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**Where womanhood and childhood meet: Female adolescence in
Victorian fiction and culture**

Boufis, Christina M., Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1994

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WHERE WOMANHOOD AND CHILDHOOD MEET: FEMALE ADOLESCENCE
IN VICTORIAN FICTION AND CULTURE

by

CHRISTINA BOUFIS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University
of New York

1994

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Abstract

WHERE WOMANHOOD AND CHILDHOOD MEET: FEMALE ADOLESCENCE
IN VICTORIAN FICTION AND CULTURE

by

Christina Boufis

Adviser: Professor Fred Kaplan

Recognizing that the nineteenth century was an age of transition affecting every aspect of life, many Victorian writers noted that "girlhood" was very different from what it had been in previous centuries. This dissertation examines female adolescence -- what the Victorians labeled girlhood -- during the years 1830 through 1870 as a "site of cultural contestation," to borrow Mary Poovey's words, in which we may read literary and cultural changes. Exploring the figure of the young woman in novels by Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, and Rhoda Broughton, as well as in numerous nonfictional sources, I discuss the ways Victorian writers project their culture's anxieties about other social transformations onto girlhood, which, by its liminal nature, serves as an ideal focus for issues of definition and development. The young woman who forms the subject of so many nineteenth-century novels

thus also serves as a symbol for larger social movements such as Chartism, evangelicalism, and imperialism. Furthermore, her equivocal status is metaphoric of perhaps the most formative change in nineteenth-century England -- that of class development.

Chapter One explores the depiction of female adolescence in early nineteenth-century conduct books in order to assess how girlhood is constructed along middle-class lines. In Chapter Two, I discuss how Gaskell's Mary Barton reveals a conflation of individual and social developmental processes; Mary Barton's coming of age both mirrors and realizes certain aspects of the Chartist social platform for women. Chapter Three investigates another route to adulthood -- religious conversion in Eliot's Adam Bede. Examining the fallen woman in the novels of Gaskell and Dickens in Chapter Four, I demonstrate that the transition from girlhood to womanhood is indeed marked by conflicting sexual and class ideologies. Chapter Five turns to Trollope's young women heroines and reads them back into the context of the 1860s. The dissertation concludes with an examination of the "Girl of the Period" in Eliza Lynn Linton's essay and her fast counterpart in the fiction of Rhoda Broughton, and asserts that the figure of the girl is often used to project larger nineteenth-century social, political, and cultural issues.

Contents

1	The Girl Question: Woman in the Making	1
2	"Setting Up Heroine on Her Own Account": Mary Barton's Success Story	28
3	"Slew the body but saved the soul": Evangelical Girlhood	72
4	"The Absolute Necessity of a Sisterhood": Fallen Women, Juvenile Delinquents, and <u>Ruth</u>	111
5	Trollope: The Girl as Commodity	158
6	"Of Home Birth and Breeding": Eliza Lynn Linton and the Girl of the Period	192
7	Conclusion	230
8	Bibliography	236

Chapter One

The Girl Question: Woman in the Making

1.

In Northanger Abbey (1818) Jane Austen makes a point of describing the ideal age for the "training" of heroines as between fifteen and seventeen (39). Literary critic Ruth Yeazell also notes that one of the traditions of the English novel from Samuel Richardson to Henry James is concerned with this same "border crossing" -- the time from an "innocent young girl's awakening" to the usual narrative conclusion of the heroine's marriage (Fictions 79). But critics have not fully examined what this border or its crossing mean in terms of nineteenth-century literature and culture. In fact, though so many English novels are concerned with the coming of age of the middle-class girl, and though contemporary social psychologists have recently begun to reevaluate female adolescence, few literary critics have asked precisely what this crucial time meant in its Victorian context.¹

¹ Although her primary focus is not adolescence, see Nancy Chodorow's The Reproduction of Mothering (1978) for the theory that asymmetrical child-rearing practices contribute to a girl's different developmental process and thus more relational sense of self. See also the work of Carol Gilligan In a Different Voice (1982) for an investigation of this idea in regard to female adolescent moral development, and in Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development (1992) for the "dissociation" that girls experience at this stage. Though Gilligan's methods and interpretations have been challenged by other scholars, her findings have received wide circulation. Peter Blos also questions Freudian

"Where Womanhood and Childhood Meet" traces what the Victorians most frequently termed "girlhood" and what we in the twentieth century now call adolescence. The question of when adolescence first became a viable social concept is still a subject of debate among scholars. Most critical discussion divides into two predominant theories: the creationist argument contends that adolescence was "invented" or discovered sometime in the nineteenth century; and the opposing school of thought contradicts adolescence as "social invention," asserting instead its continued existence (at least since the fifteenth century) as a recognizable and distinct time of life.² My own view lies somewhere in between; I do not

theories of female psychoanalytic development in "Modifications in the Traditional Psychoanalytic Theory of Female Adolescent Development." Adolescent Psychiatry 8 (1980): 8-24.

2 In "Adolescence in Historical Perspective," John Demos and Virginia Demos spell out the invention argument. They assert quite unequivocally, that not only was adolescence "an American discovery" but that it "did not exist before the last two decades of the nineteenth century" (632). In this vein, American psychologist G. Stanley Hall, with his two volume Adolescence (1904), is largely credited with being one of the "architects" of the concept. For refutation of the Demos' view see Lawrence Stone who calls the invention of adolescence in the nineteenth century "sheer historical fantasy" and cites incidents of youth unrest among Renaissance apprentices in London to support his point (512). A more balanced argument for the existence of adolescence in pre-modern times, is Vivian C. Fox's essay "Is Adolescence a Phenomenon of Modern Times?" The Journal of Psychohistory 5 (1977): 271-290. And Louise J. Kaplan in Adolescence (1984) also debunks the "inventionist" myth and gives a compelling reading of the similarities in thought between two of the shapers of adolescence -- Jean Jacques Rousseau and Hall. It should be noted that most social historians who discuss the concept formulate their analysis with male paradigms as

believe that adolescence sprang sui generis as a result of modern nineteenth-century life nor that it existed in previous centuries in the shape we might perceive as such. Rather, I believe, this stage has assumed different forms and social significance at distinct time periods to meet the needs of particular cultures.³

My concern, however, lies with the British Victorians and with the specific social, cultural, and political factors that shaped female adolescence in the nineteenth century. Though the Victorians perhaps did not invent adolescence they did "make room" for it, widening the gap between childhood and adulthood and adapting it to fit life in a transitional age.⁴ The nineteenth-

the norm. The history of female adolescence, as it is distinguished from male models, still remains to be written.

3 My belief in the necessity of examining female adolescence in its specific cultural and historical context echoes a sentiment expressed in Joan Wallach Scott's preface to Gender and the Politics of History (1988). Speaking of feminist historians, Scott appropriately calls for "the need to examine gender concretely and in context and to consider it a historical phenomenon, produced, reproduced, and transformed in different situations over time" (6). Literary critic Judith Lowder Newton expresses a similar notion when she writes of scholars doing literary/historical work to pay more attention to "material conditions" which affected women's lives, and to "work with historians more directly" ("New Historicism" 164; 165). I agree with both of these assessments, and have attempted to pay particular attention to the way adolescence is figured in different decades and in changing social contexts.

4 The term "make room" is Patricia Meyer Spacks' in The Adolescent Idea (1981). Though our work overlaps in some places, Spacks' interest is on uncovering the "fantasies" that adult novelists project onto youth. And though she purports to examine adolescence in its "shifting

century climate undoubtedly contributed. The rise of British industrialism during this period resulted in men and women deferring marriage; as young men went off to amass capital, middle-class daughters stayed at home longer. In addition, Victorian ideas about feminine roles -- especially the passage from angelic daughter to angelic wife -- helped "unwittingly" to characterize adolescence as a time of crisis (B. White 18). Such ideas suppressed the recognition of female sexuality and contributed to Victorian redefinitions of girlhood in which anxieties over coming of age were masked behind numerous tropes.

As a literary critic, my interest is in examining sexual and other tropes that Victorian writers use to depict a girl's transition to womanhood. Moreover, an analysis of the heroine's route to maturity often reveals that this developmental process is marked by ideological conflict. In aesthetic terms, such dissension is played out in Victorian literary criticism and seen in generic changes. Indeed, the figure of the adolescent girl is frequently at the site of textual disturbances: in

meanings" over time, I find her tendency to project twentieth-century views -- psychoanalyzing authors such as Dickens and Eliot -- flattens distinctions between nineteenth- and twentieth-century concepts of this phase. Her focus is also not primarily on female adolescence nor on the Victorians. Nevertheless, I find her general definition of adolescence as "the time of life when the individual has developed full sexual capacity but has not yet assumed a full adult role in society" to be useful (11).

Elizabeth Gaskell's Ruth, for example, critics have often called attention to the seeming irreconcilability of the heroine with her plot: Ruth is too good, too pure, too unaware, to fit the fallen woman script. In the "sensational" novels of Rhoda Broughton, nineteenth-century reviewers, though they commended the novelist's "flesh and blood" heroines, deplored the "unrealistic" actions of her plots. These discrepancies between plot and character point to the inconsistent workings of ideology and, when examined, offer insights about the ways in which cultural beliefs shape literary forms and inform ideas about female development.⁵ Furthermore, as Terry Eagleton reminds us, "it is in the 'significant silences of a text, in its gaps and absences, that the presence of ideology can be most positively felt" (qtd. in Newton, Women 9). Investigating female adolescence then as one such gap, or to borrow Mary Poovey's phrase, an unexplored "site of cultural contestation," may further our understanding of social, political, and literary change in the nineteenth century.⁶

5 As Spacks notes, both didactic works and novels "imply theories of development and powerfully reinforce them..." (12).

6 This apt phrase is from Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (1988) which examines how "the representation of woman," particularly as domestic ideal, becomes a "site of cultural contestation" (9). And Poovey (like Nancy Armstrong), has been instrumental in conceiving ideas about the way gender controversies deflect class issues and differences.

As I trace the figure of the adolescent girl in the novels of Gaskell, Eliot, Dickens, Trollope, and Broughton, I pay particular attention to how generic changes in the social reform novel, domestic novel, the evangelical novel, the novel about fallen women, and the sensation novel reflect shifting ideas about girlhood.⁷ Consequently, I have chosen works (and authors) that were extremely popular in the nineteenth century, and which have, for a variety of reasons, provoked much critical commentary in the twentieth century. My readings of the novels are necessarily historically contextualized, and I frequently move between fictional and nonfictional sources, including periodicals, conduct and educational manuals, and social reform literature. I posit neither literary nor non-literary sources as "truth" but rather analyze both as contributing, and often competing, discourses about girlhood. Teasing out and making suggestions about the significance of the interrelations between the literary representation of the young woman

⁷ As my project examines adolescence across many genres I am not primarily interested in the novel of development -- the bildungsroman. But see other literary critics who have begun to posit new ways of seeing this form in relation to female experience. Both The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development (1983) ed. Abel et al., and Susan Fraiman's incisive study Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development (1993), question and reevaluate the primarily male defined bildungsroman as an appropriate genre for depicting female development.

and the larger social transformations her anomalous figure symbolizes is the focus of this project.

My organizing principle is thematic and chronological, roughly spanning the years 1832 through 1867, though I do examine texts before and after these dates in order to chart changing historical perspectives. For Victorian writers often project their culture's anxieties about other transitions onto girlhood, which, by its liminal nature, serves as an ideal focus for issues of definition and development. The young woman who forms the subject of so many nineteenth-century novels thus also serves as a symbol for larger social movements, such as Chartism, evangelicalism, and imperialism.⁸ Furthermore, her equivocal status becomes a metaphor for perhaps the most formative transition in the nineteenth century -- that of class development. In this way, I have chosen to focus on the period between the two Reform Bills; and while the specter of women's suffrage really only haunted the debate in the second Bill, both Acts, in their codification of class distinctions, were also instrumental in shaping gender relations.

⁸ And I want to stress, that though I read the novel and the heroine's fictional developmental process as "evok[ing] historical situations," this is not to say that such presentations give us unmediated access to particular historical "truths." Rather, I pay attention to the way fiction, in Judith Lowder Newton's words, "relates itself to ideological perceptions or distortions of those situations" (Women 13).

My argument for the centrality of girlhood as a liminal state in which we can observe both gender and class formation, while it owes much to the work of recent feminist scholars, has its own particular emphasis.⁹ I emphasize the way class determinants continually figure in the movement from girlhood to womanhood; my focus is on historicizing this process, reading in the girl's development a reenactment of other social changes -- transitions which when examined often unfold the way middle-class value is itself constructed. For by asking the question of how a girl becomes a woman (and of course her route to middle-class adulthood is not always all that assured) we are helped to see not only the process of gender prescription but also the dynamics of class change.¹⁰

9 My line of thinking largely follows Nancy Armstrong's in Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (1987): stressing the interrelationship between sexual and political ideologies, Armstrong writes that Foucault "makes it possible to consider sexual relations as the site for changing power relations between classes and cultures as well as between genders and generations" (10). My emphasis is on the neglected area of generations and genders. For a revealing reading/critique of Armstrong, Poovey, and Gallagher see Judith Lowder Newton's "History as Usual? Feminism and the 'New Historicism'" in The New Historicism (1989) ed. H. Aram Veaser.

10 In this way, I am following Cora Kaplan's theory that "class and sexual difference 'reciprocally constitut[e] each other' and that 'to understand how gender and class ... are articulated together transforms our analysis of them" (qtd. in Homans 156).

That the girl's position is precarious as she comes of age and evokes larger social commentary is evident in many late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century didactic works. Writing in 1789 of this "critical age" when a girl first becomes "marriageable," the Reverend John Bennett, in his advice-book for girls, voices his concern for the young woman's "safety." "I should invoke the assistance of some guardian angel," states Bennett apprehensively, "to conduct her through the slippery and dangerous paths" (2: 160, Bennett's emphasis). But these slippery slopes, though couched in sexual terms, in the nineteenth century become fraught with more than sexual dangers: for the passage to womanhood also suggests the possibility of class slippage. And the rise of a classed society makes placing the girl's foot firmly in middle-class territory all the more important.

In this way, the girl's development into middle-class womanhood may be said to be a transmutation of class issues, particularly as such development often depends on distancing the heroine from less desirable traits associated with lower-class girlhood or womanhood. The difficulty or ease with which Victorian writers figure her border crossing can tell us much about how class movement itself is symbolically conceived, negotiated, and controlled.¹¹ For the girl is a woman in

¹¹ My thinking on this topic has been influenced by Rosemarie Bodenheimer's suggestive book, The Politics of

the making, hovering on the threshold but not yet crossing into middle-class adulthood. And her borderline status calls to mind what many nineteenth-century writers and commentators considered the most threatening of all possible transformations -- that of class upheaval. It is in this way that generational conflict can be used as metaphoric for class conflict or change. And I do not mean generational conflict as we might view adolescence today (between the young and their parents) but rather that the tensions or anxieties that Victorian writers perceive, and the solutions they offer, in mapping transitions between girlhood and womanhood tell of larger disturbances in class formation.¹²

Indeed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, conduct books and educational treatises alike are concerned with assessing the role of the girl in a time

Story in Victorian Social Fiction (1988). Though her subject is not adolescence, her writing on the role of the middle-class heroine -- whose "moral development and romantic settlement [are] dependent on her engagement with conflicts of class" -- has been extremely helpful in defining my own ideas (15). My project dilates upon the stage of girlhood as itself a contested site for class conflicts.

¹² By the use of the term class I mean to indicate how feminist scholars have begun theorizing about this concept: as Joan Scott notes (reformulating E.P. Thompson's notion of class as a "unitary" historical relationship), class "as a field ... always contains multiple and contested meanings" -- especially gender meanings (88). It is also interesting that Thompson employs a generational metaphor to describe his seminal work; it is, he writes, "a kind of 'biography of the English working class from its adolescence until its early manhood'" (qtd. in Scott 72).

of class flux. Harriet Martineau, in "Middle-Class Education in England" (1864), points specifically to the after-effects of the French Revolution as the cause of increasing class mobility, which in turn affects the nature of girlhood. "The present is a period of transition Within half a century the girlhood of the upper middle class has gone through an experience of permanent historical importance" (112). The best-selling writer of conduct-books and stories for children, Sarah Stickney Ellis emphasizes in The Daughters of England (1842), that the middle-class girl stood at the dawn of a new era. She is a creature "just wakened to consciousness" who finds herself for the first time in history questioning her role and position in society (9). This sentiment is expressed widely in early nineteenth-century didactic works, and Sarah Tytler's observation, in Papers for Thoughtful Girls (1863), that the middle-class girl's position is a "problem of the present day" is a commonplace of mid-nineteenth century social commentary (5).

Throughout the nineteenth century, assessing the station of the young woman has ramifications beyond merely proscribing niceties of etiquette: for "the girl," as John Stuart Mill wrote of the century as a whole, was in an age of transition. Her metonymic position calls attention to the way social and cultural determinants adhere to any discussion of her figure. It is this

interrelation that I label the "girl question," by which I mean to indicate both the difficulties of defining, in Trollope's words, "that indefinite term of a 'girl,'" and of extracting her from broader social changes. Young women are not only implicated in the very form of the novel (as subject and as standard -- sixteen years of age for acceptability at the circulating library), but are also inextricably tied to the family and thus to larger social movements of the nineteenth century.

One particularly relevant illustration, from Bessie Rayner Parkes' 1854 essay entitled "The Education of Girls," most tellingly plots the young woman's development onto the domestic and social realms.¹³ After first pointing out the cramping effect that home and "family" have on a girl's life, by dragging "down the lively school-girl, year by year, into a woman incapable of general views or sustained action for any purpose extraneous to home," Parkes provocatively hints that the subject of home "especially connects itself in the popular mind with that of girlhood and womanhood, but what is conceived by the writer to be the true theory respecting its formation can only be indicated here" (16-17). The ambiguity of the pronoun conflates the subject of formation so that home, girlhood, and womanhood are

13 In her popular guidebook, Girlhood (1869), the advice-writer Marianne Farningham articulates this relationship, stating that "home and girlhood are not exactly synonymous, but they are very closely connected" (33).

all three collapsed into a single theory of development. Furthermore, the writer's uncertain syntax only underscores that to discuss the formation of the girl at all is to see her in the context of home and family, and of the larger extension of that concept -- nineteenth-century society itself.¹⁴

Moreover, this theory of development is signified by a referent which points only to its absence or, at the very most, to a subject concealed within the margins of the text: the girl's formation, significantly, remains unexpressed. Indeed, some scholars might argue that this marginalization is proof that female adolescence as fictional subject matter and as social convention is only really apparent in the twentieth century.¹⁵ Certainly, our ideas of adolescence as a time of sturm und drang, a period of youthful experimentation and distinct subculture often in conflict with adult authority, are not very common in the nineteenth century, especially in regard to young women. I suggest that we first need to

14 For the way the family is used in metaphoric and metonymic relation to society see Chapters 5 and 6 of Catherine Gallagher's astute The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction, 1832-1867 (1985).

15 I am arguing here with Barbara White who, in Growing Up Female, contends that nineteenth-century novelists (primarily American) do not portray an adolescent stage; while I agree with White that the "novel of adolescence" perhaps emerged as a distinct form in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I still think we need to question the social and cultural ideologies that informed even relatively quick transitions to adulthood (21; 5).

understand this stage in its Victorian context. But I also believe that the very ways in which girlhood has been characterized -- particularly as it has been occluded, exaggerated, eclipsed, compressed, marginalized, truncated, transformed, elongated, or passed over in the novel -- only reveal, in its distortion, how central, and perhaps how threatening, this phase of life was in the nineteenth century.

2.

Though twentieth-century historians and social psychologists argue over when adolescence first became a viable social concept, there is no doubt that the Victorians were preoccupied with this pivotal stage. And while many Victorian novels avoid discussing the topic of female adolescence directly, nineteenth-century conduct books quite literally create a space for this intermediary stage. Critics have asserted the seminal role such works played in disseminating ideals of womanhood and thus in establishing middle-class hegemony but few have noticed that these works themselves constitute a type of adolescent genre. Both in their formal function and subject matter, conduct books comprise a way station on the way to adulthood: they both treat discrete topics relevant to girlhood and were thought essential to fill the time between childhood and married womanhood.

And just as many of these conduct books themselves serve an in between function, they similarly reflect an anxiety over other borders, particularly in attempting to categorize and define the indeterminate period of girlhood. For Victorian ideology posited an angelic childhood and womanhood between which female adolescence became a critical, anxiety-provoking point. These competing ideals, though working to deny the physical and sexual changes that occur at puberty, helped to create a "crisis" in categorization -- in part because the girl's developing physical body and sexual maturity threatened to disrupt sexless ideals.¹⁶

This crisis is particularly evident in the conflicting accounts by advice-writers who, while they imply that girlhood is not dependent on the physiological changes of puberty, nevertheless seek some kind of discreet turning point between childhood and womanhood.¹⁷

16 Marjorie Garber in Vested Interests (1993) makes a similar point in regard to the category "transvestite." Garber notes that the figure of the cross-dresser, already marginalized in cultural representations, "signals a category crisis" -- "a failure of definitional distinction," that often displaces anxiety about class and racial borders (182; 16-17). We can see similar anxieties surrounding the category of "girlhood," which likewise threatens other class borders.

17 That girlhood has class-specific connotations is evident not only in the conduct literature but also in mid-Victorian medical journals. Some doctors, for example, advocated that puberty be delayed until the girl was seventeen so that it more nearly coincided with the social ritual of "coming out." And while much care was taken with the pubescent girl because it was believed that at this time "the future woman is moulded," no such restrictions or caution applied to lower-class girls

As one conduct book author, Rhoda White, states, girls, at twelve, have "crossed the boundary-line, and have left absolute childhood behind them" (183). But American advice-writer Marion Harland appears to cherish the indeterminacies of youth, blithely asserting that girlhood's "boundary-lines are delightfully undetermined" (120). And though most nineteenth-century writers on the topic were certain that girlhood marked "a new sphere of existence," unlike Harland they were not content to allow such definitional haziness; the insistent need to categorize "girlhood" by age expresses a desire to somehow delimit and contain this nebulous period.

While twelve was often thought to mark the crossover into girlhood, the endpoint of this stage, like the culmination of adolescence today, was more difficult to determine.¹⁸ In much nineteenth-century fiction the final chapter of a girl's development appears to conclude at about nineteen and with the heroine's marriage, yet

(qtd. in Jalland 8; 22). In her article "Puberty to Menopause: The Cycle of Femininity in Nineteenth-Century America," Carroll Smith-Rosenberg analyzes these "socially defined crises," particularly the way medical discourse on puberty and menopause both contributed to, and reaffirmed conventional ideas concerning woman's place. For an excellent study of the way medical and didactic treatises contribute to ideologies of feminine girlhood in Britain see Deborah Gorham's The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal (1982).

18 Katherine Dalsimer makes this point in Female Adolescence (1986). Her book is intriguing for its application of psychoanalytic theory to five literary works, and her "Introduction" is most useful as an overview of female developmental issues.

statistics reveal that in Victorian society this conclusion was often deferred: the average age for marriage was twenty-five for middle-class women and twenty-nine years for men (Branca 4-5). But discrepancies about when girlhood ends can also be found in many fictional accounts. For Rachel Curtis, the heroine of Charlotte Yonge's Clever Woman of the Family (1865), twenty-five marks the "close of young-ladyhood" at which she "haul[s] down the flag of youth" (1). Lucilla Marjoribanks of Margaret Oliphant's Miss Marjoribanks (1865-1866), who returns home at eighteen to run her father's house, decides she has ten good years before she "goes off," and completely ruins her chances in the marriage market. But Catherine Sloper in Henry James' Washington Square (1881) is an "overripe bud" at twenty-two.¹⁹ Though assigning specific years to girlhood is problematic, as these contradictory accounts reveal, my focus will be on the later teen years, when, in Austen's terms, a girl first begins training for a heroine, the years between seventeen until marriage in most fictional and non-fictional accounts.²⁰

19 The term "adolescence" is more often used in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and clearly denotes an apprehension of sexual maturity that is missing in earlier accounts. The heroine of Eliza Lynn Linton's The New Woman (1895), for example, becomes an adolescent at sixteen when her feelings for her (male) childhood friend take on new sexual intensity.

Until the end of the seventeenth century advice manuals had been directed predominantly toward upper-class men and, to a lesser extent, women (Armstrong 61). And while the shift toward a new female audience was instrumental, as Nancy Armstrong claims, in establishing middle-class control, this turn also reveals an increased emphasis on the necessity of training young women for their future roles.²¹ Indeed, it was the prospective "young lady," the middle-class "daughter-at-home," whom the advice-writers targeted. After receiving perhaps the rudiments of education (either at a boarding or, more likely, a day school), these young women returned home at sixteen to wait for marriage. Their "want of something to do," in Dinah Mulock Craik's words, was the bane of their existence; conduct materials both helped turn the girl

20 Indeed, most conduct books specifically target the young woman of seventeen as audience. See Craik, Tytler, Ellis, among others.

21 While Armstrong finds a "single image of representation" coalescing under a new domestic ideal of woman, I find that many conduct books actually undercut this model. Eliza Farrar in The Young Lady's Friend (1837), for example, acknowledges that young women are most in need of a mother during girlhood, but she acknowledges that many mothers are "inadequate to the task." Thus the conduct book itself becomes what Farrar labels a "maternal aid," replacing the help the reader would normally get from a competent mother. Ellis and Tytler similarly portray contradictory mother images, showing a frazzled or "lazy" woman who serves as object lesson for her daughters (54-55; 17). Interestingly, these works often literally serve an adolescent purpose - reenacting what contemporary social psychologists label the "central issue in female development ... the girl's relation to her mother" (Dalsimer 129).

into the middle-class woman and occupied her time during what could often be a lengthy holding-pattern.

While assessing the girl's "position in society" was the ostensible reason for many advice-books, instilling the young woman with middle-class ideals was the more manifest intent. And by addressing the middle-class woman as the sole audience, conduct-book writers, like the influential Mrs. Ellis, as Margaret Homans has recently argued, both equated "all women with one particular social class" and made this group appear more numerous than mid-century statistics would support (155). Yet one of the ways didactic works construct and universalize class value is by discriminating between less desirable traits of girlhood -- aspects, significantly, which carry class connotations. In Women, in Her Social and Domestic Character (1831), Mrs. Sandford, while she prepares her young charges to be respectable members of the middle class, simultaneously warns them against assuming false aristocratic airs. In her view, the sole purpose of knowledge and education "is to correct vanity and repress pretension. It is to teach her to know her place and her functions; to make her content with the one, and willing to fulfil the other" (39). In The Daughters of England, Mrs. Ellis states quite categorically that her "desire is to assist [young women] to overcome the three great enemies to their temporal and eternal goods -- their selfishness, indolence and vanity -- and to establish in

their stead feelings of benevolence and habits of industry ..." (19). Though youthful vanity is certainly not a new theme, making the term synonymous with both objectionable characteristics of girlhood and with a kind of class striving gives this vice a particularly different charge in the nineteenth century. Setting selfishness and indolence, as Mrs. Ellis does, in opposition to more desirable middle-class traits, such as "benevolence and habits of industry," indicates that girlhood is a particularly important time for instilling class values; the proper girlhood is distinguished from its ungovernable "other" -- an alternative image that has all the undesirable qualities of an unruly underclass.

Not surprisingly, girlhood is characterized in many didactic works as a potentially insubordinate and fractious time. To Harland it is a period when "the girl is at war with everything" (123), to Craik "a crisis in which the whole heart and brain are full of tumult" ("Teens 220), and to Tytler it is a time when a young heart "is full of uncertain desires; and wayward inclinations, and passionate impulses" (3). The solution, according to advice writers, was to rein in the girl, to assist her "in the important task of self-government and self-instruction" (Farrar 7). That this task is inextricably tied to instilling middle-class ideals at the same time it attempts to purge undesirable traits usually associated with the lower-class is evident in the

language used to describe the objectionable aspects of girlhood: vanity, indolence, class pretension, wayward desire, and ungovernable emotion. The possibility that the young woman might demonstrate these contrary traits is never completely banished from the representation of girlhood in nineteenth-century novels.

But if many conduct books evoke the specter of insubordinate girlhood only to contrast it with the more appropriate calm of middle-class womanhood, such object lessons were thought to depend on the efficacy of correct reading. Indeed, the entire "raison d'etre" of conduct books, Armstrong reminds us, presupposed "that literacy offered the most efficient means for shaping individuals" (100). The faith in the formative power of reading relies on an understanding of subjectivity as primarily textual in nature, and it applies not only to overtly didactic material but also underlies the nineteenth-century belief in the efficacy of the novel as moral teacher.²² For it was the adolescent reader whose malleable character was thought most susceptible to impressing and shaping by the written word.²³

22 See Nancy Armstrong Desire and Domestic Fiction, and, more recently, Kate Flint's The Woman Reader, 1837-1914 (1993). Flint situates the woman reader in her socio-historical context, examining "the meeting-place of discourses of subjectivity and socialization" (43).

23 This belief is evident in the way many nineteenth-century writers discussed youth; for Ellis, it is "the season for impressions"; and for Craik, "most girls' characters are stamped for life by the associations they form ... during their teens [thus] every influence

In his 1879 essay, "Novel-Reading," Anthony Trollope perhaps best sums up this widespread notion, and elaborates on how the reader's character develops in relation to the literary:

There cannot be a doubt that the characters of those around us are formed very much on the lessons which are thus taught. Our girls become wives, and our wives mothers, and then old women, very much under these inspirations. Our boys grow into man-hood, either nobly or ignobly partly as they may teach, and in accordance with such teaching will continue to bear their burdens gallantly or to repudiate them with cowardly sloth. (25)

Like many other Victorians, Trollope believed that the lessons learned through reading were predominantly gender-specific. While his remarks are directed to both sexes, he chiefly targets the "girl-reader," whom he hopes will learn, by reading about Dickens' model young ladies, "modesty, reticence, and unselfish devotion" -- the distinct qualities of the middle-class heroine (34-35).²⁴ Moreover, Trollope insists, these sermons in character-building are historically specific. Though he credits Richardson with "inventing" the modern novel, caught, and every impression given during these years, is a matter of most vital moment" (25-26; "Teens" 220).

24 See Yeazell's Fictions of Modesty (1991) for a treatment of this theme in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conduct books as well as for the way modesty functions as narrative strategy.

Trollope doubts that Clarissa "will ever become popular again" because nineteenth-century girls are not subject to the same "horrors": female readers coming of age through fiction in the nineteenth-century need new female role-models who respond to contemporary problems (30).²⁵

That the girl's development is inextricably tied to ideas about class consciousness and inseparable from the literary genre she inhabits is implied in Trollope's essay. But less obvious perhaps is that this defense of the novel as essential for instilling middle-class values rests on a vaguely articulated class fear. Noting that "millions" of people from numerous classes had now become readers -- in factories, behind counters, "in third-class railway carriages," and in "kitchens and stables" -- Trollope reminds his middle-class audience that though their daughters might not need lessons in modesty, they should "think of the eight hundred thousands" who do (33; 34). This figure of the lower-class girl-reader haunts both Trollope's essay and his middle-class audience; and, I would argue, shadows notions of girlhood itself.

25 In this way, Trollope writes, the girl-reader will learn "the value of modesty" from Kate Nickleby even though she is "not to us an entirely natural young woman" ("Novel-Reading" 34). Even Dora, Little Dorrit, and Florence Dombey, more like "shadows of people" than "natural" characters, adequately serve as "personifications of tenderness and gentle feminine gifts." Such characters embody "not a woman, but something which will help to make many women" (35). Even worldly characters, such as the fortune-seeking Beatrix in Thackeray's Esmond, produce only "salutary" effects "on the minds of girls who read it" (37).

3.

My readings in each chapter suggest some of the reasons why girlhood was thought to be such a terribly important and potentially dangerous time period. And I am most interested in analyzing how this transition, as it was imagined in the nineteenth-century novel, reveals, even while it conceals, broader class and cultural anxieties. In Chapter Two, I discuss how Mary Barton's transformation into domestic heroine in many ways recapitulates Chartist goals for women; for, despite its debatably regressive implications for lower-class women politically, the domestic was often invoked as a rhetorical mode in the Chartist platform. Mary's "successful" development thus reenacts, even while it appears to depoliticize, the predominantly pre-industrial and home-oriented agenda that Chartism, had it been successful, would have realized; her figure becomes a symbol for social change.

Turning from the political to the religious model of girlhood in the next chapter, I examine another route to womanhood -- that of religious conversion. As I demonstrate in my discussion of Adam Bede, the process to adulthood is also intertwined with class ideologies, and is particularly evident in Eliot's nuanced use of the differences between Methodist and Anglican Evangelical practices. Moreover, it appears that Eliot attached pejorative connotations to adolescence both as a type of

literary excess and as particularly jejune forms of the novel -- the "fatuous" productions she describes in her essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." Distancing herself from what she considered immature works and from this feminine tradition, Eliot promulgates a more realistic mode in Adam Bede, one that is suitable for mature readers.

The fallen woman who forms the subject of Chapter Four perhaps most dramatically illustrates that the movement from girlhood to womanhood is indeed marked by conflicting sexual and class ideologies. According to Victorian beliefs, the "fall" into sexual knowledge instantaneously changed the girl into a woman; but such transformation calls into question both class categories and developmental processes. For the term "fallen woman" implies that a young woman could falter, and thus never attain full middle-class womanhood. Indeed, the entire genre of fallen woman novels often points to the irreconcilability of competing ideals of womanhood, ideals which largely depend on precluding sexual or developmental stages.

In Chapter Five, I turn to the pastoral world of Trollope, the "prose laureate of English girls," for a look at the role of young women in a decade of social and political change. Though England by 1860 was predominantly an industrialized and urban country, there is little evidence of these modern currents in

Barsetshire. And while the 1860s saw the rise of the word "capitalism," Trollope's most successful commodity -- his brown-haired heroines -- are significantly a product of a pre-industrial past (Weeks 21). Furthermore, Trollope's heroines reveal a surprising lack of any real generational conflict; their role is to come of age quickly, marry, and take up their positions as moral guardians of this rural world.

While Trollope forestalls any real developmental stage for his heroines, my concluding chapter emphasizes the opposite image -- the eternal and abject "Girl of the Period" characterized in Eliza Lynn Linton's sensational essay. Comparing Linton's fast young woman (who in her perpetual girlhood threatens all kinds of class and social distinctions) with the equally notorious heroines of Rhoda Broughton's sensational fiction demonstrates that not only was girlhood "discovered" in the 1860s but it was feared; such girls would never become respectable women. The girl had come into her own.

The title of my study is taken from one of the most popular poems for young women in the nineteenth century - - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Maidenhood." The third verse reads, "Standing, with reluctant feet, /Where the brook and river meet, /Womanhood and childhood fleet!" (7-9). This ambiguous image appears so often in Victorian novels with adolescent protagonists that it can be seen as a type of shorthand for the passage between childhood

and womanhood. It is an odd description, I think, but perhaps best elucidated by turning to the not-frequently-quoted sixth verse: "Then why pause with indecision, /When bright angels in thy vision, /Beckon thee to fields Elysian?" (16-18). Exchanging a more natural and perhaps sexual course, as the image of the river suggests, for a vague and ethereal field of view does not seem to me to be a very good choice. But the picture appositely captures the transformation of the girl into the symbolic middle-class Angel in the House. That this transition, fraught as it may be with indecision on one side, is no match for the strong spiritual forces gesturing on the other is evident both in Longfellow's poem and in numerous Victorian writings about the domestic angel, not the hesitant girl. My dissertation returns to this meeting place in order to trace the girl's reluctant feet onto the ideological terrain of middle-class womanhood.

Chapter Two

"Setting Up Heroine On Her Own Account":

Mary Barton's Success Story

1.

Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton (1848) has been praised by Victorian and contemporary critics alike as a "truthful" Condition-of-England novel, one that gave voice to the struggles of the "dumb" working class -- for which the young novelist received accolades from Carlyle, Dickens and others. But most contemporary critics have also noticed a "split" midway through the novel, where Gaskell shifts focus from the industrial plot of her "hero" John Barton to the more "conventionally romantic" tale of his daughter Mary.¹ Even the title which Gaskell originally planned -- "John Barton" -- was changed at the request of her publisher although, as the author states in a letter, it is "round the character of John Barton

1 Most critics have commented on this structural split. For Raymond Williams, the second half of the novel becomes "the familiar and orthodox plot of the Victorian novel of sentiment" (89). Likewise, W.A. Craik see the novel as divided into "an amalgam of ... two distinct novels, one of them a quite original tragic novel, the other a much more conventional one" (5). For recent challenges to this view see Rosemarie Bodenheimer's "Private Grief and Public Acts" and Hilary Schor's Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Novel. Catherine Gallagher in her chapter on Mary Barton in The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction analyzes structural differences in terms of competing genres and situates John Barton's tragedy in the 1840s Unitarian debates over free will and determinism.

[that] all the others formed themselves; he was my hero, the person with whom my sympathies went" (GL 42). In addition to confusion over the central protagonist of the novel, critics have commented on another novelistic schism: Gaskell appears to retreat from any sympathy with the volatile Chartist politics of John Barton to a more comfortable middle-class position, endorsing "brotherly love" as the final solution to problems between masters and men.² Gaskell's own self-effacing preface seems to confirm her ambivalent politics. "I know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade," the anonymous author states, "I have tried to write truthfully; and if my accounts agree or clash with any system, the agreement or disagreement is unintentional."³

Even those critics who see behind this scrim ignore the sexual politics behind the class politics. For Gaskell's shift in emphasis may be seen neither as artistic "failure" nor as demonstrating a lack of comprehensive social vision, but as a continuation of the

2 This view is most clearly expressed in John Lucas's essay "Mrs. Gaskell and Brotherhood" in Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction (1967) and in his The Literature of Change (1977). Though Lucas finds that Mary Barton is "weakened by [Gaskell's] readiness to slacken her realistic grip on probabilities in order to make room for some conventional liberal pieties," he praises her ability to depict working-class consciousness (Change 1;55).

3 This preface is in the Oxford World's Classics ed. and introd. by Edgar Wright, 1987. All future quotations from the novel will use this edition and will be cited in the text.

novel's political themes. We can see in Mary Barton's "set[ting] up heroine on [her] own right," in the words of one of the characters, not an evasion of political issues, but rather an illustration of Chartist goals in gendered terms. As the "not perfect" Mary Barton grows up, Gaskell illustrates an important ideological maneuver that appears to be so completely "natural" if only because it is so conventional -- namely, the inculcation of domestic ideals as young heroines come of age. And Mary's change from girlhood to womanhood symbolically accomplishes the domestic agenda that informed her father's radical politics; it also reenacts, even while it appears to depoliticize, a predominantly home-oriented and pre-industrial thrust in a branch of the Chartist movement itself.⁴ While John Barton's involvement in the Chartist movement has been the subject of critical attention, the social repercussions of Chartism for women and their families have been largely unexplored. Chartism itself was a transitional movement in British history,

4 I do not mean to oversimplify the diverse strains of Chartism, which, as one historian notes, "was never an ideologically homogeneous movement, but a mosaic of disparate elements" (Tholfsen 90). But my analysis follows the predominant and central line of thought in Chartist belief in regard to women and domesticity; namely, that "natural" differences necessitated a gendered separate sphere, much like the middle-class version. My line of thinking on this matter owes much to the work of feminist and labor historians such as Joan Wallach Scott, Sally Alexander, Sonya Rose, Mariana Valverde, Jutta Schwarzkopf, and Dorothy Thompson who examine how gender ideologies informed the construction of working-class consciousness and culture.

and in what I call Mary Barton's success story -- the novel both turned to her as domestic heroine and became immensely popular -- there is a conflation of developmental processes; Mary's coming of age both mirrors and realizes aspects of the Chartist social platform.

This is not to suggest that Gaskell's political views were radical, nor that she set out to endorse Chartist principles in Mary Barton. Rather, that the aims of Chartism for women became increasingly aligned with and indeed overlapped middle-class ideals of womanhood.⁵ In fact, though literary scholars have often addressed the "split" in the novel as politically evasive, few have taken into account the way domestic ideology as it "was articulated in Chartist rhetoric ... was used as a political weapon" (Rose 147).⁶ This process is clearly at

5 To what extent Gaskell betrays a ruling-class ideology in her portrayal, or to what extent she identified working-class and Chartist goals with the domestic and romantic agenda she describes is difficult to determine. It is also a moot point. Though Kathleen Tillotson remarks that many people read Mary Barton more as "document" than novel, and numerous Victorian reviewers (though some condemned Gaskell's "one-sided" depiction of capitalists) cited the "truthfulness" of the author's rendering of working-class life, I am more interested in how the form of the novel -- itself an expression of ideology -- has perhaps obscured the political dynamics of the domestic plot.

6 I am taking issue here with a point made by Catherine Gallagher, who notes that, "only in the second half [of the novel], after the tragic action is complete, does [Gaskell] temporarily achieve a kind of generic consistency by retreating into the domestic mentality of her heroine" (67). Though Gallagher calls attention to

work as the "not perfect" Mary Barton grows up to become the familiar domestic heroine of so many Victorian novels. The heroine's passage to womanhood, as many critics have pointed out, is often a period when class and social issues are deflected onto less threatening courtship plots. Through their choice of suitors, in Rosemarie Bodenheimer's words, middle-class heroines often "do the fictional work of reform: they attempt to remedy the injustices of their fathers or to provide missing elements in their lovers' assumptions of social power" (Politics 15).

When we view Mary's romantic plot through the lens of Chartist domestic ideology, we can indeed see that such "fictional work of reform" depends on the heroine's courtship and her development from girlhood to womanhood; rather than abandoning the interest in social issues for the safer terrain of romance, Gaskell's novel remains very much political. In fact, many of the familial and social goals that encompassed the "Chartist prospect of society," may be seen in Mary's transition to heroine.⁷

the domestic note that is sounded throughout the second part of Mary Barton, she sees it not as a political mode but in terms of competing genres. While I agree with her enlightening reading of Mary Barton, particularly her analysis of narrative forms, my point is that Mary's "domestic mentality" is not so much a "retreat" but an advance in certain working-class and Chartist circles.

⁷ I take this phrase from chapter two of Schwarzkopf's Women in the Chartist Movement (1991) which is a perceptive and sorely needed reexamination of the role women played in Chartist history. The role of women in Chartist politics, as Dorothy Thompson states, has been

Liberation for women in Chartist terms was not universal suffrage, as is commonly believed (it was dropped early on in the campaign), but freedom from all waged work.⁸ As historian Jutta Schwarzkopf states, "the main thrust of the Chartist notion of women's rights was not towards the opening up of new opportunities, but rather towards protecting women from the adverse effects of industrialism" (58). According to one Chartist writer and leader, John Watkins, every family was entitled to a "respectable lifestyle" which he depicted in his Address to the Women of England as "'a laboring man who can support himself, his wife and children, in a cottage of content, not necessitated to overtask his strength for half wages; but one, who can lay by something against a 'rainy day'" (qtd. in Schwarzkopf 39). Watkins' "cottage of content" may have been unfeasible for most of the working-class where below-subsistence wages forced women

"virtually ignored by historians." Schwarzkopf, like Asa Briggs and other historians of Chartism uses fiction (primarily the works of novelist Ernest Jones) for her analysis of Chartist visions of society. Though she does not discuss Gaskell, many of Schwarzkopf's assertions hold true for Mary Barton.

⁸ Feminist labor historians have begun reexamining how ideals of masculinity (particularly involving sole breadwinning) and female domesticity helped solidify working-class consciousness along predominantly male-defined lines. According to Valverde in "Giving the Female a Domestic Turn," "the debate on women and work ... in the second quarter of the 19th century was key in the self-creation of the British working class as a male-dominated class" (619). See also Rose's Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England (1992) for an in depth and perceptive treatment of these themes.

to work, but the goals of Chartism for women and their families were expressed predominantly in these "traditional," pre-industrial ideals.⁹

And although Chartism as a political movement "failed" in the 1840s, many of its goals for working-class men -- the franchise in particular -- were realized later in the century. But for women in radical politics, the outcome was much different. Historians have puzzled over the fact that working-class women dropped out of politics in mid-century and for all intents and purposes "seem to have retreated into the home." Dorothy Thompson speculates that this was due to a perceptual change on the part of working-class women that "occurred in [their] expectations and in their idea of their place in society" ("Women" 115; 137). Even "'labour aristocrats,'" as Barbara Taylor explains, "from whose ranks many Owenites had been drawn," by mid-century began to endorse middle-class notions of "womanly dependence and decorum." In 1849 Henry Mayhew reported that "the most respectable portion of the carpenters and joiners 'will not allow' their wives to do any work than attend to their domestic

⁹ In this way as Scott notes, the "'language of class, as Chartists spoke it," was inherently gendered; for the Chartist social platform emphasized the removal of women from the work force and promoted "a working-class family structure resembling middle-class ideals" (64-65). This thinking underscores that the political and domestic were intertwined in radical working-class beliefs, an interconnection that I find quite evident in both the form and themes of Mary Barton.

and family duties 'We keep our wives too respectable for that,' one coachman boasted" (qtd. in Taylor 79). Historians suggest that the internalization of middle-class notions of "respectability" and sentimentalized images of the angel in the house contributed to working-class women dropping out of reform movements. Certainly, these same dynamics are at work in Mary Barton's transformation from "labour's daughter" to domestic heroine.

2.

Class politics forms the subject of Mary Barton. In the words of John Barton, the problem is the enormous discrepancy between the lower and (upper) middle classes, who "live as separate as if [they] were in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus, with a great gulf betwixt [them]" (8). Bridging that gap is what his daughter Mary foolishly thinks possible in her infatuation and flirtation with the mill owner's son, Harry Carson. For Mary, conscious of her handsomeness, "had early determined that her beauty should make her a lady" (27). Furthermore, it is a rank that young Mary thinks her absent Aunt Esther (to whom she is often compared) has attained.

Esther haunts Mary's consciousness as her story does the text. Her history is fairly typical of a fallen woman plot; while Esther's good looks make her a prime target for seduction, her vanity -- as she indulges her love of

dress and thinks to make herself a lady -- insures her fall. In the first chapter of the novel, Esther's "mysterious disappearance" is easily accounted for by John Barton who sees nothing odd about his sister-in-law's fate: he had earlier predicted such desire for "artificials" would certainly turn her into a "street-walker."

Esther's downward path is representative of one school of Victorian thought which conflated a love of finery with a corrupt and licentious nature, but her story is representative in another way: Esther's factory work allows her to give way first to economic and then to sexual license, illustrating the Chartist belief that capitalism and the factory system in particular compromised women's true nature and made them sexually vulnerable.¹⁰ It was not the exploitation of labor by capital per se that the Chartists objected to, rather it was the degradation that was believed to occur when any woman worked outside the home. In the words of Henry Vincent, an early Chartist leader, "We contend that home is the place for women, and not the factory" (qtd. in Schwarzkopf 40). Though Esther is seduced by an army officer and not a factory owner, it is factory work, significantly, that John Barton condemns in recounting

10 See Valverde's informative essay, "The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse," for the way "finery" and "fallennes" operate in Victorian semiotics.

Esther's fall -- not her seducer, as is common in other fallen women stories.

Bodenheimer points out that the connections between "industrial and sexual exploitation" are "split" between the two plots; neither Esther nor Mary is employed by their actual or potential seducers, and neither John Barton nor Jem Wilson are directly exploited by the Carsons, thus preventing "a systematic analysis of industrial oppression" ("Private Grievs" 208). But we can make a systematic analysis linking sexual and economic exploitation because the entire issue of women's work in the novel is drawn largely in sexual terms and exemplifies the Chartist belief that women's waged labor was primarily a "sexual issue."

Contemporary critics have paid little attention to the subject of women's work in the novel, looking instead at depictions of men's work (or lack of it) and more at Gaskell's ability to render the working classes realistically than for expressions of political or philosophical ideas. But the subject of women's work is a problem, the problem for women according to Chartist beliefs. Most Chartists were opposed to all waged labor for women -- especially for married women -- for they believed it "contraven[ed] female nature": women's proper work was in the home or at most, the schoolroom (Schwarzkopf 41; Thompson, Chartists 148).¹¹ In his

pamphlet "The Rights of Woman" (written from his jail cell in 1840), the Chartist Manchester delegate R.J. Richardson paradoxically granted women the right to "interfere" in politics because they worked (and he saw weaving in the home as the "ideal occupation for women"), and because of their moralizing role as civilizers of men (Alexander 142). Yet Richardson repeatedly stressed that work outside the home was "unnatural" and "unwomanly," as he tells the calico-print workers of Leven:

This is the work of men ... and you ought not to perform it: your places are in your homes: your labours are your domestic duties: your interests in the welfare of your families, and not in slaving thus for the accumulation of the wealth of others, whose slaves you seem willing to be; for shame of you! go seek husbands, those of you who have them not, and make them toil for you; and those of you who have husbands and families, go home and minister to their domestic comforts. (qtd. in Thompson, Early Chartists 122-123)

11 Such beliefs necessarily implied a separate sphere ideology quite similar to that of the middle-class and relied on traditional gender relations with man as the head of the family. Explaining in part why one Chartist leader, Raynor Stephens, was arrested, a Mr. Tong states that his friend both condemned the government and "declared that women ought not to labour at all, but their duties ought to be confined to the household; that little boys ought to play about the country ... and girls ought to be ... taught to sew, knit, bake and brew ... " (qtd. from the Northern Star in Stedman Jones 151).

Richardson's admonishment betrays the fact that his objections were also economically motivated: working-class men often feared that additions to the work force would lower their wages.¹² But it more starkly underscores the regressive nature of Chartist gender relations: at mid-century, when middle-class women were beginning to agitate for wider spheres of activity, lower-class women were urged to return to "domestic comforts."¹³

In Chartists terms, women's waged labor was also condemned "for the sexual abuse it entailed." Not only were low wages thought to be responsible for leading women into prostitution, but some Chartists painted vivid

12 What women workers thought about limiting their hours (as advocated by the Short-Time Committee) or about returning to the home, is difficult to determine. Valverde quotes what little evidence exists, noting that many women responded by focusing on "concrete" hardships rather than addressing more theoretical issues. See her essay "Giving the Female a Domestic Turn," pp. 628-629.

13 I do not mean to suggest that the reality of working-class women's lives was such that they did not welcome the idea of a family wage which would allow them to return to their homes. In this sense, returning to domestic duties was not regressive so much as a welcome relief from overwork. Discussing how this belief intersects different modes on the political spectrum, Alexander rightly notes, "The social vision of the Chartists met the political and economic critique of Whiggery and Utilitarianism expounded by the Tory Democrats. The meeting point was women ..." (143). Whether the ideal of a family wage with men as the primary breadwinners was a deliberate strategy to keep women out of the workforce is a contested issue among feminist historians. See Valverde's "Giving the Female a Domestic Turn," and Rose's Limited Livelihoods for a consideration of this issue.

pictures of sexual exploitation that they believed occurred at the workplace between middle-class overseers and their working-class employees. Such images, though largely exaggerated, represented a "metaphorical class rape" and implied an economic and familial emasculation "sustained by working-class men in the course of industrialism" (Schwarzkopf 43-45). Ivan Melada, in The Captains of Industry, claims that Mary Barton illustrates radical beliefs concerning women's work -- particularly ideas about "sexual indecency" between male employers and their female employees -- a point that Bodenheimer disputes but one that I believe can be supported (75).¹⁴

It is precisely what William Ellis and Mary Turner Ellis in their review of Mary Barton label "class-morality" that allows Harry Carson to believe he can take advantage of Mary. These commentators also attribute the same class-morality to Esther's "career of degradation," and though perhaps mistaken in Esther's seducer (a point on which they do not elaborate), the conflation of sexual and class exploitation underscores an interconnection in the Victorian mind (qtd. in Easson 158-159). In Esther's case, the dynamics are slightly different -- it is she who aspires to be a "lady" and, contrary to predominant

14 Interestingly, many reformers believed that not only did the intermingling of the sexes at factories foster immorality but that the excessively hot conditions accelerated the onset of puberty for female workers (Melada 75).

Chartist beliefs, it is her economic freedom, not destitution, that leads to her fall. Still, the Ellises' misreading of Esther's situation is revealing. For Esther haunts the text as a reminder of the danger Chartists believed lurked near all women's wage-earning work -- that of the prostitute who synecdochically represents women's exploitation under capitalism.

Esther's story is a cautionary tale and an example of the moral dangers for any woman who leaves her rightful place in the domestic circle. Her role in the novel is not superfluous, as some critics claim, for as she moves shadow-like through the text she serves as an advance warning of the different roles awaiting women under industrial capitalism. Esther herself in her meeting with Jem Wilson attests to the potential sexual vulnerability of all women who work outside the home: "it's a bad life for a girl to be out late at night in the streets, and after many an hour of weary work, they're ready to follow after any novelty that makes a little change" (190). Mary's flirtation with Harry Carson follows exactly this pattern, for one "hot summer evening ... worn out by stitching and sewing, she had loitered homewards with weary languor, and first listened to the voice of the tempter" (183).

John Barton's hostility towards and rejection of factory work for women (it is "out of the question" for Mary) is partly occasioned by Esther's plight. He blames

factory work for allowing Esther the economic freedom to entertain thoughts of class aspirations -- what he labels "a do-nothing lady, worrying shopmen all morning, and screeching at her pianny all afternoon" -- and he attributes his wife's sudden death to worry over Esther's disappearance. Barton's description of the "do-nothing lady" reaches its epitome in Mrs. Carson, herself a former factory worker whom Gaskell depicts as having neither the intelligence nor the education to benefit from her changed station. Though in different ways, Esther, Mrs. Carson, and Mary all serve to illustrate the emptiness of class ambitions: class-striving it appears, is most detrimental for women. Indeed, "the work of the novel," as Hilary Schor writes in Scheherezade in the Marketplace, "is to move its heroine from her upper-class to her lower-class lover ..." (18).¹⁵ In so doing, Gaskell equates Mary's development with knowing both

15 Schor continues the sentence, "and, more interesting, to move her into public, which is where she finally (when a witness at his trial for murder of Harry Carson) tells Jem of her love" (18). In her analysis of the "public" and thus political nature of Mary's speech, Schor also redresses the novel's political/romantic schism. Schor's recent book on Gaskell is one of the best treatments of the novelist and her work. While I agree with many aspects of her analysis of Mary Barton, I differ with her assessment that the novel shows a Chartist concern with speech and women's rights. My argument throughout this chapter is that Gaskell portrays class politics over feminist issues, which mirrors what was happening in the Chartist movement at the time the novelist was writing Mary Barton.

one's own heart and one's place in the social structure.¹⁶

While John Barton condemns factory work for women for the class aspirations it fosters, he also believes that such work is harmful to women physically. He remembers his wife as being "too shiftless" [i.e. vulnerable] for such work; in addition, Jane Wilson is crippled as a result of her factory employment when she "cotched her side again a wheel" -- a literal representation of the damage to women's bodies under industrial capitalism. Her accident results in a life-long testiness of temper and, as she claims, would probably have made her unmarriageable to anyone other than her forgiving husband George. Though Gaskell herself was not always hostile to the idea of women's work (her first published stories in Howitt's Magazine show working women who, if not necessarily happy, are nevertheless financially independent), in Mary Barton she sketches how the factory system wreaks havoc on domestic life. One Victorian correspondent picked up on this theme,

16 Significantly, marriage formed part of both Chartist and middle-class domestic ideology. For the Chartists, the idealization of marriage and motherhood also had class ramifications; they "cast themselves as preservers of marriage and the family" in the face of what they termed "class-legislation" -- such as the new Poor Law of 1834 -- which they believed threatened these ideals. Chartist novelist Thomas Frost even claimed in a chapter heading "Love and Poverty" that "there is more real love among the poor than among the rich, including ... both the upper and middle classes" (qtd. in Schwarzkopf 46-47).

commenting in the Manchester Guardian that "our authoress is averse to the employment of women in factories" (qtd. in Easson 123).¹⁷

In one of the middle chapters of the novel significantly titled "Return of the Prodigal," Mary, Jane Wilson, and her sister-in-law Alice discuss the appropriateness of factory work for women. In this chapter, we see the convergence of all three plots and subplots -- industrial, romantic and fallen woman -- centering around the disintegration of domestic relations. Significantly, the discussion of women's work is framed by John Barton's plight (he sinks deeper into despair and even strikes Mary in a fit of anger), and concludes with Esther's as she is taken to the New Bailey. In Chartist terms, all these issues were related: if men could not support their families, women went to work and then most likely had to supplement their incomes with prostitution.

Aside from the threat of sexual exploitation, Jane Wilson's assertion that she "had been in a factory sin' five years old amost, and ... knew nought about cleaning, or cooking, let alone washing and such-like work" (138-

17 It is true that in Gaskell's early work, her concern with women employed in factories has to do with the adverse repercussions it had on domestic life. Gaskell's emphasis changes slightly in North and South to include the hazards of factory work itself on women. Aina Rubenius discusses this shift in emphasis in The Woman Question in Mrs. Gaskell's Life and Works (1950).

139) demonstrates both the middle-class belief that factory work rendered women unknowledgeable about domestic affairs and the Chartist belief that factory and domestic work were fundamentally incompatible. Her tale of not knowing how to cook a potato after her marriage is more than a fine illustration of Gaskell's anecdotal style: it emphasizes the view that factory work left women little time for learning domestic economy. Significantly, Mary is shown early on in the novel demonstrating her domestic skills; it is she who purchases and cooks the food for the Wilson-Barton tea party in the first chapter, and who later keeps house for her father. At the age of thirteen, Mary's domestic capabilities appear to be innate, which illustrates that she has the makings of a heroine as well as the attributes of "true womanhood."

Jane Wilson also expounds on John Barton's injunction against letting girls work in factories, telling Mary, "They oughtn't to go at after they're married, that I'm very clear about" (139). The issue of woman's work, as we have seen, was a fundamental rallying cry for the Chartists; some condoned waged work outside the home for single women under dire circumstances, but almost none thought it fit for married women. Mrs. Wilson explains to Mary that women's work destroys domestic bliss: frowzy housekeeping causes men to turn to gin-shops for comfort.

Jane's sister-in-law Alice also adds to the factory discussion, stating that her nephew Jem likewise condemns women's extra-domestic activities. "Wife o' hi'n will never work away fra'home," she claims and further expresses her wish that "Jem could speak a word to th'Queen, about factory work for married women." Similarly, Jane compares the royal family with the working class: "I say it's Prince Albert as ought to be asked how he'd like his missis to be from home when he comes in, tired and worn, and wanting some one to cheer him" (140). Though Jane and Alice Wilson's analogy may be illustrative of Gaskell's sense of humor (the narrator states that Mary believed "the Queen and Prince Albert could not make laws"), as Margaret Ganz claims in Elizabeth Gaskell: The Artist in Conflict, more importantly such rhetoric was used by Chartist women to publicly voice their grievances. According to historians, female Chartists frequently used comparisons with Queen Victoria to both legitimize their involvement in politics and to draw attention to their "natural" rights as women, which were thought to supersede class differences. The Keighley Female Charter Association writes in an issue of the Northern Star, the leading Chartist newspaper, "when our children are starving for want of the necessaries of life, we can feel for them with an affection as sincere as that possessed by the mother of the Queen upon the throne" (qtd. in Schwarzkopf 100). Such comparisons

highlight the Chartists' appeal to traditional gender relations and underscore their primarily family-oriented concerns.

The interchange about factory work is the only time Alice Wilson directly complains about women's lot. In most of the novel she is seen as embodying the principles of Christian benevolence and resignation. Unlike John Barton, Alice dispenses charity and good will in the face of the "mysteries of life." Gaskell had conceived the original "germ" for her character in her first publication, a poem "Sketches Among the Poor" published in Blackwood's Magazine in 1837. Both Alice and her prototype -- "a single, not a lonely, woman, sage" -- are forced to leave their childhood homes to seek employment elsewhere, yet they continually reminisce about returning to their ancestral hearthstone. It is important to see Alice Wilson as more than just one of the tales of the working class "in the manner of Crabbe," whom Gaskell so much admired. Alice is not ancillary to the novel but central to its theme -- that of women's exploitation under capitalism. The history of "Old Alice," who, because her family cannot afford her keep, is forced to leave her childhood home for better wages in Manchester, is a vivid object lesson that traditional rural and domestic ties are severed when women are forced to seek employment outside of the home.

Yet Gaskell's idyll is not a mere nostalgic expression for a lost pastoral world -- Alice significantly does not return to her childhood home -- but rather, I believe, it is about returning women's work to the home, its pre-industrial domain.¹⁸ Alice first appears in the text after gathering "wild herbs for drinks and medicine" in the fields all day. Though she earns her living as a washerwoman, much of Alice's "work" is unpaid -- as sick nurse and dispenser of homemade remedies -- undertaken out of the goodness of her heart and for which she expects no recompense. Alice's eagerness to help any neighbor in trouble, "there's none more ready to help with heart or hand than she is" (10), is more in keeping with women's traditional labor before the rise of industrial capitalism separated it from the home.

It is also significant that Alice is portrayed as child-like; she remains a perpetual young woman caught up in the daydreams of her youth, reminiscing about being home with her mother and sister. Alice's fantasies are ironically realized when she is paralyzed after a stroke and lies in a blissful state, "absorbed in the recollections of the days of her girlhood" where "still

18 Coral Lansbury in Elizabeth Gaskell (1975) is one of the few critics to analyze the role of Alice Wilson in the novel. Lansbury argues that Gaskell was aware of the harsh realities affecting rural life, and thus shows, in the character of Alice, the childishness of indulging in pastoral daydreams.

she talked of green fields, and still she spoke to the long-dead mother and sister..." (297). Alice's idyll is both pre-Oedipal (she longs for fusion with the maternal bodies of nature and her own mother) and pre-Industrial. And while her relations with others contrasts with the cash-nexus relationships operating in Manchester, Gaskell's portrayal of Alice's continuous girlhood demonstrates that such a lifestyle is most definitely a thing of the past: Alice's system is an outmoded form, as childish as her dreams and as untenable.

For John Barton, the cash-nexus relationship separating the capitalist from the worker produces an inexplicable conflict: "the mysterious problem of life" (70). Unlike Alice, Barton feels angry rather than resigned at the differences. When early on in the novel he goes in search of food for his dying son, the disparity between Barton's life and that of his former "bankrupt" employer, Mr. Hunter, is striking:

Hungry himself, almost to an animal pitch of ravenousness, but with the bodily pain swallowed up in anxiety for his little sinking lad, he stood at one of the shop windows where all edible luxuries are displayed; haunches of venison, Stilton cheeses, mould of jelly -- all appetising sights to the common passer-by. And out of the shop came Mrs. Hunter! She crossed to her carriage, followed by the shopman loaded with purchases for a party. The door

was quickly slammed to, and she drove away; and [he] returned home with a bitter spirit of wrath in his heart, to see his only boy a corpse!" (25)

While the comparison shows that Gaskell was undoubtedly sympathetic to the sufferings of the working poor, the novelist was not sympathetic to the means (Chartist or radical) of rectifying the problem. Gaskell's narrator moves away from inciting class conflict in the disclaimer that follows the description of Mrs. Hunter:

You can fancy, now, the hoards of vengeance in his heart against the employers. For there are never wanting those who, either in speech or in print, find it their interest to cherish such feelings in the working classes; who know how and when to command; and who use their knowledge with unrelenting purpose to either party. (25)

Barton's anger is understandable enough, but fostering such feelings to the level of class action -- "in speech or in print" -- Gaskell appears to be saying, is not.

In the next paragraph, the narrator tellingly connects Mary's development with Barton's progression into radical politics: "So while Mary took her own way, growing more spirited every day, and growing in her beauty too, her father was chairman at many a trades' union meeting, a friend of delegates, and ambitious of being a delegate himself; a Chartist and ready to do anything for his order" (25-26). Mary's "own way," her

development in the novel, will ultimately be more successful than her father's; as she grows from girlhood to womanhood, Mary not only takes over, but also symbolically achieves some of the "political" goals that her father strives for. While his plans are all for attaining domestic comforts (though it is too late to save his son), it is Mary who actually works to provide what little food there is. And like many political reformers, Gaskell employs familial metaphors to dramatize this world turned upside down and to stress the unnatural living conditions in which parents cannot provide for their children.¹⁹

That kinship relations are indeed inverted is evident not only in Barton's failure to provide for his family, but also in Gaskell's description of the Chartist agitation in general. As the narrator's analogy suggests, Barton's political involvement is a type of hideous progeny begotten by middle-class carelessness:

19 In discussions of female factory labor, radical reformers almost always drew examples which illustrated that traditional gender and generational relations had been overturned. Writing of the practice of employing youths instead of adults, one radical reformer notes, "it could place the son and daughter of fifteen, at the head of the family, to whose whims and caprices the father must bend and succumb, or in many cases starve" (qtd. in Alexander 137). In the case of grown women, male mill workers argued that such factory employment was "an inversion of the order of nature and providence -- a return to the state of barbarism, in which woman does the work, while the man looks idly on" (qtd. in Valverde, "Giving" 620).

The actions of the uneducated seem to me typified in those of Frankenstein, that monster of many human qualities, ungifted with a soul, a knowledge of the difference between good and evil.

The people rise up to life; they irritate us, they terrify us, and we become their enemies. Then, in the sorrowful moment of our triumphant power, their eyes gaze on us with mute reproach. Why have we made them what they are; a powerful monster, yet without the inner means for peace and happiness? (199)

Though Gaskell retreats from this ruling-class position by next describing Barton as "a Chartist, a Communist, all that is commonly called wild and visionary. Aye! but being visionary is something. It shows a soul, a being not altogether sensual; a creature who looks forward for others, if not for himself" (199), she nevertheless portrays Barton's radicalism as predominantly childlike. Moreover, Gaskell's substitution of the creator's name for the monster's, while perhaps a common conflation, is revealing: it underscores the multiple inversions of parent/child relations in the novel, and I believe, points toward the conclusion with Mary as domestic heroine. Righting such relations is what drives John Barton's involvement in radical politics, but it is a goal that only his daughter, through her own efforts, will achieve.

Significantly, John Barton's Chartist petition which he will carry to London is primarily concerned with painting a picture of domestic ills. While others such as Mrs. Davenport suggest deregulating factory work for children, and Job Legh argues for free trade, Barton's concerns are notably focused on presenting the workers' familial degradation, most notably the breakdown in caretaking between parents and children.²⁰ Even after the meeting between workers and masters where Harry Carson draws the fateful caricature which will incite Barton to murder him, Barton speaks first of domestic woe. As the workers listen "with great attention," Barton holds forth:

It makes me more than sad, it makes my heart burn within me, to see that folk can make a jest of striving men; of chaps who comed to ask for a bit o' fire for th' old granny, as shivers i'th' cold; for a bit o' bedding, and some warm clothing to the poor wife who lies in labour on th' damp flags; and for victuals for the childer, whose little voices are

20 Some feminist critics have seen in Barton's "maternalism," evidence of Gaskell's "female ethic of care" and a challenge to paternal politics (See Patsy Stoneman Elizabeth Gaskell). See also Schor for an analysis of the "maternal power" in Mary Barton. Such gender reversal may be a plea on Gaskell's part for more caring, "maternal" politics, but it is also in keeping with the spirit of Chartism in general, which sought to establish working-class families along patriarchal kinship models and to extend this family dynamic to entire communities.

getting too faint and weak to cry aloud wi' hunger. For brothers, is not them the things we ask for when we ask for more wage? We donnot want dainties, we want bellyfuls; we donnot want gimcrack coats and waistcoats, we want warm clothes We donnot want their grand houses, we want a roof to cover us from the rain, and the snow, and the storm; aye, and not alone to cover us, but the helpless ones that cling to us in the keen wind, and ask us with their eyes why we brought 'em into th' world to suffer?" (220)

Gaskell's political views were certainly not radical, and her narrator at times betrays an all too obvious middle-class paternalism, but she evidently was familiar with men like John Barton and their objectives.²¹ Yet rather than see these descriptions as part of Gaskell's homey "charm" or evidence of a less intellectual novelist, I read her portrayals -- because Chartism focused on domestic politics -- as more politically charged.

In one of the most moving scenes of the novel, Gaskell depicts the utter degradation and destitution of

21 Gaskell in her roles as minister's wife and social activist was familiar with many of the working-poor of Manchester and her descriptions of their lifestyle ring true. The radical leader Samuel Bamford wrote to Gaskell "of John Bartons, I have known hundreds, his very self in all things except his fatal crime ..." (qtd. in Easson 151), and Gaskell herself claimed to have modeled Barton after a working man she knew. Her portrayal of the poor and their ethics of care for each other is undoubtedly based on first-hand observation.

the poor. When John Barton and George Wilson come to the rescue of an unemployed worker and his family, they are horrified to find "three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet, brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up," while Ben Davenport, their father, lies dying on a makeshift bed that "no dog would have chosen" (67-71). Due to the new Poor Law (which the Chartists cited as a species of "class-legislation") that would have sent the family back to their parish, they are afraid to go for help and "just borned on in hope o' better times" (72). Barton is further amazed to find Mrs. Davenport trying to nurse a two years' child "from her dry, withered breast." The image of a mother unable to feed her children from her withered breast was a powerful symbol in Chartist iconography; it represented an indictment of "a social system that frustrated the fulfillment of what was regarded as women's natural maternal responsibility to the extent of drying up 'Nature's sustenance' for infants" (Schwarzkopf 91). Gaskell's depiction of this dank abode, which is far from Watkins' "cottage of content," both evokes the reader's sympathy and criticizes a system that could allow such inhumane living conditions to exist.

Though John Barton pawns what little he has left to help the Davenports and goes to London to petition Parliament, the second half of the novel shows him

largely ineffectual and increasingly unable to provide for his own family. He becomes a shadowy figure sinking deeper into opium addiction and depression. It is Mary who must work to provide basic sustenance and attempt to make their cottage a home; as Barton is jobless, the narrator early on reminds us that "Mary must do something." Due to his antagonism towards the upper classes, Barton rejects domestic service as "a species of slavery," which echoes a favorite Chartist rallying cry against the middle-class hypocrisy of emancipating slaves abroad but metaphorically enslaving women in England. And though in his injunction against girls working in factories Barton attempts to save Mary from Esther's fate, by allowing her to work for a dressmaker he ironically affords her the opportunity to encourage her vanity. At Miss Simmonds' establishment for "Young Ladies," Mary can entertain thoughts of her appearance while "never redden[ing] or dirty[ing] her face with hard labour" (27). Yet Gaskell's narrator urges the reader to be lenient: "think what are the silly fancies of sixteen years of age in every class, and under all circumstances" (27). Despite this disclaimer, the reader is not allowed to forget that Miss Simmonds' establishment is in many ways inappropriate for Mary: it is there that she fills her head with inappropriate notions gleaned from reading romantic novels and is encouraged to act on them with Harry Carson.

Mary's fantasies and her "ambition" to be a lady, ("infused years ago by her Aunt Esther"), cause her to flirt with the mill-owner's son. And though Harry's attentions flatter her vanity, it is the material comfort she could provide for her father as his "lady-daughter" that appears to drive Mary's ambitions. Yet these dreams are too grand to ever make her father happy. Though Mary would like "to live in a grand house" and provide him with bountiful meat dinners, Barton's concerns are far simpler; he merely wants to attain the basic necessities of life to fit the needs of his own class. Mary's class-striving in some ways mocks Barton's antagonism for the higher classes, yet her apprenticeship at Miss Simmonds' and in the novel requires her to outgrow these desires in order to emerge as a heroine in her own right.²² In this process, Mary's fellow sempstress Sally Leadbitter serves as foil, allowing Mary to see the shallowness behind the vanity of her ambitions, and Gaskell to project the undesirable qualities of lower-class girlhood.²³

22 I am disagreeing here with Ruth Yeazell (and Bodenheimer) who asserts that for Mary "to flirt with Harry Carson was to indulge in the feminine, personal equivalent of her father's wish for social and economic transformation..." ("Why Political Novels" 135). This formulation ignores John Barton's hostility towards the upper classes and the fact that he doesn't want to advance so much as to strengthen his own class. While Yeazell notes that for Mary to marry Jem "reaffirms the endogamy of class," she sees Mary's romance plot in Freudian terms -- as necessary "to veil the disturbing impulses associated with the hero," rather than as a continuation of political themes (136).

Gaskell is a bit harsh in her description of Sally whom she labels "vulgar-minded to the last degree; never easy unless her talk was of love and lovers" (103). Sally's role in Mary's love affair with Carson is both mercenary (she is paid for encouraging Mary's confidences) and prurient. Furthermore, Sally is too loquacious at the expense of her own and Mary's maiden modesty:

But what she lacked in beauty she tried to make up for by a kind of witty boldness, which gave her what her betters would have called piquancy.

Considerations of modesty or propriety never checked her utterance of a good thing. She had just talent enough to corrupt others. Her very good-nature was an evil influence. (103)

In the description of Sally's "boldness" is a negative image of the struggle for articulation among the working class that forms one of the central themes of the novel. Significantly, the two kinds of discourses are linked by Gaskell's narrator:

For Mary, in her seclusion at Miss Simmonds' -- where the chief talk was of fashions, and dress, and parties to be given ... varied with slight-whispered

23 Gaskell's description of Sally as "a plain, red-haired, freckled, girl; never likely ... to become a heroine on her own account," contrasts sharply with Mary's comeliness (103). Moreover, Gaskell uses the same phrase to describe Mary's transformation to heroine. The class connotations are clear.

interludes occasionally about love and lovers, -- had not heard the political news of the day: that Parliament had refused to listen to the working men, when they had petitioned, with all the force of their rough, untutored words (112)

Though the talk at Miss Simmonds' is a private discourse, not the public speaking of the Chartist men, the girls' gossip significantly excludes the other. What separates Mary from the struggles of her father and the working class -- syntactically in this sentence and in the novel -- are her fantasies of love that have class ambition.

The turning point of the novel, and one that provoked much skepticism in Victorian readers (as well as contemporary critics), centers on Mary's abrupt change of heart as she moves from higher to lower-class lover. When her childhood sweetheart Jem Wilson proposes, despite the fact that she rejects him Mary suddenly realizes the "passionate secret of her soul" -- she does indeed love Jem best. Her flirtation with Carson and subsequent dreams of ladyhood, she discovers, were mere "hollow vanities" in comparison (152). Mary's wrestling with her two selves (as represented by her two lovers), lasts only "moments," Gaskell writes, for "a few moments may change our character for life, by giving it a totally different direction to our aims and energies" (152). But this apocalyptic "unveiling," while it changes the direction of the narrative and focuses attention on Mary as

heroine, is not entirely convincing -- a point Victorian reviewers were quick to pick up on. As J.J. Tayler notes in the Prospective Review, though Gaskell offers a "psychological explanation" for this "instantaneous transition ... from one character to the other," it "is not satisfactory" (qtd. in Easson 143-144). In W.R. Greg's words, "we cannot believe that the long coquetting of the heroine ... are [sic] consistent with the sense and spirit all along attributed to her" (Essays 1: 387). And in a slightly different way, Mary's co-worker and foil, Sally Leadbitter, offers a different explanation; she attributes her friend's fickleness to "the changeableness of girlhood" (154).

As these criticisms make plain, Gaskell's portrayal of Mary's turnabout is improbable at best. And while this shift provides a "cover story," as Yeazell argues in her essay "Why Political Novels Have Heroines," allowing Gaskell to focus on her innocent heroine rather than the guilty and violent actions of her "hero" (133), Mary's conversion doesn't deflect so much as disclose the class politics that shape Gaskell's portrayal. For Gaskell's sleight of hand, which importantly signals the turning point between girlhood and womanhood, also changes Mary into the modest heroine of so many Victorian novels.

Whereas before Mary encouraged Carson's forward advances, meeting him in alleys and exchanging love letters, now Mary listens to "the whisperings of her

womanly nature," as she waits for Jem (204). In this way, it is "maidenly modesty (and true love is ever modest)," Gaskell writes, which will govern Mary's actions in the future (153). Vowing not to write or tell Jem of her love, Mary resolves only that "she would try and do right, and have womanly patience" (154). And, perversely, it is only after Jem learns from Esther of Mary's dealings with Carson that he notes the suitability of this upper-class romance. In Jem's thinking, Mary "was a lady by right of nature ... in movement, grace, and spirit" (196). But Mary only becomes a true woman and modest heroine after leaving the "changeable" state of girlhood. Adult womanhood, it appears, is equated with true love with a member of one's own class.²⁴

And though we can certainly read Gaskell's turn to Mary's romantic plot and her lower-class lover as part of the conventional "Victorian novel of sentiment," this shift doesn't evade political concerns so much as show the interconnections between the political and romance plots. Perhaps the most revealing example of this coupling, and one which dramatizes the way class issues, politics, and romance are intertwined, is seen in the case of Jem's valentine to Mary. This paper is the same

24 Jem also has been elevated to gentleman status by Gaskell. Due to his industriousness -- inventing a "crank" and receiving two to three hundred pounds for this patent -- Mrs. Wilson tells Mary that "Jem's a gentleman for life wi' the money his master gied him" (166).

one that Mary uses to copy the radical leader Samuel Bamford's poem onto for her father; it then later becomes wadding for the gun John Barton uses to murder Harry Carson. And as if to underscore the connections between politics and domestic life (or more appropriately degradation), it is then found by Esther at the scene of the crime and returned to Mary. While this information helps convert Mary to a more active heroine in the second half of the novel (as she seeks to find an "alibi" for her lover without casting suspicion on her father), it also confirms the overlap between class issues, political actions, and women's roles.

And Gaskell's choice of Samuel Bamford is revealing in this respect. For despite the radical weaver's belief that he was "the initiator of female voting," there is every indication, as Catherine Hall argues, that men and women positioned themselves differently in working-class politics with women very much in a dependent position ("Tale" 85; 82). Theorizing on how Samuel and his wife Jemima experienced the Peterloo march and their political life, Hall asserts that their tale "vividly illustrates" the differences between men and women in radical politics: for it is the man who emerges as a "political subject in his own right," and the woman whose job is centered on making home, in Bamford's term, a "dove-nest" ("Tale" 82; 85). It is also significant that the other radical poet whom Gaskell quotes in the novel -- Ebenezer

Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymer -- similarly describes "women's mission" as domestic, and as an important corollary to the male political sphere. That the political realm is reserved for men but necessarily depends on a modest and domestic angel in the house is evident, one Victorian commentator asserts, from Elliott's verses. This "creed," according to the Westminster reviewer, is inherently gendered: "The sublimest soul can have no higher aim than this, though his power shall be sufficient to revolutionize the thoughts and ways of men; nor can the single-hearted hand-maiden have any lower aim, though her desire and ability be limited to keep free from stain the steps that lead towards the altar" (120). The connection between politics and maiden modesty is clear in the reviewer's language and in his punctuation: and Mary Barton's abrupt transformation from the changeableness of girlhood to the constancy of modest womanhood tellingly illustrates this contingency.

Aside from this expedient conversion which marks Mary's change from coquette to modest heroine, there is another turning-point in the novel regarding Mary's development: the reunion with her long-lost Aunt Esther (Gallagher 79). For the meeting both underscores the wide gulf that now exists between the two women (which had previously seemed dangerously narrow), and affirms the active part that Mary must play if she is to save her

family. Though in her exhausted and overwrought state, Mary mistakes Esther's figure at the door for the comforting arms of her dead mother, the knowledge that Esther brings only serves to point out that Mary must mother herself: she must destroy the evidence that links her father to the crime and provide an alibi for her lover.²⁵

It is after this crucial meeting that Mary sets off on her mission to save the ones she loves. And unlike her father, her sojourn out of Manchester is successful; her efforts do help Jem to be acquitted (his cousin Will serves as alibi), and Mary gets her day in court. While John Barton was unable to tell Parliament of his domestic woes, Mary is given center stage to express her troubles. When asked which of her lovers she favors, Mary responds by detailing her personal history. "For you see, sir," she tells the magistrate and the listeners in the courtroom, "mother died before I was thirteen, before I could know right from wrong ... and I was giddy and vain ..." (383). Her response continues with modest blushes to indicate she loves James Wilson best. And when the counsellor asks her if she spoke of her lovers to each other, she replies, "I never would be so bold as to tell one young man I cared for another" (384). Mary's

25 See Schor for a reading of this scene in which "the dead mother" is "key" to refiguring authority in the novel (32-33).

forwardness at the trial is not the boldness of Sally Leadbitter who speaks inappropriately about love interests, but the necessary speech that helps to clear her lover without indicting the true murderer, her father.

Though critics have made much of the trial scene in which Mary publicly declares her love, her testimony concerns only her personal feelings and may be read as similar to the role many women were expected to play in the Chartist movement. For it was in their relative positions as wives, daughters, and sisters that these women were encouraged to voice their problems. And historians who chart the role of women in radical politics call attention to a long practice of women being encouraged to speak about domestic issues from these relative positions. Such roles enabled them to speak publicly and thus "politically" about private concerns. And though these addresses were not all that common among mixed audiences and were usually prefaced by a disclaimer that called attention to the dire circumstances necessitating extreme actions, we can read Mary's declaration at Jem's murder trial similarly: a drastic act involving only her personal feelings.

Historians have also called attention to the fact that when women did speak publicly their language frequently sounded stilted and rhetorical; aware of the fact that they were speaking to an audience (usually in a

male role), they often expressed themselves in the language of more established (male) discourses. In her comparison at the trial of Mary to Guido's "Beatrice Cenci," which has struck many critics as odd, Gaskell also employs a similar self-conscious rhetoric. By turning her heroine into an art object, Gaskell acknowledges the performative position from which Mary speaks:

The mellow sunlight streamed down that high window on her head, and fell on the rich treasure of her golden hair, stuffed away in masses under her little bonnet-cap; and in those warm beams the motes kept dancing up and down Many who were looking for mere flesh and blood beauty, mere colouring were disappointed One who was [there] told me that her look, and indeed her whole face, was more like the well-known engraving from Guido's picture of 'Beatrice Cenci' than anything else he could give me an idea of. (381)

Though in some ways Gaskell distances herself and her narrator from this stylized portrait, her description seems to me to suggest the pose that working-class women adopted when speaking in public: consciously aware of the rhetorical nature of public speech, these women often used more formal and stilted language.

The final dramatization of Mary as domestic heroine occurs after the trial scene. Feverish with all she has

been going through, and nearly mad with the knowledge of her father's secret, Mary is taken ill for weeks. And during this time she literally becomes like Old Alice whose girlhood memories are symbolic of England's pre-industrial past. Dreaming she is "with her mother at home," Mary reenacts Alice's final days; as the latter dies thinking of the rural "happy realms of [her] childhood," Mary eventually awakes from her dream-like state to find she is a "heroine." In the words of Sally Leadbitter, Mary sets "up heroine on [her] own account." For though John Barton is shown repeatedly reading the leading Chartist journal, the Northern Star, and seeking the means of getting a hearing for his sad tale, Mary's story is run "in the Guardian, -- and the Courier, -- and ... even copied into a London paper" (422). Her romantic tale is given headline status while Barton's struggles remain unread. And as if to underscore the complete transformation of Mary to domestic heroine, when Sally suggests her co-worker return to Miss Simmonds', Mary emphatically responds, "Don't talk so; I cannot come And even if I could -- " (423): her modest blushing answers more completely than her halting words. And her marriage to Jem seals Mary's fate.

Yet critics have often called attention to the conclusion of Mary Barton as escapism on Gaskell's part. For in the final chapters John Barton dies in Mr. Carson's arms after confessing his guilt and receiving

forgiveness. Departing from the more radical beliefs expressed earlier in the novel, Gaskell ultimately endorses not political change but a more harmonious status quo: Carson comes to see the need for "a perfect understanding, and complete confidence and love ... between masters and men; that the truth might be recognized that the interests of one were the interests of all ... in short, to acknowledge the Spirit of Christ as the regulating law between both parties" (457-458).

Furthermore, Gaskell ships off Jem, Mary, and Mrs. Wilson to Canada, where they may live happily ever after in a family that "goes upwards or downwards" (443). But if we compare the final scene of the novel to the domestic agenda imagined in many Chartist writings, Gaskell's conclusion does not appear to be escapist so much as strikingly similar. In his Address to the Women of England, the Manchester radical leader, James Wheeler, outlines his view of domestic life, available to all after Chartist goals had been realized, that is simultaneously a portrait of an idealized past and a plea for a more hopeful future:

The proper sphere of woman is home; and a proper woman should be suffered to rule there. Man goeth forth to work and returneth for that rest and refreshment which his labour at once needeth and procureth. Woman, in the mean time, fitteth and prepareth the good things provided by his toil, and

she cheereth his worn spirit by words and looks and
deeds of love. (qtd. in Schwarzkopf 267-68)

Gaskell's portrayal of the Wilson life in Canada,
remarkably echoes this in both tone and language. Peering
into the future, the narrator sees

a long low wooden house, with room enough and to
spare. The old primeval trees are felled and gone
for many a mile around There is a garden around
the dwelling, and far beyond that stretches an
orchard At the door of the house, looking
towards the town, stands Mary, watching the return
of her husband from his daily work; and while she
watches, she listens, smiling,

'Clap hands, daddy comes,
With his pockets full of plums
And a cake for Johnnie.'

Then comes a crow of delight from Johnnie. (463)

In her final portrayal of Mary and Jem's "cottage of
content," Gaskell depicts a future society that is based
on the family in its pre-industrial state -- a view that
is in keeping with many Chartist writers and visionaries.
And despite the perhaps unfeasible nature of this goal,
"Chartism appealed," in Sally Alexander's words, "for a
return to a golden age, or at least to an imagined Eden
before 1832 'invaded' the civil liberties of the people
... [and] introduc[ed] 'class legislation'" (141). That
Gaskell sets this society in Canada rather than England,

is not necessarily an evasion, but perhaps a recognition that such golden age never existed; or, that a return to "industrial organization rooted in household and kinship," is no longer possible in industrialized Britain.²⁶

By 1848, when Gaskell was publishing Mary Barton, the Chartist movement was mostly over. The impetus behind class conflict was quelled perhaps by improved economic conditions in England, and any threat of "revolution" was averted. But the legacy of Chartism in fiction may be seen in the success of heroines like Mary Barton whose romantic and domestic plot was actually part of Chartist goals. Some of the demands of the Chartists, such as working class suffrage and equal electoral districts, would wait years to be accomplished. But, in many ways, Mary Barton's success story -- the idyllic, pre-industrial return of working-class women to the home -- illustrates the role women would play when Chartism came of age. Mary Barton may be one of "Labor's Daughters -- heiress of all the struggles, vicissitudes, and sufferings consequent upon the ignorance and prejudices of the society into which she is born," as William and Mary Ellis label her, different from "the Evelinas,

²⁶ This is also Alexander's phrase. She further notes that "the appeal to the land always evokes, when it recurs in popular ideologies, a lost and more egalitarian past, one closer to natural sources of affection, feeling, and community" (141). The role of women in this vision, Alexander adds, "seldom escapes submission."

Cecilias and Belindas which superseded the Romances of the Forest, the Children of the Abbey, and the Haunted Towers of the age which preceded theirs" (qtd. in Easson 156). But her difference from these heroines, when viewed in the context of Chartist aims, demonstrates just what was at stake when Gaskell turned the novel over to Mary's story.

Chapter Three

"Slew the body but saved the soul":

Evangelical Girlhood

1.

In the 1770s, a young woman named Hester Ann Roe thinking she was dying of consumption, penned an account of her recent conversion to Methodism. Only seventeen at the time of her "New Birth," the experience left her, she wrote thankfully, "emptied of self and filled with God." Hester Ann Roe did not die in her youth as she expected, but rather lived for several more years spreading the good news of her conversion and preaching the gospel (Malmgreen 62). Her story typifies the experience of many young women during the evangelical revival of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The individual conversion, with its emphasis on the renunciation of self, was at the center of the revival (in all its denominations) that swept through Britain at the turn of the century. Moreover, historical evidence suggests that these "new births" occurred most frequently among young women "between the ages of twelve and twenty-one." In fact, female converts outnumbered their male counterparts by almost two to one. Not only were women generally thought more susceptible to a "religion of the heart,"

but young girls in particular were believed to be especially sensitive to religious zeal.¹

For young women, these conversions were often viewed as a necessary rite-of-passage into adulthood. Rebirths provided not only "spiritual independence" but also an opportunity to cast off a dependent girlhood role. Once converted, a young woman could renounce patriarchal law and marriage in favor of a religious calling and preaching (Cott 21; Valenze 65). When two American psychologists, G. Stanley Hall and Edward Starbuck, at the turn of the twentieth century, were codifying their ideas on adolescence, they saw the frequency of religious conversion during the critical teen years as seminal. "Religious enthusiasm," they concluded, "was in some way intrinsic to adolescence." Furthermore, in keeping with his belief on the importance of this stage, Hall noted that adolescence is the crucial time for "rebirth" not only for the individual but also for the race.²

1 Malmgreen, p. 59. Though these figures are from Nancy Cott's essay "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England" they appear to apply to British women as well (15). In her topical study of Methodism, Malmgreen notes that American historians of religion are far in advance of British scholars in this field. But Malmgreen's figures also support the predominance of unmarried female participants: her "preliminary survey" for East Cheshire suggests women's membership to be about 55%. And this number appears to be even higher in other manufacturing cities (Malmgreen 60).

2 The correspondence between the two phenomena, which the psychologists use as evidence to elevate and justify adolescence as a separate life stage, actually had a much longer history. Hall merely translates many common nineteenth-century beliefs to fit his developmental

What Hall and Starbuck see as endemic to the condition of adolescence was no doubt rooted in the specific historical circumstances of the nineteenth century. Historians speculate that the frequency of spiritual rebirths among young women may have been a result of the dislocating effects of the industrial revolution. In a time of social change and redefinition of women's role, evangelicalism offered women an exalted position. And for young women, whose positions in the family were suddenly less clearly defined, conversions like Hester Ann Roe's were a sure path to adulthood; they provided the convert not only with assimilable ideals of womanhood but also with an entry into a more stable "family" or community.³ In addition, religious enthusiasm

scheme (Kett 62-63). In Rites of Passage, Kett helpfully summarizes the connection between youthful conversion and the American "Second Awakening."

3 Cott applies Erik Erikson's formulation that the main "task" of adolescence is identity formation and suggests that revival provided young women with a "peer" group who could help in this process (22). Cott also maintains that, in the move toward modernization, "the daughter's household contribution sank from vital to marginal significance" (17). Deborah M. Valenze takes up this theme in her study of Primitive Methodism among the working classes. Valenze notes the predominance of "girl preachers" whose average age (in the Southwest of England) was nineteen and a half. These daughters gave the illusion of "the viability of the family" at a time when domestic security was "collapsing" (115). Valenze also argues that cottage preaching among the lower classes may be seen as a subversive response to industrialization. See Prophetic Sons and Daughters (1985).

furnished young women with socially sanctioned "outlets" in which to channel sexual and emotional energy.⁴

Despite the long history of women's participation in religious activities, few feminist literary critics have suggested correspondences between religious ideology and literary aesthetics.⁵ This lack is particularly striking considering that, as Lady Eastlake writes in 1843, the Evangelicals produced a vast number of texts -- in her words, "a complete and distinct literature of their own" (28). My focus in this chapter is on Adam Bede and the way George Eliot employs the tropes of evangelical conversion patterns both as a rite-of-passage into adulthood for her characters and as literary strategy.

4 In her autobiography, Annie Besant gives perhaps the most lucid insight into Victorian girlhood at mid-century and this process of sexual sublimation. In her account (which also describes her conversion from low to high church), Besant writes that religious idealization in the figure of Jesus is "a mere natural outlet for the dawning feelings of womanhood" (35-36).

5 In her Introduction to Victorian Women Barbara Gelpi notes the interrelation between religious enthusiasm and young women (14-15). Christine Krueger in The Reader's Repentance (1992) is one of the few critics to analyze the impact of religious discourse on literary aesthetics, asserting that nineteenth-century women novelists made use of and were empowered by the tradition of evangelical female preaching. Numerous social historians make a similar point in regard to the still underresearched field of women's relation to and participation in British religious history. The collected essays in Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930 (1986), ed. Gail Malmgreen, make a start. Though feminist critics have, for the most part, shied away from analyzing women's religious participation, it seems ripe for the kind of cross-fertilization between disciplines that Judith Lowder Newton calls for in her essay "Feminism and the 'New Historicism'" (164).

Focusing not on calendar age but on the process of transformation to middle-class ideals of feminine and masculine adulthood, Eliot revises and secularizes evangelical conversionist discourse and demonstrates its viability as a model for social integration.⁶ Eliot herself underwent an evangelical conversion at fifteen -- disavowing novels and other worldly pleasures -- and though in Adam Bede she appears suspicious of regenerations too easily accomplished on the susceptible nature of youth, she nevertheless retains aspects of her evangelical heritage, translating conversion strategies into aesthetic doctrines that also serve to mark class change.

Yet some criticism of Adam Bede suggests a more "static" portrayal of Loamshire as a classless rural idyll. Margaret Homans argues that Eliot "naturalizes" middle-class values by "projecting them backward in time," and "replac[es] class hierarchy with gender hierarchy" (156; 158). Mary Jean Corbett claims that

6 In his most recent book, Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion (1993), John Maynard briefly sums up some of the ways that socialized rites-of-passage contributed to the establishment of societal norms. Drawing on the work of British social anthropologists, such as Jean La Fontaine, Maynard writes that in maturity rituals "class may be defined; the community is brought together in a public assertion of shared values" (21). For La Fontaine, the end result of maturity rituals is simply to mark adult sexual status. Though Maynard and La Fontaine do not discuss evangelicalism, the process of religious conversion as it was articulated in early nineteenth-century religious discourse makes it clear that the process was one such rite-of-passage.

Eliot homogenizes the "social landscape, in which characters from different strata of society possess similar traits and values" (292).⁷ But both Corbett and Homans largely ignore the class-specific aspects of religious thought articulated throughout Adam Bede (Homans equates Dinah's spirituality with cross-class ideals) and the enormous impact the evangelical revival had on altering the fabric of middle-class life. While much research still remains to be done on the evolutionary changes wrought by evangelical denominations upon family life, particularly in regard to the role of women, in Adam Bede Eliot employs religious ideology to delineate social and class change.⁸

7 In her article, "Representing the Rural," Mary Jean Corbett sums up the common critique that Eliot's presentation of Loamshire in Adam Bede is static and timeless, and challenges the notion of rural idyll in her unique reading of the "communal" responsibility for Hetty's crime (208). And that Victorian readers also responded with a degree of class-blindness to Eliot's portrayals is evident in the assessment of E.S. Dallas; according to him, "the truism" of Adam Bede is that it teaches us "that we are all alike -- that the human heart is one" (qtd. in Corbett 292).

8 Some historians speculate that Methodism played a crucial role in the "peaceful" transformation of England to an industrialized and classed society and helped the society to "come of age." That the Evangelical revival and Methodist Connection largely prevented England from a "violent" revolution like the French is of course Elie Halevy's thesis. Other historians, such as E.P. Thompson, see the role of Methodism in a much less favorable light, that it was largely a reactionary movement signalling a "chiliasm of despair" and not hopeful change (388). Thompson's claim, as Bernard Semmel notes, is perhaps colored by his socialist leanings. In The Methodist Revolution, Semmel attempts to mediate between these two views, locating contradiction in specific Methodist doctrine.

For Eliot was well versed in the particular class nuances that contributed to distinguishing Methodism from Evangelicalism (Jay 60). And though I have been using the term "evangelical" as it was often used at the end of the eighteenth century -- in "umbrella" fashion to cover both Methodist and Evangelical denominations -- I will distinguish Eliot's use of the differences and class connotations between the two as the denominations became increasingly more distinct (Jay 18). Indeed, her use of these distinct religious differences points to a more fluid process of class construction. Tracing these distinctions and applying them to the evangelical conversion process allows us to see Eliot's use of religion as a shaping force in the construction of middle-class ideals. Moreover, in Adam Bede, Eliot uses the figure of adolescent womanhood -- whose troubling sexuality and emotional excitability make her one of the main targets for evangelical discourse -- as the contested site for the production of middle-class values. For it is the female adolescent, in this novel and many other Victorian works, who is perceived as the major threat to social hegemony and whose desires are most in need of being channeled.⁹

9 The representation of woman in the nineteenth century, as critics following Nancy Armstrong have noted, became a contested site for the production of class meaning and simultaneously served to deflect troubling class issues onto gender ones. In Cora Kaplan's words, "it is a woman whose class identity is at risk or problematic; the woman

2.

As in the case of Hester Ann Roe, the period of girlhood was thought to be the crucial time for purging characteristics dangerous to the social order -- the youthful preoccupation with self. In her portrayal of Hetty Sorrel, Eliot exaggerates this link between youth and self-absorption; Hetty, as many critics have noted, is almost inhuman in her total fixation on self and in her indifference to family and friends. The first mention of Hetty in the novel is in the context of her narcissism: at seventeen, Hetty is vain and egocentric, fond of looking at her reflection in the polished surfaces of her aunt Poyser's plates and furniture.

Hetty's daydreams, like her partiality for her own reflection, are similarly solipsistic. "Of every picture" Hetty imagines, "she is the central figure."¹⁰ Furthermore, her "dreams were all of luxuries," Eliot writes, "to sit in a carpeted parlour and always wear white stockings; to have some large beautiful earrings ... to have Nottingham lace round the top of her gown..." (144). While her visions may seem harmless youthful daydreams, Hetty's class aspirations and inability to care for any member of her family reveal a more complete

and her sexuality are a condensed and displaced representation of the dangerous instabilities of class and gender identity for both sexes" (166).

10 Adam Bede ed. Stephen Gill. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1980. p. 199. Future references to this edition will appear in the text.

self-absorption.¹¹ As the narrator reminds us, "Hetty could have cast all her past life behind her and never cared to be reminded of it again" (199). In the world of Adam Bede and in Eliot's humanistic philosophy, such lack of connection to family, community, and the past itself is sacrilege.

Appropriately, "Hetty's World," as the chapter given to her inward thoughts is labeled, centers solely on realizing her dreams of upward mobility by marrying Captain Donnithorne. That she believes such transition to ladyhood quite possible has as much to do with her uneducated state as it does to the time in which she lives. "Foolish thoughts! you see; having nothing to do with the love felt by sweet girls of eighteen in our days," states the narrator, "but all this happened, you must remember, nearly sixty years ago, and Hetty was quite uneducated -- a simple farmer's girl, to whom a gentleman with a white hand was dazzling as an Olympian God" (145). Though the narrator may be tongue-in-cheek here about the love thoughts of young ladies in her own day, the dating of Adam Bede is significant. Specific references to the Napoleonic War and to the publication of the Lyrical Ballads place the events in 1799, a time not only of the fear of Jacobin revolution at home but

11 See Corbett for an alternative view of the Poysers, in which she sees them as exhibiting the egotism and narrowness representative of Eliot's ideas concerning the Philister (299).

also of the heyday of evangelical revival and middle class growth. This class is conspicuously absent from Hetty's narrow world; her vision encompasses only the instantaneous change from farmer's daughter to lady of the manor.

And it is emblematic that while Hetty's vision bypasses the middle class, she inhabits no particular class herself (Homans 167). She is a dairy maid who later desires to be a ladies' maid, though her uncle insists such a step would lower, not raise, her social position. This indeterminacy underscores the class-ambiguous state of young womanhood. But while other characters, such as Dinah and Adam, are able to resolve more fully into middle-class adulthoods, this option is precluded for the "self-engrossed" Hetty. Her class striving foreshadows only that she will be cast out of society. And in her portrayal of Hetty as an ornamental plant with "hardly any roots," Eliot appears to be saying that such superficiality has no future in the growing middle class.

The class dimensions of Hetty's story are also illuminated in one of Eliot's letters to Elizabeth Gaskell. Rereading the early chapters of Mary Barton while she was writing Adam Bede, Eliot notes the "affinity" of feeling that she shares with her fellow novelist. It is in these chapters that Gaskell outlines the unfortunate history of Esther (whose nickname is also Hetty). Esther's story is also a tale of class

aspiration; like Hetty Sorrel's, Esther's beauty is "a sad snare" which leads her to believe she can become a "lady."

That Eliot means to use Hetty's story as a class tragedy can also be seen in the germs for the novel. The initial inspiration for Adam Bede, Eliot states in a letter, was a story told by her Methodist aunt Samuel about a Hetty-like figure -- a young woman named Mary Voce, who was tried for infanticide and converted to Methodism on her deathbed. Eliot also draws on the sketch of Hetty Wesley contained in Southey's Life of Wesley, which Eliot read as preparation for Adam Bede.¹² Unlike Eliot's Hetty, there is no indication in Southey's account that Mehetabel Wesley desired to change her station. Hetty Sorrel, however, is class-bound; her materialistic dreams to "be a grand lady, and ride in her coach, and dress for dinner in a brocaded silk, with feathers in her hair and her dress sweeping the ground" (196-197), like Gaskell's Esther, largely determine her downfall.

12 The Life refers to John Wesley's sister Mehetabel who makes an unfortunate and hasty marriage to a man well beneath her after becoming pregnant by another lover. Though, Southey notes, her first suitor was a fitting match for Hetty Wesley "in point of abilities and situation," Mr. Wesley took a dislike to him and Hetty was forced to meet her lover surreptitiously (2: 8). For some unknown reason they parted, and Hetty's "fatal error" undoubtedly hastened her marriage to another man. See Alicia Carroll's "Tried by Earthly Fires" Nineteenth-Century Literature 44 (1989): 218-224 for the similarities between the two Hettys.

The class dimensions of Hetty's story are also reflected in her counterpart in the novel, Bessy Cranage, the blacksmith's daughter. Like Hetty, Bessy shows a youthful preoccupation with self and appearance; proud of her red cheeks and large round earrings, she is a perfect target for Dinah's sermon on worldly vanity. In fact, Dinah singles Bessy out when she preaches on the village green because her "bonny youth and evident vanity touched her with pity" (74). She tells Bessy:

You think of earrings and fine gowns and caps, and you never think of the Saviour who died to save your precious soul....Ah! poor blind child! ... think if it should happen to you as it once happened to a servant of God in the days of her vanity. She thought of her lace caps, and saved all her money to buy 'em, she thought nothing about how she might get a clean heart and a right spirit, she only wanted to have better lace than other girls. And one day when she put her new cap on and looked in the glass, she saw a bleeding Face crowned with thorns. That face is looking at you now (75)

The image of Christ in Bessy's mirror prefigures the vision Dinah later has of Hetty in trouble, "torn and bleeding." But it also points to the desired transformation of youthful narcissism -- to convert the image of self into the image of Christ; or, in Hester Ann Roe's phrase, "to be emptied of self and filled with

God." Dinah's forceful words do have this immediate effect on Bessy; the young woman, overcome with emotion, repudiates worldly concerns by casting off her earrings.

The subtext of Dinah's message, however, is that the blacksmith's daughter must disavow her sexuality along with her finery. That Bessy's desires (like Hetty's) are in need of being rechanneled is demonstrated in the ferocity of Dinah's metaphors: "Ah, tear off those follies!" the preacher exclaims, "cast them away from you, as if they were stinging adders. They are stinging you -- they are poisoning your soul -- they are dragging you down into a dark bottomless pit, where you will sink for ever, and for ever, and for ever, further away from light and God" (75).

Eliot's rhetoric evokes the Victorian tendency to link "finery" with class ambition and corrupt female sexuality. The tension Dinah's words produce is indeed too much for Bessy, who "could bear it no longer." This process of sexual sublimation is also grounded in the particularities of the Methodism practiced by Wesley and his followers. As E.P. Thompson notes, "Methodism is permeated with teaching as to the sinfulness of sexuality, and as to the extreme sinfulness of the sexual organs" (370).¹³ Furthermore, both Methodist hymns and

13 Thompson also notes the bizarre imagery of Christ in Methodist hymns; the preponderance of blood and wound imagery, he writes, symbolizes an erotic and masochistic relationship. Discussing the prevalent "bleeding side"

practices sublimated sexual energy into almost a "ritualised form of psychic masturbation. Energies and emotions which were dangerous to social order ... were released in the harmless form of sporadic love-feasts, watch-nights, band-meetings or revivalist campaigns" (Thompson 368).¹⁴

Such watchfulness on the part of the Methodists was indeed akin to a form of policing, as Bessy's frame of mind dramatizes: she felt "very much as if the constable had come to take her up and carry her before the justice for some undefined offence" (73). Thompson, though he omits the role of gender in his discussion of Methodism in the formation of working-class consciousness, calls attention to the problematic and relatively unexplored relationship between religious and political excitement. The underpinnings of this relationship can be seen in Dinah's sermon -- particularly in the dynamic which

imagery, Thompson writes in a footnote, "the notions both of sexual pleasure and of its absolute prohibition become associated with the crucifixion ..." (372). We can see this idea in Dinah's speech to Bessy, particularly in the conflation between the bleeding God in the mirror and Bessy's eroticized reflection.

14 Wesley's beliefs about celibacy and his (presumably unconscious) sublimation of sexual energy into religious passion is well established; the impact of this teaching on his followers is just beginning to be examined. Henry Abelove, for example, speculates that "Methodist group-life," such as love feasts, might have provided Wesley's followers with an opportunity to release homosexual feelings (94).

displaces class anxiety onto the more narratable and arguably containable aspect of women's sexuality.

Dinah's assertion that Bessy's finery is "poisonous" implies the potentially contaminative effects of unregulated female sexuality. Furthermore, Dinah's chastisement links Bessy to Hetty's class striving: not only do they share a partiality for earrings but also a language. Hetty's daydream of Arthur, her "light web of folly and vain hopes," is similarly labeled "a rancorous poisoned garment" which threatens to "close round her" (295). Such diction is telling, signalling both the destructive nature of cross-class ambition and the need to contain this ambition by eliding it under the more repressible aspect of women's sexuality. We can see this in Dinah's sermon. The only spectator to be affected by her preaching and the one whose reactions are metonymic for the way Methodism affects the entire Hayslope community is Bessy Cranage, who has "been i' fits welly iver sin" (102). By singling out the potentially disruptive threat of female sexuality associated with lower and working-class women as the sole target for reform, Eliot elides class conflict at the same time as she highlights Dinah's own femininity -- one that is decidedly free from such taint and more like the image of angelic middle-class female subjectivity.

While the story of Bessy Cranage serves as a foil for Hetty, her drama is also a staple of Evangelical

tract narratives, the unthoughtful young woman (the generic she of Dinah's narrative) who is converted from her former life of frivolity into a new birth of Christian seriousness. Bessy's conversion by Dinah reads remarkably like The Dairyman's Daughter (1811), the most popular of all early nineteenth-century Evangelical tracts. Many Evangelicals claimed that reading this tale -- which sold over four million copies -- was directly responsible for their own conversion (Bradley 43). In her voracious reading of Evangelical literature during her youth, Eliot may very well have been familiar with this story, or at least with many others like it which similarly paint conversion experiences in bold and dramatic strokes.¹⁵

This pious narrative, by the clergyman Reverend Leigh Richmond (1772-1827), details the story of a young woman, much like Hetty and Bessy, whose thoughts before her conversion focus solely on her dress: "gay, vain, and ... much above [her] station." In an echo of Dinah Morris' account of her meeting John Wesley, the young sinner of Richmond's tale hears an extempore preacher, who, she recounts, "seemed to be a messenger sent from heaven to open [her] eyes." The preacher's sermon leads

¹⁵ It seems likely that Eliot read this tract, considering, as Maurice Quinlan states, that The Dairyman's Daughter "was probably more widely read during the nineteenth century than any other work except the Bible..." (194).

Bessy to discover her "ruling passion ... which was pride in outward dress; and," in her words, "by the grace of God it was made instrumental to the awakening of my soul." Where previously she had gone "to church more to see and be seen," young Betsy learns to clothe herself in humility (qtd. in Female Instructor 291).

This dairyman's daughter (unlike Hetty) is thus converted "through a course of private prayer, reading, and meditation" to cast off the evil thoughts of her youth, and in her redeemed state goes on to convert her parents. "Dear Betsy" of Richmond's tract might be a model for both Bessy Cranage and Hetty, but in true Evangelical fashion her spiritual rebirth only hastens her physical death, bringing her swiftly to her heavenly home. For Betsy soon becomes ill and dies, thus having the chance to convert not only those who gather around her deathbed but also the many readers of her posthumous narrative.

In Adam Bede, Eliot transforms the tale of Christian rebirth that forms the subject of this tract and so much Evangelical literature into a more secularized renewal. It is no accident that Bessy Cranage's conversion is short-lived; her spontaneous repentance demonstrates that such expeditious means of religious conversion are too facile and too fleeting. Though Dinah herself believes "in present miracles, in instantaneous conversions, [and] in revelations by dreams and visions" (82), true

conversions in this novel are accomplished only through a more gradual "transformation of pain into sympathy" which connects individuals to each other in communal sympathy. And by transmuting conversion into narrative strategy, Eliot highlights the class dynamics that distinguish Methodist from the more middle-class Evangelical conversion as well.

One of the ways Eliot employs conversionist discourse in her construction of middle-class norms is seen also in the case of Bessy Cranage. At Arthur Donnithorne's coming-of-age celebration Bessy once more flaunts her finery, and the reactions of her social superiors reveal their class biases and fears. She is called a "delicate bit of womanhood, or girlhood," by Mr. Gawaine, drawing attention not only to Victorian notions of the indeterminate nature of youth but also to Bessy's potentially ambiguous class status. Arthur's Aunt Lydia underscores the dangers of emulating the upper classes when she gives Bessy a coarse gown for winning a race instead of a more appropriately feminine gift. Miss Lydia rationalizes that one "should not think of encouraging a love of finery in young women of that class" (321). Bessy's sexuality and her "boldness" -- both of which Miss Lydia sees as a class threat -- are the target of Dinah's sermon. Ultimately, though Bessy remains unaffected by the Methodist preaching. Bessy does not become transformed either into a pious penitent or into

an exemplar of middle-class womanhood; and, in this failure, we may read a criticism of traditional Methodist conversion tactics. Dinah's proselytizing, despite her individual acts of personal kindness, does not effect any lasting change in the population of Hayslope. Lower-class adolescent womanhood, Eliot appears to be saying, is not fertile ground for spiritual development, nor is transformation based on specific Methodist principles a successful method.

With her other young penitent, Hetty Sorrel, Dinah fares no better. Despite her prognostication about Hetty in trouble, Dinah does not prevent Hetty's crime. And though Hetty thinks of Dinah's "soft voice" and "pitying eyes" when she makes her lonely, ill-fated journey, the shame of having others know that she is pregnant prevents the wanderer from seeking Dinah's help (435). Dinah is indeed available to Hetty in the prison, but the sinner is of course by this time waiting to be hanged for infanticide, and the final meeting between the preacher and the wretched girl had been intended to be the climactic scene of the novel from Eliot's first conception of the plot, "the scene in the prison being of course the climax which I worked" (appendix 586). The scene was to draw on a true case of infanticide: Mary Voce was hanged in 1802 for the offense but not before she had been converted by female preachers (Eliot's aunt Tomlinson among them). Hetty's conversion occurs under

similar circumstances and under the ministrations of Dinah, who softens the convict's hard heart and persuades Hetty to confess her guilt. But while Hetty's conversion follows Methodist patterns of sin and repentance -- admitting guilt was a necessary first step "of repentance towards God" -- this "instantaneous" confession is due more to the physical comfort she derives from the preacher's presence than to any heartfelt change (Cunningham 167). That Hetty has absorbed from Dinah's religious precepts only the most causal understanding is evident later, when she tells Adam that she tries to forgive Arthur only because, if she does not, God won't forgive her (506). Hetty's sense of religion, like her wanderings prior to the murder of her child, is based on the desire to avoid future discomfort (physical and spiritual) rather than on genuine belief.

Indeed, Hetty can be said to have changed little from the self-absorbed young woman presented at the beginning of the novel. In "characteristic" Methodist conversion practices, as Valentine Cunningham notes, "the convict leans, with manifest assurance, on his new-found Saviour." Hetty "clings to Dinah, the only Saviour she knows..." (169). Unlike her historical prototype and the penitents of many religious tracts, Hetty does not show an overwhelming longing for the death that would bring her to her heavenly bridegroom. While Mary Voce exclaimed on her way to the gallows, "I am quite happy, I had

rather die than live" (appendix 591), Hetty, on the contrary, tells Dinah "I wouldn't mind if they'd let me live" (495).

Hetty's longing for life reveals that her "conversion" is still very much of this world. Furthermore, Hetty's penitent ways, like Bessy Cranage's, are unlikely to outlive Dinah's presence; in the words of one of the townspeople, Bessy is destined to "be flaunting' new finery three weeks after [Dinah's] gone." Hetty's "regeneration," as Cunningham notes, is thus distinctly "non-Divine." (Cunningham reads Hetty's confession and conversion as part of Eliot's "demythologizing" use of Feuerbachian "formulas of repentance and conversion" to fit her humanistic beliefs [169]).¹⁶ But unlike the instantaneous procedure of Methodist conversion, lasting transformations in Adam Bede are patterned on the Anglican Evangelical mode, a process that is very much like narrative in its length and succession of events. Eliot may demonstrate the inefficacy of Methodism to effect permanent change on her young women characters, but she still retains the tropes of conversion as a necessary rebirth into an adult world of suffering for her characters.

16 It is a bit difficult to see Hetty solely in terms of a humanistic Feuerbachian philosophy. She certainly does not fit Feuerbach's precept that "Consciousness of God is self-consciousness, knowledge of God is self-knowledge" (qtd. in Jay 237).

Distinguishing between the Evangelical and Methodist modes, Patrick Bronte writes that in the Anglican conversion experience "a variety of facts, means, events or causes, in succession, like links in a chain, may give light to the understanding ... conviction to the conscience, and rectitude to the affections" (qtd. in Jay 60). Bronte's language makes clear that this process is more narrative than is the Methodist trope of spontaneous regeneration. Seen in these terms, Hetty's inability to foresee the consequences of any of her actions and to connect the events in narrative sequence make her "conversion" suspect. Early in the novel, Eliot attributes Hetty's inability to understand causal links to her lack of novel-reading. "Hetty had never read a novel," Eliot's narrator states. "If she had ever seen one, I think the words would have been too hard for her: how then could she find a shape for her expectations?" (181). Unable to find a form for her fancies and unable to know "what would come" of her new-found delight in Arthur, Hetty lacks the reading and interpretative skills necessary to understand any "links in a chain." Her failure thus condemns her to a narrative of which she cannot make sense.

Though the model of narration based on conversion fails in the case of Hetty, the "links in a chain" process is evident in the transformation of two other characters, Dinah and Adam. For Dinah, as Homans has

argued in a different context, this transformation is to middle-class womanhood; during the course of the novel, Eliot must transform Dinah from "a lovely corpse" to Adam's fleshly wife.¹⁷ Dinah first blushes when speaking to Adam, signifying her dawning self-consciousness and making her sexuality "compatible with her transcendence" (Homans 168). Before this encounter, Dinah is twice compared, in the context of her preaching, to a "little boy." The narrator notes that her expressions appear like novelties, "as a melody strikes us with new feeling when we hear it sung by the pure voice of a boyish chorister" (71). The comparison of Dinah to young boys in this preaching scene is in direct contrast to the overtly sexual description of Bessy's "buxom" young womanhood and underscores the desirable qualities of middle-class womanhood -- sexlessness and innocence.

Not only in physical description but also in preaching style Dinah embodies middle-class ideals. Although the germ for Dinah's character lay in Eliot's Methodist aunt, Mrs. Samuel Evans (Eliot called the idea for Adam Bede her "Aunt's story"), her mode of preaching is culled from Eliot's reading of biographies of women such as Mary Bosanquet Fletcher (Cunningham 158). Dinah

17 In Homans' reading of Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss, "the sexual woman ... and the civilizing middle-class woman are one." In her view, "Dinah becomes a signifier of domesticity only when she acquires self-conscious sexuality ..." (157).

is also closely modelled after John Wesley's preferred example of female preachers. Wesley sanctioned women's preaching only under an extraordinary call from God; he repeatedly sought to control his female preachers' modes of expression which were frequently "ecstatic" and "bilious." Concerned also that biblical exegesis was unseemly in women, Wesley forbid their practice of preaching sermons directly from the gospel. Dinah certainly represents Wesley's ideal of womanly decorum; she speaks without a book, and, as the narrator states, "nothing could be less like the ordinary type of Ranter than Dinah. She was not preaching as she heard others preach, but speaking directly from her own emotions, and under the inspiration of her own simple faith" (72).

As Eliot wrote in her journal, Dinah's character is not strictly taken from her Methodist aunt; she does not share her aunt's "vehement" preaching style and her "exhorting and remonstrating in season and out of season" (appendix 586). Dinah's "gentle preaching manner," as Valentine Cunningham reminds us, "resembles more the old age than the exuberant youth of Mrs. Evans" (154). Such "ranting" and "itinerant folk evangelism" was associated with lower-class women "who acquired a reputation for shouting and for exceptionally disorganized utterances" (O. Anderson 469). One astute Victorian reviewer, Anne Mozley, writing in the Quarterly Review, noted this anomalous aspect of Dinah's sermon and character. To

Mozley, "a woman of Dinah's class and views would have begun at once to assert some leading truth of the gospel" rather than lead up to those truths in as eloquent and reasoned manner (qtd. in D. Carroll 96). Dinah's thoughtfulness and subdued method smack of the "closet," in Mozely's eyes, not the village green where spontaneity and exuberant exhortations were more the norm for itinerant women preachers.¹⁸

In one of the most popular nineteenth-century conduct books, Mrs. Sandford's Woman, In Her Social and Domestic Character, the advice writer places female preaching under the chapter heading, "Female Defects." Charging female preachers with violating decorum, "infringing order, offending propriety, [and] exciting discussion," Sandford calls instead for a more feminine approach to what she sees only as misdirected energy and spiritual vanity. "But might she not do good more quietly?" Sandford asks of the woman preacher, "Could she

18 In her portrayal of Dinah, Eliot may have been drawing on some of the mid-century debates surrounding middle-class women preachers who formed the majority of the second evangelical revival of the late 1850s and early 1860s. While lower-class women had largely disappeared from lay preaching (including the 1803 Methodist prohibition against married women preaching that silences Dinah), middle-class women were moving into the field. These women, largely influenced by their revivalist counterparts in America, were measured against earlier female preachers by their new reserve in clothing and demeanor. Newspapers frequently commented on the sober dress of these "lady preachers," drawing attention to their "cultivated calmness" and "air of refinement" (O. Anderson 471).

not do good, and be strictly feminine?" (124-125). Eliot's portrayal of Dinah reflects this middle-class ideal; in the Reverend Mr. Irwine's words, Dinah embodies "tenderness, refinement, and purity." Although Methodism in general was associated with the working class -- the stranger who observes Dinah is surprised that it can be found at all in Hayslope among the agricultural classes until the innkeeper assures him that "there's a pretty lot o' workmen round about" (60). Dinah's preaching style has distinctive middle-class dimensions.

Not only Dinah's manner and person but her subject matter as well may be read as prescriptive of middle-class values. Her sermon itself may be a vehicle of middle-class control of working class thought and action. For Dinah's words of comfort, though elevating her listeners spiritually, simultaneously appease any sense of class injustice they may have. "The sense of God's love turns poverty into riches, and satisfies the soul, so that no uneasy desire vexes it, no fear alarms it..." (75). And though Dinah insists that she is one of the poor, she claims that "no lord nor lady can be so happy as me, if they haven't got the love of God in their souls" (76). Spirituality not birth is the important marker of status, a perspective which does not alter but rather hardens class distinctions by urging acceptance of one's station. Although Dinah stresses her commonality with the poor, her own class status "occupies two

stations," the lower-class mill worker (which Homans notes is significantly "erased" from representation in the narrative) and a more indeterminate agrarian background (162). But while Dinah's spirituality appears to transcend rank, it actually conforms to middle-class precepts proposed by Wesley at the time. These class overtones are necessary if, as Homans states, Dinah must be transformed in the course of the novel "from preacher to domestic woman" (163). But they are also part of a specific religious ideology.

Dinah's transformation to domestic womanhood also parallels the movement of Methodism in British society from its working-class inception in Wesley's time to its predominantly bourgeois legacy to the Victorians in Eliot's era. Dinah's marriage to Adam and her subsequent relinquishment of lay preaching have been read by many critics as a regressive move on Eliot's part and as evidence of the novelist's social conservatism. Yet the move to the domestic sphere reflects the lived social reality of Methodism and its incorporation of middle-class family values. It is in this sense perhaps that Eliot makes use in Adam Bede of Methodism as "a rudimentary culture" having nothing in common, as the narrator states, with "low-pitched gables up dingy streets, sleek grocers, sponging preachers and hypocritical jargon" (82). By the end of the novel, having given up lay preaching, Dinah has become, as Adam

phrases it, "a convenient household slave" to the Poyser children at the Hall farm. But, at the same time, her move into the maternal and domestic sphere parallels the growing Evangelical emphasis on home and family. Though woman's place in the domestic sphere had become a common secular belief of the middle class by the 1830s and 1840s, this sexual division was largely the result of Evangelical emphasis (Hall and Davidoff 149). "'To be a good wife is a high attainment in female excellence,'" Reverend John Angell James states, "'it is woman's brightest glory since the fall'" (qtd. in Hall and Davidoff 114).

The continual pressure on Dinah to marry reflects the pervasiveness of domestic ideology. It is more an Evangelical than a Wesleyan Methodist demand. Wesley himself staunchly advocated a "single life" for his followers; his opposition to performing marriage ceremonies and his "pro-celibacy stance" seemed to confirm the undercutting of domestic ties that many read as the subtext of his messages (Abelove 86; 92). In this spirit, Hester Ann Roe describes the providential death of a friend who was forced to marry below her spiritual station. "But the Lord saved her, and sent a lingering affliction," Hester Ann writes, " -- slew the body but saved the soul!" (qtd. in Malmgreen 61).

Dinah's progress in Adam Bede moves significantly from soul to body. When Seth Bede recounts the effects of

Dinah's last preaching at Hayslope, he emphasizes only her maternal qualities; she miraculously quiets a recalcitrant child by holding him in her arms (547-548). At the conclusion of the novel, Dinah fulfills the maternal role herself. Her marriage to Adam seals her fate as an exemplar of middle-class wifeness and motherhood. And though Dinah gives up lay preaching because of the 1803 Wesleyan dictate which forbade married women to proselytize (except to other women in their homes), she does continue "talking to the people a bit in their houses" (583), a movement which parallels the return of women to the home not only in Methodist but also in many other revivalist sects. In the change from revivalism to more organized religion in the early decades of the nineteenth century, women were increasingly excluded from any public activities (like preaching) except domestic ones "broadly interpreted" (Rendall 93).

3.

Like Dinah's, Adam Bede's progress follows more narrative conversionist principals. His transformation to manhood has as much to do with his work ethic and belief in respectability as it does with his forgiveness of Hetty. Adam's dedication to hard work, which the narrator reminds us "had always been part of his religion," echoes not only the Feuerbachian belief that "'Work is worship'" (qtd. in Cunningham 144) but also the evangelical belief

in the sanctity of labor. The end of the eighteenth century saw the rise of a new Christian man whose masculinity was increasingly tied to middle-class ideals, such as "honour and competence in business," and one whose worth was measured by respectability, piety, and domesticity (Hall and Davidoff 111; 113).¹⁹ Adam's character, his emphasis on hard work as well as his belief in the superiority of virtue over birth, may thus be seen as part of the Evangelical agenda with its stress on a "revolution in manners and morals."

The turning point for Adam comes in a chapter entitled "A Crisis," a word commonly applied both to the state of adolescence and to conversion experiences. In this crucial scene, Adam confronts his friend Arthur about the Captain's involvement with Hetty. Refusing to condone Arthur's behavior as class privilege and forcing him to break off with Hetty, Adam asserts his superior moral values. That this meeting is indeed akin to a rite-of-passage into adulthood for Adam is evident in the

19 I do not mean to suggest that Adam's values were the sole property of the middle class. On the contrary, as Thomas Laquer has pointed out in Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850, "honesty, orderliness, punctuality [and] hard work" were traits shared by the working-class as well (239). Adam's middle-class status in Adam Bede is determined relationally in contrast to Arthur's effete values, much like the way E.P. Thompson claims that the working-class came to consciousness in opposition to the class above. It is significant that Adam loses his susceptibility "to the influence of rank" during the course of the novel, thinking of Arthur only as the friend of his youth and not as representative of superior birth.

narrator's remark that "for the rest of his life [Adam] remembered that moment when he was calmly examining the beech, as a man remembers his last glimpse of the home where his youth was passed..." (341). In describing Adam's transition to adulthood, Eliot again employs the tropes of Anglican Evangelical conversion processes. Speaking of the pain Hetty's situation has caused Adam, the narrator writes:

Deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state.... It seemed to him as if he had always before thought it a light thing that man should suffer; as if all that he had himself endured, and called sorrow before, was only a moment's stroke that had never left a bruise. Doubtless a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out from that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity. (471-472)

Adam's rebirth, in which he vows "never [to] be hard again" towards his fellow man, of course may be seen as a secularized transformation to a suffering Feuerbachian Christ (Knoepflmacher 112). But Eliot also makes particular use of the Evangelical conversion process to reveal class biases. Unlike his brother Seth, Adam is staunchly Anglican in his beliefs and his church-going marks his superior social status. As Mr. Poyser makes clear, the differences between Seth and Adam are as

marked as the class dynamics between Methodism and Anglicanism. "It's only tradesfolks as turn Methodists," Poyser states, "maybe a workman now an' then, as isn't over-cliver at 's work, takes to preachin' an' that, like Seth Bede. But you see Adam, as has got one o' the best head-pieces hereabout, knows better; he's a good Churchman..." (236-237). Adam's Anglican faith thus helps assure his middle-class status in a way that turning Methodist would not.

Furthermore, the Evangelical stress on the necessity of the conversion process in the late 1790s was in part a response to and coopting of the enthusiastic Methodist emphasis on "revealed religion." But it was also a response to the "crisis [evangelicals] felt confronted English society" -- the "moral degeneracy" that was seen to be particularly acute after the French Revolution (Davidoff and Hall 81-82). Numerous references to "Bony" in Adam Bede repeatedly contrast the war with France to the work that Adam does, making clear the connections in Evangelical thought between building up British society at home and the construction of middle-class values. While Arthur leaves to fight the French, Adam buys Seth's place out of the militia and ambitiously thinks about constructing "a bridge, a town-hall, or a factory." And "the news that 'Bony' was come back from Egypt was comparatively insipid" compared to Mrs. Poyser's linguistic victory over the old squire (398).

The Evangelical idiom that underlies Adam's values and Dinah's willing embrace of a gendered domestic sphere had already become secularized and translated into "the common sense of the English middle class" (Davidoff and Hall 149) when Eliot was writing Adam Bede. Though Eliot concludes the novel with a representation of this bourgeois family before it became the dominant "social form" (Homans 158), Eliot's novel is suffused with a specific religious ideology that is replete with the constructions of class difference. Secularizing the tropes of evangelical rebirth as a rite-of-passage not to spiritual but to human community, Eliot demonstrates the formative role of religious thought in the cultural construction of middle-class hegemony. And this process, as I have stated before, is primarily textual in nature. Unlike Dinah's more expedient Methodist practices, Anglican conversion required a narrative commitment. As in the course of "private prayer, reading, and meditation" outlined in the Dairyman's Daughter, Eliot emphasizes the necessity of reading to enact and sustain the penitent's rebirth. Adam Bede's transformation is akin to this reading process; it is "a long and hard lesson" which begins when he learns "the alphabet of it in his father's death" and ends with "the transformation of pain into sympathy" through an understanding of Hetty's sins.

This transformation into sympathy forms the core of Eliot's aesthetic beliefs about the moral efficacy of realism, a philosophy that owes much to her own Evangelical heritage.²⁰ The Evangelicals were instrumental in censoring the reading of the young; ideal characters in fiction (particularly novels), they believed, were ruinous not only because they distracted attention away from the real and directed it to the ideal world but also because such fantastic productions corrupted their young readers' own developing characters.²¹ Eliot's commitment to realism is based, in part, Elisabeth Jay claims, on countering this transmutation; her Evangelical heritage is "the common denominator" she shares with Ruskin and other writers who

20 Krueger's chapter in The Reader's Repentance is the most recent critical study to examine the persistent influence of evangelicalism on Eliot's work. In Krueger's view, Eliot's use of the evangelical idiom in Adam Bede -- to "call sinners to repentance and to liberate them from their sins" -- is "gender-marked." Dinah is unable to perform the latter task, a role, according to Krueger, that Eliot reserves only for male prophets (253; 263). Though she does not discuss conversion in Adam Bede, Krueger briefly notes Eliot's secular use of this model in Felix Holt. Writing of Esther Lyon's "conversion," Krueger claims that Eliot's heroine repudiates "unwomanly desires" for "the transcendent values of a natural social order" (294).

21 Eliot's juvenile letters demonstrate that she had imbibed much of the Evangelical censure of the pernicious effects of fiction-reading from the pages of the Christian Observer. In a letter to her Evangelical tutor, Miss Maria Lewis, Eliot writes that though she agrees with the list of suitable reading material delineated in the journal, she "shall carry to my grave the mental diseases with which [such books] have contaminated [her]" (qtd. in Jay 211).

likewise believe in a "doctrine of sympathy" based on "truthful" representation (218).

That Eliot's doctrine of sympathy is endemic to her belief in the transformative value of realism is evident in Adam Bede, most notably in the digressive chapter "In Which the Story Pauses a Little." Setting up a straw-woman reader, Eliot counters her reader's criticism that Mr. Irwine the "Rector of Broxton is little better than a pagan" in his lack of strict doctrinal beliefs. This feigned attack leads Eliot to a digression on realism and her oft-quoted retort, "Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult," which is further elaborated in her praise of the truthfulness found in Dutch paintings (222-223). As the narrator states, "let us love that other beauty too, which lies in no secret of proportion, but in the secret of human sympathy" (224). The entire chapter is a lesson, and in some sense an attempt at converting the reader, indoctrinating her into an extension of sympathies both to the characters and the literary form. Adam's discourse in this chapter on religious doctrines -- "it isn't notions sets people doing the right thing -- it's feelings" -- may well be taken as the end result of the reader's conversion.²² And, significantly, this practice,

22 There is less of a sense that her readers need such tutelage on Eliot's part in this novel than there is in her first book of fiction, Scenes from Clerical Life. And while her narratorial asides are less frequent in Adam Bede, numerous references to reading and interpretation

like the more effective Anglican conversions in the novel, depends on a continued narrative engagement.

But the character of Hetty Sorrel, as many critics have noted, violates Eliot's doctrine of realism and sympathetic portrayal on both accounts. Despite the narrator's assertions that "my heart bleeds for [Hetty] as I see her toiling on her weary feet," there is little genuine compassion in Eliot's presentation (435). Though Bartle Masey tells his friend Adam that Hetty has "got another sort of a nature inside her" (503), it is a nature that is undeveloped and appears devoid of soul (Knoepflmacher 119). And while Hetty's plight becomes the means of connecting other characters together in sympathy, her character remains the weak link in the novel.²³

I have suggested that we see in Hetty's "failure" a condemnation of class striving and a suspicion of regeneration on what was believed to be the impressionable and emotional nature of youth. Moreover, in her presentation of Hetty, Eliot appears to be

suggest that her audience's desire -- to read about "titles and carriages" -- still needs to be redirected.

23 U.C. Knoepflmacher writes that the character of Hetty may be seen as Eliot's incomplete attempt to reconcile her "realism" with her "moralism" (117). In this way, Hetty's "lower nature," which demonstrates the amorality of the "natural order," conflicts with Eliot's belief in moral laws (122). In Corbett's view, Hetty's act of infanticide is "the most significant crack in the mirror," which calls into question ideas about community and responsibility (293).

attacking the egotistical potentiality of girlhood itself, implying that such solipsism both precludes imaginative sympathy and condemns one to a narrative driven by dreams not of grandeur but of disaster. But we can also read the aporia of Hetty's character in another way -- in the tradition that links young womanhood with Evangelical novels, an association that Eliot attacks in her essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists."

When Lady Eastlake called attention to the plethora of Evangelical novels in her 1843 Quarterly Review article, her intent was not to praise but to censure their production. Eastlake was most worried about the effects that works like Mrs. Sherwood's Lady of the Manor had on "young and ardent minds." Not only did such writers prey on the overheated sensibilities of the young, but the "real aim" of their texts, Eastlake asserts, "is to draw young women within the Evangelical fold" (45, 29). In 1856, just before she began her own literary career, Eliot elaborates on many of these same connections between young women and Evangelical novels.²⁴ The implicit gender distinctions in Eastlake's review are made even more apparent in Eliot's discussion of the "feminine fatuity" inherent in different forms of silly

24 There are interesting parallels between the two essays concerning the gendering of Evangelical texts and audience.

novels -- the "mind-and-millinery," "oracular," and "white neck-cloth" species.

Eliot's original target in her essay is the doctrine and novel Compensation (1856). The former, "considered as a way of life," Eliot writes in a letter, she detests, and the latter for stylistic reasons. Both seem linked in Eliot's mind to a type of religious egotism; and though directed towards spiritual rather than material vanity, this "way of life" is not unlike the self-absorption that characterizes Hetty Sorrel. As Eliot writes, "At one time I dwelt much on the idea of compensation; trying to believe that I was all the wiser for my bruised vanity, that I had the higher place in the true spiritual scale But I presently perceived that this was a very odious sort of self-cajolery" (qtd. in Pinney note 300). In her essay, Eliot "fires away" at the literary manifestation of such religious narcissism -- a style which in its bombastic language and class posturing mirrors the egotism of the writer. Though the subtitle of Compensation (by Lady Chatterton) purports that the novel is "a story of real life thirty years ago," Eliot criticizes the absurd pretensions of the heroine, whose ability to read the bible in all of its dead languages is matched only by her fondness for periphrasis, and notes that even the youngest character, who is four and a half, similarly speaks in "Ossianic fashion." Condemning such literary excess, Eliot writes, "we are not surprised to

learn that the mother of this infant phenomenon, who exhibits symptoms so alarmingly like those of adolescence repressed by gin, is herself a phoenix" (304). This rare use by Eliot of the word adolescence and the confusion in syntax points to an ambiguity about the meaning of the term: either mother or son may be seen to exhibit such tendencies. Furthermore, the word applies to the aesthetic transgressions of what Eliot sees as an entirely feminine genre in literature.

In "Silly Novels," Eliot equates adolescence with narcissism, an exuberance of style, and the class pretensions of Evangelical novels, which "fatuously" portray life "among titles and carriages" (318). In contrast, she calls for a more adult realism, one which is concerned with evoking the reader's sympathy, especially for the lower classes. "The real drama of Evangelicalism," Eliot writes, "lies among the middle and lower classes.... Why [then] can we not have pictures of religious life among the industrial classes in England, as interesting as Mrs. Stowe's pictures of religious life among the negroes?" (318-319). In Adam Bede, Eliot revises the association of Evangelical literature with adolescent womanhood and class posturing, arguing instead for a more realistic treatment of religious themes appropriate for grown up readers.

Chapter Four

"The Absolute Necessity of a Sisterhood":

Fallen Women, Juvenile Delinquents, and Ruth

1.

In his 1850 article "Prostitution" for the Westminster Review, W.R. Greg caps many mid-century ideas concerning prostitution, its causes, the status of fallen women, and their treatment in Victorian society.

Determined, he writes, to take "a true view" of what had become a most contested and absorbing Victorian debate -- "the great social evil" -- Greg argues for a more lenient and sympathetic approach towards these "lost" women, claiming that they are "more sinned against than sinning".¹ Not only absolving the unchaste of agency for their plight but also purging them of sexual passion, Greg notes that "women's desires scarcely ever lead to their fall; for ... the desire scarcely exists in a definite and conscious form, till they have fallen.... Those feelings which coarse and licentious minds are so

1 The labeling of prostitution as a "social evil" in the late 1840s and 1850s reflects the growing belief that prostitution was a public problem to be solved -- whether through increased police intervention as some journals argued (most notably the Saturday Review) or through both regulation and more charitable treatment which would allow a fallen woman to "retrace her steps" (which is the gist of Greg's essay). The phrase "more sinned against than sinning" is Dr. William Acton's, but the sentiment is also Greg's.

ready to attribute to girls, are almost always consequences" (456-457, Greg's emphasis).

Greg's article has often been seen as a "watershed" essay on the subject both in Victorian times and in our own: his essay is believed to have influenced Gaskell's portrayal of the fallen woman in Ruth; and numbers of twentieth-century scholars have seen in his views a contradictory mixture of forthrightness, denial, and genuine humanitarian concern.² Greg's essay deserves further attention and consideration for its description of the problematic nature of girls on the verge of womanhood, what we call adolescence and he "the condition of puberty." Greg's insistent attribution of the same "desirelessness" of women to the (mis)perceived licentiousness of girls is a telling observation: it highlights while simultaneously covering up a troubled relationship between girlhood and womanhood, a movement which has been similarly occluded in critical discussion of the fallen woman novel.

In many Victorian novels, "lost" women (usually teenage girls) fall both narratively and culturally; according to predominant nineteenth-century ideology, the

2 In her essay on Christina Rossetti, "Equal Before God," Diane D'Amico notes the importance of Greg's article as a "watershed discussion" (see her note p.82). And Mary Poovey writes that the "central project" of Uneven Developments is to counter Greg's assertions (in his 1850 and 1862 essays) about the "natural" distinctions between the sexes (2).

fallen could neither develop into socially acceptable women nor could they return to maidenhood after losing girlish innocence. Instead, conflictive views of women helped create a gap between childhood and womanhood through which a girl irreparably fell: "The free, happy ignorance of maidenhood is gone for ever," Dinah Mulock Craik wrote in A Woman's Thoughts About Women, "the sacred dignity and honour of matronhood is not, and never can be attained" (194).

Seen in this way, a new set of questions arises: How do Victorian "fallen woman" novels shed light on concepts of female adolescence and development? How do novels about these women criticize an ideology that disavows the young woman's emerging sexuality as she comes of age? And what do aesthetic discrepancies, such as those between plot and character, reveal about larger social issues concerning character reformation for fallen women? Both in fiction and as the subject of sociological debate, these fallen women formed a new category, inhabiting a nebulous world between competing views of womanhood. In fact, the subject of fallen women allows us to see contradictory and competing views of womanhood precisely because the act of falling itself was thought to be so totalizing in nature; it not only reified women into two groups -- the pure and the impure -- but also into two status categories -- girls and women. Though Victorian sociological accounts, such as those by Acton and Henry

Mayhew, suggest a more fluid boundary between the chaste and the unchaste (many women did cross over from fallen to "respectable" by marrying and giving up their "gay" lifestyle), nineteenth-century fiction usually allows for no such recourse.³ Instead, as Adam Bede makes clear, the Victorian novel on the whole presents the division between the fallen and unfallen as inflexible and permanent. In doing so, it mirrors the attitude of the general reading public rather than the opinions of the professional Victorian students of the subject. After learning about Hetty Sorrel's crime, Adam moans, "that's the deepest curse of all ... it can never be undone. My poor Hetty ... she can never be my sweet Hetty again ..." (468, Eliot's ellipsis and emphasis). Although it is uncertain whether Eliot is referring to Hetty's act of infanticide or, more likely, her sexual transgression, this lament echoes mainstream Victorian beliefs about the impassable gap separating the pure woman from her fallen sister.⁴ My focus in this chapter is on what the

3 Mayhew's accounts of prostitutes in London Labour and the London Poor serve, he writes, "to dissipate the foolish idea that ought to have been exploded long ago ... that the harlot's progress is short and rapid, and that there is no possible advance, moral or physical; and that once abandoned she must always be profligate" (4: 219).

4 In Woman and the Demon, Nina Auerbach notes the "absolute transforming power of the fall" which instantaneously and immutably changes literary heroines into fallen women. In Auerbach's words, "art allows no return to the old familial boundaries of identity" (161). I believe that part of the reason fictional representations stress this permanence has to do with the

discrepancies between nineteenth-century sociological accounts and the portrayal of fallen women in fiction tell us about Victorian ideologies concerning the nature of female development.

2.

Gaskell's "Lizzie Leigh," which was given prime billing in the first volume of Dickens' Household Words in 1850, illustrates the typical plight of the fictional fallen women. Though the title of the story bears her name, Lizzie is hardly mentioned directly (her older brother Will insists she be thought of as dead), nor does she enter the text until almost the conclusion of the narrative. Instead, Gaskell focuses on the effects of Lizzie's sin, the disgrace to her family, and the agony of a mother for her lost child. Mrs. Leigh, who sells the family farm after her husband's death to seek her ruined daughter, explains the causes of Lizzie's fall:

She were young, and liked the thought of seeing a bit of the world; and her father heard on a place in Manchester.... That poor girl were led astray; and ... the master has turned her into the street

issue of class -- a subject I address later in this chapter but which is absent from Auerbach's account. As sociological accounts reveal, and as some "minor" Victorian fiction portrays, rehabilitation of character and respectability was thought possible for the lower classes, but was generally feared by the middle class. As an instrument of middle-class hegemony, the Victorian novel helps solidify this distinction.

soon as he had heard of her condition -- and she not seventeen! (61)

This account of Lizzie's story, which stresses her youth, typically accounts for her fall by seduction rather than by desire; it is Lizzie's youthful passion to wander and not sexual lust that leads initially to her taking to the streets.

Gaskell's portrayal largely confirms Greg's views about the passionless state of female adolescence.

According to Greg,

In this point there is a radical and essential difference between the sexes.... In men, in general, the sexual desire is inherent and spontaneous, and belongs to the condition of puberty. In the other sex, the desire is dormant, if not non-existent, till excited; always till excited by undue familiarities; almost always till excited by actual intercourse. (457)

Greg's redirection of women's desires (where they exist) from cause to effect parallels his assertion that the licentiousness of girls is a consequence, not an inherent attribute, of girlhood. Moreover, as Greg asserts, the fall lies in the mind of the observer -- "those feelings which coarse and licentious minds are so ready to attribute to girls." But this formulation presupposes a history, an equation of sexuality with young women, that Greg works so hard to counter. Indeed,

in much mid-Victorian medical discourse, the pubescent girl is distinguished because she is sexualized: at puberty, not only are the "chief efforts of the organism in some sort concentrated upon the sexual parts," in Dr. Marc Colombat's words, but "all the faculties become, as it were, overpowered by the desire to experience the sentiment which these works [licentious books] always represent in an imaginary and exaggerated strain" (qtd. in Hellerstein et al. 92-93). The adolescent girl in Colombat's account (which went through numerous editions between 1838 and 1850) needs constant surveillance during this "brilliant and stormy crisis" precisely because she can be so easily overcome by desire; the act of reading itself was thought enough to "tear the veil of modesty" (qtd. in Hellerstein et al. 91-93).⁵

Colombat feels sufficiently uncomfortable with his main claims so that he sometimes adds qualifications, advising the guardians of young women to monitor the reading materials and even eliminate from their diets foods that might inflame them. Unlike Greg, Colombat recognizes an inherent biological sexuality that is coterminous with puberty. Most fallen women novels

5 In Victorian Heroines, Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble discuss the "perilous condition" of the adolescent girl who needed constant surveillance in order not to become like her fallen sister. See their Chapter One, "Purity or danger: Sexuality and the development of the Victorian girl." The authors also note the two modes of portraying the change from puberty to womanhood -- absence or "silent discourse" and "ritualised inversion" in which the girl retains some rebellious traits.

directly deny the association of girlhood with nascent sexual desire; the fall, as Greg insists and novelists portray, is almost always an effect of other causes, "pardonable error[s]," such as "vanity, weakness, unregulated affection, the pressure of want, the perversion of generosity, or the cruel deception of others" (Greg 473).⁶

In "Lizzie Leigh," Gaskell is careful to attribute Lizzie's fall to being "led astray;" her heroine's only active desire in this story is for her child whom she must support by prostitution, and whom she reluctantly gives up, leaving it on a doorstep, in the hope that it may have a better life than the one she can provide. In the willingness of Susan Palmer to care for an illegitimate child, Gaskell may appear to urge a more tolerant and sympathetic view of both the fallen woman and her child; indeed, Susan does become the means of reconciling Lizzie to her family. But though Lizzie is reunited with her mother and eventually forgiven by her brother, the Victorian popular belief that sin (especially sexual sin) must be severely punished

⁶ Vanity is the favorite begetting sin of fictional fallen women; it is also the least forgivable, I would argue, because it is usually accompanied by cross-class ambition and thus comes closest to active desire. While Hetty Sorrel's daydreams of ladyhood are written in terms of class striving, Eliot's stress on the form this dream takes -- an (auto)eroticized and fetishized attention to clothing and the body -- conflate sexual and class lust.

probably accounts for Gaskell's decision to have the child die in an accidental fall. Lizzie's tale ends as happily as possible under the circumstances; living out her days with her mother in a secluded cottage, the repentant Lizzie emerges only to comfort those who also have a "shadow in [their] household" or to weep at the grave of her lost child (76).

Yet the traces of Lizzie's wayward life remain indelibly marked in her face; indeed, in the first view the reader has of her, Gaskell calls attention to Lizzie's abbreviated youth:

This Lizzie was old before her time; her beauty was gone; deep lines of care, and alas! of want (or thus the mother imagined) were printed on the cheek.... Even in her sleep she bore the look of woe and despair which was the prevalent expression of her face by day; even in her sleep she had forgotten how to smile. (72)

This image demonstrates that Lizzie's face, with its accelerated senescence, is a kind of "cultural script," which, to borrow Susan Gubar's words, "women have had to experience ... in their lives by suffering them in their bodies" (qtd. in Stoneman 113). Not only can we read in her face the wages of her sin but also a denial of any kind of "normal" development from girlhood to womanhood. Her marked features are emblematic of nineteenth-century assertions about the progress of the wayward life and its

resulting physical (and thus moral) decrepitude. According to Dr. William Sanger, in his 1858 history of prostitution, "while juvenile degradation is an inseparable adjunct of prostitution, premature old age is its invariable result" (453).

But, perhaps more importantly, Lizzie's advanced age illustrates Craik's assertion that fallen women can never reclaim either the innocence of their youth or the privileges of respectable womanhood, especially motherhood. Prematurely old and forever outcast, Lizzie Leigh symbolizes the inexorable downward path (in much Victorian fiction) that occurs when young women have sexual experience. And that this fall, which takes its toll so dramatically on her features, also involves an abrupt loss of class is evident in Lizzie's isolation: for she lives with her mother "in a cottage so secluded, that, until you drop into the very hollow where it is placed, you do not see it" (76). To fall, as Gaskell implies in this story, is to decline rapidly, forfeiting normal physical development and human society.

The fallen women who haunt the pages of David Copperfield are minor characters whose roles are mainly monitory for Dickens' eponymous hero. While the reasons for the fall of the dressmaker Martha Endell -- little Emily's double -- are not given (other than the association of millinery with [precocious] female sexuality), Emily's love of dress and finery are sure

signs on the road to ruin. In desiring to rise above her station by marrying Steerforth, gender and class politics dictate that Emily must fall.

But the story of Little Emily, as Mary Poovey has succinctly argued, also serves to mark the development of David Copperfield as a middle-class subject; the "stain" of Emily's fall governs David's choice of suitable wife and shores up his own identity (Uneven 95). And as Dickens' portrayal of Emily as "little" and childlike emphasizes, the juvenile and untenable nature of David's infatuation is reiterated. The narrator writes:

Ah, how I loved her! What happiness (I thought) if we were married, and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, laying down our heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried by the birds when we were dead!⁷

The use of the past tense underscores that the adult narrator has outgrown his childish edenic dreams. And, importantly, it is a vision that, had it been realized, would have ended in death; for David to have married Little Emily would have been for him to remain childlike,

⁷ David Copperfield ed. Trevor Blount. London: Penguin, 1966. p. 202. Future references to this edition will appear in the text.

essentially putting to sleep his vocation as a writer and short-circuiting his own development.

But the depiction of Emily as childlike points to another short-circuiting, namely the aesthetic constriction of never portraying her as a grown woman. Before her elopement with Steerforth, Emily weeps uncontrollably over Martha's dilemma, insisting that she herself is "not as good a girl as [she] ought to be." The narrator finds Emily's supplication, "which in its agony and grief was half a woman's, half a child's, as all her manner was" (400), appealing, but the indeterminacy underscores her potentially vulnerable position. After her fall, it is significant that Emily is unnameable as a woman: her uncle Peggotty would often reminisce about "Emily as a child. But, he never mentioned her as a woman" (804). The last vision of Emily as she is about to set sail on the ship that will take her to Australia is still childlike; clinging to her uncle for support, she remains "beautiful and drooping," her near-prostrate position emblematic of her fallen nature, her dependence a perpetuation of her childhood role.

Emily's downward spiral serves in part as a foil to the uplifting and inspiriting role of David's true better half -- Agnes Wickfield; the last word of the novel is "upward," a reference to Agnes' angelic effect on David's own rise. But if the formation of the middle-class subject depends on and indeed requires a distancing from

the fallen, it also depends on prohibiting the transformation of the fallen woman into a subject herself.⁸ While Dickens and Gaskell believed in and supported the reformation of fallen women -- both authors were instrumental in helping women emigrate to Australia where they could make suitable wives -- in David Copperfield and "Lizzie Leigh" such options are omitted as narrative alternatives for their main characters. Martha does marry a farmer from the Bush, but the validity of this action is undercut in the next passage by the juxtaposition of Mrs. Gummidge's own fantastic marriage proposal. As Peggotty recounts the story to David, it is a source of amusement -- Mrs. Gummidge's answer to the ship's cook being a bucket over his head -- but, nonetheless, such incongruity is metonymically linked by proximity to Martha's own situation. The fact that David once entertained thoughts, however immature, of marrying Emily precludes her own marriageable possibilities. And her position, which is higher than

8 In her book, Tainted Souls and Painted Faces (1993), Amanda Anderson notes that Victorian social reformers play off contradictory arguments about the possibility of reclaiming the fallen: in many cases, a fallen woman's sense of shame produces a "self-exile" which precludes her entry back into respectable society (62). Anderson's recent work is an intriguing new look at the subject of fallen women. Arguing against equating fallenness solely with sexual transgression, Anderson sees the subject instead as a specific "historical category" revealing larger cultural concerns with the nature of agency and selfhood (7). See her "Introduction" for the idea that fallenness reflects the "attenuated agency" of a fractured subject.

Martha's, ensures that unlike the lower-class emigres helped by Dickens, their fictional middle-class sisters cannot be redeemed by marriage. The narrative options of these fallen women are severely limited; they end either in exile, prostitution, or death.

The portrayals of both Lizzie Leigh and Little Emily in David Copperfield demonstrate the binarisms at work in Victorian fiction which separate the pure woman from her fallen sister. In addition, their plights reveal the unbridgeable gap between two poles of ideal womanhood -- the innocent maid and the honorable matron -- confirming Craik's dictum that neither alternative is available to the wayward. But there is another gap that is revealed in the operation between these dichotomous tropes, namely one that points to the occlusion of any adolescent or developmental stage. Most Victorian novels depict the movement of the fall -- from child to woman or an irreversible leap to extremes of youth and old age -- in a single sentence, reinforcing the belief that there is no narrative space to communicate this transition and no developmental plot that allows for change. Dickens' delineation of Little Em'ly falls short of representing her as a woman, and Gaskell's titular character leaps immediately to premature old age.⁹ Hardy's fallen heroine

9 An 1849 essay in the Christian Remembrancer sets the process of transformation to sixty minutes: "'In one hour daughter, sister, wife, hath become the thing from which the fondest shrink; the very name of which they dare not

Tess in the novel that bears her name also transforms instantaneously: "almost at a leap," Hardy writes, "Tess thus changed from simple girl to complex woman" (84). The story of the fallen woman in fiction thus points to the non-narratability of both the movement of the fall and the (sexual) change from childhood to womanhood. But these depictions reveal as much as they conceal, for they underscore the problematic construction of Victorian ideologies of womanhood which depend on contradiction and cover-up.

When Gaskell published Ruth in 1853, it caused great public outrage precisely because it questioned many of these binarisms; not only did Gaskell give the fallen woman center stage, but she made her innocent, an ingenue heroine at odds with her social sin. Moreover, Ruth rises in the course of the novel to become an apotheosized model of martyred, selfless womanhood. In this rise and in Gaskell's conceptualization of the fallen woman in Ruth, we can see an ideological critique of a genre and cultural practice that allows no space for female development.

Gaskell presents Ruth as so unselfconsciously childlike and innocent both before and immediately after her transgression that it is difficult not only to account for her action but also to reconcile the fallen

utter. It is too horrible to look upon, or to fashion into speech'" (qtd. in D'Amico 70).

woman with her plot. Gaskell's problematic characterization is reflected in the form of the novel itself; as Rosemarie Bodenheimer notes, the novel divides between a pastoral presentation of Ruth as a Wordsworthian child of nature in the first part and "a social argument about the treatment of fallen women" in the remaining sections.¹⁰ Numerous Victorian and contemporary critics have commented on this split, seeking to answer the central question of the novel: If Ruth is so innocent, how do we account for what seems like unjust severity in the meting out of her punishment? To the Victorians, this was a moral issue; to twentieth-century readers, these aesthetic contradictions indicate the inconsistent working of ideology.

But implicit in these inconsistencies and gaps is a larger argument for the need to establish a separate developmental stage between the innocence of childhood and the overdetermined experience of Ruth's womanhood. Employing the pastoral mode to describe Ruth is Gaskell's way of criticizing "socially determined views of the

¹⁰ Bodenheimer succinctly sums up many of the critical stances on this division in Ruth (Politics 153). In her discussion of the pastoral, Bodenheimer distinguishes the way Gaskell employs this Wordsworthian belief in the novel. Calling Ruth "a Wordsworthian child," Bodenheimer states, "does not mean she is innocent ... but that she embodies an actively asocial principle, a singular imagination that works emotionally and aesthetically rather than socially" (156). See Schor's chapter on Ruth for Gaskell's rewriting of Romantic conventions in aesthetic terms.

fallen woman," Bodenheimer argues: locating value in Ruth's "pastoral sensibility," not in social norms, allows Gaskell to "naturalize" her heroine's "emotional needs" and sidestep issues of culpability (Politics 153-154). Allying Ruth with the pastoral mode may provide Gaskell a relocation of values, but it also calls attention to the problems of relying on nature as a substitute guardian for a motherless girl. Part of the novelty of Ruth seems to be more than ideological critique of society's refusal to recognize a distinct period between childhood and womanhood; it is also a call for societal or familial guidance in the developmental process. And that Gaskell appears to be proposing a different scenario for the fallen woman in this novel, as opposed to her earlier story, "Lizzie Leigh," confirms, in Eagleton's words, that "'it is not necessarily true ... that the works by the same author will belong to the same ideology. And even texts which do belong to the same ideology will not 'give' it in the same way'" (qtd. in Newton Women, 161). Placing Ruth in its historical context, particularly in relation to larger social reform movements in the 1850s, allows us to better understand, and perhaps account for, Gaskell's shifting portrayals of the fallen woman in her fiction.

The story of Ruth details the fall of a fifteen-year-old dressmaker's apprentice who succumbs to her fate out of love for natural beauty and a misplaced trust in

her seducer (the aristocratic Bellingham). Ruth Hilton's desire to escape the cloistered atmosphere of the millinery room for a ramble out of doors leads to her intimacy with Bellingham. Their first encounter at the ball in which Ruth mends Bellingham's partner's dress results in his gift of a camellia, so "perfect" and so "pure," which simultaneously foreshadows Ruth's own deflowering and contradictorily signals her purity. On the night of the ball, the narrator notes, Ruth dreams happily of Bellingham; where "the night before, she had seen her dead mother in her sleep, and she wakened, weeping ... now she dreamed of Mr. Bellingham, and smiled."¹¹ For twentieth-century readers, it is difficult not to read this easy transference in other than psychological and Freudian terms: Ruth's dreams, as she shifts from mother to lover, evoke the movement from homosexual to heterosexual love.¹² And, according to contemporary social psychologists, one of the main tasks of adolescence is precisely this second individuation

¹¹ Ruth ed. Alan Shelston. New York: Oxford World's Classics, 1985. p. 18. Future references to this edition will be cited in the text.

¹² But as Nancy Chodorow argues in her revision of Freud, this transference is particularly complicated for young women; their "fluid" ego boundaries and strong identification with their mothers account for an incomplete relinquishment of a bisexual triangle (see The Reproduction of Mothering). Indeed, it is Ruth's memory of her mother which prevents her from committing suicide and enables the Dissenting minister Benson to help Ruth.

process -- a movement away from incestuous ties (to the mother) and towards adult genital sexuality.¹³

But I do not mean to read Ruth as exemplifying transhistorical psychological processes; indeed, many feminist critics have difficulty with psychoanalytic terminology precisely because it is seen as so determined and essentializing. In Cora Kaplan's words, "one of the most intractable problems facing feminists today is the relationship between the psychological components of femininity, and the social and political elements of women's subordination" (99). Similarly, Toril Moi writes: "although psychoanalysis still needs to be creatively transformed for feminist purposes, the fact remains that feminism needs a non-essential theory of human sexuality and desire in order to understand the power relations between the sexes" (131). The story of Ruth and the entire fallen woman debate, provide an excellent opportunity for examining the particular historical and cultural biases at work in the construction of womanhood.¹⁴ These factors are evident in Gaskell's novel, particularly in the scenes detailing Ruth's

13 This view is most clearly delineated in Peter Blos' The Adolescent Passage. See Louise Kaplan Adolescence on this subject as well.

14 In her essay, "The Anathematized Race: The Governess and Jane Eyre," Mary Poovey posits "history" as the "third term" between psychoanalysis and feminism (230). My approach similarly depends on reading sociological and literary discourses in an attempt to historicize the construction of what has been seen in this century mostly in psychoanalytic ways -- female adolescence.

girlhood and her relationship to Bellingham; for Gaskell presents the "psychological components of [Ruth's] femininity" and the social dimensions of women's subordination as a result of particular circumstances and unequal power dynamics.

In fact, it is Ruth's "blank" life after the "loss of her mother" that causes her "to value and cling to sympathy" (44). Ruth turns first to the only friend she has at the dressmaker's, the sickly Jenny who is soon taken ill and forced to leave. Ruth then turns from female to male companionship in Mr. Bellingham; the narrator notes that "Jenny's place in Ruth's heart was filled up." Listening to her tales of childhood, Bellingham "insensibly" steals his way into Ruth's thoughts. But "it must not be supposed that this was effected all at once," the narrator insists, "though the intermediate stage have been passed over" (39). As the mother of four daughters and one who was acutely aware of their developmental needs (she recorded her first daughter's early years in order to give any future caretaker insights into her child's character), Gaskell narrates a psychological process as the result of fundamental need and a specific context -- there is no one else for the orphaned Ruth to share her thoughts with.¹⁵

¹⁵ Moreover, Gaskell highlights the material circumstances that influence Ruth's relationship with her

Lacking precise psychological terminology to illustrate this transference -- and governed by Victorian literary decorum which censored discussions of female sexuality -- Gaskell notes only that Ruth's intercourse with Bellingham produces "a strange undefined feeling" that she is somehow doing something wrong. During her "courtship," the narrator stresses that, according to Ruth's "knowledge," there was nothing improper in her Sunday strolls with her male friend. And though, subsequently, Ruth muses that she felt as if their walks while "somehow, not exactly wrong ... were not exactly right" (41), she remains oblivious of any real impropriety or of any growing sexual attraction to Bellingham.

This uneasy condition in which Ruth has the semi-awakened consciousness of a child on the cusp of womanhood makes her perfect prey for the more worldly Bellingham. In their second encounter, Gaskell encodes this ambiguous state and Ruth's subsequent fall using natural imagery. When Ruth -- "a child in years herself" the narrator tells us in a parenthesis -- watches a group of boys playing in the dark river she is "as unconscious

seducer. For not only does Ruth's emotional deprivation lead to her intimacy, but her fiscal poverty also largely accounts for her fall. Summarily dismissed when her employer sees her walking with Bellingham, the shaken Ruth is taken to a tea shop to recover. But because she has no money to pay for her collation and she is too honest to leave, Ruth must wait at the inn for Bellingham to return; her seducer returns only to have Ruth even more at his mercy.

of any danger as the group of children below" (21). But when one of the boys is swept away in the current and rescued by her future seducer, the narrator next refers to Ruth and Bellingham as the only two capable of action "(besides mere children)" (23). During the course of the rescue, and Ruth's symbolic fall, the heroine is no longer a child, though not quite a woman either. It is the combination of the two that Bellingham finds so irresistible: "There was, perhaps, something bewitching in the union of grace and loveliness of womanhood with the naivete, simplicity, and innocence of an intelligent child" (33).

This borderline state, as in David Copperfield, is almost a narrative shorthand for alerting the reader to the possibility for sexual fall; it is also a code for adolescence itself. In her budding womanhood and simultaneous child-like innocence, Ruth proves too tantalizing for the aristocratic Bellingham to resist. Gaskell is one of the few Victorian novelists to approximate a characterization of adolescence, but her definitional haziness also signals a crisis in categorization; nascent adolescent sexuality becomes the central problem -- the "something bewitching" which cannot be named -- between ideal womanhood and innocent childhood. The dark river separating the children from Ruth and Ruth from her childlike state is a metaphor for

the changing nature of sexuality.¹⁶ Yet, significantly, Gaskell emphasizes Ruth's ignorance during this metamorphosis: her budding sexuality can be read (and exploited) by others, but not by Ruth herself.

Indeed, Ruth remains so sexually unselfconscious both before and after her seduction that it is difficult to call her experience a "fall" in any sense of the word: the event is not narrated, nor, in contradistinction to much Victorian fiction, are there any telltale marks on Ruth herself. When Ruth is next seen in the novel, she is living in Wales with Bellingham, but she still wears white, as if she is as innocent and pure as any maiden. It is only when a child at the inn where she and her lover are staying calls her a "naughty girl" and not a lady at all that Ruth suddenly gets a "new idea running through her mind" (72).

Victorian reviewers, who criticized Gaskell for this disingenuous portrayal, were divided on the likelihood of a girl of sixteen knowing absolutely nothing of sexual relations. The Spectator thought Ruth's innocence "hardly consistent with sixteen and some months' experience in a milliner's workroom"; but Gaskell's friend, Catherine Winkworth, found nothing implausible in Ruth's naivete,

16 Gaskell has been criticized for her inability to portray sexual passion in Ruth. One critic thought the novel a "failure" for this very reason (Rubenius note 189). For Patsy Stoneman, the "flaws" in the novel point to "significant failures of ideological coherence" (100).

for many sixteen-year-old girls were "quite as innocent." The narrator attributes Ruth's guilelessness to the early death of her mother, since "she was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting the subject of a woman's life -- if, indeed, wise parents ever directly speak of what, in its depth and power, cannot be put into words..." (44).¹⁷ Though Gaskell is writing of love and perhaps only secondarily of sexual passion, she too cannot put into words the knowledge Ruth needs nor articulate female desire.

3.

In an 1863 Saturday Review commentary of a popular conduct book, The Young Lady's Friend, the reviewer commends the genre of conduct books whose benevolent purpose is "to supply the place of a mother to motherless girls." Yet, contradictorily, and perhaps rather ironically, the critic soon professes himself at a loss as to the meaning of the advice-writer's comments concerning "natural history." A young woman is urged not to talk to friends on "subjects she does not understand"

¹⁷ Gaskell continues: " -- which is a brooding spirit with no definite form or shape that men should know it, but which is there, and present before we have recognized and realized its existence." Gaskell's metaphoric imprecision is echoed not only throughout the novel but also in many journalistic accounts which similarly depict female sexuality as "monstrous" yet indistinct in shape. This obfuscation is, I suggest, part of a larger movement which denies female adolescence itself, in part because of its sexual nature.

but rather, the conduct-book writer states, "if there are any points in natural history upon which you have a reasonable desire to be enlightened, go to your mother, and ask her in all soberness and simplicity to explain them to you.... You will acquire the knowledge you desire without sacrifice of modesty" ("Some Advice" 460-61). Though the reviewer admits to being befuddled by this contradictory advice, the conduct-book author appears to have conveniently forgotten that these girls are motherless when she urges her readers to seek their mother's help for knowledge on sexual relations. While Gaskell's portrayal of Ruth stretches the limits of credulity, it nonetheless points to similar circular reasoning and collapses of logic. Both Victorian literary and social decorum inhibit detailing the fallen woman's fall, and predominant ideology disavows young women's sexuality as they come of age. Such beliefs preclude the narration of Ruth's sexual consciousness. The young girl cannot ask questions on sexual matters, and if she could she would have no "mother" to address them to anyway. To make the fallen woman the protagonist of the novel and to portray her consciousness as innocent, Gaskell calls into question this received construction of female subjectivity.

Gaskell's solution to this dilemma was harshly criticized by Craik in her chapter "Lost Women." Undoubtedly referring to Ruth, Craik points out the

"mistake" of writers who try too hard "to redeem the lost." Their heroines, and Gaskell's "painted" one in particular, are "such patterns of excellence, that we wonder, first, how they ever could have been led astray, and secondly, whether this exceeding helplessness and simplicity of theirs did not make the sin so venial, that it seems as wrong to blame them for it as to scold a child for tumbling into an open well" (Thoughts 229). For Craik, the need to acknowledge guilt is paramount: the fault must be shared by representing fallen womanhood as fallen, otherwise the sin is too "venial" and the reader too likely to "close the book [and] ... arraign society, morality, and, what is worse, Providence" (229).

Inaccurate portrayal, Craik insists, is tantamount to inciting political, moral, and religious rebellion.¹⁸

But Craik's criticism also perpetuates the level of semantic confusion that already exists in Gaskell's portrayal of Ruth. Conflating the fallen woman with a "child" who tumbles into a well absolves the former of both guilt and agency; but while it links women with children, it also emphasizes the disjunction between the

¹⁸ But while she insists first on the need to "accurately" portray corrupt female subjectivity as guilty in order to conform to societal norms, Craik then borrows the plot of Ruth to argue for the necessary rehabilitation of fallen women ignored by patriarchal policies. Only through the acknowledgement of sin and through the pity of other women can fallen women be reclaimed ... their road to and sign of redemption achieved in the process of motherhood (228-229).

two -- for experienced womanhood and innocent childhood cannot be reconciled without sacrificing logical or aesthetic veracity. This linguistic and categorical confusion is particularly evident in the chapters immediately prior to and after Ruth's "fall." When the young child at the inn chastises Ruth for not being a "lady," but a "bad naughty girl," his nurse, "standing face to face with the elegant young lady," reddens and finds it difficult to account for her charge's words (72). When another couple observes Ruth, the husband notes that the "very modest and innocent-looking" Ruth can't be more than sixteen, but his wife harshly condemns "such wickedness" out of hand, "without seeing the young girl's modest ways, and gentle, downcast countenance" (71).

By repeatedly labeling her heroine a "girl" and a "child," Gaskell calls attention to Ruth's vulnerable state and also signals the absence of any intermediary stage between childhood and adulthood which might temper her heroine's responsibility for her fall. Recognizing that the road to Victorian womanhood depends on socialization, but entreating the reader to remember her heroine's youth and "natural" goodness, Gaskell appears to be pleading for judgment based on a different set of standards than the harsher conventions of full womanhood. "Remember how young, and innocent, and motherless she was!" Gaskell writes, underscoring the need for leniency.

Similarly, Greg in his essay on prostitution calls attention to the "tender age" at which many young women fell. "The number who become prostitutes at the age of fifteen, twelve, and even ten years," he writes, "is such as almost to exceed credibility" (476). This explicit condemnation of Victorian society argues not only for increased public awareness and milder treatment of these young girls, it also precludes their classification as "women" in the full sense of the word. While such statistics no doubt point to rampant child abuse, they also undermine the assumption that all young women who "fell" could be labeled and treated as adults.

Greg's indignant charge and Gaskell's protest for the mitigating circumstances of her heroine's youth may be read as part of a larger argument being advanced in mid-Victorian social reform. Though the age of consent stood at thirteen years of age until the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 raised it to sixteen, the problem of youthful iniquity -- both juvenile delinquency and prostitution -- received heightened scrutiny during the 1840s and 1850s.¹⁹ The Juvenile Offenders Act of 1854, which mandated a two year stay in a reformatory institution, reflects a growing awareness of the need to

¹⁹ Judith Walkowitz notes that the act ironically gave police increased "jurisdiction over poor working-women and children." The Act was largely in response to a sensational article in the Pall Mall Gazette which called attention to an increase in "white slave" and child-prostitution. According to Walkowitz, these claims were largely unfounded (246-247).

distinguish between adult and youthful crime. And the increase in Victorian discourses about prostitution coincides with a new public consciousness about the existence of juvenile delinquents. Similarly concerned with distinguishing the young -- in this case from adult treatment under the law and in prison -- the reformatory movement in the early 1850s marked an "epoch" in British social history. Though prostitution, unlike juvenile crime, was not labeled a criminal act and was not subject to criminal statutes, the two were frequently linked both in journalistic debates and in actual reformatories.²⁰

Also, the principles of reformation were similar in both: to establish separate facilities for the young and not-yet-hardened sinners and restore them "to religious and social privileges" (Mayhew xxxv). Greg concluded his influential essay with a brief history of asylums for fallen women, and urged an increase in such institutions. There were twenty-one such "homes" in London in 1861 (the oldest was the Magdalen Hospital established in 1758), and nine were solely for "juveniles." While additional such penitentiaries were established in the first few decades of the nineteenth century (for example, the London Female Penitentiary [1807] and the London Society for the Protection of Young Females and Prevention of

²⁰ See, for example, Reverend Henry Worsley's Juvenile Depravity (1849) and Mary Carpenter's Juvenile Delinquents (1853).

Juvenile Prostitution [1835]), the number did not substantially increase. The Church Penitentiary Association (1852) was formed to "assist in the founding and maintaining of refuges and penitentiaries."²¹ But even then, as reformers were quick to point out, the number of fallen women who were able to gain admittance was only about 1,000 out of an estimated total of 80,000 such women in London alone (Mayhew xxxviii; see J. Armstrong 363).

Though most of the women who fall both in fictional portrayals and in nineteenth-century sociological statistics are indeed adolescents, the term was not often used then and thus critics have overlooked the status and significance of fallen women as adolescents. But the phrase "juvenile delinquent" increased in social currency during the 1840s and 1850s, the decades which coincided with the fallen woman novel. I do not mean to conflate all fallen women with juvenile delinquents, but rather to read in the fallen woman novels of the 1850s and in mid-Victorian sociological accounts a more encoded and troubled debate concerning the creation of a separate adolescent stage -- one which was undergoing construction

21 Greg 500; see Mayhew xxxv-vii; D'Amico 71. For a Foucauldian account of magdalene homes in Scotland, see Linda Mayhood's very useful The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century (Routledge, 1990). Rubenius notes that the number of magdalene homes increased with the publication of Ruth and similar reformatory-minded essays (note p. 197).

during this period along very specific class and gender lines.

Recognizing that youthful offenders were not really children and yet at the same time arguing against their being accorded the same status as adults, many reformers lobbied to treat such transgressors as a distinct class with their own special needs -- juveniles. This is indeed the premise behind the work of Mary Carpenter (who wrote prolifically on the subject) whose 1853 book Juvenile Delinquents was written with the intention of getting Parliament to alter its laws. Carpenter's treatise is concerned only with the lower classes of society -- the "perishing" and "dangerous" -- for she notes that class privilege protects upper-class children (if they commit the same "petty" crimes) from receiving punishment (1-2; 15). Indeed, the term juvenile delinquent usually denotes both the lower classes and an age category; most reformatory institutions set entrance age at about sixteen or seventeen, for it was believed that the malleability of youth made rehabilitation much more likely during these critical teen years.

Like the multiplication of categories and distinctions for juvenile delinquents, the classification system for fallen women also became increasingly complex. Some penitentiaries admitted women who had one child but were otherwise of good character. The London Society for the Protection of Young Females restricted its entrants

to those under fifteen; others only admitted "the better and higher class of fallen women"; still others only "those who have recently been led astray" (Mayhew xxxv; see D'Amico note p.79).²² This increased proliferation of categories of fallen women -- by age, background, length of time since first "ruined" -- all signal a crisis in categorization, a need to both contain and delimit transgressive female behavior and to uphold some sort of class standardization that such women threaten to overturn.

While the increased number of female penitentiaries at mid-century attests to a new level of public awareness about the need for some kind of alternative to the perceived inexorable downward spiral of the fallen, such intervention often took the form of policing and regulating lower-class women. As scholars like Mayhood and Walkowitz argue, these middle-class reform efforts were partly directed at controlling the perceived

22 These distinctions appear also in Craik's chapter on "Lost Women." For Craik, rehabilitation depends on first distinguishing the fallen from the "lost": the former are those "who have fallen out of the ranks of honest women" and are redeemable, but the "lost," those "who make a trade of sin," and with whom, Craik notes, her middle-class readers can have nothing to do, remain forever outcast -- "that other class" (222). While Craik's plea for pity rests on these hierarchical distinctions (similar to class ranks), her premise that "a woman's redemption lies in her own hands," and that she can "begin anew" by putting "the whole past life aside as if it had never been" (Women's Thoughts 226), concurs with Victorian social reformers about the possible rehabilitation of the wayward.

ungovernable sexuality of lower-class women.²³ Most penitentiaries attempted to "domesticate" the inmates, teaching them sewing, washing, and other household skills. After a two years' stay, "successfully" rehabilitated fallen women -- those who showed "middle-class standards of propriety" -- went out into service at home or abroad, in the way that Gaskell, who was familiar with the work of Mary Carpenter and other reformers, did help one young woman (who many critics see as the inspiration for Ruth) to emigrate to Australia (Mayhood 85).²⁴ Most likely Gaskell's concern for this young woman led to her first contact with Charles Dickens who was similarly interested in the rehabilitation of fallen women. With the help of philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts, he had been active in establishing a charitable home for fallen women, Urania Cottage (1847), which was a private charity organized along penitentiary lines. The inmates, who were forbidden to speak of their past lives, were domesticated along middle-class ideals and then

23 See Mahood's The Magdalenes and Walkowitz' Prostitution and Victorian Society for an elaboration of this thesis on middle-class regulation of working-class women. Walkowitz cogently discusses the history of the CD Acts in these terms.

24 Sally Mitchell notes that Gaskell most probably read Greg's Westminster Review article on prostitution as it contained a long passage on Mary Barton. Ruth's rejection of Bellingham and his proposal to make an honest woman of her through marriage is prefigured in Greg's assertion that such maneuvering towards "honesty" is ironic (Mitchell 39).

shipped off to Australia to start a new life. Gaskell may have been interested in forming a similar refuge for fallen women in Manchester (Watt 19).

What Gaskell does in Ruth, however, is not to ship her heroine off, but to pass her off as a member of the respectable middle class. Abandoned by her lover in Wales and apparently on the verge of committing suicide, Ruth is saved by the crippled Dissenting minister Thurstan Benson. When the preacher decides it is best to pass Ruth off as a widow in order to allow her to work out her redemption, the narrator blatantly states that this was "the pivot, on which the fate of years moved; and he turned it the wrong way" (122). This action, called "the real crux of the novel" by Emile Montegut in the Revue des Deux Mondes, proved a rankling issue to nineteenth-century reviewers, even though, Montegut notes, the lie "is only a kind of veil thrown over the earlier life of Ruth to hide her from spiteful gazes" (qtd. in Easson 309). In many minds such deliberate deception (on the part of a minister no less) was the real "sin" of the novel, and some Victorian reviewers dismissed it as "impossible." It also cast into question both the stability and perceptibility of class distinctions. Though reform-minded writers such as Greg, Craik, and Dickens encouraged fallen women to start afresh, there is no indication that they advocated that such women should be allowed fully to reenter respectable society in

England. For example, Dickens, though he worked tirelessly directing Urania Cottage, tied his ideas of penitential reformation to a form of colonization: he admitted only those women on the precondition that they "'came there ultimately to be sent abroad'" (Basch 208; qtd. in A. Anderson 69). Underscoring the class position of such women, Dickens furthermore insisted that the inmates dress like "'respectable plain servants'" (qtd. in Basch 208).

As George Watt states, "Mrs. Gaskell's development of a noble heroine from a fallen girl was sufficient to cause a storm" (40). But there is evidence to support the conclusion that the class connotations that this action represents -- especially in light of the fact that most "reformed" fallen women were destined for domestic service or emigration -- caused the real controversy. In mid-century social reform literature, it is lower-class women whose characters were thought to be redeemable by approximating, though not actually becoming like, their respectable middle-class sisters. Gaskell goes a step further in her novel; her portrayal of Ruth undermines these class distinctions and questions the very notion of social rank itself.

When Bellingham's mother (a "real lady") harshly urges Ruth to "enter some penitentiary" if she is "not 'dead in trespasses and sins,'" and dismisses her son's lover with a fifty pound note, Gaskell demonstrates the

inappropriateness of such action in regard to her heroine (92; 108). For Ruth's demure demeanor and her instinctive responses to beauty mark her as a "natural" lady which both supersedes notions of birth rank and make her an unfit candidate for the penitentiary. And though he is dissuaded from any further contact with Ruth, Bellingham defends his lover to his mother, stating that she is "no improper character." Ruth's tireless actions throughout Bellingham's illness likewise confirm his doctor's opinion that she is "no common person." Faith Benson, Thurstan's sister, similarly sees Ruth and decides that she is no "impostor or ... hardened sinner." Awed by Ruth's handsome and childish looks, Faith agrees that this young girl does not fit the type of fallen womanhood and reluctantly consents to help her brother test his "new ideas" for her rehabilitation.

Benson's novel theories are predicated on Ruth's joyous blessing when she learns she is pregnant; her spontaneous and heartfelt utterance, the preacher believes, is a sign of Ruth's "natural" goodness and the redemptive possibilities of motherhood. Otherwise, Ruth's only other alternative is the path that leads toward further descent. "The world's way of treatment is too apt to harden the mother's natural love into something like hatred," Benson argues. "Shame, and the terror of friends' displeasure, turn her mad -- defile her holiest instincts..." (120).

Ruth's options as a fallen woman and as a pregnant one in particular are limited, as Benson implies. To try to raise her child alone would be to face overwhelming social prejudice; for Ruth to have entered into a penitentiary would have been for her to lose caste. Essentially, she would have been in training for servanthood. Instead, in the safety and security of the Benson household Ruth is allowed to develop and mature -- a process usually not permitted most fallen women who change instantly from child to woman with no intermediate stage. Thurstan Benson's plan for Ruth's rehabilitation reads very much like the proposals of many Victorian social reformers; in Mary Carpenter's words, to "restore them [the delinquents] to a home, open their souls to good and holy influences, if need be correct them, but with a loving severity, and so under God's blessing restore them to society" (7-8). What was perhaps so shocking about Ruth to its Victorian audience was that Gaskell enacted her reformation of the fallen woman not behind the cloistered walls of an institution but in the bosom of a middle-class community.

Ruth's development in the second half of the novel follows closely the principles of penitentiary reform without the fact of penitentiary life: an adherence to the restorative process of a homelike setting that usually includes "a strict regime of 'mild, wholesome, paternal, and Christian discipline'" (qtd. in Mahood 78).

Of course, not all penitentiaries followed the same methods of rehabilitation, but the model most commonly used was the precept of the Prodigal Son -- a "system of discipline" accompanied by a large dose of Christian kindness (J. Armstrong 361, 367; Mayhew xxxv). According to the Reverend John Armstrong, in his review "Female Penitentiaries," a religious house with its own chaplain and "superior matron" (preferably the widow of a clergyman) was the model home. "Give her retirement, quiet, opportunity of devotion, help to reflection, spiritual ministrations especially directed to her condition," Armstrong urges, " -- in short, a mode of life provided and adapted to her circumstances" (367).

Ruth has all of these benefits and more living in the Benson's Dissenting household: she is under the guidance of the minister Benson, his unmarried sister Faith, and their loquacious servant Sally, who all give Ruth spiritual and moral advice.²⁵ Gaskell notes the regularity and Christian submission found in the Benson home: "It seemed that their lives were pure and good, not merely from a lovely and beautiful nature, but from some law, the obedience to which was, of itself, harmonious

²⁵ Sally, in what appears to be a rather gratuitous and harsh act, even shears Ruth's long hair as being inappropriate for a "widow." Ruth's lamb-like submission under the scissors earns her respect in Sally's eyes, but the act also echoes a less drastic form of head-shaving that was practiced in some magdalene homes (see Mayhew 80).

peace, and which governed them almost implicitly, and with as little questioning on their part, as the glorious stars which haste not, rest not, in their eternal obedience" (142). Significantly, in this alternative family Gaskell reverses not only gender stereotypes -- it is Thurstan who is more maternal and his sister Faith whose fondness for whistling typifies her more masculine nature -- but also religious affiliations; such tolerance for the fallen, Gaskell implies, can only take place in a Dissenting household outside of normative role prescriptions.

In fulfillment of the belief held by many Victorian reformers that just the presence of an unfallen sister "moving about them [the fallen] like a moral atmosphere" was beneficial, Ruth similarly finds the air at the Benson household "a purer ether, a diviner air ... than what she had been accustomed to for long months" (qtd. in D'Amico 71; Gaskell 141). Life at the Bensons' evokes a pure spirit similar to the memory of Ruth's own mother and Ruth's "holy" childhood home (141). In keeping with penitentiary practices, Ruth remains silent on her past (sinful) life; though she remembers her early childhood, she never reveals the name of the father of her child nor the circumstances of her fall. Only after her death will Benson learn the truth about Ruth's son Leonard.²⁶

²⁶ Residence in a magdalene home was voluntary, though most inmates after they were admitted were strongly "persuaded" to remain. Ruth, aware of the Bensons' scant

Usually, the first step toward reclaiming fallen women after removing them to the purer air of a magdalene home was to get them to confess their sin, or, in more punitive cases, "to replace deceit and pride with guilt" (Mayhood 82). This moral transformation was accomplished through Bible reading which "would reveal the extent of the inmate's sin, defilement and guilt..." (Mahood 83).²⁷ Significantly, Ruth first comes to understand the social (and religious) meaning of her sin through Benson's Sunday sermon. Though the preacher avoids chapters that deliberately call attention to Ruth's predicament, his words touch her "broken and contrite spirit," and overwhelming call her to repent. "As he read, Ruth's heart was smitten, and she sank down and down, till she was kneeling on the floor of the pew, and speaking to God in the spirit, if not in the words of the Prodigal Son: 'Father! I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy child!'" (154).

Ruth's awareness of the social and religious ramifications of her sin dominates the second half of the

resources, at first tactfully attempts to seek shelter nearby and thus save them the expense of her keep. But Benson persuades her to wait until the baby is a year old before leaving their household (172).

²⁷ Aside from religious instruction, the process of rehabilitation in penitentiaries also included courses in secular knowledge, such as reading, writing, geography and arithmetic (Mayhood 84). Under Benson's tutelage, Ruth also engages in a course of "book-learning" in order to "acquire the knowledge hereafter to be given to her child," and becomes a most enthusiastic scholar (177).

novel and indeed accounts for its tonal discordance with the first chapters. Her reformation and cognizance of her "sin" is in keeping with paternal politics that govern institutional refuge homes. But Gaskell challenges this restrictive social plotting for women both socially and aesthetically: she reverses the class outcome of such "rehabilitation," for Ruth becomes a governess not a servant, and in contradistinction to literary aesthetics she also allows her heroine a more normal senescence, a development from young girl to saintly woman. Gaskell portrays Ruth's "fall" more as an opportunity to "rise"; in Auerbach's reading of this mythic stereotype, Ruth is transformed by her fall, which "lends spiritual potency to the woman it destroys" (171).

One reviewer in the North British Review commended Gaskell for her ability to show this developmental process: "the erring girl ... [who] grows up into a noble Christian woman." Furthermore, the journal noted the similarity between Ruth's course of rehabilitation and the practices followed at magdalene homes. According to this critic, Gaskell went "to the root of the matter.... [and] will have done far more real service to the cause (as the cant phrase is) of penitentiaries, and ... sisterhoods ... than if she had 'taken up' any one of those subjects; simply because she has, as it were, lifted the veil from off their working, to shew us the principle by which alone they can stand or fall" (qtd. in

Helsingier et. al 3: 117). Gaskell's "principles" in Ruth included not only a transformation of traditional familial models but also the narrative space in which to allow her heroine to develop.

W.A. Craik remarks that the events of Ruth take place over the course of about thirteen years and that Gaskell, interestingly enough, shows her characters' attention to the aging process (67). Faith Benson notices her hair going white, and Ruth's child Leonard grows to young boyhood. Ruth herself (in whom Gaskell notes there "was the greatest external change"), only seems to get more lovely with age; "the banished lilies and roses" of her youth are replaced by a darker and more mature beauty. Indeed, Ruth seems to grow in dignity as well as in stature, so much so that "the most critical judge" would have difficulty determining if Ruth were not a lady by birth (208-209). In addition to the external alterations of character, she has changed internally: her dramatic second encounter with Bellingham (now Donne) and her rejection of his marriage proposal attests to her moral superiority. Recognizing that Bellingham would have a corrupting influence over her son, Ruth asserts that she would "rather see [Leonard] working on the roadside than leading such a life -- being such a one as [Bellingham]" (303).

But Gaskell loses her careful hold on chronology with one character, Jemima Bradshaw, the daughter of the

pharisaic Bradshaw who engages Ruth to work as a governess for his two younger children. In *Jemima*, as critics have noted, Gaskell created an especially interesting character. Though only two years younger than Ruth (which would make her about fourteen or fifteen), when first introduced at Leonard's baptism, Jemima, Sally notes, is expected to marry her father's partner, Mr. Farquhar (190). Jemima, who appears too young to have such matrimonial remarks directed towards her, and who, in subsequent chapters (over a period of seven years), remains in a perpetual state of girlhood, exemplifies Gaskell's inclination, unusual for a Victorian novelist, to focus on the ambiguous period between childhood and womanhood. Her exaggerated portrayal of Jemima's girlhood accentuates the importance of this stage; it also provides Gaskell with the opportunity to dramatize and evaluate the literary and cultural determinants which shape the road to Victorian womanhood. "Turbulent and stormy" by turns, Jemima conforms more to twentieth-century notions of the sturm und drang of adolescence than the model of the dutiful daughter of much Victorian fiction. Outraged when her father tries to engineer a mercenary match with his partner, Jemima then becomes moody and jealous when her lover appears to turn his attention to Ruth. The violent and volatile nature of her emotions -- first love for Ruth and then Farquhar, then jealousy and envy -- make her melancholy and passionate.

Gaskell also shows Jemima chafing at the constricting gender determinants that rule her life. Like her brother Richard, she longs to go to London to see the theatre. Though this desire tellingly links Jemima with the potential to be a painted woman herself, her brother summarily dismisses her wish telling her that "many things are right for men which are not for girls" (213). Jemima rebels against patriarchal prerogative. She deliberately sets herself in opposition to her father and her suitor, conforming to the letter but not the spirit of her father's wish that she be present at tea times and provoking her lover by her sullen demeanor. When her father and his campaign managers discuss the necessity for dubious action in getting their member of parliament elected (for reasons of Gaskell's plot he coincidentally turns out to be Bellingham), Jemima "longed to be a man, to speak out her wrath at this paltering with right and wrong" (256). In every scene, Gaskell appears to be using Jemima's reactions to argue for wider and more equal spheres of activity between the sexes.

Furthermore, it is Jemima who perspicaciously notes the sexual attractiveness of Bellingham (whom she compares to a racehorse) and uncovers Ruth's secret. When Jemima learns the truth about Ruth's past, her questions are emblematic of the novel as a whole and prefigure much of the heated critical response. "Who was good and pure? Who was not?" Jemima wonders, "Could Mr. and Miss Benson

know? Could they be a party to the deceit?" (326; 325). In order to reconcile the "two Ruths" and determine if the Ruth she knew really did work "her way through the deep purgatory of repentance up to something like purity again," Jemima decides to keep her friend under surveillance. "But for her sister's sake she had a duty to perform," the narrator states. "She must watch Ruth" (327).

Gaskell's use of an unfallen young woman to police the fallen reflects the fairly wide-spread mid-century idea of the importance of establishing sympathetic links between the fallen and unfallen. In the words of Reverend John Armstrong, "'Hence the use, hence the absolute necessity, of a Sisterhood'" (qtd. in D'Amico 72). Ruth does not need Jemima's example to help with her reclamation: she has already repented and been purified, so much so that her indefatigable nursing during the cholera epidemic makes her seem a saint to many in the community (in fact, her death, after seeing Bellingham through the same illness, was viewed as overkill by many Victorian readers). But Jemima's presence in the second half of the novel affords Gaskell the opportunity to rewrite Ruth's story from another angle. In the doubling trope of sisterhood, Gaskell overturns notions of pure and impure; she uses Jemima's knowledge of Ruth's history both to criticize the damaging belief that mandates a sexually ignorant girlhood and to reenact Ruth's fall.

Jemima, "polluted" when she first learns of Ruth's past sins, "falls" into an emotional crisis that in its intensity and language mimics a morally fallen position: "'Oh! merciful God,'" prayed Jemima ... 'the strain is too great -- I cannot bear it longer -- my life -- my love -- the very essence of me, which is myself through time and eternity.... The temptation is too strong for me. Oh Lord! where is Thy peace that I believed in, in my childhood'..." (334).

Gaskell's depiction of Jemima wrestling with temptation substitutes for the lack of conflict and narrative detail in Ruth's fall; it also reveals that sexual knowledge is what separates girlhood from the innocence of childhood. But, unlike Ruth, the fortunate Jemima is not corrupted but tamed, and can settle happily into married wifedom and motherhood. And through this distinction, Gaskell rewrites Greg's assertion about the misperceived licentiousness of girls: divorcing the awareness of sexuality from the "fall" into experience that would normally accompany such knowledge, Gaskell allows Jemima to have a sexually knowing girlhood. She also allows this young woman to develop into an exemplary wife and mother, bypassing the other outcomes usually reserved for fallen women in Victorian fiction -- loss of class, and descent into either extreme old age or perpetual juvenility. In *Ruth*, Gaskell revises the tropes that govern the fallen woman in fiction, particularly

those which occlude the passage between girlhood and womanhood, and, by so doing, calls attention to the need for an adolescent or developmental stage. In her words, she put "the small edge of the wedge in," provoking her audience not only to take a closer look at this "unfit subject for fiction," but also to reexamine public prejudice. Gaskell's explicit intent is implicitly part of a larger ideological debate concerning the sexual nature of young women as they come of age.

Chapter Five

Trollope: The Girl as Commodity

"There is a brisk market for descriptions of the inner life of young women, and Mr. Trollope is the chief agent in supplying the market." Saturday Review 24 Oct. 1863

1.

Mid-Victorian critics and readers alike were almost unanimous in agreeing that Anthony Trollope was "the ladies' man of [their] time." This assessment, as the epigraph from the Saturday Review attests, was based on the novelist's literary prowess with his young women characters; Trollope, critics believed, had a penetrating and "natural insight into the hearts and minds of young women." Though the Saturday reviewer above was referring to the eponymous protagonist of Rachel Ray, the novelist's reputation as "prose laureate of English girls" applied equally to his other memorable heroines of the 1860s; Lucy Graham, Mary Thorne, and Lily Dale were all considered representative types of English girlhood par excellence.¹ According to Henry James, Trollope was best at capturing "a simple maiden in her flower," lavishing attention on her and showing her "always

¹ It is an anonymous commentary in The Times (25 December, 1863) that first coins Trollope a "ladies' man"; according to the reviewer, "nobody understands the gentle dames and damsels of modern life half so well as this modern Anthony" (qtd. in Smalley 190). And J. Herbert Stack in the Fortnightly Review (1869) bestows laureate status (qtd. in Helling 91).

definite and natural." Moreover, in James's view, Trollope was a "paternal lover," who "settled down steadily to the English girl," and, after Barchester Towers (1857), "took possession of her, and turned her inside out" (PP 126-127). Despite the fluctuations in Trollope's novelistic reputation in the decades following his death in 1882, critics ever since have generally concurred that the author's chief "lasting merit" is his "power of portraying girlhood," which, in Michael Sadleir's fulsome estimation, "has never been excelled in the history of English fiction" (Helling 137; Sadleir, Past 36).²

Recent studies of Trollope develop this view in an attempt to account for how the novelist achieved his realistic effects. As the joint authors of Corrupt Relations remind us, Trollope's paired heroines and analogous structures provide both a sense of truthfulness by contrast and a "counterplot" containing more feminist and subversive messages.³ In Linda Nardin's

2 Sadleir's 1927 work Trollope: A Commentary did much to revive the novelist's flagging reputation in the twentieth century. Sadleir continues this sentence by pronouncing Mary Thorne of Dr. Thorne as "the first Trollopean heroine of the purest water," an assessment he shares with Frederic Harrison (Past 194).

3 In their reading of the courtship/marriage plots in Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, and Collins, the authors cogently analyze the ways in which "corrupt" sexual relations reveal an underlying dissatisfaction with larger social practices in the nineteenth century. (See Corrupt Relations (1982) Barickman et. al) But I disagree with their conclusion that major women novelists (while able to create more vivid female characters) ultimately

interpretation, even the orthodox romantic plots of Trollope's early novels (those between 1855-1865) challenge conventional Victorian ideas about women's roles; by subtly undermining the forms of "romantic comedy from within," the novelist early on shows a more nuanced awareness and sympathy for the Woman Question than scholars generally credit him with.⁴ Furthermore, the ironically "happy endings" that conclude these romantic novels often portend that marriage is at best a restrictive compromise for women (Nardin 178-179).

Contemporary critical accounts also often continue to treat the Trollope heroine in the fashion of James and

resist challenges to the patriarchal status quo -- abandoning a social solution for the safer "individual choice" as resolution for their heroines. I think this argument reifies distinctions between public and private by prioritizing one over the other, and that it does not sufficiently take into account women's limited access to the predominantly "male" public sphere.

4 Nardin is responding to (and disagreeing with) James Kincaid's premise in The Novels of Anthony Trollope (1977) that the form of romantic comedy is "opened" predominantly through the narrator's ironic stance. One of the most provocative recent studies on Trollope and romance is Christopher Herbert's Trollope and Comic Pleasure (1987). Herbert's solution to the "Trollope problem" -- that the novelist's easy style and apparent lack of ideological depth "baffles" academic analysis -- is a compelling assessment of Trollope's huge debt to Jacobean comedy. By borrowing the tropes of this "anachronistic" literary genre for his own romantic comedies, Trollope both pleased a popular audience and successfully posed as a relatively straightforward comic writer in realist's clothing. Furthermore, Trollope's "attraction" to the bawdiness of Jacobean comedy is evident, Herbert writes, in his "racy" heroines, who "bear the unmistakable stamp of their seventeenth-century ancestors" (84).

other nineteenth-century reviewers -- grouping them together "in bulk" as "subject" rather than analyzing distinct individual characteristics.⁵ In fact, The North British Review credits Trollope with forging a distinct tradition: in the journal's opinion, the novelist "discovered" the young of both sexes in the 1860s as "new" fictional subject matter. Comparing the unrealistic "heroes" of the last few decades, the reviewer writes, "there are young men in the world, now-a-days, which to judge from the novels of the last generation, was not formerly the case." And while the reviewer credits the novelist with accurate portrayals of the modern British young man, the journal finds Trollope's real forte lies in delineating "girls [who], are even better than the boys" (qtd. in Helling 82-83).⁶

5 Many twentieth-century critics who discuss Trollope's young women tend to treat them in the manner of nineteenth-century reviewers -- often with a degree of familiarity and intimacy largely reserved for real people. See, for example, David Aitken, "Anthony Trollope on 'the Genus Girl'"; E.L. Skinner, "Mr. Trollope's Young Ladies"; P. Hansford Johnson, "Trollope's Young Women." This critical slippage is most succinctly articulated in Frederic Harrison's 1895 comment on Mary Thorne et al.; he writes, that though they "may not be heroines of romance ... they are pure, right-minded, delicate, brave women; and it does one good to be admitted to the sacred confessional of their hearts" (196). For how his portrayal of women (particularly in the novels of the late 1860s and 1870s) exemplifies the novelist's thoughts on the Woman Question, see Nardin and Nana M. Rinehart's unpublished 1976 dissertation.

6 In discussing Trollope's merit and the vagaries of his reputation, Harrison claims that the "emancipated youth" of the late nineteenth century refused to read the "banal" and dated novelist (195). Ironically, Trollope's reputation for portraying ideal English girls helped

In this chapter I too will treat the Trollopean heroine as "subject," but I want to shift the emphasis and ask not how Trollope achieved his realistic effects, nor what his heroines reveal about the Woman Question, but to ask why the English young maiden became such a popular subject in the 1860s. Why was there suddenly a "brisk market" in the "inner life" of young women? What does the popularity of Trollope and his young heroines at mid-century tell us about Victorian perceptions of girlhood, the novel, and the relationship between the two? And, finally, what larger political and social issues lie behind the success of Trollope's adolescent young women as phenomenon in the 1860s? My approach does not explicate Trollope's novels but rather untangles some of the associations and cliches surrounding his heroines, and, by so doing, reads them back into their cultural and critical context.

Indeed, I would argue that a more complicated picture of the Trollopean young woman heroine is already evident in the Saturday Review assessment. While some Victorian commentators found it slightly odd that a middle-aged man could have such access into the "hearts and minds" of the female sex, reviewers appeared not to notice another troubling connection evident in the above

account for this generational difference; as Harrison states, "it is now rather silly to be a 'young lady' at all" (197). The most comprehensive analysis of these changes in public taste is found in Rafael Helling's A Century of Trollope Criticism (1956).

epigraph.⁷ The "market" in "young women" evokes a range of associations usually reserved for the truly commodified -- the prostitute. The "brisk trade" in their "inner life" suggests both a transgression between private and public spheres and an unprecedented interest in portraying young women's subjectivity for public consumption.

This interest is tellingly dramatized in two incidents involving Trollope's heroines. The first is from Trollope's first truly popular and commercially successful novel, Framley Parsonage. The novel, which appeared in monthly parts in the Cornhill Magazine (1860-1861) with illustrations by John Everett Millais, was written, according to the specifications of the publisher, to be "an English tale, on English life, with a clerical flavour" (qtd. in Hall 11). In this vein, Trollope tells the story of a young clergyman, Mark Robarts, who unwittingly gets involved with a "fast" set and signs his name as collateral to cover a friend's debtor's bill. The "love interest" centers on his sister Lucy -- a typical Trollope heroine, "so uncommonly brown" and "insignificant" -- who falls in love with Lord Lufton, a man much above her humble station.

7 Harrison notes that it is "a curious problem how the boisterous, brawny, thick-skinned lump of manhood whom we knew as Anthony Trollope ever came to ... see so deeply and so truly into the heart of ... maiden meditations" (197).

Lucy is "perhaps the most natural English girl that I ever drew," Trollope states in his Autobiography, "the most natural, at any rate, of those who have been good girls" (143).⁸ Trollope's qualification alludes most probably to his more transgressive heroines like Lady Glencora Palliser; his comment suggests not only that there are different categories of "naturalness" but that he might have preferred the latter "bad" or "contrary" types.⁹ Yet my focus is on the good girls, those who, in James's understanding, "have a kind of clinging tenderness, a passive sweetness which is quite in the old English tradition" (PP 128-129).

Lucy Robarts, who is neither clinging nor passively sweet, is nonetheless an exemplar of girlish goodness. Fearing that "the sneers of the world" (and Lady Lufton's in particular) would assume that she had deliberately set out to ensnare a wealthy husband, the young woman refuses to accept Lufton's hand when he proposes marriage. When

8 See John Glavin's "Trollope's 'Most Natural English Girl'" for the novelist's use of natural imagery and "seasonal myth" to reinforce Lucy's life-like qualities. As Glavin also notes, Trollope's assertion that Lucy's love is "downright honest" is untrue (484).

9 Nardin points out Trollope's preference for and fascination with "contrary" heroines who "diverge from the ideal of homebound innocence" (24). The Victorian commentator Stack mildly criticizes the novelist for his failure to move beyond the delineation of lighthearted girls in love and probe the "deeper chords in woman's nature," such as Lady Glencora's (Helling 91).

pressed for her reasons, Lucy lies to the lord and tells him it is impossible that she should be able to love him.

It is the aftermath of this scene, in which Lucy retires to her bedroom to cry in private, that Millais chose to illustrate. The picture, however, proved to be the source of much critical commentary precisely because it mirrored the problem I have been discussing: namely, did Millais' rendering of Lucy in her bedroom accurately represent the "inner life" of a young woman? Both the drawing and the controversy focused significantly more on Lucy's dress (suspended by her crinoline) than on her person. Millais' picture shows the young woman lying on her bed; the viewer's gaze is directed not to Lucy's face (which appears oddly impassive, or almost asleep) but to the abundant frills and folds of her dress that predominate in the foreground. According to one commentator, this illustration of Lucy fits perfectly with his idea of the heroine's expression of "natural girlish grief." For, in his view, "none of Mr. Trollope's figures in their wildest grief could be drawn except in their every-day dress." The drawing, he finds, is thus an appropriate tableau and in keeping with "the whole spirit of the book" (qtd. in Hall, Illustrators 18).¹⁰

¹⁰ Another critic, J.A. in Sharpe's London Magazine, whose hostility to Trollope's work is evident throughout his review, similarly finds this "personification of crinoline ... could not be a better emblem of the book." In J.A.'s sarcastic opinion, if novels were meant to represent "'solely the manners of the time ... [then]

But Trollope himself was outraged when he first saw the illustration; he found it "simply ludicrous" in its excessive attention to Lucy's clothing and claimed that it was a "burlesque" more appropriate for the pages of magazines like Punch. The novelist further wished that the picture might be "omitted" if it weren't too late. It was only after he had seen "the very pattern of that dress" that Trollope was appeased and convinced of the veracity of Millias' portrait (qtd. in Hall, Illustrators 15, 18, Trollope's emphasis).

It is clear from these reactions that the subject of the illustration is not Lucy but her dress, and though the dispute troubles distinctions between "natural" and "conventional" aspects of Trollope's heroine, these comments also point to a more problematic question concerning the rendering of young women's subjectivity. For the controversy over Lucy's dress touches on but ultimately evades the distinction between public and private selfhood: equating Lucy with her dress displaces her subjectivity onto her clothing. And while Victorian reviewers debated whether Millais sketched too many of Lucy's flounces, few questioned the artist's decision to

Framley Parsonage would be a 'model novel.'" In this way, the figure of Lucy Robarts with her "pretty woeful face and clasped hands and little pendant foot ... squeezed into odd corners to give due prominence to that mountain of flounces, are as the touches of real human nature which Mr. Trollope has sparsely scattered on the outskirts of his huge mass of conventionalism'" (qtd. in Hall, Illustrators 15).

focus on the young woman in a (conceivably) private space. The question of whether or not Lucy would weep in her crinoline thus sidesteps while it reveals a larger concern -- the desire to capture the "inner life" of young women. The scene is, of course, in the novel, but Millais' decision to portray Lucy in her bedroom, where she retires to lick her wounds in private, is similar to the dynamic underlying Trollope's success; pictorially and novelistically, such representations were aimed at fulfilling market demand -- providing the public with an inside view of the subjectivity of young womanhood. Interestingly, the success of this endeavor proved to be the source of much debate.

We can see a similar interest in the interiority of young heroines for public consumption in a letter George Eliot wrote to Trollope. Complimenting her fellow novelist on his success with Rachel Ray (1863), Eliot states:

I am much struck in Rachel with the skill with which you have organized thoroughly natural everyday incidents into a strictly related well proportioned whole, natty & complete as a nut on its stem.... But there is something else I care yet more about which has impressed me very happily in all those writings of yours that I know -- it is that people are breathing good bracing air in reading them.... They are like pleasant public gardens, where people

go for amusement, & whether they think of it or not, get health as well. (TL 1: 238)

Eliot's organic metaphor suggests the perceived "naturalness" of Trollope's creation, but the reference to public gardens implies an artificial construction that serves as an important collective space. Both the character and the text Rachel Ray are likened to a public thoroughfare; the salvific wholesomeness one imbibes on reading becomes almost a public service.

One wonders exactly what Eliot is referring to in her letter. Aside from the relative pleasures of reading this breezy novel, the plot, as many critics have noted, is surprisingly "thin"; its logic barely sustains the few mishaps on the way to matrimony between Rachel and her lover Luke Rowan. His driving ambition is to take over the town brewery in order to make better beer, and her dilemma concerns false rumors about her lover which hinder the courtship. Ultimately, there is little to trouble the final resolution of the story. Rachel "triumphs" in her love, as girls generally do, Trollope notes; her husband Luke, if he doesn't convert the townspeople's cider-drinking habits, at least succeeds in brewing "good beer."¹¹

11 And with the notable exception of Lily Dale, all of Trollope's young heroines of the 1860s likewise marry their chosen lovers. But the conclusion of Rachel Ray is a classic undercutting of traditional romantic endings: "A man's triumph is for the most part over when he is once allowed to take his place at the family table, as a

But behind this romantic pastoral is, as James Kincaid contends, a "specifically nationalist novel," celebrating "not only nature but English nature" and the particular form of English beauty (83). As Trollope writes, this beauty differs from the "fleshy" charms of the Italian, and from the American, which is "hard, and of the mind": English beauty is "of the heart" and "intended for domestic use."¹² Though the narrator is referring to Mrs. Butler Cornbury, his comments about this married beauty apply equally to the young Rachel: in both the "strongest feelings were home feelings" (83).

The nationalistic impulses which conflate the girl with her country are apparent throughout journalistic essays and reviews in the 1860s and reach a climax with Eliza Lynn Linton's influential 1868 "Girl of the Period" essay. Eliot's remarks about the curative powers of Rachel Ray point to a concern over the need to restore national health (a theme expressed in Linton's diatribe as well), and reveal an anxiety that the public somehow needs "good bracing air." Trollope's rural idylls, particularly his portrayal of the English countryside in right, next to his betrothed. He begins to feel himself to be a sacrificial victim, -- done up very prettily with blue and white ribbons around his horns, but still an ox prepared for sacrifice. But the girl feels herself to be exalted for those few weeks as a conqueror, and to be carried along in an ovation of which that bucolic victim ... is the chief grace and ornament" (392).

¹² Rachel Ray ed. P.D. Edwards. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1988. p. 83. Future references to this edition will be cited in the text.

the Barsetshire series, provided the reading public with this wholesome air, but it was a world that even his contemporaries noted was fast being "carted away."

Twentieth-century critics have likewise called attention to Trollope's anachronistic portrayal of England in the 1860s. The opening paragraphs of Dr. Thorne (1858), for example, begin with a paean to a pastoral English world which reveals an historical distortion: "England is not yet a commercial country in the sense in which that epithet is used for her," states the narrator; "she might surely be called feudal England or chivalrous England" (12). Raymond Williams rightly asserts that as "a description of mid-nineteenth-century England this is ludicrous ... [but] as a way of seeing it without extended question is perfect" (Country 175).

While Trollope's description is more wishful thinking than accurate depiction, Victorian readers responded with an equal degree of nostalgia. Chiding her fellow novelist for concluding his series, Margaret Oliphant reveals her longing for the pastoral world of Barset. "We did not ask that this chronicle should be the last," Oliphant emphatically states, "we were in no hurry to be done with our old friends." Other nineteenth-century reviewers likewise voiced their discontent and expressed desire to continue reading about the idyllic world of Barset, which they viewed as "a distinct country, to

which they longed to go, a dreamland at once remote and near and real" (Helling 116).

This nostalgic tone is evident in Eliot's letter; furthermore, her conflation of the girl with the text reveals that Trollope's heroines were a definite feature in this symbolic landscape, one which struck a resonant chord in the Victorian mind. And Oliphant, while she mourns the passing of Barsetshire, also reproaches Trollope for "cheating" his readers in regard to Lily Dale; in her view, Lily "had no business" to write "Old Maid" after her name, just as her creator had no business in not fulfilling Lily's "natural responsibilities" and providing "more satisfactorily" for her future (qtd. in Smalley 303).

Oliphant's objection to Lily's spinsterhood, while amusing in its literalness, demonstrates the role that young women were expected to play in Trollope's fictional world; their marriages would perpetuate the rural values of Barset and stem the forces of change. In this way, what is said of another brown-haired heroine, Mary Thorne, might well apply to the role of the Trollope girl in general: that they function as more than girls. While Mary's lover, Frank Gresham, "was only a boy," the narrator of Dr. Thorne states, "it behoved Mary to be something more than a girl." Trollope is referring to Frank's ability to declare his love with impunity (ignoring his family's dictate that he "marry money" to

save the Gresham estate), but it is Mary's responsibility to think about the larger social ramifications; for she "was in duty bound to be more thoughtful, more reticent, more aware of the facts of their position, more careful of her own feelings, and more careful of his."¹³

It is Lucy Robarts' job as well to think about "the world" when she decides to reject Ludovic Lufton. While he may be blind to the class difference between them, Lucy can afford no such luxury; in her words, she is "not such a philosopher as to disregard it."¹⁴ Although the world in general and Lady Lufton in particular will come round to acknowledging Lucy's true worth, her consciousness of the social codes governing the sexes demonstrates that marriage, in this novel, is conditioned more by communal than individual factors. And while Trollope writes in his Autobiography that "there must be love in a novel," his heroines' courtships reveal that there is more at stake than mere individual choice. As the authors of Corrupt Relations remind us, the predominance of courtship plots in Victorian novels often serves as "a framework for other, broader social concerns" (8). Both Mary and Lucy are required to be more

¹³ Doctor Thorne Introd. David Skilton. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics. 1980. p. 91. Future references to this edition will be cited in the text.

¹⁴ Framley Parsonage Introd. P.D. Edwards. Oxford: Oxford World's Classics. 1980. p. 196. Future references to this edition will be cited in the text.

cognizant of societal pressures; they must apply seemingly adult standards of responsibility to their love affairs, while their suitors throw caution to the wind.

The implied expectations that Trollope places on these heroines confirms that for women "it is only a short step from bearing the burden of a family's conscience and sensibilities to sustaining and regenerating the whole culture's values" (Barickman et. al 9). While this truism applies to the heroines of much Victorian fiction, it also instructs their real world counterparts, who are confined to a moralized separate sphere. Indeed, young women are held to different and higher standards than Trollope's young men; they show none of the carelessness of youth and more awareness of the duties of the adult "world" than their male counterparts. As the narrator of Dr. Thorne states, though Mary Thorne and Frank Gresham are nearly the same age, "she was a grown woman, [while] he was still a boy" (97). The difference in their levels of maturity is due, the narrator claims, to the fact that "women grow on the sunny side of the wall" (91). In contrast, Trollope writes of Mark Robarts and his other young men characters, "the stuff of which [their] manhood was to be formed had been of slow growth, as it is with many men ..." (501). These gender-bound formulations preclude Trollope's portraying a developmental stage approximating adolescence for his heroines. To be fair, Trollope

appears uninterested in representing this stage for women per se (his male characters dramatize much more complexly an awkward stage of adolescent "hobbledehoyhood"), but the hothouse account of his heroines' growth reveals the role they are to play in his novels; in order to uphold the social order and correct the shortsightedness of his young men, Trollope's young girls must quickly bloom into women.

In this way, almost all of the novelist's young heroines come of age offstage and before the central action of the novel. At sixteen, Lucy Robarts is not in "any prominent position" to merit narrative attention; but when she next enters the text, at "nearly nineteen," she is ready to take her part in Trollope's drama. As the narrator of Framley Parsonage states of Lucy's development:

Laying aside for the sake of clearness that indefinite term of a girl -- for girls are girls from the age of three up to forty-three, if not previously married -- dropping that generic word, we may say that then, at that wedding of her brother, she was a child; and now, at the death of her father, she was a woman. Nothing, perhaps adds so much to womanhood, turns the child so quickly into a woman, as such death-bed scenes as these. (116-117)

Though Trollope lays aside the indistinct term of "girl," he does so only to equate it more completely with

"woman." This sentence thus works much the same way as his previous aphorism -- both quickly force the growth of the girl into the full bloom of womanhood.

But if Trollope is uninterested in tracing female development, he is concerned with focusing on his young heroines' "inner lives" prior to their married state. Although exploring young women's thoughts during the most important events of their nineteenth-century lives -- courtship and marriage -- was certainly not innovative on Trollope's part, the attention with which he detailed their subjectivity was acclaimed by his contemporaries as a new theme. Moreover, as we have already seen, Victorian readers, in commending Trollope for this special insight, also stressed their interest in reading about his heroines' interiority. "I understand, Mr. Trollope your knowing what a young gentleman and a young lady say to each other when they are alone together," asked one woman of the author, "but how can you possibly know the way that two young ladies talk to each other while brushing their hair?" Trollope responded by saying, "It's not by listening at the keyhole, I assure you," yet his jocular answer hints at a covert desire for surveillance (qtd. in Terry 96).

The mid-Victorian emphasis on and interest in young women's subjectivity is similar to the process described by Nancy Armstrong in Desire and Domestic Fiction. Tracing the formation of the ideal middle-class woman who

emerges from her reading of late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century conduct literature, Armstrong notes the increasing stress on women's subjective rather than objective qualities; this movement simultaneously dismantled "the aristocratic body" and produced "a figure of female subjectivity, a grammar really," which would later be diagrammed in the nineteenth-century novel (77; 60). The new female subject whose inward qualities were lauded above outward wealth and display was crucial, Armstrong claims, to the establishment of middle-class hegemony and indeed predated its formation by almost a hundred years.¹⁵ In Trollope's time, the ascendancy of the middle-class was already complete. But what is useful for my purposes is not the dating but the dynamic itself; for Trollope enacts a similar movement. Writing in an era of vast social change, the novelist reinscribes value in the subjective qualities of his heroines. As one nineteenth-century reader recognized, by painting the "trials and agonies" of young women, Trollope shows "the essential soundness and reality of the mental and moral crisis..." (Harrison 197).

Trollope is not interested in overturning the aristocratic ideal so much as he is in "infusing new blood" into a moribund ruling class. In this way, Dr. Thorne (1858) may be read as a novel which champions the

15 Armstrong elaborates on this historical paradox in Chapter Two, "The Rise of the Domestic Woman."

success of individual merit over "blood," and by so doing revitalizes an effete aristocracy. Though she rejects her lover's advances, base-born (and indeed illegitimate) Mary Thorne is convinced of her internal worth over any aristocratic partner Frank could choose: "No wealth, no mere worldly advantage could make any one her superior," Mary thinks. Yet, despite these beliefs, she feels duty-bound to relinquish her lover. Mary's musing on what makes a gentlewoman and her conclusion that "inner reality" is superior to "blood" or worldly rank is a lesson she sets out to teach Frank's class-minded sister, Beatrice, and the readers of Trollope's novel (93).

Similarly, though Lady Lufton would prefer the more genteel Griselda Grantly as a partner for her son, it is Lucy's "ready wit and speaking lip" which attract Ludovic's attention. But Lucy, like Mary, will not marry until she is accepted on her own terms by her lover's aristocratic family. When Lord Lufton proposes a second time to Lucy, this time approaching her brother Mark, the young woman answers with a precondition: she will not marry Lufton until his mother requests it. In what must be one of the strangest proposal scenes in Victorian fiction, Lady Lufton agrees. "And now I have come here, Lucy," the noblewoman states, "to ask you to be his wife" (552). In this marriage by proxy the moral forces of two women are united: Lady Lufton, Framley Parsonage's Tory dowager and novelistic "conscience" -- who defends East

Barset from the Whiggish threat in the West -- is given "new life" by the "fiery" young Lucy without really yielding any of her power. And the pastoral world, never seriously under attack, as Kincaid notes, "almost seems to be undertaking colonization, with Lady Lufton as Empress" (121). But, more importantly, this scene quite literally illustrates a generational continuum: English class status and "natural" values are passed down through a female line.

2.

As almost every contemporary critic of Trollope has remarked, the Barsetshire novels are prose idylls dealing, in Kincaid's words, "with an epic theme: the establishment and preservation of a civilization" (92). And yet there is relatively little to threaten this pastoral world; much of the movement of the novels is towards a celebration of "victory" over the forces of change (Kincaid 92). But while scholars have acknowledged the part that the Barsetshire heroines play in upholding this moral order, few have examined Trollope's portrayals against the backdrop of a larger ideological debate being waged about "girlhood" in the 1860s. Trollope's novels of the 1860s, historically anachronistic though they may be, were written in a decade of social and political upheaval; both the second Reform Bill and the campaign for woman's suffrage threatened to overturn established class and gender hierarchies. And, as Armstrong has

speculated, the movement to posit new value in woman's subjectivity is a way of establishing class control and of diverting heated political issues. Trollope, by focusing on his heroines' inner lives, may be said to similarly reinscribe value in female subjectivity; it is quite likely that this dynamic conceals while it reveals a fear of social change.

We can see that defining girlhood and accounting for young women's innermost thoughts took on new urgency in the 1860s, and indeed masked more politically charged issues. In Dinah Mulock Craik's 1864 essay, "In her Teens" (ostensibly a review of a volume of poems, Thoughts from a Girl's Life, by Lucy Fletcher), the essayist calls attention to the problematic construction of "girls." Underscoring that definitions such as "natural" and "artificial" were loaded categories, Craik bemoans the fact that "it is rather difficult now-a-days to find a 'girl' at all, [for]they are, every one of them, 'young ladies;' made up of hoop and flounce, hat and feather, plaits of magnificently (bought) hair, and heaps of artificial flowers" (219). Though she calls on her audience's help in finding "an original natural 'girl'" anywhere "from twelve to twenty," the reviewer's quotation marks reveal that the "girl," like the sartorially-obsessed "young lady," is a constructed fiction. And Craik's nostalgic tone, similar to the longing expressed by Trollope's readers, attests to a

feeling of a world already lost; in this case, the wistful mood is due to the scarcity of the "natural girl" who is fast becoming an endangered species.¹⁶

Craik's essay is both a call to arms and a meditation on the equivocal state of female adolescence or girlhood. Unlike Trollope's characterization of this stage, the essayist acknowledges that "the years between twelve and twenty are, to most, a season anything but pleasant"; they are rather, she states, "a crisis in which the whole heart and brain are full of tumult, when all life looks strange and bewildering." But her solution to this "mysterious life" is to restrict young women from self-expression: "The less a girl writes the better -- that is publishes," Craik asserts: "almost all girls write, and nothing will stop them" (220; 222).

Craik's prohibition expresses a fear that the girl's literary production will supersede the woman's "natural" domestic duties -- an anxiety about women writers that was commonplace in the nineteenth century. But her

16 Craik is not original in her call for an old-fashioned girl nor in her nostalgic tone. An 1848 essay ironically titled "Nice Young Ladies" in Hogg's Weekly Instructor (intended for a lower-class audience) likewise bemoans the fact that "there is now no such thing as a girl -- a real, ingenuous, helter-skelter, loving, unsentimental piece of nature" (318). According to this journal, "nice" young ladies are slaves to fashion, forcing themselves into premature womanhood with their make-up and crinoline. The reviewer also mourns the loss of "some distinctive epoch betwixt childhood and womanhood, entitled girlhood," which he also sees as a thing of the past (318)

repeated insistence on curtailing young women's youthful self-expression has more sinister ramifications. For, in many ways, her prohibitions confirm Cora Kaplan's thesis about the importance of puberty as "the second determining stage of gender identity in culture," one which marks distinctions between public and private speech and in which "women's apparently weaker position in language is set" (77). In her reformulation of Lacan, Kaplan theorizes that puberty fulfills "the promises of the oedipal resolution" -- in Lacanian terms the entry into the Symbolic order or the world of adult language -- but that, for young women, this stage often finalizes a difference between patriarchal public speech and women's more "restricted speech" (76-78). Kaplan is careful to present her analysis as hypothesis, one which she states applies only to Western cultures, but her discussion of women poets -- whose subject matter often highlights the difficulty women experience at adolescence with access to "high culture" and language -- does much to confirm her thesis.

Kaplan's psychoanalytic account is certainly applicable to the nineteenth century; Craik writes of Miss Lucy Fletcher and other would-be girl poets, "long may she go on singing, unless her own contented heart teaches her a better song than all -- silence" (223). This concluding motto is ironic in light of the woman novelist's own literary productivity, but nevertheless

such a wish reveals a desire to curb female expression and to prevent young women from entering public discourse. In Kaplan's terms, the prejudice against women poets and prose writers "is intimately connected ... with the way in which women become social beings in the first place, so that the very condition of their accession to their own subjectivity, to the consciousness of self which is both personal and public is their unwritten acceptance of the law which limits their speech" (82).

And yet the prohibition against young women's speech does not appear to hold true for the Trollope heroine; for what distinguishes his young women is, most often, their verbal acuity. Lucy Robarts wins Lord Lufton's and eventually his mother's love with her "ready-witted" replies; though the latter prefers young women to exhibit the vis inertiae, Lady Lufton comes to admire "the very way" in which Lucy speaks her mind to the noblewoman (420). Lucy, Lady Lufton realizes, has "spirit" within her "insignificant" and "uncommonly brown" body, "that gift of fire" which makes her fit to be if not a "queen," at least a "woman" (520).

Mary Thorne is similarly endowed with what Trollope in her case calls "energy!" Again, the narrator calls attention to the heroine's stellar "mind and inner qualities" which, he claims, "are more clearly distinct to [his] brain than her outward form and features" (46). And though usually demure in demeanor, Mary "could talk,

when the fit came on her, with an energy which in truth surprised those who did not know her; aye, and sometimes those who did" (46). This linguistic energy (a euphemism for sexual passion as well) is also tied to Mary's innate moral superiority. In recounting an apparently minor incident from his heroine's youth, the narrator recalls how Mary's verbal daring first distinguished her from the "world at large." When Augusta Gresham's locket was stolen, Lady Arabella harshly accused the servant; but Mary's innate knowledge led her to speak out and reveal the true thief -- the French governess. Mary's refusal to keep quiet and her willingness to challenge her elder's opinions won her a special place in the household at Greshamsbury (47).

The turning point in Rachel Ray (that which delays the courtship) also revolves around Rachel's inner thoughts, particularly the difficulty that prevents her from expressing her love. When the village parson Mr. Comfort tells Mrs. Ray that Luke Rowan left Baslehurst embroiled in dispute with the brewer Mr. Tappitt and without paying his debts, he strongly advises his parishioner to put an end to Rachel's love affair. In this way, Rachel's mother instructs her to compose a formal reply to Luke's letter -- addressing him as "Dear Mr. Rowan," and concluding "Yours Truly," -- to break off the engagement (252). While the exact content of the letter is not as proscribed as the salutation, Rachel is

limited by what she can say. And though she rebels against the parson and thinks of disobeying, she is "bound by her woman's lot to maintain her womanly purity" and thus obeys "her pastors and masters" (265).

The chapter ironically entitled "What Rachel Ray Thought" reveals the restrictions on self-expression that govern the young woman's life. Although she thinks it unfair to undergo this censorship and surveillance by mother and parson, Rachel dutifully writes as she is bid; her duress is evident in the difficulty she has in composing her response. Though the incident may appear trite (as, some claim, the novel is on the whole), the injustice of Rachel's situation is made plain. She had followed the rules of courtship, not venturing "to love till her love had been sanctioned. It had been sanctioned, and she had loved; and now that sanction was withdrawn"; and as a consequence, she is "robbed of her sweetheart." (257). In this way, Trollope appears to be righteously pleading for the unhindered expression of young love; the inability of his heroine to express her innermost thoughts shows that censorship, when it comes to approved love affairs, is indeed a crime of the heart.

Trollope's feisty and outspoken heroines certainly appear to contradict, or in the case of Rachel Ray to show the inequitable results of, Kaplan's formulation that women's weaker position in language is set at puberty. In fact, these heroines are repeatedly praised

for their strong verbal skills and sharp tongues. Though the marriages which conclude Trollope's romantic comedies augur that domestic duties will almost certainly curtail the heroines' linguistic and social freedom, the novels themselves champion the expression of youthful subjectivity through language.

But while Trollope shows the need for young women to be able to express themselves publicly and indeed celebrates his young heroines' superior mental and verbal qualities, his portrayal of their subjectivity is mediated, necessarily, by his point of view. This middle-aged man with "great insight" into the hearts and minds of young women was certainly anomalous in some ways, yet Victorian readers, for the most part, readily accorded Trollope a privileged position. And I do not mean to imply that nineteenth-century readers and critics assumed a naive and unproblematic relationship between Trollope's depiction of fictional young women and "real life." On the contrary, as George Levine points out, nineteenth-century novelists and readers were consciously aware of realism as rhetorical strategy; the "'realist' effort" was a continuous "struggle," Levine asserts, to make contiguity with the "world out there" (8). In this way, the Saturday Review writes of Trollope: "His young women are capital -- very like real young women, and yet

distinct, ingenuous, and interesting" (qtd. in Smalley 184, my emphasis).¹⁷

What effect, if any, does Trollope's gender have on his portrayal of young women's subjectivity? Did it matter to the Victorians, or does it make a difference to twentieth-century readers, that his heroines' inner lives are seen through a male novelist's eyes? I believe that it is crucial that, in order "to understand gender formation within a culture," we avoid, in Auerbach's felicitous phrase, a "feminist literary separatism": restricting the portrayal of women's experiences to women writers would indeed create "new prisons," and, I believe, impoverish our understanding of girlhood in Victorian fiction and culture.¹⁸ And yet we might still ask if there are any notable differences in Trollope's portrayal of young womanhood from those of women novelists. We have already seen that both male and female

17 Moreover, to "supply this peculiar market creditably," the Saturday reviewer notes, "a novelist must not only have the gift of writing ... he must also have tact, discretion, and a gentlemanly taste" (qtd. in Smalley 185). Though the reviewer's language suggests the possibility of violation on the novelist's part (a prospect I alluded to in Millais' drawing), in Trollope's case realism is a tactful and gentlemanly mode.

18 (Beer 65; Auerbach 328, 326). See Auerbach's thoughtful essay "Women on Women's Destiny: Maturity as Penance" The Massachusetts Review (1979) 20:326-34 for the need to include "male visions." Gillian Beer in "Representing Women: Re-representing the Past" (in Belsey and More eds.) also calls for an examination of works by male and female authors in tandem, rather than "converting [difference] into current categories" (63).

Victorian novelists accelerate senescence in their young women characters. For different reasons, both Gaskell in "Lizzie Leigh" and Trollope in his portrayals of Lucy Graham or Mary Thorne forestall a more moderated development into womanhood. Furthermore, according to most nineteenth-century reviewers, Trollope's skill lay in his acute characterizations of the inner lives of young women in love. Yet Trollope's delineation of his heroines' abundant mental life cannot be equated with the self-expression of Craik's "girls" who, she fears, are narrating their own subjectivity by writing and publishing their innermost thoughts in the first person.

The differences between a male author's perceived ability to express female subjectivity and young women's direct self-expression can be illuminated, ironically, in a critical reaction to Dinah Craik's 1856 novel John Halifax, Gentleman. When the female novelist adopted a male persona to dramatize her tale, one reviewer criticized the novelist because, he notes, "she unwisely takes up her point of sight in the mind of a man." According to Richard Stang, the earliest modern usage of the term "point of view" was coined in this 1866 British Quarterly Review; "point of sight" was an equivalent term (107). Though the critic appreciated the different relationship of the narrator to the story, he found that the author's sex ultimately accounted for the "failure" of the novel; since Craik "has no understanding of how a

man's mind works," the work is ultimately flawed, for "the author has not solved her problem of point of view" (Stang 108).¹⁹

It is noteworthy that just when young women's perspectives were doing a brisk trade in the literary market the phrase that would define subjectivity and narrative verisimilitude was coined. While Trollope was credited with a unique ability to express the subjectivity of his heroines, Craik was criticized for her novelistic impersonation. Leaving aside questions of literary merit, this difference suggests that point of view was already a gendered category; Trollope was thought to be able to transgress gender boundaries in his representations, stepping outside of his male viewpoint, but Craik was bound by her female perspective. And though Victorian novel criticism was still in embryo, this nineteenth-century view pinpoints the very question feminist critics ask today: namely, in the words of Sandra Gilbert, "What is the relationship between gender and genre, between sexuality and textuality?" (qtd. in Nardin ix). We can see this alignment of sexuality and textuality not only in the criticism of John Halifax but

19 Though the Victorian reviewer was referring predominantly to the plethora of autobiographical novels, his criterion for success was the congruence between author and narratorial stance; in this way, David Copperfield was thought to be one best examples of a unified view, for both "hero and historian" were equal (Stang 109).

also in a revealing comment Trollope made about his prolific mother. As he notes in his Autobiography, one of her great failings, in his eyes, was her lack of objectivity; "whatever she saw she judged," Trollope states, "as most women do, from her own standing point" (qtd. in Nardin 12). While Frances Trollope could not divorce her sex from her text, it appears that her successful son Anthony could. Point of view, it seems, was intimately connected in the Victorian mind with female subjectivity. And while a woman's point of view was thought to be limited to her gender, the success with which nineteenth-century reviewers granted Trollope an accurate ability to portray young women's inner lives suggests that this formulation did not hold true for the male sex.

The term "point of view" as a critical category in Victorian aesthetics was both coined in the 1860s -- a decade marked by heightened interest in the "market" of young women's subjectivity -- and born in a crucial political moment. One of the themes of this dissertation has been to account for the ways in which the figure of the adolescent girl, whose ambiguous status is so often the site of textual disturbances, reveals larger social and cultural changes. That the aesthetic and political are interrelated around the figure of the young woman is seen in Craik's essay "In Her Teens." For it is significant that the essayist emphasizes the need for

confining young women to a private and domestic discourse in the very decade in which women's access to public language was first debated as a serious possibility: the female suffrage movement took place during the latter half of the 1860s (brought before Parliament by John Stuart Mill in June, 1866) and was predicated on women's right to enter into a public and political domain. That this is indeed a fear of Craik's and a subtext underlying her prohibition of women's speech is evident in the opening paragraph of her essay. "From a gynocracy, or even a self-existent, self-protecting, and self-dependent rule," she cautions, "heaven save us, and all other Christian communities!" (219). Curtailing young women's entry into public discourse -- in poetry or in politics -- not only denies them access to their own subjectivity, in Kaplan's terms, but also reinforces a patriarchal status quo.²⁰

²⁰ The idea of women's suffrage was ridiculed in journals throughout the 1860s, and cartoons, such as those in Punch, frequently depicted the figure of the young woman -- whose juvenility and frivolity were played up -- to undercut the validity of women's right to vote. For married women, opponents decried the need for female suffrage at all because, they maintained, a woman's position was already expressed in her husband's ballot. Granting women suffrage would either unfairly multiply the vote of the male head of the household (daughters and wives would automatically side with paterfamilias), the Saturday Review (30 March 1867) argued; moreover, such dependent thinking eliminates one of the prerequisites for voting. In the Saturday's terms, "independence has always been thought a desirable quality in a voter, and women are seldom independent" (386).

Trollope's success with meeting the Victorian demand for the brisk market in young women's inner lives must be seen in the context of these larger issues concerning female subjectivity. The stress on his heroines' interiority comes at a time of social change; highlighting the subjective both emphasizes middle-class values and assuages the public of a threat that "real" young women might express their minds on other matters. The increased interest in what young women were doing and saying reached epidemic proportions in 1868, a year in which Trollope was at the height of his reputation after the publication of The Last Chronicle of Barset (1867). The novelist was thought to have captured his era so completely that Sadleir decisively pronounced the novelist "the Voice of an Epoch." But this era was fast changing, and there was another "epoch-making" event in the 1860s: Eliza Lynn Linton's "Girl of the Period" essay. In that essay, the national interest in young womanhood reached sensational proportions and female adolescence was again encoded in other issues, this time imperial in nature.

Chapter Six

"Of Home Birth and Breeding": Eliza Lynn Linton and the
Girl of the Period

1.

Eliza Lynn Linton's essay "The Girl of the Period," published anonymously in 1868 in the Saturday Review, both provided a catchphrase and fueled a debate over the representation of women. Linton, the first full-time paid female newspaper writer, had earlier been a champion of women's rights both in her views and in her personal accomplishments. But in "The Girl of the Period" and in other essays that followed it -- such as "Foolish Virgins," "Modern Mothers," and "La Femme Pensee" -- Linton turned "turncoat," attacking modern womanhood in all its phases and advocating instead a return to motherhood and housekeeping as "women's first social duty" (Layard 139; Van Thal 79). Yet none of these other essays made as tremendous an impact as "The Girl of the Period." Not only did the essay sell more than forty thousand copies in pamphlet form, it also provoked a cultural sensation, permitting the merchandising of myriad forms of Girl of the Period "offspring" (Helsingier et al. 1: 113). There were Girl of the Period almanacs, comedies, waltzes, cartoons, parasols, bonnets, valentines, and a miscellany in the form of a thirty-two-page monthly with articles on French and Irish Girls of the Period (Bevington 112; Colby 17). One journal, Echoes From the

Club, even changed its name to the Period to capitalize on the excitement (Crow 202).

This textual and commercial proliferation suggests a need to codify and contain "representative" woman; it also points to a general concern about England's self-definition. Poised on the brink of empire and social transformation, the nation engaged in a public debate on the role of young women in national life. Linton's essay strikes a keynote for a decade anxious over the increasing democratization initiated by the Second Reform Bill of 1867, the expansion of Britain's international influence, the growth of industrial capitalism, and the Woman Question.¹ In addition, the Girl of the Period may be seen as a focal point for fears of class dissolution and societal changes, particularly those involving women's roles, which gained momentum in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Linton's attack on the Girl of the Period, the "pert modern miss of the sixties" (Colby 17), while certainly one of the decade's most vituperative attacks on women, is not the first of its kind. Rather, it comes at the end of much heated criticism of the manners and morals of the

¹ See Helsinger et al. for an excellent discussion and parodies of the Girl of the Period controversy. The authors acknowledge Linton's anachronistic idealization of True Womanhood, which largely ignores many of the issues in the woman question. Duncan Crow sees the essay as part of an attack on Emily Davies and her "strong-minded friends" (195). See also Nancy F. Anderson's biography of Linton, Woman Against Women in Victorian England, for an analysis of Linton's diatribes as expressing "projected self-hatred" (133) and "self-revolt" (135).

upper-middle-class girl, which also included attacks on the heroines of women's sensational novels.² The reactions to Linton's essay demonstrate, I suggest, that regulating the modern girl and controlling her presentation and representation is part of a larger struggle in England for national self-definition. Conflating girlhood with "distinctive national character" in the 1860s, the representation of women became a nationalistic -- and perhaps jingoistic -- enterprise.

Though antifeminist feeling was strong throughout the 1860s, it was young women, as future mothers, who received heightened scrutiny. In 1864, the novelist Dinah Mulock Craik warned that "the rise and fall of nations is mainly dependent on the condition of their women -- the mothers, sisters, daughters, wives -- who ... mould ... the natures, habits, and lives of the men to whom they belong." This being so, Craik asks, "Does it not behoove us ... to look a little more closely after our 'girls'?" ("Teens" 219). Craik indeed acknowledges the "strange conflicts" that occur as a result of living in a transitional age, but when she metonymically identifies teenage girls as symptomatic of all

2 Elaine Showalter notes that in her "Girl of the Period" series Linton attacked the sensationalist writers and their heroines, but she does not develop the point (177). To Vineta Colby, the Girl of the Period is a "sister of the high-spirited 'anti-heroines' who figure in a good deal of minor Victorian fiction from Mrs. Oliphant to Rhoda Broughton and M.E. Braddon" (17). Patricia Thomson also links Linton's Girl with Broughton's outspoken heroines asserting that they share "familiar attributes" (156).

that is most "artificial" in society she prefigures Linton's conflation of the girl with the period, though in a much less hostile way.

Four years later Linton makes a similar charge and bemoans the fact that Britain can no longer take pride in her women. For the "modern miss" is no better than the prostitute she seems to model herself after. The Girl of the Period, as Linton portrays her,

is a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the first articles of her personal religion; whose sole idea of life is plenty of fun and luxury; and whose dress is the object of such thought and intellect as she possesses.... Nothing is too extraordinary and nothing too exaggerated for her vitiated taste.... If a sensible fashion lifts the gown out of the mud, she raises hers midway to the knee. (340)

Although attacking the way women dress is nothing new, Linton's caustic remarks cap a decade of journalistic debates over extravagant clothing as "one of the prevailing vices of the age" (qtd. in Crow 119). The crinoline, which required extra material to clothe its circumference, was only one of the most obvious signs of increased wealth and display (Crow 119).³ Many reviewers, including Linton, were

³ The issue of the crinoline was widely discussed in the journals. One periodical, Town Talk, thought it ridiculous for the "public self-exhibition which it exacts" of its wearers. On a more serious note, the journal finds it a "sign, or symbol, of the general extravagance and inflation

fond of linking women's sartorial excess with moral turpitude, and some worried that such lavishness was a sign that the Empire was in decline (Van Thal 83; Oliphant 275).

In addition to the degeneration assumed to result from extravagance in dress, the clothes controversy reveals a breakdown in the symbolic hierarchy that distinguishes the classes. In another anonymous essay in the Saturday Review, "Costume and its Morals," Linton writes that "dress should ... be individual and symbolic, so as to indicate clearly the position and character which we desire to obtain and hold" (44). Arguing against the "sham" and "indecent" of modern women's dress, Linton expresses concern that

in its symbolism ... [such artifice] is in the highest degree objectionable, for it not only aims at what is unreal and false, but it simulates that which is positively hateful and meretricious, so that it is difficult now for even a practised eye to distinguish the high-born maiden or matron of Belgravia from the Anonymas who haunt the drive and fill our streets. (44)

The false representation that results from "pinchbeck" in women's clothing threatens not only class distinctions but also the Victorian belief in the moral and aesthetic value of realism: modern clothing "lacks that truthfulness which

of existing manners and customs; the emblem of a style of living out of all measure and compass" ("Crinoline" 5).

is, and should be, the base of all that is attractive and beautiful" (44).

At issue here is Linton's concern that women's "real value" is no longer clearly determined by their presentation. "It comes to be a grave matter of doubt, when a man marries, how much is real of the woman who has become his wife," Linton writes, "or how much of her is her own only in the sense that she has bought ... it" ("Costume" 45). Women not only "paint and powder" but they delight in display. Linton states that "the female bosom is less the subject of a revelation than the feature of an exhibition" (44). She was further alarmed that there was a booming trade in false parts, including "hair, teeth, complexion, ears, bosom, [and] figure" (45).

One may see in this stridency a concern both with artifice and the possibility that women's outward display will be misconstrued as "reality." Linton points to a troubling aspect of the growth of such novel cosmetics -- namely that they will alter the "real value" of womanhood itself. In many ways this concern with consumerism invites comparison with the growth of the commodity under industrial capitalism. Britain in the 1860s witnessed increased consumption, monetary expansion, and the evolution of the term "capitalism" into common currency (Weeks 21). But while there were many credit booms fostered by over-speculation in the cotton industry, there were also credit busts (particularly in the last few years of the decade), which

were triggered by overinflated values (Harcourt 89). It is tempting to speculate that anxiety over women's conspicuous consumption was a displaced expression of larger economic concerns.

Cultural critic Thomas Richards dates the Victorian obsession with the "new commodity culture" even earlier, starting from the 1851 Great Exhibition, and claims that it was then that such feats of production first became "autonomous icons" that "spoke for themselves" (4). In detailing this history, Richards charts the rise of the spectacle and advertising as particularly capitalistic modes of representation. Linton's concern with the sham commodification in women's costume also underlines a fear that such representation will indeed become a (false) system of signification in itself. She appears to be fighting against the degradation of womanhood in general, as if commercialism were endangering women's "real" value. Yet, ironically, her diatribe against misrepresentation in women's costumes was apparently based more on beauty advertisements than on life (Bevington 113).

In "The Girl of the Period" Linton also asserts that by imitating the demimonde in dress young women turn themselves into commodities. By modeling herself after her less respectable sisters, the girl of the period approaches them in "manner and feeling," which "leads to slang, bold talk, and fastness; to the love of pleasure and indifference to duty ... to uselessness at home, dissatisfaction with the

monotony of ordinary life ... in a word, to the worst forms of luxury and selfishness" (340). Linton's tone throughout this essay is harsh; she condemns young women for imitating men in their speech, and prostitutes in their dress, and for generally succumbing to a "national madness" (340). The essayist's ostensible target is the (upper) middle-class girl, who thinks only of herself and of snaring a wealthy husband for "his house, his carriage, his balance at the banker's, [and] his title" (340).

But Linton is not original in her attack on the fast girl of the period. In an article of July 1860, the Saturday Review had noted that while the tone of society had improved over the last hundred years it had "generated its own peculiar indecency -- the fast girl," whose modesty is a little "off" as she participates in "male" vices -- drinking, smoking, and betting (Bevington 109). As an index of civilized society, the modern girl became a scapegoat by which to judge the nation's ills. Furthermore, her "fast" character (a term of opprobrium that until the 1860s was more widely and harshly applied to men) was seen as distinctly a sign of the times. By the 1860s, according to the Victoria Magazine, "speed and high pressure everywhere [were] the order of the day" ("Latest Crusade" 194). The steam engine, transatlantic telegraph cables, and revolution in printing technology had "transformed society" -- but this transformation, the Victoria found, was having an adverse effect on both "individual and ultimately national

character," permitting little time for "self-examination" (194).

In its response to Linton's "Girl of the Period" essay, the Victoria (which was operated by the feminist Emily Faithfull) pleaded for female education as one of the ways of curing the afflictions of modern society. Furthermore, it recognized that Linton's essay targeted girls in "scarecrow" fashion to answer for "all that is most debased and intolerable" in British society (193).⁴ Though the magazine claimed such an assault was unwarranted, women were frequently cast as an index of national morality and rectitude. The Victoria cites a "want of earnestness" as the defining mood of the time, a result of increased material prosperity and the Pax Victoriana. Redirecting national attention away from the behavior and dress of young women (which it saw as only a distraction from a more imminent social "revolution"), the journal further states that "history plainly shows no country can afford to stand still,

⁴ The Victoria's astute observation may be seen as an instance of what Stan Cohen, discussing the youth crisis of the 1950s and 1960s, labels a "folk devil." According to Cohen, societies at various times (usually preceding social or legal transformation) identify "a condition, episode, person or group of persons ... as a threat to societal values and interests." Once targeted, this group is taken up by the mass media and produces a "moral panic [that] crystallises wide-spread fears and anxieties, and often deals with them by not seeking the real causes of the problems ... but by displacing them on to 'Folk Devils,' ... (often the 'immoral' or 'degenerate')." (qtd. in Weeks 14). The Victoria's response to the Girl of the Period controversy makes clear that Linton's Girl is indeed such a folk devil.

dry rot or foreign conquest must inevitably supervene" (197).

Historians and critics have only recently begun exploring the years 1866-1868 as an important turning point in British social and imperial history.⁵ Historian Freda Harcourt locates a "new phase of imperialism" beginning with Benjamin Disraeli's 1867 Abyssinian Expedition and urges scholars to look less toward the "official mind" and more toward periodicals for a "panoramic view" of imperialistic and social preoccupations (88, 87). According to Harcourt, "it is inconceivable" that for the Victorians the connections among reform, class dissolution, and British economic and international standing were "anything but obvious" (87). It seems clear from the Victoria's response to Linton that many of these concerns were indeed uppermost in the public mind; and the Girl of the Period controversy highlights these connections. While Nancy Fix Anderson finds it difficult in some ways to understand why Linton's essay created such a stir (given that her accusations were hardly

5 See John M. Mackenzie's Imperialism and Popular Culture for a valuable collection of essays discussing the ways in which imperialist ideology was at work in forms of popular culture. Jacqueline Bratton's contribution to this anthology, "Of England, Home and Duty, The Image of England in Victorian and Edwardian Juvenile Fiction," examines how "Englishness ... as a moral and ethical baseline, and therefore a starting point for the justification of Empire" works in boy's fiction (78). For girls, Bratton claims that "Englishness as a personal ideal" was emphasized later in the century (91). See also Robert Colls' and Philip Dodd's Englishness, Politics and Culture 1880-1920 for the preoccupation with the formation of Englishness and national identity in the culture during this period.

original [120]), I suggest that it was the timing of the piece, its coincidence with the national anxiety about the socio-political issues Harcourt outlines, that helped create the furor.

In addition, Linton's conflation of the girl with the period, and the subsequent controversy her essay provoked, reveals that the representation of women became a significant battleground for England's political self-perception. As postcolonial theorists claim, the "trope of nation-as-woman" underlines much nationalist rhetoric. Moreover, such construction usually depends on an image of woman as pure, maternal, and chaste (Parker et al. 6). In their introduction to Nationalisms and Sexualities, the editors note that both nationalism and sexuality are "volatile sites for condensing and displacing the ecstasies and terrors of political life" (Parker et al. 13). This assertion holds true for mid-Victorian England. And in the Girl of the Period controversy we can see the dynamics of this displacement at work; for the girl comes to stand both for a decade and her country.

2.

When Linton, for example, compared the modern girl to a prostitute, the analogy brought with it to the mind of mid-Victorian England a variety of class and social meanings. The prostitute was a storm center -- a figure who was both sentimentalized and feared, a target for class guilt and "a powerful symbol of sexual and economic exploitation under

industrial capitalism," as Judith Walkowitz notes (4). The prostitute was seen as "literally" and "figuratively" the "conduit of infection" between the classes (Walkowitz 4). Regulating her activities and controlling her sexuality became the subject of legal, medical, and journalistic discourses that culminated in the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s. But while the Acts "reinforced existing patterns of class and gender domination," they also generated discussions which served to deflect attention away from these class issues (Walkowitz 4, 41).⁶

Furthermore, according to Lynda Nead, prostitution "represented a nexus of anxieties relating to class, nation and empire" (94). Using the Greek and Roman civilizations as models, the Victorians were haunted by "the spectre of imperial decline," believing that such decline results from the "moral degeneration" of a people (Nead 93). As Nead states: "Morality was a central component within the ideology of empire. International leadership and the domination of foreign competition were believed to depend directly on the existence of a stable domestic base, and social stability, it was claimed, was a consequence of moral purity" (91).

⁶ While in the 1850s and 1860s there was no longer a fear of "revolution" resulting from "social inequity," according to Walkowitz, increased proliferation of discourses served as "diversions" from more heated class issues. It was in the 1850s that "prostitution was enshrined as the 'great social evil'" (Walkowitz 41-42).

When Linton compared the Girl of the Period to the demimonde, she played on these class issues and domestic fears.⁷ By modelling herself after "certain savages in Africa" or Madge Wildfire, the modern girl loses her "purity of taste," for she "thinks herself all the more beautiful the nearer she approaches in look to a maniac or a negress" ("Girl" 340). In her alliance with such marginalized figures, Linton's Girl threatens class distinctions. She not only is seen as decidedly "other," but she also loses her "distinctive national character" (340). The modern girl who brushes too closely against the demimonde thus bears the brunt of class contamination and the fear of class dissolution. Keeping her pure becomes an act of great national importance.

The concern with young women's innocence is part of the dichotomized Victorian view of women as either asexual angels in the house or as fallen creatures. But it is also, as Leonore Davidoff asserts, "directly related to the power

⁷ Though the Girl of the Period, like the prostitute, is a scapegoat for class issues, Linton's attack was again not original. Since 1860 the Saturday Review had been calling for a more realistic approach to the "Great Social Evil." Tired of what it considered a soft approach to prostitution, where every "fallen sister" became a "heroine of a sentimental tale," the journal articulated a need for increased police regulation (qtd. in Bevington 109). In addition, it saw the real "social evil" in the increased contact between the modern girl and her shameful sisters, in which not only were "the manners of the courtezans ... creeping into the verge of the court," but such courtesans had become "the goddesses of modern fashion ... the extant models, in manners and conversation, of the British fast young lady" (qtd. in Bevington 109).

structures of gender and class" (23). Davidoff states that in rescue work young women "carried the burden of purity and pollution and indeed of projected male sexuality" (Davidoff 22).⁸ This fascination with young girls was part of an attempt to control not only the perceived sexuality of the lower classes but also that of middle-class males. In addition, such containment of sexuality was also believed to quell class guilt, disorder, and, in economic terms, "the immoral forces of the market" (Davidoff 20). Anthropologist Mary Douglas asserts that in primitive societies, ideas of pollution act as powerful enforcers of social boundaries and that "wherever [such] lines are precarious we find pollution ideas come to their support" (qtd. in Delamont and Duffin 23). Her findings apply to the mid-Victorian climate surrounding the passage of the Reform Act of 1867, which opened the franchise to some members of the working class and most of the middle class, and the campaign for women's suffrage. Focusing on young women's purity may thus serve to deflect attention from more serious class politics.

When Linton compared the modern girl to her fallen sisters, she was also responding to a relatively recent cultural phenomenon -- the high visibility of the "queens" of the Victorian demimonde who first appeared publicly in

⁸ Davidoff asserts that this preoccupation with young girls was "reinforced by the legal system" and is apparent in the age differences of many marriages. Often an older man would raise a ward to be his future wife. Furthermore, this concern contributed to the paradoxical belief in both young girl's innocence and their inherent corruption (23).

Hyde Park in the early 1860s (Mitchell 75). These "Anonymas" of the marketplace, successful prostitutes, also complicated visible class markers by imitating upper-class women in their dress and their lifestyles. Extravagantly clothed, they were seen riding in their carriages in the park, where one of them, Catherine Walters (a.k.a. Skittles), is said to have caused traffic jams by the attention she excited.⁹ In their dress and manners, as they frequented the opera or luxuriated in their suburban villas, such hetairas were imitating the life of the upper-middle-class woman (Crow 216; 213). Even lower-class prostitutes, the painted women on the street, imitated in their showy dress "the conspicuous display of Victorian ladies" (Walkowitz 26).¹⁰

The irony of the Girl of the Period imitating the demimonde imitating the upper class may have been lost on Linton. But what this imitation of dress reveals is that the visible signs of class consciousness were becoming

⁹ Skittles was also the subject of a scandal when in 1861 her portrait by Edwin Landseer hung in the Royal Academy with the title "The Shrew Tamed" (Nead 61). According to Nead, this painting was remarkable in that it did not show a fallen woman suffering "the wages of sin" and because it subverted the class codes of moral respectability usually associated with portraiture (62). The Victorians relied on such visible codes. That a portrait of a courtesan "hung on the walls of the Royal Academy signified a breakdown in the distinction which separated the pure from the fallen" (Nead 61).

¹⁰ According to Walkowitz, however, this aping of class costume was mostly "lost on self-righteous middle-class observers." She further states that for most prostitutes, as opposed to the queens of the demimonde, a closer examination proved this affluence of dress to be "illusory" (26).

increasingly unstable. In her emulation of the forms of female deviance -- namely the indulgence in "pleasure" and "display" -- the Girl complicates the tropes of respectability the Victorians used to categorize women (Nead 180). As Linton's harsh tone makes clear, there was "a sense of urgency in this appeal for absolute categories" separating the respectable from the non-respectable woman (Nead 180). At issue is that the "real" woman and her presentation are at variance, which complicated Victorian notions of decorum and further confused the predominant belief in mimesis as an aesthetic and morally viable category.

While Linton accuses the Girl of the Period of modeling herself after the demimonde she also asserts that such imitation is fruitless. Not only do men fear this modern girl "with her false red hair and painted skin," but they do not take her seriously: "she is only a poor copy of the real thing; and the real thing is far more amusing than the copy, because it is real" (340). Linton's concern with mimesis is reminiscent of Luce Irigaray's theory about the self-consciousness involved when women attempt to write themselves into a discourse:

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself simply to be reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself ... to "ideas," in particular to ideas about herself, that are

elaborated in/by masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language.

(qtd. in Russo 223)

One may see the Girl of the Period controversy as reenacting this process. The modern girl, playing with the tropes of female representation, self-consciously attempts to reclaim a space for (self) representation. Though Linton asserts that young women misread these tropes, one may see also in this emulation a more complex awareness of the "male" codes that govern female display. In the more balanced responses to Linton's "Girl of the Period," most notably those by Henry James and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, it is indeed apparent that the source of this playing with female dress is inexorably tied to the young man of the period, whose desires are responsible for shaping the Girl's imitation. In her article "Whose Fault is It?" Braddon points to the degenerate young man whose scorn for "everything domestic as 'slow'" encouraged the Girl to model herself after the fast: "Who taught the girls of England this hateful slang? who showed them -- nay, obtruded upon and paraded before them -- these odious women?" (214). Claiming that "when men cease to admire vicious women, good women will cease to imitate them.... When the apotheosis of the courtesan is over, modesty will come into fashion again." Braddon defends the

"weaker" sex by again positing male desire as the shaping force behind young women's symbolic fall (215).

Similarly, in his review of the American edition of Linton's collected articles from the Saturday Review, Modern Women and What is Said of Them, James finds the improprieties of young women understandable only as part of the follies of young men. He writes that women "reflect with great clearness the state of the heart and imagination of men," for it is men who "give the ton -- they pitch the key" of society. Unlike Braddon, however, James does not see the "follies of modern civilization" as part of a general degeneration, but rather as one of the "blunders" that occur as a result of progress ("Women" 334).

While James encourages the new freedom of women, Linton condemns the Girl of the Period as a "loud and rampant modernization" ("Girl" 340). She posits instead the "genuine girl of the past" who is the model of British womanhood. By this she means "the ideal of womanhood ... of home birth and breeding," an advantage English girls presumably have over their European or American counterparts. Indeed, Linton states, "a fair young English girl [is] something franker than a Frenchwoman, more to be trusted than an Italian, as brave as an American but more refined, as domestic as a German and more graceful" (339).

Significantly, this girl, "with her tender little ways and pretty bashful modesties," is distinctly a fiction, a product of a rural past in which "love in a cottage" was the

romantic ideal (Linton, "Girl" 340). This myth of an idyllic rural England was perpetuated in both literature and painting and, according to Nead, was important because it helped form a "national identity" based on the "ideological continuity between the past and the present" (40). When Linton compared the Girl of the Period to the demimonde, she invoked a decidedly urban figure, as the Girl's alliance with the prostitute -- a figure of urban and modern life -- makes clear. But Linton's ideal English girl is indeed a "girl of the past." Not only was the image of love in a cottage irrelevant to a world where many "redundant" women had to work and many more to forego marriage, such representation was also anachronistic in the changing socio-political climate of mid-Victorian England. By the 1860s, though its ideal of itself remained rural, England was a thoroughly "urban and industrial" country (Howkins 62). Thus the romantic girl of the past (an increasingly impossible vision) and the modern girl of the period become mythical figures in an ideological debate over English self-representation.

Paradoxically, it was Linton herself who was accused of treason for her attack on the "representation of English womanhood." One particularly enraged reader suggested she receive a sound thrashing for her lack of patriotism (Layard 145). Even the satirical journals, most notably Punch and Judy, defended British womanhood from what the latter publication dubbed the "Saturday Sneerer." Outraged at this

attack on upper-class girls, "the pride and flower of England," Judy, using Linton's own words, accuses her of creating a "new race of women utterly unlike the old insular ideal" ("Sneerer" 297). The anonymous Linton, whom Judy also labeled a "miss-creant" (Layard 144), thus serves as a lightning rod, drawing to herself the heated debate about the publicity surrounding the nation's girls. An April 1868 cartoon sketch of a "Prurient Prude" drawn by Matthew Morgan for the Tomahawk further illustrates the censure heaped on the Saturday Reviewer. It shows an old woman deliberately misrepresenting a young girl whose portrait she paints with demonic features. The legs of her easel are covered in true modest style, but the painter's brush is dipped in venom and gall.

When Linton posited a "genuine girl of the past" who was "romanesque" as the antithesis of the modern girl, she invited an excursion into narrative, her diction invoking both the adjectival and the literary meaning. According to Craik, there is something "decidedly adjective" about young women; they appear unformed, a collection of qualities until they become women or "noun substantive(s)" (Thoughts 96). Linton always considered herself a defender of "true womanhood," and by this she meant women who embodied adjective qualities -- "sweet and dainty and delectable" (qtd. in Layard 148-149). The "brown-haired girls at home" who are Linton's English ideal are fictional characters of the dovecot stamp (Linton, "Girl" 339-340). Retiring and

domestic, they do not assert themselves or make spectacles like the modern girl. Rather, this "genuine" girl's role is to chronicle her life in her person: "the tile-page of which you may read in her quiet countenance; her manner ... her unflinching interest in all things and people" (Craik, Thoughts 16).

That the girl of the past forms the grammar of the narratives that other's write but does not write her own is clear in the responses to Linton's essay. In the Tomahawk, the modern girl is not only an aspect of punctuation, "a girl who is too fast to mind her proper stops," but also a verb to be declined: "The Future of Woman -- This, otherwise irregular verb forms its future regularly, 'I will, or shall, woo-man.' Its optative mood takes the form of an infinitive heir-ist" ("Girl" 153). Punch also takes advantage of the potential for grammatical punning: "If the Girl of the Period is as she is represented, the sooner a stop is put to her the better" (qtd. in Layard 144). The replies to Linton's essay -- songs, almanacs, miscellanies, plays and parodies -- represent a flurry of textual proliferation that not only capitalized on a unique marketing opportunity but also became an exercise in linguistic dueling.

The anonymous Linton was believed to have started all the fuss. In the original essay, in which satire and caricature predominate, Linton claims that it is only when things have come to a terrible state that censure of women

manifests itself. This "fall" into writing is part of a tradition, as Helena Michie reminds us in The Flesh Made Word, about "the assumed purity, innocence, and relative iconicity of spoken language" (103). Linton blames the debasement on the Girls of the Period: "It is only when [women] have placed themselves beyond the pale of masculine respect that such things could be written as are written now" (340). The invocation of the "fall metaphor," Michie notes, "in turn throws into relief the figure of the fallen woman who comes to stand for rhetoric, ornament, manipulation, and insinuation -- for all the seductions of language" (103). Indeed, it is the essayist herself who comes under attack for being a fallen creature. One reviewer of Linton's Modern Women collection writes of this link between writing and prostitution:

The general impression received from these varying and very unequal essays is that the Girl of the Period is entirely worthy of the Critic of the Period. In him the fine elements of satire are as degenerate as those of dressing and pleasing in her; extravagance, coarseness, and commonness characterize both; and if the girl has taken her costume and manners from Anonyma, it appears that the critic has formed his ideas and opinions upon the same authority. ("Modern Women" 639)

Though mistakenly identifying the critic as male, the reviewer later admits the work of several (probably female)

hands (640). Linton's literary excesses, her manipulation and distortion, were seen as a fall from the usually high standards of the Saturday Review.

Like this Atlantic Monthly reviewer, James accuses Linton of the same charges she herself levelled against the Girl of the Period; he condemns the essays as "all equally trivial, commonplace, and vulgar" ("Women" 332). James also points out that the critic bears the brunt of the scorn. "As we read the volume, modern women -- heaven save the mark! -- passed quite out of our thoughts, and our attention transferred itself to modern scribblers" (333). Linton's Girl of the Period, with her "slang, bold talk, and fastness," is more appropriately seen as the Girl's critic.

While the responses to Linton's article alleged that the reviewer herself was a sister of Anonyma, they also repeatedly asked where her fictional Girl of the Period was to be found. Most journals were certain that the essayist borrowed from the sensationalism that was in the air. James thought the comparison of this girl with the demimonde "a wanton exaggeration [done] in the interest of sensationalism" ("Women" 334). Furthermore, he faults the reviewer for a complete lack of style and grace as well as for her "colloquial slanginess," calling the entire publishing history "an almost inconceivable spectacle" (332-33). In "Mrs. Punch's Letters to Her Daughter," the satirical magazine ridicules both women's suffrage and the Girl of the Period, who casts her vote based on the

candidate's ability to defend her from "those horribly critical creatures who find fault ... and want us to leave off chignons and Sensational novels" (143). Most responses to Linton's article link the general decline of manners and morals with the increase in sensational novels. In the words of the Victoria Magazine, that "overwhelming swamp of books and papers which, hasty and ill-digested, it is a sacrilege to call literature" ("Latest Crusade" 194-195). Sensational fiction, particularly that written by women writers, was perceived to be the staple food for the girl of the period.

In her 1867 review of novels for Blackwood's Magazine, Margaret Oliphant had identified the "young woman of the period" as the fast heroine of sensational fiction, particularly in the works of Braddon and Broughton (265). The phrase did not become a catchword, as did Linton's, but the debate over these novelists' heroines was a source of controversy throughout the 1860s. Responding in part to a review in the Revue des Deux Mondes that praised Annie Thomas and Edmund Yates as "representative novelists of England," Oliphant writes that such praise is an injury to "our national pride" (260-61). As a "test of [a country's] moral standard" (Dicey 557), sensational literature, particularly that written by women, was perceived as a threat to national integrity.

Indeed, women sensation writers were often faulted for their "pernicious and disgusting lucubrations," and according to the Victoria these works contributed to the

demoralization of the country ("Latest Crusade" 200). Similarly, Oliphant writes that the "wickedness of man is less ruinous, less disastrous to the world in general, than the wickedness of woman" (275). After scolding women for writing shamefully and claiming that "women's rights and women's duties have had enough discussion," Oliphant insists that "a woman has one duty of invaluable importance to her country and her race which cannot be over-estimated -- and that is the duty of being pure. There is perhaps nothing of such vital consequence to a nation" (275). Addressing a particular moment in Indian history, the postcolonial critic, R. Radhakrishnan asks, "Why is it that the advent of the politics of nationalism signals the subordination if not the demise of women's politics? Why does the politics of the 'one' typically overwhelm the politics of the 'other'?" (58). His query is equally valid for the mid-Victorian debates over women's literary and political representation. For Oliphant, consistent with the Victorian rhetoric that subsumed women's rights under women's duties, also aligns such duties with patriotic responsibilities. Like Linton, she links the depiction of young women with the race and the nation.¹¹ Moreover, according to these beliefs, it is

¹¹ Jane Mackay and Pat Thane assert that a "clearly defined, uncontested, image of the Englishwoman is surprisingly elusive in this period [1880-1920]", but that her superiority was apparently measured by the extent to which her domestic and maternal qualities exceeded those of other women. They further claim that women were identified more with the race than the nation, though the term "race" was "slippery" throughout this period (192). One may see the Girl of the Period controversy as a prelude to the

important for any representation of women to stress chastity and purity. Women sensation novelists not only violate the canons of respectability when they portray women as other than innocent, but they also commit a form of treason.

In her other essays on women, Linton, too, describes the importance of their duties to the nation. In "Modern Mothers," which also appeared in the Saturday Review in 1868, she bemoans the fact that "society has put maternity out of fashion" (268). Her rhetoric suggests the plots of the sensation novels Oliphant and her ilk were condemning: for instance, she claims that "this wild revolt against nature, and specially this abhorrence of maternity, is carried to a still greater extent by American women, with grave national consequences resulting" (268). Betraying her class consciousness, Linton castigates mothers who selfishly leave the care of their children to working-class nursemaids: "A great deal of other evil ... is taught in the nursery; a great deal of vulgar thought, of superstitious fear, of class coarseness" (269).¹² Similarly, in a heated letter to the editors of the Daily Graphic condemning their illustration of "Lady Footballers at Play," she states that "the woman who violates the canons of modesty of her own preoccupation with Englishness and imperialism that was to occupy the latter half of the nineteenth century.

12 Linton's fear of "class coarseness" perhaps also carries sexual overtones. Davidoff contends that class and gender divisions were often formed in the nursery, and that it was thought that nursemaids were the ones "who first awakened sexual as well as other feelings" in children (23, 24).

times is as reprehensible as if those canons were as essential as the elementary crimes and obligations of organized society" (qtd. in Van Thal 89).¹³ As we can see in these debates over women's representation, the only acceptable image of public woman was as modest and maternal. Sensation novels -- and criticism drawing upon their modes of expression -- invoked this image's opposite.

Oliphant likewise uses the tropes of prostitution to describe the productions of these public women, the sensation novelists such as Braddon and Broughton. Furthermore, her metaphors apply to the young women readers who no longer crave the wholesome fare of novelists like Walter Scott, but require more stimulating "mental food." Arguing that sensational novels come from the "lower strata" of fiction, Oliphant links such works with a literary demimonde.¹⁴ In a word reminiscent of this transaction, she

13 Linton was not entirely consistent nor entirely misogynistic in her views towards women. In 1885 she wrote that "women should have an education as good in its own way as, but not identical with, that of men; that they ought to hold their own property free from their husbands' control ... [and] that motherhood should be made legally equal with paternity" (qtd. in Van Thal 74). Vineta Colby writes that such inconsistency "is not mere waywardness, nor the reflection of an irrational, hysterical nature," but rather mirrors Linton's own times (22).

14 See Lynda Nead's Images of Sexuality for a provocative analysis of the debates surrounding "low" and "high" culture in painting and the way in which class and national identities were shaped around these issues. In many ways Nead's conclusions invite interesting comparisons with the mid-century debate over literature and "light literature" mirrored in Oliphant's essay.

urges Braddon to be true to her "clientelle" by following her own imagination and not borrowing plots from other authors, most notably Charles Reade (265). These works from the "lower regions of book-making," which "circulate everywhere," are a threat to young women readers, who -- Oliphant claims in a touch reminiscent of Linton's evocation of a mythic rural idyll -- were formerly free from such corruption.

In addition, the "female monopoly" that women sensation novelists had over the literary marketplace in the 1860s was viewed unfavorably as an inappropriately commercial enterprise. Challenging the single notion of the father/author figure for women writers, Catherine Gallagher proposes another ancient literary metaphor -- that of "the author as whore" ("George Eliot" 40). Gallagher distinguishes between a procreative father/author who "generates real things in the world through language" and the sterile whore in whom "language proliferates itself in a process of exchange through the author" ("George Eliot" 41). This metaphor is particularly apt for women sensation novelists who were seen as answering only to the demands of the marketplace: they too had lost their "modest, maternal" qualities in moving into the commercial literary demimonde.

The client of sensational fiction is the (upper) middle-class girl, the patron of Mudie's and the fast young

lady in Linton's essay.¹⁵ Elaine Showalter describes the "covert solidarity" between the predominantly female readers and the women sensation novelists who "articulated [their] fantasies" (159).¹⁶ But the interaction between these novelists and their young women readers was also thought to be dangerous in an overtly sexual way. Oliphant's metaphors of depraved appetite are reiterated more dramatically in the Victoria Magazine, which describes a seduction scene in which "the slave of Sensationalism," an almost vampiric reader, "breathless with morbid excitement ... closes the latest admired effusion, and turns with undiminished craving to his [sic] library for fresh food" ("Sensational Novels" 460). While bigamy, murder, and intrigue were the rule of women's sensational fiction, the Victoria saw a greater charge in "their sensuality -- with many amounting to, in nearly all inculcating immorality" (458). The threat was particularly acute to the young women reader whose critical faculties were believed to be "weak."

15 The sixteen-year-old girl was the standard for determining the acceptability of fiction at Mudie's library, and throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century this standard was the subject of criticism on the censorship involved in reconciling "literature and young girls" (Griest 138). Interestingly, in 1890 Linton wrote against the restrictive approach which dictated all literature should be fit for girls to read; she proposed "locked bookcases" as an alternative (Griest 139).

16 Linton herself wrote "sensational" novels in which "murder, madness, and melancholia were basic ingredients" (Colby 37). She often portrayed matronly "bloodhound" figures who would unearth the "skeleton in the cupboard" and reveal the dark truths lurking behind deceptive appearances (Van Thal 83-84).

Though Oliphant criticizes Edmund Yates for the representation of his bigamist heroine, she severely castigates women novelists, particularly Rhoda Broughton (whose work she mistakenly attributes to Annie Thomas) and Braddon:

It is a shame to women so to write; and it is a shame to the women who read and accept as a true representation of themselves and their ways the equivocal talk and fleshly inclinations herein attributed to them. There [sic] patronage of such books is in reality and adoption and acceptance of them. (275)

Writing of Braddon and the Aurora Floyds of fiction, Oliphant asks, "Is, then, the picture true?" Reluctantly, she answers "yes." For while Oliphant claims that others are crying out against such misrepresentation, the young women readers of Mudie's Circulating Library, accept it "as something like the truth" (260). Not only do such a class of girls "not disown the picture" presented of themselves in these novels, but they also hang "it up in the boudoir and drawing-room [where] ... the books which contain it circulate everywhere and are read everywhere, and are not contradicted" (259).

While Oliphant accuses women sensation writers of misrepresentation, she also recognizes the novelty of Broughton's narrative style. In particular, Oliphant cites Cometh Up as a Flower: An Autobiography, stating: "The

wonderful thing in it is the portrait of the modern young woman as presented from her own point of view" (265). The term "point of view," as we have seen, appears to be gendered and inherently tied to women's subjectivity in the 1860. And though Oliphant, despite her criticisms, acknowledged the distinctiveness of telling a story from a young woman's viewpoint, other Victorian critics questioned the veracity of this technique; in Anthony Trollope's words, Broughton "has made her ladies do and say things which ladies would not do and say" (Autobiography 258).¹⁷ Broughton's first two novels, Cometh Up as a Flower and Not Wisely, But Too Well, both published in 1867, established the author as "wicked" and "fast," and were considered unfit reading for young women. And though largely unknown today, for Victorians the name Rhoda Broughton on a title-page was "almost a national institution" (Sadleir 84). Cometh Up sold more than ten thousand copies in seven years, but her works

¹⁷ In an 1868 letter to Broughton, Anthony Trollope, after first defending his fellow-novelist from the charge that her stories "were written in a strain not becoming a woman," offers her some revealing advice. He notes that her "fault ... is of exaggeration," a criticism which he also applied to his mother (TL 434). Years later, in his Autobiography, Trollope wrote favorably of Broughton, but continued to express a hope that she would outgrow and "overcome her fault in this direction" (258). Trollope's comments make an interesting comparison to Nancy Miller's theories about the possibility of determining gender in fiction. In her compelling essay, "Emphasis Added: Plot and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," Miller (following Irigaray) notes "a form of emphasis: an italicized version of what passes for the neutral or standard face" in women's writing of female lives in fiction (343). This emphasis, Miller claims, often "points to another text" (357); this analysis certainly holds true for Broughton.

were thought to be too "fast" for the Mrs. Grundy of circulating libraries and were not available at Mudie's until the latter 1870s (Frykstedt 85-86).

What was so "wicked" about Rhoda Broughton's work? As Oliphant writes, the problem lay in the modern girl's viewpoint which Broughton tied to women's passion and sexuality. When Cometh Up was first published, it was an immediate success despite its perceived wickedness and within a year went into a second edition. The nineteen-year-old heroine, Nell Lestrage, with her "redundant crop of curly [red] hair" (7), comments candidly throughout her "autobiography" about her passion for a soldier, Richard McGregor. Oliphant's simultaneous attraction and repulsion toward Broughton's heroine reveal a tension between her moralizing role as a reviewer and her recognition of the novelty of Nell's position as she attempts to write the truth about her own body.

The story begins with Nell in a graveyard contemplating the tombstones and her eventual burial among her ancestors. Here Nell meets her future lover. It is an appropriate meeting place: not only is the romance doomed from the start, but it also becomes apparent early in the narration that Nell is writing her story from her deathbed and that her lover is already dead. Nell's only hope for romantic satisfaction lies in the next world, and significantly her vision of heaven is decidedly sexual: "Oh, my Dick, my bonny, bonny sweetheart!" Nell exclaims, "I wonder in that

distant Somewhere where you are; or when we meet next, shall we be two bodiless spirits, sexless, passionless essences God forbid that it should be so!" (44) Oliphant notes that Nell's description of her body is "curious language . . . for a girl," and she condemns this passage as "disgusting in the fullest sense of the word" (267). This novel, like many of Broughton's works, has much to say about the disposal of women's bodies both before and after death. Nell continually comments on the position of her person -- imagining herself on the sofa, on her deathbed, or in a coffin -- thus demonstrating the way women's bodies are framed for display in both narrative and convention.

The critique of heaven and Nell's longing for sexual fulfillment, a union not to be granted in this world, establish a conflict between the patriarchal rules governing the sexes and Nell's more female-centered romance. In her article, "Dialogic Plots and Chameleon Narrators," Elizabeth Langland, outlines this multivoiced aspect in Charlotte Bronte's Shirley as representative of nineteenth-century women's novels in general. Langland states that a dialogue occurs between the "authoritatively persuasive (or patriarchal imprimatur) and the internally persuasive (the female or feminist sensibility) [which] are often in marked conflict" (24). Though she does not discuss Broughton, Langland's paradigm applies to Broughton's work and her version of the sensational novel, for sensation fiction is

generally thought to be a hybrid form in which "romance" and "realism" are violently joined (Hughes 16).

We see this conflict in narrative forms throughout the novel, particularly in the clashes between Nell's desire for romance and the Victorian conventions which thwart her fulfillment. Though Nell is in love with the penniless soldier, Dick McGregor, she marries wealthy landowner Hugh Lancaster to save her ailing father from further financial ruin and declining health. Breaking the Victorian code of silence that governed physical relations between the sexes, Broughton writes openly about the sexual repulsion Nell feels for Lancaster: she "shudders" whenever he is near. Thoughts of her impending marriage cause Nell to exclaim, "Merciful Heavens! If the prologue is so terrible, what will the play be?" (135). Broughton's work is full of this epigrammatic wit, which, as Langland states, is a device used by women writers to undermine patriarchal "reality" in favor of romance (27). The analogy also reveals that such dominant conventions trap women in narratives that are not of their making.

When Hugh and Nell are married, Broughton underscores that sexual relations between husband and wife are often a form of prostitution. Nell states:

His arm is around my waist, and he is brushing my eyes and cheeks and brow with his somewhat bristly mustache as often as he feels inclined -- for am I not his property? Has he not every right to kiss my face

off if he chooses, to clasp me and hold me, and drag me about in whatever manner he wills, for has he not bought me? For a pair of first-class blue eyes warranted fast color, for ditto superfine red lips, for so many pounds of prime white flesh, he has paid down a handsome price on the nail, without any haggling, and now if he may not test the worth of his purchases, poor man, he is hardly used! (135)

What is sensational about this passage is what Oliphant labels "shameful language," an avowal that women's bodies are part of a market economy. To represent them in this way is to call into question what Victorian ideology holds most dear -- the very bases of marriage and society. As Broughton makes clear, matrimony is often a patriarchal contract, governed by the laws of exchange, and operating much to the disadvantage of women.

In a final dramatic scene, the married Nell meets Dick for the last time and finds that her sister Dolly has been responsible for preventing the lovers from corresponding. Nell tries to convince Dick to let her run away with him. She exclaims most melodramatically, "Oh, don't go ... don't you know how I love you?... I cannot live without you!" and continues her narration, "He strained me to his desolate heart, and we kissed each other wildly, vehemently; none came between us then" (153). Oliphant calls this passage "objectionable" but not "disgusting," as the feelings of the lovers on discovering the source of treachery that has kept

them apart are understandable (268). But Geraldine Jewsbury, reviewing Broughton's novel for the Athenaeum, condemned it as "the work of a man [sic], 'destitute of refinement of thought or feeling, and ignorant of all that women either are or ought to be'" (qtd. in Fryckstedt 87). Jewsbury's heated response echoes the predominant view of women's sexuality -- namely that they were passionless beings. In the words of Doctor William Acton, "the majority of women (happily for them), are not much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind" (qtd. in Marcus 31).¹⁸

Broughton's first two novels, which both end unhappily for the heroine and her lover, provoked one reviewer in the Spectator to label her "the novelist of revolt ... [for the] feeling ... that there is some mistake, some misarrangement, some failure in the grand scheme" (Rev. Not Wisely, 1173). And although Broughton's heroines were thought to be realistic "flesh and blood" creations -- in part due to her characteristic style, as "Life, verve, elasticity pervade her pages" (Austin 202) -- such characters, though perhaps "growing more common every day" (205), were still exceptional types. "The world would be a pandemonium if they were not, and will be a pandemonium if they ever become a

18 Leaving aside the falsity of such assertions, Steven Marcus observes that this remark reflects an inherently class-conscious belief; the "majority of women" does not include the lower classes (32).

clear majority," Austin noted (205).¹⁹ Interestingly, in an 1887 review, Linton later praised Broughton's work. The article complimented Broughton on "the sparkle, the verve, the epigrammatic 'go'" of her prose ("Novels" 196).

Furthermore, Linton admired Cometh Up for the appropriateness of its form and subject matter: "The whole thing is, as it should be, a story of life and love told by a girl from a girl's point of view" (198).²⁰

Initially criticized in the journals, lambasted as a fast writer, Broughton was considered "one of those novelists who owe[d] all their success to themselves and the public, and nothing, or comparatively nothing to the press" (Linton, "Novels" 196). The relationship that Broughton shared with her readers was ridiculed by James, who wrote that her novels were "devoured by the young ladies of

19 While Alfred Austin praises Broughton in this review, he first complains that the domestic novel has helped to increase the insularity of England, "the only truly imperial people" since the Romans (198-199). Instead of epic or tragedy, the British have narrowed their focus to the novel. Austin writes, "The world is one big circulating library, and the circulating library is the novel" (200).

20 Linton states that Broughton's novel Joan (1876) "is perhaps the prettiest of all Miss Broughton's novels" (203). Her choice is revealing as Joan is the most class-conscious of all Broughton's works. It chronicles the story of Joan Dering who, after losing her wealth upon her grandfather's death, is forced to live with her lower-class cousins. Joan's response upon meeting them is one of horror: "First cousins! with such hats! such jackets! such ear-rings! such beads! and with such a trolloping length of uncurled curls down their backs!" (20). Linton praises the influence of Joan's "good-breeding" in bringing order to this household and writes of the novel, "It coincides with an old idea of our own, touching the connection of vulgarity and disorder -- want of delicacy and want of care" ("Novels" 204).

England, among whom the appearance of a new work by Miss Broughton is a literary event of high importance" ("Helen Hunt Jackson" 514). Condemning the style as coarse and crude, James nonetheless saw Broughton's novels as a sign of the times, "in which young girls must be supplied with a strongly-seasoned literary article for their own especial consumption" ("Jackson" 515). The young women reader, as James recognized, was a new target audience.²¹ One may see in Oliphant's scolding and James's scorn a fear that the "author as whore" was catering to the "reader as whore" -- that through the medium of sensation fiction the ideal "girl of the past" would transmogrify into the corrupt Girl of the Period. In the new alliance of commercial author and commercial (girl) reader, fiction, whose responsibility it was to inculcate morals, would instead erode them by giving the real-life Girl a sensation heroine as role model.

²¹ Though it is difficult to determine the constituency of this new audience or to assess the effects of these works on young women readers, I concur with Monica Fryckstedt's assessment that "the impact of popular novels was undeniable" (39). As the numerous comments in the Saturday Review reveal, young women were thought to read nothing but such fiction. And, the journal states, "from these she draws her ideas; by these, to a great extent, she regulates her conduct" (qtd. in Fryckstedt 39).

Conclusion

In his autobiography, Thomas DeQuincey reflects on the problem of determining the culmination of adolescence as a stage in life. "By what indication, does [adulthood] commence," DeQuincey asks. "Physically by one criteria, legally by another, morally by a third, intellectually by a fourth -- and all inadequate. Equator, absolute equator, there is none" (qtd. in Sugar viii). DeQuincey's speculations draw attention to the various social and cultural parameters that define the passage to adulthood. And, as he suggests, no one definition can ultimately suffice to categorize this transitional stage. Yet at the same time, DeQuincey's comments point to the fact that developmental markers are heavily value-laden. "Where Womanhood and Childhood Meet" uncovers some of the various meanings that female adolescence and the passage to womanhood represented in the nineteenth century. Tracing the figure of the young woman through the years 1830 to 1870 and examining the ways nineteenth-century writers chart her coming of age, I suggest, helps us to read these changing cultural signposts on the road to adulthood in their specific literary and historical contexts. And for the Victorians, female adolescence was particularly weighted with social and cultural determinants. This equivocal phase constituted a social problem; if on the one hand, the Victorians sought to

suppress female adolescence, in part because of its sexual component, they were also significantly involved in (re)defining this stage as a separate category precisely because they saw it as a critical stage of gender-role assimilation.

Furthermore, the idea of female adolescence was often embedded in other transitional movements, such as Chartism, evangelicalism, and imperialism, and thus used metaphorically to accomplish a type of cultural work. This work involves not only gender but also class issues: imagining the girl into a woman (which is the subject of most Victorian novels) and a middle-class one at that, nineteenth-century writers symbolically represent both an individual and a social rite-of-passage. The abrupt transition of Mary Barton, for example, from a changeable state of girlhood to a modest and domestic womanhood, allows Gaskell to work out (albeit by a sleight-of-hand) some of the class politics that form the subject of her novel. In Adam Bede, Eliot likewise uses the transition to adulthood for her characters to delineate social issues; through her use of religious conversion processes, Eliot depicts the process of class change. Furthermore, her condemnation of adolescence as an immature and predominantly feminine literary genre demonstrates that ideas of individual development were intimately tied to nineteenth-century theories of aesthetics. This interconnection is quite evident in the

Victorian novels which portray fallen women. In Ruth, Gaskell's rewriting of the rules governing the fallen woman in fiction and the subsequent controversy her novel produced, reveal the extent to which social ideas of development informed literary genres. Moreover, as my discussion of the rehabilitation of fallen women in Victorian social discourse shows, these ideas of development were inextricable from larger class issues.

The young women characters who inhabit Trollope's Barsetshire novels of the 1860s reflect how the change from girlhood to womanhood (in this case a quick transition to a static category) could be used as an expedient vehicle to hold a culture's moral and social values. In this way, Trollope's British maidens perhaps best reflect a more widespread nineteenth-century worry about change in general: the mourning tone evident in Victorian reviews of the novelist's work, illuminate the way Trollope's heroines were projections of rural ideals which, it was feared, were quickly becoming obsolete. This fear is even more evident in the controversies surrounding Linton's fast "Girl of the Period" and Broughton's outspoken heroines: in both cases, the enormous flurry of journalistic debates about these fast young women reveal the extent to which the figure of the girl was often used as a scapegoat to answer for political, social, and even literary ills.

It is not surprising that the debate over girlhood should reach such epidemic proportions in the 1860s; for as Victorian critic Edward Dicey reminds us, it is "idle to imagine that this transition period, during which women are emerging, as a class ... [would] not be attended with a great amount of extravagance and absurdity" (562). Dicey's observation points to an important turning point in the history of women in the nineteenth century and to broader feminist implications in our own. In many ways, the movement of this project -- which begins by tracing the way the girl is used metaphorically as a symbol for class and social change and concludes just when young women were emerging as a distinct class -- tracks the shift that Dicey outlines. In the late 1860s women, and young women in particular, were indeed being thought of as a class with new social significance: the movement for female suffrage and property rights, the opening of higher education to young women, and the increased opportunities for work outside the home, all helped to increase a sense of class consciousness.¹

¹ I do not mean to suggest that we can see in these increased opportunities for women a relatively straightforward and progressive "feminist" movement in the nineteenth century. On the contrary, as Carol Dyhouse points out, many of the new girls' schools, for example, "were in some ways conservative institutions ... not seminaries of feminist consciousness committed to any comprehensive scheme of social change" (120). See Dyhouse's Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England (1981) for an astute analysis of how these social and familial changes affect girls in the

The belief that women had become a recognizable social class in the 1860s with their own point of view was played out also in the field of Victorian aesthetics. Controversies over women's point of view in the novel (especially in sensation fiction), and the gendered use of the term, indicate a new level of awareness and perhaps a fear of a distinctly feminine standpoint. This dissertation has examined the ways the figure of the adolescent girl, so often at the site of textual disturbances, was used to denote larger social, cultural, and literary change. But what of the relationship between the fictional young woman and her creator? One Victorian reviewer, discussing girlhood in the novels of Charles Dickens and Harriet Beecher Stowe, muses on the congruence between the fictional girl and the woman writer in the nineteenth century. "In the isolation of these beings," the reviewer states, "in their vagrancy, in their sufferings and struggles, longings and disappointments, we might have found the circumstances of the artist-woman, and the analogies of her destiny. But," he concludes, "the idea was too pregnant; we did not feel adequate to unfold it" ("Ideal Girlhood" 392). Assuming a correspondence between the figure of adolescent womanhood in Victorian novels and the nineteenth-century woman writer, while it may have been too pregnant a topic for

late nineteenth century. In Chapter Four, Dyhouse also discusses the concept of female adolescence in terms of "autonomy" and "dependence."

this Victorian reviewer, may be too facile a comparison to make in our own day. Nevertheless, the commentator's assertions about the similarities between the girl's and the woman writer's marginalized positions suggest that it is absolutely crucial to unfold Victorian ideas about girlhood if we are to fully understand the position of women in the nineteenth century. "Where Womanhood and Childhood Meet" explores the equivocal figure of the young woman in her literary and historical context, a subject, as the Victorian reviewer implies, ripe for critical interpretation.

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