrow another Gissing title, "unclassed" from both the lower and upper orders of society.

More obviously, differences in class divide characters throughout the novels: Mrs Edmund Yule objects to Reardon on class grounds (271-72), as Widdowson's sister objects to Monica Madden (119). The married couples themselves are antagonistic for this reason: Widdowson worries that Monica will turn out to have the same "weaknesses" of "character" that Virginia has, weaknesses that are common to her class (241). Marian's parents are alienated from each other because of the mother's "low" background, as Alfred puts

¹¹ Another parallel to Orwell, who deeply admired Gissing, can be drawn here: in *1984*, the inner party does not bother to control the "proles" because the former knows the latter can never organize to attack them.

it (317). As the mother perceptively notes, the more Alfred succeeds, the wider the gap between them will grow: "He'd think me more in his way than ever. He'd wish to have a large house, and live in quite a different way; and how could I manage then? I couldn't show myself; he'd be too ashamed of me. I shouldn't be in my place. Even you'd [Marian] feel ashamed of me" (325). The earlier discussion of Yule's friends with "unpresentable wives" (133) supports Mrs Yule's anxieties, as do Gissing's first two marriages--to Nell, discussed above, and to Edith Underwood, a "work-girl," as he called her in a letter to Eduard Bertz (25 October 1890)--which disintegrated amid acrimony resulting from real distances in mindset and behavior.¹² Exactly why Gissing married Edith after the collapse of his relationship with Nell and after he had written several fictional accounts of failed cross-class marriages is unclear, though an inability to preserve authorial objectivity in his own personal life is perhaps not surprising, and his terrible loneliness right before he met Edith is clear.¹³ He did seem to believe that he could only marry a woman from the lower class, since "educated English girls *will* not face poverty in marriage" (letter to Bertz, 6 September 1890). Amy's famous rejoinder to Reardon--"I am certainly not the wife of a clerk

¹² See Korg, 49-50, 184-85. Only when he married a more intellectual woman, Gabrielle Fleury, whom Gissing met after she requested permission to translate into French *New Grub Street*, was he able to find some domestic happiness.

¹³ See the diary entry for 16 September 1890: "Feel like a madman at times. I know that I shall never do any more good work till I am married" and for 19 September: "A bad, bad time with me; the wasting of my life in bitterness."

who is paid so much a week" (261)--and her final rejection of him-- "his wife felt ashamed of him. Strictly ashamed; he seemed to her a social inferior" (383)--are clearly tinged with the class feelings he feared from a marriage to an upper-class woman.

This class hierarchy even divides various women characters in Gissing, a group we might expect to be united by their oppression in terms of gender. Mary Barfoot's lack of concern for lower-class women seems in many ways endorsed by the discourse of the narrative, as well as by Gissing's own well-documented, strongly negative sentiments about the lower class,¹⁴ but two incidents undermine this. One is Rhoda's lack of compassion in the case of Bella Royston, who had run away once and then sought shelter again in Mary's establishment; Rhoda's counsel to reject her led to her suicide. Rhoda's coldness is criticized by Everard: "But perhaps you tend to err on the side of severity. Perhaps you make too little allowance for human weakness" (129). It is also criticized by Mary herself: "You have hardened your heart with theory. Guard yourself, Rhoda! To work for women one must keep one's womanhood. You are becoming--you are wandering as far from the true way--oh, much farther than Bella did!" (132). Clearly, at least some poor are worth trying to save, even though prejudices get in the way. The

¹⁴ See, for example, Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (175-79). But as Korg notes, Gissing's experiences in France and Italy, where he found the poor not to be vulgar and degraded, "added another complication to the problem of the relationship of character and poverty, deepening his confusion about it" (129). A novel about the Continental poor would have probably been revealing.

other telling incident is Rhoda's initial refusal to visit the ailing Monica: "Undoubtedly it would give some vague relief to her mind if Monica were persuaded to go to Clevedon, but she could not bring herself to think of visiting the suffering woman. Whatever the end might be, she would have not part in bringing it about. Her dignity, her pride, should remain unsullied by such hateful contact" (291). Part of this must be her jealousy over Monica's supposed liaison with Everard, but repulsion from the vulgar is evident in "unsullied by such hateful contact." Even before the misunderstanding over Everard, Rhoda has already expressed her distaste for Monica (51). In any case, her refusal, at this point in the novel, seems positively heartless.

Characters are also "unclassed," to borrow again Gissing's coinage, in their alienation from people of their own economic level. Marian, for instance, feels no attachment to any of her fellow laborers, though their outward situations are fairly similar to hers, as Monica feels nothing for the likes of Miss Eade, Mr Bullivant, or any of the other shop girls. Reardon believes that he is above his native class, a feeling shared by Biffen, notable in their desire to marry above themselves, as well as in Biffen's dismissal of Reardon's lament for not having married a poor woman. Though such a couple would have been on closer financial footing, the intellectual gap would be insurmountable:

All your efforts to make her understand you would only have resulted in widening the impassable gulf. She would have misconstrued your every sentence, found food for suspicion in every harmless joke, tormented you

with the vulgarest forms of jealousy. The effect upon
your nature would have been degrading. (404)

In addition, the lower-class woman would, naturally, try to leave her class anyway: "The girl would have married you in firm persuasion that you were a 'gentleman' in temporary difficulties, and that before long you would have plenty of money to dispose of. Disappointed in this hope, she would have grown sharp-tempered, querulous, selfish" (404). One thinks of the French sisters of *In the Year of Jubilee*. As *The Nether World* had already demonstrated, being on equal footing economically does not ensure fellow feeling, community. Jameson claims that in *Thyrza* "what is at work . . . is some primal *envy* at the heart of Egremont's interest in the poor, a longing to appropriate that class solidarity from which he must eternally remain excluded" (199). But there is no solidarity in the nether world of the poor. As the parvenu Godwin Peak of *Born in Exile* would be ashamed to see his own family name on the placard of his uncle's proposed diner in the university town (42), so the protagonists of *New Grub Street* and *The Odd Women* aspire to leave their own social backgrounds.

Like his predecessors discussed above, Gissing also saw gender roles as arbitrarily restrictive. Although real gains in women's rights had been made, such as advancements in custodial rights and the Married Women's Property Acts (Altick 58), the latter of which is mentioned in *New Grub Street* by Amy's brother as ensuring her ownership of her inheritance even in the case of divorce, gender roles and rights were still much as they had been early in the century, especially among the lower classes (Hobsbawm, *Empire*

192). Women--that is women over thirty who were either householders themselves or the spouses of householders--were given the vote only in 1918 (Thomson 188). Of perhaps more immediate concern to Gissing was the fact that, as Altick points out, "until the last decades of the century almost the only occupation open to women of good family but reduced circumstances was teaching, as a schoolmistress (Charlotte and Emily Brontë) or, more likely, as a governess in a private family (*Jane Eyre*)" (55), professions of which Gissing makes use in the careers of Alice and Virginia Madden. Tindall notes that Mary Barfoot's training of her pupils in the skills of clerks "may hardly seem [today] a pinnacle of emancipated freedom, but at the period clerking jobs were nearly always done by men and therefore for a woman to take one on was a way of showing that she was, in Mary's words, 'a rational and responsible human being'" (170). Thus, Beatrice French of *In the Year of Jubilee* is repeatedly called "old chum," "old chap," and "old fellow" by Crewe (e.g., 78, 79, 146)--against which Beatrice reacts with "stormy emotions" (214)--as if such terms of address implied that the successful Victorian businesswoman must become unsexed. Virginia comments of Rhoda, "She is quite like a *man* in energy and resources" (30, Gissing's italics). In this context, Gissing's rather flattering portrait of a female physician, Janet in *Born in Exile*, a character to my knowledge unprecedented in Victorian fiction, seems almost revolutionary.¹⁵

¹⁵ The first woman granted a legal license to practise medicine in Great Britain was Sophia Jex-Blake, in 1877, after her strenuous reform efforts. That year was also the first that medical schools were legally "empowered to examine women," though not all did so immediately. The University of Edinburgh, at which Jex-Blake had

When women begin to hold diverse professions, they are proving that, as Rhoda believes, "whatever man could do, woman could do equally well" (54).¹⁶

But even in Gissing, Janet is an exception, more an ideal than a common case, as his novels emphasize the difficulties women faced in getting real opportunities and how such constraints imposed the condition of isolation.¹⁷ This is made clear in *New Grub Street* by the gendered hierarchy that exists within the writing profession. The Milvain sisters begin to compose children's tales, and while Bernard Bergonzi notes that this is "a better alternative, as [Jasper] reasonably argues, [and with which his sisters agree,] than taking employment as governess, which was the only other possibility for middle-class girls at that period" (15), the work of higher forms of

once studied, first allowed female students to graduate only in 1894 (Jex-Blake).

¹⁶ Lloyd Fernando's comment, "The men would be able to do the world's work, or pursue the ideal of secluded and cultured living, [Gissing] seems to say, if only the women did not seek an exaggerated degree of independence in their lives" (114), is very difficult to support. Reardon, for one, is hindered not by Amy but by his diminishing resources and, even more importantly, by his fading creativity, as several characters note. As the narrator reminds us, "It is significant . . . that no native impulse had directed him to novel-writing" (90). Alfred Yule, similarly, has lost his money and his touch for incisive criticism and admits to himself, as noted earlier, that Marian's work is superior. And Widdowson does not even *want* to do any work. Gissing, in fact, encouraged his sisters to become educated, "self-reliant" (Korg 57, 185).

¹⁷ And even Janet is single until near the end of the novel, and her fiancé assumes she will give up her work (389).

literature is largely unavailable to them.¹⁸ Though women may be as talented as men, they are excluded from participation in, or at least credit for, more satisfying endeavors. The "passages of Marian's writing," her father notes, "which were printed just as they came from her pen had merit of a kind quite distinct from anything of which he himself was capable, and it began to be a question with him whether it would not be advantageous to let the girl sign these compositions" (111). Yet she is not allowed to sign them, partly from Alfred's selfish desire to preserve his own image, but partly from a reluctance to admit her gender to the reading public. Yule's calling this more accomplished critic "girl" reflects a condescending conception of the female mind, and the lack of any other female intellectual in the novel implies that Marian's work, if signed, would not be treated as seriously.¹⁹ The highest she will ever rise in her profession, despite obvious potential, is to the post of rural librarian, which she only accepts bitterly. The position, which like Janet's is apparently unprecedented for a Victorian heroine,²⁰ is still physically and emotionally isolating and intellectually unsatisfying.

¹⁸ Maud's lukewarm reaction to the idea indicates how unfulfilling even this occupation will be. She retorts to Jasper's "If you'd give your mind to it" with "Better say 'abandon your mind to it'" (43).

¹⁹ Amy Reardon clearly has intelligence, as her early taste for fine literature indicates. But she soon abandons this for the type of material that Whelpdale publishes.

²⁰ Fictional Victorian male librarians include Gilbert Grail of Gissing's *Thyrza*, and Tom Pinch, who catalogs Martin Chuzzlewit's private collection. According to W. A. Munford's *Who Was Who in British Librarianship 1800-1985*, women librarians were exceedingly

The Odd Women examines the disparity between men's and women's opportunities at greater length. The persistence of a narrow range of choices for women, as demonstrated by the Madden sisters' work as companions to elderly women and by their grand plans, appropriately never realized, for a school, has already been discussed. Rhoda, too, at first declares proudly her intention to be a schoolteacher (3). But she is too forward-looking, and her work with Mary Barfoot is an attempt not only to provide women with a wider variety of opportunities, but also to eliminate the very concept of gendered professions.

Rhoda makes clear the existing connection between work and gender when, noting the loneliness, as well as the desire for a saving marriage, of the average teacher, she states, "But girls are to be brought up to a calling in life, just as men are. It's because they have no calling that, when need comes, they all offer themselves as teachers. They undertake one of the most difficult and arduous pursuits as if it were as simple as washing up dishes" (98). The connection of schoolmarm to Victorian domesticity is clear, and as Nina Auerbach writes, "In [Rhoda's] determined aim at offices, the moment has come when the mission of work is cut off from its

rare before the 1880's (I count only five in all of Great Britain). A Mrs Elliot "was probably the first woman librarian of a British Municipal library"; her term began in 1879. Munford calls two women librarians from the 1890's, Mary Petherbridge and Marian Frost, "pioneers."

confusion with maternity" (*Communities of Women* 143).²¹ The amount of ground that women need to make up is indicated in the differing desires of Widdowson, who finds a "clerk's life--a life of the office without any hope of rising--[to be] a hideous fate" (43), and of Mary Barfoot, who trains women for this very life. Robert Selig calls this difference an "incongruity" in the narrative (76), but Gissing has constructed this purposefully, for the gap in outlook reveals the vastly different goals to which men and women could aspire. As we first saw with Brontë's *The Professor*, women only aspire to what men are already dissatisfied with.

One could argue that since professions are being newly opened to women by Mary and Rhoda, *The Odd Women* reveals a rather optimistic authorial viewpoint, but the lives of these reforming women are painful, as Rhoda's celibacy demonstrates. Her taking on the task of role model to unmarried women further reduces her chance for a love relationship, as she explains to Barfoot:

"What would become of the encouragement I am able to offer our girls?"

"Encouragement to refuse marriage?"

"To scorn the idea that a woman's life is wasted if she does not marry" (182).

Poole writes that her reading of sexual relations as an unequal power struggle "drives her towards a fanatical rejection of *all* relationship" (190). Her surname, Nunn, which is in fact a profession, certainly

²¹ See also John Goode: "The so-called womanly professions of hospital nurse and governess . . . keep women in their 'proper sphere' (i.e. they are versions of motherhood)" (159).

suggests that she has chosen to withdraw from society, as does her unapologetic carriage: "In her face he read chastity; her eye avoided no scrutiny; her palm was cold" (131). But a woman like Rhoda, as well as the women she champions, is offered few alternatives--the only non-gendered profession wholly accepted at this time was shop-worker--and this rejection is not surprising; Everard's desire that her part in their relationship be "nothing short of unconditional surrender" (261) indicates the limits on her options.²² Miss Eade, for instance, who has drifted from her work as a shop-girl to the work of a prostitute--"a not unimportant type of the odd woman" (299)--would represent one extreme option, though of course Rhoda's advantages would obviate such a necessity for her.²³ Marrying for money would be another, but as the Widdowson marriage shows, even this escape does not promise happiness or a larger community: Monica is rejected by Widdowson's sister even before the wedding occurs.

Part of the gender problem relates to the issue of marriage, for Widdowson is too unimaginative to realize that a woman's taxing responsibilities in marriage, as he and the Victorian theorists assign them, at least in lower- and middle-class families, are scarcely

²² Similarly, in *In the Year of Jubilee*, Both Lionel Tarrant (356) and Barmby (265) desire Nancy's subjugation.

²³ Miss Eade, it should be noted, is not the typical fallen Victorian woman. She is never morally castigated or blamed for her fate; the social system that treats her first as a disposable automaton and then as a purchased sex object is. Gissing's first wife would most likely have something to do with this unusually sympathetic portrait.

different from the oppressive burdens of the business world. He states that if he were a shopman,

"I should be earning a hard livelihood by slaving for other people. But a married woman who works in her own home, for her husband's children--"

"Work is work," [Monica replies,] "and when a woman is overburdened with it she must find it difficult not to weary of home and husband and children all together" (162).

Monica is not an overworked poor housewife, but her husband's condescending view of marriage contributes to her feelings of isolation. Edmund's use of Ruskin to justify gender inequalities is a measure of the degree to which Gissing refutes this Victorian version of the institution. Widdowson praises Ruskin as his highest authority: "Every word he says about woman is good and precious. If a woman can neither have a home of her own, nor find occupation in any one else's she is deeply to be pitied; her life is bound to be unhappy" (153). But we have already heard Mary's eloquent dismissal of "the view of us set forth in such charming language by Mr. Ruskin--for it tells on the side of those men who think and speak of us in a way the reverse of charming" (135).

Certainly, Widdowson does not hold charming views. The strict regularity with which he orders his life--and, therefore, the life of his wife/servant (150)--looks both forward to Woolf's Mr Ramsay, who clearly bases his role as father on a Victorian model, and back to Dickens's Wilfers, whose daughter feels trapped in her role. Monica's subservience is revealed when Edmund buys her a new dress to be

"pleasing to him": "'You are making a butterfly of me,' said Monica merrily" (151). Monica's merriness will soon turn to bitterness when she recognizes the limits which are placed upon ornaments and when she suffers the violence that results when women come to demand a measure of freedom for themselves and, therefore, cease to please (249). By the time Widdowson, while waiting "In Ambush"--the title of chapter 23--ruminates on the nature of women, his Ruskinian view has come to seem ridiculous: "Women were very much like children; it was rather a task to amuse them and to keep them out of mischief. Therefore the blessedness of household toil, in especial the blessedness of child-bearing that followed" (236). This is disturbing for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that "child-bearing" recalls Mrs Madden's early death and foreshadows Monica's own. Moreover, his possessiveness has been predicted by his calling Monica "my girl" (156): women in Victorian society, it seems, are either "old chum" or "little girl," never "woman."

But the full significance of Gissing's discussion of marriage is not simply that he revealed such theories about women to be already outdated in his day, but that they still persisted so tenaciously, partly due to women's expectations. The unhealthy Widdowson marriage is almost inevitable. Tindall writes that the narrative "is so subtly done that for quite a while the reader, like Monica herself and like Mary and Rhoda, is misled into half-believing that this marriage with an older man may, after all, be the best thing for the girl" (195), but we begin to realize that there is, for Monica, almost no other palatable option, a fact which Monica recognizes early on: "She felt no love in return; but between the prospect of a marriage of esteem and

that of no marriage at all there was little room for hesitation. The chances were that she might never again receive an offer from a man whose social standing she could respect" (68). Thus, Goode's comment that the novel "seems to involve itself with what is almost a side issue" because Monica is a woman who has no opportunity to marry for love and his question "What happens to the polemic when there are more men than women?" (145) are rather beside the point, since the novel is not a theory of ideal relations but an examination of the reality of English life.²⁴ Marrying for love is extremely rare in Gissing; Monica's marriage is instructive because it is representative, as the marriage of Lady Horrocks, Edmund's sister, helps to suggest (331).²⁵ Monica's is of a piece with Mrs Yule's because it is their only real opportunity. Only when, as Rhoda puts it in a voice harking back to Wollstonecraft, "*all* women, high and low alike, are trained to self-respect, then men will regard them in a different light, and marriage may be honourable to both" (99-100).²⁶ That is, only when

²⁴ As Hobsbawm points out, Great Britain did contain many more women than men (one and one-third million in 1911), leading to a rise in celibacy and childlessness (*Empire* 215-16).

²⁵ Thus, Linehan's comment, "The few counterexamples given of the 'good' woman and the 'good' marriage do little to support a faith in women's emancipation" (362), seems to miss the point. As Rhoda and Gissing himself in his letters point out, a good marriage, as Gissing sees it, is based on equality; emancipation is a *precondition* of a good marriage.

²⁶ Compare, for instance: "The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams, and that they cannot have much effect on her husband's heart when they are seen every day" (Wollstonecraft 96).

there is a joining of equals will marriage be more than a cynical transaction. Reardon, in his more enlightened moments, demands the same: capable, educated women to share fully in a marriage's joys *and* responsibilities (157, 225).

Such equality is needed for women to succeed in their other roles within the family and society at large. But these novels suggest that a level field is not soon coming. Like Maggie Tulliver of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, who is denied the educational opportunities that are afforded her brother Tom,²⁷ Dora and Maud "are sacrificed to [Jasper], as we have always been. Why should we be pinching and stinting to keep him in idleness?" (41). This inequity stems from the still widely held view that women are incapable of great accomplishments, that their minds are delicate. It is Whelpdale's acting in accordance with this attitude--"You should only read of beautiful things, of happy lives"--that leads Dora to complain, as mentioned above, like Bella Wilfer, "I really have no ambition to be treated like a doll of such superfine wax" (494). This condescending opinion of women's potential is also seen in Mr Madden, who acts as a sort of shorthand for the Ruskin-oriented Victorian father, as Jenni Calder notes that Widdowson is of the Victorian husband (201). A typical moment is his response to an earnest observation by young Rhoda:

"Mr. Smithson thinks there ought to be female members of Parliament."

²⁷ See, for example, Book One, Chapter Two.

"Does he? Have the girls told you that there's a nightingale in Mr. Williams's orchard?" (4)

Such a separation of sexes leads to birthing being Mrs. Madden's "function in this wonderful world" (1), as well as Mr. Madden's failure to prepare his daughters for life after childhood, a fact which provokes Rhoda's "wrathful eloquence":

Now could one have a better instance than this Madden family of the crime that middle-class parents commit when they allow their girls to go without rational training? Of course I know that Monica was only a little child when they were left orphans; but her sisters had already grown into uselessness, and their example has been harmful to her all along. (107)

The prospects, as Gissing sees them, for both equality *and* the integration of women are grim. Monica, like Bella Royston, is dead, and Marian and her mother have been exiled, as have Virginia and, in a way, Miss Eade. Though Amy has found marriage, she has staked no claim for her gender, only played by existing rules. She has lost our sympathy: Dora's numerous attacks on her near the end of the novel--that by abandoning her husband in time of pecuniary difficulties, "Her conduct was cowardly, faithless, unwomanly!" (500), that, in fact, "She killed her husband" (546)--seem at least partly justified. But as Everard comments on a similar point, "Men have kept women at a barbarous stage of development, and then complain that they are barbarous. In the same way society does its best to create a criminal class, and then rages against the criminal" (102). Since they are founded on conflict, relationships have become a

battle, as the courtship of Rhoda by Everard demonstrates; and as Mary exhorts, there seems to be room for only one winner: "We live in a time of warfare, of revolt. If woman is no longer to be womanish, but a human being of powers and responsibilities, she must become militant, defiant. She must push her claims to the extremity" (136).²⁸ Such a revolution would be painful to men, but justified. As Gissing wrote to Bertz, again echoing Wollstonecraft,

My demand for female 'equality' simply means that I am convinced that there will be no social peace until women are intellectually trained very much as men are. More than half the misery of life is due to the ignorance and childishness of women. . . . I believe that the only way of effecting this is to go through a period of what many people will call sexual anarchy. Nothing good will perish.
(2 June 1893)²⁹

²⁸ Halperin's comment that "*The Odd Women* makes no plea for women's rights" since Rhoda allows for some women, those who are best suited, to remain at home and work there (184), seems misguided. It is odd that apparently only male critics (Halperin, Coustillas, Fernando) find Gissing and his texts misogynistic, while female critics (Auerbach *Communities*, Jenni Calder, Fox) find him a champion of women's rights.

²⁹ Compare Wollstonecraft (at least for the first half of the quote): I have "a profound conviction that the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes, originating from one hasty conclusion" (73).

The ways in which the Victorian family hinder women's fulfillment reflect a decay in this structure larger than spousal relations only. Throughout Gissing's novels, nuclear and extended families are in disarray. The source of Gissing's dissatisfaction is probably not his childhood, since by all accounts his was fairly happy. As Poole notes, "Direct reflections of Gissing's own childhood and family relationships are conspicuous by their comparative absences. Indeed there is a general recession in the later Victorian novel from the preceding emphasis on child-parent and family ties as referential images and analogues for adult relationships" (2). Yet the family in Gissing's novels is determinative, and what Gissing learned of it from his marriages helped to convince him that even in this setting human relationships were poisoned by class and other power conflicts.³⁰

As in the works of Shelley, Brontë, and Dickens, in Gissing's novels orphans occupy an important position. The Maddens' deprivation has already been discussed in terms of their gender, but it should also be emphasized that their struggles begin immediately upon the death of their father. Other orphans include, in *The Odd Women*, Widdowson and, in *New Grub Street*, Biffen and Reardon. The latter's parents, when alive, had provided for him fairly well, but their deaths, seen only in retrospect, become symbolic of Reardon's untethered, poverty-stricken state. Upon his father's demise, he moves to London to live "the strangest life, of almost absolute loneliness" (88). Many other families are missing one parent.

³⁰ See, for example, Korg 12, 49.

Examples include the Milvains, Amy Reardon, and Rhoda Nunn, all of whom have no father; Rhoda's mother dies soon into the novel.

Biffen's unfulfilled wish--to die "at home. . . . I never have had a home since I was a boy, and am never likely to have one. But to die at home is an unreasoning hope I still cherish" (473)--sums up the desolation of the orphan.

Moreover, even families that are intact suffer from tremendous discord. The bad marriages noted earlier are certainly not limited to those of Everard's acquaintances. They include the Reardons', on which Edward blames his failure as a novelist (108, 234); the Widdowsons'; Widdowsons' parents'; and the Yules'--the narrator comments about Alfred, "If he lost Marian, he would indeed be a lonely man, for he considered his wife of no account" (310). The Yules themselves have a list similar to Everard's of friends with failed marriages (133-34). It is no wonder that the Widdowsons' wedding seems more like a funeral, or that even *The Odd Women's* Mrs. Cosgrove, whose own establishment for girls attempts to find desirable husbands for her charges, claims, "I always have a distinct feeling of pleasure when I hear of married people parting. . . . But it isn't a malicious pleasure; there's nothing personal in it. As I have told you before, I think, I led a very contented life with my husband. But marriage in general is *such* a humbug" (284-85). It is also no wonder, then, that divorce is justified, as in late Hardy, throughout the novels, on grounds of financial as well as emotional incompatibility: by both Reardons, Everard, and both Widdowsons, as well as by characters in other Gissing novels, such as, for example, Lionel Tarrant of *In the Year of Jubilee*. Rhoda, of course, preaches

against ever getting married in the first place. Marian and Jasper's courting in the "lurid fog" (141) not only foreshadows the demise of their own relationship, but also symbolizes how marriage in general has become contaminated by the unhealthy atmosphere of urban life.

Other familial relationships, most notably parent-child ones, but also sibling, are similarly damaged. As noted earlier, there is tension between Jasper and his sisters, as well as between Dora and her mother, over the preferential treatment he receives.³¹

Widdowson's father was violently abusive, and rather like Bentley Drummle, died unmourned. His brother's will, in addition, while making Edmund wealthy, left to him "only a small part of what he had" (41). Everard's father, continuing a tradition of fictional Victorian fathers,³² cuts off Everard after a sexual indiscretion, having previously not given his son financial assistance upon his embarking on a business career: "Of course his father wouldn't assist him with money after he came of age; he had to make his way like any young man who has no influence" (86). Appropriately, Everard became a radical not out of personal convictions, but from the "desire to oppose his father in everything" (85). Alfred Yule, like Mr. Barfoot, uses money as a weapon against his family, threatening to disown Marian if she marries Jasper. Alfred's "loud, mocking

³¹ In a related vein, both Rhoda and Monica herself recognize that "Miss Madden is useless. Monica cannot look to her for advice or support" (217). Thus, even the families that care for each other can offer no real assistance. See also 307.

³² This fictional tradition is based on reality, as demonstrated by Mary and Percy Shelley's being cut off by their fathers after their elopement.

laughter" (446) upon learning of the collapse of Marian's inheritance is symbolic of his treatment of his family: "Marian's Home" (the title of an earlier chapter), indeed.³³

The death of the Reardons' child, who had acted as a wedge between his parents, brings relief. The child had strained their limited resources, and Amy's "love for [Edward] had given place to a mother's love for the child." With the child safely out of the way, "Now it would be as in the first days of the marriage; they would again be all in all to each other" (486). A similar emotion is felt by the Christophersons, friends of the Yules (134). This relief is not unusual in Gissing, since many family bonds have become subordinate to more practical concerns. The deaths of Gertrude, Martha, and Isabel Madden, for example, are reckoned in terms of the increased benefit that the inheritance will bring to three people, rather than six. The feeling here is not far removed from the bitterness with which Bob Hewett of *The Nether World*, upon learning of the death of his new-born, exclaims, "Thank goodness for that, any way!" (314). The criminally violent and the meekly pious share the same concerns. John Yule the elder's thoughts on his family--"But it was doubtful whether the sudden disappearance from the earth of all his relatives would greatly have troubled him" (50)--symbolize family relations in general, and the plot device whereby the birth of his own child leads Widdowson to further distrust Monica is apt (296). Middle- and upper-class families are as

³³ See Regina Paxton Foehr for a useful discussion of the ways in which Alfred violates the parental role, and how Marian and Alfred in fact switch roles.

unhealthy here as the poor ones are in *The Nether World*, the latter of which are summed up at one extreme by Clem Peckover's murder attempt on her mother.

Religion in Gissing, even more than in Dickens, is conspicuous by its absence. Gissing himself seems to have had little use for this traditional support, as his biographers note. Grylls calls him a "lifelong agnostic" (xii), an identity which, according to Korg, was inherited from his father (7). Part of Gissing's distrust of the church, like Dickens's, seems to have stemmed from its inability, discussed in the previous chapter, to effect social change. As Korg notes, Gissing's father "had intended to become a clergyman as a young man, but his dissatisfaction with the church's general incompetence and indifference to social problems led him to revolt against his Evangelical upbringing" (5). It is probably such a lack of institutional concern which led to Gissing's anger over the use of *The Nether World* as the basis for a sermonizing, though laudatory, article (Korg 142).³⁴

Certainly in the novels few, if any, clergy appear to help salve the wounds of the dispossessed. There is no late-night confessional, as in *Villette*, which, though problematic, at least helped to ease the mind of the suffering Lucy. Instead, the Maddens, in a time of great distress, receive from an aged aunt "barely legible . . . fortifying texts of Scripture, but nothing in the way of worldly counsel" (10). Even

³⁴ Part of the rancor was due to the omission of the struggling Gissing's name from the paper, but his ideological objections were real.

the function of *Our Mutual Friend's* Reverend Milvey, to offer sympathy if no real consolation, goes unfulfilled in Gissing.

When they do appear, the clergy, rather like those in Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, are notable more for their social and political maneuvering than for their performance of clerical functions: in *Born in Exile*, Godwin Peak uses an outward show of piety to try to snare an upper-class wife, while Bruno Chilvers, who at first appears to be honestly religious, is Broad Church in the broadest sense, merely enjoying the spoils of office. Notably, Peak is a sympathetic, partly autobiographical character.

Moreover, faith has become convenient: only when their circumstances are healthy does God exist for most Gissing characters. Reardon, for instance, upon his marriage, "felt the benevolence of a God" (96). The indefinite article is revealing; there is no strongly held belief here. Likewise, *The Odd Women's* Micklethwaite, having become successful, experiences a sense of unity with the universe: "They lunched joyously. The mathematician drank a bottle of excellent hock, and did corresponding justice to the dishes. His eyes gleamed with happiness; again he enlarged upon the benevolence of mankind, and the admirable ordering of the world" (91). Juxtaposed with an epicurean feast, this optimism seems to the reader too easy, especially as we have already seen the Maddens' enforced dietary frugality. Those who are unhappy cannot easily share Micklethwaite's religious confidence; Gissing thus relates an optimistic theology to a lack of social awareness. Gissing's dislike of such part-time belief is illustrated by the controversy surrounding an alleged deathbed conversion by the novelist, reported to *The*

Church Times by an English cleric present at Gissing's death. The lengths to which his friend Morley Roberts went to contradict this report indicate that Gissing's rejection of an easy creed was thorough.³⁵

In some instances in Gissing's novels, faith is used to oppress directly. Widdowson, for instance, uses his interpretation of scripture to oppress his wife. And as the narrator claims, his case is not unusual: "Like most men of his kind, he viewed religion as a precious and powerful instrument for directing the female conscience" (154). Thus, the few characters who have a Christian orientation are usually oppressive in their lack of concern for, and even abuse of, the powerless.

But Gissing is concerned not only with what he sees as religion's failure of social responsibility; the forms of Christian worship are also criticized. Rhoda and Barfoot, for instance, are dismissive of Christian ritual. When negotiating about their union, he asks, "You wish for that old, idle form--?", to which she replies, "Not the religious form, which has no meaning for either of us" (266). Given the examples of marriage already cited, and the traditional one which Everard will later embrace, their radicalism here is approved by the narrative as progressive.

Moreover, Gissing's novels denigrate religious faith itself as stupidly optimistic at best, narrow-minded at worst. Gissing decried dogmatism as the death of imagination. He wrote to Bertz, "I suffer so much from the absolute lack of conversation. My poor sister is a

³⁵ See Korg, 253-54.

Puritan. and we can talk of nothing but matter of fact" (5 September 1889). Coustillas writes, "[Gissing] did not attack religious faith but formalism and its manifestations" (130), but the spiritual tribulations of mid-century have given way here to an almost flippant scorn of faith; Gissing, in fact, attacks both. Biffen says, with a large degree of authorial approval, "We have no belief in immortality; we are convinced that this life is all; we know that human happiness is the origin and end of all moral considerations" (477). This is not an equivocal expression of doubt, but a confident statement of the divinity's non-existence; in its lack of faith in immortality, it moves even beyond deism. Thus, while Mary notes of the Maddens, "It would be a terrible responsibility to rob them of . . . their religious faith." both she and Rhoda agree that the Maddens' belief is misguided (52). As the conversion of Jessica of *In the Year of Jubilee* is rather pathetic--"the poor girl in the hideous bonnet had fallen very low, and her state of mind called for forbearance" (364)--so Alice's reliance on the Bible is dismissed somewhat contemptuously as no different from Virginia's reliance on the bottle. As the author comments of Alice, immediately after Virginia's alcohol problem is exposed: "She read in the book for about half an hour, then covered her face with her hands and prayed silently. This was *her* refuge from the barrenness and bitterness of life" (305). While certain individuals might find some comfort from it, religious faith seems to the intellectuals in Gissing's works simply a crutch, an old, spent force.

Not surprisingly, religious allusions do not often appear in Gissing's novels. When they do, they usually undergo a

transfiguration into secular concept. Early on, Jasper characterizes the British Museum Reading Room, and by extension nearly the entire profession of literary criticism, as the "valley of the shadow of books" (46). But this phrase from Psalms has lost its primary religious significance in its application to social commentary; it simply means here a wasteland of drudgery and economic deprivation, and there is no Shepherd to guide them through it. Similarly, the ringing bells that seem to call to Reardon are not the church bells one hears throughout the Victorian novel, but rather the bells of the workhouse. When Jasper tells Marian, "I have seen you several times . . . under the great dome" (50), their companion Miss Harrow is appropriately surprised, as "the great dome" seems to her to refer to a cathedral, at which these characters have no business. John Peck notes that the dome of the Reading Room "acts as a central symbol" (11), but this is a symbol emptied of its Christian significance. The valley of the shadows is *within* the dome.

In fact, Marian first envisions the Reading Room as a sort of circle of hell:

The fog grew thicker; she looked up at the windows beneath the dome and saw that they were a dusky yellow. Then her eye discerned an official walking along the upper gallery, and in pursuance of her grotesque humour, her mocking misery, she likened him to a black, lost soul, doomed to wander in an eternity of vain research among endless shelves.

But finding this metaphor ultimately unsatisfactory, Marian finally settles on the lay metaphor of a Benthamite prison (138).

Other apparently religious signs--as we have already seen, money becomes "blessed"--are also actually devoid of Christian implications. Rhoda Nunn, for instance, is not so named for any religious feelings, but for her independence from men; the narrator of *New Grub Street's* use of the terms "monkish solitude" and "monastic seclusion" (95, 219) indicates not a pious withdrawal but an unhealthy isolation. Jane Snowdon of *The Nether World* has a Gethsemane scene when she begs her grandfather not to make her the administrator of his charitable scheme: "Grandfather, don't ask it of me! Give it all to some one else--to some one else! I'm not strong enough to make such a sacrifice. Let me be as I was before!" (308). But her sacrifice to the poor would come as the result of the manic scheme of an obsessed, almost deranged old man, not from a Christian understanding. Selig notes that Mary Barfoot "continues to toil for 'the joy of advance,' 'the glory of conquering,' the 'winning' of 'souls,' the 'propagation' of a 'new religion,' the 'purifying' of 'the earth'" (75), but these terms are used in distinctly non-Christian senses.

There are isolated occurrences which are described in spiritual terminology: these events at first seem to indicate the presence of the divine, seem to promise the reintegration of the outcast, but these moments are fleeting, and ultimately the terminology is secularized. For instance, during an argument with Monica, Widdowson briefly embraces feminism in rather metaphysical terms heralding a new age: "For a moment he thought himself capable of accepting this change in their relations. The marvellous thought of equality between man and wife, that gospel which in far-off days

will refashion the world, for an instant smote his imagination and exalted him above his native level" (168). But this passage occurs only halfway through the novel; his tyranny has barely begun. The words "moment" and "instant" are crucial. Another such occurrence takes place shortly before Biffen commits suicide, in a vision of natural, transcendent beauty. As he walks "westward," which while suggesting death is also one metaphorical direction of Christian rebirth,³⁶ "An unwonted effect in the atmosphere caused him to turn and look to the east. An exclamation escaped his lips, for there before him was the new-risen moon, a perfect globe, vast and red. He gazed at it for a long time" (529). But this is the cold, reflecting moon that is new-risen, not the life-giving sun, and it cannot save him. This vision is not transformative, there is no promise of resurrection, and his fall into obscurity in the next chapter has been predicted by this imagery. Religious forces in Gissing's novels have, thus, completely lost their power to help the isolated. Dickens, who, as discussed above, saw little truth in Christian doctrine, could still use the term *Christian* as a humanist compliment, but Gissing denied any beneficial associations to the term. In its rare appearances in Gissing's works, religion is briefly enticing but ultimately empty.

Alden writes that Gissing was "profoundly distrustful of the fundamental Victorian faith in progress and the perfectibility of man" (17). Without such a faith, there is little ground for hope left in his world, as religion and the family are not strong enough to assuage the isolating effects, discussed above, of class and gender biases. The

³⁶ See, for example, such John Donne poems as "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward" and "Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness."

only solutions that promise relief are divorce, advocated throughout the novels; celibacy, the final resort of Rhoda, who at the end of the novel "regard[s] the world with an intense bitterness" (281); and suicide, contemplated by Reardon and Monica and committed by Biffen (and, one might argue, Reardon). None of these solutions reintegrates the outcast, but instead leads to the further disintegration of society. For Gissing, the promise of Victorian society lies in tatters.

Gissing's narrative form echoes this lack of faith in conventional Victorian thinking. The double plot structure, for instance, normally suggests analogies and describes the life of the community as a whole. As Peter Garrett writes of the mid-Victorians, double plots "imply an effort to comprehend the fictional world as a pattern of coexisting people, places, and events. . . . the whole as a complex spatial pattern"; he claims that Dickens's novels, by using this structure, "transcend the limits of individual points of view" (30). But this is not true for Gissing. His use of this organizational pattern in fact often highlights the ways in which society fails to connect.³⁷ Jasper's rise, seen against Reardon's

³⁷ Despite his problems with it, of course, Gissing still relied on this structure. But as a number of critics have noted--see James M. Keech, for instance--he was bound by the dictates of publishers and the lending libraries. This form was, in fact, an enormous burden to him (Korg 157-58). Moreover, his advice to his brother Algernon, also a writer, shows Gissing working towards a more Modernist style, stripped of authorial comment: "I am convinced that the less you think about analysis, the better and more acceptable work you will do. Let the reader analyse character and motive . . . do you simply present facts, events, dialogue, scenery" (qtd. in Korg 179). Such a presentation would remove the didacticism that characterized many

decline, is no longer morally instructive, as had been, for instance, David Copperfield's against Uriah Heep's. It is, like Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, a documentation of two types of failure, as is the concurrent Widdowson marriage and Rhoda/Everard courtship. In addition, Gissing has practically abandoned the use of coincidence. And the one important use of this plot device--Bevis's and Everard's living in the same building--does not serve to unify the characters' lives. Leading as it does to Widdowson's violent beating of Monica and the final decline of their marriage, it indicates rather the accidental, random nature of existence. Moreover, the title of the final chapter of *New Grub Street*, "Rewards," is deeply ironic, as this is no happily-ever-after epilogue: the marriage of Amy and Jasper is hardly akin to that of John Grey and Alice in Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* or Coningsby and Edith in Disraeli's novel.³⁸ Similarly, their inheritance is not poetic justice, as it only mocks with success the sympathetic Marian and enriches the undeserving Amy. As Evelyn Toynton puts it. "To discover Gissing is to become harrowingly aware of the gulf between what we know of Victorian England from our novel reading and the strangling reality of life in that time. The happy endings are exposed as falsehoods; the satisfying convention by which

Victorian novels and work towards a more Modernist ambiguity, as well as away from the often padded three-decker format.

³⁸ In this latter work, Flora can be seen as parallel to Marian, as a possible lover of the "hero" who fades away (dies, in fact) at the end. But her end is almost a sacrifice to the more appropriate coupling. This is a structural weakness, an inconsistent way of tying loose ends, but its approval by the narrator is instructive for its distance from Gissing's novel.

redemption, resolution, the restoration of the moral order are achieved by the last page seems like mere evasion" (138). Toynton might be guilty here of exaggerating her case, but she is right to point out the ways in which Gissing reacted against the Victorian myths of prosperity and order.

Poole writes of the ending of *New Grub Street*--"This final scene, so neat, so glib, is not the one demanded by the novel's internal logic. Gissing's deep, humane identification with those who are left outside, requires that the final scene should belong to Marian, and her lonely, loveless vigil in the provincial library" (155). But this claim is off-target. Part of Gissing's point is the way society has annihilated attractive values and those who hold them. Much as the Voice of Society in *Our Mutual Friend* no longer evokes the names of those for whom it has no use, so Reardon--"Back to obscurity!" (290)--Marian (550), and Biffen (531) disappear from memory. As Poole himself writes, they are "outside"; their removal from the narrative is, therefore, apt.

Moreover, Gissing also documents how many Victorian ideas about society have lost what can now be perceived as their mythic resonance. Society, whether high or low, is fractured and antagonistic, and there is no community into which one *can* be reintegrated. In Gissing's fiction, then, the modern world is coming into full being: earlier novels posited a social center which marginalized the greater part of humanity. Yeats will later write, "the center cannot hold," but in Gissing, there is little center at all. His characters wander about, looking for meaning and sustenance, but find none. Bergonzi writes that Reardon "is not presented in

stark isolation, as such figures tend to be in twentieth-century fiction" (22), but Reardon certainly feels himself to be, as does, for instance, Stephen Dedalus in the Dublin society of *Ulysses*, though he too really is not. A Brontëan self-reliance is exposed as illusory here, and the isolation of Gissing's characters is so complete that they have become self-alienated: Reardon doubts his art, Monica the integrity of her marriage vows, Alfred and Marian their criticism, Rhoda, at least at times, her celibacy and life work. These novels represent what is becoming a full revolt against the Victorian social structure.

CHAPTER 6

THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS: THOMAS HARDY AND THE TURNING POINT INTO MODERNISM

The Victorian writers I have been examining were confronting the shock of discovering that human society was fragmented and disoriented; their novels, pervaded by the sense that this horror has blindsided its victims, document this condition, describing the various effects of isolation on the individual consciousness. Even a writer as late as George Gissing was still busy elucidating the extent of societal trauma.

But Thomas Hardy is the first to begin to accept disillusion and exile with a tragic resignation, what Irving Howe calls a "somewhat passive 'modern' sadness" (139); the condition of isolation is the *donnée* of his novels, especially the later ones. Characters such as Tess and Jude, and, to an extent, Angel and Sue, are deracinated wanderers whose experiences have not only cast out, but also alienated them from their nominal homes, perhaps best symbolized by the fact that Jude and Sue feel closer to animals, namely the birds. The young Jude is supposed to drive away from the farm, the pig he is supposed to kill slowly, and the rabbit they find in a trap, than to other humans. As the narrator comments regarding the birds: "Why should he frighten them away? They took upon them more and more the aspect of gentle friends and pensioners--the only friends he could claim as being in the least degree interested in him, for his aunt had often told him that she was not" (53). Tess's loneliness is articulated most clearly when she struggles, due to her sense of guilt

concerning Alec, to decide whether or not to marry Angel: "To decline to marry him after all . . . and leave the dairy, meant to go to some strange place, not a dairy . . . to go to some arable farm where no divine being like Angel Clare was. She hated the thought, and she hated more the thought of going home" (268). Nearly alone in the world--Angel is no divine being--she has no real confidantes, no real family, no true home. She is, as Jude says of himself, "an outsider to the end of [her] days!" (401).¹ Or as *Jude's* narrator puts it, "Nobody did come, because nobody does" (72). The individual isolation that had been developing during early- and mid-Victorianism has reached its nineteenth-century peak here. As Deborah L. Collins rightly notes, "There is no Joe Gargery to Jude's Pip, no Magwitch to deliver him from fatal unnecessary" (137). The same can be said of Tess. We might note that she resembles in certain ways Jane Eyre, as in her flight across the countryside, during which she must sleep out of doors, in Chapter XLI. But Flintcombe-Ash, where she arrives, is wholly unlike the Rivers' house, and she has no desire to remain there, either. She is a new type of heroine in Victorian fiction because the troubles that afflict her become overwhelming; there is no escape from the social dilemmas that turn an innocent girl into an outcast. As Annie Escuret writes, "If one of Jane Austen's heroines . . . is able to understand her wrongdoings and 'make amends,' the mistake made by Tess cannot be atoned for" (210).

¹ Though she does love Angel, their marriage is an unmitigated disaster, and even their period of courtship is shadowed for her by her guilt.

In fact, both she and Jude are not merely cast out, but in certain ways desire separation from their societies. To be integrated into their worlds would be for them anathema. Tess, Jude, and Sue, and to an extent Angel, feel themselves to be different. They feel above their societies, which they view as crass and petty. They do not respect their associates--in Tess's case the Queen of Spades and the Queen of Diamonds, in Jude's Arabella and Vilbert--and like Stephen Dedalus with regard to Buck Mulligan, they are right to want to escape them. And like that of many characters in Gissing, their alienation leads to thoughts of suicide, verbalized repeatedly in both novels.²

But their acceptance of their condition, stemming not only from Hardy's sense of a mystical, tragic Fate, but also from a more quotidian belief that society's damaging structures were deeply entrenched and almost unchangeable, for a while saves them. Like Beckett's characters, though they seemingly can't go on, they go on. Like the novels of such Modernists as Conrad, Lawrence, Forster, and Joyce, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* are attempts to formulate a compensation for social disintegration, examining various possibilities for rebellion against the rigid doctrines that have strangled humanity's instinctual expressiveness and suppressed the possibility of true interaction. Walter E. Houghton writes that from 1830 to 1870, "doubt never reached the point of positive or terminal

² This desire for oblivion has a source in Hardy's own life. Martin Seymour-Smith notes that "he drew . . . much philosophical satisfaction from . . . the fact that he had almost not been born at all, something which was his obstinately stated ideal" (13).

skepticism" (13), but it has in Hardy. Whereas characters such as Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, Pip, and Monica Madden tried, at least tentatively, to conform to a traditional society, Jude and, to an extent, Tess fully reject society's formulations and try to create new, personally viable modes of living.

Several important strains of Modernism move beyond documenting the decay of contemporary society and look for alternatives to orthodox assumptions. *The Shadow-Line*, for instance, finds relief in work, though a relief that differs greatly from orthodox Victorian views on this subject, since the attention to duty brings not meaning, but needed distraction from meaninglessness. Forster's desired connections, while difficult to achieve, are pursuable goals, be they across class (*Howards End*) or racial (*A Passage to India*) boundaries. Moreover, the unconventional relationships in Lawrence (e.g., *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, and *The Man Who Died*) and Joyce (*Ulysses*) demonstrate a continuing preoccupation with forming real communities, fragile and small though they may be. Though Stephen will probably not return to act as Bloom's son, the possibility clearly remains; in any case their friendship has helped contribute to the affirmation at the end of the novel, as perhaps the greatest modernist text ends not in bleak despair, but with Molly's ringing "yes I said yes I will Yes" (644). The final words of Eliot's *The Waste Land* are "Shantih shantih shantih" (434) translated by Eliot as "The Peace which passeth understanding" (76); the speaker has already declared, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (431). Woolf's *To the*

Lighthouse ends with Lily's "I have had my vision" (310), *The Waves* with Bernard's heroic, Romantic gesture, "Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!" (297); though the waves then break on the shore, the character has remained to the last powerfully active and life-embracing. We might also note that "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" documents a healthy change in "human character" and human relations in the development of Victorian life into Georgian. Perhaps what makes Modernism so striking is not its sudden awareness of emptiness and fragmentation, but its desperate attempt to reorganize and regenerate the possibilities that many Victorian commentators could no longer see.

The problems documented in earlier writers are still apparent in Hardy. Class structures and economics, for example, still act as disruptive forces. Tess's poverty, for instance, plays an important role in her domination by Alec--and in her physical and mental isolation--not only in her early mission to him on her impoverished family's behalf, but also in his hold on her late in the novel, which derives from the Durbeyfields' continuing monetary woes. As John Lucas puts it, discussing Alec's use of Tess's poverty in his capture of her, "Sexual possession is for her only one aspect of his attempt to own her" (181). Or as Ian Gregor writes, "Alec's world, the world of the Stoke-d'Urbervilles, is inseparable from nineteenth-century *laissez-faire* capitalism, it is the triumph of the individual bourgeois ethic, what is wanted can be bought" (*Great Web* 192). The

commerce here is in human beings, and Tess certainly seems like a slave at Flintcombe-Ash as she feeds the merciless threshers.³

Class biases, moreover, are clear in both *Tess* and *Jude*. The Clare family is most obviously infected with them. Both Angel's brothers and his parents express their displeasure with his marrying beneath him. As one brother states, "Ah! poor Angel, poor Angel! I never see that nice girl [Mercy] without more and more regretting his precipitancy in throwing himself away upon a dairymaid" (376). This is later echoed by his mother: "Don't, Angel, be so anxious about a mere child of the soil" (455). Although Angel initially defends Tess against class biases (226), the family's attitudes weaken the already failing marriage. The Clare prejudice is exposed when Angel blurts out to Tess, "You almost make me say you are an unapprehending peasant woman, who has never been initiated into the proportions of social things" (302). He seems to have forgotten that he had also once been like a peasant, and that class biases reveal more about the judge than the judged, two facts demonstrated by his brothers' condescension towards his life at Talbothays Dairy. As the narrator comments, both summing up and responding to the Clares' snobbery: "He was getting to behave like a farmer. . . . The manner of the scholar had nearly disappeared, still more the manner of the drawing-room young man. A prig would have said that he had lost culture, and a prude that he had become coarse" (219).

³ E. J. Hobsbawm notes that in "modernized farming [at the end of the nineteenth century] . . . considerable use was made of seasonal migrant labour, often from far away, for whom farmers did not have to take responsibility when the working season ended" (113). Like earlier heroines, Tess's work isolates her.

Jude is famously hindered by his class status from a university education, of which he would probably make good use, as the scene in the tavern with the Latin "scholars" implies. There, he impresses the university students with his knowledge of the language, and, with the confidence of an expert, identifies their heretofore hidden ignorance. His rejection letter, which is addressed, "To Mr J. FAWLEY, Stone-mason," clearly defining him as a member of the working class, advises him, "you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere" (167).⁴ As the narrator had commented, "Only a wall divided him from those happy young contemporaries of his with whom he shared a common mental life. . . . Only a wall--but what a wall!" (132). Jude's desire to rise in status merely echoes one of the great economic shifts of the nineteenth century. But he learns that such opportunities are quite limited, as those who hold class biases control many of the institutions that regulate movement. Whereas Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth* notes the hostilities of old money towards the vulgar nouveau riche, *Jude* documents the difficulties of ever becoming a parvenu, at least

⁴ Moreover, as Merryn and Raymond Williams point out, even if Jude were admitted to a university, he would be at a severe disadvantage: "The forms of this class education, and especially the attachments to dead languages and to orthodox religion (Balliol College), betray the ambitious scholar from outside the class: not only in denying him access but in directing his mind towards limited class forms which, because of the social dominance, pass for general learning" (38). As Elizabeth Tenenbaum pointed out to me, the claim has been made that this letter is a reproduction of one that Hardy received from the master of Balliol College.

through education.⁵ Jude's difficulties are perhaps best symbolized by his later meeting with the composer of "At the Foot of the Cross," at which he is treated ignominiously, leading, as class-based rejections so often do, to embarrassment and self-doubt.

What distinguishes Hardy from many of his predecessors is that he recognizes that earlier attempted solutions, such as, for instance, Forster's Education Act of 1870 and its national corollary in 1880, which attempted to close the gap in learning across the social classes by making school attendance compulsory (Altick 250), are at best partially effective. While some poor have received a measure of formal education--Tess has passed the Sixth Standard (58), and Jude, though mainly an autodidact, had attended Phillotson's night school--they cannot complete it, and they become alienated from their own class without being able to join another. As the narrator comments about Tess:

Between the mother, with her fast-perishing number of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed. (61)

⁵ Jude's experience was especially true of the poorer classes, to which he of course belongs. As Hobsbawm notes, "School was the ladder by which children of the more modest members of the middle strata climbed higher; [yet] even in the most meritocratic educational systems few sons of actual peasants and even fewer of workers got further than the bottom rungs" (*Empire* 179).

The narrator has already noted that Tess must switch back to dialect when in the house, as if the mother speaks a foreign language, at least not the language of "people of quality" (58).⁶ The estrangement caused by the nineteenth century's economic shifts is due, Hardy thus claims, to an increasing amount of contact, though not bonding, between various social strata, since contact with the higher classes causes the lower to become disaffected, but offers them no society to join. Jude's education serves only to demonstrate his distance from people such as the coarse Arabella and Vilbert on the one hand and the privileged university students on the other; and in Jude's case, at least, there are no similarly placed students with whom to form a middle-class. Attempts to raise oneself in class, which at least partially succeed for characters such as Jane, Lucy, and Pip, are tragic failures for the Durbeyfields and for Jude.

Tess, like Jane and Monica Madden, attempts to cross class boundaries with her marriage, but Jude attempts a full-scale rebellion against his lot. Like Pip, he attempts to raise himself socially and leave his simple life behind. Also, like Pip, he develops a

⁶ Dorothy Van Ghent's comment, while discussing the use of Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode" to analyze the Durbeyfields' expulsion from Marlott (441), that "no circumstances have been suggested in which Tess could have had time or opportunity or the requisite development of critical attitudes to brood so formidably on Wordsworth's lines" (197), misses Hardy's point that Tess's feeling distant from her mother is in part due to her learning, for, while not an accomplished scholar, Tess does have some education. In any case, Hardy's syntax does not assume Tess knows the poem; it only asserts that the poem does not apply to her and "some few millions of others" (441). Whether or not this rather minor detail is consistent is not very important in regard to Hardy's understanding of the social implications of Tess's education.

sense of disdain for the common country worker. But a key difference between these two is the varying impetus for each quest. While Pip is thrown into his adventures by Magwitch and encouraged by Estella's baiting, Jude's quest is wholly self-willed. His fertile intelligence cannot flourish in the oppressive and degrading atmosphere of Marygreen, so he leaves to pursue an academic career. His quest is mainly driven by a desire simply to increase his knowledge--Jude is no scheming social climber--but it also displays an inherent class-consciousness that Pip did not originally have, and education is not the only advantage Jude seeks in Christminster. Pip must learn to feel socially disadvantaged, but Jude has always felt a sense of injustice. Thus, it is significant that class biases hinder his rise. His limited education, constrained by class hierarchies, is too great an obstacle. While Pip would need only some ready money to leave his old world behind, buying clothes, hiring tutors, and attracting a higher class of friend, Jude must overcome a more firmly grounded class structure.⁷

As Patricia Alden points out, Hardy's novel makes tentative stabs at socialism in the scene where Jude makes a speech to the Christminster townspeople: "Jude, a working man, stands with a child on his hip, his companion, not his wife, beside him, talking with other laborers, organizing their experience around new ideas rather than around outworn notions of social and moral order, protesting the

⁷ While Pip and Jude aspire towards different goals--Pip towards the gentry and Jude towards education, Pip therefore having more social ambition than Jude--the difference in their abilities to rise is what I am concerned with here.

'social formulas' which hampered him and which are no longer appropriate if, indeed, they ever were" (63-64). Stephen Blackpool, whose complaints about class, like Dickens's, are certainly passionate and articulate, especially during his second confrontation with Bounderby at the latter's house, cannot accept the proto-socialist appeals of the evocatively named Slackbridge; such a rebellion, Stephen believes, would also be a dereliction of duty erasing the moral high ground he can take in his complaints about the injustice of his situation. Jude, however, owes no duty to his superiors; he has become an honorable version of Slackbridge: he is no rabble-rouser, but a rather noble figure worthy of the readers' support and sympathy because he recognizes and takes a principled stand against real injustice. And as Simon Gatrell argues, Sue's use of *comrade* to describe Jude is most likely not a coincidence: "The first instance of this usage in the OED is dated 1884, and it seems almost certain that Hardy would have come across the use in newspaper reports or elsewhere by 1895; there may well be a deliberate socialist overtone" (161).⁸ Jude and Sue have rejected the stay-in-your-sphere mindset that was promulgated by the Victorian power structure.

Gender roles also play a part in the alienation of Hardy's characters, though not as much as in other writers in this study, perhaps because Hardy in general focused on a rural economy, where

⁸ Hobsbawm notes that socialism grew "with startling rapidity" from almost non-existence in the twenty years or so after 1880 (*Empire* 116-117).

the separation of the sexes was less pronounced.⁹ Bathsheba Everdene's role in *Far from the Madding Crowd* as head of the farm, while unsettling to some of the male characters, does not warrant much discussion in the novel; it is for the most part simply accepted. Still, Hardy well understood the ways in which women as a sex suffered, as his letter to Mrs Fawcett dated 30 November 1906 makes clear:

I have for a long time been in favor of woman-suffrage. . . . I am in favour of it because I think the tendency of the woman's vote will be to break up the pernicious conventions in respect of manners, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household (that it must be the unit of society), the father of a woman's child (that it is anybody's business but the woman's own). . . .

Victorian ideas about women had already been exposed by Hardy as the rationale for Henchard of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* to sell his wife, an act which, as Seymour-Smith points out in his notes to the Penguin edition, has historical precedents (422). In *Tess*, the restrictive power of gender roles is criticized most overtly in the hypocritical morality that forgives Angel his trespass but condemns Tess for hers, though as Tess instinctively recognizes, "No, it cannot be more serious, certainly . . . because 'tis just the same!" (292). One might wonder whether the stress in the title of Phase the Fifth--"The Woman Pays"--should fall on "Pays" or "Woman," since Angel will not

⁹ Rosemary Eakins, while discussing attitudes towards women and agricultural work, quotes nineteenth-century tracts that reveal that women did much of the farm work that men did (121-122).

pay. Despite his earlier recognition that women labor under attitudinal disparities and his scrupulous avoidance of taking advantage of them--he realizes that forcing himself on Tess would create great discomfort for her, though not for him, due to the gossip of their fellow workers (245)--Angel now condescendingly plays the part of moral superior, as if he could grant Tess pardon out of his wise benevolence: "The severity of the decree seemed deadly to Tess; she saw his view of her clearly enough; he could regard her in no other light than that of one who had practised gross deceit upon him. Yet could a woman who had done even what she had done deserve all this?" (324).¹⁰ But Angel comes from no moral high ground; he merely slavishly follows what Tess believes to be "an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature" (353). Tess has the high ground by attempting to overturn the Victorian ideal of the virgin, an ideal which is exposed as fantasy by Angel's mistaken insistence that there are two Tesses, one pre- and one post-lapsarian. As Howe puts it, "in her incomparable vibrancy and lovingness, she comes to represent a spiritualized transcendence of chastity" (110).

¹⁰ John R. Reed writes that "Tess . . . suffers from the imagined disapproval of her companions, though the narrator specifically indicates that her associates are sympathetic rather than hostile" (347). This may be true of Izz and Marian, but the hostility of Angel, the one companion who truly matters to her, is all too real. She is right in not telling him, at first, of her experience with Alec. Fancy Day, of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, is, in the context of *Tess*, not a scheming flirt, but a real, living person, sexually aware and honest with herself. Her decision to hide from Dick her promise to marry Maybold no longer seems underhanded, but realistic. She is a Tess more versed in the practical truths of love and relationships. Maybold's advice to be honest and tell Dick advocates the same course that poisons Angel's feelings for Tess.

Gender handicaps in *Jude* are most often seen in relation to the Church's treatment of women, though Gillingham's response to Sue's desire to leave Phillotson for Jude--"I think she ought to be smacked, and brought to her senses" (296)--shows that the Victorian domestic situation, in which some men felt the need to dominate women, as if the latter were misbehaving children, was still powerfully alive. Hardy's main complaint with respect to this problem is that the Church contributes to this ideology. As Sue notes, the marriage ceremony reenacts the subjection of women by representing them as chattel:

I have been looking at the marriage service in the Prayer-book, and it seems to me very humiliating that a giver-away should be required at all. According to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; but I don't choose him. Somebody *gives* me to him, like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal. Bless your exalted views of woman, O Churchman! (226)

Jude's worry that he has driven Sue to Phillotson is mirrored in his acting, at Sue's request, as giver-away. And Sue's complaint is not simply a reflection of her sexual anxieties; Arabella voices similar concerns about the Church and gender: "I used to think o't when they read it in church, and I was carrying on a bit. 'Then shall the man be guiltless; but the woman shall bear her iniquity.' Damn rough on us women; but we must grin and put up wi' it!" (389). Whether or not this is theologically accurate is almost beside the point: this has been her experience, and it reflects the double standard towards

female sexuality that existed both morally and legally throughout the nineteenth century.¹¹ Her biblical quote, from Numbers, is slightly out of context, but the passage, which explains how to deal with an adulterous wife, has no corresponding passage for an adulterous husband. It also excuses the jealous man who only suspects his wife from exposing her to judgment. Sue and Arabella are thus correct to point out that Christian ideology has led to a social code that demeans women.¹² When Sue is expelled from her lodgings after being found in possession of statuettes of Roman gods, the offense to the landlady is a combination of paganism and obscenity, for these are erotic talismans to which Sue seems almost to make love:

They seemed so very large now that they were in her possession, and so very naked. (141)

These little obstacles to the indulgence of what had been the merest passing fancy, created in Sue a great zest for unpacking her objects and looking at them, and at bedtime, when she was sure of being undisturbed, she unrobed the divinities in comfort. (143)

But eroticism is supposed to be denied to the nineteenth-century woman. Therefore, when Sue becomes hysterically possessed by

¹¹ See Francoise Basch, especially 24-25.

¹² U. C. Knoepfelmacher writes, "Hardy does not condemn Arabella for her frank selfishness in the way that Thackeray subtly forces us into condemning Becky. Arabella is merely acting in accordance with the cruelty that is 'law'" (*Laughter* 228). This law is a natural, Darwinian, non-Christian one.

religious guilt, she stifles her sexual desire, and according to Jude, her femininity:

"I musn't stay?--Not just once more? As it has been so many times--O Sue, my wife, why not!"

"No--no--not wife! . . . I am in your hands, Jude--don't tempt me back now I have advanced so far!" (430)

Similarly, Mercy Chant in *Tess*, the quintessential domestic virgin, is both unsexed and inhumane, as her uncharitable response to finding Tess's boots reveals. As Angel sees it, Mercy has committed "a curiously unnatural sacrifice of humanity to mysticism" (339). That both Tess and Sue, though especially the latter, lose sight of what defines their own selves during their struggles with moral codes--both feel a guilt which is undeserved and which runs counter to their original liberation--is testament to the power that nineteenth-century social constraints have to self-alienate.

In a pattern that is very familiar by now, traditional modes of support for the alienated figure do not offer comfort. But in Hardy, Tess, Jude, and for a time Sue will finally reject tradition and seek out new structures. The family, for instance, must be defined anew, as it is now recognized unmistakably as an often debilitating structure. Family relationships throughout the two novels are at best inept, at worst hostile, but in either case destructive. Tess's parents, for example, are famously engrossed in their lineage, at the expense of their children.¹³ John's failure to recognize his daughter while

¹³ Roger Robinson notes that Hardy strengthened this theme in his manuscript revisions (137-38), highlighting their misplaced priorities.

dreaming of "family"--"I'd quite forgot it in my thoughts of greater things!" (47)--seems comic early on, but it is indicative of the self-absorption that will later yield such terrible results, for it is, of course, her parents' imagined greatness that sends Tess out alone to reclaim their imagined heritage.¹⁴ It also causes Tess's terror that Sorrow's lack of baptism will condemn her to Hell, since John will not allow the publicity which would attend the performance of the sacrament: "His sensitiveness to the smudge which Tess had set upon that nobility [was] most pronounced. . . . No parson should come inside his door, prying into his affairs, just then, when, by her shame, it had become more necessary than ever to hide them" (143). That the family's affairs are only "his," not "theirs," is revealing. Parental concern and remorse for sending Tess to Alec are voiced only once in the novel, and even this incidence is tinged with narratorial sarcasm:

"Well, 'tis a chance for the maid--Still if 'twere the doing again, I wouldn't let her go till I had found out whether the gentleman really is a good-hearted young man and choice over her as his kinswoman."

"Yes, you ought, perhaps, to 'ha done that," snored Sir John. (93)

John cannot be bothered to help, and Joan will later criticize Tess for her failures, again abnegating responsibility.

¹⁴ Maggie Humm notes, "The titles *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary* are names given to frustrate their heroines whose personal identity has to be established against a given social identity" (42). But *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* also indicates her frustration by her familial environment, not merely her possession by Alec.

But even before John hears of his lineage, the Durbeyfields have failed as parents. As Collins puts it, "[They] may be decent people, amusing in their rustic simplicity and dialectical banter, but fine parents they are not" (126). Again, they seem comic early on, such as when Joan tells Abraham, "Go away, and play on the stairs until father and mother be ready" (are finished getting drunk) (65). But the tragic implications multiply, as the death of the horse and thus Tess's ruin are partly set in motion by John's drinking.¹⁵ We have, by this point, already read the narrator's metaphor of the "Durbeyfield ship":

If the heads of the Durbeyfield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were these half-dozen little captives compelled to sail with them--six helpless creatures, who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield. (61)

Tess's later complaint that her parents have prepared her ill for the real world--"Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me?" (131), which Alec later echoes (394), and which is related to Rhoda Nunn's complaint about Victorian parents'

¹⁵ John is a sort of updated Thias Bede, alcoholic and lazy--Adam Bede's scathing criticisms of his father would apply here as well--and his only real efforts come too late to be effective: "He worked harder the next day in digging a grave for Prince in the garden than he had worked for months to grow a crop for his family" (73).

raising of girls--and her rejection of her heritage--"She had no admiration for them [her ancestors] now; she almost hated them for the dance they had led her" (156)--are wholly justifiable.¹⁶ Her parents' pride and greed lead to her seduction; home life is not the nurturing force it is supposed to be. Therefore, Tess must reject home and strike out on her own to develop a more stable life. All of her attempts to find a replacement family--in the farm, in Angel, even in Alec--will fail, but they are explorations of alternatives to the Durbeyfields' ruinous domesticity.

Angel's family is as unhealthy. Like the Durbeyfields with regard to Tess, they do not prepare Angel for life in the outside world, but whereas the Durbeyfields' failure is unconscious, the Clares' is willful. Their refusal to send Angel to Cambridge results in consequences which include Angel's falling away from "the 'good old family'" (172); and as the narrator notes, these implications "were not long in showing themselves" (171). Like the Durbeyfields, the Clares rarely express unease about their decision (419). While both Clares harbor secret regrets, they do nothing to rectify the situation. Though John, as noted above, is snoring when the topic is discussed, at least he regrets Tess's lack of preparation; the Vicar Clare, near the

¹⁶ Tess is not the only victim. Her brother, too, clearly suffers: "When Abraham realized all, the furrows of fifty years were extemporized on his young face" (72). As Gatrell points out, textual revisions in later editions emphasize more strongly the magnitude of the familial problems the Durbeyfield parents have caused. Eakins's focus on the curse of the d'Urberville coach therefore seems somewhat misguided, since this provides too easy an excuse from responsibility. The narrative makes it clear that, despite what seems a determinative Fate, a change in attitudes can help prevent as well as alleviate suffering.

end of the novel, "did not even now hold that he would have been justified in giving his son, an unbeliever, the same academic advantages that he had given to the two others" (419). Such lack of compassion in a father has by now become distressingly familiar.

Angel's standing with his parents as a sort of pariah increases his alienation from his brothers. Their class feelings are exacerbated by Angel's work as a farmer, and they refuse even to attend his wedding: "Angel would have liked at least one of his brothers to be present as groomsman, but their silence after his gentle hint to that effect by letter had signified that they did not care to come" (279). This silence highlights the growing distance between him and his brothers, which is also apparent in the text's lack of direct conversations between them. As one brother comments, "He never tells me anything nowadays. His ill-considered marriage seems to have completed that estrangement from me which was begun by his extraordinary opinions" (376); apparently having recognized the implications of his brothers' coldness, Angel has begun to accelerate the severing of his fraternal ties.¹⁷ Like Tess, Angel must also reject traditional kinship bonds in an attempt to find his own solutions. As Jan Gordon points out, such actions reverse the pattern of the Victorian orphan by creating a desired orphanhood when the original family is insufficient (367).

Jude's family is likewise crippling, the effects of which he also must attempt to counteract. Orphaned at a young age, he lives with a

¹⁷ Tess's relationships with her siblings are better, but as burdens, they play, albeit innocently, a crucial role in her return to Alec.

great-aunt--the extra generation emphasizing the distance--who tells him, "It would ha' been a blessing if Goddy-mighty had took thee too, wi' thy mother and father, poor useless boy!" (51). Similar to Dickensian orphans, he knows that "his great aunt did not care much about him" (62). He also plays a role similar to that of Jane Eyre at the Reeds', as a victim of (figurative) violence: while his aunt talks about him with a stranger, "the boy, feeling the impact of their glances like slaps upon his face, moved aside" (51).¹⁸ Other local adults who have some sort of authoritative relation to Jude, such as Phillotson and Farmer Troutham, serve as no parental surrogates. Phillotson does not realize his importance to the boy, and Jude feels abandoned by him to a life of painful servitude, emphasized by the interruption of Jude's lamenting revery for having lost Phillotson to Christminster by Troutham's "sudden outcry: 'Bring on that water, will ye, you idle young harlican'" (49).

Spousal relations in the two novels are also contaminated. The healthiest marriage in these two texts appears, in fact, to be the Durbeyfields', though it is certainly no incarnation of romantic bliss. In *Tess*, what should be a happy marriage between Tess and Angel is destroyed as soon as it begins by Angel's too-traditional views. Conventions are seen to be so restrictive and deadening that by the time Angel's brother marries Mercy Chant, marriage seems a fall into banality rather than an expression of supreme love. This would

¹⁸ The familial pattern of the burdensome child will be repeated, to an extent, in Jude and Sue's offspring, who are a financial drain, as well as an obstacle to finding lodgings, though any actual hostility is not demonstrated.

seem to indicate that there is little hope in a reliance on this traditional institution. Ramon Saldivar writes, "In the Victorian novel marriage is preeminently the foundation of social stability. As a quasi-contractual agreement, it sets up the participants as a center for other integrating relationships. These relationships are not simply necessary for society; they constitute it" (615). But in late Hardy, even more markedly than in the other Victorian writers I have examined, the foundation is cracked and supports nothing.

Jude the Obscure examines this theme at much greater length. One of Hardy's points here is that people marry for the wrong reasons. Most often, a brief physical attraction and relationship leaves the lovers subject to a punitive Victorian morality that chastises "a transitory instinct which had nothing in it of the nature of vice, and could be only at the most called weakness" (107), with "a permanent contract [based] on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship tolerable" (115). Arabella's ability twice to trick Jude into marriage depends on his reluctant acceptance of this code of ethics.¹⁹ The same morality argues for Tess's reuniting with Alec; yet they too shared only a brief physical relationship. In both cases, such a union is abhorrent.

Sue, as well, rushes blindly into marriage, though she does so more willingly, out of despair over Jude, who, she learns, is legally unavailable. For Sue, sexual relations with her husband Phillotson

¹⁹ Sexual attraction is also the fleeting bond which unites *Far From the Madding Crowd's* Bathsheba and Troy in another disastrous marriage.

are tantamount to rape (479);²⁰ in any case, no one seems to marry for love. Hence the narrator's comment that Arabella and her publican husband were in "the antipathetic, recriminatory mood of the average husband and wife of Christendom" (365).

A result of these poor motives, and of this foul mood, is one that, as we have seen, has many predecessors in the novels of earlier Victorians: what in these days is termed domestic violence. In addition to the physical battles between Arabella and her husband, the soldier at the registry office has obviously beaten his wife, who has a tell-tale black eye (351), and wives are twice referred to as sacrificial offerings (355, 445). This is an old story; thus, numerous characters in the novel do not believe a couple to be married until they see discord in the form of verbal or physical battle.

Marriage, these novels claim, at least in its typical Victorian incarnation, kills any love that had existed before the restrictive demands of the commitment are imposed. This is made quite explicit in *Jude*, but it is also appropriate that Tess's relationship fails as soon as she is led into the marriage chamber. The family structure has failed to provide a sense of stability, and the characters must strike out on their own to compensate for their loss. Tess, as mentioned above, seeks haven in a number of different places as she attempts to redefine the family. Like Jane at the Rivers', for instance, Tess finds, at least temporarily, a new family structure at Talbothays

²⁰ Sue's revulsion from Phillotson could be part of her general distaste for matters sexual, noted by a number of critics. But a similar level of anguish in her relations with Jude is not described; Sue, it would seem, would not jump out of Jude's window.

Dairy. And like Jane she finds a higher-class husband in Angel. But what makes her so new as a heroine is her flouting of conventional ethics in her search. Jagdish Chandra Dave claims, speaking of *Jude*, that "Hardy has strongly disapproved of free-love here, and aimed moderately only at rectifying the institution of marriage" (112), but the narrative structure of *Tess*, unlike *Angel*, never criticizes Tess for her sexual indulgence.²¹

Tess's narratorial approval might become clearer in a comparison of Tess to a related character: *Adam Bede's* Hetty Sorrel. Very natural, sexual beings, both conceive an out-of-wedlock child; both mourn its death after ambiguous feelings towards it. Both, in fact, are murderers. But Hetty has killed the child, not the father, and this results from the same self-absorption, the novel implies, that had allowed her to commit fornication and betray Adam, whom she had led on. Her punishment, endorsed by the narrative, seems as much for her sexuality as for her crime. Tess, however, is no criminal--even her murdering Alec, which has almost nothing to do with the child and mostly to do with his persistent attempts to possess her, is not condemned by the narrative. Rather than a transgressor, she is the victim of a draconian morality that robs her of her chance for happiness. Thus, though she ignores conventional

²¹ Whether or not Tess was raped or seduced remains a source of debate. Margaret Higonnet represents the first reading (206), Howe the latter (116). While Alec certainly takes advantage of her, the narrator describes the event as "confused surrender." It seems to me that the ambiguity is necessary; this moves the discussion away from who is to blame to whether or not the event is significant at all.

morality in her union with Angel, the narrative clearly approves of her actions--the novel's subtitle is *A Pure Woman*--despite her violation not only of contemporary religious beliefs but also of conventional sexual mores.²² Her few days with Angel in the empty house, shortly before her capture, are portrayed, unlike Hetty and Arthur's tryst, as beautiful, and they resonate with the Edenic tragedy--minus the original sin--of bliss cut short.

Tess attempts to construct a family unbound by social conventions. Angel, likewise, considers flouting morality in his short-lived proposal to Izz Huett. Were he to follow through, he would be blamable only for betraying Tess, the emotional center of the work, for whom, it is perhaps quaint to say, the reader cares very much. But he would not be condemned by the novel as an adulterer *per se*.

This reevaluation of marriage ethics is more explicit in *Jude*, where Jude and Sue do, for a time, construct a family that is in direct violation of marriage law and public opinion. They live together, though neither is yet divorced, as Sue had lived with her undergraduate friend; though this earlier relationship was platonic, it was still scandalous. And even though Jude and Sue's relationship becomes legally sanctioned, Christian ethics still labels this union adulterous, as divorce is still not accepted by the community, a fact made clear by Phillotson's forced resignation from his post as

²² As Seymour-Smith relatedly points out, a lack of criticism in *Far from the Madding Crowd* of Fanny's fornication caused Leslie Stephen to urge that the illegitimate baby be removed from the text (188).

schoolmaster and by Jude and Sue's dismissal from their work restoring a church. As Jude explains when Sue asks if they are staying at Shaston, "We couldn't possibly, don't you see. We are known here--I, at any rate, am well known" (301). An adulterous couple, as they are still defined by their community, could never earn a living; they must, therefore, find somewhere to pretend to be married. Gillingham's reactionary response to Phillotson's release of Sue also makes clear the community's position: "But if people did as you want to do, there'd be a general domestic disintegration. The family would no longer be the social unit" (295). The children, in any case, are illegitimate, which would prevent the family's general acceptance into a traditional community.

But for Jude, and for a while Sue, traditional legal bonds do not hold. A marriage ends when the attraction does: Jude considers himself divorced when he sees his gift to Arabella in a pawn shop, long before the legal documents are drawn up. Moreover, marriage to an unloved man is "prostitution" (437). And as for the legal ceremony of marriage, Jude tells Sue, "I loved you, and you loved me; and we closed with each other; and that made the marriage" (437). Arabella's, and according to her, Australians' in general, lack of concern about the illegality of bigamy--"Crime! Pooh. They don't think much of such as that over there! Lots of 'em do it" (243)--is, upon looking back, a refreshing contrast to Sue's pedantry, a point made later when Sue calls Jude "my fellow sinner"; Jude's response, "my mistaken wife" (438), is, the novel insists, correct.

Thus, while the non-traditional families that Tess and Angel and Jude and Sue found do not succeed, they are at least proposed

alternatives to the conventional Victorian family structure, whose demise in fiction Hardy has helped to accelerate. These new versions, it is true, do not work, but they should have. And if Sue is right, if "Everybody is getting to feel as we do. We are a little beforehand, that's all" (354), then society as a whole will one day redefine itself. Sue's comment occurs in a pessimistic context, but it is part of Hardy's larger point that humanity will be able to wait for society's laws to catch up with its "pioneers" (*Jude* 428).²³

As we have begun to see from the Church's role in gender inequities, religion, too, is no salve and becomes in Hardy another target of rebellion. One aspect of the problem is that helpful clergy, as in Dickens and Gissing, are almost entirely absent from these novels. The church offers very little in support of the lonely souls who need it. Christminster is anything but what its name implies, for no one there ministers to Jude's wants, certainly not in the name of Christ. And the clergy who do appear are worse than Dickens's rather helpless Reverend Milvey: they in fact cause great damage.

Parson Tringham, for example, sets in motion Tess's tragedy by exciting John Durbeyfield's interest in his noble lineage. He can hardly be faulted for the carter's dreaminess and fatherly

²³ Richard Dellamora notes a similar passage which appears in the manuscript: "When men of a later age look back upon the barbarism, cruelty & superstition of the times in which we have the unhappiness to live, it will appear more clearly to them than it does to us that the irksomeness of life is less owing to its natural conditions, though they are bad enough, than to those artificial conditions arranged for our well being, which have no root in the nature of things" (qtd. 155).

shortcomings, but the parson's worldly hobby--the d'Urberville's progenitor is named Sir Pagan (43)--seems unusual for a cleric. Moreover, the narrator notes that he withholds crucial information: "He might have added, what he knew very well, that the Stoke-d'Urbervilles were no more d'Urbervilles of the true tree than he was himself" (78). His discourse to Sir John, as the parson first calls him, thus seems at best a vain or gossipy show of knowledge, at worst a rather ill-willed deception.

In addition, Tess is probably correct to fear the Reverend Clare when she plans to approach him on the Sabbath to plead for help, Angel having abandoned her: "Such a good man," she fears, "might be prejudiced against a woman who had chosen Sunday, never realizing the necessities of her case" (374). Whether or not this is true, his Christianity, which includes a typical antipathy towards Catholics (334), is selective and betrays a rather perverse impetus: "[The Clares'] Christianity was such that, reprobates being their especial care, the tenderness towards Tess which her blood, her simplicity, even her poverty, had not engendered, was instantly excited by her sin" (457). That the Marlott congregation does not act morally--their malicious gossip drives Tess from church (134), and the Sabbath is described as "this day of vanity, this Sun's-day, when flesh went forth to coquet with flesh while hypocritically affecting business with spiritual things" (199)--is hardly surprising, given their lack of benevolent clerical role models.

More incriminating to Christianity is Alec's turn as a revivalist preacher. Alec's new-found religion does not prevent him from remaining dangerous; religion does not reform him, but feeds his

obsession with Tess and provides spurious grounds for a permanent reunion, which would clearly be disastrous for Tess. Religion in his hands is destructive, a warped theology that blames the victim: "Of all persons in the world whom it was my duty and desire to save from the wrath to come--sneer if you like--the woman whom I had so grievously wronged was that person" (386). He also equates Tess to Eve, the temptress of misogynist belief: "And why then have you tempted me? I was firm as a man could be till I saw those eyes and that mouth again--surely there never was such a maddening mouth since Eve's" (402). Thus, while Christianity itself cannot be faulted for Alec's behavior, it is certainly powerless to transform him, and it provides him with a specious justification for his sins.²⁴ Christianity is for Alec an impotent force, as it will also be for Arabella. Alec's later proposal to Tess, almost identical to St John Rivers's to Jane, exploits religious guilt with a sexual ulterior motive, a combination whose implications for male hegemony have been discussed above.

Jude himself considers entering the clergy, but he knows that religion will offer no comfort. When a cleric advises, "Only you must make up your mind to avoid strong drink," Jude responds, "I could avoid that easily enough, if I had any kind of hope to support me!" (177). Obviously, the church will not provide that hope. Like Virginia Madden, Jude finds periodic drunkenness more soothing

²⁴ Dorothy Van Ghent points out that "in the episode of the planting fires, . . . we see him with a pitchfork among flames," belying his reformation. However, despite this pose, Alec is not, as Van Ghent rightly claims, merely a "stage villain" (208). He demonstrates the inconsistencies that lie within Evangelical Christianity.

than religion. Certainly, what he sees of the church is not helpful, a distressing fact most clearly demonstrated when he overhears two clergy engaged in a rather trivial debate about the direction a priest should turn while administering the Eucharist: "Good God--the eastward position, and all creation groaning!" (411). In his notes to the novel, C. H. Sisson points out that this is a "matter to which great theological importance has been attached--by some" (508). But for Jude, nearing the end of his rope, there are far more pressing matters with which the Church should concern itself. It is, however, distanced from real human problems and desires, as the narrator implies in the phrase "the species of nunnery known as the Training-School at Melchester" (193), where "nunnery" represents not a conclave of spirituality, but an unhealthy, virginal isolation.

Other representatives and symbols of Christianity are similarly disillusioning. Two such are Angel and Mercy. The former is first seen playing a harp (cf. his name) in a garden, yet he is not a benign, understanding guardian, but rather a being driven by the restrictive and hypocritical sexual morality that Hardy associates with doctrinaire Evangelical Christianity, despite his professed heterodoxy, as his reaction to Tess's past reveals. The seemingly minor details of the "thin notes of the second-hand harp" reveal the decay that has crept into his version of religion. Though at first Tess and he are, for the most part, content at Talbothays, as Lucas points out, "Such paradisaal imaginings prefigure a descent into a fallen world" (183). But it is not sin that provokes the fall, but the way their moral code defines sin. As for Mercy Chant, as noted above, though she herself and her community thinks of her as traditionally pious, she shows no

mercy and shares the Clares' bigoted view that "Roman Catholicism [is] sin, and sin damnation" (339).²⁵

Not only the clergy of Christminster, but also the city itself are faulty in their spirituality. The young Jude associates the city with "The heavenly Jerusalem" (60), but he will be, finally, disabused of this notion. He is deceived by its siren song: "Suddenly there came along this wind something towards him--a message from the place--from some soul residing there, it seemed. Surely it was the sound of bells, the voice of the city, faint and musical, calling to him, 'We are happy here!'" (63).²⁶ As Marilyn Thomas Faulkenberg writes, "For Jude, . . . the greater curse is not that man dreams, but that the labyrinth of reality is bound to seduce the dreamer by leading him on with expectations of a sacred center never to be attained" (105). And the absence of the divine here is prefigured by the "obliterated" church in Marygreen (50), for in Christminster, "It seemed impossible that modern thought could house itself in such decrepit and superseded chambers" (125). The disillusioning greed of Christminster's composer, whose hymn had so moved Jude, has a

²⁵ Not much information seems to exist on Hardy's view of Catholics, but as Seymour-Smith notes, while describing Hardy's dislike of Kipling's anti-Semitism, an even more common Victorian sentiment than anti-Catholicism: "Tom was one of the very few writers of his time and place who never made a hostile remark about other races" (416). This tolerance seems to have also been true of other Christian denominations.

²⁶ This seems to me related, in a way, to the incident described in "Channel Firing," where the corpses think they hear the trumpets announcing Judgment Day and their resurrection to Heaven; they have mistaken the sounds of the guns of warships for a religious sign.

corollary in the spiritual indifference of the once-admired university students, who prove to be heavy drinkers and Jude's inferiors in Latin.

Along with Hardy's disgust with hypocritical demonstrations of conventional piety, his faith in a benevolent God deteriorates and reaches an ebb unprecedented in the Victorian age.²⁷ As Collins points out, Hardy seems to have taken many different stances concerning his religious beliefs, which have made it difficult for commentators to fix his position (3), but I believe we might most appropriately describe him as an agnostic, as Hardy did himself. Discussing the attacks which his novels inspired, he wrote in his journal (17 October 1896), very shortly after the publication of *Jude*:

To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces must be either limited in power, unknowing, or cruel--which is obvious enough, and has been for centuries--will cause [the vast body of men] merely a shake of their head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer or foam, and set all the literary contortionists jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic, as if I were a clamorous atheist, which in their crass illiteracy they seem to think is the same thing. (*Life* 302)

²⁷ Some critics, especially Seymour-Smith, argue that Hardy was questioning faith less than he was criticizing a "superficiality of faith in others" (46)--Gatrell notes that in the paperback edition of *Tess* Alec's conversion is made "less sincere" (70). But extensive evidence from the text demonstrates, in addition, a questioning of the foundation of Christian theology.

The distinction between atheist and agnostic is important, for Hardy almost always, in his novels, attempts to understand the workings of a supernatural Force that puts the world in motion.²⁸

Bernard Lightman notes that the agnostic movement gathered steam when T. H. Huxley coined the term in 1869; its first appearance in print was the same year (10). The movement seems to have reached its height in the mid 1880's, as the founding of the journals *Agnostic Annual* and *Agnostic*, in 1884 and 1885, respectively, attest, though it began to decline in the 1890's (177).

But as Lightman also points out, agnosticism grew out of an orthodox religious context: the first Victorian to claim that God is unknowable was an Anglican Dean, who did so to defend the Bible from the skeptical conclusions of the German Higher Critics (6). As Lightman reminds us, from a modern vantage point "we ignore the Victorian agnostics' idealism" (3). He writes that while twentieth-century "skepticism [has] an agonizing sense of loss," the Victorian

²⁸ In other writings, however, Hardy does venture towards atheism. We can see this as early as the poem "Hap," which seems to contain a precursor of the empty terror of such Frost poems as "Desert Places." See also the entry in his journal dated 29 January 1890: "I have been looking for God 50 years, and I think if he had existed I should have discovered him" (*Life* 234). Seymour-Smith downplays the importance of this and comments, "[the note] is chiefly interesting as recording that, after all, he *had* been looking for God" (415). But a willingness to believe is not the same as belief. Like many Victorians, Hardy wanted faith, but could not see his way to it. See Houghton's excellent analysis of this problem among Victorian intellectuals, 64-77. In any case, whether he was agnostic or atheist, he was clearly moving away from conventional Victorian belief.

agnostics "exulted in [their] feeling of liberation from the oppressive bonds of Christian faith" (3).

Hardy, therefore, must be seen as a transitional figure moving from the optimistic Victorians to the despairing moderns, for, as I hope to show, his version of agnosticism considers the unknowableness of the divine, who is now renamed a Force, instead of the Christian God, to be evidence of its indifference, if not hostility, towards humanity. In the novels, Hardy is still not atheistic--he posits a deity--but that deity is neither the loving, healing God of the New Testament, nor the just if wrathful God of the Old.

The causes of this development in Hardy's thought are somewhat difficult to isolate in his own life. Certainly the work of nineteenth-century scientists affected him as much as any writer. Robinson calls him "the most honest and sensitive recorder of the shock-wave from the evolutionary discoveries" (129-130). And for all the gibes Hardy received in his own lifetime about his informal education, he had a wide knowledge of contemporary science, philosophy, and social theory. Collins, for instance, notes that he "devoured" *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Essays and Reviews* (1860), an "English version of higher criticism," very soon after they were published (33).²⁹ Various letters demonstrate the effect that his reading had on his faith:

²⁹ See Lennart A. Bjork's "Hardy's Reading" for a very useful survey and analysis of Hardy's research in numerous areas. Seymour-Smith also notes, for example, Hardy's meticulous research on astronomy for *Two on a Tower* (285).

Whether [Spencer's] theories are true or false, their effect upon the imagination is unquestionable. (17 June 1893 to Lena Milman)

Well: what we gain by science is, after all, sadness, as the Preacher saith. The more we know of the laws & nature of the Universe the more ghastly a business we perceive it to be--& the non-necessity of it. (27 February 1902 to Edward Clodd).³⁰

But as Seymour-Smith points out, Hardy's "notion of an indifferent (i.e. non-benevolent) deity was essentially his own," pre-dating his reading of Darwin (77), a claim most readily supported by the oft-quoted passage in the *Life* that describes an epiphanic melancholia he experienced as a young boy, while lying with a straw hat covering his face, an episode fictionalized in *Jude*. His reading, apparently, only exacerbated his gloomy personality.

Still, in his novels Hardy identifies this melancholia as a function not of individual personality, but of history: Tess's dark outlook, her "sad imaginings," are famously described as "feelings which might almost have been called those of the age--the ache of modernism" (180). This was earlier labeled "the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of a belief in a beneficent Power" (174). And Father Time's murder-suicide prompts this observation: "It was in his temperament to do it. The doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us--boys of a

³⁰ Lightman identifies Clodd, who wrote a biography of Huxley, and Leslie Stephen, for a time Hardy's publisher, as two of the important Victorian agnostics (16, 15).

sort unknown in the last generation--the outcome of new views of life" (410-411). Thus, while one must have a sensitive temperament to suffer, contemporary history can create the despairing "nature"; that is, in effect, personality itself is a function of history. Tess and Angel and Jude and Sue are meant to be representative.

Whatever the reason, the intensifying doubts about the existence of a benevolent god lead alternately to terror and to a sense of meaninglessness. When the characters suffer, they often blame an indifferent, capricious, even cruel god, whom Hardy denominates "the President of the Immortals." Whether this figure is truly the Christian God or a metaphorical representation of fate is debatable, but in either case, a transcendent "Force," instead of performing its expected role as nurturer and protector, accelerates the destruction of an innocent. The lack of protection by this force leads to a questioning of Wordsworth's Romantic vision of humanity in harmony with Nature/God (*Tess* 62, 441), a doubt summed up in the grim parody of "Pippa Passes": "God's *not* in his heaven: all's *wrong* with the world" (*Tess* 325).

As Tess understands it, the deity is punitive:

She thought of the child consigned to the nethermost corner of hell, as its double doom for lack of baptism and lack of legitimacy; saw the arch-fiend tossing it with his three-pronged fork, like the one they used for heating the oven on baking days; to which picture she added many other quaint and curious details of torment. (143)

And not only sin but happiness is punished by this vengeful God: "All this good fortune may be scourged out of me afterwards by a lot of

ill. That's how Heaven mostly does" (271). There is no chance for serenity. The application of the metaphor of "Last day luridness" to the tableau in which Tess confesses to Angel is apt (292), since heaven seems to show itself only when meting out a spurious justice. Therefore, in the scene where a wandering Evangelist paints "THY, DAMNATION, SLUMBERETH, NOT," as well as other terrifying warnings from the Bible, on a stile and wall, Tess reacts that the words of the Bible, which punish joy and sorrow alike, are "horrible, . . . Crushing! killing!" (128).

In a similar vein, Sue has been taught to believe that social ills and the tragedies that result from them are forms of divine retribution. The novel insists she is wrong: her logic about Father Time's being a messenger of heavenly wrath, "the right slaying the wrong" (425), is faulty, since he also kills himself (the right killing the right), and in any case, the narrative does not view his siblings as wrong. But the more important point is that her reading of social doctrine is based on religion as the devout understand it.

The only divinity that Hardy can envision besides a malevolent God is an indifferent one, perhaps an even more fearful possibility. Its implications are explained as follows by Tess: "I am forbidden to believe that the great Power who moves the world would alter His plans on my account" (399). Even if God exists, as this passage affirms, he has no interest in alleviating human suffering, as the juxtaposition at Jude's death of his quotations from Job with the cheering of the crowd demonstrates. As the narrator of *Tess* asks during the seduction scene: "But, some might say, where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith?"

Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked" (119).³¹ For Tess, God is distant, inscrutable, a "vague ethical being whom she could not class definitely as the God of her childhood, and could not comprehend as any other" (135). As she later comments, "But perhaps I don't quite know the Lord as yet" (158). Moreover, though Tess suffers far more than her fellow villagers, her lack of faith is not unique. At a dance early in the novel, a villager, wondering why she is so anxious to leave on a Saturday night, asks, "What's yer hurry? To-morrow is Sunday, thank God, and we can sleep it off in church-time" (108). His apathy seems aphoristic, as does his empty and, to Hardy, deeply ironic use of the phrase "thank God." Angel, too, is disturbed by God's inscrutability, a doubt which haunts the end of the novel. When Tess asks him if he believes they will meet after death, she is desperate for an answer: "Tell me now, Angel. . . . I want to know." In his lack of a response, the narrator implicitly compares Angel to Christ being questioned by Pilate: "Like a greater than himself, to the critical question at the critical time he did not answer" (486). But where Christ's silence derives from his Divine acceptance of his burden, Angel's derives from an inability to comfort Tess with religious myth.

The Bible itself is used in *Jude* to suggest the incomprehensibility of life's meaning: "For who knoweth what is good for man in

³¹ That other god, David Skilton points out in the notes to the Penguin edition, is Baal (526). This implies that the difference between Christian and pagan figures is difficult to discern.

this life?--and who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" (399). But where in Ecclesiastes humanity's ignorance contrasts with God's might, in *Jude* humanity's ignorance is unassuaged by a divinity's care; the passage as used in the novel expresses the inscrutability of existence. In the novel, the Testaments certainly provide no explanations, as is clear when Jude and Sue heatedly argue whether the Song of Solomon's version of sexuality, which Sue at the time endorses, or the Church's version explains human nature: "Jude saw the absurdity of quarreling on such a hypothetical subject, and she the silliness of crying about what was written in an old book like the Bible" (207).

With Christianity now lacking its traditional authority, Hardy begins to search for another governing myth. Peter J. Casagrande writes that Hardy advocates "a new sense of beauty compatible with [a] tragic sense of human destiny" (*Hardy's Influence* 212). This is useful since Casagrande's formulation contains, as does Christianity, both fall and redemption. What makes Hardy modern is that "fall" here is not "sin" so much as "alienation." Casagrande's "sense of beauty" is more practically adaptable to contemporary life, and less moralistically deadening, than the old form of religion. It sympathetically recognizes pain while rejecting religion's need to assign guilt.

For Hardy, the most obvious place for this beauty to be found is in human love and sexuality. As Tess tells Alec, "Why, you can have the religion of loving-kindness and purity at least, if you can't have--what do you call it--dogma" (410). This faith in love is most touchingly recorded in her suggestion that Angel marry her sister,

again in violation of typical morality: "That's nothing, dearest. People marry sister-laws [sic] continually about Marlott. . . . O I could share you with her willingly when we are spirits!" (485). Tess's suggestion is distinctly non-Christian in its acceptance of polygamy--she and 'Liza-Lu will share Angel after death--but it is better than anything Christianity has to offer.

Pagan elements are, in fact, often notable in these characters' rare moments of happiness, as in the narrator's almost idolatrous sun-worship:

His [the sun's] present aspect, coupled with the lack of all human forms in the scene, explained the old-time heliolatries in a moment. One could feel that a saner religion had never prevailed under the sky. The luminary was a golden-haired, beaming, mild-eyed, God-like creature, gazing down in the vigour and intentness of youth upon an earth that was brimming with interest for him. (136)

The sun's apparent interest is in distinct contrast to Jehovah's ostensible indifference.³² Sue's purchase of the pagan statuettes seems justified by the closer connection pagan gods apparently have to Wessex than do the Christian. She will later comment, "I fancy we have had enough of Jerusalem . . . considering we are not descended from the Jews. There was nothing first-rate about the place, or people, after all--as there was about Athens, Rome, Alexandria, and

³² We should also note that an absence of earthly society contributes to this state. The human condition would presumably complicate the sun's pleasurable vision.

other old cities" (156). She is correct here as well: her "pagan" sexuality and liberation, not her later pedantic Christianity, make her first-rate. As Jude explains their contentedness with each other, "I feel that we have returned to Greek joyousness, and have blinded ourselves to sickness and sorrow, and have forgotten what twenty-five centuries have taught the race since their time, as one of your Christian luminaries says" (366).

What their community's religion has taught Jude and Sue, as well as Tess, is not only that "what was good for God's birds was bad for God's gardener" (55), that "Nature's law [is] mutual butchery" (378), but also that simple human joys are perverse. Christianity's constraints upon sexuality constitute the first and main reason why Jude abandons orthodox religion. At first, in his flinging down the Testament to keep his tryst with Arabella, such abandonment is rather comic (87), but it is wholly serious in his relationship with Sue: "The kiss was a turning-point in Jude's career. . . . it was glaringly inconsistent for him to pursue the idea of becoming a soldier and servant of a religion in which sexual love was regarded as at its best a frailty, and at its worst damnation" (278-79). Earlier, Jude "saw in her almost a divinity" (199) as his sexual attraction began to grow--this is the scene in which Sue comes to his apartment dripping wet and changes into his clothes, a scene filled with erotic tension. Sue is right to call the Good Friday tunes "morbid" for squelching the couple's arousal, for celebrating the arising from the dead of a celibate god is unnatural.³³ Celibacy is repressive, creating

³³ This idea is developed by D. H. Lawrence in *The Man Who Died*, where Christ escapes death and renounces his celibate past.

conflict between the mind and body. Even Mrs. Edlin criticizes Sue's late puritanism (442). As Arabella instinctively knows, the love of a man is worth more than that of a god: "After all that's said about the comforts of this religion, I wish I had Jude back again" (386). As for Sue, her abandonment of Jude shows that, as Arabella puts it, "she's took in a queer religious way, just as I was in my affliction at losing Cartlett, only hers is of a more 'sterical sort than mine" (432-33). Jude, Hardy feels, is healthier than Sue because "the human was more powerful in him than the Divine" (267). Thus, in her reversion to conventions and to misery, Sue fails to fulfill her rebellious potential--as Jude says of her, "I was gin-drunk; you were creed-drunk" (470). However, real possibilities for dealing with, as Tess calls it, our "blighted" world, have been suggested.

Hardy was, of course, a great pessimist, and he saw little hope in the old solutions. For instance, though Hardy finds true poetry in the rural landscape, his works are not pastoral idylls. For one, he clearly recognized that the traditional ways of country life were

Hardy, like Lawrence, was often censored for his frankness about sexuality, notably concerning the scene where Arabella flings the pig's pizzle to attract Jude's attention. Several scenes in *Tess* are highly charged with eroticism, such as the scene in the barn where "her sleeves were rolled far above the elbow, and bending lower he kissed the inside vein of her soft arm" (239). We might also note the scene where Jude and Arabella breathlessly chase each other about her house "till a laugh revealed her to have rushed up the stairs, whither Jude rushed at her heels" (100). Sexual tension is nothing new in the novel, but a description of love-making is, at least in the Victorian era, in which only Gissing, roughly cotemporaneous to Hardy, is as candid on this topic.

passing, mainly due to economic forces which were not only destroying a culture but also defacing the landscape:

These families, who had formed the backbone of the village life in the past, who were the depositaries of the village traditions, had to seek refuge in the large centres; the process, humorously designated by statisticians as "the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns", [sic] being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery. (*Tess* 436)

The powerful description of the threshing machine at Flintcombe-Ash, which seems to defecate all over the farm, is symbolic of the invasion of the rural by this urban machinery.

Moreover, Hardy knew that even if left alone, rural life could be one of real suffering.³⁴ Hardy demonstrates, as Dickens had in *Great Expectations*, that the country is not a bastion of pure values. As Eakins notes, "[Hardy] understood also the serious hardship that the work folk too often had to endure. In his article, *The Dorsetshire Labourer*, he flatly condemns anyone who, from a misguided sentimentality, would wish to preserve the picturesque" (120). Certainly the countryside is no timeless Eden in his novels, as the deaths in *The Return of the Native* of Mrs Yeobright on the heath--by snakebite, provocatively enough--and of Eustacia Vye and Wildeve in the dark Shadwater Weir indicate. The latter two's grim end

³⁴ This is opposed to the view of such Victorians as Ruskin, for whom, writes Houghton, "Whether in fact or in art, the countryside is to save the 'spiritual' values now being destroyed in the unspiritual city" (80).

echoes back to that of *Our Mutual Friend's* Headstone and Riderhood in Plashwater Weir Mill Lock; in certain respects, not much difference exists, apparently, between the city and the country. And as Gregor relevantly points out, "If in our first encounter, Marlott, in the Vale of Blackmoor, seems 'an engirdled and secluded region, for the most part untrodden as yet by tourist or landscape-painter', we are at the same time reminded that it is 'within a four hours' journey from London'" (*Great Web* 180). In *Jude*, The frenetic rushing on the train between city and country blurs any distinction between them, as if to show that the problems of the city are in fact problems everywhere. Jude and Sue seem modern figures partly because of their disorienting restlessness, partly because of their dependence on the urban machine.

The chaos of contemporary existence is reflected in Hardy's use of coincidence and accident. Like Gissing, Hardy inverts this Victorian plot device so that such occurrences do not unite, they divide. Several such incidents occur in *Tess*: Alec's unfortunate appearance as the Queen of Spades and her cronies are deriding Tess; Tess's written confession slipping under Angel's rug; the interruption by Angel's brothers of Tess's mission to the Clares, which the narrator implies would have been successful (378); and the critical way Angel "misinterprets" Tess's silence when he is overseas (421). Relatedly, Tess could have broken down Angel's resistance of her, but she does not know how--"If Tess had been artful, had she made a scene, fainted, wept hysterically, in that lonely lane, notwithstanding the furious fastidiousness with which he was possessed, he would probably not have withstood her" (324). As

Seymour-Smith writes, "Just at the most crucial moments in people's lives, small things seem to turn against them" (436). Moreover, the great accident of Jude's and Sue's lives is that they have been born out of their time--they are moderns living in the Victorian world--as their theorizing about the world to come implies, and as the opening of the university too late for Jude confirms. The characters come tantalizingly close to success, to community, but they miss out. They exist in a world utterly unlike that of Pope's *Essay on Man*. Nothing is in its proper place; events are always skewed.³⁵

Hardy's refusal to use the Victorian literary convention of a redemptive *deus ex machina* reflects his belief that the world is disorganized, unstructured. Supernatural occurrences (like Jane's hearing Rochester's cry), wild coincidences (like Magwitch's relations to Estella and Pip), and miraculous reformations (like Mr. Boffin's from villain to benefactor) could no longer help reintegrate the exiled, who are now almost completely alienated, because Hardy's belief system does not allow for the intervention of Providence.

Another convention Hardy reacts against is the use of names to indicate character. Angel, Clare, Mercy, Chant, Christminster: all are ironic.³⁶ And when the narrator comments of the Reverend Clare, "Nevertheless, he loved his misnamed Angel" (420), the reader

³⁵ Reed is thus incorrect when he asserts, "Hardy would resemble Eliot in her unabashed use of coincidence to regulate and unite the various story lines her characters follow" (345), since accidents almost always separate characters in Hardy's novels.

³⁶ Dickens had already done this with Mercy (or Merry) and Charity Pecksniff.

realizes that the Reverend's conception of the name's inappropriateness is incorrect--it is not Angel's unwillingness to take clerical Orders but his slavish attachment to a dead morality that makes him un-angelic. Tess also completely misunderstands Angel's character in her view that he is "so disinterested, chivalrous, protective, in [his] love for women" (257): a guardian angel he is not. Experience is extremely difficult to read, and Hardy's deceptive use of names implies that a facile method of interpretation is misleading. Hardy's duplicity with names seems related to Stendhal's use of pseudonyms, discussed by Jean Starobinski. But whereas Starobinski notes that Stendhal used his "masks" (78) in a liberating way (90), Hardy suggests that the descriptive names that many other Victorian authors assigned their characters are false masks, that they create confusion, that those who feel that character can be easily read are prey to, as Starobinski describes it, the "common illusion . . . that our destinies and our truths are inscribed in our names" (79).

But although Hardy is one of the first, if not the very first, Victorian author to begin to reject completely the social and literary traditions which he finds oppressive, he also saw little hope of success in his characters' rebellious endeavors. I think the readings that see Tess as "not diminished by her defeat at the hands of her human tormentors, her circumstances, and 'the President of the Immortals'" (Casagrande, *Influence* 206); that view her "ruin [as] not fatal because she sins without intending to sin and because she is, finally, one with nature and therefore not subject to a merely social morality" (Casagrande, *Unity* 200); that at the end "she is, genuinely,

'fulfilled'" (Gregor, *Great Web* 196); and that Jude has "an instinctive resilience" (Gregor, *Great Web* 210) are too optimistic. Jude, hardly resilient, is dead, after all, at the age of thirty. Gregor is right to point out that the final four sentences of *Tess* are each important, both the ones that indicate gloom and the ones that reveal Angel and 'Liza-Lu moving on, and that this ending is reminiscent of that of *Paradise Lost* (*Great Web* 197). But Eve is not executed. She leaves with Adam to become one of the first two great Christian wanderers. Tess, on the other hand, "lives on," as Casagrande puts it (*Unity* 217), only symbolically, only in memory. Her soul does not rise; only a black flag does. It is oversimplistic to call *Tess* an "ultimately hopeful vision" (Casagrande, *Unity* 201); such readings ignore the immense suffering these characters undergo. At the end of his novel, Jude is almost like Beckett's Murphy without comedy: he is practically obliterated shortly after his death, almost erased from memory as Arabella sets out in search of new companionship. Her preventing a final meeting between him and Sue is tantamount to tossing his ashes, Murphy's fate, since by lying about his final wishes. Sue has defaced his soul: Jude will be misconstrued by Sue, forgotten by everyone else.

Hardy's characters largely fail in their attempts to restructure their lives and are tormented not only by their isolation, but also by the knowledge that their ostracism was partly self-inflicted. The self-doubts that sometimes tormented earlier characters blossom in Hardy's texts into a real self-alienation, seen, as noted above, in Tess's and Sue's torturing themselves with unwarranted guilt, and in

Jude's irrationally harsh self-assessments. For instance, when he is rejected by "Biblioll College":

The stroke of scorn [writing on the college walls] relieved his mind, and the next morning he laughed at his self-conceit. But the laugh was not a healthy one. He re-read the letter from the master, and the wisdom in its lines, which had at first exasperated him, chilled and depressed him now. He saw himself as a fool indeed (170).

As evidence of the rift between various classes and of the dysfunctions of the Victorian family became irrefutable, as women continued to suffer from debilitating social restrictions, and as nineteenth-century science and philosophy continued to undermine Christian mythology's claim to provide salvation, such late Victorian novelists as Hardy documented characters who were caught in an extreme social bind: only completely new modes of living--risky ventures indeed--offered a means of resolving the deeply entrenched problems of Victorian society, but the continuing hegemony of Victorian conventions usually caused these ventures to fail, leaving the defeated iconoclasts to rue their hapless radical actions. Whether they are angry at their society or disgusted with themselves, they are doomed to a state of alienation.

Later, such Modernists as Conrad, Lawrence, Forster, Joyce, and Woolf will explore tentative solutions to the problems of alienation in part because the Victorians had left them such powerful representations of situations that needed to be improved. Proto-Modernism reaches a turning point in Hardy's novels not because his proposed solutions succeed--they usually do not--but because the

isolation of outcast characters in early and mid-Victorian novels has developed into a alienation so fierce that alternate modes of living must be envisioned. Anomie must be counteracted. The alienated and the outcast, who in Hardy now seem doomed, are more likely to meet the fate of the Madden sisters or the failed literati of New Grub Street than to find a Rochester or a M. Paul to rescue them. The full force of the dislocating effects of contemporary life had to be addressed. In a crucial way, the Victorian novelist had become the Modernist.

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