

The
L A N G U A G E
of
G E N D E R
and
C L A S S

Transformation in the Victorian novel



P A T R I C I A
I N G H A M



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THE LANGUAGE OF GENDER AND CLASS

In this lucid and cogently argued work, Patricia Ingham examines in detail the widely accepted critical cliché, 'Examining the representation of gender always involves investigating the representation of class.' Using historical material about 'class', she re-examines six major Victorian novels. Focusing upon language, she explores how stereotypes of gender and class encode cultural myths that reinforce the social status quo. She shows how, in the standard plot, class conflict is displaced onto romantic conflict between individual men and women which can be happily resolved.

However, *The Language of Gender and Class* demonstrates that none of the novelists, either male or female, completely accepts either the stereotyped figures or the authorised story. The figures of the Angel and the Whore are re-assessed and modified, according to Ingham's in-depth reading of the novels, with the result that, by the 1890s, the treatment of gender is released from its task of containing and neutralising class conflict. New accounts of femininity can thus begin to emerge.

This highly original and innovative work will provoke debate and encourage students and scholars in literary, linguistic and gender studies to re-think their views on the Victorian novel.

Patricia Ingham is Fellow in English at St Anne's College, Oxford, and Times Lecturer in English Language. She has developed what is recognised as an original linguistic model of criticism already used illuminatingly in her previous works, which include *Thomas Hardy: A Feminist Reading* (1989) and *Dickens, Women and Language* (1992).

THE LANGUAGE
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Patricia Ingham



London and New York

First published 1996
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library,
2003.

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

*Routledge is an International
Thomson Publishing company*

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permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-41869-7 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-72693-6 (Adobe eReader Format)
ISBN 0-415-08221-8 (hbk)
ISBN 0-415-08222-6 (pbk)

For Jenny

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the help given by Jenny Harrington and Shannon Russell this book could not have been completed. Penny Boumelha generously read and commented on every chapter of it. Specific information was kindly given by Nigel Bowles, Mark Curthoys, Ruth First, Peter Ghosh, Terry O'Shaughnessy and the library staff at St Anne's College, Oxford, particularly David Smith. To all of these I am very grateful.

I also wish to thank the News International Research Fund for generous financial help with the cost of research.

NOTE ON REFERENCES

The sources of quotation in the text are indicated by the author's surname and date of publication. Full details are given in the Bibliography at the end of the book.

Quotations from the six novels discussed are from the following editions:

Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley*, eds Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (1979), Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Angus Easson (1982), Oxford: World's Classics.

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, eds George Ford and Sylvère Monod (1966), New York: W.W.Norton & Co.

George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical*, ed. Fred C.Thomson (1980), Oxford: Clarendon Press.

George Gissing, *The Unclassed* (1884), London: Chapman & Hall.

Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, ed. Patricia Ingham (1985), Oxford: World's Classics.

THE REPRESENTATION OF SOCIETY IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

...in the room they entered, the dirty, ragged, miserable crew, were all in active performance of their various tasks; the overlookers, strap in hand, on the alert; the whirling spindles urging the little slaves who waited on them, to movements as unceasing as their own; and the whole monstrous chamber, redolent of all the various impurities that 'by the perfection of our manufacturing system' are converted into 'gales of Araby' for the rich, after passing in the shape of certain poison, through the lungs of the poor.

(Frances Trollope, *Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (1840))

Nor should the weaving-room be forgotten, where a thousand or fifteen hundred girls may be observed in their coral necklaces, working like Penelope in the daytime; some pretty, some pert, some graceful and jocund, some absorbed in their occupation; a little serious some, few sad. And the cotton you have observed in its rude state...you may now watch as in a moment it is tinted with beautiful colours or printed with fanciful patterns.

(Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby, or The New Generation* (1844))

The contrast between these two contemporary 'descriptions' of factory work in the 1840s illustrates from fiction the point made by a recent historian discussing 'the languages of factory reform': that 'the factory was a concentrated metaphor for hopes and fears about the direction and pace of industrial change' (Gray 1987:143). And the significance of these two interpretations of the factory metaphor has implications for the whole subject of how social class is represented in the first half of the nineteenth century. Since these are largely ignored in literary criticism, I wish to elaborate them before addressing the treatment of the language of class and gender in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*

(1849), Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854). A similar consideration of non-fictional representations of social class will also be necessary as a preliminary to discussing George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866), George Gissing's *The Unclassed* (version of 1884) and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

That these two subjects of class and gender go together is already an axiom of feminist criticism. As Lynda Nead puts it in her *Myths of Sexuality*:

The representation of women can never be contained within an investigation of gender; to examine gender is to embark on an historical analysis of power which includes the formation of class.

(Nead 1988:8)

At the same time it is striking how well aware feminist critics are that the 'standard' account of gender focusing round the middle-class ideal was

both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute and the emergence of oppositional formulations.

(Poovey 1989:3)

This statement is Mary Poovey's explanation of why she gave the title *Uneven Developments* to her study of how gender was represented in mid-Victorian England: to emphasise that it was not a unified and uncontroversial process. Literary critics, however, seem readily to overlook the possibility that the representation of social class and that of industrial society were similarly 'in the making' and 'open...to dispute'. For Poovey's account is in broad terms an accurate description of what is happening to language all the time. Vološinov/Bakhtin explains it in terms of *signs*:

Every stage of the development of a society has its own special and restricted circle of items which alone have access to that society's attention and which are endowed with evaluative accentuation by that attention. Only items within that circle will achieve sign formulation by that attention and become objects in semiotic communication.

(Matejka and Titunik 1986:21–2)

Further, such items are those associated with the socio-economic interests of a particular society and in their coding as *signs* competing ‘accents’ or emphases of various groups intersect:

Existence reflected in sign is not merely reflected but *refracted*. How is this refraction of existence in the ideological sign determined? By an intersecting of differently oriented social interests between one and the same sign community.

(Matejka and Titunik 1986:23)

This multi-acculturality, resulting from variation of interest between members of a ‘sign community’, is what Gray is referring to in the ‘metaphor’ of the factory. For it allows individual users of signs to attempt to appropriate the sign, to try to make it ‘univocal’ or at least usurp the dominant accent with one that asserts their own stance. A practical illustration of the process is provided by the two quotations from Frances Trollope and Benjamin Disraeli which head this chapter.

Historians do not overlook the fact that the description of class in the nineteenth century is characterised by linguistic conflict. They are, for instance, aware that, as Robert Gray puts it, ‘industrialisation was a complex and uneven process’ and that its representation could be similarly described. He argues that the political and social crisis of the 1830s represents a

deeper cultural dislocation defined by *the presence of alternative languages* whose boundaries were unsettled. For example ...moral languages drawn from evangelical religion or the romantic imagination claimed to address the workings of labour markets.

(Gray 1987:145; my emphasis)

The crisis referred to was compounded of several elements: economic depression from 1836 into the 1840s; social unrest caused by working-class conditions at home and in the workplace; the operations of the Corn Laws and of the New Poor Law of 1834; and the separation of the middle classes from the working classes by the Reform Act of 1832 which excluded the latter from the franchise. Matching this was a linguistic crisis, or conflict of discourses, which Gray illustrates from the specific area of discussion of factory reform. But he sees clearly that these discussions indicate what was going on generally in the ‘condition of

England debate of the 1840s'. The debate, as I hope to show, was one in which contestants attempt to appropriate convincingly to their own account the meaning of new social structures in the manner described by Volos'inov/Bakhtin: by reaccenting signs. Gray does not consider the various registers used in the broader debate, but he concludes that it 'never effected any definitive closure' (Gray 1987:145). What he shows to be true of factory reform is also true of the encompassing subject of the social classes and their relationships. The ideological containment of these in language was, like that of gender, an 'uneven development'. An outline of this unevenness is therefore necessary before it is possible to consider how the two semantic areas or sign systems interrelate in fiction. Such an outline is attempted in this chapter.

RANK

To say, as Asa Briggs did as long ago as 1967, that by the early nineteenth century the terminology of *class* had replaced that of *rank* and *station* is only a beginning. We cannot, as he did, assume the identity of sign and referent (or physical actuality): words are not labels on goods. They are rather part of a contemporary structuring of the society described above in which verbal descriptions are part of a fiercely contested argument about the map of society and its meaning. This was the linguistic equivalent of the struggle between social protest and its repression: the Luddite machine-breaking of 1811–16 and its repressive aftermath, including the Peterloo massacre of 1819; the Chartist agitation for political reform from 1836 to 1848 and the government's reaction. The debate centred around an attempt to establish the 'real' significance of the new social patterns that had emerged. It took place in many kinds of writing: popular and middle-class journalism, economic treatises, government and other reports—as well as in fiction.

In the development of the debate one broad contrast with the past is clear: the gradual abandonment but not total atrophy of a picture of society vertically organised in a fixed hierarchy of *ranks* and *stations*. Replacing it as the dominant discourse was an account of two or three organised groups or *classes*. The language of *rank* had for centuries offered an interpretation of society as inherently well-ordered and harmonious. Metaphorically it was encoded as a divinely ordered dance or a 'Great Chain of Being'. The architectural beauty of the latter is spelt out in eighteenth-century terms by Pope in his *Essay on Man* (1733–4) when he alludes to it as a 'frame' with 'bearings', 'ties', 'strong connexions, nice dependencies', and 'Gradations just' (1, ll.

29–31). The traditional significance embodied in these metaphors was that the mathematically elegant arrangement was devised by God for the benefit of all concerned, no matter where they found themselves placed, whether high or low. The picture (simplistically presented here) offered security and permanence, with benevolence always trickling down from rank to rank and service passing equally efficiently up and down. Its own ‘unevenness’ is not relevant to this discussion though one aspect of it will be referred to below.

With changing social conditions (the referent), classification (into signs) had fluctuated, but recurrent eulogies or laments in literature reinforced the value of the system. By the mid-eighteenth century a sober cataloguing of ranks as ‘Nobility, Gentry, Mercantile or Commercial People, Mechanics and Peasantry’ (Corfield 1991:101) could be contested by a satirical grading of a theatre audience as:

1. The Nobs
2. The Citizens and their Ladies
3. The Mechanics and Middling Degrees
4. The Refuse

(Corfield 1991:117)

Whatever the classification, the interpretation of society and its meaning was based on a grading largely dependent on inherited status at birth, ownership or non-ownership of land, and profession or occupation. It provided the individual with a personal identity, a role to play, a status and a set of social mores. It was based on the individual, *not* on the group. Since it was an interpretation, not an ‘objective’ description, of society, it could continue to offer permanence even in times of change. This interpretation, presumably, is what Defoe was trying to undo with his early attempt at subversion in his reclassification of 1709:

1. The Great, who live profusely
2. The Rich, who live plentifully
3. The middle Sort, who live well
4. The working Trades, who labour hard but feel no want
5. The Country People, Farmers etc. who fare indifferently
6. The Poor that fare hard
7. The Miserable, that really pinch and suffer want

(Corfield 1991:115)

The subversive element in Defoe’s list lies in its concentrating not on

the familiar criteria but, within what is apparently the orthodox framework, on the relative economic positions of social groups seen in relation to a norm for subsistence.

But the traditional and comforting representation, of social structures as a hierarchy of *ranks* was not erased suddenly by such challenges as Defoe's. Like all linguistic change, the change in the way of describing society depended on the rise to dominance of a co-existing variant description. In this case that variant was one which logically contradicted the interpretation of *rank* as expressive of the inherent harmony of a graduated system, since it re-interpreted 'superior' and 'inferior' in a judgemental sense. But the way was prepared by the fact that the 'lower orders' had always been potentially a *mob*, or *rabble*, when in the wrong frame of mind; and the vulgar *de facto* not just 'plebeian' but 'coarse' or 'ill bred'. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, when radicalism and Jacobinism reared their unharmonious heads, abusive epithets, such as Burke's 'swinish (multitude)' were frequently applied to the lower ranks by the representatives of conservatism. This denial of the order and harmony of rank already shadows it with an adversarial two-level model of society consisting of an elite and a non-elite. The former, being elite in all senses, had the necessary intelligence and experience to control the rest who, without these qualities, represented the more brutish aspects of mankind. No-one could deny that original sin (which seemed heavily concentrated in the 'lower orders') might spoil the dance if not restrained. So the coexistence of the two accounts was possible, explainable in terms of human deviance from the ideal. The conflictual version provided a basis for what was later to emerge and become dominant, the class-based system. The harmonious account also re-emerged as a weaker variant in the first part of the nineteenth century, in the form of 'paternalism'.

CLASS TERMINOLOGY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

As industrialism developed in the late eighteenth century, the new language of class referred to by Briggs (1967) at first competed with and then ousted that of *rank/order/station*. The changeover accelerated, as did the development of industry which, between 1800 and 1830, replaced agriculture in terms of jobs provided. Instead of land, factories making cotton goods or iron were typical workplaces. In them individuals were organised into groups performing the same tasks. By this time a new representation of social structures had

developed to which the terminology of class had become firmly attached.

The term *class* had for a long time had the neutral or empty sense of 'sort' or kind. It was used for instance in classification of natural species. By the 1780s it had developed a social application either for specific ranks or for general gradings of people as lower, middling or higher (which appeared in that chronological order). So the word *class* does not by itself indicate a move to the new frame of reference such as is found in industrial novels. A real indicator is provided by the use of the word in combination with a varying range of adjectives relating to production: *industrious*, *laborious*, *labouring*, *operative* and *(un)productive*. (The last of these was contested in terms of which economic group(s) it properly should be used of.) All these adjectives indicate that the criterion for inclusion in a *group/class* is no longer inherited status but current occupation. Alternative terms also used for industrial workers by the nineteenth century were *lower classes*, *hands*, *workmen*, *workpeople*, *operatives* and *the poor*. These variants were not used to make fine distinctions and are generally thought to have been interchangeable or 'in free variation'.

Nonetheless some distinctions are observable. As indicated in the previous section, throughout the history of terms describing social class in English, those at the lower end of any chain or strata (e.g. *villain*, *knave*, and more recently *peasant*) have seldom failed to acquire pejorative connotations. It is not long before the reaction of radicals makes clear that this happened in the early part of the nineteenth century to the term *lower*: the hierarchical significance gives way to an evaluative one. Instances in the radical press include Cobbett in his essay for the *Political Register*, 'Mechanics' Institution', condemning the 'insolence' of those who call the working classes of the community 'the lower orders' (Cobbett 1823:435–8). A solid piece of evidence for the virtual disappearance of the adjective in this context is given by Harriet Martineau in 1849:

The term 'lower class', or 'lower classes', is gone out of use. The term is thought not complimentary to the democracy, and so we say 'the working class,' which is less precise, and conveys false notions.

(Himmelfarb 1984:291)

The value of this as evidence lies in her partisanship towards the middle classes and her patronising approach to the working classes.

The latter is illustrated by a use in her letters of her own term ‘Workies’ (using the ‘y’ of pet names and diminutives), which, context also suggests, has a condescending force: ‘I have thought of two men who know as much as individuals can know of the special life of the “Workies”’ (Sanders 1990:176). Certainly in Edwin Chadwick’s *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842), *lower classes* is used only rarely in a work which quotes verbatim from many named individuals in various parts of the country (Flinn 1965).

Similarly it is observable that by the 1840s the subject of class was so volatile that those debating it seriously in books, journals and reports trod carefully to avoid not only *lower* but also, of course, the transparently reductive *hands*. The implications of the latter are spelt out by Dickens in *Hard Times* (1854) when he speaks of how ‘some people’ would have preferred it ‘if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs’ (p. 49). The avoidance of this word is general in Chadwick’s *Report*, yet in Charlotte Brontë’s *Shirley* (1849) it is not only the reactionary supervisor, Joe Scott, who uses it. So too on one occasion does the sensitive and sympathetic narrator (p. 26). This ‘slip’ suggests that the taboo term has to be consciously avoided and what was not said in serious discussions of the ‘condition of England’ was a spontaneous use amongst the middle class in industrial areas. Its use is debated by characters in *North and South* where the manufacturer Thornton tries to sanitise it as a ‘technical term’. A contemporary linguistic parallel to the avoidance of *lower* and *hands* for the working classes is the recent avoidance of terms like *negroes* or *blacks* for the currently ‘correct’ ‘African-Americans’. Similar ‘correct’ norms are probably evident from Chadwick’s *Report*. The commonest expressions from contributors are *workpeople*, *working people* and *labourers*. These are evidently the more neutral terms, as novels bear out.

By contrast the rare use of *the poor* in the *Report* belongs to a different register and frame of reference, a biblical and religious one associated, for instance, with an allegory much used in reference to social inequalities: the biblical story of Dives the rich man and Lazarus the beggar, which is found in Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (Chapter 9), in *North and South* (p. 150), and in Geraldine Jewsbury’s industrial novel *Marian Withers* (1851, Vol. 1:35), as well as in several nineteenth-century ballads (Smith 1980:15). One of the few uses of *the poor* in Chadwick’s *Report* bears out this view of the register to which it relates.

The term is found in an extract from the Reverend George Lear's remarks on fever statistics in Dundee:

The poor, we are told, we shall always have with us, and so with disease and death...and the community that does not strive by every available means, to reduce its disease and mortality bills to the lowest sum of human suffering... is as guilty of suicide as the individual who, Judas like, takes with his own hands the life God has given.

(Flinn 1965:274-5)

This biblical register remains a variant in the conflicting discourses that make up the language of social description throughout the century. The language of rank had integrated easily into Christianity through the belief that everyone should do their duty in whatever position it had pleased God to place them. The language of class developed *ad hoc* in a secular context, and did not lend itself to systematic support from Christianity. Attempts to relate the two usually depended on an inappropriately individualistic perspective requiring the individual worker to submit to God's will when times were hard and the individual master to behave charitably to those he had dealings with. Such attempts were at odds with the group-based nature of a class system. However, familiarity with the language of the church meant that it survived as a rhetoric of power.

The framework to which class terminology came naturally to relate, as Wallech (1981) points out, was that of economists who, from the mid-eighteenth century, attempted to describe mechanistically the nature and relationships of the elements comprising industrial society. In the writings of classic political economists, exemplified by Joseph Harris's *An Essay upon Coins and Money* (1757), Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Origins and Nature of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) and David Ricardo's *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), these elements were readily identified as land, stock/capital and labour. They corresponded roughly but obviously in human terms to three social groups: landowners, entrepreneurial capitalists and labourers. Harris, Smith, Ricardo and others were concerned to describe precisely, at a level of abstraction, how the three components interacted. What for instance constituted value? Was its sole measure labour (Smith)? Or labour in combination with land and skill (Harris)? Was value itself static (Smith) or variable (Ricardo)? It seems their assumption was that they were bent on a description that would be accurate in

economic terms and were not concerned with the social status of the groups or classes involved. But what was argued over as economic value lent itself almost necessarily to an equation with social worth/status. The development of a new semantic construct or system of signs which might be called the language of class (distinct from the earlier use of the term *class* as a variant for *rank*) depends on an acceptance of the connection between economic role and positioning in a three-tier hierarchy of *higher*, *middling* and *lower* classes. With this acceptance goes the corollary that what constitutes a *class* is a common economic interest determined by economic function. The alternation in this period between the commoner plural form *working classes* and the singular *working class* is illuminating. Their free variation indicates that the grouping referred to can be thought of as singular since its constitutive feature is a common role in production. Later in the century a clear sign of this perception of working-class identity as unitary is (as ‘woman’s’ was) to be found in the semantic shift whereby *labour*=‘act of labouring’ developed an alternative sense of ‘those who labour’ or ‘the working classes’.

Adam Smith’s account of capitalist society still operates with the idea of *orders/ranks* in uneasy combination with notions of class. But by 1817 Ricardo was using only class terms with a socio-economic significance. It is also Ricardo who most plainly theorises a conflict of interests between groups into his model. Accepting Malthusian views about over-rapid increase of population, he argues that its pressure would cause profits to fall. Only an improvement in the means of production, such as machinery provided, could check their decline. Machinery would reduce the demand for labour and he therefore concluded that

...the opinion entertained by the labouring class, that the employment of machinery is frequently detrimental to their interests, is not founded on prejudice and error, but is conformable to the correct principles of political economy.

(Sraffa and Dobb 1951–73:392)

This does not mean that Ricardo is responsible for the emergence into communal use of the language of class. Shifts in language *do* occur through the development of individual variants (or new accented of signs) at semantic as at other levels. Sometimes those responsible are identifiable. An example would be twentieth-century feminists attempting to alter the convention that in indefinite use *he* subsumes

sbe, or to change forms like *spokesman* to *spokesperson*. But individuals do not change language at a stroke. What becomes of variants in the communal system is not predictable. They may become dominant or may be assimilated to the dominant accent. Because of a wish to avoid the tabooed *spokesman* when referring to a woman, *spokesperson* has been preferred in that context, so that now it is marked for feminine gender, not unmarked as was intended. By the time Ricardo wrote his *Principles of Political Economy* the Luddite machine breakings had already taken place. Class hostility had manifested itself in physical forms. His integration of it into his theory is only one factor in the development of the new coding of social structures.

The undeniable fact is, however, that by the early part of the nineteenth century, the dominant discourse in which society was represented was that of political economy. This was not only amongst intellectuals. Like Freudian terms in the twentieth century, the terminology of economics spread to a wide public. The subject itself was extensively discussed in serious reviews such as the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*. And as N.W.Thompson (1984) points out, the debate spread to the working classes themselves through the radical press which flourished in the 1830s. It consisted of fifteen or twenty newspapers written for the working class, either by some of its own members or by those who recognised its interests as inimical to those of other socio-economic groups. Discussion focused round the causes and nature of working-class emiseration. A reference to the spread of the debate occurs in *North and South* when the workman Higgins tells indignantly of an employer thrusting upon him a book on 'political economy' to instruct him on how 'wages find their own level' (p. 229).

As described by most classic economists, the economic machine in its ideal state, not interfered with by government or thrown into disarray by historical events, would produce the most good for the greatest number. This broad generalisation, even in Ricardo's version, conveniently erased what might happen to the lesser number, who would of course belong to the labouring classes. In talking of 'the laws' governing such things as profits and wages these writers appear to claim descriptive truth for what they say. By contrast, their 'socialist' opponents in the 1820s and 1830s, who espoused the cause of the working class, saw 'political economy' as a way of theorising contemporary exploitation into an immutable and ahistorical system. Thomas Hodgskin in his *Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital* (1825) described it as 'shutting out of view MAN himself, in

order to justify the existing order of society, which is founded on property or possessions, and the existing oppression of the labourer, who forms unhappily part of these possessions' (Cole 1922:66). There were many vigorous protests of this kind: a typical example in the radical press in 1824 wished to 'leave political economists to their jargon' because they wrote not in order to get rid of evil 'but to cut down man to the endurance of it' (Thompson 1984:23).

Nonetheless it was in 'the jargon of political economy' that the exploitation of the working classes and the unjust nature of society now had to be discussed. One prevalent sign became that of the machine: perhaps because of mechanistic accounts of the marketplace; perhaps because of the significance of the mechanising of industry. Its ubiquitousness was similar to the pervasiveness of the sign of the factory in the 1980s, with the application of 'productivity', 'output' and 'use of plant' to institutions of all kinds. Then as now some resisted the dominant sign, regarding it as a misapplied metaphor. Radicals complained that the workers themselves were treated like non-human cogs. Carlyle derisively draws attention to this linguistic coding in his early essay 'Signs of the Times' (1829):

Civil government does by its nature include much that is mechanical...We term it indeed, in ordinary language, the Machine of Society, and talk of it as the grand working wheel from which all private machines must derive, or to which they must adapt, their movements.

(Shelston 1971:70)

But, by the 1830s, for many the picture of society as a machine and human beings as its parts was no longer a metaphor. In *Shirley* the industrialist Moore, without any irony, refers to himself as a human mill whose boiler (heart) is about to burst. To a large extent the language of political economy and the picture of society as an economic machine became inescapable, as what had at first been taken metaphorically came to be regarded as literal. This was the dominant significance that came to attach to class terminology. It coexisted with attempts to provide other explanatory frameworks, two of which will now be described.

SOCIETY AS A NECESSARY STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE

A class-based society was visibly competitive. So it is not surprising

that another powerful discourse in the struggle to provide an explanatory framework for new social structures was one which integrated humanity into a similarly competitive view of creation as a whole. Such an account co-habited easily with that of political economy: despite the difference between mechanical and organic accounts, both rested on the idea of the operation of relentless laws.

Thomas Malthus (1766–1834) in his *Essay on the Principle of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society* (first edition 1798; revised version 1803) begins with an acceptance of Adam Smith's economics and goes on to concern himself with 'social' issues, turning his attention exclusively to the production of food and infants. In language intended as precise, he captures the basis of his world view succinctly and apparently mathematically: 'population, when unchecked, increased in a geometrical ratio, and subsistence for man in an arithmetical ratio' (Flew 1985:73). This results in an excess of people over food. Since Malthus divides society into only two classes, 'the rich' and 'the lower classes', and since the latter are by far the more numerous, he addresses their condition to argue the need for keeping wages to subsistence level and for securing the preservation of rights to own property.

Through successive rewritings and recolorings of the *Essay* the influential core of his beliefs persisted. They were derived, as I have indicated, from a parallel between what happens to men and women and what is already established as happening to plants and animals. With both the latter 'superabundant effects are repressed by want of room and nourishment' and with animals by some becoming 'the prey of others': some of the surplus suffocate, others starve or are killed by predators. The fate of human beings is described as similar to this. Amongst them, because of powerful sexual instincts, 'there is a constant effort towards an increase of population' (Flew 1985:77). By a process of deduction, 'distress' is seen to be the result of a level of wages which offer 'easy support' and encourage procreation. Fortunately the excessive production of infants and subsequent 'distress' contains its own cyclic solution—unless someone interferes by providing over-generous poor relief or by controlling the price of corn. Other factors including starvation and disease conveniently reduce the number of mouths.

In briefly considering the minority of the population, the rich, Malthus recognises that they may 'by unfair combinations' prolong the sufferings of the lower classes. However he concludes that no alternative social structure would remedy the situation: 'no possible

form of society could prevent the almost constant action of misery upon a great part of mankind' (Flew 1985:79). The reason for this is that the rich are too few in number in relation to the poor.

For Malthus the cycle of high wages?excess of mouths?starvation and disease?fewer mouths?tolerable comfort?more mouths, endlessly repeated, was the alternative framework to the divine harmony that had been described as lying behind a hierarchically ranked society. It fitted well with economic theories and a class system. His account could be given a pessimistic or optimistic colouring, shown to be catastrophic or efficient, as other ideas were added. It addressed 'social' issues and avoided moral ones. Its attractions for many were not only that it afforded a basis for letting things alone to sort themselves out, but also that it seemed strongly rooted in the use by natural scientists of nature as an arena in which a 'struggle for existence' took place. A familiar early use of this image is that made by Erasmus Darwin in his *Phytologia; or the Philosophy of Agriculture and Gardening* (1800): 'Such is the condition of organic nature! whose first law must be expressed in the words, "Eat or be eaten!" and which would seem to be one great slaughter-house, one universal scene of rapacity and injustice' (p. 556). Like the signs of the factory and the strike already referred to as vehicles for the discussion of industrial society, this account of the plant and animal worlds was also contested as to its significance, though it could be seen in various ways as beneficial, a kind of divine pruning.

For Darwin later the 'struggle for existence' became central to his theory where it had a functional role. It also provided part of the subtitle of his best-known work and the title of his third chapter in *The Origin of Species* (1859). In this chapter he refers to it as an already established fact: 'Nothing is easier than to admit in words the truth of the universal struggle for life...as more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with individuals of distinct species' (Burrow 1985:115-17). By using the 'Struggle for Existence...in a large and metaphorical sense' (p. 116) he extended and validated its explanatory force. But even before he wrote, it was the strongest framework into which accounts of a class society could be fitted: an account that might be described as callously optimistic, in which some had to be sacrificed for the general good. However, it matched the system it described by its willingness to ignore the welfare of the individual. In this it also drew on the long-standing Utilitarian discourse. The latter had first been articulated

by Jeremy Bentham, who wrote in 1776 that 'It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong' (Harrison 1960:3).

The assertion of struggle as the 'natural' pattern in the marketplace as in the physical universe sidesteps important issues which Gallagher, in her impressive study *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832–1867* (1985), sees as necessarily involved in this debate: what is the role of God/Providence in all this? Is humanity 'free' or not? For economists the answer was pre-empted by a belief in determinism; but this did not entirely seal off the question for devout Christians as the novels will show. Plots and causality go together.

Nor did the optimistic view of struggle go unchallenged. For radical thinkers at this time it took on a new significance, as they reaccented it. They too found it natural in a society composed of bourgeoisie and proletariat. However, as Engels wrote in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1844):

But this I maintain, the war of the poor against the rich now carried on in detail and indirectly will become direct and universal. It is too late for a peaceful solution. The classes are divided more and more sharply, the spirit of resistance penetrates the workers, the bitterness intensifies, the guerilla skirmishes swell into more important battles, and soon a slight impulse will suffice to set the avalanche in motion. Then, indeed, will the war-cry resound through the land: 'War to the palaces, peace to the cottages!'—but then it will be too late for the rich to beware.

(Kiernan 1987:292)

No novelist advocates this outcome but it haunts their texts like a ghost.

SOCIETY AS GROUPS OF PATRIARCHAL FAMILIES

As the previous section shows, many types of discourse came together to support a comprehensive explanation of industrial society as an ultimately benign struggle in which, alas, the weaker necessarily went to the wall. Similarly what looked like a totally opposed and humanitarian view, concerned with the fate of individuals, also represented the convergence of several linguistic registers: poetic,

religious, political. This alternative convergence has been called 'paternalism' and has been seen as having its roots in widely divergent writers including some of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, essayists like Thomas Arnold and Thomas Carlyle, as well as churchmen. This discourse reached its height in the 1830s and 'hungry' 1840s, when details of conditions and hours of work in factories and mines, of the low rates of life expectancy among the working classes, and of the incidence of disease, crime and prostitution were being made widely public through official government reports.

Despite their explicit wish to remedy social problems, exponents of paternalism all work on an assumption that they are attempting to return to an underlying reality which has been temporarily submerged, but is recoverable through a change of heart in individuals. This is in direct contrast with those who use the explanation of a functional struggle to explain the inevitability of social conditions remaining as they are. But paternalism also involves an acceptance of the existing social structures as necessary: conditions can be improved but social inequality is a given. Indeed for some, paternalism was a means of pre-empting the revolution that Engels predicted. Arthur Helps, who in 1844 wrote *The Claims of Labour; An Essay on the Duties of the Employer to the Employed*, a treatise that crystallises paternalist views in a usefully simplistic form, makes this clear at a time when Chartism offered a recurrent threat of political agitation:

I do not seek to terrify any one into a care for the labouring classes, by representing the danger to society of neglecting them. It is certainly a fearful thing to think of large masses of men being in that state of want and misery which leaves them nothing to hazard; and who are likely to be without the slightest reverence or love for the institutions around them.

(Helps 1844:16)

This rhetoric decoded means that paternalist care is necessary to ward off a revolution which might overthrow society.

Helps also spells out simply the framework from which paternalist discourse derives, its central metaphor paralleling the alternative 'struggle for existence': 'I believe that the paternal relation will be found the best model on which to form the duties of the employer to the employed' (Helps 1844:156). Paternalism is, to an extent, an attempted revival of the rank system. But it is a pastiche form which concentrates heavily on one aspect of a system made up of higher and lower classes: the

duties of landlord, manufacturer or master of servants to his inferiors. The former are fathers to the latter, a trope which tacitly draws support from the Christian idea of God as Father. In doing so, it puts the father-child relationship in the position of Genesis. It is the beginning of the given. It draws on the sign of the patriarchal family which was now firmly established. It is of course totally inappropriate to a group-based society such as that which now existed.

Naturally, when such a father-child sign is central, the emphasis in addressing social problems is local. As paternalistic discourse spread through the reviews, a writer in the *Quarterly Review* wrote in 1840: 'Let each man take care of his own part, and the whole will take care of itself (September 1840:501–2). This presumably is how the parent-child relationship could be given a fuzzy general application. Its strength, as Helps demonstrates, lay in detail and practicality; and he offers a pattern of behaviour for parent/master. The father/master should concern himself with housing, drainage, public baths, smoke control and provision of allotments for the lower classes. Personally he must not be condescending, not expect gratitude, not display authority offensively and not be suspicious. On the contrary, he must be kind and truthful. Helps' language, like that of others, leans heavily on the support of a religious register as he insists that the parable of the talents should not be taken literally (Helps 1844:34), and that his whole paternalist approach is an expansion of the injunction in the Sermon on the Mount 'to visit the sick, clothe the naked, and feed the hungry' (Helps 1844:167). The master should do all this in relation to those dependent on him in his local area. Few paternalists wished central government to interfere. Carlyle, a notorious exception, who wished paternalism to take a centralised form, has been subsequently accused of authoritarian tendencies inclining to fascism.

In fact, even when concerning itself with the local and specific, paternalist discourse was necessarily authoritarian, given that it related to a patriarchal family. It was based on the assumption that children/the lower classes needed parental control and guidance as well as concern for their physical well-being. As Helps puts it:

Consider how a wise father will act as regards interference. His anxiety will not be to drag his child along undeviatingly, in the wake of his own experience but rather, to endue him with that knowledge of the chart and compass...which will enable the child, himself, to steer safely over the great waters.

(p. 153)

Within the general paternalist consensus there were many variations, apart from those on the question of government interference: many condemned general philanthropy as destructive of self-reliance, others did not; some thought vice endemic to the working classes; some wished to make explicit links with the Church as an institution.

The fluidity of paternalism can be illustrated by comparing Helps' version with that of Disraeli in *Coningsby*, which was published in the same year (1844) as Helps' work. In the novel there is a satirical scene where the hero's friend, Lord Henry, and his brother-in-law, Lord Everingham, discuss the condition of England in the presence of the latter's ducal father. The duke refers to 'the labouring classes' and Lord Henry objects, adding

'...the other day we had a meeting in this neighbourhood to vote an agricultural petition that was to comprise all classes... Of course, I described it as the petition of the nobility, clergy, gentry, yeomanry, and peasantry...and, could you believe it they struck out *peasantry* as a word no longer used and inserted *labourers*.'
(*Coningsby*, Book 3, Chapter 3)

In Disraeli's form of paternalism, rank was to be reinstated along with feudal duties, labourers were to be baptised 'peasants', and made the happy beneficiaries of a treaty with the fatherly aristocracy. Mill scornfully summed up this variety of paternalism in his *Principles of Political Economy*:

The rich should be *in loco parentis* to the poor, guiding and restraining them like children...This is the ideal...of those whose dissatisfaction with the present assumes the form of affection and regret towards the past...it exercises an unconscious influence on the opinion and sentiments of numbers who never consciously guide themselves by any ideal.
(Mill 1848: Bk4, Ch. 7, Sect. 1)

Mill's sardonic comments come late in a verbal contest involving the contestation of the dominant accenting of the father-child relationship. Out of the anti-slavery campaign grew an alternative troping of the relationship between employers and employed: slave-master and slave. Its similarity of scope made it a powerful rhetorical weapon in the hands of radicals like William Cobbett who wrote to the abolitionist William Wilberforce in August 1823, arrogating the slavery image:

it is notorious that great numbers of your '*free* British labourers' have actually *died from starvation*, and that, too, at a time when...there was in the country an over-production of food...This being the case...and it being equally notorious that no Black slave ever suffered for want of food, will not the care, will not the anxiety of a really humane Englishman be directed towards the Whites, instead of the Blacks.

(Political Register 47:522)

The image took physical form in the banners proclaiming 'White Slavery'.

As Gallagher points out, the paralleling of factory workers and slaves was, confusingly, used by abolitionists and anti-abolitionists alike. But applied to the factory it could tellingly combine vivid detail (overheated factories v. tropical sun) with racial prejudice on the side of reform (Gallagher 1985:3). Here again, trapped in the comparison of worker and slave, is the issue of freedom and hence of responsibility for action. The question of what freedom is and where responsibility lies is an undercurrent of most industrial novels.

So society as (rightfully) groups of patriarchal families was one of the competing and conflicting linguistic codings current in the first half of the nineteenth century. In a nebulous and not altogether coherent way it tied economic and social issues together, or appeared to do so, by ignoring the obvious clash of interests between the new class groupings, reviving the authoritarianism of the rank system and supporting it by the use of religious language. It offered an accessible but flawed alternative to the harshness of the Malthusian struggle and Benthamite Utilitarianism.

THE INTERLOCKED CODING OF CLASS AND GENDER

SIGNS AND SYNTAX

When arguing that the interlocked coding of class and gender in the novel untwines in the course of the nineteenth century, I use linguistic terms as a framework: signs and syntax. The former are understood in the linguistic-cultural sense that Vološinov/Bakhtin describes and which has already been discussed. The significance of that description is the account of ‘multiaccentuality’ referred to in Chapter 1. For it is this which makes change in the system of signs possible: ‘This social *multiaccentuality* of the ideological sign is a very crucial aspect...it is thanks to this intersecting of accents that a sign maintains its vitality and dynamism and the capacity for further development’ (Matejka and Titunik 1986:23). Within recent history, for instance, the term *radical* (with reference to social and economic policies) acquired a dominant accent which assigned its favourable connotations to profoundly right-wing extremism. The previous dominant evaluation had ascribed these connotations to profoundly egalitarian positions on socio-economic policies. A change has taken place (though another may follow) as the hierarchy of accents shifted. The dominant accent is now right-wing.

It is such change on a large scale that is the focus of my argument. It will deal with those ideological signs in nineteenth-century novelistic discourse which are key terms in the areas of class and gender. They construct the two areas as a single semantic field which holds together a coherent identity for the middle classes, distinguishing them from the socio-economic classes below. In particular, I wish to show how the attempts to reaccent the signs of both the *womanly* woman and the *fallen* woman succeeded in rewriting their significance and what this meant for the treatment of class and gender as a whole.

Built into the general perception of a class—as opposed to a rank-based—society was not merely division but divisiveness. Under capitalism this fact had to be processed so that it could be managed ideologically. One way of achieving this is to characterise the working classes wherever they are represented (in law, social documentation, or art) in terms that justify treating them materially and politically in ways that are different from the treatment of middle and upper classes. And there is a common matrix on which representations of them draw, though by no means uniformly: the working classes are not self-reliant or in a laissez-faire society they might have risen to the top; they are improvident in better times and so make bad times worse; they are too stupid or too unsophisticated to resist the temptation of political agitators who incite them to join trades unions and strikes; and they are not capable of understanding their own long-term interest so far as their employers are concerned. They are also of a strongly animal nature conducive to prostitution, crime and revolutionary impulses.

Holding them down therefore was socially necessary. However, the justification for doing so depended on a construction of the middle class as essentially different in nature. As usual with the coding of cultural values, the principle of the defining ‘other’ operates to imply illogically that, because the working class are weak, irrational and animal, the middle classes are not. But upon this framework, so crucial to the dominant code, a more positive and powerful image had to be built. This image depended in practice on the contemporary construction of gender in terms of separate spheres and the complementarity of men and women. Ironically what gave imaginative power to the oppressors of the lower orders was the force attributed to the sign of the *womanly woman*, who was represented, shaped, celebrated and offered as an aspirational model in every form of writing from the law and ‘non-fictional’ documents like conduct books to novels and poetry. She is powerfully present, as a standard for judging by, when inevitably absent from accounts of working-class squalor or promiscuity. And the force of this sign is significant for more than representations of gender alone. As Mary Poovey points out, instead of being articulated upon ‘inherited class position in the form of noblesse oblige, virtue was increasingly articulated upon gender in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries...As superintendents of the domestic sphere, [middle-class] women were represented as protecting, and increasingly incarnating virtue’ (Poovey 1989:10).

Though not uncontested or ‘uni-accented’, this was the dominant sign for the representation of femininity. Feminine gender was constructed around an elaboration of ‘natural’ maternal and nurturing instinct into the guardianship at home of morality generally, and sexual purity in particular. Complementary masculinity then fell into place as ‘naturally’ fit for the marketplace and its struggles: self-interested, aggressive, competitive and with a strong procreative instinct suited to the founding of dynasties. These apparently functional descriptions made available a positive image of the middle classes, differentiating them from and justifying control over the lower. For by uniting himself in marriage to a satisfactory exponent of femininity, a typical exponent of middle-class masculinity could subsume her identity into his, and become possessed of her high-mindedness and purity, along with a domestic haven of comfort. As articulated by the law, the process of marrying changed husband and wife into one person, since ‘the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband’ (Manchester 1980:368). This now morally excellent man thus became well suited to the duty of restraining the irrational and dangerous working classes.

In conduct books for women where the coding of femininity was reflected, shaped and passed on, there is a bizarre blend of moral injunctions and practical recommendations on household management. These are somehow linked or matched. Fitted into a broad framework laying down the most essential feminine quality as disinterested kindness and selflessness are recommendations as to regularity and judgement in the provision of household linen; advice on supplying food in some variety but in moderate quantity; and on how to keep the all-important domestic hearth. If a man likes stirring the ‘glowing embers’ himself, his wife should prepare ‘a tempting crust for him to break through on his arrival’ (Ellis 1843:91). Such works are fiercely directive and exhortatory.

In this discourse the ideal middle-class home was (if women came up to scratch) a haven as well as a heaven, managed by an efficient angel whose education had combined a strict formation on Christian principles with a rigorous training in domestic skills:

...the general appearance of his home has much to do with the complacency man naturally feels on returning to it. If his taste is for neatness and order, for the absence of servants, and for

perfect quiet, it would be absolute cruelty to allow such a man to find his house in confusion, and to have to call in servants to clear this thing and the other away after his return.

(Ellis 1843:90)

In this way comfortable and tasteful domesticity becomes the sign for moral excellence, the House for the Angel. It served as a safe expression of physicality and a validation of materialism as virtue.

The supposedly physiologically determined qualities of the Angel were extreme emotional sensitivity, weakness of intellect, unlimited selflessness, and, crucially, a lack of 'animal' passion. Paradoxically these marks of women's inferiority were coded positively as concomitants of moral excellence. Logically, given the essentialist nature of this account, such qualities might be expected to crop up in women of any class, including the lower ones. But also to be accommodated in the scheme of things represented was female sexuality. There was a tacit but universal acceptance of men's fairly ungovernable sexual appetites which were natural enough. Female sexuality, however, was deviant and its natural location was amongst the class which in practice provided the prostitutes in Victorian cities, that 'multitudinous amazonian army the devil keeps in constant field service for his own ends' (Miller 1859:5). It is arguable that the containment of female sexuality is a prior cause of the angel figure but I am concerned with the organisation of the semantic field rather than with causal chains.

Clearly, though one task of ideology is to conceal its own illogicalities, not all working-class women could be characterised as sexually 'deviant' just because some of them were. Instead, those who were not became invisible, as is evident from the condition-of-England novels where they are usually peripheral to the class confrontations. Their social invisibility and silence is witnessed by the fact that of the 142 working-class autobiographies listed by Vincent as covering the period 1790 to 1850 only six were by women. His explanation is that women did not lack the necessary skills but lacked the self-confidence to write such accounts; and that their increasing exclusion from 'most forms of working class organisations' cut them off from the training and stimulus for self-expression (Vincent 1981:8). Apart from invisibility, two ideological strategies appear. The first is the assumption that middle-class women never 'fall'. An extreme illustration of this is the attack, in Samuel Bracebridge Hemyng's informal documentary account of

prostitution, on any claims by the women he meets that they have fallen from a higher social group:

Loose women generally throw a veil over their early life, and you seldom, if ever, meet with a woman who is not either a reduced governess or a clergyman's daughter; not that there is a word of truth in the allegation—but it is their peculiar whim to say so.

(Mayhew 1861–2:217)

So sexual deviance, though not universal, is represented as endemic amongst the working classes:

To be unchaste amongst the lower classes is not always a subject of reproach...the depravity of manners...begins so very early, that they think it rather a distinction than otherwise to be unprincipled.

(Mayhew 1861–2:221)

As Nead says, writing of signs in nineteenth-century painting,

The definition of female sexuality across an axis of class made it easier to construct a coherent image of respectable femininity. Beliefs concerning the nature of female sexual desire were extremely fractured, but these differences could be displaced and a consensus could be reached by invoking a generalized notion of female respectability and opposing it to the imagined excess passion and sexual deviancy of the women of the undeserving poor.

(Nead 1988:7)

Added power is given to the necessary connection between these classes and immorality of all kinds by a second strategy: the symbolism of pollution. Because of its association with venereal disease, prostitution was readily coded as a dangerous contagion which was simultaneously physical and moral. As Judith Walkowitz points out in her historical study of prostitution: 'Pollution became the governing metaphor for the perils of social intercourse between the "Two Nations"; it assumed heightened scatological significance in a society where the poor seemed to be living literally in their own excrement' (Walkowitz 1980:4).

The power of the metaphor is displayed in the description of the prostitute, Martha Endell, in Dickens' *David Copperfield*, when she stands contemplating suicide on the bank of the Thames. Her

subsequent comparison of herself to the river turns the narrator's description of it into an image for her. Like the wrecks of machinery that surround it, she represents human debris 'vainly trying to hide itself'. She is the vessel that transmits human pollution as the river does. She stands for a corruption that is merely enacted by the physical plague of disease and goes beyond it:

Slimy gaps and causeways, winding among old wooden piles, with a sickly substance clinging to the latter, like green hair, and the rags of last year's handbills offering rewards for drowned men...led down through the ooze and slush to the ebb tide. There was a story that one of the pits dug for the dead in the time of the Great Plague was hereabout; and a blighting influence seemed to have proceeded from it over the whole place. Or else it looked as if it had gradually decomposed into that nightmare condition, out of the overflowings of the polluted stream.

(Chapter 47)

To the narrator she is 'a part of the refuse' the river had cast out and left to 'corruption and decay'. It is hard to distinguish here between emotional, physical and moral blight. The *fallen woman* is thus a linguistic coding as important as the Angel/House trope in the interlocking of class and gender. In the dominant discourse of the period she signifies the inescapable corruption of the working classes, which must be contained at any cost.

Even hard-headed official reports on the vile living conditions of workers in cities 'reinforce' the connection between class and vice. Chadwick (1842), for instance, quotes a Poor Law official's description of a family of eleven who live in only two rooms:

The man, his wife, and four children, sometimes five, slept in one of the rooms, and in one bed...The other part of the family slept in one bed in the keeping-room, that is, the room in which their cooking, washing, and eating were performed. How could it be otherwise with this family than that they should be sunk into a most deplorable state of *degradation* and *depravity*?

(Flinn 1965:190; my emphases)

Facts thus seem to 'support' a significant contrast between the well-ordered and well-equipped middle-class home, cultivating peace, love and morality, and inhuman living conditions spawning sexuality,

promiscuity and crime. For crime, like vice, is seen as natural to the lower orders: both environmentally determined and innate, a familiar confusion in the Victorian novel. As Lucia Zedner has shown in *Women, Crime and Custody in Victorian England* (1991:27–33), the gravity of female criminality in particular was usually seen to involve what were called ‘crimes of morality’ and was measured by the failure of working-class women to live up to the middle-class model.

My account indicates how the signs for middle-class femininity/domesticity and for the fallen woman hold together a coding of society in which the working classes are represented as irrational, immoral and in need of restraint. At the same time the middle classes are their natural masters, possessed of the qualities necessary and proper to control them. This dominant discourse was more fluid than my simplification so far makes clear. It was, as has been said, challenged, contested and eventually reworked. Undoing such an ideological web was not an easy process. What rendered it most potent were the powerful images evoked in a communal language and across a wide range of media. However, as has been made clear, each use of the fallen-woman image in the early Victorian period is not a replica of every other use but an individual variation on it. This can be seen in the variety found in a writer whose fallen women are often regarded as identical stereotypes: Dickens’ use of the trope includes variants as different as Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, Martha Endell as well as (less obtrusively) the respectable Rosa Dartle in *David Copperfield*, and the independent and forceful Miss Wade in *Little Dorrit*. The individual variants, expressive of the multiaccultural nature of signs, represent a site for possible change in novelistic language. When a whole semantic area such as class or gender is at issue, the process of change is slow and difficult. It *can* be attempted at a discursive level, as when Hardy tried to rewrite the image of the ‘pure woman’ by adding that phrase as a subtitle to a novel concerning Tess Durbeyfield, whose fornication, adultery and crime of murder marked her as outrageously ‘impure’ in conventional terms. The rewriting had to work at a symbolic level within the text if it was to work at all: a sign cannot be defused or drained of power merely by a verbal contradiction asserting that it does not mean what it usually means. A trivial example will illustrate this. The current health warning mandatory on cigarette advertisements fails to break down the arbitrary connection long made, by the use of verbal and visual images, between cigarette-smoking and sophistication. The link creating that meaning is arbitrary but has become strong—so strong that skilful users of the advertising

code have now shrewdly managed to perpetuate it by creating ironic images of purely visual sophistication above the health warning. These sustain the connection previously made by pictures of elegant or 'sophisticated' individuals smoking cigarettes.

Similarly it is at the level of symbolism and rhetoric that ideological codings of a more extensive kind can begin to break down. For this reason the chapters that follow will focus mainly, though not exclusively, on the fictional treatment of the two (central) signs relating to middle-class femininity and to fallen women already discussed. It is apparently in narratives that the process of dismantling images that help to hold together ideology can be seen to begin. This happens, of course, alongside a non-fictional debate, in which novels are an intervention. Some of that debate has been referred to above and includes the writings of Carlyle, J.S. Mill, political economists, social reformers and others. The narrative form which initiates this shift in the representation of gender is a vehicle for many contradictory voices. I therefore intend to discuss extensively only works which appear to develop markedly this change in the coding of class and gender. For a wide variety of novelists in the period from the 1830s to the 1850s address the looming problem of the industrialised working classes. The most well known of these are: Harriet Martineau's *Manchester Strike* (a fable-like novella published in 1832); Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (1840); Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845); Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848); Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849); Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet* (1850); Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854); and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855).

As already stated, non-fictional and fictional writings (as well as visual signs) in any period share a common range of signs with established though fluid meanings. The advantage that novels have over other kinds of writings is that they place signs within a narrative which, like the syntactic frame of a sentence, attempts to determine and control meaning. Plots, like signs, make statements. They do not simply answer the question 'What happened next?' Their main function is to show 'what it all means', how these events add up, even if they add up to meaninglessness. They are part of the method of re-accenting signs. Walkowitz demonstrates, for instance, that several contradictory narratives were constructed from the Whitechapel murders of prostitutes by 'Jack the Ripper' in the 1880s. These stories were 'expressive of important cultural and social divisions within Victorian society' and were shaped by 'the alternative

perspectives of feminists, libertarians, of the Whitechapel poor' or 'people in positions of power' (Walkowitz 1992:225–6). So my discussion of the chosen novels will always take place within this broad framework of signs within plots or narrative syntax.

In each of these occur central confrontational events which act as signs for class division. The confrontation could be of various kinds. It could involve direct cruelty from a member of one class to another: the brutal overseer Joseph Parsons and the factory owner Elgood Sharpton who victimise pauper apprentices in Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong*; or the Poor Law guardians maltreating the Green family and the cruel Mr Z tyrannising the factory where Helen Fleetwood dies in Charlotte Elizabeth's novel of that name (1839–41). Though these sympathetic accounts of working-class suffering are fortified by details drawn directly from reports in government Blue Books, they lack narrative specificity. Historical verisimilitude does not prevent them from merging with traditional tales of brutality, myths of cruel ogres and innocents.

More explanatory significance is latent in alternative confrontational plots which accommodate the fact that class-based society is built out of groups with conflicting interests. Such narratives are typified by workers' riots resulting in attacks on middle- or upper-class property. The have-nots trying to become haves are seen in the assault on Mowbray Castle in *Sybil*, the machine-breaking attempts in *Shirley* and the riots in *Alton Locke*. All these focus the economic issue more clearly than the cruelty novels. But the event which can be most forcefully expressive of an economically and socially divided society is the strike, where the property attacked is the machine for wealth-making, the factory itself, that crucial ideological figure. The strike could simplistically spell out the cause of class hostility, the 'gradation of ranks and inequality of fortunes' which Dickens' *bête noire*, J.R. McCulloch, saw as 'the essence of society' (Ford and Monod 1966:322). The potential meaning of the strike, however, encompasses the clash of economic interests; a testing of the power of capital and labour; a questioning of the rights of combination; and a measuring of the threat of violence and disorder inherent in the way society is structured.

What the first three novels to be discussed share at a general level is a common narrative syntax. The dynamic of each is an attempt to negotiate an apparently intractable problem: class hostility created

by the emiseration of the working classes. They draw on a wide range of linguistic discourses both to construct the problem and to handle the negotiation. To shape the problem into a narrative is to control its meaning. Martineau, for instance, a strict authoritarian, deploys the languages of political economy and of Utilitarianism to represent strikes as causes of distress, not symptoms. Disraeli draws on the descriptions found in Blue Books or official reports on housing, hours of labour, the truck system, to characterise the condition of a second nation to which the first nation could in an ideal world play the role of all-powerful and benign father. But surprisingly the language which could most neatly, in ideological terms, 'resolve' the problem of a divided England was that of the romantic novel in which divided middle-class lovers are finally united.

Such narratives are fuelled by the desire of a middle-class 'master' for the sexual and romantic satisfaction as well as the domestic comfort and prospect of heirs that the middle-class woman represented. The plot's reversal hinges on the resolution of the disharmony between the two. The struggle for this feminine object of male desire displaces the conflict between class and class onto that between the sexes. The process is helped by a compassionate sympathy felt by the true woman for individual workers. The expression of such sympathy is ideologically safe because it is part of her natural mothering role and has no wide implications in the factory, where she has no place. Once accepted by a suitable woman like this as a proper master and father in the home, the 'hero' becomes a proper master in the workplace through a token action of disinterested kindness towards his workers. Harmony at a domestic level is thus transposed onto the class level. Romantic novels can apparently 'demonstrate' that an anomic society, in which accepted social standards and values are lacking, really has moral cohesion.

Their narrative syntax provides a pattern of struggle becoming harmony which strongly reinforces the use of the language of gender to contain the class issue in the first half of the nineteenth century. Hence my concentration on 'romantic' novels. What I wish to argue is that, in the first three novels to be discussed at length, the dominant significance of the House/Angel and Whore/Disorder signs begins to break down. In this breakdown the gender of the narrating voice proves crucial. As Walkowitz points out:

That individuals do not fully author their texts does not falsify Marx's insight that men (and women) make their own history,

albeit under circumstances they do not produce or fully control.

(Walkowitz 1992:9)

This involves historians, as Spiegel says, in explaining cultural constructs in terms of a 'historically-situated authorial consciousness' (Spiegel 1990:62). Similarly it involves critics of nineteenth-century novels in considering the gender of the speaking voice historically constituted as feminine or masculine. Certainly the gender of the narrator, if 'feminine', was usually prominent for contemporary reviewers. 'Femininity' had as corollary social class: to be a *lady*, not a female, was to be middle-class.

The result of a 'feminine' perspective is that, as Lynda Nead says of feminist visual art, 'the image itself is seen as part of a process that constructs possible viewing positions for its audience' (Nead 1992:61). In the early nineteenth century there was an accepted range of such positions. But there was also the possibility that the individual circumstances of a novelist might shift her from these in various ways. The relevance of this to the novels under discussion is that the first three to be discussed are virtually contemporaneous but two are written by women and one by a man. And close reading reveals that Brontë and Gaskell each perceive and re-present domesticity and the Angel/House sign in a subversive way, whereas Dickens has an unstable perception of the Whore/Disorder sign. Their individual uses of novelistic language are shaped by these facts, as the idiolect (personal language) of each works to reaccent the communal system of signs. These individual perceptions have the consequence of releasing the representation of gender from its task of neutralising class conflict, and of allowing new accounts of femininity to emerge. The process can then be seen to go further in the three novels from the second half of the century.

The analyses that follow are predicated upon Bakhtin's view that novels are multi-voiced:

The novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice. In it the investigator is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities often located on different linguistic levels and subject to different stylistic controls.

(Holquist 1981:261)

The divisions within my chapters represent attempts to distinguish these conflicting voices in the six texts.

*SHIRLEY***GENDERING THE NARRATOR: THE DUAL VOICE**

The novel of *Jane Eyre*...purports to have been edited by Currer Bell, and the said Currer Bell divides the authorship, if we are not misinformed, with a brother and sister.

(Contemporary reviewer)

From the time of the publication of Charlotte Brontë's first novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) her 'originality' and 'power' were recognised. But since the pseudonym, Currer Bell, effectively concealed gender, admiration or distaste were written up as a recognition of masculine or feminine identity: for comfortable criticism even texts had to be gendered. The terms of the discussion are made clear by the reviewer who, discounting the idea of a male author, comments that 'a book more unfeminine, both in its excellences and defects, it would be hard to find in the annals of female authorship. Throughout there is masculine power, breadth and shrewdness' (Allott 1974:89). *Jane Eyre's* capacity to defy classification as either masculine or feminine is captured by the desperate comments of Edwin Whipple who decided that, as Gounelas (1984:152) points out, it was the joint production of a brother and sister: 'The work bears the marks of more than one mind and sex...The family mind is strikingly peculiar...but it is still male and female' (Allott 1974:98).

When *Shirley* appeared in 1849 it was widely known that the author was a woman but that only increased the critics' difficulties with this hermaphrodite text. Those who wished to praise it sometimes did so by insisting that its main concern was appropriately 'feminine': 'Her main purpose has been, to trace the fortunes and feelings of two girls' (Allott 1974:123); 'the principal continuous

interest of the book attaches to two brothers, and two girls with whom they are in love' (Allott 1974:127). The attack on Robert Moore and his mill are often ignored. The 'masculine' aspects of the narrative were difficult to accommodate in a favourable review of a woman's novel. G.H.Lewes, though he had believed that the author of *Jane Eyre*, which he originally admired, was female, began to see the work differently when he was certain. In reviewing *Shirley* he wrote of the earlier text: 'a more masculine book in the sense of vigour, was never written. Indeed that vigour often amounts to coarseness—and is certainly the very antipode to "lady like"' (Allott 1974:163). In relation to *Shirley* the masculine vigour of *Jane Eyre* is now characterised by Lewes as 'this same *over-masculine* vigour' (Allott 1974:163; my emphasis) and is berated as offensive. He concludes his attack with a quotation from Schiller's comment on Madame de Staël's *Corinne* (1807): 'she steps out of her sex—without elevating herself above it' (Allott 1974:169).

His review relates to Brontë's incomplete adoption of conventional novelistic language in which the 'feminine', or 'womanly' as he calls it, is determined by a middle-class male perspective. In stepping 'out of her sex' Brontë is betraying this perspective. It is significant that he finds this difficult to accept in a novel which involves more than the marriage tangles of *Jane Eyre*. Significantly too his greatest difficulties are with Caroline Helstone and her mother Mrs Pryor—perceived as the unwomanly woman and the unmaternal mother. He becomes impassioned in his distaste for two women 'as untrue to the universal laws of our common nature as if they had been drawn by the clumsy hand of a male' (Allott 1974:167). Decoded this means that they do not conform to the stereo-types. The subversiveness of this kind of femininity alarms him. He connects it with the narrating voice and Brontë's error in making the 'gentle, shy, not highly cultivated Caroline talk from time to time in the strain of Currer Bell herself rather than in the strain of Helstone's little niece' (Allott 1974:167).

Like Lewes, Brontë recognises that in writing she abandons her gender as conventionally constituted. She told Lewes himself in a letter written in 1849 before his review of *Shirley* appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*:

Come what will, I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and of what is elegant and charming in femininity; it is not on those terms, or with such ideas, I ever took pen in hand; and if

it is only on such terms my writing will be tolerated, I shall pass away from the public and trouble it no more.

(Wise and Symington 1980, Vol. 3:31)

What this claims, without discarding conventional accounts of the feminine, is a right to speak from a historically situated female consciousness which does not match those accounts at all points. The idea of womanliness is still valued in *Shirley* in a general form but there are also experiential values expressed for which contemporary vocabulary has no descriptive terms other than 'not womanly' or 'masculine' or 'unnatural'. Taken overall, favourable and unfavourable reviews represent a struggle to handle this disturbingly dual voice. The struggle results from Brontë's acceptance of conventional novelistic language, particularly in the form of narrative syntax or plot combined with the shifts in the linguistic signs for characters involved which subvert it. These shifts are personal to her.

NARRATIVE SYNTAX: INDUSTRIAL PEACE THROUGH DOMESTIC HARMONY

'The machinery of all my nature; the whole enginery of this human mill: the boiler, which I take to be the heart, is fit to burst'.

(Robert Moore)

The insistence of reviewers, already illustrated, that *Shirley* was a romantic tale or even a weaker variation on *Jane Eyre* indicates a selective conventional reading that suppresses the significance of working out the problems of an industrialised society through romantic entanglements. Those who noticed these problems saw them as cosily resolved on the side:

The tale...is laid in the manufacturing districts and the wrongs and rights of the mill-owners and their operatives form subsidiary parts of the story. In treating of these questions, a discriminating and kindly spirit is evinced, with a manifold desire to heal the antagonism of classes.

(Allott 1974:159)

What really makes *Shirley* different from *Jane Eyre* is the extent to which it engages through these 'subsidiary' events with the debate about the existing class structure. The male lead is not a Byronic

Rochester but a mill-owner whose selfhood is represented by his factory. The prominent female is not an orphaned governess but Shirley Keeldar, free of family, rich and independent. Shadowing them of course are the more familiar-looking hero and heroine in Louis Moore, a penniless but well-bred tutor, and Caroline Helstone, a refined orphan girl. The remaining individual characters are mainly identified by their role in an industrial area. Beyond them are the nameless: child workers scurrying unfed to the mill at 6 a.m. and the mass of adult workers distinguished, as Eagleton notes, primarily by their absence (Eagleton 1975:47).

The narrative syntax offers a masculine perspective: a plot which shows the healing power of the 'feminine'. It even asserts a willingness to confront the naked reality of class conflict in three main events: the destruction of Robert Moore's newly imported machinery; the attack on his mill and his Irish blacklegs; and the attempt on his life. Though written during the collapse of the Chartist movement for political reform, the confrontation preferred by Brontë is one safely sealed into the past of almost forty years earlier, for details of which she used the files of the *Leeds Mercury* for 1812, 1813 and 1814, the period of the Luddite disturbances in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Bodenheimer (1988) suggests that the choice of an earlier 'dry spell' involves a 'cyclical view of human history' (Bodenheimer 1988:40). Most critics have agreed that the text is a response to the events of 1848 when the Charter was spurned by the establishment. Brontë herself then wrote with characteristic equivocation that now Chartism was 'judiciously suppressed' it would be 'the right time...to examine carefully into their causes of complaint, and make such concessions as justice and humanity dictate' (Wise and Symington 1980, Vol. 2:203). However, the response of the text to 1848 is more complex than an assertion that history repeats itself.

Any linear stringing together of a series of events implies some statement about causality. In this case the causal question foregrounded is, where does the responsibility for working-class distress and violence lie? The negotiation in *Shirley* is carefully ambivalent. The overt causal explanation for the machine breaking offered by the narrator is historically factual and carries the implication of a classical political economist's view that circumstances had accidentally thrown a spanner into the works of the otherwise well-functioning machine. Whether the machine is God-made is not a problem that this secular novel addresses:

The 'Orders in Council'...had, by offending America, cut off the principal market of the Yorkshire woollen trade, and brought it consequently to the verge of ruin...At this crisis, certain inventions in machinery were introduced into the staple manufactures of the north, which, greatly reducing the number of hands necessary to be employed, threw thousands out of work, and left them without legitimate means of sustaining life.
(pp. 36-7)

The class position assumed by this textbook explanation is reflected in the reference to the workers as 'hands', an employers' term. The same employers' explanation is invoked before the attack on Moore's mill: England is still 'at heart...no better: still her poor were wretched, still their employers were harassed: commerce seemed threatened with paralysis' (p. 185). Historical explanations like these safeguard the status quo by turning employers into victims as much as the employed. They implicitly offer the proposition that no-one is to blame.

But though the machine-breaking and the attacks on the mill and later on Moore have been given a sufficient cause in external events, they are over-determined. For they are also attributed to Moore himself whose family bankruptcy has reduced him to an 'embarrassed penury' that he regards as loftier and more significant than 'the *natural*, habitual poverty of the working man' (p. 82; my emphasis). His perception of his own class superiority causes his rejection of the workman William Farren's suggestion that a slower introduction of machinery might cause less distress: 'neither to your dictation, nor to that of any other, will I submit...I will have my own way' (p. 154). He thus appears to be claiming agency over events already represented as an unbreakable chain. His rationale for his actions is a familiar one, Malthusian in tone. It translates self-interest into the exertion needed to survive: 'if I stopped by the way an instant, while others are rushing on, I should be trodden down' (p. 154). To survive in the inter-species struggle, he must crush or ignore those who oppose him in the intra-species strife—another textbook excuse for exploitation. In this way the causal links in the sequence leading to distress, starvation and class conflict are ambiguously constructed. They are 'caused' entirely by external historical events; and paradoxically they are also 'caused' by the vices of Robert Moore in particular. Out of all these causes the last serves the purpose of opening the way to a paternalist solution later. The historical cause ensures that though responsible he is not too responsible.

In the narrative, as the dominant ideology requires, this conflict is to be resolved by the two women who, by sometimes standing in for the working class, can safely domesticate and eradicate it by spreading kindness. First, however, they need to be separated from the employer Moore's point of view. This severance is worked out through the assault on the mill which is represented through their eyes. Initially it evokes for them also the middle-class fear of lawless violence that might escalate into revolution, as they stand looking down on what they perceive as a theatrical performance in the natural amphitheatre where the mill stands. Jokingly Shirley underlines their role as that of women in 'days of chivalry' watching a joust; and congratulates herself on preventing Caroline from making a 'romantic rush on the stage' (p. 385).

When the narrator finally turns up the lights on the scene the colourful illusion vanishes for the two women. The 'altered impulse' of their heart is a distaste for their own spuriously romantic interpretation:

The mill yawned all ruinous with unglazed frames...more than one deep crimson stain was visible on the gravel: a human body lay quiet on its face near the gates; and five or six wounded men writhed and moaned in the bloody dust.

(p. 389)

Moore's sense of militaristic triumph overwrites the realities of the scene; theirs does not. Melodrama is rejected in favour of 'the real, cool, and solid' (p. 7). This divergence positions them to carry out the role ideologically required of them: out of the superfluity of causes for 'the present troubles' they can address themselves solely to Moore's culpability and the need for his recognition of his fatherly duty towards his workers.

Though his conduct suggests that such a 'conversion' was unlikely, the concept was a familiar one in a period when forms of religious dissent which involved being born again morally were spreading. And Moore has shown signs of grace since he does not flog his child workers. Further, his domestic life shows him to be in need of domestic redemption as well. His Belgian housewife sister, Hortense, is not modelled on Sarah Ellis's English woman. In a fictional language where good and plentiful English food equates with a satisfactory degree of womanliness and the serene domesticity it can offer, Moore's domestic life is represented as foreign: emotionally and morally

impoverished. He is a candidate for the domestic bribe in return for which he must give up his callous treatment of his workers.

In his penniless cousin, Caroline, he perceives the prospect of English domesticity and is tempted to marry her, but hardens his heart against her as against his employees. One rejection figures the other: both illustrate the same indifference to everything but profit. Both woman and workers suffer through his rejection: Caroline pines and wastes, the workers starve. It is she who, by drawing the parallel, is able to offer the paternalist remedy for unrest:

‘I know it would be better for you to be loved by your workpeople than to be hated by them, and I am sure that kindness is more likely to win their regard than pride. If you were proud and cold to me and Hortense, should we love you? When you are cold to me, as you *are* sometimes, can I venture to be affectionate in return?’

(p. 105)

Moore resists both Caroline’s instruction and the bribe of House/ Angel that she stands for, as he later rejects Farren’s plea to slow down the introduction of machinery. This is his industrial sin; its domestic parallel is to attempt to marry Shirley for her money (not Caroline). She rejects him in an appropriately biblical register for bringing the values of the marketplace into the sacred sphere of domesticity and morality. She recognised earlier that his mill was his ‘lady love’; now she sees it as the heathen god, said (in *Kings* and *Jeremiah*) to have been worshipped with human sacrifice: ‘*you* want to make a speculation of me. You would immolate me to that mill—your Moloch!’ (p. 608). She perceives him as a ‘brigand who demanded my purse’ (p. 607). In retrospect Moore describes himself emerging from this encounter as the guilty figure of Cain. The image reveals the underlying equivocation in the text between the discourses of class and gender. He is guilty of the romantic crime of preferring money to love. In perpetrating it he has somehow symbolically murdered his brother in the workplace. This use of the biblical register is essential if the discussion is not to become a radical examination of society.

The confusion of tropes continues as in his shame he removes himself from the neighbourhood of Shirley and so of his workers. He punishes himself by retreating to the hell of London and Birmingham, where the epiphany effected by Shirley’s reaction to his outrage against domestic values takes an industrial form. In his later explanation it

appears both romantic and economic. He learns the need for fidelity to love and sexual desire if he is to avoid humiliation: 'never more will I mention marriage to a woman, unless I feel love...No woman shall ever again...feel towards me as Miss Keeldar felt' (p. 611). As a consequence he can now see the previously invisible 'causes of the present troubles of this country' and the poor as 'famished' animals offering 'a new lesson' (p. 616). More dangerously from a capitalist point of view, he has learnt to let 'Credit and Commerce...take care of themselves' (p. 611) while he busies himself doing 'justice to his fellow-men' (p. 616). There is capitalist hope, however, in his description of his broken heart in the familiar terms that Carlyle had derided: 'the boiler, which I take to be the heart, is fit to burst' (p. 604).

At this point the narrative syntax is impaled on the horns of a dilemma: how to combine hearts and boilers. How is a paternalist entrepreneur to achieve the success necessary for the general good if he abandons commercial values for love and kindness? As with causes of social and economic problems, so with their resolutions: again history proves to be the answer. At this precise point Moore (like the Yorkshire manufacturer, Horsfall, in 1817) is struck, though not fatally, by an assassin's bullet. His slow recovery is rich in significance: it is a punishment for his sins, an expiation; it turns him from oppressor to victim; and it enacts his succumbing to the domestic feminine world of sickness, dependence and emotion. It also allows enough time to elapse in accord with the historical time-frame of the novel for the repeal of the Orders in Council. Trade picks up and generosity to his workers becomes compatible with a healthy profit for Moore. A documented historical fact serves to validate the proposition that one reward for domestic and fatherly virtue in the home and in the factory is solvency.

Of the repeal, Moore says: 'this day lays for my fortunes a broad, firm foundation; on which for the first time in my life, I can securely build' (p. 733). His use of the plural 'fortunes' is suggestive: economic success and a happy marriage are interchangeable:

'I breathe: I can act...I can take more workmen; give better wages; lay wiser and more liberal plans; do some good; be less selfish...*now* I can seek a wife.'

(p. 733)

In fact he can be more selfish: 'she *will* care for me...these hands will be the gentle ministrants of every comfort I can taste. I know the

being I seek to entwine with my own will bring me a solace—a charity—a purity—to which, of myself, I am a stranger' (p. 734). Marriage is now a comfortable reward and an achieved set of moral values. Moore, in the farcically neat schema of the plot, marries for love, not money, but since his brother, Louis, marries Shirley, Capital becomes his sister-in-law. He turns into a Robert Owen who builds the model mill and workers' cottages which, as Bodenheimer (1988) notes, strangely disfigure the final vision of the landscape (p. 40).

Presumably, like paternalist solutions generally, this one is metonymic: as it is here, so it could be throughout the whole of industrial society. However, the text offers what Deirdre David (1981) calls a 'fiction of resolution', which only in a mechanical sense dissolves the distress and class conflict previously spelt out. In terms of narrative syntax the reason for this fictitiousness is the asymmetry between what needs to be resolved and its supposed resolution. Moore's well-rewarded remorse is no match for the state of the working class as represented here. They are usually said to be absent. True, they are nameless, but they *are* present as a 'sort of moral earthquake...heaving under the hills of the northern counties' (p. 37). They take violent collective action in the dark, in unknown numbers and in unknown shapes, their presence an absence. After the attack on the mill the casualties remain pathetically anonymous, merely one dead and five or six wounded. Eagleton writes that the event is 'structurally central and curiously empty' (Eagleton 1975:47). Presumably he is referring to the lack of any experiential reconstruction of the workers' life. But this absence tellingly enacts the middle-class view of the 'hands' as that and no more. It also significantly leaves unresolved the threat of greater disorder. Invisibility is menace. In this text, to be un-inscribed is to remain uncontained and to resist the panacea of fatherly kindness. A parallel is the 'minimal self representation' or 'absence of self' noticed by Gagnier (1987:336) in working-class autobiographies which may be an indication of selfhood perceived as solidarity rather than uniqueness. Like the depiction of the workers in *Shirley*, it clearly in some sense evades control.

REWRITING WOMEN AS SIGNS: THE ANGEL IN PRISON

'The cleverest, the acutest men are often under an illusion about women: they do not read them in a true light...their good woman is always a

queer thing, half doll, half angel: their bad woman almost always a fiend.'

(Shirley Keeldar)

The sign which is designed in the masculine plot of *Shirley* to refigure the satisfactory resolution of class conflict as harmony is the Angel/ House equation. But the treatment of domesticated women serves instead to destabilise the text further. Her reviewers did recognise that all was not well as the dual voice at once approved feminine propriety in the domestic sphere and simultaneously rewrote it as a horror. Ambiguity on the subject of women's proper role and duties is evident in Brontë's letter to Elizabeth Gaskell written in 1850 about the change in some men's views:

They say, however...that the amelioration of our condition depends on ourselves. Certainly there are evils which our own efforts will best reach; but as certainly there are other evils—deep rooted in the foundation of the social system—which no efforts of ours can touch.

(Wise and Symington 1980, Vol. 3:150)

This 'unfeminine' view quickly gives way to a 'feminine' one: the evils of the system are things 'of which we cannot complain: of which it is advisable not too often to think' (Wise and Symington 1980, Vol. 3:149–50). What held the social fabric together was the performance of women's domestic labours in accordance with their class. Two aspects of these are startlingly re-written in *Shirley* from a perspective in which all that remains of the feminine is a residual guilt in Caroline's case and not even that for Shirley Keeldar or Rose Yorke. This contestation of the familiar significance of domesticity is echoed in other texts by women, written at about the same time. They depict it as oppressive, not fulfilling, in violent figures. The domestic duties regarded as representative, sewing and providing food, are in the themselves trivial. Their triviality and repetitiveness are the point. There is nothing for women outside these narrow limits and there is no escape. Ideologically such accounts are deeply subversive, particularly in a novel like *Shirley* where the Angel/House sign is debunked even as it is supposed to underpin the plot. At the same time the text goes further by showing Caroline and Shirley finding a means of temporary escape from the imprisoning feminine.

Rose Yorke, whom the narrative privileges as one of a family of eccentric children and one who can at 14 play the *enfant terrible*,

articulates forcefully the idea of the domestic as stasis. She urges Caroline Helstone to travel no matter where and describes her life with her misogynist uncle, Matthewson Helstone, as 'a black trance like the toad's, buried in marble', a 'long slow death' (p. 451). Any change would be better than this death in life: 'Nothing changes in Briarfield Rectory: the plaster of the parlour-ceilings, the paper on the walls, the curtains, carpets, chairs are still the same' (pp. 451–2). The 'long slow death' is presumably a daring allusion to Helstone's dead wife, the 'monumental angel' (p. 61) Mary Cave, who was earlier confined by him to the rectory. He took her death to be sudden, others saw it as gradual: 'he thought, so long as a woman was silent, nothing ailed her' (p. 61).

According to the OED, women's 'work' characteristically meant from the seventeenth century onwards needlework of various kinds. Such 'work' in *Shirley* and in other domestic novels is always ready to be picked up. Figuring its unending nature is the much-noticed Jew-basket, a kind of mobile sale-of-work to which the women of a parish add and sell hand-made trivia for local sale. Caroline, shut up with such tasks in the tomb of Briarfield Rectory, asks herself 'where is my place in the world?' (p. 194). This translates daily into 'how am I to get through this day?'. She is in the position described by Florence Nightingale in *Cassandra* (written 1852):

Society triumphs over many. They wish to regenerate the world with their institutions, with their moral philosophy, with their love. Then they sink to living from breakfast till dinner, from dinner till tea, with a little worsted work, and looking forward to nothing but bed.

(Stark 1979:35–6)

Helstone's answer to Caroline's smaller question returns her to his equivalent of 'a little worsted work':

'...stick to the needle—learn shirt-making and gown-making, and pie-crust making, and you'll be *a clever woman* some day'.
(p. 111; my emphasis)

Caroline takes his advice and experiences a revulsion that echoes Nightingale's: 'she tried to sew—every stitch she put in was an ennui, the occupation was insufferably tedious' (p. 121). Later, trapped in the drawing room, she tries a similar occupation but gives herself up to 'a sort of brain lethargy' (p. 134). Still, as time wears on, she 'sticks to her needle', as her uncle advised and as women must:

She did sew: she plied her needle continuously, ceaselessly; but her brain worked faster than her fingers. Again and more intensely...she desired a fixed occupation, no matter how onerous.
(p. 269)

Women's 'work', it seems, is no more occupation than a grindstone. Other female voices in less well-known novels of the period express the same sense of futility and desire for meaningful work. In the text *Miss Miles*, begun in the 1840s by Brontë's schoolmate, Mary Taylor (allegedly the model for Rose Yorke), Amelia Turner finds herself in a similar position to Caroline's. It is made worse by a poverty which has to be concealed and turns idleness to depression:

She would trail about, doing something, she knew and cared not what. When told, she would go and sit down in the breakfast-room, now the living room of the whole family. There she fiddled with some work, which she seldom finished ...and never gave any sign of caring whether the world was coming to an end or not.
(Murray 1990:301)

The eponymous heroine of Jewsbury's *Marian Withers* (1851) is similarly entrapped. She tells the industrial reformer, Cunningham, 'I have nothing to occupy me;...I feel as if I were buried alive' (Vol. 3:124-5). All these female voices bear witness to Nightingale's powerful general description of women deprived of all work but 'domestic duties', as living a life of a 'corpse, which lies motionless in its narrow bed' (Stark 1979:51).

Amongst the 'domestic duties' scathingly dismissed by Nightingale as 'high sounding words', provision of food looms, like sewing, as an oppressive and relentless exaction. Women submit to the blackmail because the food they provide codes their identities as more or less desirable consumer goods. For Nightingale's aristocratic class the oppression took the form of arranging and enduring lengthy ritualistic meals which she rejects in a mock blasphemy: 'Dinner is the great sacred ceremony of this day, the great sacrament. To be absent from it is equivalent to being ill. Nothing else will excuse us' (Stark 1979:30). In *Shirley* the tyranny takes a humbler but no less crushing shape. Caroline recognises her 'duty' to provide food for the greedy curates according to a rigid protocol:

It *was essential* to have a multitude of plates of bread and butter,

varied in sorts and plentiful in quantity: it *was thought proper*, too, that on the centre-plate *should* stand a glass dish of marmalade; among the viands *was expected to be found* a small assortment of cheesecakes and tarts.

(p. 127; my emphases)

The directive nature of what has been internalised by Caroline parallels the hortatory nature of Ruskin's famous lecture on womanliness in 'Of Queens' Gardens' (1865), with its framework of verbs of obligation (*should, must, ought to*). Caroline, as she satisfies social requirements 'more anxiously than cheerily', is accepting that she will be judged by her provision. Certainly this is how men in the novel read the language of food. Hortense Moore's foreign messes encode her inadequacies and general undesirability. In rejecting the pious old spinster Miss Ainley's sponge-cake and cowslip wine, the curate, Malone, is rejecting her failure to exist as a desirable woman. The obtrusiveness of food and domestic objects which clutter the text like a Victorian drawing room in disarray jarred on the reviewer of *Shirley* for the *Athenaeum* who thought it a study of women's unrest and dissatisfaction: 'Tea, buns, catechisms and samplers are excellent things,—but not in the least picturesque' (1849:1109). Their surrealist foregrounding is not unique to this novel but is much more frequent than the similar strategy in *Jane Eyre*, where it is said that 'women...suffer from too rigid a restraint...precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow minded in these more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags' (Chapter 12).

Caroline can only repress her feelings of ennui and entrapment in relation to women's work of stitching and providing food. Shirley, with independence and money, is able to reject the stifling interiors and to insist on being outdoors, even breaking with convention by refusing to enter the church after the Whitsun Feast. She fills her life with the activities she chooses—reading, travelling, involving herself in Moore's business. Above all she understands the coding of the language of food and she ironises it by exercising her power as an independent person to provide it or withhold it at will. It is only after terrifying the obnoxious curates Donne and Malone with her ferocious dog, Tartar, that she chooses to spring on them 'a neat luncheon, consisting of cold chicken, ham, and tarts' (p. 317). They are rewarded pointedly like dogs that have come to heel.

Men like Helstone push the evaluation of women in terms of the food they provide to its logical conclusion and treat them as food (a practice relished, for instance, at this time, by Dickens). Helstone regards Caroline as food which has gone off when she slips into a love-sick decline:

'These women are incomprehensible...To-day you see them bouncing, buxom, red as cherries, and round as apples; tomorrow they exhibit themselves effete as dead weeds, blached and broken down.'

(p. 212)

Shirley, audaciously adopting the masculine role of choosing her own lover, also reverses masculine language to torment her snobbish uncle when telling him she intends to marry his son's tutor:

'A while ago, you much wanted to know whom I meant to marry: my intention was then formed, but not mature for communication; now it is ripe, sun-mellowed, perfect: take the crimson peach—take Louis Moore!'

(p. 716)

In this way she asserts that men too may be delicious food for which women have a gourmet's appetite. She dismisses her aristocratic suitor, Sir Philip Nunnely, as someone to be fed sugar-plums 'if he is good'. Men, like dogs, are controlled by what they are 'fed' either literally or emotionally.

Shirley rejects the equation of herself with food, as a source of sensation and male desire. Even when her lover, Louis Moore, tells her that his heart 'craves to be fed. If you knew how hungry and ferocious it is, you would hasten to stay it with a kind word or two', she is adamant: 'Poor Tartar!...poor fellow; stalwart friend; Shirley's pet and favourite, lie down!' (p. 712). In subverting the language of food Shirley rejects the trance/tomb/interment/ imprisonment that, as the text and its spiky texture make clear, is what marriage and domesticity represent for individual women.

It is not only the language of food that Shirley subverts. It is she who sees men misreading women through a conventional opposition of doll/angel and fiend/whore and who helps Caroline in a curious form of escape from the linguistic grid. Women are texts and often misread. Hiram Yorke advises Moore to propose to Shirley, because he has misinterpreted

her: 'Yorke tried to read, but could not—the language was there—visible, but untranslatable—a poem—a fervid lyric in an unknown tongue' (p. 418). The absent 'her' after 'read' enacts the opacity of Shirley as text. Similarly her uncle Sympson, eager to question her about whom she intends to marry, is kept mute by something in Shirley's face—'inscrutable to him as the writing on the wall to Belshazzar' (p. 621). The masculine lexicon offers no means of translation. The vocabulary and syntax of womanliness are incommensurate with a text which sees the angel in the house as a being stunted by imprisonment. Shirley has been noticed as untranslatable both in her person and in what she says. And Shirley, Caroline and the narrator all break out of the doll-fiend opposition which is conventionally constitutive of feminine identity. They do so by offering an unorthodox, not a conventionally feminine perspective on domestic life and also by evolving a language which gives them a shared identity as women.

It has been argued 'the people's tongue was dialect and it spoke their true identity' (Joyce 1991:154). Certainly by the 1840s a distinctive literature in dialect 'written by working men and read by a mass working-class audience emerged in the course of the 1840s in industrial Lancashire and Yorkshire' (Joyce 1991:161). However, novelistic speech conventions (to be discussed in Chapter 4) inhibited the use of regional dialect as a way of allowing workers equal status as human beings. In this narrative a 'deviant' language is constructed by Shirley and Caroline from their reading, in which their minds can move beyond the constraints of a gendered time and place. It is compounded of classical legend, the Old Testament, myth and poetry such as Shakespeare's and Milton's. It is shuddered at by Sympson's daughters as antithetical to their own 'young ladies' school-room code of laws on language, demeanour etc.'. They never transgress this code and 'they regarded with secret...horror all deviations in others' (p. 512).

Shirley and Caroline, however, develop a capacity to use texts to speak supposedly unthinkable thoughts and desires. Caroline can expound to Robert Moore the unpalatable lesson that workers are individual beings through a discussion of *Coriolanus*. She can express her frustrated love by reciting to him a plaintive French poem, *La Jeune Captive*. Shirley can scorn Moore as a worshipper of Moloch and a Cain; she can combine the Old Testament and the *Aeneid* to characterise her uncle's intolerant cruelty:

'...your god, your great Bel, your fish-tailed Dagon... Behold how hideously he governs!...He binds the young to the old,

the strong to the imbecile. He stretches out the arm of Mezentius, and fetters the dead to the living.'

(p. 633)

Though they are already safe, Sympson's reaction to this is to lock up his daughters: 'This language is terrible! My daughters and you must associate no longer!' (p. 634). Lewes in the *Edinburgh Review* shared the horror at this language: 'The manner of language of Shirley towards her guardian passes all permission'; Caroline speaks to Mrs Yorke 'in a style...both marvellous and alarming' (Lewes 1850, Vol. 91:161). Lewes feels this is the language of 'Currer Bell herself—that hybrid of gender.

Lewes and Sympson are right to be alarmed, for this language is put to subversive uses: the reconsideration of women as signs in life and literature and the volitional extension of women's lives beyond the accepted limits. It is Shirley who raises the question of the way that men miswrite and misunderstand Eve by a witty equation of Milton's creation with her own cook:

'Milton tried to see the first woman; but...he saw her not ...It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs. Gill, as I have seen her, making custards, in the heat of summer...preparing a cold collation for the Rectors,—preserves and "dulcet creams"—puzzled "what choice to choose for delicacy best"; ...I would beg to remind him that the first men of earth were Titans, and that Eve was their mother.'

(p. 359)

The narrator pursues the question: if Eve/Woman does not reach her apotheosis as the good cook that convention required then what can she be? Her answer is: someone like Shirley, who has an imagination which 'can make earth a heaven, life a poem', even if it is untranslatable. For Shirley herself Eve is an animating force in the natural world, a God the mother: 'The first woman was heaven-born: vast was the heart whence gushed the well-spring of the blood of nations; and grand the undegenerate head where rested the consort-crown of creation' (p. 360). Shirley's refusal to enter a church on a fine spring evening figures her rejection of the domestic as the appropriate equation for women and substitutes 'my mother Eve, in these days called Nature'. She is 'Jehovah's daughter as Adam was his son' (p. 361): not a spare rib after all but a twin and equal.

Both women also act subversively by using this newly forged language as Florence Nightingale described other women doing: to

write new feminine narratives of desire extending beyond the masculine plots of their lives. Significantly, she devotes most of the first section of *Cassandra* to this topic:

What are the thoughts of these young girls while one is singing Schubert, another is reading the Review, and a third is busy embroidering? Is not one fancying herself the nurse of some new friend in sickness; another engaging in romantic dangers with him, such as call out the character and afford more food for sympathy than the monotonous events of domestic society; another undergoing unheard-of trials under the observation of someone whom she has chosen as the companion of her dream?
(Stark 1979:27)

To these trajectories of desire Nightingale returns repeatedly, seeing them as characteristic of women.

Caroline's desired plot focuses around some occupation other than the mere filling of time with domestic trivia; Shirley's around a wish to keep and extend the independence and power to act freely that she demonstrates in the food game. Unlike Nightingale, they do not resist the desire to rewrite their lives. But then she attributes 'the charm of every romance that ever was written' to the fact that 'the heroine has generally no family ties (almost *invariably* no mother)' (Stark 1979:28). And Shirley is entirely free of ties while

Caroline only acquires belatedly a semi-detached mother. Caroline's projected narrative is first put into terms that Robert Moore would understand, since he asks 'What life are you destined for?'

'...if I were a boy it would not be so difficult to find one... I could be apprenticed to your trade—the cloth-trade... I would do the counting-house work, keep the books, and write the letters.'
(p. 81)

Later her story is translated into the more expansive language of women. She reconsiders critically the literary examples conventionally offered as 'patterns of what "the sex" ought to be': Lucretia 'spinning at midnight' and 'Solomon's virtuous woman'. She dismisses the former as much like that martinet, Hortense Moore, with her capacity for disturbing people. She is able to make more of Solomon's account, historicising the 'virtuous woman' to produce an heretical model for herself:

'...she was a manufacturer—she made fine linen and sold it: she was an agriculturist—she bought estates and planted vineyards. *That* woman was a manager: she was what the matrons hereabouts call “a clever woman”...But are we, in these days, brought up to be like her?’

(p. 443)

This is the kind of ‘clever woman’ she longs to be, not the stitching automaton that her uncle described in that phrase.

Caroline recognises that labour alone cannot make her happy: it can only give ‘varieties of pain’ but even that extension of life is desirable. Again this parallels Nightingale:

Give us back our suffering...suffering rather than in-differentism;
for out of nothing comes nothing. But out of suffering may come
the cure. Better have pain than paralysis!

(Stark 1979:29)

For Shirley the ‘paralysis’ is represented by a conventional marriage, evoked in the text by the stasis and claustrophobia of domestic interiors. Attempts later by the narrator to rationalise this hostility to marriage as merely a tactic to give Louis Moore a proper sense of his own male mastery fail. She is forced finally to describe Shirley’s submission in terms of a Promethean figure: ‘fettered to a fixed day...there she lay conquered by love, and bound with a vow’ (p. 729).

In women’s language where Caroline is an inventive interpreter of literature, Shirley is a writer of romantic texts which obliquely free and empower women. Her story of an orphan girl ‘in the dawn of time’, brought up by Nature in a wilderness, is her own, that of the rewritten Eve already described. It is finally revealed that the girl is Eva, the representative of humanity made immortal by the embrace of the god-like figure of Genius. The tale projects Shirley as part of the same natural force with which she earlier equated Eve and all women. It also transcends gender by subsuming under female both female and male humanity in a characteristically bold way. Only by adopting the language of symbol and myth can Louis Moore induce her to agree to marry him when he tells a story of how in the virgin forests of North America they could find a shared liberty that was more extensive than solitude (pp. 700–1).

Thus the narrative syntax of *Shirley* embodies a conventional pattern: class conflict is displaced onto divided middle-class lovers,

and industrial peace is equated with the domestic harmony provided by marriage with a womanly angel. But paradoxically the statements it makes about the nature of domestic life and women are reduced to clichés by the gendered voices in the text re-presenting the significance of domesticity and the meaning of women as signs. These discourses begin to unravel the representation of women as happily domesticated angels that underpins the argument for the oppression of the working classes. This is not how they perceive themselves and not what they aspire to. The new image is further developed in the treatment of gender differences in the novel which will be discussed next.

REWRITING MEN AS SIGNS: TRANSGENDERINGS

‘If you were a woman...you would school Monsieur, *votre mari*, charmingly: it would just suit you; schooling is your vocation.’

(Shirley Keeldar)

Already in her first novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) Charlotte Brontë had toyed with gender boundaries in the episode where Rochester disguises himself as a female gypsy fortune-teller. The text had been seen as transgressing them by the critic who wrote that ‘the work bears the marks of more than one mind and one sex’ (Allott 1974:98). More significantly, Jane’s return to support and lead the blind and maimed Rochester has readily been interpreted as role reversal. Later in *Villette* (1853), Lucy Snowe’s divided self is figured by her half dressing as a man to take a male role in the school play (Chapter 14). In *Shirley* the questioning of gender identity is trumpeted by the arrival of an independent woman, with a name (Shirley) that her disappointed parents would have bestowed on a son and heir (pp. 27–8), boisterously drawing attention to her male privileges: ‘They gave me a man’s name; I hold a man’s position’ (p. 224). There is sexual piquancy here for the patriarchal men around her who refer to her as Captain Keeldar and allow her to act out her mock transsexualism by lending her a pistol to protect Caroline during the attack on the mill. And she exercises her freedom theatrically by going against the grain of expected feminine behaviour: disinheriting a boy in favour of his sisters; and rejecting six suitors, including a baronet. Then, despite the novelistic convention that a heroine can only choose a husband from amongst those who have first chosen her, she prefers

one inferior in class and socially dependent. But even a pantomime principal boy draws attention to contemporary constructions of gender. By raising the issue, Shirley's ludic 'masculinity' throws into prominence the more significant transgenderings of Louis Moore and William Farren.

Brontë's characteristic governess figure, familiar from *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, had first appeared in male form in her early novel *The Professor*, unpublished in her lifetime. The significance accruing to the sign *governess* in the language of the period is, like that attaching to actress, an ambiguous or multi-accented one: free of the family ties that bind and inhibit movement outside the domestic circle, but penniless except for what she earns and so subject to the tyranny of her employer. She is also, as Mary Poovey points out, vital to the 'ideological work of gender' in that she represents a threat to orthodoxy. This is 'because of [her] proximity to two of the most important Victorian representations of women: the figure who epitomized the domestic ideal, and the figure who threatened to destroy it' (Poovey 1989:127). Poovey here refers to class, seeing the governess as 'like the middle-class mother in the work she performed, but like both a working-class woman and man in the wages she received'. As a result 'the very figure who theoretically should have defended the naturalness of separate spheres threatened to collapse the difference between them' (Poovey 1989:127).

Shirley boldly works with this ambiguity to disturb simultaneously the boundaries of class and of gender. In the text this already ambivalent feminine role is played by a man, Louis Moore. He suffers at the hands of his employer precisely the humiliation that Mrs Pryor describes from her own experience, when made to understand her anomalousness in terms of gender as well as class: "I was not their equal"...I was held a "burden and a restraint in society"..."a tabooed woman," to whom "they were interdicted from granting the usual privileges of the sex"' (p. 423). 'Tabooed woman' presumably alludes to the association of lower-class status and sexual deviance.

Yet Louis Moore is such a governess figure, first to Shirley and then to Henry Sympson. A feminised identity is confirmed by the language he uses; he claims to be able to read Shirley rightly (unlike the other men) and uses skilfully women's language of literature, symbol and fantasy. Like Shirley and Caroline (and Florence Nightingale), he rewrites his life in romantic narratives of desire to

cancel out his humiliating position. In the first he fantasises about a reversal of his and Shirley's class status: 'if I were a king and she the housemaid that swept the palace-stairs...my eye would recognize her qualities' (p. 593). In the second he envisages a reversal of gender roles. He would be a 'priest of Juno', afflicted with the mad love of her until shrivelled up by the descent of the goddess 'white blazing—dread as the down rushing of stars' (p. 598). He underlines this reversal of gender by describing his tale as the story of 'Semele reversed' (p. 597): in Greek myth it is the female Semele who is consumed by Jove's thunderbolts.

As tutor/governess he is admired by those underwritten as discerning for the qualities attributed to the ideal middle-class mother. He tenderly cares for the crippled boy, Henry Sympson; and in what is usually regarded as a totally irrelevant scene he calms/'mothers' Shirley who is distraught by the fear that she has contracted hydrophobia from a rabid dog. It is for these qualities and because he speaks (through and with books) her own language that she loves him. In several ways he is not complementary to her but like her and different from other men. The sharp distinction between 'essentially' feminine and masculine characteristics collapses. At the same time Louis' change of class through marriage to Shirley and loss of his lowly status flouts the assumption that it is a woman who takes on the man's class in marrying, not the other way round. Shirley's strange taunts to him quoted at the head of this section draw attention to the class issues involved, as well as to her undying wish for independence.

This pairing of Shirley and Louis Moore, as socially superior woman and socially inferior man, is matched by that of Caroline Helstone and William Farren, Moore's workman. What breaks down the class barrier between Caroline and Farren is mundane, not romantic. Like the women, Farren is interested in nature, not in Shirley's extravagant terms but at Caroline's practical level of an interest in natural history. Social equality is enacted by shared interests: neither knows more than the other, neither instructs. The egalitarian relationship is underlined by Mrs Pryor's disapproval. She feels the usual 'great gulf' between her 'caste' and Farren's, and is amazed that Caroline can be perfectly at ease with 'a man of the people' in a way she finds subversive. She fears 'degradation' for her daughter and 'presumption' on Farren's part. What the degradation might be is not clear, unless she is afraid that Caroline might marry Farren and join the working class with its reputation for sexual deviance. What Caroline and Farren

also have in common is that both in different ways are dependent for their happiness on the good-will of a middle-class man—Robert Moore.

The second component in the Shirley-Louis Moore relationship is also found here: William Farren too crosses gender boundaries. When pleading with Robert Moore to introduce machines more slowly, he speaks in a womanly fashion, patiently and deferentially to his 'master'. He weeps, woman-like, over his children's hunger. Indeed he appears in the role of mother when Shirley refuses to attend the church service. Farren, significantly, joins the women outside, 'carrying in his arms an infant...of some two years old—roaring with all the power of his lungs...two little girls, of nine and ten, followed' (p. 363). He dandles the infant on his knee, as the narrator notes approvingly, '*as tenderly as any woman*' (p. 363; my emphasis). And as Louis Moore 'mothers' Shirley over the mad-dog episode, Farren mothers Caroline when he wheels her round the garden after her illness. Like Moore, he has been removed from the world of men to that of women, created by domesticity, parental care, emotion and illness; and in it he stands as a valued figure.

The significance of these transgenderings is double. Firstly they remove the justification for the separation of men's and women's spheres, supposed to lie in the essentialist argument for different and complementary natures. In doing so they sabotage the crucial distinctions between public and private; men/workplace and women/home; callous competitiveness and caring morality. Without these distinctions, the potential for using the patriarchal family as a metaphor for ideal industrial relations disappears. The breaking down of difference turns Louis Moore and Farren into emotional and moral bisexuals, who are yet more highly valued than their 'masculine' counterparts by the female moral authorities in the text. Further, there is no example of a patriarchal family that is not dysfunctional: Helstone's slow murder of his 'monumental angel' has already been described; his dissolute brother caused his wife, Mrs Pryor, to abandon her sacred maternal duty to Caroline; and the Yorke family is a model of multiple disaffection. The paternalist discourse can only remain available for use if a strong symbolism of the family as a nurturing moral force is maintained. Just as the text used the Angel/House sign as a plot mechanism while presenting a female subtext that undermined it, so too the vehicle of this central figure for the resolution of class conflict is problematised.

And there is a second significance attaching to the breaking down

of gender boundaries by Louis Moore and William Farren: the effect on the representation of class. The strategy embodies a recognition that the gender and class ideologies currently prevailing left both middle-class women and working-class men disvalued and disempowered. (Working-class women, however, still remain invisible.) Caroline believes that society shuts its eyes to the fact that single women should have ‘better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now’. The reason is that

‘People hate to be reminded of ills they are unable or unwilling to remedy...Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the happy and the rich: it disturbs parents.’

(p. 441; my emphasis)

This echoes, with the added pain of frustration, the more robust sentiments found in the writing of Brontë’s schoolmate, Mary Taylor (1817–93), who emigrated to New Zealand in 1845 and supported herself as a shopkeeper. In a letter written in 1850 she chided Charlotte:

I have seen some extracts from ‘*Shirley*’ in which you talk of women working. And this first duty, this great necessity you seem to think that some women may indulge in—if they give up marriage...You are a coward and a traitor. A woman who works is by that alone better than one who does not.

(Wise and Symington 1980, Vol. 3:105)

More explicitly Taylor wrote later in the *Victoria Magazine*, with a ‘historically situated consciousness’ close to but more liberated than Brontë’s own and to which working-class women *were* visible:

Though the great majority of women are fortunately for themselves compelled to work, and to enjoy the interest and stimulus of labour, yet the opinion of all classes leads them to condemn such exertion except when starvation is the alternative.

(Taylor 1870:111)

By effecting transgenderings Brontë has cut through the orthodoxies of class and gender to what lies beneath for both middle-class women and working-class men. Already while writing *Shirley* she had drawn this parallel between the two in a letter speaking of women:

when her destiny isolates her, I suppose she must do what she can...complain as little, bear as much...as possible... At the same time I conceive that when patience has done its utmost, and industry its best, whether in the case of women or operatives, and when both are baffled, and pain and want triumph, the sufferer is free, is entitled, at last to send up to Heaven any piercing cry for relief, if by that cry he can hope to obtain succour.

(Wise and Symington 1980, Vol. 2:216)

The piercing cry on behalf of women and working-class men in *Shirley* works to dismantle the ideological subterfuges of the 'masculine' plot. In doing so it rejects the use of gender politics to contain class conflict. The insistence of the plot that movement towards social harmony is irresistible is ironised by the alternative volitional plots fabricated around it by Shirley, Caroline and Louis Moore. The contradictions within the text perhaps explain Brontë's own remark in a letter written a year after its publication: 'Often I have been puzzled to know what "Shirley" was like' (Wise and Symington 1980, Vol. 3:181).

The novel speaks for the working class but still cannot let them speak for themselves. They remain what Carlyle in *Chartism* (1839) called 'that great dumb toiling class which cannot speak' (Shelston 1971:154). For women to find a voice was, however, at least a step towards 'a clear interpretation of the thought which at heart torments these wild inarticulate souls, struggling there, with inarticulate uproar...unable to speak what is in them!' (Shelston 1971:155). What prevents such articulation in narratives in the 1840s is an ideologically oppressive novelistic language. Only a change in that could allow new representations of femininity and give the working class voices.

NORTH AND SOUTH

GENDERING THE NARRATOR: THE SUBVERSIVE FEMALE

The author allows herself for certain purposes to be a false witness.
(P.N.Furbank on *North and South*)

Elizabeth Gaskell's earlier industrial novel *Mary Barton* (1848), though anonymously published, was rapidly recognised as the work of a woman. The fury it aroused in some quarters for doing 'very great injustice to the employers' (Easson 1991:107) because it was 'one-sided and unfair' could therefore be readily attributed to her gender. Naturally she could not write with authority on this technical (and masculine) subject. Had she not in her preface rightly claimed to know 'nothing of political economy'? In fact, as a letter to her daughter Marianne in 1851 reveals, she had considerable acquaintance with at least some of its main writings. In urging Marianne not to make up her mind too hastily on Protectionism she writes:

Before you fully make up your mind, read a paper in the Quarterly on the subject of Free Trade, (written by Mr. George Taylor) in...the year 1839; and then when you come home I will read with you Mr. Cobden's speeches. But first I think we should read together Adam Smith on the Wealth of Nations. Not confining ourselves as we read to the limited meaning which he affixes to the word 'wealth'.

(Chapple and Pollard 1966:148)

North and South, published under her own name, reveals more of this knowledge, but is more covert in its subversion of the social

status quo. Its radical reworking of narrative syntax is camouflaged by a sketchy outline of the conventional plot in which class conflict is healed by reconciling lovers. This camouflage was what the reviewer in the *Guardian* for 22 August 1855 took to be its essence:

The gradual influence of Margaret's character upon [Thornton], the way in which, out of love for her, and respect for her feelings and opinions, he is led to cultivate a better understanding with his men, is the chief serious interest in the book.

(Easson 1991:348)

Mary Barton had more awkwardly reconciled a capitalist father and his son's trade unionist assassin in a way that left questions of social justice exposed and unanswered. But while the earlier novel eventually compromises its own radicalism by a shift to domestic affairs, *North and South* has only a skin-deep conformism. Beneath lies a deep structure of dissidence effected by a narrator whose perspective is not what would have been regarded as appropriately feminine.

Double dealing by the narrator is interestingly noticed in a venomous attack by P.N.Furbank in *Encounter* on this 'mass of duplicity' (Furbank 1973:52). In his view the focus of this duplicity is Margaret Hale who behaves as a model of virtuous femininity but who is really full of deceit and mendacity. According to Furbank, the narrator (and therefore Gaskell) colludes in an immoral way with this deception. She pretends to be writing 'from the outside' with proper detachment while really writing 'from the inside', taking Margaret's own viewpoint. She 'tells fibs', lies, cheats and is generally 'mendacious'. In this account the empty-headed Edith becomes 'Margaret's pretty cousin', a truly natural and feminine creature, far removed from the repugnant collusion carried on by Margaret and the narrator/Gaskell. The satirical treatment she receives throughout is overlooked.

This spontaneous distaste registers a recognition of the fact that Margaret Hale does not remain a standard middle-class stereotype/heroine and that the narrator's perspective on this changing self is not conventionally 'feminine'. She observes as a woman who has stepped out of her gender as then constituted. To that extent she does 'collude' with Margaret Hale who, as Furbank sees, is not what Thornton imagines. Like Charlotte Brontë, Gaskell had a sense of being a divided self and wrote in a letter to a woman friend in 1850

on her feelings about buying a new and better house while so many were in poverty:

...that's the haunting thought to me; at least to one of my 'Mes', for I have a great number, and that's the plague. One of my mes is, I do believe, a true Christian—(only people call her socialist and communist), another of my mes is a wife and mother, and highly delighted at the delight of everyone else in the house...Now that's my 'social' self, I suppose. Then again I've another self with a full taste for beauty and convenience whh [sic] is pleased on its own account. How am I to reconcile all these warring members? I try to drown myself (my *first* self), by saying it's Wm [sic] who is to decide... and his feeling it right ought to be my rule. And so it is—only that does not quite do...I long (weakly) for the old times where right and wrong did not seem such complicated matters; and I am sometimes coward enough to wish we were back in the darkness where obedience was the only seen duty of women.

(Chapple and Pollard 1966:108–9)

But, unlike Brontë, she moves in *North and South* firmly out of this darkness to confront the 'complicated matters' of right and wrong in relation to class and gender, referred to in her letter, without a final compromise. It is a confrontation effected by a more radical alteration of narrative patterns than Brontë's, and by a further undoing of the significance of domesticity as women's sphere.

Unobtrusively a claim to authority is registered by the narrator in her use of the language of political economy in the discussions of conditions in Milton that take place between Margaret Hale and John Thornton, which will be dealt with at length in the next section. The Preface to this novel makes no disclaimer as to knowledge of political economy. Perhaps ironically it merely commends the tale 'to the kindness of the reader',

Beseking hym lowly, of mercy and pité,
Of its rude making to have compassion.

The confidence of the narratorial commentary belies this mock humility. In addition the narrator speaks more confidently than did Brontë's in *Shirley* from a historically constituted female consciousness.

NARRATIVE SYNTAX

‘What is a strike?’

(Chapter title in *North and South*)

The questioning of dominant ideologies in *Shirley* is effected chiefly through contesting the significance of the Angel/House sign through the expression of woman’s desire for something outside the womanly ideal; and through the partial identification of women and workers. In both these areas *North and South* moves further. The conventional surface structure of the novel seems to provide an easy answer to the running question ‘What is a strike?’—a question crucial to the interpretation of a class society. From the start the narrator foregrounds the mill-owner Thornton’s class arrogance, evident in his refusal to explain to workers demanding higher wages that trade is bad. The consequent attack on his mill by ‘men, gaunt as wolves, and mad for prey’ (p. 177), first perceived as the ‘far-off roll of the tempest’ (p. 172), evokes the spectre of brutal conflict between the classes. Conventional tropes appear, which support the idea that this is what the narrative means. For instance, it is pointedly stressed that Margaret gains a powerful influence over Thornton before the strike takes place because of the womanly attributes inscribed in her appearance. He is struck by her when she appears in Milton in all her southern foreignness and compares her with his home-bred and vulgar sister, Fanny. He contrasts Fanny’s eyes

...uneasily with the large soft eyes that looked forth steadily at one object, as if from out their light beamed some gentle influence of repose: the curving lines of the red lips, just parted in the interest of listening to what her companion said—the head a little bent forwards, so as to make a long sweeping line from the summit...to the smooth ivory tip of the shoulder; the round white arms, and taper hands, laid lightly across each other, but perfectly motionless in their pretty attitude.

(pp. 161–2)

Margaret’s specifically middle-class beauty is apparently that of the Angel, depending on the assured knowledge of how to bend one’s head attentively, how to cross one’s hands and how to keep them still. And so Thornton reads it as indicative of perfect womanly values. Margaret and her home cause him to re-interpret his own lavishly equipped house within the confines of the mill:

Somehow, that room contrasted itself with the one he had lately left; handsome, ponderous, with no sign of feminine habitation, except in the one spot where his mother sate, and no convenience for any employment than eating and drinking. To be sure, it was a dining-room;...But the drawing-room was not like this. It was twice-twenty times as fine; not one quarter as comfortable. Here were no mirrors,...no gilding; a warm, sober breadth of colouring, well relieved by the...chintz-curtains and chair covers.

(pp. 78-9)

To Thornton the scene silently spells out the life of culture to which he clumsily aspires by reading 'the classics' with Mr Hale. As well as the 'pretty baskets of work', indicative of well-directed femininity, he observes that 'books, not cared for on account of their binding solely, lay on one table, as if recently put down' (p. 79).

Thornton's own uncomfortable and ostentatious grandeur is decoded in the expected way by Margaret's middle-class eyes when she finds his drawing-room furniture 'bagged up with as much care as if the house was to be overwhelmed with lava', 'great alabaster groups...under their glass shades', and 'smartly bound books' arranged unread at regular intervals 'like the gaily-coloured spokes of a wheel' (p. 112). The scene is not only ugly but signifies a way of life alien to middle-class culture and feminine taste:

...there was evidence of care and labour, but not...to procure ease, to help on habits of tranquil home employment; solely to ornament, and then to preserve ornament from dirt or destruction.

(p. 112)

These two interiors seem to figure the moral options for Thornton: his present hard-line capitalism without comfort or culture, or humanitarianism such as Margaret represents in a cultivated home over which she presides. The softer values that she embodies and her sexual seductiveness, particularly during the attack on his mill, lead him to see her as a form of salvation. He is disarmed into dealing with a worker, Nicholas Higgins, face-to-face, even though he is a trade unionist and striker. The two talk on supposedly equal terms, and through her intermediary, Margaret effects a metamorphosis. The result is the provision of a dining room and communal catering arrangement for the workers, produced after proper consultation with

Higgins. Thornton gives up the idea of not explaining how things are to his workers. And his new-found virtue survives an unrelated test when he refuses to speculate with his creditors' money even in bad times.

On a simple reading, he gets his reward, and obstacles to marriage and domesticity with Margaret disappear: his mistaken belief that she has another lover is dispelled by the discovery that the man in question is her brother; and she inherits a large sum of money from her guardian, Mr Bell. Like Shirley's capital in Brontë's novel, this cash acts as a *deus ex machina* to restore Thornton to prosperity, thereby illogically 'proving' that he has done the right things. The novel is construable as a romantic love story in which 'Margaret Hale who, by her womanly influence alone, is sufficient to calm hatred and heal sorrows' (Easson 1991:363)—QED. On such an interpretation the question 'What is a strike?' is given the answer 'It is a form of misunderstanding which a middle-class woman can correct.'

When it comes to causes of strikes the answer is less clear. The narrator has no difficulty in finding emotionally acceptable causes of such human problems as the deaths of loved ones. They are a natural part of a divine (and ultimately benign) plan. Margaret, often the mouthpiece of the narrator, is the first to urge her own widowed father and Bessy's, as well as the widow of the worker John Boucher, to see them in that light. Strangely, this is true even when the death in question is the direct result of industrial exploitation. Bessy dies from lung disease caused by inhaling cotton fluff while working in the mill; and Boucher drowns himself in despair over the failure of the strike, his dead face 'stained by the water in the brook, which had been used for dyeing purposes' (p. 294). So even these last two deaths are distinguished (illogically) as belonging to a different causal order from class conflict that erupts into a strike against Thornton and an attack on his mill. There is no comforting explanation of this raw distress and conflict in terms of Providence. Its causes and significance are repeatedly interrogated by the text which fails to find a bland answer, or one which exculpates the middle classes who maintain the social system.

The focus of this subversive interrogation soon becomes Margaret Hale when, as a result of her social displacement from a middle-class position and setting, she becomes the locus of conflict between workers and capitalists: North and South. A southern rectory is replaced by ugly lodgings in a northern industrial city; a superior social position by one which is anomalous. This causes a fracturing

of her identity not recognised by Thornton or conventional reviewers but grasped by the infuriated Furbank. She manages to construct the semblance of a middle-class home in her Milton lodgings and Thornton believes that he can decode it in the familiar way: an Angel in her domestic setting. But the family it shelters is gradually revealed by the narrative as dysfunctional. Margaret's mother is unadaptive, discontented, jealous of her husband, and as it turns out mortally ill. Her father is incapable of taking responsibility for the consequences of giving up a comfortable living on conscientious grounds, of speaking honestly to his wife, of facing up to her illness or of coming to terms with her death. Thornton may idealise the Hales' drawing-room and its significance, but it is a sham. It offers no resource for Margaret herself but is instead the scene of incessant and inordinate demands on her. Moreover it conceals the painful secret, as Margaret learns fully in Chapter 14, of an only son exiled for naval mutiny and under threat of execution. Significantly this particular wound is never healed. This hardly provides a patriarchal family which might offer a pattern for wider social relations. It does however provide a near example for Margaret Hale of how an individual may question the established order out of a sense of burning injustice. It is through her affinity to Frederick (whom she so closely resembles physically) that she develops a model for dissent.

Margaret's own sense of identity is fractured because, outside this fragile structure which so impresses Thornton, she is an alien. For she is middle-class, in her own terms, in tastes, feelings and values but with no social group that shares them. Her sense of her class as a constituent of identity is destabilised. The only alternatives that the Milton class system has to offer are the mill-owning Thorntons' vulgar menage and the workman Higgins' motherless family. Her uncertain status is recognised both by Thornton's mother, who regards her as lower-class because her father is an impoverished tutor, and Bessy Higgins, who is surprised that she is dining with the upper-class Thorntons. Since she cannot attach herself to the philistinism and vulgarity she perceives in the mill owner, her only refuge is with the Higginses. They are not ostentatious or vulgar; they invite compassion; they refuse condescension; and like her they are out-casts. So it is with them that she aligns herself, reconciled even to the ugly streets of Milton because of the 'interest they had gained by the simple fact of her having learnt to care for a dweller in them' (p. 99).

This attachment on terms of equality to the working class is bizarre in contemporary terms and still leaves her a social anomaly. It is

signalled simply but unambiguously by the ostentatious breaching of a novelistic practice. From early in the nineteenth century there was a clear convention that narrators and other middle-class characters used only 'good' or 'standard' English. Though 'lower-class' characters with suitably high moral standards (like *Oliver Twist*) may also use it, the reverse move of middle-class speakers into dialect or 'substandard' speech is not made. One of the few exceptions is the eccentric mill-owner, Yorke, in *Shirley*, who chooses intermittently to affect what the narrator calls 'the Doric' (i.e. Yorkshire dialect) as an indication of radical political views. It is this linguistic apartheid that Margaret Hale symbolically breaches by quite slight 'deviations'. Partly under the influence of her husband, William Gaskell, as he worked on local dialect, Gaskell herself had come to feel (as some native speakers of dialect such as Hardy did later) that some dialect words had no expressive match in standard English. As she wrote on the subject of Warwickshire words to Walter Savage Landor in May 1854: '...you will remember the country people's use of the word "unked". I can't find any other word to express the exact feeling of strange unusual desolate discomfort, and I sometimes "potter" and "mither" people by using it' (Chapple and Pollard 1966:292). And she has long been admired for the skilful handling of dialect, pointed out by Melchers (1978), in which dialectal forms of second personal pronouns are carefully adapted to status and age as well as degrees of intimacy between speakers.

The significance of Margaret's use of dialect is underlined by a rebuke from her mother which draws attention to it:

'Margaret, don't get to use these horrid Milton words. "Slack of work:" it is a provincialism. What will your aunt Shaw say, if she hears you use it on her return?'

(p. 237)

Outrageously Margaret claims that the use of Milton words is on a par with her cousin Edith's use of posh military slang, picked up from her officer husband. Mrs Hale is duly shocked by the wilful comparison between 'factory slang' and upper-class affectation. But Margaret insists that 'if I live in a factory town, I must speak factory language when I want it' (p. 237). She rewrites 'slang' as 'language' which she may 'want' (or need). She jokingly offers to teach her mother terms like *knobstick* ('strike-breaker') which Mrs Hale categorises as 'vulgar'. But Margaret's understanding of the crucial

concept of 'vulgarity' has changed; it is the Thorntons' pretensions which are vulgar, not this natural speech. In a further breach of convention the narrator joins Margaret on the wrong side of the class divide by the casual use of a few dialect terms in contexts where the workmen and their families might use them: the wretched Mrs Boucher has an *ill-redd-up* (or 'untidy') house and Margaret is reported as suggesting 'redding up' after Boucher's death (p. 301). For middle-class speakers to do this is to change the whole orientation of the narrative in relation to class. Usually, as Keating (1971) points out, 'the novelist presents himself, or one of his central characters, as someone who undertakes a dangerous voyage of discovery into an uncharted working-class world, from which he eventually returns with a fully documented report of his adventures' (p. 33). Margaret, however, does not return; she joins the enemy, though she is still not one of them.

However, she can become a Trojan horse in the middle class. In doing so, she finds scope for an unfeminine desire to exert control that is evident to Thornton at their first meeting (and to Furbank in 1973): though he 'was in habits of authority himself... she seemed to assume some kind of rule over him' (p. 62). She is attracted by power even when it takes a form she dislikes in the talk of the local mill-owners:

She liked the exultation in the sense of power which these Milton men had. It might be rather rampant in its display... but still they seemed to defy the old limits of possibility, in a kind of fine intoxication, caused by the recollection of what had been achieved, and what yet should be.

(pp. 163-4)

Margaret is prepared to become accustomed to the strange taste of olives (p. 167) that such men represent and to yield like them to the 'fine intoxication' of power.

In her new situation at Milton the only way for her to 'defy the old limits of possibility' for a middle-class woman is to undertake the task that Gaskell claimed for herself in *Mary Barton*: 'to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people'—the working class (pp. 37-8). Speaking for them, but with all her own middle-class skill, she first battles verbally with Thornton, initiating discussions which revive the question of what a strike means. Their arguments are a debate over the discourses in which justifications

of the existing class structure are coded. The simplistic explanation of a strike as a misunderstanding that a woman can heal becomes manifestly ridiculous.

As a preliminary, Margaret has made Thornton aware of the reductive implications of using the word *hands* for his employees:

‘Miss Hale, I know, does not like to hear men called “hands,” so I won’t use that word, though it comes most readily to my lips as the technical term, whose origin, whatever it was, dates before my time.’
(p. 120)

This disingenuously misses her point, which is to awaken for him the full force of the dead metaphor, all the more a distasteful one to her because now a matter of course. In practice, Thornton secretly agrees with another master, Hamper, who thinks he would survive poverty better than his workers because ‘he had head as well as hands, while they had only hands’ (p. 146).

But Margaret’s questioning goes far beyond disliking the use of reductive terms for workers. She problematises both the contemporary major discourses that justify their emiseration: paternalism and ‘the struggle for existence’. She invokes the father-children metaphor, used by paternalists, grasping that as J.S. Mill said, in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1845, ‘with paternal care is connected paternal authority’ (Mill 1845, Vol. 81:507). If mill-owners are to be described as, ideally, fathers, then in a patriarchal society they must be assumed to have absolute authority over their workers. The latter then pay a high price even if they receive welfare benefits. Margaret, taught by Higgins, sees this language as a weapon: ‘the masters would like their hands to be merely tall, large children—living in the present moment—with a blind unreasoning kind of obedience’ (p. 119). No-one, she adds, not even a workman, remains a child for ever unless his growth is deliberately stunted by the parent-employer. Turning the trope against the mill-owners she deploys it in the anecdote of a rich father who by keeping his son confined for forty years turned him into a monster of depravity (and incompetence). Thornton is driven to defend himself and his authoritarianism on the grounds that workers *are* by nature unfit for independent action, at least in business hours. This somewhat comically reveals his illogicality since it is a crude way of detaching ‘paternal authority’ from ‘paternal care’. Outside business hours, he asserts, ‘care’ would be interference with liberty. Gallagher (1980) argues that all parties to this discussion discard the idea that industrial society could

be modelled on a patriarchal family because all are aware of its dangers as well as its usefulness (p. 85). More exactly, Margaret dismantles its uses by employers and provokes Thornton into using it in contradictory ways that reveal how it papers over cracks.

The other emollient explanation of emiseration (and strikes) as part of the inevitable struggle for existence is also dismantled. It is Thornton's own preferred metaphor for the way things are, more suited to his combative nature. He claims to deal with workers' 'tales of suffering on sound economic principles'. By this he presumably means that he adopts the classic economists' view that competitiveness amongst entrepreneurs is healthy for the economy and so in the long run benefits the whole of society. He claims

that, as trade was conducted, there must always be a waxing and waning of commercial prosperity; and that in the waning a certain number of masters, as well as of men, must go down into ruin, and be no more seen among the ranks of the happy and prosperous.

(p. 152)

The narrator's commentary makes clear that Thornton's explanation of economic principles derives its force from a mechanical use of the current discourse of the Darwinian 'struggle for existence' used also in *Shirley*:

He spoke as if this consequence were so entirely logical, that neither employers nor employed had any right to complain if it became their fate: the employer to turn aside from the race he could no longer run, with a bitter sense of incompetency and failure—wounded in the struggle—trampled down by his fellows in their haste to get rich.

(p. 152)

Significantly Thornton considers only the 'intra-species' struggle, prominent in Malthus. Neither here nor in his account of his own energetic rise from poverty does he reflect on the 'inter-species' struggle between class and class. That is left to the narrator who, like Margaret, takes the opportunity to draw his conclusion for him:

Of course, speaking so of the fate that, as a master, might be his own...he was not likely to have more sympathy with that of the workmen, who were passed by in the swift merciless

improvement or alteration; who would fain lie down and quietly die out of the world that needed them not.

(p. 152)

It is left also to the female narrator to join in and represent sympathetically 'the hands' reactions: an inability even to rest in their graves 'for the clinging cries of the beloved and helpless they would leave behind' (p. 152); and a maternal wish that, like the pelican in fables, they could feed their children with their own blood. Such a comment parallels J.S.Mill's cooler statement in his revision of Ricardian economics in 1848:

I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress.

(Mill 1848: Bk 4, Ch. 6, Sect. 2)

The only connection that Thornton makes between his own and the other class is to offer himself as a role model. As he says earlier, 'one of the great beauties of our system' is that 'a working-man may raise himself into the power and position of a master by his own exertions and behaviour' as he has done (p. 84). Since the 'behaviour' referred to is, paradoxically, the very decency, sobriety and dutifulness that he is certain workmen lack, there seems to be little hope for them in his account. This 'answers' with an anecdote Carlyle's question in *Chartism* (1839), 'Can the labourer...hope to rise to mastership?' (Shelston 1971:159). It is an answer which represents a widely held view, later crystallised by Samuel Smiles in *Self-Help* (1859). Margaret's response to his Smiles-like eulogy on 'the beauty' of the social system is to demolish it by ironically drawing out its 'logical' implications:

'You consider all who are unsuccessful in raising themselves in the world, from whatever cause, as your enemies, then, if I understand you rightly.'

(p. 84)

When he defends himself as 'honest, punctual, quick and resolute' with his workers, adding authoritatively, 'What the master is, that

will the men be', she turns his own argument back on him: 'When I see men violent and obstinate in the pursuit of their rights, I may safely infer that the master is the same' (p. 123). He attempts a feeble joke to the effect that what the 'rough, heathenish' men of Milton need is not 'rosewater surgery' (of an ineffectual kind) but the savage surgery of a Cromwell as their mill owner and master. Margaret turns the joke into a weapon by returning to the earlier stage of their argument about paternalism:

'Cromwell is no hero of mine... But I am trying to reconcile your admiration of despotism with your respect for other men's independence of character.'

(p. 124)

In refusing to accept the usual middle-class explanations of emiseration and strikes, Margaret achieves verbal dominance over Thornton. She transforms the womanly influence referred to by the *Guardian* reviewer. By arguing with him she is 'staking her claim for identity in a male world' (Pikoulis 1976:184), and that turns influence into power. From argument she moves on to attempt control of his actions by driving him to treat his workers as individuals. But this is no longer represented as the universal panacea claimed by paternalists; it is merely what is locally right.

The issue is spelt out through the episode of the attack on Thornton's mill when she coerces him into confronting the attackers face to face. She then exceeds his courage by shielding him physically and taking the only injury. In this way she seizes the central role in the kind of histrionic confrontation that Shirley and Caroline shrank from. *She* becomes the locus of conflict, a troubling hybrid of South and North, the focus of attention with her 'pale, upturned face,... still and sad as marble', marked by a dramatic 'thread of dark-red blood' (pp. 179–80).

At this point issues of class and gender are inextricably entangled. By stepping out of her class to defend the workers and then Thornton, she has stepped out of her gender. By becoming an agent in the public sphere and the centre of all eyes she has turned herself into a public woman, an *actress* not an angel, potentially a fallen woman. As one chauvinistic character in a near-contemporary narrative puts it: 'A woman who... exhibits herself in any way ... seems to me little better than a woman of a nameless class', that is, a prostitute (Jewsbury 1848:2, 18–19). Though contested by a few such as Nightingale, who

believed that epitome of the public woman, the actress, to be a possible role-model for emancipation because she was free to use her mind purposefully, this is the dominant reading or accentuation of the sign. The need to maintain the connection between the public sphere and illicit sexuality is thought, plausibly, by Harman (1988) to be part of the linguistic mechanism to deny any 'public' career, such as medicine or law, to women. Certainly the sexual nature of the scene, variously interpreted, has been recognised at least since Dodsworth's comments in 1970. In general terms what the scene makes clear is something that the prevailing ideologies insist on for women: the connection between being in the public domain and being recognised as an unwomanly sexual being. In practice, as the Frenchwoman, Flora Tristan, found, when visiting London between 1826 and 1885, for her to appear in certain London streets led to an assumption that she was a 'streetwalker' (Hawkes 1982:83–4). As Griselda Pollock puts it, 'going out in public and the idea of disgrace were closely allied' (Pollock 1988:69).

Margaret Hale does far more than merely go out alone in public when she faces the crowd of strikers. So it is assumed generally, and by Thornton's mother in particular, that he has a duty to make her an honest woman by marrying her. This public perception is internalised by Margaret herself as a sense of sexual guilt. In respect of womanly 'purity', as with her social class, she is a divided self. One side of her denies any sexual motive as she claims that she would have protected any striker in the crowd as readily as Thornton. And yet in looking back on the incident all other circumstances are erased except for the recollection that

...a cloud of faces looked up at her, giving her no idea of fierce vivid anger, or of personal danger, but a deep sense of shame that she should thus be the object of universal regard—a sense of shame so acute that it seemed as if she would fain have burrowed into the earth to hide herself, and yet she could not escape out of that unwinking glare of many eyes.

(pp. 191–2)

This later translates itself into a sense of sexual sin as (when finding her home village changed) she imagines herself 'whirled on' through all the phases of her life like sinful lovers in Dante, as if in 'the circle in which the victims of earthly passion eddy continually' (p. 400). The reference reveals the other side of herself which knows that she

finally protected Thornton from his workers (whose cause she espoused) because she was passionately attracted by him. In denying this, she is attempting to obscure a new self-awareness effected by her contact with the crowds of mill workers in Milton. Their comments on her physical attractiveness first aroused indignation at the offence to her 'delicacy' and later, in private, some amusement (p. 71). This was the beginning of an epiphany of which the strike is the climax.

There are two consequences for her divided self in this. One is the displacement of her feelings of sexual guilt onto the lie she told to prevent her brother from capture in England. This turns into an obsessive desire to 'clear her name' with Thornton by revealing the identity of the man with whom he has seen her alone late at night. The other more significant consequence of the revelation she experiences about her feelings for Thornton is a relentless determination not to let physical attraction give him power over her. Since he too regards her action as compromising, he sees the opportunity to propose marriage. At this she 'shrank and shuddered as under the fascination of some great power, repugnant to her whole previous life' (p. 197) of sexless purity. What she most resists is a marriage that will relegate her to a position of mere womanly influence over him. She remembers 'the continued series of opposition' in which he earlier showed his contempt for her opinions on life in Milton. Even in the proposal scene he speaks contemptuously of her 'misguided sympathies' with the strikers. He offers her a chance to influence him but what she wants is power. And her desire for power has by now defined a purpose: the politics of gender are to be worked out through the class issue. She will act in defiance of the established order on grounds of the principle revealed to her by her brother Frederick's mutiny against his captain. Loyalty and obedience are virtues when those who wield power are wise and just, 'but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used—not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless' (p. 109).

This explains a ferocity in their relationship noticed by Margaret Oliphant (1855) though overlooked by many male reviewers: 'here is love itself, always in a fury, often looking exceedingly like hatred' (Easson 1991:346). Their sexual desire is figured as physical violence that parallels their sharp verbal battles. When she refuses to marry him, Thornton feels 'as if Margaret...had been a sturdy fish-wife, and given him a sound blow with her fists. He had positive bodily pain' (p. 207). Later he feels a desire to strike her in order that 'by some strange overt act of rudeness, he might earn the privilege of telling her the remorse

that gnawed at his heart' (p. 336). Class struggle has been displaced onto the disharmony between middle-class lovers but this conventional novelistic syntax is now reworked. The conflict (or mutiny) is uniquely ferocious in its eroticism; it now clearly reflects the underlying hostility of class relations and it is not smoothly resolved. Margaret only submits to marrying Thornton when she has reduced him to a state in which she can, through her collaborator Higgins, control his actions as an employer. His cast-iron convictions as to the shiftlessness of his employees melt. He not only employs Higgins, though he is a trade unionist, but, after discussions with him, takes Carlyle's advice (and Margaret's) about creating something more than a 'cash nexus' as a link with his workers. She has in fact returned class conflict to its proper place between employer and employed. The final test of Thornton's new-found virtue comes in economic form when he resists the temptation to speculate with his creditors' money. Ironically this decision proves he was right to think that in this society ruthlessness was the only way to succeed. He loses his mill and is forced to look for work himself, as Higgins was earlier.

Only when she has achieved control over his will in the treatment of his workers can Margaret happily make a rapid sexual submission 'all smash in a moment', as Gaskell wrote in a letter (Chapple and Pollard 1966:329). Significantly, however, though Margaret's new-found money can return Thornton to prosperity, it cannot work the larger miracle of transforming the whole town as Shirley's does for Moore in Brontë's novel. Once more the trope of Frederick's mutiny underpins the narrative. His courageous act did not erase the kind of brutality he was resisting: his fellow mutineers were hanged and he himself was condemned and exiled for ever. Similarly it is stressed that Milton as a whole is unchanged:

Meanwhile, at Milton the chimneys smoked, the ceaseless roar and mighty beat, and dizzying whirl of machinery, struggled and strove perpetually. Senseless and purposeless were wood and iron and steam in their endless labours; but the persistence of their monotonous work was rivalled in tireless endurance by the strong crowds, who, with sense and with purpose, were busy and restless in seeking after—What?

(p. 418)

The disconcerting syntax, switching from statement to question in mid-stream, enacts the inconclusiveness of any attempt to resolve

the defects in the social system. What follows dwells on the troubled status quo, as unalterable as the movement and noise of machines:

...every man's face was set in lines of eagerness or anxiety; news was sought for with fierce avidity; and men jostled each other aside in the Mart and in the Exchange, as they did in life, in the deep selfishness of competition.

(p. 418)

So the narrative syntax effects no closure. The metonymic argument that the relationship (whatever it is) between Thornton and Higgins can be reproduced until industrial society is entirely at peace is not pursued. Nor does the marriage of Margaret and Thornton figure a way out of the present condition of strife. No answer is ever given to the question 'What is a strike?' which has now been transformed into another question 'How can they be avoided?' And the answer to this is that, given this society, they cannot. Even Thornton's 'utmost expectation' is that they may not be in his area quite the 'bitter, venomous sources of hatred they have hitherto been' (p. 432). Only so much has been achieved and that not for certain. Strikes are not represented as misunderstandings but now exposed as symptoms. And this openness of ending, with all its discomfort, has been brought about by endowing a middle-class woman with the agency and sexuality that throw into question the dominant ideologies of gender and therefore of class. Through victory in the power politics of gender, Margaret Hale has also made an advance in the power politics of class, moving the discussion further than Brontë.

FEMALE VOICES: THE ANGEL IN THE HONEY-TRAP

'One may be clogged with honey and unable to rise and fly.'

(Thornton to Margaret Hale)

The subversive female voice of the narrator also creates a dual voice which continues the rewriting of the Angel/House sign already found in Brontë and elsewhere in the 1840s and 1850s.

It is not in her home village, Helstone, that Margaret has been shaped into the model of middle-class womanhood that Thornton rapturously decodes but in the house of her Aunt Shaw and cousin Edith in Harley Street in which she has lived from the age of 9 to 18

and to which she returns after her father's death. In class terms it is nearer to the aristocratic household that Nightingale so loathed than to Caroline Helstone's Briarfield. It is a place where the 'wheels of the machinery of daily life were well oiled, and went along with delicious smoothness' (p. 372), a feat effected by servants who 'lived in an underground world of their own' and 'only seemed to start into existence when some want or whim of their master or mistress needed them' (p. 373).

Her experiences at Milton reveal to her that erasure of the working classes necessary for the production of 'eventless ease'. But even before this Margaret shows signs of an unwomanly scorn for the rituals surrounding the object of a woman's existence as represented by Edith's society wedding. The endless arrangements fill her with 'indescribable weariness'; she sees the weeks of preparation as unnecessary trouble taken merely to achieve 'a pretty effect' (p. 11). In this luxurious and trivial life the narrator perceives Edith and Margaret herself as luxurious and trivial objects: one is 'a soft ball of muslin and ribbon, and silken curls' (p. 3), the other a 'block' for the displaying of Indian shawls.

At Milton, Margaret's comment on the language of the rich manufacturers' wives shows them caught in the same well-padded trap. She rejects their language as a prelude to her own embracing of that of the workers. She tells her father that it reminds her of 'our old games of having each so many nouns to introduce into a sentence' (p. 167). But the nouns the women recycle are all those that 'were signs of things which gave evidence of wealth,—housekeepers, under-gardeners, extent of glass, valuable lace, diamonds, . . . and each one formed her speech so as to bring them all in, in the prettiest accidental manner possible' (p. 167). This account, taken with the discussion of class terms and the treatment of dialect, firmly links class and gender to prevailing discourses with which the text engages.

Later, on her return to Harley Street after her father's death, Margaret further dissociates herself from its consumerist ethos. As reported by the narrator, she is repelled by the socially ideal husband treating his wife as a status symbol, 'anxiously attentive to Edith's dress and appearance, with a view to her beauty making a sufficient impression on the world' (p. 373). This is said to bring out 'the latent Vashti' in her (p. 373), a reference to the biblical queen who imperiously refused her husband's summons to a banquet because it was brought by a chamberlain. In fact Vashti is more than latent. Milton has made her aware of two things: the previously invisible 'toilers and moilers' who

oil the wheels and create the luxurious comfort; and the 'strange unsatisfied vacuum' in her own life. Harley Street, at this stage in the text, is always read by Margaret as a contrast with what the narrator calls 'the lurid vividness' of life in Milton (p. 416). This gives her a framework for decoding it in a new way. She craves for even talk of the Northern town and its inhabitants—'their energy, their power, their indomitable courage in struggling and fighting' (p. 416). She sees the recollection of this as her only defence against becoming 'sleepily deadened into forgetfulness of anything beyond the life which was lapping her round with luxury' (p. 373). While Brontë figures a middle-class woman's life as a living death, *North and South* represents it as a honey-trap, a narcotic that will numb the mind as well as the senses.

But her deviation from model womanhood goes further than the rejection of the domestic as the only sphere. Her stoical endurance within that sphere of her family's demands has a reverse side, a *gestalt* effect. Her perfect demeanour overlies a recognition, after her mother's death, that she is 'weary of this continual call upon me for strength' (p. 322). It is this weariness with a life lived entirely for others which leads her to crave 'the relief of solitude' after Thornton's display of contempt.

It is this desire which makes her refuse to accompany her father on what turns out to be a fatal visit to Oxford:

It was astonishing, almost stunning, to feel herself so much at liberty; no one depending on her for cheering care, if not for positive happiness; no invalid to plan and think for.

(p. 344)

So, amazingly, the narrator can admit on Margaret's behalf that her mother's death and father's absence bring relief. During Hale's absence she can, 'entirely free from any responsibility...rest her mind and heart in a manner which she had not been able to do for more than two years past' (p. 344). Even this heresy is further elaborated: she can be 'idle, and silent, and forgetful,—and what seemed worth more than all the other privileges—she might be unhappy if she liked' about 'her own personal cares and troubles', not others' (p. 344). She can, as Nightingale saw it, reclaim her own selfhood in 'pain', out of which, unlike the stasis of selflessness, change may come.

Just as Margaret and the 'collusive' narrator offer an alternative account of the significance of middle-class domesticity, so too they offer a re-interpretation of womanly self-suppression. Less stridently than Nightingale they make her central point:

The family? It is too narrow a field for the development of an immortal spirit...The family uses people, *not* for what they are, not for what they are intended to be, but for what it wants them for—for its own uses...This system dooms some minds to incurable infancy, others to silent misery.

(Stark 1979:37)

Gaskell's new accentuation of the womanly sign still further destabilises the novelistic discourse in which the representation of gender is secondary to the containment of social class.

REWRITING MEN AS SIGNS: SUBVERTING COMPLEMENTARITY

'Th'oud parson would ha' fretted his woman's heart out, if he'd seen the woeful looks I have seen on our measter's face.'

(Higgins in *North and South*)

The process of initiating changes in novelistic language described in the two previous sections is carried further by the process of transgending already used in *Shirley*. The process modifies existing signs for men and women in a way that questions contemporary constructions of masculinity and femininity. As has already been made clear, Margaret goes beyond the feminine by seizing agency in the class conflict that she finds in Milton. But within the previously unknown territory of working-class life there, she does not find familiar representatives of masculinity. Instead she encounters in the forceful Higgins a man who, conversely, has taken on 'feminine' qualities. Before speaking to him she experiences 'a silent recognition', presumably of someone like herself burdened by the daily care and responsibility for the welfare of others. This recognition is confirmed when she meets him with one of his two motherless daughters, who, as he candidly declares, is dying. What Margaret has 'recognised' is that this aggressive and touchy man is a mother. When Margaret tends Bessie in her fever he understands 'all her signs for different articles with the quickness of love' (p. 91) expected by Ellis and her like of a woman. He shows a similar care for the orphaned Boucher children when surprised by Thornton's unexpected arrival at his house (p. 325). He mothers his daughter as Margaret does her parents; and it is this that puts them on equal terms emotionally and socially. She is expected to accept his rebukes as he accepts her advice.

Nonetheless, she is the more powerful and 'masculine' character of the two, who sends him to ask Thornton for work until he is finally employed by and involved with the manufacturer. By this action Margaret returns class conflict to its proper place between 'masters and men', displacing it from its location in the surface plot where it is (falsely) resolved by a beautiful woman's conversion of a recalcitrant man. Faced by Higgins, Thornton can no longer assume that their inferior position and privation are 'the natural punishment of dishonestly-enjoyed pleasure, at some former period of their lives' (p. 85). He learns, not from a woman, but from a man who shows some feminine qualities, to be a domestic provider for others. With a comic literalism he 'provides' at an immediate level as most women do by making sure of an adequate supply of food for his workers. He also resolves on a more humane conduct of his affairs, based on rejection of his own false class assumptions.

To bring this about Margaret has become a 'masculine' agent and Higgins a 'feminine' persuader, thereby subverting the notion that ideally men and women are necessarily complementary to each other in all respects. It is only when that idea is broken down that the corset of class begins to disintegrate. What this subversion of complementarity means is that human characteristics are no longer evaluated differently depending on whether they occur in men or women. Some can be seen as desirable in both genders, if they are not excessive or misdirected: judgement and the capacity to take responsibility are necessary for women as well as men; concern for others and a degree of selflessness are desirable in men as well as women. Evaluation is disentangled from questions of gender, as is demonstrated by the representation of Mr Hale, a father who is almost wholly feminised. The feminising has long been recognised by critics but its significance has not been understood. For he is in no way on a par with the feminised Higgins. The latter has many conventionally 'masculine' qualities including the judgement that recommends non-violence in the strike and an aggressive independence even when asking for work. Mr Hale by contrast is neither judicious, rational nor independent.

His appearance is shown from early on to indicate a timid, passive and (in the conventional sense) 'feminine' nature, as Margaret notices:

The lines in her father's face were soft and waving, with a frequent undulating kind of trembling movement passing over them, showing every fluctuating emotion; the eyelids were large

and arched, giving to the eyes a peculiar languid beauty which was almost feminine.

(p. 80)

His reaction to his wife's death shows the same helplessness and vulnerability:

...he uncovered the face, and stroked it gently, making a kind of soft inarticulate noise, like that of some mother-animal caressing her young.

(p. 251)

His Oxford friends, withholding the anger he expects over his apostasy, demote him to a womanly status by showing him 'something of the protecting kindness which they would have shown to a woman' (p. 348). He rightly reads into this a refusal to treat him like a responsible person. However, it is not because timidity, weakness and emotionalism are found in a man that they are treated by the narrator as undesirable but because they are excessive. By being so they throw the burden of his life upon others, as though he were a child. Such qualities would be undesirable in this text in an individual of either gender.

This process of shifting the significance of conventionally 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities also involves, in Gaskell's hands, a re-examination of the concept crucial to the Victorian construction of femininity—motherhood. As has been suggested, this 'sacred office' of intelligently caring for and cherishing dependants is shared by female and male, Margaret and Higgins. As is frequent in novels at this time, biological mothers characteristically fail in this role: Mrs Hale is weak and egotistical, Mrs Thornton is over-fond and over-possessive. Gaskell goes further than usual in rewriting what it is to be truly maternal. In doing so, she removes some of the ideological gloss that inscribes it as pure selflessness. There is a strong suggestion that Thornton's passionate feelings of anger and love towards Margaret are a mirror image of maternal feeling. The latter is twice used to trope his emotional reactions to specific incidents involving her. On the first occasion, after her mother's death there is a clear indication that a mother finds a selfish and almost sexual pleasure in the dependency of a child or even in its suffering when she knows she can appease it:

...there was selfishness enough in him to have taken pleasure in the idea that his great love might come in to comfort and to

console her; much the same kind of strange, passionate pleasure which comes stinging through a mother's heart, when her drooping infant nestles close to her, and is dependent upon her for everything.

(p. 269)

Later the enjoyment of another's pain as an opportunity for giving comfort pleasurable to the giver is made even clearer. Thornton has deliberately pained Margaret by a reference to her not being truthful but has no chance to soothe her pain:

He felt as the mother would have done, in the midst of her 'rocking it, and rating it,' had she been called away before her slow confiding smile, implying perfect trust in mother's love, had proved the renewing of its love.

(p. 336)

The reference is to an Elizabethan poem which has the refrain 'The fallyng out of faithfull frends is the renyuing of love' (Brydges 1810:42). The refrain implies that inflicting pain by showing displeasure to the loved one is a calculated way of deriving pleasure from reconciliation. This is an unfamiliar idea in relation to Victorian accounts of motherhood. The deferral of the longed-for pleasure underlines the fact that the pain inflicted by Thornton is like the 'rating' or chiding spoken by the mother: sexual and maternal pleasure are equated. In these passages Gaskell coolly charts, in revisionist terms, the nature of the emotional experience that underlies the ideological account of maternity, through its occurrence in a man. Since in *North and South* the representation of gender is no longer secondary to or entirely controlled by the need for a particular representation of class, it can begin to be examined afresh. A new semantic territory opens up relating to the emotions of motherhood. It moves away from the orthodoxy that derives maternal pleasure only from self-abnegation. It creates possibilities of different views of maternity that are taken up in George Eliot's *Felix Holt*.

*HARD TIMES***GENDERING THE NARRATOR:
THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY**

Mr. Gradgrind...sat writing...proving something no doubt,—probably,
in the main, that the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist.

(Narrator)

In outline Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) is another example of the industrial/romantic novel typified by *Shirley* and *North and South*. Viewed at a general level, it involves the same standard ingredients: working-class distress and poverty, disaffected workers, manifestations of social unrest and a callous mill-owner who marries a beautiful and refined middle-class woman. Since the first publication of the text there has been critical disagreement as to what these elements are made to signify, what statements the narrative makes about industrial society. There was an early tendency to read it as a somewhat embarrassing attack by a popular national figure on the establishment. In October 1854 the *British Quarterly Review* suggested that the contemporary 'economical school' contained 'few of them fully as bad as the picture here given' (1854:582). Lord Macaulay wrote more forthrightly in his journal on the day on which the serial publication was completed that it consisted mainly of 'sullen socialism' (Collins 1971, Vol. 20:300). A few nineteenth-century commentators, particularly later, approved of its perceived subversiveness. They included Hippolyte Taine who asserted in 1856 that in this novel Dickens 'falls foul of manufacturing towns, combats the pride, harshness, selfishness of the merchant towns of smoke and mud, which fetter the body in an artificial atmosphere, and the mind in a factitious existence' (Collins 1971:341). By contrast, in the twentieth century the desirability of an attack on industrial and social ills has not been in dispute. Instead critical concern has been on

whether or not the text fudges the issues it is supposed to confront. Defenders have argued on the lines of F.R. Leavis (1948) that this is a powerful and subtle critique of Utilitarianism and industrialism. Accounts of what constitutes the subtlety have varied of course, sometimes focusing on rhetoric, sometimes on the question of whether the narrative attacks the theories or merely the consequences of political economy as then practised (Coles 1986).

There is no doubt of the demonstrated capacity of *Hard Times* to disturb and confuse. And I would suggest that it derives from a self-contradictoriness which is the result of a ludic handling of the novelistic language belonging to this kind of text. Such bizarre inconsistency is characteristic of Dickens' representation of women and class generally.

The opening scenes of the narrative, appearing under the subtitle 'Book the First—Sowing', appear to direct the reader to locate the source of 'hard times' in the schoolroom at Coketown. Surprisingly what is poured into the rows of 'little vessels' by the teacher M'Choakumchild, at Thomas Gradgrind's insistence, is 'imperial gallons' of encyclopaedic facts, not some repressive injunction to know one's place. A binary opposition is set up in the most simplistic terms between fact and fancy, head and heart. The latter is represented by the disvalued Sissy Jupe, daughter of a circus clown, who stands for feeling as well as fancy and who consequently cannot cope with Gradgrind's kind of facts. The prominence of these scenes creates narrative expectations as to the ground plan of the novel which are thwarted by a subsequent lurch in the narratorial commentary. They also have the confusing result of seeming to suggest that what those who are reduced to the status of headless/mindless hands require is a free play of imagination.

The lurch in the narrative comes as the narrator moves to connect the impoverished educational system of the opening scenes with the evils of industrialism as embodied in Coketown. He does so in arithmetical equations which disconcertingly resemble Gradgrind's form of instruction:

You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful
 ...The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might
 have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or

both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction.

(p. 17)

The conclusion is a trope transforming the physical structure of the town into ‘fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town’. Architectural uniformity becomes ‘fact’ and all the rest follows:

Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town ...everywhere in the immaterial. The M’Choakumchild school was all fact, ...and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn’t state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.

(p. 17)

By this sleight-of-tropes the attack on a factual and unimaginative education is transformed into an attack on conditions in Coketown, now seen as manifestations of the evil workings of political economy. The notion of evil is reinforced by transforming the opposition between the (now overloaded) Fact and Fancy into a conflict between the false religion of the political economy and the true religion of Christianity. The former substitutes the Good Economist for the Good Samaritan—who, being a Bad Economist, will not do. In place of heaven and hell the Good Economist offers an appropriate equivalent: the ‘good grown-up baby’ who sticks to sound economic principles will get to the savings bank; the ‘bad grown-up baby’ who does not will get transported (p. 38).

Most of the babies in M’Choakumchild’s classroom turn out to have learnt their lessons, at least by rote. The upwardly mobile Bitzer, when asked later to let Tom Gradgrind escape punishment for his theft from the bank, refuses on grounds derived from Gradgrind:

It was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy that everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever... to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be. Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter. And if we

didn't get to Heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there.

(p. 219)

Significantly this satire has a soft centre in its casual assumption on the part of the narrator, which slips by unnoticed, that in the lower classes, gratitude to their superiors can be appropriately expressed by helping a middle-class criminal like Tom Gradgrind to evade the law. But then by this time, as Gallagher (1985) points out, the illogicalities in the use of the paternalist metaphor are showing through.

Paralleling Bitzer's formation is Louisa Gradgrind's. M'Choakumchild's instruction so shapes her perception of the working class that when she meets a member of it she can classify him only as

Something to be worked so much and paid so much, . . . something to be infallibly settled by laws of supply and demand; something that blundered against those laws, and floundered into difficulty; something that was a little pinched when wheat was dear, and over-ate itself when wheat was cheap.

(pp. 120–1)

Again superficially the narrator is distancing himself from those who see the world in (his version of) Utilitarian/Malthusian/'politico-economical' terms in which a depersonalised working class, blundering and floundering like a bull in a china shop, from time to time wrecks the machine. These discursive disclaimers in fact conflict with the significance of narrative events to be discussed in the following section.

However, the confidence with which the narrator engages with the discourse of political economy is enough to constitute his identity as masculine. Gaskell felt obliged to disclaim such expertise and reviewers naturally assumed the feminised narrators of *Mary Barton* and *North and South* to be out of their depth. But even hostile commentators on *Hard Times* felt that masculinity had a right to speak on such subjects even when thought to be in error:

The time will come when it will be as intellectually discreditable for an educated person to engage in a crusade against the established laws of political economy as in a crusade against the established laws of the physical universe; but the fact that men like Carlyle, Ruskin, and Dickens can write economic nonsense *without losing intellectual caste* shows that the science

of political economy, before its beneficent truths come to be generally admitted, must go through a long struggle with benevolent sophisms and benevolent passions.

(Collins 1971:315–16; my emphasis)

The authority of this narrator is further ‘validated’ by the way in which he draws on another exclusively masculine discourse: that of the law. Marjorie Stone (1985) points out that though overtly anti-Benthamite in his fiction, Dickens draws enthusiastically in this novel and others on Bentham’s fierce critique of contemporary ‘legal fictions’. These were procedural devices involving fictitious assumptions (such as the existence of John Doe and Richard Roe, or the non-existence of women once they were married) invoked allegedly to facilitate the working of existing laws. There are references to legal fictions, as Stone points out, in *Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*. She presumes that Dickens became particularly familiar with them during the time that he worked as a law clerk and a law reporter. In *Hard Times* ‘these legal fictions’ are seen to be paralleled by the prevailing ‘popular fictions’ of Coketown, or rather of Coketown capitalists, that are recurrently alluded to in the narrator’s account. They work as legal fictions do to maintain the status quo. The employers’ assumption of the working classes’ greed above their station is crystallised in Bounderby’s repeated claim that whenever dissatisfied ‘the hands’ have as their object a coach and six, venison, turtle soup and gold spoons (p. 54). On the other hand it is assumed that their failure to acquire desirable consumer goods is the result of lack of effort: if any capitalist can make sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence then so can everyone else who really tries (p. 85). A corollary fiction here is that so convinced is the Coketown capitalist of the value of free enterprise that he will be quite ready if there is any interference with its working to ‘pitch his property into the Atlantic’ (p. 84). With these handfuls of satirical verbal glitter the narrator presents himself confidently as demolishing the arguments of classical economists, Utilitarians, Malthus and the proponents of what became known as ‘Smilesian self-help’.

In contrast to the deployment of these two forms of masculine discourse to lend authority to the narrator is his avoidance of that of the Blue Books which evoke working-class misery in such detail. It is precluded from the beginning by the representation of facts and statistics as always and only the tool of the political economist. In practice they were often the tool of social reformers as well, albeit within a capitalist

framework. Earlier novelists as different as Frances Trollope, Benjamin Disraeli and Charles Kingsley had drawn directly on such language. A comparison between *Hard Times* and Trollope's *Michael Armstrong* makes clear how precise factory conditions become invisible in Dickens' text. Present in the manuscript of *Hard Times* but deleted from the serialised version in *Household Words* is a reference to Rachael seeing her young sister's arm torn off by unfenced machinery in the mill. Industrial accidents of this kind were a matter of Blue Book description. Frances Trollope, unlike Dickens, laboriously spells out in *Michael Armstrong* exactly how children were injured:

The miserable creature to whom the facetious doctor pointed, was a little girl about seven years old, whose office as 'scavenger,' was to collect incessantly, from the machinery and from the floor, the flying fragments of cotton that might impede the work. In the performance of this duty, the child was obliged, from time to time, to stretch itself with sudden quickness on the ground, while the hissing machinery passed over her; and when this is skilfully done, and the head, body, and outstretched limbs carefully glued to the floor, the steady-moving, but threatening mass, may pass and repass over the dizzy head and trembling body without touching it. But accidents frequently occur; and many are the flaxen locks rudely torn from infant heads in the process.

(Trollope 1840, Vol. 1:201–2)

The deletion of the manuscript material from the printed text of *Hard Times* was, of course, authorially judicious: it maintained a homogeneous representation of the mills of Coketown, at once surreal and generalised:

The Fairy palaces burst into illumination, before pale morning showed the monstrous serpents of smoke trailing themselves over Coketown. A clattering of clogs upon the pavement; a rapid ringing of bells; and all the melancholy mad elephants, polished and oiled up for the day's monotony, were at their heavy exercise again.

Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful, and steady. A special contrast, as every man was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism at which he laboured.

(p. 53)

The flurry of metaphoric and metonymic tropes in *Hard Times* has been discussed by many recent critics, including Spector (1984), Gallagher (1985), Coles (1986) and Johnson (1989). In general terms what is striking about Dickens' figures is the obvious contrast they offer with the repeated statements about the uniformity and monotony of Coketown itself and the lives of its workers. And yet they are the medium for a kind of magical transformation. The blackened red brick of the 'several large streets all very like one another' becomes famously 'a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage'; the smoke from factory chimneys is metamorphosed into 'interminable serpents' and the ceaseless working of the steam engine's piston into the agitation of 'the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness' (p. 17). Coketown is deprived of imagination and fancy but the narrator demonstrates his own possession of these qualities by turning it into the visual equivalent of Sleary's circus. Even the lighted factory windows are (to the innocent eye) those of a fairy palace. As can be seen in the passage quoted above, each of these picturesque equivalents becomes the logo which evades even as it describes the miseries of an industrialised town. It is a technique similar to that which is used in our contemporary cigarette advertisements when colourful visual allusions to cigarette brand names divert the eye from the actual smoking (and possible thoughts of its consequences) to which they refer.

In this way the narrator is constituted as a viewing subject who is masculine and middle-class. His commentary, with its declarations of compassion and generalised satire of those who exploit the workers, claims to detach him from the class that he manifestly belongs to. At the same time his display of fanciful rhetoric makes his satire less painful for the middle-class reader than cruder representations.

NARRATIVE SYNTAX: THE HEART OF THE MATTER

A story which has a direct purpose in reference to the working people all over England.

(Letter from Dickens, 1854)

Counterpointed against the narrator's satire on contemporary economic and social theory are the events of the plot and the significance given to them. In industrial novels strings of events are

linked in such a way as to confirm or deny that society is exploitative (and possibly anomic). Since the narrator in *Hard Times* attacks the theories of political economy as false doctrines which rationalise the exploitation and deprivation of the working class, events might be expected to underpin this opposition. It would be logical for the plot to locate the source of working-class distress among the employers. But this text, like the others discussed, is not stable. What happens does not support but contradicts the narratorial commentary.

The choice in a novel of a particular set of events to show the industrial state of things already defines a potential range of meanings—whether a confrontation of men and master, a machine-breaking, a strike, murder or other incident. Dickens, in expressing a preference for *North and South* over ‘Margaret Hale’ as the title of Gaskell’s novel, gives as his reason that ‘it implies more, and is expressive of the opposite people brought face to face by the story’ (Storey, Tillotson and Easson 1993, Vol. 7:378). This recognition in someone else’s narrative of the importance of the selection of a particular kind of incident to demonstrate class hostility/division underlines the hole in his own: the absence of an expressive clash between ‘the opposite people’ that the commentary prepares for. As Margaret Oliphant noticed in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1855: ‘We are prepared...for the discussion of an important social question; and...the story gradually slides off the public topic to pursue a course of its own’ (Vol. 77, p. 560). In 1854 a writer in the *Westminster Review* spelt out in more detail the perceived lack:

When it was announced, amid the strikes and consequent derangements of commerce, that Mr. Dickens was about to write a tale in ‘Household Words’ to be called ‘Hard Times’ ...it was imagined the main topic of the story would be drawn from the fearful struggle which was being then enacted in the north, in which loss of money on the one side and the pangs of hunger on the other, were the weapons at command. The inner life of those great movements would, it was thought, be exhibited,...[but] this purpose is subordinated and made incidental to another.

(1854, Vol. 6:604–5)

The ‘fearful struggle’ that Dickens is assumed to be avoiding is the red-hot topic of the Preston lock-out, which lasted from October 1853 to late April 1854, and so overlapped with the writing of *Hard Times*

between 23 January and 19 July 1854. Charlotte Brontë had similarly 'avoided' giving an account of contemporary Chartist activities in *Shirley*; but had replaced them by the 'expressive' act of machine breaking, so substituting equally violent events. Dickens refers to his own omission in a much-quoted letter to Elizabeth Gaskell on 21 April 1854:

I have no intention of striking. The monstrous claims at domination made by a certain class of manufacturers, and the extent to which the way is made easy for working men to slide down into discontent under such hands, are within my scheme.

(Storey, Tillotson and Easson 1993, Vol. 7:320)

There are two points of interest here. The first is that though Dickens makes no reference to what events he will choose, his meaning is ready to be encoded in them: the masters' domineering causes the workers to decline morally into discontent. The second point of interest is the difference between even this somewhat reactionary precast meaning and the text of his novel.

In the text *Bounderby* is certainly monstrously domineering socially, though he is not seen in action at the mill. But this defect is not linked causally with the central episode, which figures the alienation of the workers from their employers by their decision to become unionised. The trigger is not *Bounderby*, but the unionist agitator, Slackbridge. Though trade unions were made legally possible in 1824, they were subjected to various forms of sanction and almost universal middle-class hostility. By 1854 they were stereo-typed as sources of political agitation and anarchy in the writings of social reformers and hard-liners alike. Trade unionism as a form of political agitation was familiar from the 1830s onwards in literary narratives including, for instance, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *Combination* (1832), Elizabeth Stone's *William Langshawe* (1842), as well as *North and South*. The trade unionist himself becomes, as potential anarchist, a manageable-sized version of revolutionary threats who can be discredited by an unexplained duplicity of motive.

So in *Hard Times* Dickens substitutes a political meeting for class confrontation and inscribes Slackbridge as a satanic figure. His appearance spells out his innate malignity and makes him a Quilp or Richard III without the vitality and sexual attractiveness: 'an ill-made, high-shouldered man, with lowering brows, and his features crushed into an habitually sour expression' (p. 106). Though he is repeatedly said to contrast 'unfavourably' with his plainly dressed audience,

whose 'earnest faces' shine with honesty, he is clearly represented as the (safe) embodiment of their worst and most dangerous impulses. This is the ghost of the revolution that Engels foresaw. Like Satan, Slackbridge seduces the audience before him with a rousing speech. But it is constructed from the same kind of rhetoric as that satirised in the mouths of Dickens' windbag evangelicals:

'Oh my friends, the down-trodden operatives of Coketown! Oh my friends and fellow-countrymen; the slaves of an iron-handed and a grinding despotism! Oh my friends and fellow-sufferers, and fellow workmen, and fellow-men! I tell you that the hour is come, when we must rally round one another as One united power, and crumble into dust the oppressors that too long have battered upon the plunder of our families, upon the sweat of our brows, upon the labour of our hands... upon the God-created glorious rights of Humanity, and upon the holy and eternal privileges of Brotherhood!'

(p. 105)

Chadband in *Bleak House* might well have produced this empty rhetoric with its three exclamatory and confused terms of address, its biblical allusion and its vague invocation of human rights and brotherhood. It also uses the industrial reformers' supposedly exaggerated comparison between workers and slaves.

Comparison shows that what Slackbridge says is a pastiche of contemporary union addresses, such as that made to the Metropolitan Trades Conference, on a similar theme, in 1852:

We call, then, upon our fellow workers to meet in their council rooms throughout the provinces, to consider this address, and the report of the meeting...To address themselves to the matter like men worthy to be free...We hope that result will be the appointment in every locality of a delegate for an imperial conference to be held in London, to consider the general questions we have indicated and the vote of the utmost that can be spared from the society's funds, for the assistance of the Amalgamated Society. Remember, workmen of England, that that society is not only fighting its own battle, but yours also.

(Cole and Filson 1951:482)

The general rhetorical similarity of these two passages does not

conceal the cogency and purposefulness of the second, though the implication in *Hard Times* is that the first is the typical utterance of the trade unionist.

Yet the Chadband version is enough to mislead Bounderby's workers into joining the supposedly demonic United Aggregate Tribunal, and into ostracising Stephen Blackpool for not doing so. Slackbridge's success is the result, as the narrator sees it, of the unitary character of the audience which is contrasted with their seducer's:

...he was essentially below them...not so honest ...not so manly...not so good-humoured; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense.

(p. 105)

Their very good qualities lead them astray:

There was no carelessness, no languor, no idle curiosity; none of the many shades of indifference to be seen in all other assemblies visible for one moment there. That every man felt his condition to be, somehow...worse than it might be; that every man considered it incumbent on him to join the rest, towards the making of it better; that every man felt his only hope to be in his allying himself to the comrades by whom he was surrounded; and that in this belief...(unhappily wrong then), the whole of that crowd were gravely, deeply, faithfully in earnest; must have been as plain to any one who chose to see what was there, as the bare beams of the roof and the whitened brick walls.

(p. 106)

Logically this crucial argument for the truth of the narrator's account is an inverted pyramid of large assertion balanced on a pinhead of analogy. The syntax enacts this feeble structure. The assertions are claimed to be as true as the fictional architectural facts of a fictional hall. They are supposed to substantiate the case that what is described is the true nature of the workers and that what they decide (by the way) is wrong. Joining a trade union is a moral fall and the workers are led into it by their unitary character as honest, trusting and childishly gullible. This way lies discontent and who knows what after that?

Slackbridge brings out the worst in the workers; someone else might bring out the best:

these men, through their very delusions, showed great qualities, susceptible of being turned to the happiest and best account.
(p. 106)

Viewed in the mass they are potentially dangerous and in need of a guiding and fatherly hand to 'turn' them in the right direction.

Gallagher in her early study of the paternalist discourse in *Hard Times* reads the narrative as 'organized according to this...metaphoric conception of the ideal relationship between the family and society' (Gallagher 1980:71). In her account, the dysfunctional nature of the Gradgrind family undercuts the argument that paternalism is a remedy for society's ills. But in the central Slackbridge episode the argument *for* paternalism is a more insidiously authoritarian one based on an acceptance of the workers' resemblance to the 'large, grown-up children' referred to in *North and South*. It is not because they are deprived of fancy and circuses that they succumb to Slackbridge's flabby oratory; but because such behaviour is a truth universally acknowledged by observers of the working class: 'Strange as it always is to consider any assembly in the act of submissively resigning itself to the dreariness of some complacent person... it was particularly strange,...particularly affecting, to see this crowd of earnest faces...so agitated by such a leader' (p. 106). It is hard to argue, as Schacht (1990) has done, that Dickens is mounting a radical attack not only on the consequences of political economy but on its basic tenets, in a text where the workers' error/fall in unionising themselves and ostracising a fellow worker takes the place of a confrontation of some kind with their exploiters. This is especially so when the narrative offers no reversal, merely an anti-climax that makes a sharp contrast with the battles in *Shirley* and *North and South*.

Further, the Slackbridge episode initiates a chain of events culminating in the martyrdom of Stephen Blackpool. His fellow workers ostracise him and so cause Bounderby's summons for him to parade his supposed anti-union views before Harthouse. Stephen's refusal elicits from Bounderby a response neatly summarised in Dickens' Working Plans: "Ill-conditioned fellow. Your own people get rid of you—well then—I'll get rid of you too" (p. 237). His dismissal prompts a sympathetic visit from Louisa, which Tom Gradgrind uses to trick him into behaviour that will implicate him in the bank robbery. It also causes his departure from Coketown and subsequent return journey (to clear himself of the robbery) involving

a fall into the Old Hell pit shaft. His fate thus serves to elaborate and validate the proposition that his fellow workers' actions were evil.

These events also structurally confirm Blackpool's role as the one unfallen worker, representative of their potential good qualities. This status has already been allotted to him earlier in the text where he is the only male worker singled out and individualised. However, it was then made clear that he is not like those few working men, some of whom Dickens met and encouraged at Mechanics' Institutes:

Old Stephen might have passed for a particularly intelligent man in his condition. Yet he was not. He took no place among those remarkable 'Hands', who, piecing together their broken intervals of leisure...had mastered difficult sciences.

(p. 49)

More typical than this, he is 'a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity...what else he had in him, if anything, let him show for himself' (p. 49). He is to figure positively the potential of the working-class male. Working-class females remain invisible.

The construction of this crucial identity depends in large part upon the fact that he is a dialect speaker. Earlier novels, such as *Michael Armstrong*, *Helen Fleetwood* or Elizabeth Stone's *William Langshawe, the Cotton Lord* (1842), had handled this class indicator casually, inserting when necessary some random markers of non-standard speech. *Hard Times*, however, like Gaskell's novels, takes further an alternative form of speech for the working classes. It has recently been suggested by social historians that in reality the existence and even maintenance of dialect as a distinct and distinguishing language was a means of creating a sense of social identity and community (Joyce 1991:154). In this process real dialect literature, mainly ballads and verse narratives written by native speakers, can be shown to have circulated vigorously in the North of England.

But the insertion of dialect into more conventional and nationally circulated forms of literature was a different matter. Working-class autobiographies for instance, such as that of the chartist Thomas Cooper (1872), are commonly written in a variety of standard English which 'kept the speech forms of their community very much at arm's length' (Vincent 1981:193). And in the mainstream novels under discussion here, the apartheid described in Chapter 3 prevails. In such texts, breaches of linguistic decorum like that so skilfully handled in *North and South* were unknown; altering the convention could

only be a slow process. Characteristically narrators enclosed some markers of dialect in working-class speakers within their own Standard English frame. These, however, indicated more than where the speakers stand in the social scale. They carry connotations of being unrefined not refined, uneducated not educated, naive not sophisticated, and often because comic not morally significant. The convention has a long history in drama and the novel, and it creates particular difficulties in novels which attempt to 'give utterance' to the mass of working people, or at least working men.

Gaskell, as has been shown, creates a linguistic bridge between classes by a few subtle moves. Dickens, by contrast, transposes Blackpool's speech in a comprehensive way into a north-western form of dialect. This was crudely done with the aid of a glossary printed at the end of a work first published in 1746 and known as 'Tim Bobbin' (Ingham 1986). The result is as obtrusive as the language of Joseph in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, which Charlotte Brontë subsequently toned down for her in the interests of intelligibility. The creation of Blackpool's language can be seen as paralleling the women's new language in *Shirley*. But the latter brings with it no ideological baggage suggesting ignorance, unrefinement or unimportance in human terms. On the contrary, it is elevated above everyday language by its literariness. Still in both novels there is a claim that individuals speak what they are, aspirations and all. Blackpool then is to speak for himself, through both what he does and what he says.

What he does is, as workmen do, 'slide' into actions under pressure from others as his fellows slid into the union under pressure from Slackbridge. He desists from murdering his drunken wife under guidance from the only visible female worker, Rachael; he stands aloof from the union because of a promise to her; and he is tricked by Tom Gradgrind into hanging round the bank in a suspicious way. His only clear independent action is his flight after Tom's theft from the bank. He demonstrates in rather more detail than the unionised mass the workers' childlike status.

All that remains to demonstrate his perfect inner integrity is what he says to his fellow workers, to Rachael, and particularly to Bounderby in their final confrontation. The usual novelistic technique for lending moral significance to a speaker tainted by the associations of non-standard speech was to reduce the frequency of its markers and, more effectively, to give the speaker a syntactic control (normally lacking) that could transform it. Nancy addressing Rose Maylie in *Oliver Twist* and Lizzie Hexam to Wrayburn in *Our Mutual Friend*

speak with a fluency and an ability to articulate their passionately felt views that to an extent override the associations of non-standard speech. By and large this minor convention decrees that to become morally significant is to become articulate. That is what happens to John Barton in his crucial plea for justice in Chapter 16 of *Mary Barton*. The parallel speech for Blackpool is that in the chapter entitled 'Men and Masters'. Bounderby, speaking for the masters, asks 'What...do you people, in a general way, complain of?' The answer is the definitive apologia for the speaker and those he stands for:

'Sir, I were never good at showin' o't, though I ha' had'n my share in feeling o'it. 'Deed we are in a muddle, Sir. Look round town—so rich as 'tis—and see the numbers o' people as has been broughten into bein heer, fur to weave, an' to card, an' to piece out a livin', aw the same one way, somehows, 'twixt their cradles and their graves. Look how we live, an' wheer we live, an' in what numbers, an' by what chances, and wi' what sameness; and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to onny dis'ant object—ceptin awlus, Death. Look how you considers of us, and writes of us, and talks of us, and goes up wi' yor deputations to Secretaries o' State 'bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had'n no reason in us sin ever we were born. Look how this ha' grown an' grown, Sir, bigger an' bigger, broader an' broader, harder an' harder, fro year to year, fro generation unto generation. Who can look on 't, Sir, and fairly tell a man 'tis not a muddle?'

(p. 114)

This syntax evokes perfectly the Stephen that the text has constructed. Logical links are lacking in the sentence beginning 'Look how you considers of us', where it is not clear in what way 'how yo' are awlus right' relates to the preceding part. Similarly what follows—'and never had'n no reason in us'—is ambiguous. Does it mean 'you accuse us of not being rational' or 'there was never cause in us for your thinking us wrong'? The linking 'and' fails to make the specific point. The repeated imperative with an illocutionary force of mere protest helps to increase the obscurity of the argument. There are redundant phrases: 'somehows', 'fro year to year', 'fro generation unto generation'. To these is added the vagueness of reference referred to above: anaphoric reference with nothing to refer back to: from the

rather vague ‘t’ of the opening, which presumably means what is complained of, the passage leads to a culmination in an account of an even vaguer ‘this’, growing ‘bigger...broader... harder’. The marvellously specific quality of Barton’s similar complaint is lost in uncertainty. The indication of dialect pronunciation in this novel is reasonably accurate, and the syntax colloquial. The result is that what the narrator represents is a narrow, limited and confused mind. Stephen’s catchphrase, ‘Tis a muddle’ (with all its variations), comes ironically to reflect a confusion within him that matches the confused uncertainty of his actions. This is what he ‘shows for himself’. The narrator in practice is ambivalent: he asserts that this is a man of ‘perfect integrity’ but constructs him as an individual whose moral confusion and intellectual limitations confirm the conventions that dialect speakers are in various ways inferior. Giving speech to individual members of the working class within the existing novelistic convention turns out to be a Trojan gift-horse. Enclosing dialect speech within a narrative framed in middle-class language enacts and reinforces the tradition of the natural inferiority of those who use it.

Dickens protested in the letter quoted at the head of this section against those who wished to connect *Hard Times* with events in Preston. To do so was to ‘localise’ a text which had a reference to ‘the working people all over England’ (Storey, Tillotson and Easson 1993, Vol. 7:291). This is the usual metonymic argument in industrial novels: ‘as it happened here, so it might be everywhere’. The final passage of the novel alludes to this implication: ‘Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not’ (p. 227). If the events of Coketown are to be taken metonymically as an awful warning, they involve acceptance of the demonstration that the child/worker needs control if he is not to bring about and to suffer disaster. According to the narrator, political economists have got it wrong but so too have those who wish for radical social changes. Things are bad, human feelings are crushed, but the status quo must be protected for fear of something worse.

REWRITING WOMAN AS SIGN: THE AVENGING ANGEL

‘In this strife I have almost repulsed and crushed my better angel into a demon.’

(Louisa Bounderby)

Taken together, the narrator's commentary and the industrial plot of *Hard Times* seem to represent a defence of the existing class structure camouflaged by a flippantly satirical attack on aspects of the theories of political economy that underpin it. If that were really all that the text offered, it would be difficult to account for the strong reactions of those such as Macaulay and Leavis who disapprovingly or approvingly regarded it as a powerful expression of social disaffection. I would argue that this is because too much attention has been paid to the industrial aspects of the text when the real disaffection has its source elsewhere.

The narrator, for all his explicit claims to sympathy with the workers, is too firmly placed as a viewing subject within the middle class to react with anything other than a suggestion of the need for control to signs of social disturbance. For Dickens the horror of revolution expressed in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* seems to be evoked by any crowd of dissatisfied 'inferiors', even the amiable mass of Coketown workers. But just as in the two historical novels there is a contradictory titillation in the horror, so in *Hard Times* social anarchy arrived at by a different route turns out to be a desired and even exciting end. Such contradictory discourses often create a dialogic effect in Dickens' novels, creating a characteristic tension.

The dominant ideology that is enacted by the industrial story in *Hard Times* is held in place by linguistic devices which include the separation of middle-class angel and working-class whore, described in Chapter 1. Significantly Louisa claims in the quotation that heads this section to be stranded between the two. Earlier chapters have shown the reworking of the ideal figure by woman writers who change the significance of the House/Angel trope. Such contestations of conventional signs were shrewdly noticed as early as 1855 by Margaret Oliphant. Writing in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* about literary heroines, she says ironically:

Here is your true revolution. France is but one of the Western Powers; woman is the half of the world...Do you think that young lady is an angelic being, young gentleman? Do you compare her to roses and lilies...? She is a fair gladiator—she is not an angel...Why should *she* be like a rose or lily any more than yourself?

(Oliphant 1855, Vol. 77:558)

Oliphant in this passage is deriding heroines in whom submissiveness

to their lovers is replaced by the combativeness of a Jane Eyre or a Margaret Hale: she is resisting the alteration in the images of women effected by women who write from a divided viewpoint. Some male authors also contribute to Oliphant's perceived revolution, as she notices with reference to the American Nathaniel Hawthorne. Dickens is another such male, though she is apparently unaware of this. Their contribution to the upheaval comes through a pre-occupation with women's sexuality. This obsession is evident even in those of Dickens' novels which insist on the sexlessness of his nubile girls. In his reworking they offer scope for a ghost pornography by being subjected to a voyeuristically represented sexual threat (Ingham 1992). On the other hand explicit female sexuality is in current novelistic language necessarily illicit, but his representation of the prostitutes Nancy in *Oliver Twist* and Alice Marwood in *Dombey and Son* moves them towards womanliness. Significantly, also, he unobtrusively rewrites the fallen woman in the persons of the dark and smouldering Rosa Dartle in *David Copperfield* and the satanically beautiful Miss Wade in *Little Dorrit*. Both women possess a middle-class respectability that contradicts the regulation view of the harlot's progress to gin, ruin and death, though Rosa has been Steerforth's mistress and Miss Wade, Henry Gowan's. Just as Dickens in these texts varies the existing sign for the fallen woman, so in Louisa Bounderby he shifts the significance of the ideologically crucial sign of the middle-class woman, still an angel but now fallen and avenging.

In an earlier summary Louisa was referred to as one of the standard ingredients of the industrial romantic novel. However, my accounts of these ingredients are predicated upon the argument that each exponent of any sign, verbal or visual, is never totally standard but in part an individual accentuation of it. And it is only under the most general description that Louisa belongs to the same category as Caroline Helstone, Shirley Keeldar and Margaret Hale. Like them she is middle class and well educated, at least in the knowledge of the hard-fact persuasion to which her father belongs, though deprived of the literary resources of the other three women. And she is beautiful in a properly middle-class way, with a refinement and mysterious reserve noticed at once by the dissipated James Hart-house. She is singularly lacking, as he also sees, in domestic skills:

There was no mute sign of a woman in the room. No graceful little adornment, no fanciful little device, however trivial, anywhere expressed her influence. Cheerless and comfortless,

boastfully and doggedly rich, there the room stared at its present occupants, unsoftened and unrelieved by the least trace of any womanly occupation.

(pp. 97–8)

Though Louisa remains physically chaste and therefore virtuous, the mystery which Harthouse draws out of her is a smouldering sexual passion. But even before this a connection with the fallen woman has already been made when she trades herself in marriage at the age of 19 to the 50-year-old Bounderby:

Love was made on these occasions in the form of bracelets; and, on all occasions during the period of betrothal, took a manufacturing aspect. Dresses were made, jewellery was made, cakes and gloves were made, settlements were made.

(p. 82)

For Louisa to be sold in marriage in this way puts her in the same class as Edith Dombey, who shares her ambiguous significance: middle-class, beautiful, intelligent, 'refined', aware of the degradation of her marriage and yet miraculously distanced from it through the fact of recognising it. The parallel between Edith and a prostitute is explicitly made by a comparison with the fallen Alice Marwood who turns out to be her half-sister. In *Hard Times* it is Louisa's relationship with Harthouse which provides the natural centre of the text that contemporary and subsequent reviewers, following the directive in the title, tried to fill with the slippery subject of industrial unrest. Ultimately and powerfully it does relate to class but not in any immediate way.

As has been frequently noticed, the titles of the three books into which the narrative is divided—'Sowing', 'Reaping', 'Garnering'—make a pointed contrast between the cycle of natural growth and the sterile machine that is Coketown. The latter is a place to be measured in terms of numbers of 'hands' and amount of 'horse Steam Power' (p. 53), 'where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in' (p. 48). Nature is here seen only in a poisoned form:

It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves...and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal...and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye.

(p. 17)

The location of the natural order referred to by the metaphorical titles of the books is left to inference. However, the divisions of the text point plainly to Louisa. The 'Sowing' ends with her marriage to Bounderby; the 'Reaping' with her apparently adulterous flight from his house; and the 'Garnering' retails all that follows this action.

The harvest is a blighted one and it is Louisa's. This is made clear by references which link her to the overarching natural cycle. On her journey to her mother's death bed, her future garnering is alluded to:

Her remembrances of home and childhood were remembrances of the drying up of every spring and fountain in her young heart...The golden waters were not there. They were flowing for the fertilization of the land where grapes are gathered from thorns, and figs from thistles.

(p. 151)

And when she has left Bounderby she reproaches her father for the harvest she has garnered and asks him whether, if he had known the future, he would have 'given' her to Bounderby:

'Would you have doomed me...to the frost and blight that have hardened and spoiled me? Would you have robbed me—for no one's enrichment—...of the immaterial part of my life, the spring and summer of my belief?'

(p. 165)

'In this strife,' she adds, 'I have almost repulsed and crushed my better angel into a demon' (p. 166).

So the heart of the matter is really Louisa and Harthouse. From the time of his arrival in Coketown the trajectory of the narrative is fuelled by the question 'Will he succeed in seducing her?' It dims the only other significant question 'Will Stephen Blackpool be cleared of theft?'—which is covertly answered in the affirmative from the start anyway. The dramatic reversal on which the story hinges comes not with Stephen's death but with (what looks like) Louisa's adulterous elopement with Harthouse. This parallels Edith Dombey's flight with her husband's agent, James Carker. It turns Louisa, like Edith, into near/putative/would be/and certainly reputed adulteress. To be such a (non)adulteress is to be a woman of whom the irrevocable question 'Is she an adulteress?' has been asked. This is not the first time of asking in novels. Earlier examples of this strange novelistic sign are

the eponymous heroine of Geraldine Jewsbury's *Zoe* (1845) and Katherine in Dinah Mulock Craik's *The Ogilvies* (1849). The negative in this sign works there as Freud saw negation working in taboo areas:

It is as though the patient had said: 'It's true that my mother came into my mind as I thought of this person, but I don't feel inclined to let the association count.'

(Strachey 1961, Vol. 19:235)

Freud's response provides a model which seems the appropriate response to non-adulteresses: 'In our interpretation, we take the liberty of disregarding the negation and of picking out the subject-matter alone of the association' (Strachey 1961, Vol. 19:235). This makes sense as a way of interpreting the products of a culture in which 'dishonour' is a matter of repute as much as of fact. So Zoe Gifford, Katherine Ogilvie and Louisa Bounderby as (non)adulteresses extend the range of novelistic discourse in a significant way: wives are chaste; non-adulteresses are something different—both unfallen and fallen, or neither fallen nor unfallen. They create a new space between these two types of women.

Whereas in the contemporaneous *North and South* a merely protective public action on Margaret Hale's part is perceived by some as a shameful embrace, Louisa is portrayed at an extreme in wishing to commit adultery. Though the subject was taboo, a linguistic coding of such illicit feelings existed. The significance of loosened hair as a sign of sexual accessibility is well known in literature and painting (Gitter 1984). The sign for desire is equally simple. Zoe's passion for a man who is not her husband, for instance, is portrayed in a scene where a luridly described fire leaves her in the rescuing arms of the man she loves:

Zoe opened her eyes, and saw Everhard bending over her. The colour rushed over her face and neck...the next moment Zoe's burning arms were round his neck, and her long hair fell like a veil over him. Everhard's...veins ran fire.

(1845/1989:245)

Reviewers readily decoded the fire/sexual desire figure. Oliphant refers to it in the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* article already quoted. She describes Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* as if it were a hot coal: '[it] glows with the fire of a suppressed, secret, feverish excitement'; it is a 'feverish drama' in which the excitement is created by 'a fire that neither wanes nor lessens' (Oliphant 1855, Vol. 77:563).

Significantly Oliphant has to admit the ‘unwholesome fascination of this romance’ (Oliphant 1855, Vol. 77:563). By 1867 there is a self-referential allusion to the trope itself made by Nell Le Strange in Rhoda Broughton’s *Cometh Up as a Flower*:

‘And really I don’t think that Englishwomen are given to flaming, and burning, and melting, and being generally combustible on ordinary occasions, as we are led by one or two novelists to suppose.’

(Broughton 1867:1,226)

If we remember Sarah Stickney Ellis’s volumes on the *Women, Wives, Daughters* and *Mothers of England*, it is not surprising that here again class, gender and nationality intersect in Le Strange’s assertion. In a later reference to *Hard Times* in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1877, Edwin Whipple complains that because Dickens could not, like French novelists, directly record ‘every phase of passion in the breasts of the would-be adulterer and the would-be adulteress’, Louisa undergoes a ‘sudden passage of ice into fire without any warning’ (Whipple 1877, Vol. 39:358).

Though making clear the familiarity of fire as a metaphor for sexual passion, Whipple is wrong over the detail. The connection between Louisa and a smouldering fire has been tellingly present in the novel from early on. It is the narrator who first describes her face showing ‘a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn’ (p. 10). But she takes this image to herself at every turn in the story when she chooses to sit staring into the fire. When questioning Tom she speaks ‘slowly, and in a curious tone, as if she were reading what she asked in the fire, and it were not quite plainly written there’ (p. 41). Rebuked by her mother for ‘wondering’ and being asked what encouraged it, she claims it was ‘the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying’ (p. 41). After Tom has urged her to marry Bounderby, she gazes at the ‘lurid’ fires of Coketown, and the narrator comments that ‘It seemed as if, first in her own fire within the house, and then in the fiery haze without, she tried to discover what kind of woof Old Time...would weave from the threads he had already spun into a woman’ (p. 73). Louisa thus equates herself with fire, represents it as concealing something within as yet unknown to herself and predictive of her future.

The importance of linking Louisa through the fire trope with illicit sexuality depends on the anomalous fact that it is managed without compromising her womanly status. Her loveless marriage, her half

seduction and her desertion of her husband are overwritten by the natural imagery of sowing seed and reaping a harvest. And although the narrator unreliably offers the information that she has eloped with her lover, she is retrospectively shown to have removed herself prudently from the hands of one legal guardian, her husband, to her father who can become another. She displays some of the shame of a fallen woman but no more intense than that of Margaret Hale, though she has gone much further. She remains like the Ellen Ternan inscribed in Dickens' letter to a friend, Frances Elliott, simultaneously fallen and unfallen (Dexter 1938, Vol. 3:475–6).

The telling use of the fire and ripening seed metaphors have endowed Louisa with an ambiguous power. As she says to her father, 'when the night comes, Fire bursts out' (p. 76); and as the narrator remarks of her state when she reaches her father's house, 'All closely imprisoned forces rend and destroy. The air that would be healthful to the earth, the water that would enrich it, the heat that would ripen it, tear it when caged up' (pp. 170–1). What she rends and destroys, by the germinating power with which her developing sexuality has endowed her, is the Bounderby empire. Her public defection from him is followed by, and therefore appears to cause, a public exposure of his self-aggrandising lies about his pitiful upbringing. Soon after comes the prediction that his future is to be an ignominious death from 'a fit' in the street leading to a contested will causing 'quibble, plunder, false pretences, vile example, little service and much law' (p. 225). Again the linear sequence implies causality: his reversal of fortune begins with Louisa's elopement. Ironically, his dynasty, if it emerges from this confusion, will be 'five-and-twenty Humbugs, past five-and-fifty years of age', each assuming his name and becoming pseudo Bounderbys, living on his alms 'with a Bounderby chaplain' and 'a vast amount of Bounderby balderdash and bluster' (p. 225). But even this grotesque progeny remains putative. Female sexuality has proved in Louisa to be the source of exciting, desirable and cleansing change.

However, the fires which smoulder into flame to bring about this desirable anarchy are not only those of Louisa's passion but the fires of Coketown with which she equates herself when her father suggests marriage to Bounderby. It is literally their glow of which she says to him that, though there seems to be nothing there but 'languid and monotonous smoke', yet at night fire bursts out (p. 76). The narrator has always made an 'analogy' between the Gradgrind children and the Coketown population in that they share cravings which 'must

and would be satisfied aright, or must and would inevitably go wrong' (p. 19). Louisa is not only repressed but subjugated by her father as 'the hands' are repressed and subjugated by Bounderby and his like. When she is revealed publicly as a sexual being she becomes tenuously linked with the female deviants like Blackpool's wife, whose presence is endemic amongst the working class, and yet she retains some of her womanly qualities. In this way her new ambivalent identity destabilises a boundary by which class divisions are maintained. In conventional terms the end of *Hard Times* enacts a moral and therefore social chaos of shifting identities. A middle-class wife turns into a (non)adulteress while an unhappily married working-class man remains as sexually pure as she ought to be. Her middle-class brother not only turns out to be a criminal, but by trying to blacken an innocent worker still further elevates the latter's moral status. The only source of uncorrupted womanly virtue is the daughter of a clown. And as Gallagher (1985) points out, the middle-class family can only protect itself by dedicated selfishness and by evading the law. All this is Louisa's harvest and without doubt the harvest of the narrative. The dismantling of the crucial symbolic sign of the middle-class woman has effected the social revolution feared by the narrator when it lurked in the crowd of Coketown workers. Brought about through the figure of sexualised woman, it is recorded with satisfaction, even delight.

6

CHANGES IN THE REPRESENTATION OF CLASS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

There are two changes in the representation of class relevant to the novel in this period: the diversification of terminology and the increasing development of a moral discourse attaching to descriptive terms. Both these changes took place within a generally accepted framework of three classes based primarily on their roles and interests in a capitalist society. Clearly, those within these groups perceived further gradations, varying in number, some discernible to members of other classes, some not. This was clearly understood by Alfred Venn Dicey MP in a pro-reform speech in Parliament in 1866:

Who can say where the upper class ends, or where the middle class begins? Who...can draw a line which shall accurately divide working men from small tradesmen? Yet if there exist a class or order, it is the class of workmen. To those who see this class from without, and from a distance, it appears, no doubt, much more of a class or order than it really is; because its subdivisions escape notice.

(Dicey 1867:82)

Class consciousness aside, those writing from a supposedly neutral position accepted a basic three-tier model. This is evident in writers who are not primarily scrutinising class but handling other topics to which it is relevant: women's conduct, parliamentary reform or high culture. As early as the 1840s Sarah Stickney Ellis indicates the constituency that she is addressing in laying down aspirational models for a particular group of women:

In looking around, then, upon our 'nation of shop-keepers,' we readily perceive that by dividing society into three classes, as regards what is commonly called rank, the middle class must include so vast a portion of the intelligence and *moral power* of the country at large, that it may not improperly be designated the pillar of our nation's strength, its base being the important class of the laborious poor, and its rich and highly ornamental capital, the ancient nobility of the land.

(Ellis 1839:14; my emphasis)

Naturally it is the conduct of women belonging to 'the pillar of our nation's strength' that concerns her and she writes for the middle class.

The same tripartite system is seen, differently represented, in the 1860s in the speeches of some parliamentarians discussing the franchise. Many wished to protect the interests of the nobility and landed gentry from the attacks of those of the middle class given the vote in 1832 and from the threat of similar attacks by any section of the working class who *might* be given the vote in the proposed new Reform Bill. Verses called '1867' by Coventry Patmore, published after the Act had been passed, crystallise the aristocratic evaluation of the three parts of the system. The lines begin with an appropriately hostile allusion to Disraeli's part in the episode:

In the year of the great crime,
 When the false English Nobles and their Jew,
 By God demented, slew
 The Trust they stood twice pledged to keep from wrong...
 Ye outlaw'd Best, who are yet bright.
 With the sunken light,
 Whose common style
 Is Virtue at her gracious ease,
 The flower of olden sanctities,
 Ye haply trust, by love's benignant guile
 To lure the dark and selfish brood
 To their own hated good;...

But when the sordid Trader caught
 The loose-held sceptre from your hands distraught,
 And soon, to the Mechanic vain,
 Sold the proud toy for naught.
 Your charm was broke, your task was sped,
 Your beauty, with your honour, dead...

(Smith 1966:241-2)

Here the central place is taken by the nobility rather than by the middle class, as in Ellis's account. The nobility appear not as a mere ornament to a society held up by the middle class but as a disregarded 'Best', a flowering of virtue, love, charm, beauty and honour, guilelessly trusting the 'Sordid Trader' of the middle class. The latter have faithlessly extended the privilege of the vote to the 'Vain Mechanic' (= 'stupid labourer'). The values encoded are a strange mixture of aesthetics and economics but the simple three-class system is still the framework.

Similarly Matthew Arnold, writing his polemic *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), speaks with confidence of 'the three great English classes', 'our aristocratic, our middle, and our working class' (Lipman 1994:66). Looking down from the Everest of culture onto the anarchy below, he re-presents them critically as Barbarians, Philistines and (philistine) Populace. For him all are defective in their relation to the high culture he wishes to defend.

The diversification of terminology in the latter part of the century takes place within this three-tier framework. It consists partly of a proliferation of general names for the working class and partly of the use of their occupations as their description. The work done came fairly easily to give a label to the doer, particularly at a time when trades unions were discussing such matters as whether seventeen categories of pottery workers, including Slip-makers, Throwers, Lookers to Ware, Turners, Handlers, etc., should unite to form a consolidated union (Cole and Filson 1951:474). This was strongly reinforced by the national censuses which from 1841 onwards identified individuals by occupation and provided occupational tables. Both these reinforced the idea of working-class individuals as a function of their work. The terms elaborate the idea of workers as *hands*: the apparent trend towards individualism disguises a denial of personal identity for members of the working class, in stark contrast with the intense individualism found in the construction and representation of other classes in this period.

Centrally relevant to the novelistic treatment of class, however, is the second linguistic change: the intervention of moralistic discourse into social description. It has recently been argued that 'Victorian Britain's language of social description lacked a perception of a system of relationships which the terminology purported to describe in its entirety' (Crossick 1991:160). What Crossick seems to regard as missing is the kind of religious and moral glue which theoretically held together the rank system. If individuals are treated as cogs in an economic machine it is possible to construct a manageable account

of class inequality with every cog in its proper place. The account becomes more difficult if questions of justice and individual rights are raised.

These were the very issues that some radicals (as well as some novelists) had begun to raise in the early part of the century. Cobbett had tried to introduce moral considerations into descriptions of industrial society only to find himself trapped in the discourse of economics:

Elegant dresses, superb furniture, stately buildings, fine roads and canals, fleet horses and carriages, numerous and stout ships, warehouses teeming with goods;...so many marks of national wealth and resources. But all these spring from *labour*. Without the Journeyman and the labourers none of them could exist; ...the country would be a wilderness.

(Cobbett 1816, Vol. 31, No. 18:433)

He concludes:

With this correct idea of your own worth in your minds, with what indignation must you hear yourself called the Populace, the Rabble, the Mob, the Swinish Multitude; and with what greater indignation, if possible, must you hear the projects of those cool and cruel and insolent men, who, now that you have been...brought into a state of misery, propose to narrow the limits of parish relief, to prevent you from marrying in the days of your youth, or to thrust you out to seek your bread in foreign lands, never more to behold your parents or friends?

(Cobbett 1816, Vol. 31, No. 18:434)

The passage, since it claims value for 'labour', is a demonstration that society described in the language of political economy, even by a supporter of the working class, is, as Crossick claims, anomic—without a common set of social values and standards. The accounts in previous chapters of how novelists try to set up a paternalistic model indicate an attempt to meet the same lack. On the other hand, the representation of society as the inevitable cruel struggle for existence that Thornton perceives in *North and South* is an attempt to argue down suggestions that things might be otherwise.

In the latter part of the century the search for an ideological framework comes to include a new kind of moralising. This moralising focuses on an individual's worth and its relation to his (not her) social

mobility. This goes well with the view famously expressed in the first chapter of Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* that society is a gymnasium full of ladders in which self-reliant climbing is a capital virtue: 'The spirit of self-help is the root of all genuine growth in the individual...it constitutes the true source of national vigour and strength. Help from without is often enfeebling in its effects' (Smiles 1859:1). This means that only willpower is needed to achieve success: 'For opportunities, as we shall afterwards find, fall in the way of every man who is resolved to take advantage of them' (Smiles 1859:11–12).

The questions apparently being debated in the second part of the century were: What constitutes social value in an individual? How is it acquired? And can any acquire it up to its highest level? Despite Smiles' idea of a readily available ladder there was already emerging a new description of the working class which excluded a large group of them from the possibility of climbing it. Ellis's reference in 1839 to the 'laborious poor' already implied that some of them were not 'laborious'. Mayhew in his *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861–2) divided the poor into three groups: those that *will* work; those that *cannot* work; and those that *will not* work. These two writers are already moving towards a description of the working class as split into the respectable and the underclass. A significant term for the latter originating in the mid-nineteenth century was the 'residuum', or remainder, which by the 1860s was even used by the reformer John Bright, just before the passing of the second parliamentary Reform Act: 'I call this class the residuum, which there is in every constituency, of almost hopeless poverty and dependence' (*Times*, 27 March 1867). Not even reformers were exempt from the prevailing middle-class view that 'dependency' was a vice which should not be increased by charitable or state intervention.

Presumably formative in this description of the subclass as hopelessly poor, hopelessly dependent and even dangerous were the parliamentary debates of the 1850s and 1860s about extending the vote. The whole working class was regarded as potentially threatening, as Coventry Patmore's verses show. But below the 'vain mechanics' of the working classes were those most dangerous to property and property owners. For the establishment that Parliament represented, statistics became crucial in relation both to overall numbers of possible new working-class voters and to the effect of their presence in individual constituencies. The political arithmetic became frenetic. It evoked a contemptuous rebuke from Gladstone:

But I do object to the whole mode of dealing with this question of statistics, as adopted by Honourable Members...They seem as if they were engaged in ascertaining the numbers of an invading army; but the persons to whom their remarks apply are our fellow-subjects, our fellow-Christians, our own flesh and blood.

(Smith 1966:86–7)

Significantly the reference to an invading army echoes a reference in James Miller's work *Prostitution Considered in Relation to its Cause and Cure* (1859) to prostitutes as a 'multitudinous amazonian army the devil keeps in constant field service for his own ends' (Miller 1859:5). The residuum and prostitute are equatable as social threats contained by a definition that invites condemnation.

Despite Gladstone's protest, the new representation of the working class as divisible into a respectable artisan group and an irredeemable residuum was confirmed as an orthodoxy by the franchise debates. By 1869 Arnold alludes without argument to the diligent working class as 'one in spirit with the industrial-middle class' (Lipman 1994:70). And as Stedman Jones (1971) demonstrates, the increased casualisation of labour in London and slum clearances such as that brought about by the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwelling Act of 1875 did create an urban subclass. They lived in ever more overcrowded and squalid conditions, sinking ever deeper into poverty and without hope of emerging from it. They fitted the name already current: 'the dregs' of society, its 'residuum'. Charitable work such as the provision of housing organised by Octavia Hill (1838–1912) reinforced the gap between the two sorts of working class by providing housing only for those well-paid and well-organised enough, if casual labourers, to afford a regular rent. The dominant significance now attached to the condition of the residuum was that even in a morally decent society these people were deserving of what they got. For the middle class could now be represented as morally decent in its efforts to improve the working and living conditions of the respectable or artisan part of the working class, since there was no possibility of doing anything for the rest.

Interestingly, an elaborate justification for the then prevailing ideology was offered by a major figure amongst nineteenth-century economists, Alfred Marshall (1842–1924). He provides at once the moral social framework that Crossick (1991) finds missing earlier and links class with moral worth. John Stuart Mill in his *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) had offered an optimistic view of the

'Probable Future of the Labouring Classes'. Marshall claims in a paper read to the Reform Club at Cambridge in 1873 to be following in Mill's footsteps. The question he wishes to examine is whether the 'amelioration of the working classes has limits beyond which it cannot pass'. The answer depends partly on what it might cost in financial terms to give to more than a small number of people 'an education in youth and an occupation in afterlife' similar to those 'proper to gentlemen' (Pigou 1925:102).

Marshall answers affirmatively his own question 'whether progress may not go on steadily if slowly, till the official distinction between working man and gentleman has passed away' (Pigou 1925:102). But in developing his argument he is able to make a logical connection between membership of the working class and a propensity to insensitivity, stupidity and depravity.

'Who', Marshall asks, 'are the working classes?' A definition follows: a man (never a woman apparently) is classified as belonging to the working classes in terms of 'the effect that his work produces on him rather than of the effect that he produces on his work' (Pigou 1925:103). If his work tends 'to keep his character rude and coarse' then he is said to belong to these classes. The rudeness and coarseness are characterised in terms of both things missing and things present. They are partly manifest in the lack of social ease with different kinds of people, the inability to anticipate the feelings of others on small points or to avoid giving others pain or annoyance over trivialities. These qualities are 'required for success' and need long training. 'Wealth is not indispensable' but it helps to cultivate them. Things present are the rudeness and coarseness which are the result of 'lowering influences' on 'those vast masses of men who, after long hours of hard and unintellectual toil, are wont to return to their narrow homes with bodies exhausted and with minds dull and sluggish' (Pigou 1925:104-5). The harder the labour, the more 'the effect of the work of man's body in dwarfing the growth of the man' (Pigou 1925:106). His own experience of inability to read a book on philosophy after a day's climbing in the Alps has shown Marshall that the working man's fatigue inhibits study and education, and so refinement. Concluding this section he adds

There is another terrible fact about exhausting work. It is that physical fatigue in its extremest forms causes physical unrest and physical cravings that hound a man on to his undoing.

(Pigou 1925:106-7)

Toil dulls the brain leaving it open only to ‘the coarser pleasures—drink, ignoble jests, and noise’ (Pigou 1925:107). He quotes one brickmaker interviewee testifying to a Royal Commission in 1866: “You might as well try to raise and improve the devil as a brickie, sir” (Pigou 1925:107).

What Marshall does here is spell out in detail an argument for the connection, long made in many kinds of writing, between working-class status (and language) with lack of refinement, a taste for ‘coarser’ pleasures and a lack of sensitivity. There is no point in highlighting Marshall’s uneasiness with his own argument resulting from an intermittent recognition that these undesirable qualities are not confined to the class he is describing and whose members he wishes to improve. His explanations of working-class nature, like the argument that fish feel no pain, could also serve to ‘justify’ treating the working classes differently since (for reasons beyond their control) they have become a different species. Marshall merely makes explicit a widely held unstated assumption.

In the moralised discussion of ‘value’, ‘nature’ and the working classes a crucial term, particularly after 1850, is *gentleman*. He was the yardstick against which moral value could be measured. The term is, of course, multiaccentual and could have a pejorative stress. But for many, though not all, it was an accolade to which they aspired. And, as with all class terms, the perceptions of aspirants or those who assume possession are variable. Its dominant accent made of it a kind of Holy Grail to many sorts of men, until late in the century when those whose rank, property and lineage had guaranteed it to them originally, became more wary of the term, at least as used in conversation. Phillipps (1984), who tends to treat the nineteenth century as a single period and leaves context unexamined, cites examples illustrating this avoidance by those belonging to or claiming to belong to the upper classes (pp. 4–13). There are several complicating factors here relating to context: whether the person speaking is a man or a woman, whether the person referred to is present, whether a contrast is being made with someone else, why and where reference is being made. What is clear is that gradually the use of the term by those of middle or upper-class standing, when speaking of their peers in their absence, became less common. When they were present the term ‘this gentleman’ was slower to disappear. It persisted of course in fossilised forms such as parliamentary address. This withdrawal from its use by and for the class that it originally designated indicates a

long slow shift in its significance. Phillipps quotes a passage written in 1827 by R.P.Ward:

By a gentleman, we mean not to draw a line that would be invidious between high and low...riches and poverty. The distinction is in the mind. Whoever is open, loyal and true; whoever is of humane and affable demeanour, whoever is honourable in himself, and candid in his judgement of others, and requires no law but his word to make him fulfil his engagement...is a gentleman.

(Phillipps 1984:5)

The writer adds that though these qualities *may* be found amongst even 'the tillers of the earth', for the most part 'high birth and distinction...insure the high sentiment which is denied to poverty and the lower professions' (Phillipps 1984:5). The virtues listed are in this account the natural accompaniment to being born into the upper class. This sense of the word is the reverse of Marshall's coin: a labourer naturally grows like a weed, a gentleman grows equally naturally like a plant out of his material circumstances.

The rising entrepreneur, such as John Thornton in *North and South*, could not lay claim to the name on grounds of birth or ownership of land but did do so on grounds of 'distinction', which he equated with financial success, facilitating national prosperity, or performing public service, as well as on the grounds of his own kind of moral worth. Thornton actually denies that he aspires to gentlemanly status, claiming self-righteously (in a not unfamiliar tone in this period) greater moral standing: 'A man is to me a higher and a completer being than a gentleman', he says (p. 164). Margaret Hale's understanding of the latter term is like Ward's and she is puzzled. But Thornton explains to her that 'gentleman' is a term that only describes a person in his relation to others but 'man' describes him 'in relation to himself,—to life—to time—to eternity' (p. 164). He is too proud to claim the title. Others were not, and they explicitly give emphasis to a fuzzy perception of their own 'moral' value—as he does implicitly.

It is important to notice that when the middle classes applied the term to themselves and expected others to do the same, they asserted its dominant significance as a crucial combination of moral worthiness with their own various forms of 'distinction' listed earlier (wealth, success, public service). In doing so they provide a firmly negative answer to Marshall's question about whether the distinction between

gentlemen and the working classes could ever be totally obliterated. Exclusivity was always in some way a necessary part of the meaning of the term 'gentleman'. No-one so far has pointed out the importance of recognising that in this period there is a metaphorical use of *gentleman* which falsely suggests an egalitarian usage. It was frequently claimed that, *in principle*, gentlemanly qualities could be found in 'the lowest of the low'. Samuel Smiles is a typical example of one who makes such claims. In his final chapter 'The True Gentleman', he allows that the 'highest boon' of nature, characteristic of a gentleman—a 'great heart'—is not denied sometimes even to 'the poorest' (Smiles 1859:325). He elaborates sentimentally on this feature existing 'under the hodden grey of the peasant as well as under the laced coat of the noble' (Smiles 1859:325). This should not be misunderstood. The 'great heart' in the 'poorest' does not mean that in practice the term *gentleman* was socially applicable to its owner. He is only symbolically a gentleman: one of nature's, not one of society's.

The term *lady*, though it might seem to be a parallel term, is not equally significant in this period. The limitations on women's roles in society meant that there was not a class of achievers aspiring to a name they felt themselves to have earned. The name *lady* was socially aspired to, instead of the only semi-polite usage *person*, but unqualified 'woman', unlike man, was in conversation an offensive description, indicating the lowest possible status.

Those most affected by the struggle over where to draw the limits in applying the term *gentleman* were the lower middle class whose uncertain position on the greasy pole is already referred to before the middle of the century. Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1833) wrote:

Two thirds...of professional men may be reckoned amongst the uneasy class...The general rule with daughters of men of small income...is a choice between celibacy and marriage with one of the uneasy class. Now, a great proportion of young men in the uneasy class dread marriage, unless there be fortune in the case, as the surest means of increasing their embarrassment. This is one of the most important features in the social state of England.
(Neale 1983:153)

Engels also spoke of the 'restless' class:

...a few remnants of a past time, and a number of people eager to make fortunes, industrial Micawbers and speculators of whom

one may amass a fortune, while ninety-nine become insolvent, and more than half of the ninety-nine live in perpetually repeated failure.

(Engels (1844) quoted in Kiernan 1987:67)

Such people become familiar in novels in the later part of the century.

This development in the debate over social class is reflected in the three novels now to be discussed: *Felix Holt* (1866), *The Unclassed* (1884) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). In them, the early focus on the issue of social justice and on ameliorating poverty and deprivation in the three earlier novels gives way to other considerations. These texts concentrate on questions of moral and social worth and on moral improvement and social mobility. Their interventions in the general debate about these subjects are radicalised by the appearance in the two later novels of the previously invisible working-class woman as a central figure, and by a rewriting of the fallen woman. In different ways all three novels contribute to the unlocking of the languages of class and gender which had served largely to immobilise the treatment of both these subjects. I hope to show that they complete at least a major stage in the transformation initiated by the earlier novels.

*FELIX HOLT***GENDERING THE NARRATOR:
THE ANDROGYNOUS VOICE**

There is an organic unity in the career of these two authors, which allows us to consider them as a double mouthpiece of a single brain.
(Contemporary reviewer on George Eliot and G.H.Lewes)

In her first work of fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857), Marian Lewes/Evans adopted not only a male pseudonym but a masculine persona. Gillian Beer (amongst many others) points out in *George Eliot* a variety of possible reasons for the name: to keep apart an 'intellectual' work of journalism from the more risky venture of fiction; to avoid the condescension of male critics; to create 'a neutral space for her writing'; or to protect her work from association with a woman known to be living scandalously with a married man (Beer 1986:21–4). But these speculations relate to biography, not to the texts. And it is undeniable that the narrator of the three tales which make up *Scenes of Clerical Life* is constructed as a masculine authority figure. Gender is explicitly established by his satirical self-inclusive references to men's vanity:

We are poor plants buoyed up by the air-vessels of our own conceit: alas for us, if we get a few pinches that empty us of that windy self-subsistence! The very capacity for good would go out of us. For, tell the most impassioned orator, suddenly, that his wig is awry, or his shirt-lap hanging out, and that he is tickling people by the oddity of his person, instead of thrilling them by the energy of his periods, and you would infallibly dry up the spring of his eloquence.

(Noble 1988:13–14; my emphasis)

This persona is sustained by ironic addresses to an inscribed 'lady reader' as 'my dear madam', a form of patronage towards readers not permitted to women. And these superficial devices are supported by a pervasively confident tone, whether the subject is clerical, social or moral. The narrator can speak from a position of superiority above provincial life and provincial judgements.

Whether the name 'George Eliot' indicates compliance with a masculine tradition or subversion of it, the gendering of the narrating voice is far more important to the reading of the text. Shortly after the publication of *Adam Bede* (1859), the identity of the author became widely known in the wake of the fraudulent male claimant (Liggins). From that time the narrator's knowledge of clerical life and inclusion amongst 'those who think for us' (Carroll 1971:221) were still observed by some critics but they were felt to be in need of explanation, since they came from a woman. The journalist Richard Simpson, for instance, felt obliged to attribute them (somehow) jointly to Marian Evans and George Lewes in the quotation which heads this section (Carroll 1971:223). He is prepared to discuss George Eliot's ideas of art and philosophy and to conclude that 'she identifies herself with Mr. Lewes; and Mr. Lewes has spoken plainly: Göthe [sic] is his master in art, including views of life, morals, and religion; and Comte is his master in science' (Carroll 1971:245). What this recognises is a narrating voice which can speak authoritatively on life, morals and religion, though to accommodate it in a female author Simpson has to subsume it under the legal notion of man and wife as one person. This makes an interesting contrast to the brother and sister assumed to have written *Jane Eyre*.

Whatever the motivation for the pseudonym, it does in textual practice equate with a claim to speak authoritatively on subjects beyond women's sphere. To do so is to take up a historically constructed masculine identity, which involves also the familiar nineteenth-century view of feminine identity. It embraces complementarity. Since *Felix Holt* is a text about political events it is naturally the masculine voice which interprets them. Politics are men's business. The debate about extending the franchise to certain categories of male property-holders, in which the novel intervenes, did temporarily involve the question of votes for women. On 20 May 1867, John Stuart Mill, MP for Westminster, proposed that in the Reform Bill before the House the word 'man' should be amended to 'person', thereby extending the vote to female holders of equivalent property. The logic of Mill's argument

got him nowhere in the face of opposition like that of Samuel Laing, who dismissively claimed that the instinct of nine out of ten men (and, as an afterthought, women) was opposed to the inclusion of women. Though they might 'not be able to give a single argument for their opinion' they would 'back their instinct' against Mill's logic (Helsing, Sheets and Veeder 1983, Vol. 2:45). Perhaps his racing metaphor appealed more than Mill's logic, for the amendment was defeated. Though Eliot in at least one letter expresses a very guarded sympathy with Mill's speech (Haight 1956, Vol. 4:366), her explicit view is that 'Woman's Suffrage' is 'an extremely doubtful good' (Haight 1956, Vol. 4:390). To write authoritatively on the franchise therefore required a masculine voice competent to do so.

The narrator of *Felix Holt* speaks (as the next section will show) extensively on the subject from a clearly held and passionately articulated viewpoint. But confidence is not enough in an author known to be female. Significantly the central section of the text is pervaded by an exclusively masculine discourse which charges the narrator with the necessary authority. This is the legal language in which the narrative negotiates the intricacies of laws relating to inheritance, to Transome and Trousem, and also the details of the trial of Felix Holt for his part in the election riot. The Byzantine complications of the plot relating to Esther's right to the Transome estate show much learning gleaned by Marian Lewes from a long and detailed correspondence with the barrister (and Positivist) Frederic Harrison, between January 1866 and the proof stage of the novel in June 1866. She bombards him with elaborately worked out questions. He replies in great detail, which he is subsequently forced to modify as a result of more research on this obscure area of the law (Haight 1956, Vol. 4:264).

What is striking about this legal discourse is its omnipresence. It is not minimally presented in order to explain the complexities of the main plot but is in everybody's mouth, transposed into different keys: the coachman; the lawyers, Jermyn and Johnson; the dubious Christian, servant to the Debarrys; Rufus Lyon; Felix Holt; and even the drunken Trousem claiming to be 'the head o' the family' (p. 232). The skilful deployment of legal technicalities by the narrator validates his implicit claim to speak magisterially on large issues like social panoramas or politics. Early in the novel he sums up the state of political affairs in 1832, using references from *The Times* of that period:

At that time, when faith in the efficacy of political change was at fever-heat in ardent Reformers, many measures which men are still discussing with little confidence on either side, were then talked about and disposed of like property in near reversion. Crying abuses—'bloated paupers', 'bloated pluralists', and other corruptions hindering men from being wise and happy—had to be fought against and slain. Such a time is a time of hope. Afterwards...comes a time of doubt and despondency.

(p. 157)

Included in this authoritative masculine perspective is the understanding of the complementary 'feminine' woman as represented by Esther contemplating marriage to a poor man:

In the ages since Adam's marriage, it has been good for some men to be alone, and for some women also. But Esther was not one of these women: she was intensely of the feminine type... She was 'a fair divided excellence, whose fulness of perfection' must be in marriage.

(p. 360)

This construction of femininity, as will be seen in the next section, is crucial to the significance that this voice draws out of political events. But this is not a single-voiced text. Critics have recognised that it speaks with at least two voices. Some, such as Pykett (1985), have identified these as a satirical or cynical voice and that of an Arnoldian 'better self'. I wish to argue differently: that the other half of the dual voice here is again, as in Brontë, 'female'. Whereas the masculine voice determines the significance of Esther and her development, it is a historically situated female voice which elaborates the meaning of her conventional opposite, the fallen woman Mrs Transome. It is the struggle between these two discourses which creates a dialectic that subverts conventional novelistic language and particularly its narrative syntax. It is the masculine account of the significance of the plot that is described in the next section and the female account of Mrs Transome which concludes the chapter.

NARRATIVE SYNTAX: A SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION

For what we call illusions are often...a wider vision of past and present realities—a willing movement of a man's soul with the larger sweep of

the world's forces—a movement towards a more assured end than the chances of single life.

(Narrator)

As its Midland location indicates, *Felix Holt*, unlike *Shirley*, *North and South* and *Hard Times*, is not an industrial novel. For the North in early and mid-Victorian fiction is a time as much as a place: the period of achieved industrial revolution. It is also a set of values clustering round the virtues of entrepreneurial skill and unremitting self-help/interest, which are thrown into question by the need to reconcile them with the emiseration of the working class that they create. The move south to an area between the rivers Trent and Avon is to a time when the rural past still shows through. This is figured in the masculine narrator's introductory account of a coach journey through picturesque countryside which as the day wears on gives way to a land 'blackened with coal-pits', miners 'with knees bent outward from squatting in the mine' (p. 7), haggard hand-loom weavers and dirty children. Eventually the two periods merge into a palimpsest: 'crowded nests' of shuttles, wheels and roaring furnaces in the midst of 'the large-spaced, slow-moving life of homesteads and far-away cottages and oak-sheltered parks' (p. 8). The moral nature of this fictional landscape is more ambiguous than that of the North, which starkly poses the question of social justice, however that question may be resolved in a text. The inclusion of a (mildly ironic) idyll alongside industrial distress reduces the significance of the latter by introducing diverting questions to do with the value of the two lifestyles. What is most prominent for the moment is the moral edge that the stage-coach has over the railway train.

In spite of identifying the text in the introduction as variously pastoral/satirical/realistic/tragic, the narrator at a general level presents the same kind of narrative patterns as the earlier novels discussed. The main event takes the form of scenes of working-class violence involving the hero. He is saved (not morally but from a long imprisonment) by the intervention of a refined and (by now) high-minded woman. Their reunion, marriage and projected happy future offer a picture of social harmony to cancel out the disruption and dislocations of the narrative. *Felix Holt* also resembles *Shirley* in its use of history as part of the plot. Brontë goes back from Chartist unrest in the 1840s to the machine-breaking of 1812–14. Eliot's Introduction returns to 1831, the year before the first Parliamentary Reform Act; and then for the narrative itself to the following year

when the Act had doubled the electorate and enfranchised many of the middle class. In doing so, it uses the past to write about the present. The novel was written between March 1865 and May 1866, when the question of further reform had become a hot topic, partly for party political reasons. The issue now was the expediency of extending the franchise to the more 'respectable' portion of the working class, however defined. It was not generally thought that the vote was a natural right but that extending it might reduce the number of the disaffected and the likelihood of trouble. It is on the working class, the potential new voters in 1866, that *Felix Holt* focuses, spelling out their character through the story of a local election in 1832. Shortly after the publication of Eliot's novel, the so-called Hyde Park Riots of July 1866, despite their relatively peaceable nature, created disturbed political conditions from which emerged the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1867. This, by increasing the electorate from something over 810,000 to 1,300,000, presumably decreased the number of potential trouble-makers by half a million. The text itself is an intervention in the debate leading up to these events. So, though *Felix Holt* is not an industrial novel, it is concerned with what lies at the heart of such texts: social class and its significance.

In *Felix Holt*, however, the masculine narrator offers to fill the theoretical gap referred to in Chapter 6 with a new account of society as a developing organic whole. The discourse is secular and Providence has no part to play in the nature and future prospects of society, which is, as Eliot says in an essay, citing the German sociologist, von Riehl, 'incarnate history' (Pinney 1963:289). Causality, which troubled earlier novelists, is no longer a problem but a matter of determinism: the interaction of individuals with past and present external circumstances through the choices they make. As the individuals learn to prefer altruism to self-interest, social progress will come about. Causality is a matter of the automatic operation of these general laws. These ideas underlie the maxim produced by the masculine narrator in Chapter 3: 'There is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life, from the time when the primeval milkmaid had to wander with the wanderings of her clan, because the cow she milked was one of a herd which made the pastures bare' (p. 45). In the narrative, however, this axiom seems to be reversed: it is the individual acts which ultimately shape public life. And since every act is seen as an index of the self, it was relevant in a debate in the 1860s over

extending the franchise to question the acts and therefore the character of the working class as potential voters.

The difficulty of the question is alluded to by Eliot in the essay of 1856:

How little the real characteristics of the working-classes are known to those who are outside them, how little their natural history has been studied, is...disclosed by our Art as well as by our political and social theories.

(Pinney 1963:268)

She thinks that 'if we could ascertain the images called up by the terms "the people," "the masses," "the proletariat," "the peasantry," by theorists and legislators, it would be seen how far they are 'from completely representing the complex facts summed up in the collective term' (Pinney 1963:268). Complete knowledge requires not only details of how they are 'influenced by local conditions, their maxims and habits' (Pinney 1963:272) but also 'a thorough study of their habits, their ideas, their motives' (Pinney 1963:272). Without this, nothing but stereotypes will be produced in art: 'not much more real than the idyllic swains and damsels of our chimney ornaments' (Pinney 1963:268). Despite these warnings the answer to the question 'What are "the people" (her preferred term), "the masses", "the proletariat" like?' is not provided by minute analysis of individuals in *Felix Holt*, but by the significance of communal action in the central event of the text. I have shown that a strike is potentially a source of diverse narratives shaped to express diverse meanings; but a drunken election riot by non-voters offers less scope for varying interpretations; and *Felix Holt* makes the worst of it.

The violence of the riot is as extreme as any in early or mid-Victorian fiction, apart from Dickens' account of the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). Unlike the machine-breaking in *Shirley* and the attack on Thornton's mill in *North and South*, it is not linked to any particular grievance. The point is made by this narrator that the crowd is animated by 'no real political passion or fury against social distinctions' (p. 268) but by 'a mere medley of appetites and confused impressions' (p. 268). Similar riots occur in Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) and Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850), but though they too involve wanton violence, they occur in narratives that give sympathetic accounts of the working-class poverty and oppression that generate them. The Treby riot is fuelled simply by alcohol paid for by political

agents. Given enough drink the crowd is quickly reduced to the state of beasts whose actions 'could hardly be calculated on more than those of oxen or pigs congregated amidst hootings and pushings' (p. 264). The scene gives life to the spectre of revolution that haunts the condition-of-England novels and which Engels hopefully predicted.

The aims of the riot are shown as entirely improvised: more to drink; windows to smash; property to damage; and finally a scape-goat to punish in the shape of the unpopular political agent, Spratt. With the beast out of control the taste for violence grows. It culminates in the death of a constable thrown down by the now sabre-carrying Felix Holt as he deviously attempts to channel the rioters into damaging property rather than committing murder or rape. The significance of the scenes lies in the randomness of the rioters' rampage and its consequences: the death of Tucker and the trampling down of the last true Transome, Tommy Trounsem. His death means that Esther, adopted daughter of Rufus Lyon, the dissenting preacher, is now heir to the Transome estates. But more importantly the randomness of these events figures the mindlessness of a riot which merely predicts the consequences of a 'democratic' extension of the vote which came in 1867. In doing so, it captures a reading of the working classes that explains a pejorative use of the adjective 'democratic' currently dominant when the text was written. Disraeli, for instance, having presided over the Reform Act in the House of Commons, felt obliged in 1867 to make a disclaimer:

It is said we are on the verge of a great democratic change...
believe me the elements of democracy do not exist in England
...I have no fear of England.

(Smith 1966:232-3)

For the masculine narrator of *Felix Holt*, as for Rufus Lyon, action is meaning made visible. What the riots make visible about the working class is spelt out more laboriously by the speech that Felix makes on nomination day. This was amplified, after the Act had been passed, into a version published in *Blackwood's Magazine* (January 1868) more damning than that in the narrative. Both make use of the insidiously inclusive 'we' to suggest that this is shared knowledge, not polemic:

To us who have no gardens, and often walk abroad, it is plain
that we can never get into a bit of a crowd but we must rub
clothes with a set of Roughs, who have the worst vices of the

worst rich—who are gamblers, sots, libertines, knaves, or else mere sensual simpletons and victims. They are the ugly crop that has sprung up while the stewards have been sleeping; they are the multiplying brood begotten by parents who have been left without all teaching save that of a too craving body, without all wellbeing save the fading delusions of drugged beer and gin. They are the hideous margin of society, at one edge drawing towards the undesigning ignorant poor, at the other darkening imperceptibly into the lowest criminal class.

(Pinney 1963:423)

This passage from the Address elaborates what Holt means when in the novel he warns the crowd against 'Ignorant power' which 'comes in the end to the same thing as wicked power' (p. 249). Give the residuum the vote and it 'makes misery' for them and 'the children that come after us' (p. 249). The misery will 'poison the nation's blood' (with syphilis) (Pinney 1963:423), and pass on the parents' addiction to opium, alcohol and sex with the resultant population excess that Malthus deplored.

The narrow focus on the working class, perceived as threatening and even irredeemable, is shared by others at the time, including Robert Lowe, who spoke for the landowners in Parliament against extending the vote:

If you want venality, if you want ignorance, if you want drunkenness, and facility for being intimidated; or if... you want impulsive, unreflecting and violent people... Do you go to the top or to the bottom?

(Smith 1966:80)

The opening panorama has promised a view in which all classes are to be included and in which the motives even of the individual milkmaid are to be examined. The masculine narrator however falls back on the stereotyping Eliot had dismissed, to present the working class as 'the masses': monolithic, undifferentiated and dangerous.

Though the treatment diverges from the mainstream positivism in its apparent pessimism, the narrator clings to the broad notion of society as an organic process. Here use is made of a paradigm familiar beyond the writings of Positivists and social scientists. Charles Lyell in 1830–3 and Charles Darwin in 1859 had formally crystallised the recognition that geology and natural species were 'incarnate history'. Philologists were busy with the same project: reconstructing from

existing forms the languages of earlier periods, tracing origins, considering 'laws' of sound change and exceptions, even questions of deterioration and improvement. So it is striking that, from all the applications of the organicist paradigm, Eliot in her 1856 essay chooses the linguistic one. What is understood about language is to be used as a way of exploring the nature of society:

The historical conditions of society may be compared with those of language. It must be admitted that the language of cultivated nations is in anything but a rational state; the great sections of the civilized world are only approximately intelligible to each other, ...one word stands for many things, and many words for one thing; ...language [is] an instrument which scarcely anything short of genius can wield with definiteness and certainty.

(Pinney 1963:287)

Improvements cannot be artificially made by constructing a 'patent de-odorized' universal language:

Language must be left to grow in precision, completeness, and unity, as minds grow in clearness, comprehensiveness, and sympathy. And there is an analogous relation between the moral tendencies of men and the social conditions they have inherited.

(Pinney 1963:288)

In *Felix Holt* the theoretical significance given to language in the essay becomes reality, the social 'medium', the fabric of society. Test a woman's or, more often, a man's language and you test their moral nature. Eliot's novel resembles *Shirley* and *North and South* in its exploration of the significance of class through the handling of narrative syntax and the rewriting of signs. It resembles them too in the foregrounding of language. But whereas the new 'language of women' in *Shirley* and the re-evaluation of dialect in *North and South* are one component amongst others, the treatment of language in *Felix Holt* is all-pervading. It is also, as Sheets (1982) points out in an important essay, peculiarly self-referential. However, my concern is that throughout the text the point is repeatedly made that the way language is used is perceived as an index of moral value.

Felix Holt, as the hero, is the only character in the novel, apart from Mrs Transome, to recognise throughout the value of linguistic purity. His speech is marked by homely figures of pouring milk into

cans without bottoms, or of resisting the kind of power that can't plant a potato (p. 249). This kind of crude simplicity suggests that this apotheosis of the working man has achieved a mind grown to 'clearness, comprehensiveness, and sympathy' (Pinney 1963:288). When mistakenly tried for the manslaughter of the constable, Tucker, he puts his trust in plain words to express the truth convincingly: 'He had a perfectly simple account to give, and needed not to avail himself of any legal adroitness' (p. 301).

Others of the working class who provide the rioting crowd are linguistically and therefore morally in 'anything but a rational state' (Pinney 1963:287). They are not dismayed at finding words unintelligible and enjoy 'that peculiar edification which belongs to the inexplicable' (p. 112). As Johnson, the political agent, points out, what they prefer in public speeches are two things: 'one is, to tell them what they don't understand; and the other is, to tell them what they're used to' (p. 165). The first assumption is proved right when he tells the colliers at the Sugar Loaf: 'We've got Reform, . . . but now the thing is to make Reform work. It's a crisis—I pledge you my word it's a crisis' (p. 119). He is certain that none of them knows what the 'great word' *crisis* means but

he had large experience in the effect of uncomprehended words; and in this case the colliers were thrown into a state of conviction concerning they did not know what, which was a fine preparation for 'hitting out,' or any other act carrying a due sequence to such a conviction.

(p. 119)

So the riot is a due sequence to 'they know not what', the 'uncomprehended word', a perfect manifesto for its aimless destruction.

What is important for the lower classes to understand is what Felix Holt stands for. This is supposedly captured by the epithet applied to him by the subtitle 'the Radical'. It is a term of approval but is attached to a fierce opponent of the 'Radical' policy of extending the franchise. But then, like Hardy when he added the subtitle 'a Pure Woman' to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, George Eliot, in adding hers, is attempting to rewrite the dominant meaning of the description. Like Hardy's, her intervention was noticed. As Joseph Jacob wrote when discussing the novel in 1895: 'Felix Holt the Radical is rather Felix Holt the Conservative; he is not even a Tory-Democrat' (Pinney 1963:415): one who, though probably opposed to electoral reform,

might have supported Disraeli when he proposed it in 1867, in order to secure the smallest possible extension. No wonder Felix is required to redefine the term to show the puzzled Rufus Lyon how it applies to himself. He does so in a familiar way by claiming to be a truer exponent than previously recognised radicals of the 'real' or etymological meaning of the word: 'A Radical—yes; but I want to go to some roots a good deal lower down than the franchise' (p. 226). For him there is a higher priority: 'I go for educating the non-electors ...my academy is the beer-house' (p. 65).

Multiaccentuality is here foregrounded. Though Felix is the Radical authorised by the text, there is a 'false' Radical ready to lead people astray. Harold Transome, on the face of it, has a better claim to the name since he favours increasing the electorate. But according to the narrator he wants to do the right deed for the wrong reason, as is clear in a passage which parodies in anticipation Felix's action during the riot. He convinces his Tory uncle, the Reverend 'Mad Jack' Lingon, that 'if the mob can't be turned back, a man of family must try and head the mob, and save a few homes and hearths, and keep the country up on its last legs as long as he can' (p. 31). He also reassures Lingon by supplying him with a harmless definition of 'Radical': 'I am a Radical only in rooting out abuses...I remove the rotten timbers...and substitute fresh oak' (p. 39). This is well adapted to the Reverend Lingon whose political vocabulary surely includes the ship of state.

So the vital word 'Radical' becomes subject to the process of diversification of meaning described in Eliot's essay. Like other political terms it is already widely translated—as differing interests intersect. Early on the narrator ironically characterises the 'dim political consciousness' which the 1832 Act has brought to the town and the concomitant confusion over political labels:

Tory, Whig, and Radical did not...become clearer in their definition of each other; but the names seemed to acquire so strong a stamp of honour or infamy, that definitions would only have weakened the impression.

(p. 44)

Evidently the 'honour' and 'infamy' are transferable from one side to another as inclination dictates. The publican Chubb's 'notion of a Radical' is that he is 'a new and agreeable kind of lick-spittle who fawned on the poor instead of on the rich, and so was likely to send customers to a "public"' (p. 116). Johnson consciously manipulates

the confusion that equates political allegiance with the provision of free beer by warning the tipling colliers at Chubb's to 'be careful ...of men who come to you and say they're Radicals, and yet do nothing for you' (p. 121). This allusion is to Felix Holt who cannot be a Radical because he does not buy them drink. Transome, on the other hand, is a Radical because he does (p. 123). Johnson makes them understand that 'Reform, if it were good for anything, must at last resolve itself into spare money—meaning "sport" and drink, and keeping away from work for several days in the week' (p. 120). As Sheets (1982) demonstrates, miscommunication, both uncalculated and contrived, is rife in this world. But structurally most important is the confusion and struggle about true Radicalism (or right moral choices) as Felix understands it.

His self-appointed task is to remove the error and confusion over class roles that misunderstanding of Radicalism involves. His own conversion, already in the past when the narrative begins, has been the easy result of disgust created by 'six weeks' debauchery' (p. 55) which deflected him from the life of 'easy pleasure' (p. 56) that Chubb's patrons long for. Despite the university education that his father's quack medicine funded, he then chose to reject it, along with any other more legitimate 'push and...scramble for money and position' (p. 221). 'Why', he asks Rufus Lyon, 'should I want to get into the middle class because I have some learning?' (p. 57). In Felix's mind, this feeling translates into an important mission: to teach the working classes that there is 'some dignity and happiness for a man other than changing his station' (p. 364). Never mind that they are unlikely to have such a chance as his to follow Samuel Smiles' advice.

The source of 'dignity and happiness' is only tenuously delineated when he takes 'a little knowledge and common sense' (p. 65) to the drinkers at Chubb's. He hopes to move 'the best fellows' amongst them to save 'something from their drink' for the education of their children (p. 114). Little more is heard of this scheme, though on his release from prison he intends again to do similar things 'such as will never be known beyond a few garrets and workshops' (p. 364). Evidently by educating them to a higher state of being he hopes to improve the moral condition of the working class; but this project is never fulfilled even by one representative working man. However, in the sphere of gender the narrator is able to figure a redemption through the history of Esther Lyon/née Bycliffe. As in *Shirley* and *North and South*, the readjustment of relations between the sexes takes the place of readjustment between rebellious workers and their superiors.

The appropriateness of this shift within a supposedly organicist account of society is explained by Shuttleworth. Speaking of the eventual marriage of Esther and Felix, she says:

Marriage was seen as a microcosm of the social order: the harmonious union of the sexes, with its differentiation of functions, offered an ideal image of the social division of labour. The ideas of duty and obedience...of the wife were applied, in the political sphere, to the working class.

(Shuttleworth 1984:128)

There is thus a striking difference in the treatment of the parallel between women and the working class in the Brontë and Gaskell novels and the parallel between Esther and the workers in *Felix Holt*. Caroline Helstone and Margaret Hale are presented as true, refined middle-class women from the start. Esther is seen by the narrator and Felix as intransigent and over fond of refinements. The very qualities of freshness, elegance, beauty and grace that captivate John Thornton in Margaret Hale are perceived by Felix as triviality and wrong values which it is his duty to eradicate. He has at first a suspiciously violent desire to cut off the 'shining brown plaits with curls that floated backward' (p. 60) and to make her cry. Her appearance and behaviour are interpreted as the result of her way-ward judgement. Like the workers, she seems to live only for 'easy pleasure' though hers derives not from her 'sport' but from wax candles, clothes that are not vulgar and scents that are not importunate. Behind all these lies her standard of 'taste' which identifies the 'ladylike'.

We see little of Felix instructing the working classes but a great deal of the instruction of Esther. She is in the position with him that Thornton is in with Margaret Hale in *North and South*. Sexual desire drives her to conform to his wish for a woman 'whose mind was as noble as her face was beautiful—who made a man's passion for her rush in one current with all the great aims of his life' (p. 223). In doing so, she turns herself into a woman he can legitimately fall for. There is no longer a need for the rape of her locks. In interpreting her as a dangerously unwomanly figure, he identifies the linguistic corruption which is at the root of her deviance:

'O, your niceties—I know what they are...They all go on your system of make-believe. "Rottenness" may suggest what is unpleasant, so you'd better say "sugar plums,"... Those are your

roundabout euphuisms that dress up swindling till it looks as well as honesty,...I hate your gentlemanly speakers.’
(p. 63)

In a significant exchange he quizzes her over the remark that she does not mind ‘about people having right opinions so that they [have] good taste’ (p. 107). He gets her to define *taste* as ‘sensibilities’ to ‘small things’ and then asserts his own meaning of the term:

‘It comes to the same thing; thoughts, opinions, knowledge, are only a sensibility to facts and ideas. If I understand a geometrical problem, it is because I have a sensibility to the way in which lines and figures are related to each other; and I want you to see that creature who has the sensibilities that you call taste, and not the sensibilities that you call opinions, is simply a lower, pettier sort of being—an insect...’
(p. 107)

This makes her one of ‘the women who hinder men’s lives from having any nobleness in them’ (p. 107).

Her development creates the trajectory of the novel and can be summarised as the internalising by her of his initial lesson under the pressure of external events. She becomes the textbook milkmaid of Chapter 3 (p. 45) who can subjugate selfish desires to altruism, and milk her cows for the greater good. Her new ‘definiteness and certainty’ then faces what for her and the working class is the ultimate temptation of rising to a higher social class. In it she would be able to gratify all her tasteful and trivial sensibilities in what seems to her a Garden of Eden. Earlier, Felix rejected this possibility of social ascent, helped by an instinctive dislike of satin stocks and neckties and a delight in plain and vitriolic speaking. Esther, on the other hand, has long dreamt of the luxury offered by Transome Court when she is finally recognised as the heir to the estate. This crisis of choice is the peripety in ‘her life...a book which she seemed herself to be constructing’ (p. 322). Will she, won’t she marry Harold Transome, take her place as a member of the landed gentry and indulge all the ‘fine ladyism’ that Felix Holt so much despises?

She is tempted by the satin cushions and ‘atta of roses’, and by Harold who, ‘always quick at new languages’, can make her feel ‘charming’ (p. 341). But her understanding of the ‘taste’ which these things would satisfy has been clarified and she recognises that

'whatever Harold might think, there was a light in which he was vulgar compared with Felix' (p. 340). In choosing not to marry him and to give up her right to the estate, she accepts Felix's lexicon in which 'good taste' is venal compared with 'ideas and motives' or 'opinions' (p. 340). Consequently, at the prospect of marrying Harold, she feels like a student who 'having believed that to gain a certain degree he must write a thesis in which he would bring his powers to bear with memorable effect' is expected only to produce 'the sum (in English money) of twenty-seven pounds ten shillings and sixpence' (p. 342). Marriage as thesis-writing is a strange figure though perhaps appropriate when the possible bridegroom is himself 'a commentary in small and subtle characters which alone can tell the whole truth' (p. 300). As Esther constructs her own book she does not marry Harold, but returns to her adoptive father who represents her past. Ironically, the move is for her, as the Byzantine legalities of the text reveal, back to a class to which by birth she does not belong. Felix merely decides 'to stick to the class I belong to' (p. 57), Esther steps down from hers.

This submission matches her perception of herself as fallen, a Magdalen to Felix's Christ, which comes to her when from the prison he sends only a painful message about taking 'poverty as his bride':

...in the future she seemed shut out from him...he wanted nothing. He evaded calamity by choosing privation. The best part of a woman's love is worship; but it is hard to her to be sent away with her precious spikenard rejected, and her long tresses too, that were let fall ready to soothe the wearied feet.
(p. 302)

With the end of her temptation to rise socially, she finds a way of speaking that breaks into Felix's future. At the end of his trial she volunteers spontaneously to speak on his behalf without 'vanity or shyness' as if 'she had been making a confession of faith' (p. 376). She tells the court briefly of his actions on the day of the riot and influences the powerful men of the neighbourhood to petition successfully for a pardon that will release Felix from his prison sentence.

These things presumably are a parable. Where Brontë and Gaskell represent marriage as a reward for men who become fathers to their workers, Eliot uses it to figure the harmonious future for workers who, like women, recognise their nature as inferiors and their duty to stay put. Since the parable is not expounded, the weaknesses of the parallel (including Esther's relatively comfortable background)

are not exposed. This vagueness allows a note of optimism to be injected into an account of the working class that verges on paranoia. And the displacement of class relations onto those of gender in this particular way makes it possible to obfuscate the crucial question that Bamber refers to in this context as the Orwellian distinction. For the text focuses on what Orwell calls the 'moralistic' position: 'What is the use of changing the system before you have improved human nature?' In doing so, it covers up the 'revolutionary' position: 'How can you improve human nature until you have changed the system?' (Bamber 1975, Vol. 18, No. 4:428). With Esther the question never arises and consequently it is never asked about the working class.

REWRITING THE SIGN FOR A FALLEN WOMAN: NOT MAGDALEN BUT MEDEA

The fortunate Jason...saw clearly that he was not at all obliged to Medea: Jermyn was perhaps not aware of the precedent, but thought out his own freedom from obligation.

(Narrator)

It belongs to masculine novelistic discourse to make Esther, a 'feminine' woman, the symbol of a working class which should learn, like her, the submission which brings moral improvement to a wayward nature. This support for the social status quo would have been reinforced by a suitably warning representation of the lower-class fallen woman who, by deviating from 'feminine' standards, found herself degraded and spiralling downwards. In the 1860s when the working class was beginning to be characterised as divisible, as shown in Chapter 6, into the 'respectable' and the irredeemable 'residuum', this female figure for the abyss from which the former should shrink had an important role to play. Its relevance in this narrative which spoke against the extension of the franchise is clear. So it is paradoxical that the fallen woman in *Felix Holt* is the imperious Arabella Transome. She is far removed from the ginsoaked frequenter of the Haymarket or the drowned magdalen. Instead she is a 'Medea', a deserted and vengeful queen. As writers like Shuttleworth (1984) have pointed out, in general terms the representation of Mrs Transome works to disturb the restatement of social myths effected by Esther. In this text characters are all busy combining a chosen literary genre with their individual form of language to shape the story of their lives: Esther toys with 'the novelette' offered by high life, Harold tries to escape

the 'genteel comedy' that seems his natural medium, Felix attempts a pilgrim's progress. Mrs Transome alone amongst them is anomalously constructed by a female voice which writes her as a tragic heroine whose language fits that role.

This rewriting of the fallen woman was the culmination of a long-drawn out linguistic shift in narrative discourse. Already in *Hard Times* a male narrator had modified a near adulteress into a morally neutral figure of great magnetism and power. In the sensation novels of the 1860s written by women this development spread into a popular form and diversified. There appear non-adulteresses (who are wrongly thought guilty); near adulteresses (who draw back at the last moment); accidental adulteresses (who unknowingly make bigamous marriages); and real adulteresses (who sometimes knowingly make bigamous marriages). Isabel Gilbert in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) is a non-adulteress, an English Emma Bovary who misreads attempted seduction as romantic friendship. Kate Chester, in Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely but Too Well* (1867), is a later instance of a near-adulteress who retains her sexual yearnings to the end. Aurora Floyd in Braddon's novel of that name (1863) is an accidentally bigamous adulteress after an early marriage to a handsome servant and the (in)famous heroine of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), Lady Audley alias Lucy Graham, alias Helen Talboys, née Maldon, is an intentionally bigamous and murderous adulteress. Lynn Pykett in her study *The Improper Feminine* (1992) is concerned to explain the ephemerality of the sensation novel while showing its contemporary cultural significance. In doing this she mentions the anticipation of the 'marriage problem novel' in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* (Pykett 1992:199–200), but significantly does not connect the genre with *Felix Holt*. But then it is hard to think of Arabella Transome as a sister to other fallen women. However I would argue that she is the apotheosis of the heroines of women's sensation novels, transposed into a tragic key. The sign of the fallen woman is sharply reaccented. The transformation not only widens the discussion of women's sexuality in novels which did not belong to popular culture, but also disentangles further the treatment of gender from that of class. The narrating voice changes, when characterising her, to one at odds with the authoritative masculine discourse on class politics.

One defining feature of the near/non/real adulteresses in sensation novels is that they are not working class. At worst they are, like Lady Audley or Isabel Gilbert, of 'the poorer middle classes'

(Braddon 1864:25)—respectively the daughters of a dubious half-pay naval officer and of a dishonest barrister. Both move upwards socially through marriage: Helen Maldon by marrying a member of the landed gentry and then a rich baronet, Isabel Sleaford by marrying a dull but respectable doctor. Kate Chester is the ward of a clergyman uncle and as impeccably and bouncingly middle-class as the girls in Charlotte M. Yonge's novels; Aurora Floyd is the pampered child of a rich banker. None is declassed by what she does or fails to do or is thought to do. Even Lady Audley ends up in a luxurious French mental asylum for the upper classes. At least middle-class status, and frequently one much higher, is the common pattern for these fallen/falling women.

With Mrs Transome social class is foregrounded from the introductory panorama on. Transome Court is its crowning glory and 'As for Mr. Transome, he was as poor, half-witted a fellow as you'd wish to see; but *she* was master, had come of a high family, and had a spirit' (p. 10). Her tragic stature is alluded to by cryptic references that end the Introduction. They refer to the Virgilean/Dantean story of sinners confined to trees that bleed and speak if broken. Mrs Transome is evidently such a tree, fraught with the power of 'unuttered cries' and 'the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory' (p. 11). This locates her in a text of her own which is defined as tragic. The silence of these cries, redolent of a sensational secret, is soon linked with the silent figure of Mrs Transome who controls her husband with a wordless glance as she waits for the return of her long-absent son, Harold. The transgression alluded to in the Dantean reference is picked up by the sympathetic narrator's description of her anxiety as to whether, when he appears, she will see that 'the doubtful deeds of her life were justified by the result' (p. 16). The sexual nature of these deeds is spelt out by the arresting likeness of the son—'for whom she had sinned' (p. 16)—to someone other than her husband. It is clear that she is an adulteress who still retains her high social position. It is not that her affair with Jermyn is unknown. As the exchange between Sir Maximus Debarry and his wife in Chapter 7 demonstrates, neighbourhood gossip has long grown stale on the subject.

For Pykett, in the sensational novel 'ambivalences and anxieties about gender categories and boundaries are...related to anxieties about class' (Pykett 1992:107). I read them as more assertive than this. Sexual transgression is boldly made the pivot of the narratives,

outrageously detached from the working class. And it is no longer a uniform brand stamped on women: each woman sins or fails to sin in an individual way. Isabel Gilbert misreads Roland Lansdell's sexual advances because she is an inept reader of life anyway, fed on the escapism of romantic novels. Aurora Floyd, by contrast, over-indulged, spirited and mad about horses, elopes with a stable-boy because she is used to taking what she wants. Helen Maldon, a natural entrepreneur, uses a spectacular body to move up in the world, ruthlessly doing what is necessary by way of marriage or murder to get to the top. Each woman becomes more significant and interesting because of a connection with adultery.

Such representations prepare the way for Arabella Transome in whom long-concealed adultery is made worse by the accession of an illegitimate heir to land and property (the offence that the double standard of the 1857 Divorce Act sought to prevent). But adultery is not her defining feature. To answer affirmatively the question 'Has she sinned or not sinned?' is not to constitute her identity. Her appearance, which figures what she is, has a regal beauty that blatantly denies a fall from her social origins:

She had that high-born imperious air which would have marked her as an object of hatred and reviling by a revolutionary mob. Her person was too typical of social distinctions to be passed by with indifference by any one.

(p. 27)

Her strongest feelings are maternal, as sensation heroines' usually were, but they are of a scale and type appropriate to the Greek tragedy which the narrator creates around her. They make her wish her legitimate and dissolute son dead so that the illegitimate son can succeed him.

What she wants from Harold is strikingly not mere affection but the chance to exercise power: 'The shadow which had fallen over Mrs. Transome in this first interview with her son was the presentiment of her powerlessness' (p. 24). Like Shirley Keeldar and Margaret Hale she has tried to extend her sphere; and is 'used to be chief bailiff, and to sit in the saddle two or three hours every day' (p. 20). Harold consigns her instead to being a 'grandamma on satin cushions' (p. 20) and to woman's 'work' ironically described by the narrator as 'that soothing occupation of taking stitches to produce what neither she nor any one else wanted, [which] was then the resource of many

a well-born and unhappy woman' (p. 82). This pointedly aligns the female narrating voice with the discontents of the forcibly domesticated women in the earlier novels discussed. By contrast, Mrs Transome's demeanour figures the role she might have fulfilled:

...it would have fitted an empress in her own right, who had had to rule in spite of faction, to dare the violation of treaties... to grasp after new territories, to be defiant in desperate circumstances.

(p. 27)

This projected imperial plot is the measure of the qualities that are frustrated in her because she is a woman: she edures 'the narrow track of her own lot'—merely 'a little tale' (p. 280).

The mismatch between allowed scope and inner need echoes what George Eliot had written of the struggle between Antigone and Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*, describing the typical tragic conflict between 'elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs' (Pinney 1963:264). Mrs Transome's inner and outer life are *not* brought into harmony. She is enmeshed in 'the bitterness of this helpless bondage' as though by the 'finest threads' of her embroidery which 'if bound cunningly about the sensitive flesh' can by the slightest movement 'bring torture' (p. 99). Like her disappointment, her suffering, though concealed, is on a grand scale. But this is not the pain of remorse for adultery and she is not penitent. 'She had borne too hard a punishment. Always the edge of calamity had fallen on *her*' (p. 392). The calamity that degrades her is Jermyn's subsequent financial fraud and exploitation of his relationship with her. As she tells him sardonically, 'if a lover picked one's pocket, there's no woman would like to own it' (p. 337).

Part of the torment, too, is the shattering of her hopes about Harold. In speaking of this the female voice of the text satirises the conventional account of maternal feelings:

It is a fact...kept...too much in the background, that mothers have a self larger than their maternity, and that when their sons have become taller than themselves, and are gone from them to college or into the world, there are wide spaces of their time which are not filled with praying for the boys, reading old letters,

and envying yet blessing those who are attending to their shirt-buttons.

(p. 98)

This reaccenting of motherhood and the sacred duties of maternity causes the structural collapse of the narrative. It reduces Esther's pivotal acceptance of Felix's perspective on femininity to a process of pointless self-restriction. Her projected future with him is one which requires her to ignore a 'larger self' and devote herself permanently precisely to her boys and their shirt buttons. But this will not now do as a prescription for the improvement of the moral condition of the working class.

By contrast there is human grandeur in the fallen woman. For the female narrator constructs Arabella Transome as a queenly Medea deserted by her faithless lover Jason. Medea in Euripides' play takes revenge by murdering their children; Mrs Transome takes revenge by refusing to prevent Harold's legal attack on Jermyn's fraud (by telling him who his father is). When Jermyn asks her to do so her answer is in the grand manner:

'I should think the demons have more honour—...I would not lose the misery of being a woman, now I see what can be the baseness of a man. One must be a man—first to tell a woman that her love has made her your debtor, and then ask her to pay you by breaking the last poor threads between her and her son.'

(p. 337)

The break with Jermyn leaves her the Francesca da Rimini of Dante's *Inferno*, doomed to the endless whirlwind that punishes illicit lovers but *without* her Jermyn/Jason/Paolo by her side (p. 338). And the severance from her son that Harold's return brings turns her into Euripides' other tragic heroine as 'Hecuba like' she grieves for the loss of her one child as Hecuba did for many.

In the essay cited on p. 119, George Eliot characterised a perfected language: it would have 'music' and 'passion' and 'vital qualities as an expression of individual character, with its subtle capabilities of wit, with everything that gives it power over the imagination' (Pinney 1963:288). In a text full of linguistic deviousness only Mrs Transome's speech constantly matches Felix Holt's lack of corruption. But he speaks, as Pykett (1985) points out, always as though addressing a public meeting (p. 236). She by contrast has only a private voice. She speaks with the easy phrase and high-bred tone of an aristocrat in a form of

'rhetoric' that her maid and confidante, Denner, decodes as belonging to her 'superior rank, her grand person, and her piercing black eyes' (p. 316). In this language she outdoes Holt in vivid truth-telling not only about her own fate, but about that of women in general. She recognises what frustration has led her to: 'there's no pleasure for old women, unless they get it out of tormenting other people' (p. 26). She recognises to Denner, despite her beauty, 'what an old hag I am. These fine clothes you put on me ...are only a smart shroud' (p. 314). She goes on to discard conventional maternal feeling without concealment: 'if I could choose at this moment, I would choose that Harold should never have been born' (p. 317). In her crucial interview with Jermyn she deploys her rhetoric to taunt him with the descriptions which might conventionally apply to her as a fallen woman:

'Don't speak!... You have said enough; I will speak now. I have made sacrifices too, but it was when I knew they were not my happiness. It was after I saw that I *had* stooped—after I saw that your tenderness had turned into calculation... And I have caused you to *strain your conscience*, have I?... I who have *sullied your purity*?'
 (p. 337; my two latter emphases)

She generalises her own lot to speak of the suffering of all women in her society, including even that which threatens her opposite, Esther, from her own son Harold:

'He will make her fond of him, and afraid of him... A woman's love is always freezing into fear... This girl has a fine spirit... Men like such captives, as they like horses that champ the bit and paw the ground; they feel more triumph in their mastery. What is the use of a woman's will?—if she tries, she doesn't get it, and she ceases to be loved. God was cruel when he made women.'
 (p. 316)

This is a rhetoric which is supported by the female narrator who underwrites its truth. It is that voice which sees her as having always felt 'the edge of calamity'; and recognises that 'half the sorrows of women would be averted if they could repress the speech they know to be useless' (p. 36).

A linguistic fusion of the sensation novel and Greek tragedy sets up a powerful discourse endowing the fallen woman with a new

significance: not declassed, not degraded but tragic in her capacity to suffer, to link her suffering to that of other women and to speak for them. Her significance decisively separates the issues of gender from that of class, fracturing the structure of the novel as it does so. Ironically this significance is built upon her social class which gives her the opportunity and the will to speak. Like *Shirley*, this text also sends up a 'piercing cry' on behalf of women, or at least some women. There was still no utterance available in novelistic discourse for the silent women of the working classes. That had still to come.

THE UNCLASSSED

UNCLASSING AND UNGENDERING THE NARRATOR

The author—or rather authoress, for the work plainly shows a female hand—of *The Unclassed* has written a tale of lower middle class life in London.

(Contemporary reviewer)

As this quotation shows, Arthur R. Barker, reviewing the first edition of George Gissing's *The Unclassed* in 1884 (Coustillas and Partridge 1972:69), had problems with gendering the text rather like those of the early reviewers of *Jane Eyre*. This is surprising since the novel deals in great detail with the prostitute Ida Starr, who is hardly a likely subject for a woman writer at the time. Pointedly, another contemporary calls his review 'A Novel for Men' (Coustillas and Partridge 1972:66), suggesting by his title a novel too salacious for a woman to read, let alone write. Possibly Barker is disregarding much of the text and assuming that sympathy with a woman's point of view is possible only in another woman. But most probably the comment is yet another reflection of what Walkowitz (1992:39) calls a 'crisis of gender and class identity' in the latter part of the nineteenth century. And perhaps Barker's failure to recognise a 'masculine' voice in the text lies in the class with which the narrator identifies. His is clearly not the voice of an authoritative middle-class man, deploying the register of political economy or of legal discourse, as do the narrators of *Hard Times* and *Felix Holt* respectively.

It is significant that the narrative is seen by Barker as dealing with lower-middle-class urban life. He is referring only to the two central male figures, Osmond Waymark and Julian Casti, whereas the text

deals extensively with the urban *working* class: Lotty and Ida Starr and other unnamed prostitutes; the reformed prostitute turned shop-girl Sally Fisher; the degenerate shop-assistant Harriet Smales and her depraved cory, Mrs Sprowl; the violent, alcoholic Slimy; the property shark, Abraham Woodstock, and others. Barker's myopic perception of the class involved must rest on the persistent identification of the narrator with Waymark effected by the recurrent adoption of his viewpoint.

Waymark is aptly described in Gibbon Wakefield's phrase as one of the young men of 'the uneasy class' (Neale 1983:153). He is mainly self-educated, having left school at 14, though he claims to have picked up Greek and Latin. He is sometimes employed as a teacher. However, he sees himself as belonging essentially to an intellectual caste. He, Casti and Ida are obviously the characters Gissing had in mind when he wrote in the Preface to the second edition of 1895:

With regard to the title, which has sometimes been misunderstood, I should like to say that by 'unclassified' I meant, not, of course, *déclassé*, nor yet a condition technically represented by the heroine. Male and female, all the prominent persons of the story dwell in a limbo external to society. They refuse the statistic badge—will not, like Bishop Blougram's [sic] respectabilities be 'classified and done with'.

(Coustillas and Partridge 1972:74–5)

In an anglicised form *to declass*, the French *déclasser* 'to lower someone's social position', is found in the 1880s in 'Mrs. E., who declasses herself once for all by painting her face' (*Pall Mall Budget*, 5 July 1888). Mrs E. is downgraded by painting herself as a prostitute does. 'Unclassed' has a different sense, roughly equivalent to 'free of any social class', as in Shelley's line in *Prometheus Unbound*: 'but man/Equal, unclassified, tribeless, and nationless,...the king/ Over himself'. It represents an attempt to extend the lexicon of class. These people, according to the usual markers of income, education, occupation, dwelling, are plainly not middle class but neither are they working class. They belong, like the unfeminine woman or unmasculine man, or in this case the artist, in some nameless limbo that Gissing characterises as an 'unclass'.

From this limbo, external to middle-class society, Waymark, the would-be artist, speaks in the 1884 version of a projected literary work which might deal, as *The Unclassed* does, with prostitution:

every human situation is interesting to me in proportion as it exhibits artistic possibilities, and my temperament is especially sensitive to the picturesque in what is usually called vileness. Thus, for instance, prostitution and everything connected with it is my highest interest. In the prostitute you have the incarnation at once of the greatest good and the greatest evil, the highest and the lowest, that which is most pure associated with that which is most foul,—using all these words in the conventional sense.

(Vol. 3:9)

This iconoclastic attack on the conventional idea of ‘feminine’ chastity and so of ‘masculinity’ was disorientating for the contemporary reader. It must certainly have left him/her baffled as to the class and gender of the speaker and also of his alter ego, the narrator.

For, as the narrator of *North and South* colludes with the unconventional thoughts and activities of her central female figure, so the narrator of *The Unclasssed* locates himself alongside Waymark. He echoes the latter’s interest in prostitutes when describing Ida’s prostitute mother, Lotty Starr/Woodstock:

...she did not associate herself with the rank and file of abandoned women; her resorts were not the reeking centres of dissipation; her abode was not in the quarters consecrated to her business. In all parts of London there are quiet by-streets of houses given up to lodging-letting, wherein are to be found many landladies, who, good easy souls, trouble little about the private morals of their lodgers, provided and so long as no positive disorder and no public scandal is occasioned.

(Vol. 1:56)

Like Waymark, the narrator questions the middle-class ‘masculine’ view of true women as necessarily middle class and sexually pure. When Waymark first observes Ida’s face, ‘beautiful, and, better still, full of character’, the narrator reports the details as Waymark sees them and adds fervently:

But I have begun a foolish task. . . The tenderest and most delicate pencil would fail to give that face as it then was; words are useless even to suggest it. . . The type I speak of can be recognized by none save those who knew it in reality; nature cast the mould and broke it.

(Vol. 1:247–8)

Waymark and the narrator show a passion for what was usually characterised as vile, in a way undoubtedly subversive of their contemporary gender identity. Such reaccenting of the sign of the fallen woman which occurs in various forms of writing at about this time was a source of social anxiety that is reflected in both literature and criticism. It involves the gender not just of individuals but of texts such as *The Unclasssed*. As Arthur Waugh puts it in his well-known article 'Reticence in Literature':

Art, we say, claims every subject for her own...Most true. But there is all the difference in the world between drawing life as we find it, sternly and relentlessly...and...yielding ourselves to the warmth and colour of its excesses, losing our judgment in the ecstasies of the joy of life, becoming, in a word, effeminate.
(Waugh 1894:210)

He expands on the concept of 'effeminacy' in terms that might refer to Waymark's excited diatribe on prostitution or the narrator's tender lingering on the face of a prostitute:

It is unmanly, it is effeminate, it is inartistic to gloat over pleasure, to revel in immoderation, to become passion's slave; and literature demands as much calmness of judgment, as much reticence, as life itself.

(Waugh 1894:210)

Reasserting the contemporary construction of gender, Waugh insists that 'the man lives by ideas; the woman by sensations'. Judged by this criterion the text of *The Unclasssed* 'plainly shows a female hand' in the sense that it is 'unmanly' and 'effeminate'. This is more true of the 1884 version than the heavily censored and abbreviated text of 1895. The evasions of the latter were welcomed as more conventional and presumably closer to a 'masculine' viewpoint on the subject matter involved. It is therefore the first, 'unmanly' text that is used in this chapter.

Earlier novelists generally viewed the working classes from a middle-class perspective which by convention saw them homogenised into representative figures such as John Barton in *Mary Barton* or Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times*. Even in sociological accounts, working-class individuals are merely typical case histories. More important than this invisibility of individuals is that through it they are deprived of voices, except to roar or growl as mindless crowds.

Even the arch-conservative Dinah Craik recognises, in passing, that 'the whole working class is a silent class' (Showalter 1993:92). This is the silence which Brontë alludes to as broken only by a 'piercing cry for relief and Gaskell saw as the convulsive agony of a 'dumb people'. Gaskell did move on to identify the mill-worker Higgins as a complex and articulate individual and sketched in other working-class figures. Her main innovation, however, was to create a mouth-piece for the workers generally in Margaret Hale, who as a woman recognises an affinity with them. Middle-class women, like working-class men, are usually perceived as unitary.

But these developments do not release the poor from their silence. That is finally achieved by Gissing, who in *The Unclasssed* gives voice to a working-class woman as a central figure. It is possible because of the narratorial position of a man clinging precariously to the lowest fringes of the middle class (like his hero Osmond Waymark). The true middle class is scarcely present except in the governess, Maud Enderby, and her family. By contrast two other Gissing novels from the same period, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) and *Demos* (1886), which also deal with class issues, fail to give voices to the 'lower' classes because they adopt middle-class perspectives.

In the first text working-class figures are the stereotypes, whom middle-class 'workers in the dawn' (Heatherley and Helen Norman) try to rescue. An example is the hero Golding's wife, Carrie Mitchell, seduced by another man, married out of pity and slipping unstopably into alcoholism and prostitution. The reactionary *Demos* details the 'predictable' career of a working-class socialist, Richard Mutimer, who aims to better the lot of his fellow workers with an unexpected inheritance. As the middle-class and fiercely hostile narrator relates, he rapidly turns, Crusoe-like, into a capitalist, but a ruthless and fraudulent one. Meanwhile the workers revert to mob status showing 'faces of fathomless stupidity, faces degraded into something less than human' (Chapter 34). They turn on Mutimer and cause his death, losing not only human feeling but, specifically, human voices: 'Demos was roused, was tired of listening to mere articulate speech; it was time for a good wild-beast roar, for a taste of bloodshed' (Coustillas 1972:453).

So it is only in *The Unclasssed*, where a middle-class narrator gives way to an unclassified one, that the gift of tongues is fully given to the urban poor. It is a gift that creates problems for Gissing because of the current novelistic conventions relating to speech. The early nineteenth-century novel had inherited from eighteenth-century comic

drama the device of using 'substandard' or 'vulgar' London English as a marker not only of social class but of literary marginality. A Cockney could be a wit, a buffoon, a servant with a heart of gold, but not the hero of a narrative. Dickens' first novel was not 'The Weller Papers', though that might have been appropriate, but *The Pickwick Papers*. Standard speech was a necessary concomitant of serious moral worth as well as social standing. 'Substandard' or Cockney English, perhaps because of its geographical proximity to the original location of the standard form, was less open to reevaluation than regional dialect such as Margaret Hale temporarily adopts in *North and South*. The technical difficulty of dealing with lower-class Londoners who are central figures of virtue is not one that Gissing surmounts. His morally valuable Cockneys speak Oliver-Twist language: 'inborn' standard English. And in accordance with the same convention, in *Workers in the Dawn* Carrie Mitchell's inability to resist alcohol is matched by an inability to learn standard English even under the guidance of a husband who assumes that moral and linguistic improvement go together.

Just as Gissing stays within the usual conventions relating to 'substandard speech', so he does not in *The Unclasssed* entirely break free of contemporary narrative conventions. The linguistic contradictions involved reflect the fluctuating positions in relation to class that the text offers. These are on the one hand an empathy with the misery of the working classes and a recognition of their exploitation and on the other hand feelings of repugnance or even hostility towards them. *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) had leaned more strongly to the first position and *Demos* (1886) to the second. *The Unclasssed* combines both and includes a defence of the prostitute Ida Starr that goes far beyond sympathy. This is made clear from her first appearance in the text when she spontaneously addresses Waymark in the street: 'She had the accent of an educated person, and her voice was remarkably full, clear, and sweet' (Vol. 1:240). By this alone she is unambiguously identified as a potential heroine.

Like Charlotte Brontë, then, Gissing speaks from 'a historically-situated authorial consciousness' (Spiegel 1990:62) which in his case does not match the conventional construct of 'masculinity', as hers did not match conventional femininity. Throughout the text experiential values are expressed, for which the contemporary lexicon has no terms. Barker thought those values not masculine and therefore feminine. Gissing himself described them as those of the 'unclassified'. In doing so, he revealed the period's requirement that to be truly

'masculine' a man must be middle-class. The narrator of the novel, like Brontë, steps out of his gender as conventionally constituted, though like her he sometimes tries to shelter within it. The questioning of the contemporary construction of both class and gender is a fault-line running through the novel which sometimes turns to an earth tremor. But it is not so high on the Richter scale as to cause the collapse of the social fabric. However, the narrator's oscillations in these semantic areas, like those of the narrator of *Jude the Obscure*, capture a cultural moment when the interlocked systems of class and gender are at last untwining.

NARRATIVE SYNTAX: ESCAPING FROM LIMBO

The end?—Oh, you must invent one. Ends in real life are so common place and uninteresting.'

(Ida Starr to Waymark on her life story)

In focusing on working- and lower-middle-class life, Gissing shifts from the industrialised North which had preoccupied social novelists in the early part of the century to the 'contested terrain' of London (Walkowitz 1992:11) and from the Midland landscape of George Eliot. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries documentary-style fictions had represented the low life of the city as a metropolis of pleasure. In works such as Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821) its gambling, prostitution and general seediness were part of its attraction. This version of London was one that Dickens appropriated to neutralise the impact of the urban distress he claimed to address. Waymark comments in *The Unclassed*, when discussing his own projected novel,

The fact is, the novel of every-day life is getting worn out. We must dig deeper, get to untouched social strata. Dickens felt this, but had not the courage to face his subjects; his monthly numbers had to lie on the family tea-table.

(Vol. 2:33)

Gissing himself reached these strata in this text.

Different resources lay to hand from those used by Dickens. By the 1880s London had totally replaced the factory as the site of and the sign for perceived social unrest and distress. It was the largest city in the world, twice as large as Paris, with an estimated 10 per

cent of the population of the East End doing only casual work (Jones 1971:56). And London had also taken on another significance that the factory had possessed in the 1840s. In non-fictional texts it was sometimes figured as the equivalent of East and West—Third World and First:

In passing from the skilled operative of the West-end, to the unskilled workman of the Eastern quarter, the moral and intellectual change is so great, that it seems as if we were in a new land, and among another race.

(Mayhew cited by Walkowitz 1992:19)

The unskilled stand to the middle classes as black to white; each is a 'residuum'. The slavery figure found in the early part of the century is again used by do-gooders as well as hard-liners.

But the underclass is, as usual, perceived as threatening. This became clear in the 'meaning' attributed to the unemployment riots of the 1880s which culminated in so-called 'Bloody Sunday'. This was 13 November 1887 when an intended meeting-place, Trafalgar Square, was closed by police. A fight followed between rioters and police. Despite the nickname for these events, and though many were injured, no one was killed. However, even the philanthropist Samuel Smith in 1885 spoke of unemployment riots like this one in generally apocalyptic terms:

I am deeply convinced that the time is approaching when this seething mass of human misery will shake the social fabric, unless we grapple more earnestly with it than we have yet done ...The proletariat may strangle us unless we teach it the same virtues which have elevated the other classes of society.

(Jones 1971:291)

Distress, figured as threat looming out of the fog of the East End, became common currency in the language of the day.

The concept of the deserving and undeserving poor, which had been a part of class ideology since the late 1850s, received in the 1880s what Jones (1971) calls a 'dramatic re-interpretation' (p. 285) which provided another explanation or accenting of the residuum. This had a fashionably evolutionary tinge and argued that the process of weeding out the unfittest had been hindered by medical and sanitary improvements. Improved conditions kept alive in large towns 'thousands of such persons, who would have died even fifty years

ago' (White (1887), cited Jones (1971):287). Generations bred in slums had been allowed to evolve into creatures who were morally and physically degenerate. They naturally gave birth to others like themselves and naturally also sustained their slum habitat. Current ideas on heredity and eugenics gave a new force to the long-standing political discourse on the demoralising nature of state intervention and private charity. But such ideas were now given institutional form: no outdoor relief; provision of adequate housing (by Octavia Hill and others) only for the frugal; and the development of the Charity Organisation Society. The latter, more properly The Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendacity, was created in 1869 to co-ordinate charitable relief in such a way as to prevent its exploitation by the improvident. The general theory was priggishly crystallised in 1884 by Platt:

Humanity, like every other living item, has a basis which is made for it by inheritance, and not by itself. When it keeps towards such a basis, it repeats the history of its forefathers, and 'like begets like' in the record of its race. To get rid of poverty, we must take such steps as will improve the race.

(Platt 1884:130)

Particularly in a period when some interventionist social measures had been taken, the theory of degeneracy conveniently confused the questions of causality and responsibility.

Like some other fictional texts, *The Unclasssed* engages with this volatile debate about the improbability of the working classes in the context of degeneracy. Indeed it enacts the confusion of the period (and of Gissing himself) in the conflicting positions that it adopts. For Gissing the idea of degeneracy accorded with his interest in heredity, demonstrated by the extensive notes in his *Commonplace Book* on Ribot's 'L'Hérédité Psychologique' (Korg 1961:604–7). And two significant forces in the narrative structure are simple manifestations of hopeless degeneracy bred by evolutionary development. One is Harriet Smales, Ida's schoolmate, who causes her expulsion from school and her first step out of respectability. She also becomes the wife of Waymark's friend, Julian Casti, whom she tricks into marriage (the beginning of his misery, physical decline and ultimate death). Like Gissing's own first wife, the prostitute Nell Harrison, she is of a 'scrofulous tendency' (Matthiesen, Young and Coustillas 1990, Vol. 1:306) with 'body and mind...alike unhealthy',

full of 'baseless resentments, malicious pleasures...depraved intellect' (Vol. 1:76). Her mental and physical rottenness are figured by the fits which (like Nell Harrison's) her drunkenness precipitates:

In her [Mrs Sprowl's] absence, a change suddenly came over Harriet's face; her eyelids drooped, and her mouth began to work convulsively. Then her...head fell back, and, with a low moaning and a struggling, she slipped sideways and... fell heavily to the ground...lying there in convulsions, her lips covered with a thin foam, her limbs violently distorted.

(Vol. 2:249)

The full measure of her degeneracy appears in her determination to destroy Casti's friendship with Waymark; her instinctive reversion to alcohol, 'low' companions and prostitution; and most of all in her malicious and successful plot to have Ida wrongly imprisoned for theft, so returning her to a world of criminals and prostitutes.

The male symbol of degeneracy is a tenant of Woodstock's, more simplistically presented. He is 'known only as Slimy' and is visibly and linguistically subhuman:

Leaning on the counter...was something which a philanthropist might perhaps have had the courage to still claim as a human being; to all appearances *it* represented some loath-some monstrosity all the more fearful from its distant resemblance to a man. A very tall creature, with bent shoulders, and head seemingly growing straight out of *its* chest; thick, grizzled hair hiding almost every vestige of feature, with the exception of one dreadful red eye, *its* fellow being dead and sightless.

(Vol. 1:182; my emphases)

Slimy, like Harriet, intervenes in the course of events by nailing Waymark to the floor of his slum dwelling while he goes off to 'drink myself dead' (Vol. 3:75) on rents stolen from him. Thus he prevents a meeting with Ida on her release from prison.

The symbolic prominence of these two figures implies an acceptance of the theory of degeneracy as an explanation of the significance of the irredeemable residuum. On the other hand Waymark and Ida show a resistance to the effect of their environment. Though Ida is brought up by a prostitute and suffers extreme poverty, exploitation and sexual assault, she survives morally unscathed. And

though Waymark is taught how to press money out of slum tenants by Woodstock, he performs the brutal task without becoming brutalised, since he is an artist. And at moments when narratorial support most underpins his assertions he challenges the very criteria on which notions of what constitutes degeneracy depend: 'Sin...has been a word without significance to me...the murderer could not help himself, and the saint has no merit in his sanctity' (Vol. 3:56); and 'Purity and impurity are not actually existing things; they are only states of thought' (Vol. 2:11). Or as the narrator puts it, 'Morality he had none, in the ordinary sense of the phrase;...being quite satisfied to judge of each case as it arose without prejudice or precedent' (Vol. 2:201–2).

When his brother Algernon accused him of '*contradiction* in the book', Gissing replied, 'If my own ideas are to be found anywhere, it is in the practical course of events in the story' (Matthiesen, Young and Coustillas 1991, Vol. 2:228). Look, he says, to the statements made by the plot. But doing so illustrates rather than resolves the contradiction since it reveals a dialogic tension. For Harriet and Slimy, as shown above, affect the course of events and so substantiate theories of degeneracy. The central narrative structure involving Waymark and Ida makes quite other assertions about the nature of the working classes and their improbability. Strangely, where earlier industrial novels took class confrontation as their dynamic, *The Unclasssed* centres on the romantic plot which usually accompanied and camouflaged it. This throws into prominence and makes overt the fact that class issues are displaced onto gender, as they have long covertly been. The place of strikes and machine-breaking is taken by Waymark's agonising over the choice of a wife: is she to be middle-class and pure or lower-class and a prostitute? Such a focus, ironically enough, makes clear the ideological basis of gender construction in a way that the industrial strike plot conceals. For through all Waymark's Byzantine arguments and layers of self-deception he recurrently raises the question of whether to marry a middle-class woman who will give him status equal to his intellectual gifts or a sexually deviant working-class woman whom he will be ashamed to own.

The tension lies in his precarious social position. Though Waymark already claims to feel himself 'raised' in terms of intellect, sensibility and artistic talent: 'Strange as it may sound, I am by nature an aristocrat,—because I am by nature an artist' (Vol. 3:6). The connection, he explains, is that both are egotists, the artist the more supreme type. However, the nature of this talent, which bestows on

him an 'aristocratic' character, is one which confounds middle-class morality and involves him with the residuum:

Two supreme artists are at work in the creation of the world,— God and the Devil. Some of us delight to imitate the former, some the latter. In the work of the Devil I find my own delight and inspiration. I have only to go out into the streets all night to come across half a hundred scenes of awful suffering or degradation, every one of which fills me with absolute joy... every human situation is interesting to me in proportion as it exhibits artistic possibilities.

(Vol. 3:8–9)

In this strained rhetoric Waymark tries to break free from involvement with them by claiming to be an outside observer using the working classes as artistic fodder.

His more active attempt to detach himself from the meannesses of working-class life is his reckless abandoning of his post as teacher in a wretched school dominated by the headmaster's ignorant and tyrannical wife. Despite an initial sense of freedom, this action is a failure. In the 'brutal fight for livelihood' he is driven back into closer contact with the slums, forced to feed off them as a rent collector for the rapacious Woodstock. Confrontation with extremes of human misery becomes his daily lot; and he is initiated by Woodstock into the necessary physical violence.

It is at this early stage that the issue of marriage begins to dominate his thoughts. Within the space of single day, two alternatives appear: Maud Enderby, for whom he sacrificed himself at the school, and Ida Starr, whom he encounters on her prostitute's beat. Since both women make clear to him that they are available, he is like the traditional heroine hesitating between two suitors. In this way conventional masculine and feminine roles are reversed. At least one contemporary critic noticed the outcome of this, seeing it as the reversal of a novel by Margaret Oliphant in which 'a young man is saved from a life of vice by the power of love awakened in him by a pure and good woman' (Coustillas and Partridge 1972:68–9).

The choice that Waymark strives to make is the upwardly mobile one. And he rewrites Maud Enderby as the woman who offers him that. Significantly it is mainly in his own life that his fictional talents are displayed. Having observed her general appearance at the school he chooses to interpret it so as to fill the niche already prepared in

his mind where 'a refined and virtuous woman had hitherto existed for him merely in the sanctuary of his imagination' (Vol. 1:234). She can become, he tells her, his 'ideal personified, who shall embody all the purer elements of my nature, and speak to me as with the voice of my own soul' (Vol. 3:57-8).

This is his public stance. It is repeatedly eroded by a fear that she is sexually frigid. Soon after meeting Ida he has doubts about Maud: 'how would Maud's timid conventionality—doubtless she was absolutely conventional—suit with the heresies of which he was all compact?' (Vol. 2:19). His parenthetical assumption on such a large question is a measure of how little attention he pays to the real Maud. It is in her absence and without specific reference that he asks himself 'whether Maud's was a passionless nature, or whether it was possible that her reserve had the same origin as his own'. He concludes without further reflection 'the latter...to be unlikely' (Vol. 3:152-3). When most 'tempted' by Ida he turns this perceived negative in Maud's nature to a positive: 'In her presence he enjoyed a strange calm of spirit; the spirit indeed subdued the flesh more entirely than ever before' (Vol. 2:158).

On the other hand, he has difficulty in accommodating the idea of Ida's overt sexuality into the picture of an ideal wife. He claims to have unconventional views on feminine purity but, despite a strong friendship with Ida, is suspicious of her physical attractions: 'Ida had ...a dangerous hold upon him; she possessed his senses, and set him on fire with passionate imaginings' (Vol. 2:17). Anxious to shake off the threat that marriage to her would constitute, he tries to rewrite her as a sexual commodity:

Were he but rich, he could buy her, make her his property, as did any other of the men on whom she lived...In fact, it amounted to this: any hint of love on his part was a request that she would yield to him gratis what others paid for.

(Vol. 2:17-18)

He tells himself that to offer a 'non-legal union' would be 'the destruction of her great hope'; yet that the offer to make her his legal wife would be 'a confession of her inferiority' (Vol. 2:204). This convoluted argument rationalises his conflicting convictions that on the one hand 'marriage was not to be thought of' (Vol. 2:205) and on the other that Ida is a pure woman and suitable wife.

From the beginning he calculates the arithmetic of the value of the two women: 'both young, both beautiful...Each answered to an

ideal which he cherished, and the two ideals were so diverse, so mutually exclusive' (Vol. 1:263). Waymark's struggle to choose flounders in an inability to sustain the old distinction between the pure woman and the fallen one. This is figured by his ambiguous dream of two unnamed women. In it he is standing hand-in-hand with a veiled woman at the altar, 'making desperate efforts to discern her features through the gauze, for a horrible suspicion possessed him that somehow she was not his real bride' (Vol. 1:261). He finds, when asked to make the marriage vow, that

the clasping hands were suddenly severed by another woman, also veiled, who sprang forward and clung to him. The repulsed woman fell back with a moan; the new-comer took her place. Her countenance also the dreamer tried vainly to discern; his doubt and trouble had increased. . . . with a great effort, he spoke the 'I will'. Immediately a shriek rang out. . . . chilling his blood. He turned. The rejected woman had thrown back her veil, and a death-like face stared upon him. Mad with a conflict of emotions, he wildly called out her name,—and so awoke.

(Vol. 1:262)

Whether the unnameable is Ida or Maud is not revealed and this equation of the two captures a moment of confusion as signs shift.

Thanks to Harriet's false accusation and the guilty verdict at her trial, Ida is publicly defined as morally worthless. This creates a false resolution of Waymark's difficulties in choosing a wife. His reaction to the charge of theft, unlike Casti's, is not to trust Ida:

He had to confess that there was even a element of relief in the sensations which the event had caused him. He had been saved from himself; a position of affairs which had become intolerable was got rid of without his own exertion.

(Vol. 2:282)

Meeting Maud horrified and fainting after an exploratory foray into the East End, he proposes to her. Again his chief feeling is 'relief'; 'he had given up the effort to discover his true path' (Vol. 3:60).

Waymark never really has to choose between Ida and Maud. Gissing in practice creates the 'commonplace' ending that Ida ironically spoke of to Waymark. His engagement, which was an insurance against proposing to an ex-prostitute, is brought to an end by Maud

herself, afraid of passing on hereditary madness to their children. Ida by now is living a blameless middle-class life on her grandfather Woodstock's money. She acquires the trivial womanly arts: playing the piano, reading books, and running a well-resourced middle-class house. She can also play the Lady Bountiful, doling out cakes and soup to the poor, and so signals her separation from them and her new social superiority. This is further marked when she creates a training school for domestic servants to raise girls from the drudgery she once endured. The narrative structure hinging on Waymark's choice of a wife collapses as the need for a painful decision evaporates. The unclassed allow themselves to be 'classed and done with'. Ida and therefore Waymark, who marries her, retreat to what Harsh (1992) calls 'those very categories [of class] that the narrative has revealed to be intellectually inadequate and personally oppressive' (p. 933). Since Ida becomes middle-class in all outward forms, Waymark secures his social status by marrying her.

Even this final compromise turned out to be deeply offensive. As Genette asserts, "plausibility" and "propriety" are wedded to each other; and the precondition of plausibility is the stamp of approval affixed by *public opinion*' (Miller 1988:26). In 1884 public opinion could not give the stamp of approval to this narrative and therefore could not find it plausible. As one reviewer wrote: 'the long-continued platonic attachment between a normal young man—even of aesthetic tastes—and a London prostitute is an incident hardly within the range of probability' (Coustillas and Partridge 1972:70). The publisher George Bentley wrote to Gissing in January, refusing to publish the novel:

Though we know in this unfortunate class there are many with kindly instincts yet the nature of the life tends to degrade & in time destroy the good originally present.

(Matthiesen, Young and Coustillas 1991, Vol. 2:189)

Bentley is returning Ida to her proper underclass—seeing her supposed emergence from it as implausible and improper. The often disapproving reviews did focus, as Gissing suggested to his brother, on the plot. They express an outrage which hardly matches the story. From Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) onward, fallen women had risen to respectability. Even social commentators on prostitution were sometimes prepared to accept that occasionally prostitutes might do this. But as so often with Victorian reviews, alarm over sexual matters is not explicitly related to the more offensive areas of the narrative.

There is much of this offensiveness in the 1884 text in relation to the character of Ida which Gissing deleted for the 1895 edition (in an extreme case of self-censorship) and which was never reprinted. It is this which radically disturbs existing narrative discourses relating to gender and therefore ultimately to class.

**REWRITING WOMEN AS SIGNS:
ALTERNATIVE ANGELS**

Was it true that Maud was his good angel, that in her he had found his ideal?

(Waymark)

It is in the radical rewriting of women as signs that Gissing in *The Unclasssed* effects a transformation in the language of class and gender. George Eliot in *Felix Holt* had already given a voice to women as a group by using the device of one whose high social status gave her the opportunity to speak fearlessly from a tragic experience peculiar to her gender. Gissing goes further by dismantling the two icons that held together the interlocking of class and gender in the way described in Chapter 2. These were not only the fallen woman but also the middle-class angel. This process, unlike the narrative syntax of the novel, has clear contours.

As shown in the previous section Waymark fixes on Maud Enderby as his ideal. He transforms the apparently stereotypical governess—pretty, refined and timid—into someone ‘spiritual’ and mysteriously superior. Originally unmoved, he is stirred by constant observation and eventually a single warning look from her at a time when he is under threat:

Now he all at once experienced the awakening of quite a new interest;...he was struck with the possibilities of emotion in the face which this one look had revealed to him.

(Vol. 1:211)

These ‘possibilities’ are created by him entirely from the surface, her face, demeanour and voice. The latter is clearly like that of her mother who, when marrying the (then) Reverend Paul Enderby, irritated his northern parishioners by exaggerating ‘the refinement of her utterance that it might all the more strike off against the local twang’ (Vol. 2:109). The charm of a middle-class accent is really what enchants Waymark. He is captivated by the ‘keen pleasure to his ears’ even when she is

merely reading aloud to the children in her charge (Vol. 2:213). What she says convinces him by how it sounds: her very phrases had 'that musical fall which only associates itself with beautiful and honest thought' (Vol. 2:160). When she tells him her lurid life story he eventually listens only to the voice, the 'more than womanly sweetness in the voice which so unconsciously modulated itself. Finally he merely hears it as music, though she is pouring out her deepest secrets:

Towards the end he could but yield himself completely to the spell, and, when she ceased, he, like Adam at the end of the angel's speech, did not at once realize that her voice was silent.
(Vol. 3:47)

Since he does not listen to what she says his fictionalising of her can expand to the point where, high on his rash resignation from his teaching post, he imagines an epiphany: 'The doubts had left him; she was indeed the being from a higher world that he would have liked to believe her from the first' (Vol. 1:236). His supposed revelation about her, however, is an act of will. He is determined to find that she is from a world which is 'higher'—evidently confounding, as in her voice, the aesthetic, the moral and the social.

So Waymark wilfully and wishfully misreads a woman as calm and spiritual who has seemed to him recurrently a 'feeble and characterless type' with an 'understanding [which] corresponded with the weakness of her outward appearance' (Vol. 1:235). The narrator makes this fictionalising of Maud clear. More than that, he reveals that behind the icon of ideal, middle-class womanhood that Waymark constructs lie, as Florence Nightingale insisted, strange passions. Strangeness turns out, unknown to him, to be the essence of her nature. Her 'higher world' does not include a model middle-class family but, like Margaret Hale's, a dysfunctional one. Her absent father is an embezzler, her mother promiscuous and suicidal. The aunt who brings her up on a religion that insists on pain and self-abnegation is a goddess of doom to whom she returns out of a guilty fear of madness, as Sue Bridehead *Jude the Obscure* succumbs out of guilt about her children's death to the repressions of organised religion. This final conversion is, like all the major decisions in *The Unclasssed*, precariously stretched over chasms of indecision.

Out of this family Maud's strangeness grows naturally but is unmarked or explained away by Waymark. It is there in childhood as the narrator shows in the account of the dreams that she communicates to her schoolmate Ida:

Seldom a week went by, but Maud had some weird vision of the night to recount...Maud often shuddered and grew pale as she whispered of awful shapes, and of words dimly remembered, but unintelligible to the waking mind.

(Vol. 1:72)

Sitting with her father and mother later in the story, she seems cursed with 'hideous second-sight':

silence all at once fell upon the room, and everything was transfigured in a ghostly light. Distinctly she saw her mother throw her head back and raise to her throat what seemed to be a sharp glistening piece of steel; then came a cry, and all was darkened before her eyes in a rush of crimson mist.

(Vol. 3:25)

The reality is that her mother is tapping her mouth with a paperknife. But Maud's prescience is confirmed as more than neurosis after her father's arrest. Keeping vigil by her mother she suddenly awakes and sees her mother

standing in front of the looking-glass, her raised hand holding something that glistened...There was a wild laugh, a quick motion of the raised hand,—then it seemed to Maud as if the room were filled with a crimson light, followed by the eternal darkness.

(Vol. 3:279–80)

In effect Maud's life is a sensation novel. She is afflicted with the guilty sexuality of a fallen woman, demonstrating ironically the truth of the Shakespearean maxim handed on to Ida by Waymark: 'Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so.' To all this, though afforded several glimpses, Waymark manages to remain impervious. When at one point the horror of life with her mother causes her to take flight to a post of governess in Paris, he does not 'even care to speculate on the reasons which had led Maud to leave home' (Vol. 3:167). She is never allowed to become for him much more than the heroine of a would-be conventional romance.

She is said by the narrator to have the 'soul...of an artist' (Vol. 2:130). This shows itself in an overacute sensibility of the sort deplored by Waugh. But she has learnt from her aunt to fear emotion:

She could not understand herself...This irrepressible delight

and interest in the active life of the world, what could it be but the tendency to evil most strongly developed? These heart-burnings whenever she witnessed men and women rejoicing in the exercise of their natural affections, what could that be but the proneness to evil in its grossest forms?

(Vol. 2:131)

So it becomes clear that what disturbs her most is the sight of sexual feelings displayed 'by men and women rejoicing in the exercise of their natural affections'. She is not passionless after all, merely terrified of the passion within her.

That is why, on the night when her mother is entertaining a lover in the house, she becomes both alarmed and excited at a threatening storm sinking down on them with the 'threat of an overwhelming, storm-winged fate'. The physical disturbance releases her pent-up feelings, for 'with this mood of terror was combined an unwonted instinct of passion; her veins ran with fire; her heart beat to the point of anguish...she took paper and sat down at her desk to write

...Her hand trembled as she filled the pages with words of burning love' (Vol. 3:157). But before she can send the letter 'of burning love' and 'passionate frenzy' she sees her mother kissing her lover Mellowdew. The house now seems full of 'pestilence and...death of the soul', and the letter 'proof of contagion which had seized upon her own nature' and which must be burnt (Vol. 3:160).

This Lady Audley in the making explains the wilder aspects of herself away, after her mother's death, as the result of a hereditary taint of madness. She decides not to risk passing it on by marrying Waymark. This is presented to him in a letter as turning to God. So what the text offers in Maud is an equivocal picture of the middle-class 'ideal' woman and the contorted reality it conceals: the kind of struggling and suffering behind a conventional exterior that Nightingale describes in *Cassandra* (1852):

And women, who are afraid, while in words they acknowledge that God's work is good, to say, Thy will be *not* done... go about maudling to each other and teaching to their daughters that 'women have no passions'. In the conventional society, which men have made for women, and women have accepted, they *must* have none, they *must* act the farce of hypocrisy, the lie that they are without passion...'Suffering, sad' female 'humanity'! What are these feelings which they are taught to consider as disgraceful...What form do the Chinese feet assume

when denied their proper development? If the young girls of the 'higher classes,' who never commit a false step, whose justly earned reputations were never sullied even by the stain which the fruit of mere 'knowledge of good and evil' leaves behind, were to speak, and say what are their thoughts employed upon, their *thoughts*, which alone are free, what would they say?

(Stark 1979:26)

The narrator presents the male misperception of Maud as conventional and passionless, and also, like Nightingale, shows wild aspects which she herself cannot understand but can only simplify into a conception of latent madness. This reading of her own complex nature makes decisions easier and relieves her from the struggle to understand herself and make a choice based on the knowledge.

With Maud we are shown the alternative side of the angel which Florence Nightingale so well understood. With Ida we are offered an alternative angel or ideal woman, a successor to Tess Durbyfield as one reviewer noticed (Coustillas and Partridge 1972:77): working class, uneducated and unchaste. She is in fact more unchaste than Tess since, refusing offers of help from her grandfather after her mother's death, she turns instead for months to prostitution, whereas Tess is merely seduced into becoming one man's mistress. Mrs Transome in *Felix Holt* carries off her adultery because she holds a high social position. Ida does not have this resource and for most of the narrative resists classification as a degenerate fallen woman by force of character.

Most importantly, unlike Tess Durbyfield, she does not accept and internalise society's image of her. She therefore does not carry the psychological stamp of the fallen woman: shame and self-loathing. Waymark at their first meeting speaks of how in future he will think of her face 'with all its freshness gone and marks of suffering and degradation upon it'. She is indignant: 'suffering perhaps; degradation, no. Why should I be degraded?' (Vol. 1:243). He sees it as 'one of the inevitable consequences' of the life she has 'chosen'. She resists the idea that she had 'choice' as she resists the idea that she will be 'degraded'. She questions his lexicon in a way that leaves him no response. She never feels self-loathing but, more than any other character, is at ease with herself. At a later meeting she boldly outfaces convention:

'A respectable woman, as they are called, would not speak to me, would run and wash her hand if I touched it, would not let her dress brush against mine in the street... Am I really so vile?... I

get my living by a vile trade. But what I *will* declare is this: that my trade does not render me hopelessly degraded. Give me a fortune, and to-morrow I will be as chaste as if I still sat on my mother's knee.

(Vol. 2:12–13)

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* it is the narrator who claims that Tess is a 'pure' woman; in *The UnclasSED* it is Ida herself, when still a prostitute: 'Here at this moment...I am as pure as any woman who lives' (Vol. 2:13). Hardy's narrator claims purity for Tess on the grounds of good intentions; Ida agrees with Waymark that 'thinking makes it so'. As he puts it, 'Purity and impurity are not actually existing things; they are only states of thought' (Vol. 2:11). Ironically, by this criterion it is the guilt-ridden Maud who is sexually impure. For Ida selling herself is a transient episode, a mere sub-plot, not a defining characteristic. The story of her life holds more meaning than that.

And her claim to be unashamed and undamaged is borne out by her appropriation of the conventional angel's domesticity when she takes Waymark back to her lodgings: 'in everything the utmost order and much regard for comfort' (Vol. 1:250). The light, the lamp, the open piano are worthy of a Margaret Hale, as is Ida's poise. But it is made clear that she does not have that smattering of education proper to an angel. She cannot play the piano and she has never liked books, preferring simple pleasures such as she enjoyed in childhood summers and showing a particular love of animals. She avoids the conventional and follows her own tastes. It is into the orderly, domestic setting that the unexpected symbols of overt sexuality are introduced. Leaving Waymark briefly, she goes into her bedroom and returns transformed:

She appeared in a handsome dressing gown and with her feet in slippers. Her glorious hair fell heavily about her shoulders, warm and fragrant as that of a goddess. And in her arms she held a beautiful cat, with white throat and white paws, else glossy black, and with golden eyes.

(Vol. 1:251)

Her acceptance of her sexuality is skilfully signalled by the dressing gown, to which the implication of undressing generally could be attached, and her loosened hair. No middle-class woman would appear in public with her hair streaming over her shoulders. To do so is to suggest intimacy and to break down the barriers between

private and public. Yet Ida, in returning to Waymark, shows no signs of either shame or boldness, despite the fact that this presumably is her habitual dress for her male clients. In appearing thus she is claiming to be sexually accessible only when she chooses. The conventional sign of the fallen woman inscribed in her appearance is reaccented by deliberate negation.

Even more strikingly, the harlot's ultimate decline to death by drowning, depicted frequently in Victorian art and symbolising both expiation and cleansing, is overwritten by a new reading. This takes place when Ida is alone at night on a beach. As prostitutes do, she throws herself into the water:

She stepped from the water a few paces, and began hastily to put off her clothing; in a moment her feet were again in the ripples, and she was walking out from the beach, till her gleaming body was hidden.

Already the description counterpoints such pictures as G.F.Watts' *Found Drowned*: dead prostitutes are always clothed. It continues:

Then she bathed, breasting the full flow with delight, making the Sundered and broken water flash myriad reflections of the moon and stars. As she came forth on to the beach again, it was another Venus Anadyomene. Heaven gloried in her beauty, and overshadowed her with chaste splendour.

(Vol. 2:104)

The expiatory force that has been read into this account is contradicted by the already 'gleaming' body that enters the water and by the joyous nature of the swimming in a sea of fragmented moon and stars. This is Apelles' famous antique picture of Venus, goddess of love, risen from the foam, breast-high in the sea, her body showered with silver drops. It is a celebration of her sexuality and not atonement for it.

It emphasises the positive nature that Ida has shown from the moment of her meeting with Waymark when she addresses him in the street, pays for his meal, invites him on innocent outings. She takes the proactive role in their relationship with all the confidence of a woman sure of her own attractions and also of her own integrity. Unlike Tess Durbeyfield nothing shakes her sense of self. Even wrongful imprisonment afflicts but does not degrade her. It merely

makes 'her beauty all the more impressive for its record of unspoken woe' (Vol. 3:109).

In all respects for most of the narrative, Ida steps out of her gender and class as conventionally constructed, by being pure but not chaste, working-class but refined, independent but not unfeminine, an agent but not masculine or middle-class. She confounds the usual oppositional signs of respectable and fallen women. What I have referred to as the collapse of the plot logically contradicts this, but in practice serves to underline it. With all that has gone before it is ridiculous for her to rehearse her abjection before the confused and self-deceiving Waymark: 'It is no arrogance to say that I am become a pure woman; not my own merits, but love of you has made me so' (Vol. 3:244). As the atheistic narrator tartly comments:

The ideas of conventional religion were often strong in her, despite that clear insight which would have assured her of their folly; the ideas which make the body of more importance than the soul, and are at utter variance with the spiritual truths whence they profess to derive. Fortunately, her time did not long remain unoccupied.

(Vol. 3:245)

In this way the narratorial perspective reasserts its priority over the commonplace ending, leaving Ida as a more than Tess who subverts the dominant discourses of both gender and class together.

*JUDE THE OBSCURE***GENDERING THE NARRATOR:
THE UNMANLY OUTSIDER**

The social revolution which is impending in Europe is chiefly concerned with the future of the workers and the women. It is for this that I hope and wait.

(Ibsen)

The 1890s were a period of acute social unrest. Economic depressions in the late 1870s and in the 1880s had been accompanied by much activism in trades unionism and in socialist politics. In addition to the demonstrations and riots of 'Bloody Sunday' in Trafalgar Square in 1887, there were several well-organised strikes. The most notorious was that of the 'matchgirls' of Bryant & May in 1888, which gave working women (all referred to as 'girls') a visible presence. There were also those of the London gas workers and of the London dockers in 1889. Now that roughly half the electorate were working class, efforts to have them represented in Parliament increased. Three were elected in 1874 and six in 1886. The perceived threat to the middle and upper classes grew more frightening and created new resistance. Accompanying these events went cultural unrest also, as in the 1840s.

Its nature, however, was now different and multi-faceted, but it involved increasing uncertainty over the representation of femininity (and of masculinity). As legally constructed, the 'identity' of women had been affected by the liberalising Married Women's Property Act of 1882 and by the Guardianship of Infants Act of 1886. It had also been practically challenged by the suffragists' activities, despite their failure with legislators. At the same time the overt attempt in literature to overwrite the sign of the properly feminine with the sign of 'the

New Woman' as an ideal had focused a contentious semantic area in the representation of gender. The contentiousness was compounded by a consequent uncertainty over the representation of masculinity. This itself was complicated by the fear of a third or intermediate sex. This fear helped towards the creation of a legal identification of homosexuals as deviants by the Labouchère amendment to the Criminal Law Act of 1884 which made all homosexual acts illegal. The old certainties of gender needed constant shoring up to prevent social disintegration of the kind that was widely feared. So the recognition of texts as deviantly gendered carried large implications.

In his article 'Reticence in Literature', Waugh had distinguished two kinds of sexually deviant writing. One of these showed 'the excesses prompted by effeminacy'; the other was the type demonstrating 'the excess which results from a certain brutal virility, which proceeds from coarse familiarity with indulgence' (Waugh 1894:217). Waugh's example of the former category is Swinburne's masochistic 'Our Lady of Pain'. Another would be, as I have shown, Gissing's sympathetic and even lyrical treatment of prostitution in *The Unclassed*. The second category is more surprising than the first. It is easy to see how an excessive indulgence in emotion or sentiment came to be regarded as weakly womanlike and hence effeminate and unmanly. But it is unexpected that the depiction of the 'coarser passions of the common farm-hand' in 'vulgar, sordid surroundings' using the 'language of the bargee' (Waugh 1894:216–17) should be thought unmasculine in contemporary terms.

Waugh was writing shortly before the publication of *Jude* but some hostile critics of Hardy's novel involved it in the same debate and placed it by implication in the second category of texts, which are sexually deviant on account of their coarseness. The classicist R.Y.Tyrrell says twice in his review of June 1896 that 'The book is steeped in sex.' In doing so, he claims, it deals with the subject by 'going as near French lubricité as a writer can venture without awakening the nonconformist conscience in our strangely constituted society' (Cox 1970:293–4). The French word is at once a euphemism for 'fleshliness, prurience', and a reference to Zola who is thought of as largely responsible for leading English writers into this particular mire. The directness of both Zola and *Jude* deviates from the convention of reticence and obliqueness in reference to sexual matters. This coarseness is illustrated for Tyrrell by a comparison between an unacceptable scene in *Jude* where the bedraggled Sue puts on a suit of Jude's clothes while her own dries by the fire and the

‘daintily-written scene’ in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. The latter is the episode when, as Tyrrell says,

...the heroine rescues her lover by means of a rope made of all her underclothing, and walks home with him clad only in her gown, which, drenched with rain, is glued by a head-wind to her figure, every curve of which is thus delicately outlined.

(Cox 1970:294)

This ‘alluring’ and ‘vivid’ picture is thought to reveal by contrast a deterioration in *Jude*. To the private eye of the voyeuristic male (Knight or the narrator), Elfride has all the feminine allure of a classical nymph in clinging wet drapery—a pleasingly conventional form of titillation. The scene in *Jude* is perceived however as having something of the unnatural about it in its deliberate reference to the ‘sexless’ underclothes and its focus on the alarmingly androgynous figure of Sue, so like Fawley himself. For Tyrrell it may verge on the perverseness which led A.J.Munby to his suggestive liking for working-class women, such as pit girls, in trousers. Transvestism in female labourers is one thing, in Sue it is another and presumably comes under the heading of a ‘treatise on sexual pathology’ (Cox 1970:292). It is also one of the types of passage referred to by another academic reviewer, A.J.Butler, who sheds light on why the ‘coarse’ text is regarded as unmasculine. In ‘Mr. Hardy as a Decadent’ he refers to passages ‘which will offend men in direct proportion to their manliness’ (Cox 1970:290). The latter was a crucial term in the construction of masculine-feminine complementarity. Insistence on it in the 1890s became fervid: ‘The tendency of evolution is to make man more and more manly and woman more and more womanly’, wrote Joseph LeConte (Russett 1989:144). Lack of ‘manliness’ is a frequent idea in the contemporary discussion of literary and social decadence. It is supposed to erode in fiction and in life ‘manliness and self reliance in men, and womanliness in women’ (Stutfield 1895:845). Manliness underpins the concept of gentlemanliness and includes the virtues of being ‘upright, frank and honourable’. Honour, of course, was an external as well as an internal matter requiring certain forms of behaviour and language. Chivalrous discretion towards women was an important part of it. Phillotson, when discussing Sue’s plea for permission to leave him, refers to this. He tells Gillingham that only a man whom an ‘intrinsically good woman’ has begged for release can judge his decision to agree: ‘I have been

that man, and it makes all the difference in the world, if one has any manliness or chivalry in him' (p. 242). It is against such 'manly' discretion that a direct treatment of sexual matters in relation to Sue or Arabella offends.

The suggestiveness of the wet garment episode in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* belongs privately to male eyes; propriety is not offended by involving Elfride herself in the process. But there is nothing manly and delicate in showing Sue as a half-man who herself refers to her 'sexless' underclothes. Nor is there in Arabella saying to her companions after seeing Jude: 'I want him to have me; to marry me! I must have him. I can't do without him. He's the sort of man I long for. I shall go mad if I can't give myself to him altogether' (p. 47). The offence against conventional norms lies not just in the direct expression of desire but in attributing it to a woman.

Breaches of chivalry indicate a narrator who is, or has chosen to be, outside the middle class, an unmanly outsider who says the unsayable (even though it may be privately thinkable). And the 'ethically' unsayable goes with the political unsayable. A new perspective on gender was seen to involve a new perspective on class. Stutfield, in the article of 1895 already quoted, debunks the erotic fiction of the 1890s in just such terms. He is much concerned with the link between unmanly literary decadence and class dissidence. In giving his piece the title 'Tommyrotics' he took up an already current quip and elaborated it with deadly seriousness:

The connection between revolutionary principles in ethics and politics is obvious. The aesthetic sensualist and the communist are, in a sense, nearly related. Both have a common hatred of and contempt for whatever is established or held sacred by the majority, and both have a common parentage in exaggerated emotionalism. Everybody knows that among the Jacobins of the French Revolution filthiness of life, ferocity, and maudlin compassion went hand in hand. In these days the unbridled licentiousness of your literary decadent has its counterpart in the violence of the political anarchist. Each is the *alter* egomaniac of the other. The one works with the quill, the other with the bomb; and the quill is the more dangerous weapon of the two. Continental degenerates rave as impotently against the social order under which we live as against the moral restraints which distinguish man from the brute beasts.

(Stutfield 1895:841)

This indicates how the social unrest of the 1880s, partly triggered by the economic depression of the late 1870s, had reinforced fears of what the residuum might do if unleashed.

The social subversiveness perceived in *Jude* relates to the treatment of the central institution of marriage, sanctioned by church and state, and also to the impertinence of the criticism of Christminster. Even Edmund Gosse, distancing himself from Hardy, comments on Jude's academic failure in biting terms:

...it is difficult to see what part Oxford has in his destruction, or how Mr. Hardy can excuse the rhetorical diatribes against the university which appear towards the close of the book. Does the novelist really think that it was the duty of the heads of houses to whom Jude wrote his crudely pathetic letters to offer him immediately a fellowship? We may admit to the full the pathos of Jude's position—nothing is more heart-rending than the obscurity of the half-educated—but surely, the fault did not lie with Oxford.

(Cox 1970:266–7)

The narrator of *Jude* is by implication also a half-educated autodidact. Like Gissing's narrator in *The Unclassed* he shows no control of some authoritative middle-class registers such as those of political economy or legal discourse. On the contrary he has that mark of the social outsider—a feeble grasp of standard English. He makes vulgar errors such as *contusing predicate and predict*, and uses *evince* merely to mean 'show'. He makes an affectation of scholarship by using Greek words—but transliterates them wrongly. His style is laboured and pretentious. These qualities filter into the speech of his characters so that Sue Bridehead sometimes talks like 'George Eliot, after she came under the blighting influence of science' and at others 'like a maid of all work' (Cox 1970:297). He is to be equated with Jude who talks 'a sort of University extension jargon that breaks the heart' (Cox 1970:269). He constructs a work with 'pedantic subdivisions' and an "architectonic" air' as if it were a scientific treatise. Such criticism defined *Jude* as an unmanly and déclassé text. In essence these hostile critics got it right. The narrator no longer sustains a middle-class stance. He does not condescend to the working class. They are no longer treated as a group but as individuals with different stories, against which dominant ideologies can, dangerously, be tested.

**NARRATIVE SYNTAX: DOWNWARD
MOBILITY**

When nature implants in a young man eager desires for a certain career...she generally gives him the powers and the resolution by which he may achieve his ambition.

(Contemporary reviewer)

Like Waymark, Jude Fawley is, in a sense, an urban man. More than any other Hardy novel, *Jude* insists on the town as the natural habitat of its protagonists—whether it is Christminster/Oxford, Aldbrickham/Reading, or Melchester/Salisbury. But the preoccupation of earlier industrial or urban novelists with poverty in the form of squalor or starvation has no place here. Jude is a skilled workman, an ‘artisan’, not one of the hopeless residuum but eventually a respectable speaker of standard English. He is potentially upwardly mobile and, according to the current theory, likely to achieve the rise that he aspires to.

Though the familiar title of the novel gives prominence to Jude and his failure to rise to middle-class status, it is asymmetrical in terms of a text where the two chief characters, male and female, are equally prominent. The earlier, more simplistic, titles (‘The Simpletons’, ‘Hearts Insurgent’ and ‘The Recalcitrants’) all insist on a parallel between Sue and Jude. These discarded titles are often read as a reference to their joint failure in relation to conventional propriety in sexual and marital relations. On that reading Sue becomes merely the medium for Jude’s social failure as Ida Starr is ultimately the medium for Waymark’s social ‘success’. She is only a second and more refined Arabella whose appeal to Jude’s passionate nature helps to destroy his academic and social dreams. And certainly in a moment of bitterness Jude himself toys with this interpretation of her:

Strange that his first aspiration toward academical sufficiency had been checked by a woman, and that his second aspiration—towards apostleship—had also been checked by a woman.

(p. 228)

But the thought soon translates into a recognition that an alternative explanation is likely: that it is caused by ‘the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress’ (p. 228). It is the social system, as well as what the system makes of women, that he finally blames. Apart from visual parallels

several other references elaborate Sue's similarity to Jude, not to Arabella. Phillotson, planning to allow his wife Sue to leave him for Jude, says, 'They remind me of—what are their names—Laon and Cyntha. Also of Paul and Virginia a little' (p. 243). Both allusions are to lovers: the first pair in Shelley's poem 'Laon and Cyntha' (1817) who in an early version are brother and sister; the second couple in a novel by J.H.B. de Sainte Pierre (1789) who grow up as brother and sister. The fact that Jude and Sue are cousins is also given by the narrator as a reason for their closeness, as well as for their hereditary unsuitability for marriage. When Sue takes refuge in Jude's lodgings after escaping from the Training School through the river, a deleted manuscript reading emphasises the peculiar nature of their 'two in oneness' (pp. 241, 306, 357). She sleeps by the fire wearing his clothes (those of a working man) and he sees in her 'as it were the rough material called himself done into another sex;—idealized, softened and purified' (manuscript, p. 149). This suggests that their blood relationship is a trope for a different kind of equivalence: their identity as victims of society, Sue as a woman, Jude as a working-class man. She is a working-class man 'done into another sex'. The bond between them is assumed by the narrator to be more durable than marriage or even sexual love, an ineradicable tie. A blood relationship or two-in-oneness is a perceived analogy between two kinds of contemporary disvaluing of individuals that they separately suffer, one based on gender, the other on class.

The connection is not new to Hardy's work. It begins with a preoccupation in the early novels with the humiliation of a talented man solely because of lower-class origins. In the fragments of the unpublished first novel woven together and published in 1878 under the ironic title *An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress*, the poor man Egbert Mayne (earlier Strong) suffers cruel contempt because he aspires to marry the aristocratic Geraldine Allenville. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* Stephen Smith, son of a mason, now an architect's assistant, is brutally rejected on social grounds by Elfyde Swancourt's clerical father. And Swithin St Cleeve in *Two on a Tower*; a brilliant astronomer but the son of a peasant mother, is so despised by Lady Constantine's brother that they can only marry in secret. All three men find that their 'value' is determined by society, in advance of any talent or achievement, on account of their parents' class. To an extent, as women do, they internalise this judgement, this category-based disvaluing of themselves, and have difficulty maintaining self-esteem. The prominence of class judgements in the dynamic of these novels

brings about the recognition of an equation between what happens to these talented working-class men and all women. The parallel is spelt out by the two games of chess in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. In the first Elfride humiliates Stephen over his clumsy handling of the chess pieces by condescendingly allowing him to win. In the second game she endures the same fate at the hands of her educated middle-class suitor, Henry Knight. It is Smith who reveals the exactness of the equation when a sense of inescapable inferiority floods over him at the time of Swancourt's dismissive rejection:

Quickly acquiring any kind of knowledge he saw around him, and having a plastic adaptability more common in woman than in man, he changed colour like a chameleon as the society he found himself in assumed a higher and more artificial tone.

(Manford 1985:92)

Smith's absorption of the very class prejudices which condemn him mirrors precisely the uneasy acceptance by Elfride of standards of womanliness which she cannot achieve. Anxiety, insecurity and self-doubt are common to both the man and the woman. Each is vulnerable to humiliation undeserved by them as individuals, because of the groups to which they belong.

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) the equivalence of women and the working class, so long concealed by the linguistic devices of ideology described in Chapter 2, is revealed. Tess is at once both exploited 'woman' and exploited working class. In a reversal of prevailing norms in language, 'woman' here subsumes 'man': Tess stands for working-class humanity as a whole. In *Jude* the process of uncovering the concealments of ideology goes a stage further. The two groups of victims that Tess represents are given separate but parallel identities, though the mechanism for the exploitation in each case is distinct and relates ultimately to different aspects of the late Victorian establishment. The text engages in this way with three major forces of the time: the now explicit awareness of many women that the self-estimates and roles forced on them by society are not the only possible ones; the upper-class stranglehold on access to the most prestigious university education and its content; and the unresolved tension evoked by an established church which for many had lost rational justification, but which was still socially and imaginatively powerful.

Of the three the church is the overarching force, keeping in place gender and class norms through its control of marriage and its role in

a form of education which authenticates class and produces clergymen 'like radishes'. Sue's story is the failure of her attempt to free herself from the predetermined mould that marriage imposes and validates. Jude's is his failure in the attempt to move into a higher class by persistent effort in a way current ideology claimed to be possible for all those with talent and determination. Both stories, of course, involve the church in different guises and the outcome of each violently challenges conventions which underpin the social status quo.

Jude like many is still imaginatively enamoured of religion and dazzled by its institutional prestige. He confuses his desire for learning and social advancement with the church and religious belief. He does not seriously consider the nature of either. Even before his first meeting with Arabella, the narrator ironically outlines his trajectory of desire, his wished-for plot against which reality will be counterpointed:

[He] thought he might become even a bishop by leading a pure, energetic, wise Christian life. And what an example he would set! If his income were £5,000 a year he would give away £4,500 in one form and another and live sumptuously (for him) on the remainder. Well, on second thoughts a bishop was absurd. He would draw the line at an archdeacon. Perhaps a man could be as good and as learned and as useful in the capacity of archdeacon as in that of bishop. Yet he thought of the bishop again.

(p. 34)

In seeking, like Waymark, to change his social class, Jude rightly assumes that social status is what the older universities of Oxford and Cambridge have to offer. As the historian Roach puts it:

The English universities were not...devoted either in 1800 or 1900 to the production of a class of Platonic guardians. Many of their students had no particular academic ambitions; they were sent up by their fathers to enjoy the type of education considered suitable for their class...The role of the universities was, in a sense, social rather than intellectual. They were devoted to producing gentlemen rather than scholars.

(Roach 1959:131)

Until well into the second half of the nineteenth century the careers of Oxford graduates were mainly in the church, public life and the law. Hence Jude's failure to distinguish between scholarship, religion

and social advancement. His confusion echoes an earlier comment by the narrator in *The Return of the Native* (1878): 'In passing from the bucolic to the intellectual life the intermediate stages are usually two at least, frequently many more; and one of these stages is almost sure to be worldly advance. We can hardly imagine bucolic placidity quickening to intellectual aims without imagining social aims as the transitional phase' (Gatrell 1990:174). Similarly Jude mixes categories, seeing in the religious titles that he covets moral worth, social status and wealth. Clerical rank is his version of what it is to be a gentleman, though that is not the term he uses. It is equivalent to Waymark's understanding of the artist he aspires to be as both morally and socially superior. Each has his own vision of the greasy pole of success and of what will make him a gentleman. Each believes that the doctrine of free upward mobility preached by Smiles is true.

In placing Jude among 'the bucolic' who aspire to 'the intellectual life', Hardy's novel ironically focuses on an issue which had already been pushed to the margins of the intense debate about the university which had raged from 1850 onwards. The central issue was, in rough terms, a struggle between the upper and middle classes: those who wished to preserve the older universities for the leisured classes and those who wished to open them to the middle classes by providing a different kind of education. As Fitzjames Stephens wrote to Lord Lytton in 1879: 'This is not the age for public life; it is emphatically the age for special knowledge and study, the age for engineers, men of science, lawyers and the like' (Roach 1959:147). The question of attempting to include marginalised groups (women and poor men) had already been raised and bypassed. In particular, though lip service was paid to the need to open traditional university education to poor men, little was done except by provision of an alternative and less prestigious 'extramural' University Extension.

In the 1890s there was in fact more difficulty of access for the poor than in the very early part of the century. This was because the high cost of life in colleges at Oxford and Cambridge was now less likely to be met by the scholarships which had previously provided a few with the means to enter. Such scholarships had been restricted to the poor but were now thrown open to competition from all classes, however they had been educated. This is part of what Jude discovers when he reaches the city of Christminster for the first time:

By indirect inquiries he soon perceived clearly, what he had long uneasily suspected, that to qualify himself for certain open

scholarships and exhibitions was the only brilliant course. But to do this a good deal of coaching would be necessary, and much natural ability. It was next to impossible that a man reading on his own system...even over the prolonged period of ten years, should be able to compete with those who had passed their lives under trained teachers, and had worked to ordained lives.

(p. 118)

Jude is fighting a battle already lost finally by 'egalitarianism' over closed scholarships. Even in 1897–8 only eight sons of working men and twenty-eight sons of tradesmen entered Oxford, a tiny percentage (1 per cent and 3.5 per cent) of student numbers as a whole. At the time less prestigious and newer universities were much more accessible to the poorer members of society and even to women, who numbered 844 students in 1897 (Showalter 1992:7). But Jude chooses to attack a virtually impregnable bastion of the upper classes. This indicates the choice of a narrative bound to end in failure for the protagonist on financial grounds alone: a story whose 'meaning' is how the institution reinforces the existing class system.

The Smilesian principle of advancement (at least) as available to all who exerted themselves sufficiently is further eroded by an obstacle which would still exist even if Jude had money. The obstacle was created by the traditional curriculum. From 1850 to 1864 (a period which included the time when Hardy's own university ambitions manifested themselves), no candidate at Oxford, for instance, could take a degree in any other subject without first taking one in *Literae Humaniores*—Classics and Scripture. Though this requirement was dropped in 1864, the first examination, a necessary preliminary to a degree, still had to be taken in Greek and Latin. These were routine subjects for public school pupils and so available even to the middle classes, but deep mysteries to the self-taught like Jude, who after ten years' solitary 'grind' discovers that he will need several years more.

The letter of rejection that he receives from one of the heads of colleges he has dared to approach spells out the significance of these obstacles. The Master of Bibliolli tells him succinctly that 'judging from your description of yourself as a working man, I venture to think that you will have a much better chance of success in life by remaining in your own sphere and sticking to your trade than by adopting any other course. That, therefore, is what I advise you to do' (p. 120). This makes the very case that liberals wanting to open some form of university education to poor men had to answer: that they were

offering an 'inducement which tempts so many away from their more appropriate occupations' (*Oxford University Extension Gazette* 1893:34), or that they were turning 'a good workman or clerk into a bad schoolmaster' (*University Extension Congress Report* 1894:56). Their response was to deny any attempt to open the jealously guarded professions to 'overcrowding' and to claim that they offered only self-cultivation in the form of 'true knowledge and intellectual progress' (*University Extension Congress Report*, 1894:44). Even university 'extension' was only acceptable if it explicitly ruled out any aid to social climbing. So much for the education which according to those like Alfred Marshall (1873) was the method for 'the amelioration of the working classes' (Pigou 1925:102).

When Dr Tetuphenay's letter plunges Jude into despair the narrator underlines the identification of a man unable to move out of the underclass, with women similarly restricted from moving out of the limited and frustrating roles offered to them by society:

It was hell—the hell of conscious failure—both in ambition and in love. He thought of that previous abyss into which he had fallen...the deepest deep he had supposed it then; but it was not so deep as this...If he had been a woman he must have screamed under the nervous tension which he was now undergoing. But that relief being denied to his virility, he clenched his teeth in misery.

(pp. 127–8; second emphasis mine)

Though Jude cannot weep as a woman would, he acts like a woman by internalising the failure of his academic ambition as a lack of self-worth. He sees the very ambition to succeed as a vice: a form of social restlessness that allowed him to take employment as a mason in Christminster 'as a provisional thing only'. At that point the narrator had referred ironically to Jude's proviso as 'his form of the modern vice of unrest' (p. 85). Jude now reads it in this way and blames himself for it:

The old fancy which had led on to the culminating vision of a bishopric had not been an ethical or theological enthusiasm at all, but a mundane ambition masquerading in a surplice. He feared that his whole scheme had degenerated to...a social unrest which had no foundation in the nobler instincts; which was purely an artificial product of civilization.

(p. 133)

Like Stephen Smith, he becomes a chameleon—absorbing Tetuphenay's and the establishment's view of men like himself.

Somehow his exercise of the 'patient purpose, resolute working and steadfast integrity' recommended by Smiles has not resulted as was promised in 'an honourable competency and a solid reputation' (Smiles 1859:7). He remains 'obscure'. He therefore rewrites his wished-for plot in humbler terms to fit his diminished selfhood. He will abandon his university hopes and try to become merely a licensed curate:

...to enter the Church in such an unscholarly way that he could not in any probability rise to a higher grade through all his career than that of the humble curate wearing his life out in an obscure village or city slum; that might have a touch of goodness and greatness in it; that might be true religion, and a purgatorial course worthy of being followed by a remorseful man.

(p. 133)

Though he feels worthless, the determination to punish himself does not persist as it later does with Sue. In 'masculine' fashion his guilt turns to anger against the establishment. However he does become more woman-like in deciding to find his fulfilment in the emotional side of life. This seems an option when Sue confesses to finding Phillotson physically repugnant: 'it is a torture to me to live with him as a husband' (p. 223). As he disengaged from social ambition Jude now is easily able to disengage from the institutional religion which had seemed to be a step on the ladder—'my doctrines and I begin to part company' (p. 225). He undergoes another ironic epiphany:

...he saw one thing...as long as he nourished this unlicensed tenderness it was glaringly inconsistent for him to pursue the idea of becoming the soldier and servant of a religion in which sexual love was regarded as at its best a frailty, and at its worst damnation...He was as unfit, obviously, by nature, as he had been by social position, to fill the part of a propounder of accredited dogma.

(pp. 227-8)

In burning his books he disclaims all masculine ambition. In doing so he becomes as unmanly as the narrator, as he dedicates himself to the decadent role of defending 'tooth and nail' his affection for another man's wife and in pressing upon her his 'impassioned attentions' (p.

228). What he has forgotten in the urgency of his change of life is that she does not wish to live by her emotions as a conventional woman should. She prefers the masculine world of intellect and friendship which overtly at least is not sexual. The disastrous end to her earlier platonic cohabitation with the undergraduate does not deter her from half inclining to the same asexual relationship with Jude. The unmanly male and the New Woman are clearly not two halves of a single whole. Neither fully understands the other, however deep their sympathy. The breaking down of complementarity leaves both in a territory without maps. In particular there is no agreed mapping of the role of sexuality in a relationship based on friendship and a sense of affinity. In this respect it enacts the insecurity of its time.

Jude's failure to rise in the world despite his intelligence and ten years of struggling alarmed some contemporaries to an extent that is now perhaps surprising. But it was rightly recognised as a worrying challenge to the necessary underpinning of the class structure. This underpinning was the argument that was formulated much earlier in an extreme form by Smiles. It asserted that

The poorest have sometimes taken the highest places; nor have difficulties apparently the most insuperable proved obstacles in their way. Those very difficulties, in many instances, would ever seem to have been their best helpers...The instances of obstacles thus surmounted, and of triumphs thus achieved, are indeed so numerous, as almost to justify the proverb that 'with Will one can do anything'.

(Smiles 1859:7)

Jude has not lacked 'will' until rejected by Christminster. It is rejection, not, as some critics have argued, a too passionate nature, which destroys his hope and ambition.

The counterexample that he represents to the contemporary myth that success is available to all is savagely attacked by Tyrrell in his early review of *Jude*. He berates Hardy as a successful climber of ambition's ladder who now 'can afford not only to kick away the ladder of lowliness, but even to flout those who have raised [him] to the topmost rung' (Cox 1970:292). Tyrrell counters this socially vicious act by the magisterial formulation of a natural law:

When Nature implants in a young man eager desires for a certain career, such as those which animated Jude, she generally gives

him the powers and the resolution by which he may achieve his ambition.

(Cox 1970:298)

It follows that if Jude does not succeed in his chosen career, it is because he has inadequate 'powers and resolution'. Given Tyrrell's Law, Jude's story is anomalous not representative, and therefore not worth telling. Hardy has shown a deplorable 'falling off in conception' by telling it. There are no such stories in nature, only those such as Samuel Smiles told of the astonishing rise of Jeremy Taylor, Richard Arkwright, Captain Cook, Inigo Jones, Shakespeare, Dr Livingstone, Andrew Jackson and others with both ambition and the powers and resolution to achieve success. Their very rise from obscurity proves their abilities. Similarly, those who decline into obscurity demonstrate by doing so that they deserve it.

Tyrrell's neatly circular argument attempts to reinstate current ideological views of social mobility. A less adept reviewer, A.J. Butler, gives the ideological game away by taking up the argument of last resort against the implications of Jude's failure. This is a reversion to the primitive 'Christian' principle that individuals should be satisfied with whatever place God has given them in the (preordained) scheme of things. He attacks *Jude* for deviating from the morality of novels like *The Trumpet Major* and *The Woodlanders* which rightly leave the impression that in the lives of 'most good people renunciation must always play a larger part than enjoyment'. By failing to demonstrate this the novel has challenged 'the axiom' which 'lies at the base of social existence', 'the formula' upon which 'the whole fabric of society depends' (Cox 1970:287–8): that 'you can't have everything' (Cox 1970:286). The much vaunted idea of freely available social mobility is thus shown to be merely a distracting national lottery, with prizes only for the Shakespeares and Arkwrights. It serves to keep the exploited in place by a delusory hope such as Jude experiences. For all but the few the only cure for social restlessness is the 'renunciation' Butler finds in Hardy's earlier novels. What this claims is that the lower classes are only to be kept in place by acceptance of the idea that for them, as for women, self-abnegation/renunciation is the ultimate virtue. A desire for social justice equates with subversive unrest, that 'modern vice'.

In formulating his 'Law', Tyrrell modernises Smiles' principle as an argument for maintaining the existing class system. Success itself becomes a litmus test of worth. Those who fail have demonstrated

that they properly belong in the underclass. It is a more insidious version of how social mobility works than is Smiles', but it serves the same purpose. To attack it is manifestly socially subversive. Hence the violent indignation at the narrative sequence relating to the failure of Jude's hopes and to his angry bitterness at his lack of success. His early 'remorse' for his restlessness would have provided a proper ending, but it fails to endure and creates a man verging on the anarchist that Stutfield envisages. He goes in for denunciation of the system instead of humble renunciation. This was particularly objectionable at a time when Tyrrell's Law had been given a spurious scientific validity in the works of those like James Platt who wrote dogmatically on *Business, Money, Morality, Life, Economy, Progress*, and also on *Poverty*, of which he said:

Like it or not, we must abide by it, that inexorable law of the 'survival of the fittest', the law of 'inequality'...The strongest, bravest, the best armed, triumph, and gradually stamp out the weak and feeble; and thus the races become more perfect. In human society, the great end to be attained is the general welfare, and this is best effected by allowing the laws of nature to pursue their course, and not by endeavouring to introduce plans of reform invented by men in opposition thereto.

(Platt 1884:159)

Like Jude, Sue attempts to break free of constraints imposed generally regardless of the individual. She, as a woman, challenges ideology by wanting to 'have everything': by evading marriage, which she sees as a way of being 'licensed to be loved on the premises' (p. 271); by living on terms of friendship only with a member of the opposite sex; by living with a lover but refusing to share his bed unless and until she chooses to. This is a narrative pattern similar to those of 'New Women' novels, so called because they attempted to construct the identity of their heroines in different terms from the properly feminine. Since marriage is presented as their only option, they attempt to change themselves by writing new feminine plots. They do this by rejecting what Bentham called 'the tie of society and the basis of civilization' (Manchester 1980:360) either before or after the ceremony. But many of these novels compromise their own radicalism. Those women who have refused to marry may finally do so, others will happily return to a previously rejected husband. Even in resolutely libertarian texts the woman who has committed herself sexually outside marriage may meet

the usual wages of sin by dying. To an extent then these novels underpin 'the axiom' they overtly deny. Sue's story superficially follows the same pattern in her return to Phillotson but its significance is different from other similar returns. Her remarriage does not restore order, it creates chaos for her in which she is at war with herself. Mentally she has regressed to orthodoxy; physically she is still in rebellion. The regression is caused by guilt over the death of the three children, which requires self-punishment. This takes the form of returning to sexual relations with Phillotson. So the legitimate marriage to a largely forbearing husband figures the kind of trap that George Egerton (1894) describes as 'a nightly degradation, a hateful yoke' (Egerton 1983:155). Sue, now diminished to a parody of her former self, does not directly represent it in these terms but Jude, speaking to Mrs Edlin in a passage found only in the manuscript, does:

When men of a later age look back upon the barbarism, cruelty, and superstition of the times in which we have the unhappiness to live, it will appear more clearly to them than it does to us that the irksomeness of life is less owing to its natural conditions, though they are bad enough, than to those artificial compulsions arranged for our well-being, which have no root in the nature of things.

(manuscript p. 427)

What Hardy captures in Sue is a woman whose intellectual liberation is debilitated by the failure of emotions (conditioned by the artificial compulsions of her time) to keep up with her opinions. In doing so, he offers a forceful attack on the institution of marriage as well as on establishment learning. It carried dangerous implications which he later referred to in a letter when he spoke of getting 'into hot water' for touching on them in *Jude*: the break-up of the most 'pernicious conventions in respect of manners, customs, religion, illegitimacy, the stereotyped household (that it must be the unit of society)' (Purdy and Millgate 1982, Vol. 3:238). For the family is much more than a domestic matter, as Mona Caird wrote later when dismissing its claims to be the ideal social unit. Through its pre-dominance 'Life is tied up into myriads of tight little knots, and the blood cannot flow through the body politic' (Caird 1897:145). Her metaphor is obscure but the scope of its reference is not: marriage involves not just individual families but society as a whole. To dismantle the current concept of marriage is to dismantle the social fabric. It is also to disqualify paternalism as a model for class relations.

REWRITING THE SIGNS FOR WOMEN

I have been thinking...that the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns.

(Sue Bridehead)

The disturbing nature of the narrative pattern in *Jude* depends largely on Hardy's rewriting of the signs for women which are the chief method of articulating meaning. Like all linguistic signs they are multiaccentual and therefore fluid. The five authors discussed in earlier chapters shift the meaning of these signs as speakers shift the meaning of words by the sentences or contexts into which they insert them: 'That makes no *sense*; I had a *sense* of something coming'; 'he had no *sense* of smell'; 'The *sense* of the meeting is clear to me'. Speakers, of course, shift largely within commonly recognised boundaries. Change or extension of communal boundaries takes place when an individual's shift beyond them becomes generally accepted. An example of this is the current meaning of *gay* as 'homosexual'. The earlier range of meanings from 'joyful' to 'addicted to (dissolute) pleasure' has largely fallen out of use, as the conscious decision of a group to replace the use of *queer* for 'homosexual' by a more positive term gained acceptance. (The linguistic contest continues, however, with the new reaccenting of *queer* as a positive term.)

Looked at in the light of this, it is possible to describe a dominant or 'core' meaning for a 'womanly' or conventionally feminine Victorian woman as including middle-class status, sexual purity and selflessness. Secondary features are moral and emotional refinement, maternal and domestic skills, submissiveness. By contrast the 'fallen' woman in this period suggests a combination of low-class status, sexual impurity and ineradicable guilt. Other possible and more peripheral additions include degraded and vulgar tastes, alcoholism, impaired capacity for mothering, selfishness and unruly temper. What this account defines is stereotypes. But each instance is a particular exponent of the sign and a variation on it (or particular accenting of it). The women already discussed illustrate this and also illustrate the slow process of change in the meaning of the signs. Margaret Hale in *North and South* is a fairly typical example of the first sign, showing all the core elements, but in addition she possesses the anomalous characteristics of social rebelliousness and (suppressed) passion. Louisa Bounderby in *Hard Times* is middle class, pure and submissive but paradoxically suggests an underlying nature that is fierily

passionate. In both these instances the anomalous passion is added and made acceptable by careful contextual handling. With Margaret it is ambivalently described as a 'passion' other than sexual and its true nature is only figuratively alluded to. In Louisa's case it is suddenly quenched and seems retrospectively not to have existed. Mrs Transome in *Felix Holt* is more aristocratic than middle class, more refined than all around her. She is manifestly not submissive in general, though she is selfless in relation to Harold. However, her husband's witlessness provides a contextual excuse for her unwomanly dominance; her sexual fall is in the distant past; and she is conscious not of guilt but of remorse caused by fury at Jermyn's exploitation of her. She represents a major step towards the breaking down of barriers between the two signs.

Ida Starr in *The Unclassed* marks a further stage in the move away from the prototypes. She is of the lowest class and involved in the worst kind of sexual impurity. Fallen women previously are (like Tess) seduced, nearly seduced or thought to be seducible; Ida is a prostitute in cold blood. Her new distinction is to feel no shame or guilt: not to internalise society's judgement on women who engage in her trade. She is marked out also by the absence of secondary characteristics: degraded tastes, alcoholism, vulgarity, dishonesty or impaired mothering capacity. This absence is highlighted contextually by the presence of these features in a part-time prostitute, Harriet Smales, who has all the stereotypical qualities and no unexpected ones. Ida by contrast encroaches on the secondary characteristics of the womanly woman in her self-esteem, selflessness and capacity to mother, as well as in her domestic skills. She is a step towards Sue Bridehead in her combination of central characteristics from the two signs. So these instances in earlier novels had already familiarised variants which challenged the ideological stereotypes.

In *Jude* the process of breaking down the boundaries between the two signs and so undoing their crucial ideological significance is completed. In *Jude* as in *The Unclassed* there are two women who are in broad terms sexually deviant. And, like Ida and Harriet, Arabella and Sue serve to determine each other's meaning. Arabella is undoubtedly strongly marked as belonging to the fallen woman sign by fornication, adultery and bigamy. She also possesses the optional characteristics of dishonesty, degraded tastes, vulgarity, a taste for alcohol, a lack of maternal instinct and a strongly animal nature. The absence of guilt therefore comes as a surprise since, in contemporary terms, she has so much to feel guilty about. Its replacement by

shameless self-esteem springs, however, like her sexuality, from feelings that the narrator sees as strongly instinctive: a desire for self-interest and for self-preservation. Free from the emotional complications of guilt or sense of failure, she coolly sizes up her situation with the newly married Jude, with her bigamous husband Cartlett and, when Jude is dead, with the itinerant quack Vilbert. Like Farfrae in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, who is similarly free from the finer emotions, she is a pragmatist. Even her recurrent preference for Jude as a sexual partner does not interfere with the shaping of her life towards financial security and respectability. She is never a victim, never merely the object of others' desires; but an agent and a survivor. She caused horror in 1895 but in 1853, when Elizabeth Gaskell drew her picture of a seduced girl in *Ruth*, who spends the rest of her life in atonement, an Arabella would have been unwritable. She is a measure of the transformation that had taken place in the language of gender over a period of some fifty years. She is also one major reason why the narrator of *Jude* is associated with French 'lubricité' and decadence.

Arabella pairs Sue in *Jude* as Harriet pairs Ida in *The Unclasped*. Like Arabella, Sue is an anomaly created by an unorthodox narrator. She is a sign with two faces for she is both fallen woman and equally a womanly woman. Her womanliness is first depicted, and she has the core characteristics of a middle-class angel. Though her father and Jude's mother were brother and sister, her early history is elaborately confused to distance them socially. All versions of the text are internally inconsistent about her childhood but her social superiority is a constant. Her father, a worker in wrought iron, is said by Jude's Christminster workmates to have been 'a clever chap' who 'went away to London', that polisher of rustics (p. 100). His grandmother warns him (in the 1912 version) that she was brought up by her father to hate her mother's family—'and she'll look with no favour upon a working chap like you—a townish girl as she's become by now' (p. 113). She has the refinement characteristic of middle-class woman without being one.

In voyeuristic sequences Jude observes her, unseen, several times before they meet. At his first glimpse, when he sees her working in Miss Fontover's shop, he recognises the distance between them: 'She seemed so dainty beside himself in his rough working jacket and dusty trousers that he felt he was as yet unready to encounter her' (p. 89). Later, when they come face-to-face in the street, still without her knowing him, he finds her looking into his face 'with liquid,

untranslatable eyes, that combined...keenness with tenderness, and mystery with both' (p. 90). He, however, translates her mystery into a superior otherness that is irresistibly alluring. Her voice is the final confirmation, for it is, like his own, 'softened and sweetened, but his own' (p. 89)—not rustic but the middle-class accent of a standard speaker.

When Jude becomes a stalker, he reads into her appearance and social remoteness the signs of a religiously angelic nature. He fictionalises her immediately as not only a 'kinsman and well-wisher' but his future angel, 'a kindly star, an elevating power, a companion in Anglican worship, a tender friend' (p. 91). She seems to promise as an angel in the house did 'both social and spiritual possibilities'. This ideal vision remains with Jude and to an extent with the narrator throughout the text, marking her out as an exponent of the positive sign for a woman, though lower class in origin.

Sue's superiority and womanliness remain a strong presence and a framework within which anomalous characteristics appear as her other face. In a period when the 'feminine' woman stays fixed in the domestic web, Sue is discovered out in the world earning her living in Miss Fontover's shop. Like the governesses in Charlotte Brontë's novels her orphaned state requires her to be mobile and to work. So later she becomes Phillotson's apprentice teacher and, after their marriage, joint teacher in a 'double school'. Even when she leaves Phillotson to become eventually Jude's common-law wife, she continues to help with his work as a mason and later by selling his Christminster cakes. She is always undomesticated. Ironically one of the few signs of her as a household provider is the fruitless boiling of eggs for the children whose corpses are about to be discovered by Jude.

For a woman she knows too much and has not an education of the kind that Sarah Stickney Ellis recommends for 'the women of England'. Ellis and others later had insisted that 'it is the peculiar province of a woman rather to lead others out into animated and intelligent communication, than to be intent upon making communications from the resources of her own mind' (Ellis 1839:145). Sue, however, takes precisely this as her province. The resources of her mind include, as she tells Jude, the classics in translation, as well as Beaumont and Fletcher, Boccaccio, Scarron, De Brantôme, Sterne, Defoe, Fielding, Shakespeare, the Bible. She uses J.S.Mill's *On Liberty* as a verbal brickbat to hurl at Phillotson when asking for her own liberty from their marriage (p. 324). This reading is quite extraordinary

for a woman, though it resembles some of the upper-class New Women in fiction of the 1890s. It makes a curious contrast to an account of 'What Girls Read' in the *Nineteenth Century* (October 1886), based on a poll of 1,000 girls under 19 who were asked to list their favourite writers of fiction. None of the names in Sue Bridehead's list occurs except Shakespeare who comes fifth after Charles Dickens, Walter Scott, Charles Kingsley and Charlotte M. Yonge (Salmon 1886:527–8). Though the writer of the article doubts the truthfulness of the respondents, it is because he suspects that their real preferences are probably for more lightweight contemporary authors. Sue's reading would be more appropriate to a middle-class man and makes her more mannish than womanly.

The same inappropriateness is found in her dealings with children. She is awkward and unadaptive. When questioned by Father Time about her third pregnancy at a time of homelessness and extreme poverty, she can only repeat: 'I can't explain...I will when you are older...I can't help it.' Fatally she makes no reply to his characteristic suggestion that unwanted children should be promptly killed off. Hardy's upper-middle-class friend, Agnes Grove, writing on 'What Children Should Be Told: On Physiology', condemns such 'half-hearted avowals' as Sue's and blames her for the children's death (Grove 1896:398). So in spite of her social superiority and refinement, Sue has 'defects' which render her an anomaly. However, the contradictions are integrated into an idealised figure whose enigmatic motivation is coded as charm. The unusual characteristics represent merely a modification of the conventional sign for womanliness and some, such as her well-stocked mind, are paralleled in the modifications of New Women in fiction of the 1890s.

But the same is not entirely true of her bluntness over sexual matters and her claims to new kinds of male-female relationships. For Arabella to speak coarsely is one thing, to have an idealised and refined woman tell how she lived with an undergraduate but never became his mistress and how she has never 'yielded' herself 'to any lover' is another (p. 154). The 'unmanliness' of the narrator is revealed in the account of her conversation with Jude about Phillotson: 'What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes' (p. 223). This boldness expands into the other face of Sue as she eventually transgresses by becoming Jude's mistress, especially since she does so at a point after their divorces when marriage to him is an option. She evidently acquires the status of a fallen woman wilfully. What she has 'fallen' from of course is proper femininity,

yet she does so without diminishing the narrator's sense of her as 'pure'. When she transgresses, the two signs collapse into each other, as the compatibility of characteristics previously seen as incompatible is demonstrated by a narrative syntax which specifies all of them as part of a particular individual's significance.

In the process a disruption also takes place in the conventional separation of the classes as the morally and culturally distinct categories which the ideological distinction between the two signs held apart. It is not only the narrative sequences which reject the institution of marriage as illogical and unworkable, but the nature of Sue herself. She drives even a conventional man like Phillotson to say, 'I don't see why the woman and the children should not be the unit without the man.' To which the more conventional Gillingham replies 'By the Lord Harry!—Matriarchy!' (p. 243). But Phillotson denies that he has acquired his views from *talking* to Sue. It is living with her that has made him feel this.

Like the death of Tess, Sue's 'repentance' and self-punishment are charged with a different significance from those of other fallen women. They are represented as the disastrous destruction of a gifted individual. And it is conditioning which has produced the guilt that unnecessarily destroys her. Tess subsumes in her identity all members of the working class; Sue challenges the divisions between the classes as well as the complementarity that defines women and men. In her, Hardy produces an individual variant of the positive sign for women which, along with other variants of the 1890s, breaks down the rigid polarisation between the signs for women. Such variants create flux in the representation of gender in novelistic discourse, out of which new signs would emerge into the communal system. At the same time the text ignores the perspective from which the working class is seen as a category divisible only into the residuum and the respectable. Instead, it casts working-class individuals as the central figures, viewed by a narrator who inscribes himself as an equal. *The Unclassed*, like other novels, reverts finally to a narrative syntax which underwrites the social status quo. *Jude* overwrites this structure by another which to the end asserts that the story of working-class individuals signifies brutal inequality.

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