

British Socialist Literature:
from Chartism to Marxism

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Preface

This thesis is a selected narrative sequence, focusing upon social/political narratives published between 1870 and 1888 in order to connect the literature of Chartism, published in the 1840s and 1850s, with the naturalistic political novels of Margaret Harkness published between 1888 and 1921.

The thesis was initially conceived during graduate study undertaken at the University of California in 1981-3. The foundations were fully laid by research undertaken independently during 1989 and 1990, while teaching in New York. Here, the truly inspiring facilities of the New York Public Library made it all real.

The complications of returning to England in 1991 and the pressures of earning a living in a non-academic environment resulted in the study being left for many years, though not forgotten. I owe the completion of the thesis to its reception by the School of English, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff University in 2003, and to the rigorous and detailed support from my adviser, Professor Stephen Knight. I would also like to extend my thanks to the facilities of the School of English, Communication and Philosophy for supplying me with prints of rare microfilmed documents, available only from the British Library.

Working on such a thesis as a part-time student in addition to full-time and largely unrelated work eats significantly into personal time. I therefore thank my partner, Ruth Hecht, for her support and positive encouragement throughout its composition. Finally, I would like to remember my family, the Bottrills, who lived for many generations between Coventry and Leicester, the men as farm labourers or coal miners in rural pits, the women in domestic service. They lived and worked throughout the period covered by this thesis and to them ultimately it is dedicated.

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[Please note that full textual reference will be made for each text at its introduction; thereafter, abbreviated reference will be made, either in footnote, in the case of texts consulted, or, for texts discussed at length, at the end of each quotation used.]

Summary

This thesis focuses centrally upon social/political novels published between 1870 and 1888 in order to connect the literature of Chartism, published in the 1840s and 1850s, with the naturalistic political novels of Margaret Harkness published between 1888 and 1921.

The central argument of the thesis is that there is literary continuity between the literature of Chartism and the political naturalism of the last years of the Nineteenth Century, that this continuity is both literary and political, and that key radical texts published after 1870 provide that continuity. It is also the argument of this thesis that such a continuing, if not simplistically continuous, political and aesthetic project represents a countervailing radical aesthetic to the established norms within which it was produced, but against which it was aimed.

Section One of the thesis describes the character and function of the forms of literary criticism to be adopted in order to realise the full aesthetic and political potential of radical and socialist texts.

Section Two of the thesis argues that Chartist literature possesses more than a sociological interest and has very real value *as literature* in articulating a radical political consciousness at a particular time of its development: engaging with the effects of the Industrial Revolution, fighting for radical political change and parliamentary representation for a newly emerging social and political class, trying to find ways of using fiction to articulate this new self-awareness and in doing so struggling with inherited fictional forms largely alien to its political project. The thesis also argues here that Chartist literature made very real progress in challenging conventional available forms for fiction, thus breaking ground in ways that could be taken further by later writers.

Section Three of the thesis, comprising its main body, argues that the period between Chartism and political naturalism constitutes a much more fertile area for study than has often been assumed: that radical novels were written at this period which are fully deserving of extended study, being important indicators of the changing relationship between literary realism as the

normative representative within literature of a dominant capitalist ideology, and of oppositional radical and socialist ideologies in development. It also argues that these issues have important implications for literary form.

Section Four of the thesis comprises an analysis of the fiction of Margaret Harkness, as exemplary both of the ideological link with radical fiction of earlier years and the new development of English political naturalism based in Marxism.

Section One

Part One Description and Parameters

This thesis will investigate the emergence, within British culture, of socialist literature at three linked stages of its development: the literature of the Chartist movement, social narratives of the 1870s and 1880s, and socialist fiction of the turn of the century, 1887 - 1921. Its main emphasis will be upon the middle section of these three as the period least studied previously.

The search for literary forms adequate to the socialist project will be measured against the dominant traditions of form within which this literature was developed. This will require an analysis of the relationship at the time between the historical continuities of literary genres and observable historical moments of change. Acknowledging realism as the dominant form throughout the period in question, the thesis will incorporate linked studies of the emergence of a self-consciously political fiction with the Chartist movement, politically radical fiction 1870-1888, and the oeuvre of a particular author, Margaret Harkness, whose work exemplifies a socialist response to the realist tradition of social fiction.

Two of these three historical foci really present themselves. The first because it represents the first real effort at political/socialist fiction; the third because the development of a naturalistic 'movement' marked the

decline in authority of the middle-class realist novel, allowing for a broadening of focus, a relaxation of censorship and, thus, the possible 'politicisation' of literature; the second is more problematic, and needs a brief introduction.

Many works have contributed valuably to the study of these periods: The Literature of Labour, The Socialist Novel in Britain and The Rise of Socialist Fiction, all edited by H. Gustav Klaus and published by St Martin's Press, New York, (the first two in 1982; the third in 1987), all contain work of crucial value to the recovery of the socialist tradition. The same is true of British Industrial Fictions, edited by H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2000), Writing and Radicalism, edited by John Lucas (Longmans, 1996) and Socialist Thought in Imaginative Literature, by Stephen Ingle (Macmillan, 1979). However, only one essay, by J.M. Rignall in The Socialist Novel in Britain gives valuable and particular, but brief, attention to the novels of the second area of study in this thesis.

It is the central assertion of this thesis that there is a literature of the period 1870 to 1888 which lends itself to extended literary and political analysis, providing a strong continuum of radical fiction for which the term socialist is an accurate term. I will use the term 'socialist' throughout for the reasons suggested by H. Gustav Klaus. To do so avoids the dangers of terms such as 'proletarian' or 'working-class' when literature written by or about working people may actually endorse their subordinate condition. A crucial 'ideological correlate' is contained within the term socialist:

A socialist novel by being written in the historical interests of the working-class, reveals a standpoint consistent with that of the class-conscious sections of this class.¹

Such a statement suggests an emphasis upon sociological and thematic criteria. It should be stressed, however, that this thesis is designed as a work of literary criticism, not one of sociological analysis. However, if the critical method will not be a sociology of literature as such, neither will it be a mode of stylistic literary criticism which will ignore the determining factors of the socio-economic environment. Rather, a method of critical analysis will be adopted, political in nature, which will be appropriate for both close stylistic textual criticism and the radical placement of texts, and the act of criticism itself, within the processes of British, and notably English, culture. Most of the texts under scrutiny in this thesis have been ostracised from the traditional canon of English literature as inferior material. Consequently, if the attempt is to be made to reassess the literary/political value of these texts there must also be some serious reassessment of the critical methods previously adopted, which have dominated our cultural readings of literature. Both literature and the acts of criticism must be radically historicised. The implication here is not that we should absorb into the canon works unfairly left out, but that we should re-think the way literature functions within (and not above) historical social relationships, and how successfully or unsuccessfully criticism, itself historically placed, has apprehended literature in this guise.

¹ H. Gustav Klaus, H. Gustav Klaus (ed.) The Socialist Novel in Britain (New York: St. Martins Press, 1982), p.1

Each of the three clusters of texts in this study articulates through aesthetic form social and political concerns salient within a particular historical period, with significance beyond it. First, the Chartist movement of 1837–53 which constitutes not only the first attempt by a conscious working class to institute political reform but also the first attempt to explain such political motives in fictional form. Second, the attempt by radical novelists to counter the failure of Chartism, the failure of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, and the power of the short-lived economic triumph of the bourgeoisie in mid-century England in order to retain a radical focus for their fiction; to use their fiction to apply stress to points of social division and failure, to highlight social, political and economic inequity and to promote the interests of working people and of their ability to govern themselves. Third, the literary response to the beginnings of union organisation (with such significant joint action as the Dock Strike of 1889) and the availability of the influence of French naturalism as a tool with which to combat or alter the ossifying tradition of the middle-class realist novel.

It is central to my study that history and literature do not exist as some separable duality. Historical activity does not give rise to a 'subsequent' literature any more than literature gives form and meaning to otherwise shapeless events. As Frederic Jameson has indicated literature cannot exist without absorbing the 'real' into its texture and making it its subtext. In this way literature articulates its own political and social situation. Similarly,

Gareth Stedman-Jones in his historical study of *Chartism* concludes that the study of historical experience is inadequate without a simultaneous study of the consciousness of the 'actors' in that historical activity. We must concentrate he says, upon 'the problematic character of language itself'² in order to study closely any historical period. It is my contention that fiction constitutes an invaluable index to that linguistic consciousness.

Before entering into an explanation and justification of my study and bibliography, it makes sense to clarify an issue that has caused repeated difficulties in Marxist literary criticism and has been seen to be problematic in the recent theories of the structuralists, namely that of determinism.

Briefly, for Marxism the mode of production of the material means of subsistence finally determines the form that society will take. People within that society possess social being as their basis for existence rather than as an absolute individualism - their 'being' is determined by that society. At the same time Marxism also conceives of a self alienated from that society, alienated by modes of production, their use and function. The self thus appears to be both constituted by ideology and history, and simultaneously able to criticise that society and act to change history. Marxism cannot conceive of a subject outside of societal structure; if it did so it would cease to be a revolutionary philosophy. At the same time determinism cannot be absolute or no concept of an alienated individual would be possible, we would remain passive in the face of historical determinisms and no active agency in bringing about change would be possible, change itself becoming an entirely

² Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 20

arbitrary process.

Raymond Williams in Culture and Society has highlighted the way in which the dilemma exposed by concepts of determinism obstructed a dynamic Marxist criticism in Britain. The confusion lay in British Marxists simultaneously insisting upon art as a mere reflector of the means and relations of production, and to an essentially Romantic theory of the self able to stand somehow above society and project forward an ideal future world toward which all men should strive. For Williams, a theory of determinism is clearly necessary but cannot be the simple dualism that had passed for cultural Marxism: 'A Marxism without some concept of determination is in effect worthless. A Marxism with or without many of the concepts it now has is quite radically disabled'.³

Williams' response is to favour an interpretation that allows for 'determinism by multiple factors'⁴ not a singular monolithic reality. As Engels put it 'We make our history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions.'⁵ This allows Williams to interpret determination as 'the setting of limits' and 'the exerting of pressures'.⁶ Determinism seen this way is therefore neither an abstracted 'mode of production' nor a reified concept of psychology but the whole social process itself, 'an active and conscious as well as, by default, a passive and

³ Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 83

⁴ *ibid.* p.83

⁵ Quoted in Marxism and Literature, p.85

⁶ Marxism and Literature, pp.85, 87

objectified, historical experience'.⁷

It is just here that political literature and political ideology have their juncture; the work of Pierre Macherey is valuable in clarifying this relationship for the purposes of literary analysis. Macherey asserts that literary discourse is a 'contestation of language'⁸ rather than a simple representation of reality. It is a manipulation of signs which take the place of an absent reality; its deceptive nature, and its power, is to constantly press into being the literary work's fictional content, something which cannot be real. Literary discourse thus tries constantly to make us take the word for the thing and becomes a process of 'myth' or 'illusion'. For Macherey, this gives such discourse a very particular identity, that of dominating 'the realm of the constantly absent'.⁹ In turn, such a function gives literature a very potent relationship with ideology in that the internal dissonances within texts which this function creates are the very sites at which the ideological truth of such 'absence' is most effectively exposed. Internal dissonances within texts are thus produced, which become the locations of crucial, and 'silent', ideological meaning:

The structure of the work, which makes itself available to knowledge, is this internal displacement, this caesura, by which it corresponds to a reality that is also incomplete, which it shows without reflecting. The literary work gives the

⁷ *ibid.* p.88

⁸ Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, translated by Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.61.

measure of a difference, reveals a determinate absence,
resorts to an eloquent silence.¹⁰

Literary analysis becomes the articulating of internal disparities or conflicts of meaning within a text in order to bring out their 'silent' ideological and political meanings. Critical analysis thus becomes the articulation of what is not being said, but is being resisted, by the text, and theorises these silent absences, explaining their ideological nature. The work of analysis is to explain the meaning of these textual distortions which thus constitute the 'unconscious' of the work,¹¹ this splitting within the work revealing its most telling 'gestures of expression'.¹² Such splits and logical disruptions constitute for Macherey crucial ruptures within texts; the analysis of such ruptures is mandatory if analysis is to be effective.¹³ It is the gap that matters; it is not the differences in the various contradictions and determinisms which have the power within a text, but precisely 'the hollow which separates and unites them'.¹⁴

The real value of Macherey's analysis is that it allows literature to function as literature, while exposing to full detailed analysis its relation to real history. One note of caution, however, must be struck. His analysis does leave open the possibility that literary texts possess only a negative relationship with history, leaving analysis no more than a 'post-structuralist' exercise in 'de-

⁹ *ibid.* p.62

¹⁰ *ibid.* p.79

¹¹ *ibid.* p.92

¹² *ibid.* p.94

¹³ *ibid.* p.95

¹⁴ *ibid.* p.100

constructing' traditional canonically-established texts in order to realise the ideological underpinnings they are 'unconsciously' hiding or disguising. With working-class or socialist literature we can see literary form simultaneously receiving 'given' ideological forms of fact and value, responding critically to them and trying to create new ideologies and suitable literary forms for them. The full value of Macherey's ideas can only be realised if we add to them the necessity of specific historical placement within distinct sets of social and political relations. Such a placement allows us to see ideologies in contest for political and economic power, while, without this, Macherey's concept of ideology can seem too singular.

It is therefore to a reciprocal relation of production between texts and ideologies to which we must turn, a relation in which texts are produced by ideologies in complicated ways and respond to it similarly, producing new ideologies which produce new textual forms for them and so on. Such a form of analysis can render the relationships between texts and ideologies as clearly as possible, while allowing no argument to collapse into either position as a 'separable' entity. Such an analysis denies ideology a 'given' status, but acknowledges its very real, and often deceptively indirect, power; it denies literature a 'natural' function, innocent of ideological content, but strengthens its function *as literature*, with its own distinct forms.

Such an understanding allows for a major role for active agency, so often lacking in the theories of others, and reflects the thoughts of the Chartist leader Ernest Jones who in the introduction to his chartist novel Women's Wrongs (1851–52) insisted:

It is folly to say 'we can't help it', 'we are the creatures of our circumstances' - 'we are what society makes us.' We can help it - we can create circumstances - we can make society - or whence the efforts to redress and reform - moral, social, political, religious.¹⁵

Here Jones makes it clear that political thought and activity themselves constitute the denial of the passive voice. If it can be conceived and worked at, it can be achieved. In addition, the terms 'redress' and 'reform' insist that the actor exists within, and only within, a specific set of social circumstances and not apart from them. Change achieved is achieved through the combined agency of historical experience and its simultaneous conscious articulation, language. This short quotation from Jones is not only a small part of Chartist 'history' it is also a part of the articulation of Chartist consciousness.

What we have then is a complex society subject to many forms of making and re-making; a society of multiple determinisms and hegemonies with multiple critically constructive, and conscious, responses - not, however, in some loose pluralism, but clearly within a history of a deterministic and exploitative capitalism. The individual exists, but as the crystallization of social forces and structures of meaning, both part of society and able to criticise it, but always with an inevitable involvement and responsibility for it. What we have in the individual is the logic of a political position experienced and performed at a

¹⁵ Ernest Jones, Introduction, Women's Wrongs, Book IV, in Ernest Jones (ed.) Notes to the People, vol. II (1851-52), pp. 913-914.

personal level. That personal level is a radical connection with society through immediately accessible conditions: class, economic standing, social status, job, self evaluation and, perhaps most deeply of all, language. However, when talking of literature we are not dealing with language in the abstract but with a history of chosen forms of representation; various poetic forms, drama, sermon or tract, non-fiction essay and, most latterly, the novel form.

Chartist literature, then, constituted not merely a dimension of political response to 'limits' and 'pressures', but also a combating of an established literary consciousness of 'accepted' forms and conventions. In a rare essay on Chartist fiction Martha Vicinus criticises Chartist writers for adopting, perhaps too readily, the conventions of the melodrama and the romance. Remaining largely at the level of plot delineation, Vicinus seems to assume conventions as too-fixed bodies of ideas and does not enter into detailed analysis of specific articulations to analyse the connection between a residual and 'dying' form and an emergent consciousness yet to achieve fruition. In a study of Chartist literature we need to undertake a sustained analysis of form, not as a fixed entity or idea but as something toward which the 'inner necessities' of a text work; form is what we end up with not what we start out with. Changes in form caused, for Chartism, by the political necessities of its project can be seen as 'a function of content seeking its adequate expression in form'¹⁶ form being its fullest articulation. In this sense the 'failure' of a text may in fact be read as a kind of articulation: of problems, processes, or historically determining limitations.

Chartist literature provides us with a number of such 'formal' articulations of literary/historical issues that make available not merely historical experience but its 'current' consciousness; the search for literary forms adequate to real historical experience is clearly underway. In Thomas Cooper's work we encounter local political history in novel form, political drama, pamphleteering, and familial 'performance' of political and social realities. Sometimes lurid, often melodramatic, Cooper's work stands nonetheless as a complex experimentation, an exposure of old conventions to new questions. Should they be found wanting, this is itself of clear political/literary significance. Similarly, Ernest Jones also employed the romance, the melodrama, the historical novel and the domestic short story; Thomas Frost ventured into territory to be later explored by the mystery novel, while John Watkins wrote uncompromising political dramas, and Thomas Martin Wheeler produced a contemporary historical novel to dramatise Chartist experience, ideas and goals. Between them these five writers put virtually all of the literary forms available to them under a new political lens, a lens made by historical experience and its still experimental literary articulation. These works constitute complex linguistic projects developing in an alien environment, antagonistic toward it yet seeking an audience, critical of it yet unable to exist without it, both needing and condemning the only literary forms fully available to them. This is not to suggest, however, that the Chartist literary effort is a singular one; rather it is a pattern of political/literary projects with a cohesive and unifying underlying purpose rather than one 'individual' aim. Our literary analysis must therefore be a species of mapping rather than simple 'literary' analysis; an assessment of ground broken, of ground gained.

¹⁶ Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 328

It was thus the task of the 'initial' socialist writers to search for linguistic forms adequate to their socialist project. It is the duty, therefore, of the socialist critic and the intention of this thesis, to implement a critical method adequate to elucidating and analysing that socialist project; a method that advocates a socialist politics but is also alive to 'mistakes' and failures, that is more than sympathetic but is radically and rigorously critical, that can closely analyse the language used by those who lived it.

One of the effects that structuralist methods have had upon literary criticism has been to render all texts secondary texts, indices of ideological meaning, reflectors of hidden political intent and power. For an advocative criticism, and for this thesis, this will not do. We must 'return' to the practice of respecting the specific 'stylistics' of literary projects but this time with full political consciousness. As Walter Benjamin has written, the position of any work of art within the relations of production of its time, 'is concerned...directly with the literary technique of works.'¹⁷

This statement has two major effects. First, it clearly identifies literature as existing in dialectical relationship with the historical realities of its time. Second, that we must look closely at what Benjamin calls 'the organising function' of a work in order to account for the complexity of the relationship as fully as possible. Critical judgement thus becomes simultaneously political and literary. As critics, investigating in depth the 'organising function' of a

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', Reflections (New York: Schocken Books, Random House, 1986), p. 222

work, we are able to discover an advocative criticism that is neither naïve, nor a crude ideological impressment reductive of the complexity of writing's function. We can judge the success or failure of a work against the political logic of its position, the political coherence of its writing, rather than abstract aesthetic criteria. The preferred critical method for analysis, therefore, must also be dialectical in order to recognise fully the creativity of the art product *and* the materiality of its language, the historical and extra-literary social materials that make artistic production possible *and* the work done upon those realities to produce writing. It is such a method that I intend to pursue throughout this thesis.

The texts of the 'middle period', produced between 1870 and 1888, will be interrogated as emerging forms no longer able to maintain the revolutionary fervour of the Chartists, nor able to draw substantially upon organised labour for clear ideological grounding, and as a literature whose pre-occupation is its own core subjectivity: the grounding consciousness of its own revolutionary potential. It will be central to my argument that these texts elucidate the literary/textual means by which a revolutionary subjectivity is brought into place and function, its causes and its products. The potency of these texts lies less in their aesthetic success or distinct calls to political action (though these are not absent qualities) than in their complex articulation of the unstable relationship between literary form and the dominant political ideology of the time.

This thesis will argue that these texts constitute a dissident intrusion into the tradition of the realist novel, interrogating its assumptions and their disguised

power, thus proposing an alternative politics which questions aesthetic assumptions regarding literature and wider economic, social and political relationships, and which include the very purpose of government itself. These texts destabilise the notion of the fictional text, revealing their own constructed form and the sources of their own possibility within new and rapidly changing historical/political relationships, in which history itself becomes an itinerant character in the search for its own identity and aesthetic articulation.

If, therefore, we view any aesthetic work to be part of a continually articulated process of lived history and textual production, a complex coexistence,¹⁸ it is imperative that we understand its sequential function rather than its existence as an individual entity. A sequential study of the work of a single author gives added coherence to such an approach. We move away not only from the 'single work' analysis, but from the temptation to accept the analysis of a cross-section of a period as an adequate representation either as history or as literature. Rather we can focus upon the quality of a deliberate engagement with politics and literature over a period of time and reveal changes, developments, failings, and assess their relations to the historical substance that is their foundation.

Margaret Harkness makes an excellent choice for study in such a context for a number of reasons. The decade of the 1880s (her first novel *A City Girl* was published under the pseudonym of John Law in 1887) saw the beginnings of the modern labour movement climaxing with the dock strike of 1889:

The triad of concepts which motivate the present Labour movement - the concept of a working-class politics, the concept of trades union power and the concept of welfare - gets its first firm start.¹⁹

Literary articulations of such developments were much influenced by the French naturalist movement, most notably the work of Emile Zola, and its rejection of the formal and ideological limitations of the bourgeois realist tradition. William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, Mark Rutherford, George Meredith, George Gissing, all confronted the political questions of their day. Most of them highlight the 'problem' as one of individual liberty rather than an issue of class-based politics and, as a result, compromise the very question they purport to be asking. Margaret Harkness, not a member of the working-class herself, embraced socialism, but had an uneasy relationship with it, as the only means by which an apparently crumbling capitalist society might be restored to its fullest human potential. Her work maintains a strong humanist theme throughout, and, in her later novels especially, there appears a clear Christian commentary upon the events described and analysed. Nevertheless, the progress of her work, in all its variation, remains an important index to the variabilities of the socialist consciousness at the historical period of its political institutionalisation. It is central to her novels that her characters speak as members of a class rather than as individuated figures of subjective consciousness.

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 312

¹⁹ John Goode, 'Margaret Harkness and the Socialist Novel', H. Gustav Klaus, (ed.) *The Socialist Novel in*

The writers selected for extended analysis within this thesis can be seen working to discover workable forms for the socialist novel, a method of combining personal history with both class-consciousness and literary form, to recognise that individual consciousness is a political position and that narrativisation can be a political act in itself. This thesis accepts Jameson's point that narratives can be understood to be symbolic acts constituting attempted resolutions to determinate historical contradictions and 'a symbolic meditation upon the destiny of community'.²⁰

It will investigate the mediating qualities of language evident within its chosen texts in their relations with the socialist politics they are attempting, and as the key relational factor revealing the ways in which classes meet, overlap, confront, etc., thus freeing literature, and literary characterisations from entrapment in the 'private' and freeing them into the politically public. When historical realities become so clearly a dimension of literature then any act of criticism has to be also a form of political discussion:

the propadeutic value of art lies in the way in which it permits us to grasp the essentially historical and social value of what we had otherwise taken to be a question of individual experience...For, particularly in middle-class society, the fact of work and of production - the very key to genuine historical thinking - is also a secret as carefully concealed as anything else in our culture. This is indeed the very meaning of the commodity as a form, to obliterate the

Britain (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 45

²⁰ Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 70

signs of work on the product to make it easier to forget the class structure which is its organisational framework.²¹

This is not to imply that all of the literature has one point to make, one ideology to adhere to. Yet, however different the treatment and results, work, the historical reality and the literary process, is determinedly central. More than this, the very multiplicity gives strength and 'corroboration' far more valuable than any single fixed ideological perspective. As Gareth Stedman Jones discovered, a too-formal 'closed' political theory creates

a tension between Marxist definitions of class and the historically observable behaviour of particular groups of workers.²²

What the literature provides us with is the historically observable behaviour of particular working people articulated through literary means and dedicated to the survival and the welfare and prosperity of their community. In order to allow such subordinated social groups to achieve full recognition we must allow them, they must achieve, full articulation. For historians, a full and complex investigation of the workings of such communities is necessary, respecting them and listening to their articulated consciousness. For literary study the effort is toward a thorough understanding of the production of their texts:

²¹ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, pp. 407-8

²² Gareth Stedman Jones, *The Languages of Class*, p. 8

a concrete working through of detail, by a sympathetic internal experience of the gradual construction of a system according to its inner necessity.²³

This necessity, in this context, is political, is work. The historical realities that form much of the ordinary raw material for these novels constitute the economic relations of classes of people and therefore of all forms of production. If we thus view art as work, with all of the connections and responsibilities that that implies, then we cannot but acknowledge that literature is political in its very inception; and that to do anything less would be a gratuitous and culpable act of reification with its own political consequences.

²³ Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form, p. xi

Section Two

The Literature of Chartism

Radicalism in the first half of the Nineteenth Century grew out of direct political and economic desires and pressures. Arguably, the most complete form it took was the Chartist movement: the political realisation and articulation of a new political class's aspirations and demands. However, it should be noted that the demands were not new to Chartism. The six point plan for parliamentary reform had been drafted by the Westminster Association in 1780, inspired by the petitioning movement led by John Wilkes and later by the Association movement started by Christopher Wyvill. After 1790 the work of Tom Paine and the ratification of the Constitution of the United States, and the impact of the revolution in France, led to widespread radical activity aimed at making government more representative of its people and opposing increasingly repressive government legislation. This political activity failed to attract the labouring poor to its cause as the aim was broadly to engage the propertied to the cause of political reform, particularly of the franchise. However, the focus upon individual rather than collective rights can be seen to have contributed to the rich and diverse literary output of the Chartist period.

Both Martha Vicinus and Gustav Klaus have outlined some of the strengths and many of the weaknesses of Chartist fiction.¹ However, as they both cover the period in comparatively short articles they both adopt rather too narrow a

¹ H. Gustav Klaus, (ed.) The Socialist Novel in Britain (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), and H. Gustav Klaus, The Literature of Labour, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985)

framework for their critical enterprise. Gustav Klaus states bluntly: 'Chartism's socio-historical significance clearly exceeds its standing in literary history,'² while Vicinus writes: 'This essay is an examination of the parameters of Chartist fiction and an analysis of why Chartist writers chose melodrama over realism as more expressive of their lives and aspirations.'³ Klaus' statement seems to assume too clear a dichotomy between history and literature to be safe, and Vicinus, throughout her article, seeks to subordinate the literary production of the period to neat critical categories which tend to patronise the literature while purporting to praise it.

Vicinus is right in declaring that for Chartism 'the richest literary period came when the movement was declining and its political goals seemed more remote than ever. Most Chartist fiction dates from after 1848.'⁴ Moreover, this gives us an indication of the major purport of the Chartist writers. Their work was not only a call for action in support of a particular political movement. Chartist literature was concerned primarily with ways of thinking, ways of thinking politically. Its prime problem was to investigate, clarify and assert, not just the working classes as the subject matter of fiction and history, but their *subjectivity*, their intellectual source, and resource.

It is not just the subject matter of Chartist fiction that interests us; we are concerned with the constructing consciousness as representative of aesthetic

² The Literature of Labour, p.46

³ Martha Vicinus, 'Chartist fiction and the development of a class-based literature' in H. Gustav Klaus, (ed.) The Socialist Novel in Britain (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p.7

⁴ *ibid.* p.7

and historical response and actions that, by their very nature, cannot help but be political. Chartist literature gives us not just a literary view of politics and history, but a politics and history of literature itself. Its purpose is essentially educative. It wants to keep the movement alive, sometimes practically, sometimes in spirit; but always its main aim is to encourage and solidify, urge and legitimise ways of thinking about all aspects of human life, that are class-based, working-class in origin, and can be asserted in contradistinction to a 'legitimised' culture predisposed to ignore or reject them. What we see in Chartist literature is the emergence of a complex subjectivity, the subjectivity of a class and of its members, asserting itself from within a hostile environment, articulating itself both to its enemies and, more importantly to itself; investigating its own possibilities, asserting its own judgements, demystifying the power of the opposition, being both iconoclastic and constructive, taking apart that status quo and trying to substitute something it sees as better.

It is in just this way that Chartist literature marks for us a crucially important stage in the history of English literature, the complex intellectual articulation of a newly emerged and emerging 'literate and sophisticated working class, different in tone and temper from earlier protest movements.'⁵

As E.P. Thompson has said, The English working class was present at its own 'making,' a making that owed 'as much to agency as to conditioning.'⁶ Thompson is here asserting a form of self-consciousness as experienced by a class of people

⁵ H. Gustav Klaus The Literature of Labour (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985) p. 46

⁶ E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), p. 9

as they lived their own history and became increasingly aware of the history they were part of, and were making. Such a consciousness did not, of course, emerge in isolation. Raymond Williams has suggested that the year 1847 marked a period of social crisis. It was a period that saw the combined effects of industrialisation and the Chartist movement, and that produced new ways of thinking about society and a new *form* for doing so, the novel. Such changes affected more than just the working class:

The changes in society had been long in the making: the Industrial Revolution, the struggle for democracy, the growth of cities and towns. But these also, in the 1840s, reached a point of consciousness which was in its turn decisive It brought in new feeling, people, relationships; rhythms newly known discovered, articulated; defining the society, rather than merely rejecting it; defining it is novels.⁷

The rise of Chartist fiction, therefore, signified two major steps: the emergence into self-reflective agency of a working-class consciousness, and the development of this working-class 'subjectivity' as one capable and desirous of defining society from its own perspective, being the subject of perception not merely the object of another's perception. While we can chart the emergence of such a consciousness, it must also be observed that it developed into a society almost entirely alien to it. More specifically here, it emerged into a 'literary world' in

⁷ Raymond Williams, The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), pp. 9-11.

which it had no place and which was itself undergoing radical alteration.

Michael McKeon has suggested that the rise of the novel as a form was synonymous not only with the rise of an economically dominant bourgeois class within English society, but with a specific and crucial element of that class in its relations to society as a whole, namely the possibility, and historical actuality, of the alienated self:

Hypostatized over against the individual, 'society' slowly separates from 'self' as 'history' does from 'literature', a ponderous and alienated structure whose massive impingement on the individual paradoxically signifies the latter's autonomy, the fact of the individual's 'rise' as well as the subjection of self to this greater power. The autonomy of the self consists in its capacity to enter into largely negative relation with the society it vainly conceives itself to have created, to resist its encroachments and to be constructed by them. The work of the novel after 1820 is increasingly to record this struggle.⁸

The significance of such findings may be observed in the preponderance of 'condition of England' novels published during the 1840s and discussed in more than one place by Raymond Williams: Disraeli's *Sybil* and *Tancred*, Dickens' *Dombey and Son*, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, Charles Kingsley's *Alton*

⁸ Michael McKeon, The Origins of the English Novel, 1640-1740 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 419

Locke. It can also be seen in the development of Charles Dickens' novel writing and in the increasingly intellectualised control over her fiction as exhibited by George Eliot.⁹ While such a response may be observed in the development of the bourgeois novel, this cultural development necessarily meant something different for a developing and politically conscious working class. First, alienation was experienced as a class response and could not be adequately articulated on an 'individualist' basis, and second, that a consciously political socialist working-class literature, advocating a newly conceived awareness of its own power of agency had of necessity to fight *against* an overwhelming sense of alienation, to assert an effective ideological alternative to it that might operate on a collective social level. To do otherwise would have necessitated capitulation and acceptance of the status quo. The newly emerged working class needed to argue against alienation on all levels in an increasingly fractured society. Moreover, the literary forms available for them to use for their literature were in a state of flux. As Gertrude Himmelfarb has pointed out Dickens and Disraeli could both, at one level at least of their fiction, revert to naturalness, to humanistic values as a shoring against social problems:

Dickens' solution to the social problem lay in an enlightened, humane, natural middle class--natural, as opposed to the utilitarians who tried to suppress all natural affections and instincts--Disraeli's lay in an enlightened, humane, natural aristocracy, an aristocracy of noble character and paternal

⁹ N.B. Raymond Williams's discussion of these issues in Culture and Society, 1780-1950 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), and The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence, 1970

purpose as well as title and estate.¹⁰

This option was available to them as a political response to the fear of a conscious and dangerously active working class. This aspect of their fiction (Kingsley and others did likewise) represented a species of fantasy to avoid dangerous political realities and take recourse in an imagined 'safety'. Working-class and socialist, here Chartist, literature could clearly take no such route, had no such options. Consequently, the developing middle-class novel with its 'realist' mode could not serve as a coherent model for a socialist political fiction. Rather, the Chartists adopted and adapted literary forms currently available to them (largely melodrama and romance) even while claiming, as most Chartist writers did, that they were realist writers. This apparent contradiction is itself revealing. While using customary forms that with our parlance we could not think of as realist, they were attempting a species of political realism, the reality of an emerging and extending social and political identity: a complex subjectivity. As a result, we must be aware of form as a flexible index to flexible patterns of social and political relations, not as embodying absolute parameters as Vicinus implies.

While incorporating the 'tradition' of melodrama, nowhere in Chartist literature is the writing as lurid or voyeuristic regarding the lives of the poor and working class as can be seen in the writing of such as Kingsley, Dickens, Disraeli or Mrs. Gaskell. Nor is this accidental. Using a tradition and using it differently,

¹⁰ Gertrude Himmelfarb, The Idea of Poverty in Early Victorian England (New York: Random House, 1984), p. 498

subverts it. Chartist writers used melodrama, but they used it to emphasise the legitimacy, the growing strength, of an emerging class-based consciousness, not, as had often been the case, to use melodrama's strong outlines to emphasise helplessness in the face of life's pressures in general and the subject's immediate social situation in particular. Romance is also used by Chartist writers not as a device for distancing the dramatised issues from their social and political contexts, but as a means to invoke political thinking, to define ideas as political in origin and function, to connect abstract thoughts with concrete contexts. Exotic locations, distant or imaginary countries, unconvincing and fanciful plot devices are all to be found in the Chartist canon, but all of the issues involved centrally in this work are intensely and deliberately political. Relations between classes, the nature and exercise of undemocratic, political power, devices of social control, assertion of dissent and the passage to active rebellion are all emphasised for a clear educative purpose. The reader is to be helped toward an enhanced critical awareness of the situation in his own country, in his own town, in his own job, in his own house.

While it cannot be claimed, and must not be assumed, that all Chartist writing was uniformly successful, it is necessary within any criticism to maintain our awareness of the *political* enterprise, and its unique identity, upon which the Chartists embarked. It was both a practical, concrete effort with the attempt to have the Charter accepted in Parliament (and in the urge toward rebellion), and an intellectual project (in the fullest sense) in investigating, articulating as fully as possible and legitimising a working-class/socialist consciousness. The literature was thus both means and end, and it is within its political context that we must judge its success.

In this section of the dissertation I have chosen a sequence of texts, representative of shifts of emphasis in Chartist literature between the early 1840s and the early 1850s, from the height of Chartism's popularity to the first years of 'failure.' I will begin with a poem and a short story, each with accompanying political commentary, and then discuss a putative novel in the form of a mythic political biography. I will then include two romances: the first, a novel of Hungarian revolt against Russian rule, A Romance of the People (1848), the second, a novel of absolutist government, The Confessions of a King (1848). I will conclude with two late, but openly Chartist, novels (they incorporate the Chartist movement into their subject matter) Sunshine and Shadow published in the Northern Star in 1852 and De Brassier: A Democratic Romance, published in Notes to the People in the same year. It should be noted that the work of author-activist Ernest Jones figures largely in this section.

While the politics of textual structure is the central focus of this thesis, the study of Chartist texts must place them within the context of a broader rereading of nineteenth -century fiction to include issues of genre identity, reinterpretations of the significance of genre types e.g. melodrama and romance, and publishing practice - all to be read within the context of a radicalized politics.

Sally Ledger in her article 'Chartist Aesthetics in mid-Nineteenth Century: Ernest Jones, a Novelist of the People' in Nineteenth Century Literature, vol. 57, No 1, June 2002, posits the argument that the turn of Chartist writers to popular fiction and the writing of melodrama in the 1840s was part of an attempt to reharneß radicalism to populism, at a time when the new

commercial press was increasingly luring lower-class readers away from the radical press. Focusing on the novels of Ernest Jones, the essay counters recent arguments for the essentially conservative or anti-activist thrust of melodramatic writing, arguing that a less formalist, more materialist account of the way that melodrama circulated in the cultural economy of the mid-century produces a more radical apprehension of its cultural politics. She also argues that Chartism's turn to melodrama coincided with the rise of a political vocabulary of class identity and class conflict within Chartist discourse. While Chartism's initial investment in a Liberal Reformist language of individual rights had lent itself to the lyric individualism of Romantic poetry, the binary oppositions and frequently violent conflicts that characterize melodrama made it the preferred genre for later Chartist writers.

Margot Finn, in After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical politics, 1848-1874 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) signals significant connections between bourgeois and working-class radicals and subsequent inter-class relations. She notes the development of Chartist efforts into such as the Reform Union and the First International, the relationship between class relations and nationalism, and the influence of continental efforts at revolution in 1848 and joins them into a body of serious influences upon the continuity and persistence of radical agitation after the fall of Chartism as a mass platform after 1848 and before the 1880s. She acknowledges the shared radical lineage of the working and middle classes, stemming from roots within protestant dissent and the revolutions of the seventeenth century. She then emphasises how this relationship was rendered problematical by the middle-class radicals' responses to classical liberal economics and by different, and

class-based, responses to the French, German, Hungarian and Italian revolutions of 1848-9, the Polish and Italian nationalisations of the 1860s, and the rise and fall of the Paris Commune in 1871. She charts the changing responses of the two classes as producing a 'new liberalism', which was, in turn, influential in shaping the development of the socialist movement.

One much-referred-to text is Ian Haywood's Working-class Fiction from Chartism to 'Trainspotting' (Northcote House - in association with the British Council - 1998). Haywood stresses the importance of Chartist literature as clarifying the British novel's bias against a working-class perspective on society and providing a valuable narrative from this point to recent fiction. He charts the ways in which working-class perspectives question ruling-class notions of reality. He also interprets the Means Test as a new Poor Law intended to extend the oppression of working-class people.

Florence Saunders Boos concentrates upon the role of poetry during the period in her article 'The Poetics of the Working Classes' (Victorian Poetry, vol. 39, No. 2, West Virginia University Press, Summer 2001). She argues that such poetry began and flourished in songs, ballads, hymns, dirges, outcries of protest, and prayers of thanks, songs, epics, chants, broadsides, newspaper-poems and other verse forms in dialects or regional languages. Her work actively encourages the understanding of poetry's artisanal origins, to enlarge our sense of the lost variety of Victorian imaginative life, and realign the traditional canon of Victorian poetry¹¹.

¹¹ Richard Brown in Chartism (Cambridge University Press, 1998), places all Chartist efforts within a conscious and deliberate politics, while Eileen Groth Lyon in Politicians in the Pulpit (Ashgate Publishing,

Aldershot, 1999) investigates the role of religion in Chartist work and popular success. S. Roberts, and D. Thompson review more pictorial Chartist artistic production in 'Images of Chartism' published in the Journal of Victorian Culture, vol.61, 2001, pp.180-186. Stephanie Kuduk combines sedition, the tradition of epic poetry and Thomas Cooper's 'The Purgatory of Suicides' in the periodical Victorian Poetry, 2001. In the same periodical, Ronald Paul connects Chartist poetry with empire in 'In Luring Hindustan: Chartism and Empire in Ernest Jones's 'The New World, A Democratic poem; Mike Sanders in his article 'A Jackass Load of Poetry: the Northern Star's Poetry Column 1838-52' in Victorian Periodicals Review, 2006, gives a renewed look at the significance of the mass of poetry published by that newspaper.

Part Two: Early Chartist Writings

The English Chartist Circular, published in London between 1841 and 1844, provided a remarkable cross-section of political journalism: political essays, historical pieces (for example, a history of England by William Cobbett), arguments for extended suffrage containing all the points of the Charter, reprints of local political speeches, discussions concerning the effects of industrialism, anti-government polemics, figures relating excessive government expenditure, biographies of significant radicals past and present, updates on the fortunes of Chartist politics, and information and discussion regarding politics abroad. Gustav Klaus has referred to the 'diversity and unwieldy profusion'¹² of Chartist output. Literature, fiction and poetry are always incorporated and integrated into the body of the periodical as a whole, thus intermingling with the more literally political material and revealing a serious concern for the consciousness of political attitudes in all of its varieties of expression. The literature chosen for publication in this periodical gives us a very valuable picture of the imaginative consciousness of the Chartist movement between 1841 and 1844 and of the condition of an emergent radical fiction before the novel form became more widely used later in the same decade.

A remarkable example of the crystallisation of historical fiction into 'aesthetic' form to enhance its political reality occurs in a poem printed in the English Chartist Circular in 1842. The poem is entitled 'The Chartist Return to the Income Tax; or Chartism versus Mock Parliaments', and is short enough to quote in full:

¹² H. Gustav Klaus, The Literature of Labour, p.46.

Fiscal and other laws by Commons made,
Without the people's choice, are not to be obeyed.
We owe no right in any Parliament
To bind their wills by whom it is not sent;
To tax our food and God's free gifts to man,
To bow our necks as slaves to class and clan.
"Unrepresented++ (sic) we disclaim the right
Of Commons, Lords and King, and all their might
To levy aid or tax.

We Chartists stand

On England's Constitution for our just demand,
That what doth all concern, by all shall be
Debated and allowed;--This is to be free.
All other power than that the people grant,
By their free manly vote, doth mainly want

The essentialS (sic) of power--the force to bind
The assent and will, and to subject the mind.
This is the doctrine of our ancient sires,
Who fought and bled, and kindled freedom's fires
On British lands. We claim their legacy--
"Make your own laws, and ye shall still be free!"¹³

REVOLUTIONIST

Twenty lines of imperfect iambic pentameter, the poem is most remarkable

for what follows. One hundred-and-sixty-five words of poetry give rise through five footnotes to over one thousand words of commentary. And it is in, and only with, this commentary that the real weight of the poem is presented: that the rights of the common people of England had a substantial history, a much more substantial history than the usurpation of those rights which was of comparatively recent origin. Specific reference, even quotation, is made to definitions of democracy, freedom, the natural and common rights of ordinary people as confirmed by statements and statutes that became either custom under the unwritten constitution, the common law of England, or were passed into legislation. These references cover a period from the reign of Edward I through the reigns of Edward III, Henry III, IV, and VI, and Charles II, and to the legal and constitutional writings of Edward Coke, Algernon Sydney, William Blackstone, and John Locke. The commentary draws upon authoritative legal sources to establish a democratic tradition:

The legislative power cannot be conferred by writ of summons, but must be essentially and *radically* in the people'...'The restrictions of the people's liberty must be from themselves, or there can be none. *Disc. on Gov., Al. Sydney, pp. 336. & 451.*

and

There remains still inherent in the people a supreme power to remove or alter the legislative, when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them; for when such trust is abused, it is thereby forfeited, and devolves to those who gave it.

¹³ English Chartist Circular, No.91, vol.2, September, 1842, p.156

Locke on Gov., part 2, p.149.

and fully endorses Blackstone's claim that:

the power of choosing those measures which appear most desirable, is termed natural liberty; being a right inherent in us by birth, and one of the gifts of God to man at his creation, when he endowed him with the faculty of free-will. (English Chartist Circular, No. 91, Vol. 2, p. 156)

The single poem becomes a distillation of previous authorities, a piece of editing not an original work. No such original identity is intended, indeed it is denied completely by its subject matter and purpose. It possesses the advantages of brevity, specificity, emotional weight, appeal to a considerable historical tradition of nationalism of the common people of England, and an assertion not of new rights, but rather a restoration of the traditional rights of the common people under the Constitution of England, a Constitution claimed to be existing in perpetuity but in fact under the control of distinct and specific hegemonic power - the power of an aristocracy owning the land and dominating Parliament and thus the practical law of the land. The poem thus acts as both informant regarding historical information and as an inspiration, educating toward political consciousness succinctly and with conviction.

The constitutional history referred to here is clearly theoretical in that no government during the period mentioned had seriously countenanced even the

idea of an egalitarian society. In addition, the law, and thus the constitution, of the land had been changed, and drastically, over many years, and it remains unclear how an appeal to a previous condition of legal institution can help do anything but provide a species of nostalgia, itself a very dubious term and practice. The Industrial Revolution and its social and political consequences was not about to be unwritten. Ultimately, the political consciousness of the British radicals would have to become a class-based consciousness, more clearly grounded, and organised not around ancient claims to individual rights and customs in a rural, agrarian society, but around the specifics of industrial and economic practices in an urban, industrial one.

This is not to suggest that such appeals to common law tradition are without value. On the contrary, the assertion of legitimate rights on behalf of a people rendered structurally subordinate by an increasingly structured society can only be an aid to empowerment by asserting that political awareness. The poem both reveals the staggering historical weight behind the radicals' political claims and reveals social reality itself as a *political* reality of competing power groups vying for control of the law. The assertion of such a background can only help into effective life the newer, more closely organised, demands that must accrue with the creation of a proletarian class by an Industrial Revolution and emphasise that the working class's involvement in the control of their own lives has a very considerable and substantial history. This poem, then, seeks to unify the aesthetic cause of poetic composition with the need for a fully active historical consciousness based upon the law of the land and its constitutional evolution, but it can't do them together. This poem is hardly a poem at all, beyond its attempt to look like one, and it reads as a slogan, a

rallying call. However crude the distinction between the aesthetic and political can be seen to be here, it does embody an issue that has followed politicised literature ever afterwards, namely the relationship between fiction as art and fiction as political ideology. This poem embodies in a simple way the tensions that can occur between art and ideology and that can find themselves, in more complex and extended literary works, embedded into the very structure of the work itself, causing stresses, fault lines and contradictions, themselves providing valuable clues to political problems inherent in literary production.

This poem's insistence upon distinct historical and social placement for literature, thus revealing and insisting upon literature's political nature, can be seen to equally pronounced effect in 'A Simple Story' published by the English Chartist Circular in 1841. The story occupies three columns of printed space, with one entire column taken up with a lengthy explanation of the 'purpose' of writing the story. The narrator begins:

How little of the patient endurance of misery, the real benevolence of heart, and generosity of action, of the toil worn portion of the community is known by the more favoured children of fortune, or the votaries of pleasure. Nor shall we be surprised at this ignorance for this inattention to the virtues of the poor, when we consider that the literary works of the day, are mostly produced and conducted by individuals classically educated, and are written expressly for that class

who alone are able to purchase them.¹⁴

The passage introduces a piece of literary criticism disclaiming the limitation of literature and the aesthetic project generally, as seen above, in which those who own society also lay claim to be the only arbiters of universal values when what they produce is clearly limited by their social and ideological market. The writer then goes on to claim that as a result of this power and its political realisation in the 'assize courts and magisterial examination' with the law of the land in the hands of the propertied, there exists in the mind of the superficial observer:

. . . a strong propensity to associate the ideas of crime, folly and ignorance, with those of labour, manufactories, mills and working population, and scarcely ever do many think of the one without the other rushing into the mind. (Eng. Chart. Circ. No.16, vol.1, 1841)

In addition, while crimes are indiscriminately attributed to the working classes the virtues they possess are '...unobtrusive, and practiced in circles that men of letters but seldom enter...'
(Eng. Chart. Circ. No. 16, Vol.1, 1841)

The consciousness of a literature, therefore, is constituted by its social and economic setting; middle-class writers have not depicted and cannot depict, the life of the working classes. They do not belong to that world and

¹⁴ English Chartist Circular, No.16, vol.1, May 1841, p.62, concluding No.17, vol.1, p.66

therefore cannot faithfully record its multiplicity, and are prejudiced against its values and actions by a clearly political partiality:

. . . whenever sketches are given of the poor in any literary periodical, it is generally the composition of some clever, irresistible humorist seeking to raise, it may be, a good natured smile, or even a broad grin at provincialism; the peculiar habits and usage of trade, the eccentricities of individuals remarkable in some other mode than their poverty, but how rarely do we hear of the benevolence, the active sympathy, or charities of the poor? (Eng. Chart. Circ. No.16, Vol.1, 1841)

There is only one way in which such an inequitable situation, such an 'erroneous notion' can be countered, the writer argues:

it is necessary that some of the artisan's own class should devote a portion of time and talent in detailing a few of the occurrences daily taking place in every large manufacturing district throughout the country. Occurrences that may with propriety be published and contrasted with the darkest pictures that have hitherto been laid before the public, and which may bear comparison with the brightest actions of any class or age, without fear of suffering in consequence. (Eng. Chart. Circ. No.16, Vol.1, 1841)

There must, then, be a literature of the working classes, by the working classes, expressing and elucidating their own consciousness. That consciousness is not to be seen as something separate from their daily working concerns but based squarely upon the realities of their lives. It would, the writer claims, bear comparison with any literature.

In this opening passage of explanatory introduction, the writer emphasises the significance of the experience of working people and rejects the assumption that it is somehow subordinate to the experience of the wealthy. This introduction functions as a piece of clear-sighted literary criticism which emphasises the connection between literature and politics and which clearly urges a consciously political literature to counteract the effects of a 'previously' hegemonic literature pretending to universality while being ideologically partial, through and through.

It should be noted that the author argues his case in humanist terms, 'benevolence', 'generosity', rather than strictly political/ideological and economic terms, but this does not detract from the political fundamentals of his argument and it is of great significance that he begins, consciously, to use the term 'class' to define and denote his constituency. He knows whose side he is on. In addition, there is implied a very close relationship between literary criticism and literature, both having as their aim the radical reappraisal of society and its aesthetic articulation of itself - setting ever its universal concepts into a distinct social and political context.

The story itself concerns hunger. A young boy, working in a factory will not admit through pride, that he and his family are hungry until he becomes desperate. When he finally admits their condition his workmates, grown men, his superiors, without hesitation give him food. In part 2 of the story the boy arrives at work late, having been missed for some time. He is at first chided for his tardiness until it is discovered that once given the food he immediately went home to share it with his hungry family. Upon realising this, his workmates accumulate even more food and send the boy home with it to his family. The men then briefly discuss their own knowledge of unemployment and poverty. The story closes with the narrator informing us of the boy's death, three years after this incident, from malnutrition, together with the ironic remark that 'it was said by neighbours that he died in a decline.' (Eng Chart. Circ. No.16, Vol.1, 1841)

The narrative consciousness of the story deliberately denies an absolute individualism and places itself and the story's events within a collective historical setting, away from a traditional bourgeois model of the self, toward the idea of groups as characterised by political and economic identity, and of responsibility toward that group. The meaning of this story cannot, therefore, be divorced from its politics. The generosity of the working men is an act of political connectedness. It can be viewed in humanist terms, but can also be seen symbolically, as a form of class solidarity and identity: the more so as no outside consciousness is presenting these actions and meanings. Yet the desire to be the 'dealers out' (ibid.) clearly indicates the need to be active agents in their own lives; to no longer be merely subject to the power and political decisions of others but to be themselves in a position to determine

their own world. No direction or means of political action is advocated, though class identity is strongly implied. The uncertainty in the story between clearly political and humanist terminology suggests a piece written at a time of considerable change in the working class: the formation of such a class at all, and a subsequent mapping of the working-class consciousness, both how it saw the world and how it understood itself.

'A Simple Story' highlights the validity of working-class action and of working-class consciousness, of the whole world of a class hitherto denigrated and/or simplified into one faceless, though threatening, mass. While the protagonists in the story belong to the same class and at crucial moments act as a class, nonetheless they also reveal varieties of identity within that class. Joe is a young boy always available for chastisement/punishment within the workplace should he behave in a manner deemed unfitting by his workmates and is even beaten by one of them for returning to work late, on suspicion of negligence. No pat ideological definition of event or character is presented here, indeed it is a story deliberately written *against* such generalising about class from a middle class viewpoint. What this story really constitutes is an attempt to legitimise both a working-class consciousness arising out of a distinct historical experience, and a working-class literature as a continuing index to that consciousness in development.

A movement toward the more extensive novel form from the folk tale can be seen in the many printings of traditional stories with a political message. During the 1840s several versions of William Tell were published, the hero symbolising relevant political perspectives and actions. The version discussed

here, William Tell, or Switzerland Delivered¹⁵ by the Chevalier de Florian was published in the English Chartist Circular between September 1842 and February 1843. It can be seen as an attempt to merge the experience of the common people into a novel form, to achieve an increased complexity of social consciousness and to attempt the deliberate articulation of conscious social action, not merely passive response to given circumstances. Its printing in the Chartist Circular clearly emphasises its contemporary relevance for stimulating popular political action in support of the Charter and the political aspirations of its advocates.

As with the 'The Chartist Return to the Income Tax', and 'A Simple Story', there is an extra textual dimension to de Florian's 'William Tell' in the form of an introduction, which connects 'the name of Tell, with those of Wallace, Hampden and others'. (Eng. Chart. Circ. No91, 1842) This, therefore, is not a new story; it is one of great familiarity, but far from breeding contempt, this is a point of advantage. It lends the story a power of tradition: an alternative political tradition of the power of ordinary people to claim and to achieve their full democratic rights. Part of the purpose of this introduction is to reveal how the official and legitimised law of the land is in fact arbitrary and illegitimate, and that to disobey the law can be an act of moral and political rectitude:

To resist...such robbery...To check the tyrant, to vindicate the sacred rights of humanity, and to free their country, was the

¹⁵ Chevalier de Florian, William Tell or Switzerland Delivered, The English Chartist Circular, vol.2, No. 91-

glorious aim of Tell and his companions. (ibid. no. 91, vol. 2, 1842)

In consequence, the hero figure is man who does not obey the law of the land but owes his allegiance to values higher than arbitrary law. They are presented largely as humanist values (the sacred rights of humanity) but in practice, the novel itself clearly identifies these values with a particular group (a moralised peasantry) with distinct needs and values. Here a certain species of primitive communism is implied: a tight-knit community with clearly delegated and permanent responsibilities, and with social duties clearly identified.

Plot summary is hardly necessary in what is effectively a public narrative. The story is replete with exclamation marks and such heightened rhetoric as 'brethren', 'uncivilised clime', 'the rods of the oppressor', and 'rights, sacred and inalienable'. Such terminology attempts to invoke a heightened sense of importance that its familiarity forbids, while individual motives become social actions, levered into the enhanced consciousness of the politically conscious and motivated citizen by the very extraordinariness of the language. Melodrama can function as a means of fitting extraordinary responses within conventional parameters. Every situation, no matter how extreme or extraordinary, can be safely controlled if we are able to respond to it with conventional attitudes. William Tell suffers from this weakness: while the apparent urge toward a morally just revolution creates a dynamic within the novel, the characters and relationships remain remarkably static.

Tell himself, typifying the ideal socially responsible and therefore politically active citizen reduces the rest of the Swiss to an amorphous mass, supporting characters in their own drama and as easily led by William as by Gesler. Florian's politics is based less upon ideological conviction than upon what he sees as a reasonable logic in human relations coupled with the morality of social responsibility and the standards of humanism, though the emphasis here is upon social action rather than inspiration, action including violence when in a just cause. It is just this need for action in dire circumstances that demands the elevation and intensification of consciousness so evident in the language.

The communities that Tell represents are all but Edenic, having 'preserved those simple manners which the Creator of the world gave at first to man'. (Eng. Chart. Circ. No. 91, vol.2, 1842). They existed in a state of 'happy obscurity' (Eng. Chart. Circ. No.91, vol.2, 1842) and seem to have escaped history altogether:

This people, simple and virtuous, almost forgotten or unknown to the world, remained alone with Nature, protected by their poverty, continued to be good, and were as yet unpunished. (Eng. Chart. Circ. No.91, vol.2, 1842)

What follows, what they are forced into through the barbarities of arbitrary law and despotic power without moral restraint, is nothing less than a political history lesson. They are not in Eden and cannot remain innocent; they are involved in political relationships and must act accordingly. This situation

demands a real change in political self-awareness, hence the urgency of the language and characterisation.

The resulting battle over and won, Tell, we discover, is not merely the strong leader who arrives at the right time to save the community; he is of it and returns to it at the end, refusing the offer of leadership, advising the people against the 'blind adoration' of those who had attained liberty. Rather, Tell wants 'to enjoy that equality that charm, so pure, so dear to true republicans. In a republic, my friends, we are all useful'. (Eng. Chart. Circ. No. 111, vol. 2, 1843) Throughout the novel the collective rural and agrarian basis for all honourable social conduct is stressed against the corruption and fragmentation of such values, the possibility of the oligarchic powers, as represented by the city, Altdorf.

Tell thus represents the continuity of such communal values and not the fragmentation of them into an individualist consciousness. Florian wants the reader to see Tell not as an exception to human qualities and abilities but as a representation of them, albeit in heightened form. Thus Tell does not perform the role of the aggressive dominating individual, but that of the social man, with family, friends, neighbours, community and country, who remains firmly within that context at all times, and whose abilities are enhanced by dire need. This enhancement and the elevated language throughout the novel indicate a lack of confidence in the common people as they are and have been and an awareness that a fundamental change in condition must be experienced for them to realise, in both senses of the term, their full political and social identity through taking power. Thus while certain

elements of the novel, its exotic setting, emotional appeal and heightened rhetorical style could be deemed diverting, it constitutes an attempt to present political ideas and the need for a more mature, more urgent political consciousness in a manner that avoided political diatribe. While we might find the absence of realism a limitation, the work hardly offers escapism, intellectually speaking.

Part Three: Ernest Jones: Two Historical Romances

Louis James has shown that while the working class in early Victorian England were avid readers, there was a noticeable decline in the popularity of overtly political writing in the 1840s as a result of the failure of the 1832 Reform Bill to secure rights for the working class, and, by the mid 1840s, the apparent failure of the Chartist movement to secure either parliamentary reform or substantial social change through radical action. He also notes the influence of the Romantic movement between 1815 and 1840, which 'was helping to turn the appetite for the strange and wonderful into new channels'.¹⁶

Romantic poetry was in fact one of the most consistently profitable lines of publication to lower class publishers at this time, catering as it did for both intellectual and political interests. (ibid.)

Some elements in the popularity of Romantic fiction make it ultimately an uncomfortable vehicle for radical political fiction. While the radicalism of the Romantic hero was attractive it also tended to produce idealised human types and therefore to suggest an essentialist model for the human self, rather than an historically determinant one. There would always remain a very powerful recourse to transcendent origins for value, to magical realities, to mystery and the supernatural. This in turn led to the possibility of the depiction of static social relations through the creation and perpetuation of stereotypical

¹⁶ Louis James, Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p.73.

characters and behaviour patterns.

Largely without formal literary alternatives, political activist and Chartist leader Jones tried to use the popularity of the romance not to divert consciousness from daily political life, but to reconcile the heightened awareness and stimulated imagination of romance with an enhanced and active political consciousness. The crux of his ultimate failure is that he conjoined a newly emergent political awareness with a dying literary mode - the romance being rapidly superseded by the realist novel. The problem Jones faced was clear and acute. As a political leader (a prominent Chartist, jailed for his political activities 1848-50) he needed to represent a connecting consciousness adequate to the advocacy of the group he both represented and led. At the same time no such consciousness was fully formed to be assumed readily into fiction. Without an established historical reality to draw upon, Jones was inevitably involved in drawing that reality and what better than to draw upon those literary forms most popular with the working class? It is this involvement with form and consciousness that I want to investigate in two of his novels, A Romance of the People¹⁷ and Confessions of a King¹⁸, both published in The Labourer during 1847 and 1848.

In the first of these novels, the attempt to depict the political turmoil going on around him to both entertain and instruct his readers involved certain literary decisions. First, he placed the events of the novel in a distant, though distinctly recognizable, place and fifteen years into the past. This both allowed

¹⁷ Ernest Jones, A Romance of the People, The Labourer, vols 1-2 (London: Northern Star Office, 1847) and vol.3 (Manchester: Abel Heywood, Oldham Street, 1848)

him a base upon which to build a dramatised political argument and also gave him a real event (the rise of the Poles against the Russians in 1831) to draw upon and an event in which the popular rising was successful. Second, he presents a revolutionary consciousness in process rather than in completion – history is not a 'given' to be inherited passively; we must be involved in making it. Third and last, he produced a method of writing which seemed to draw upon as many sources as possible to achieve his aim: historical novel, romance, political speech, journalism, melodrama, symbolism, political ideology, all in an attempt to build a fictional/political language representative of an emergent consciousness with a developing ideological intent.

Political awareness as self-realisation is of central significance to Jones. Early in the novel, we are introduced to Wladimir, a Pole living in Russia and the central character, and to the novel's central symbol, a scarf embroidered in Polish national colours that is at first disguised, but is finally worn in triumph. The development of Wladimir's character dramatises the unchaining of the mind and the earning of the scarf, which is the symbol of the connecting consciousness. The potential victory of the Poles in the novel is fraught with ambiguity, and the human relationships are really relations-in-progress, working towards independence and identity rather than suggestive of completion. Despite the setting, the Chartist experience is clearly the inspiration for this historical dramatization and its political arguments.

This sense of the incomplete has important connotations for the political and aesthetic thrust of the novel. As the narrative makes clear:

¹⁸ Ernest Jones, *Confessions of a King*, *Notes to the People*, vols 1-2, 1850-52

tyranny does not often appear in its full deformity;--it has the beautiful at its command to mask its hideousness; the birth fascinations of life are gathered manifold around it:--music mingles with the death-groan on the battlefield; carnage turns to glory, by a touch of chivalry; slavery assumes the name of gallant devotion; cruelty slinks behind the flowing robes of priestcraft; and despotism takes the awful semblance of divine delegation. Thus, once within its vortex, the eyes of inexperience are blinded,--and we may hardly wonder that the young, the ardent and the honest, should fall into the snare. (Romance, vol.1, p.264)

Power is able to manipulate the appearance of fact and value and to commodify the realities it manipulates for reader consumption. One of Jones's aims is to raise this awareness in his readers and so he sets himself the task of writing an iconoclastic novel that avoids becoming too easy a commodity itself.

Jones's novel, albeit crude in form, is an attempt to question the way we see reality; to question the nature of the human subject and from a clearly political perspective. To do the former Jones chooses a specifically historical subject and includes both fictional and historical information in the novel. To do the latter he asks us to digest the material made thus available, not merely to enjoy a good story, but to understand the political consequences lying behind the immediate action. Again, such choices of rhetoric can be seen as an attempt to stress the class-based identity of the political effort and the significance of

the individual in that context as an actor, an agent in the process of bringing about real social change, engaging in an effort that demands a heightened response and cannot be maintained in repose. What Jones is attempting to reveal, through the melodrama of romance, is the consciousness of an oppressed group beginning to realise its own identity both intellectually and practically, and to demand independent expression for it.

The growth of Wladimir's character is really the fullest index to the consciousness in development. At the novel's opening Wladimir is described as:

Frank, fiery and impetuous there was a heart in the breast of Wladimir, that might make him a hero or an outlaw, might lead him to glory or to shame. Many a noble impulse was harboured within it; framed for the great, it lacked the gentle. His talents were high, but they wanted guidance; his generosity was profusion; his valour was daring, yet, at times, the wayward scornfulness of his nature made him overlook insults, many a man, less brave, would have resented. (Romance, vol. 1, p.28)

Such naïveté needs only the correct challenge to focus it more constructively. After some years forced conscription into the Russian army, Wladimir is tempted by a Russian Princess with sexual and emotional appeals, and intellectual and political debate. She points out that Wladimir's position in Russia is much better than it would have been in Poland where his only freedom would have been the freedom to be, and remain, a serf. She points out, and in

so doing produces an important moment of realisation in Wladimir, that his class position in Poland, dominated by its aristocracy, is no better than in the Russia that his patriotism so condemns:

Now, serf in Poland! Where is tyranny? Now, freeman in Russia!
Where is slavery? (Romance, vol.1, p.218)

Wladimir allows this argument to sway him and to persuade him that his hatred of class-based (aristocratic) government in Poland was his main enemy:

he fell into the error into which democracy has so often fallen, of choosing the lesser out of the two evils --[sic] oligarchy and monarchy instead of rejecting either as a worthless mockery of common sense (Romance, vol.1, pp.266-7)

Here Wladimir's failing is our instruction. He eventually comes to see the error of his ways and, refusing to fight against his countrymen, takes rightful possession of the scarf of Poland.

With the novel remaining unfinished, the final fate of Wladimir is uncertain and divisions within Poland, most particularly the role of the aristocracy, threaten the chances of ultimate Polish victory:

Thus the insane pride and selfish passions of the aristocracy were ruining the strength of the insurrection at the very outset.
(Romance, vol.1, pp.29)

The lesson for Chartism is clear, the Chartist issue is a class-based politics that

is also of great national significance, that what is at stake is no less than the national, and international, future of England and the British Isles. The options are either a real move toward democracy and a form of government based upon the needs and desires of the common people (with the working class as the most vocal, most powerful and most authoritative voice), or a move toward greater oligarchy and a reduction of democratic government. An insurrection abroad can be a valuable political lesson at home as Jones makes abundantly clear in Chapter IV of this novel. While the cause of Polish independence became a cause célèbre among the upper classes in England, their government in Westminster refused to give open support or commit itself and for obvious political reasons:

But they *did* say, (in secret however,) if we bestir ourselves for Poland, then Russia may cry, "Ireland!" to our teeth; and as we *have* tyrannised, and do tyrannise, and intend still further to tyrannise over the *latter* country, we had best not say a word about the *former*. (Romance, vol. 3, p.80)

The significance of the Polish insurrection lies in what it implies for politics on an international scale. Jones then widens his focus to 1830s Europe:

England did stir--France rose--Italy shook itself in sleep--Spain rallied, and Germany spoke in its dreams. England gained Reform, and found it nothing, France achieved liberty, and after three days lost it! Italy struggled, and is bleeding now, and Germany awoke with the memories of its hopes! Spain alone attained

something, for it expelled the Inquisition; thus, the foulest went first for the crime of him is light, who fetters the body, to that of him, who would enchain the mind. (Romance, vol.3, p.82)

It is just such an unchaining of the mind that constitutes the basic purpose of Jones' literary efforts. The Polish insurrection, while important in itself, is also a fictional opportunity to emphasise the political possibilities of the working class. The Romance also emphasises the ideological value of drama with its stimulating and emotive qualities when geared toward politically educative ends; especially when supported and guided by the legitimising role of 'real' history, even though, or perhaps especially when, it is not the 'official' version. Jones uses the romance to add a political dimension to working-class literature, and to clarify the identity of working-class thought as inherently political when it breaks hegemonic models and power relations, both intellectual and physical, and begins to recognise itself for what and who it really is and might become.

Confessions of a King is a dystopian romance, a romance that proves its own undoing. Using first-person narration throughout, this novel exposes the consciousness of a young man born into dire poverty who leaves home to seek fame and fortune and who does indeed achieve enormous wealth and power, but only at the cost of becoming deeply corrupted before ending his days destitute.

Louis James notes the shift in English life that took place during the first forty years of the nineteenth century: the change from a rural to an urban society. He emphasises the creation of a protracted period of fragmentation of rural culture by the new town life without there having developed an identifiable

urban culture to supersede it.¹⁹ In Jones's novel we can see something of this. While educated and socialised out of his peasant rural heritage, our young man cannot truly be re-socialised into a new social setting; the circumstances of his birth are too determining a factor to allow for total social mobility. Unable to come to terms with the rules of the society he has moved into, he falls victim to them and obtains social preferment by compromises that engender hatred in him for the power systems he confronts. As a result, and by means of his social advancement, he determines to accumulate power to defeat those *in power*. In attempting to play them at their own game, he, of course, ultimately becomes as corrupt as they are. Political power now has no end but itself. He begins to calculate his moves and strategies not on the basis of conviction or responsibility but on brutal acquisition.

He supports a popular rising against the king, then having supplanted him, viciously compromises a genuine democratic leader. His motivations lose all purpose, aim or meaningful identity. The historical placement of the self has vanished and we are left with a mind with no sense of place, with no value system, no connecting relationships, no culture or ideology. It represents the supreme isolation of the Romantic concept of self as one radically dehistoricised, but devoid of all transcendent value. The individual mind is no longer protean and able to represent ideas and values superior to the everyday. At this point he reaches the apogee of his power. He manipulates his people by pretence of championing democracy, but his triumphs are short-lived. He loses the support of powerful allies until only the common people are left, and Jones' readers cannot have found this attitude toward them surprising or particularly

¹⁹ Louis James, Fiction for the Working Man, pp. 28-44

new:

The people only were now left; but I felt I could control them by the hand of force. I felt it was vain to attempt conciliating them for I knew they could never be prosperous so long as I ground them to the dust by an aristocracy, a church establishment, a funded interest, pension list and court, supported by a vast taxation and upheld by a costly army and police. (Confessions, vol. 3, p.42)

The only outcome of this apparent consolidation of power is a greater sense of isolation, and fear of defeat and death from attack or assassination: '...the conqueror of nations was but a fugitive flying from himself'. (ibid. p.43) Further power intrigues lead to his ordering the murder of his wife; guilt at this act results in increasing superstition and a rapid decline into withering old age.

The novel offers the reader little by way of verisimilitude. Although we can guess that most of the action takes place somewhere in Italy between warring states, its location remains unclear. As a result, the causal context remains undefined and the relationships in the novel remain abstracted from concrete possibilities. From this, the work builds a magical quality throughout: symbolic characters move in and out of the narrative conveying a vaguely supernatural significance rather than an historical function, their abstraction rendering them disoriented in a novel of apparent radical political intent. Such a narrative structure and style clearly militates against a radical politics with its necessary dimension of historically specific causalities. The young man is first persuaded

to leave home by a mystical character called The Merchant (usually capitalised) who possesses supernatural qualities which are never explained and yet represents crucial causal developments in the action of the novel and the behaviour of the characters. The decision to leave home brings with it disorientation, impotence, isolation, power without value, and bloody chaos. The romance can no longer be a romance. For Jones, transcendentalism brings no solutions, it simply makes bad worse. Without history and without social and political purpose there can be no human identity and no viable world.

The novel is a political lesson integrated with elements of the romance, the melodrama and the historical novel. Jones is attempting here to present lessons concerning the consciousness of arbitrary power, its mental fragility, its ritualistic identity, its violent desperation. The moral is of course a warning not to respect arbitrary government that resists democracy at every turn and to beware of tyrannical government wherever it comes from and whatever it claims to be.

Ultimately, however, it must be concluded that the form of this novel is simply not adequate to the demands of its attempted content. There is no real interplay between class ideologies at any level, no complex relational sense at all. This gives the novel the sense of being radically undeveloped and politically immature. Political actions seem to be self-enclosed activities with simple rather than complex causes and results - the effect being a linear sequence of cause and effect rather than a more sophisticated pattern of hegemonic interplay at both the practical and the mental levels. As a result, it is unclear exactly where the novel leaves us. There can be no persuasive resolution when a

distinct set of relational problems has not been created and worked through with dramatised analysis. No historical conclusions have been drawn in a work apparently dedicated to condemning the ahistorical. Jones does seem to be leaning heavily toward a materialist conception of history, but here he is relying upon literary forms that imply transcendent origins for meaning and value and thus his efforts are always compromised. Using a popular literary form has constrained Jones's capacity to contravene its limitations for his political purposes.

Yet the very chaos of its construction is not without significance. Written at the same time as other, middle-class, novelists were becoming concerned about the 'condition of England' question, but without their middle-class ideology to sustain him, and given the political failure of the Chartist movement to produce radical social and political change, it is hardly surprising that Jones should reflect social and political relations as an endless round of bloody battles, repressions, famines, brutalities, political intrigues, politically expedient murders and secret plots. The world was, in a sense unconstituting itself and no reconstitution seemed possible.

The first-person narration does echo the Romantic lyric, but the single voice here represents no totality of meaning. For Jones, the monologue bears witness to a world in which totality is impossible except as a temporary act of political brutality. The narrator longs for a community that he has renounced, and for a sense of totality that remains permanently beyond his scope either mentally or practically. If it were possible for meaninglessness to have a form, this may be it. An inherited Romantic subjectivity as a unifying force is no

longer available: the events of the class struggle between 1817 and 1847 have been too much for it.

This novel while not representing an adequate form in itself argues the impossibility of literary form without distinct historical placement and suggests class alignment as a strong orientation: both indicating a move toward realism. The impossibility of adequate form here becomes direct evidence of the dissonance of social and political relations, not as resolution of that dissonance but as its revelation. Given structures of meaning are no longer more than temporary states, either overthrowing or about to be overthrown. There are no longer absolute traditions, only a conflict of class and social conflict made visibly public. The world as homogenised social/political totality, as organic entity, is gone; alienation is an historical reality. A traditional form of human subjectivity lies condemned, in need of redefinition and replacement.

Jones uses conventional forms, but the results are not conventional. Normality is not confirmed: the world is not left stable, the fate of the central figure and narrator is not known, nor does the novel's closing present adequate closure to reorientate the reader. Neither the function nor identity of *The Merchant* is interpreted or explained, nor is his future known. These are all disruptive elements in a disruptive text which while not roundly and smoothly articulating inter-class relations within a single process of signification, does represent a form or forms of broken articulation representative of class relations during a specific historical matrix: a materialist articulation that helps us toward a political definition of textual representation.

Part Four: Two Novels About Chartism

Gustav Klaus and Martha Vicinus have both argued that perhaps the most fully developed of Chartist novels are Thomas Martin Wheeler's Sunshine and Shadow, a Tale of the Nineteenth Century²⁰, serialised in the Northern Star, and Ernest Jones's unfinished novel De Brassier: A Democratic Romance²¹, serialised in Notes to the People between 1850 and 1852.

Both writers point out the historical timing of these novels which coincide with the decline of the Chartist movement, and their similarity in having Chartism as a movement (though not mentioned by name in Jones's novel) as their central subject. In addition, certain critical themes dominate their response to the novels. Martha Vicinus emphasises the presence of contemporary factors such as Romance and melodrama in the structure of these novels and their preventing a fuller development of the working-class novel of the day. Such structures, she argues, prevent the novels from demonstrating methods of, or opportunities for, social change:

oppression and ignorance are so powerful in the novels that the reader is uncertain about the possibility of revolution. When the processes of change are shown, such as rioting and burning, they are fearsome and destructive of the people's cause. Melodramatic interventions beyond the control of the

²⁰ Thomas Martin Wheeler, Sunshine and Shadow, Northern Star and National Trades Journal (Leeds: November 1844-March 1852), vol. xii, No.597, March 31st 1849, to vol. xiii, No.637. January 5th 1850

²¹ Ernest Jones, De Brassier: A Democratic Romance, Notes to the People, (London: Ernest Jones, 1851-

heroes only reinforce the hegemony of the ruling class.²²

She also claims that Romance and melodrama were, as forms, over-conservative and too rigid to carry the political weight that was demanded of them by the Chartists. Klaus reached similar conclusions by viewing the historical predilections of the Chartist novel as a form of 'structural defeat':

...the fact that the novel can now encompass Chartism... is the surest indication that the movement is in decline. For in order for it to be able to do so, certain conditions must obtain, particularly as far as the protagonists are concerned. The movement needs to be in all essentials reviewable, relatively complete and historically as close as possible. Only thus can it become the objective of aesthetic reflection.²³

While such conclusions are not in error they do suggest a critical response brought about by the imposition of a binary concept of criticism. By this I mean the understanding of fiction as two separate entities, content and form, artificially and unsuccessfully forced together. Gustav Klaus does something very similar with the historical consciousness of the day and its evidence in journalism, contrasted with the attempt at fiction writing. However, a different approach to the project of literary Chartism may, without radically altering a view of the literature as limited, find more complex reasons for its reassessment and its significance for an English literary tradition. My analysis

52, facsimile: (London: Merlin Press, 1967), 2 vols

²² Martha Vicinus, in H. Gustav Klaus, (ed.) The Socialist Novel in Britain, p. 22

will focus upon specific ways in which the effort to account for new and changing realities produced a radical questioning of the forms used to convey this information, thus producing new forms in the process. These changes were wrought not in tidy and easily measurable ways, but using methods both deliberate and unconscious which articulated the conflicts being waged in the world of this literature's making.

The title of Thomas Martin Wheeler's novel Sunshine and Shadow is indicative of the method and structure. For just over half of the novel's length Wheeler compares and contrasts definitions of the self and of social reality; of inter-class relations and of literary representations of human relationships. He does so in order to evaluate them critically in the light of real social crisis and to investigate the possibility of a new human subject in society and history and new forms for the representation of that subject. From Chapter XXI to the end of the novel we are presented with a firmer, though not completely successful, advocacy of such a subject in acknowledgement of the defeat of the Chartist movement. Protagonist Arthur Morton's search for identity through the novel and his behaviour when he has discovered it parallel the historical emergence of an authentic working class with a developing ideology of its own, and the simultaneous possibility and capacity for articulating this emergence.

The plot of the novel has been adequately dealt with by Klaus and Vicinus and need not be laboriously repeated here. When we first meet Arthur as an independent character it is as a devourer of books but, significantly, as a

²³ H Gustav Klaus, The Literature of Labour, p.55

reader of romances:

. . . books became to him what society is to boys more advantageously situated; in them his whole delight was centered, they were the only medium through which he could give vent to his affections, and many a hot tear did he shed over the woes of the Madelines and Rosinas, the Algernons and the Aubreys, of the romances which adorned his uncle's scanty and ill-selected library. (Northern Star No.599, April 14th 1849, p.3)

But this urge toward the emotions, this susceptibility to affectation, does not provide the circumference of his character:

yet he was not altogether a dreamer; there was in him, young as he was, sufficient of the iron of human nature to give something of a practical character to his most dreary reveries, and give promise that if hammered on the harsh anvil of human adversity it would emit sparks dangerous not only to his own safety but to the safety of others. (Northern Star No.599 Apr. 7th 1849, p.3)

We are not presented with a romantic concept of the organic or essential self with its protean imagination, nor with a Lockean blank to be written on by experience. Rather we have a human subject born into specific social

circumstances conditioned though not completely determined by them. It is a world that seems unsatisfactory to his young mind:

His character was fast maturing--he was emerging from the part of a dreamer to that of worker. But a want was still growing in his heart. He was alone in the midst of a crowd--he longed to have some definite object to do, some satisfactory employment for his mind. (Northern Star No. 600, Apr 21st, 1849, p.3)

On Arthur's first move into London we are introduced to the contrasts between urban and rural living. The compactness of the city throws together people who in rural areas would live more separated lives:

Each passing moment introduces new actors in the scene; now the monarch great in high-sounding titles, next the infected courtesan, the titled lordling, and the adept in crime--the millionaire and the starving artisan--the Christian bishop and the atheist priest. (Northern Star, No.601, Apr 28th, 1849, p.3)

It is a city in which Arthur becomes effectively outcast. He begins to make connections and to extend his knowledge of social and economic relations, which are starkly man-made with observable interest groups at their base;

they are neither natural nor inevitable. The pain of city life has one advantage in that nothing is hidden. Significantly, Arthur is not merely a viewer but is centrally involved in the economies of city life by the simple but effective means of having no money. In Chapter 5 Wheeler virtually displaces all characters with a diatribe against the economic and political injustices that such a city as London represents.

Such authorial intrusions can be seen as burdening the novel with too much telling and not enough showing, but really they belong to a didactic tradition in English literature which predates the novel form (the sermon, the tract). In addition, such utterances, by breaking the surface of the text quite forcefully indicate a lack of ideological closure, indicating locations of overlap and interrelation between values that the writer finds it difficult to dramatise. A novel produced at a time of great social fomentation is unlikely to possess a fixed form but rather becomes an arena for the interplay of forms seeking adequate expression for its subject matter. Wheeler is extending the potential for the novel, not merely as a vehicle, a fixed structure which can be used to convey certain ideas, but as a flexible index to social and political, personal and psychological experience. True, the weakest parts of the work are those sections in which we are told what particular characters are thinking when a much more fully developed working of their motives and actions might be revealed through dramatic exposition, but that does not rule out the authorial voice as an effective instrument. In real terms the drama of the novel is the possibility of its own attempt; the growing awareness of a truly viable working-class protagonist who cannot be a hero of romance with its ahistorical assumptions of an 'essential' consciousness, but with a new kind

of subjectivity. Yet, neither can he have a given place in society as this would suggest too great a sense of determinism and infer the impossibility of social change, or suggest a society in which he was and could remain an unproblematically identified member, unlikely for a political radical at such an historical juncture.

Arthur, in the early part of the novel becomes essentially de-classed as a result of his being abandoned by Walter North. His subsequent fortune is to become an outcast, a part of the underclass of unemployed poor. Unable to find work, Arthur swallows his pride and decides to appeal for help to an uncle who had been anything but welcoming on Arthur's first arrival in London. His uncle, the one person who might have helped him materially and made his transition to London unproblematic, is absent, while the young servant girl left in charge of the house, despite her poverty, shares her food with Arthur and, on his leaving, not only gives him more food to take with him, but wraps up a shilling with it: a real sacrifice. The emphasis quietly placed here gives a clear indication of the need for an independent class understanding, a putative ideology, for working people, and for the achievement of political power through their own efforts and organisation; not through reliance upon the actions of others.

Arthur reaches Birmingham, where he discovers a coherent articulation of his half-formed desires in Chartism:

Seven years had passed since that eventful period in England's history. The men of Birmingham--the men of

England--had discovered they had been made tools in the hand of the Whigs and their bourgeois supporters, and defrauded of all share of the spoils of the dead carcass of Toryism; and in order to obtain from Whig fear what justice and gratitude should have been have immediately granted, they had banded together from north to south--from John O'Groats to Land's End--in one vast combination, to agitate for their political rights, and had embodied those rights in a document called the People's Charter. (Northern Star, No. 605, May 26th, 1849, p.3)

It is at exactly this point that Arthur arrives in Birmingham where fortune smiles upon him and he finds employment in his old trade of printing, in an establishment whose proprietor is a strong advocate of Chartist principles. Hitherto, Arthur has been seen as an individual without a social context to which he might adhere and with which he might identify. This move constructs a way for literature and politics to be articulated together. Arthur, through his acquaintance with and growing involvement in the Chartist movement, discovers a method of analysis and identity that does represent both his present self and his aspirations that are not merely his but belong to a large group: the whole working class. Such a form of identity is not individual in the sense of singular, but in the more traditional sense of 'not to be separated'. Arthur's new sense of political self-hood has its constitutive basis in an emergent state; it is not something achieved immediately, whole. It is a process, a combination of action, experience and intellectual analysis of the

social and political relations around him. Thus the human self (and by extension the literary representative self) defined by such political force, is a locus of social and political forces rather than an individualist concept. Indeed Arthur's self now rapidly becomes a public one as he becomes more openly involved in Chartist activities.

When accommodated by members of the National Convention with a seat on the platform at the meeting a new and public self comes, not without difficulty, to the surface:

The spirit of the time and hour were burning within his veins. A feeling of suffocation pervaded his frame. Unknowing what he did, and scarce conscious of his own identity; he sprang to the centre at the close of one the speakers' harangues, and casting a glance of fire on the agitated and troubled mass of human beings below him, gave utterance to the pent-up feeling of years, and poured forth such a torrent of fervid eloquence that the excited myriads before him were spell bound with the potent charm. (Northern Star, No. 606, June 2nd, 1849, p.3)

It is notable that the public emergence is made possible when Arthur is scarcely conscious of his personal identity. His individual self had now become subsumed into a collective sense of self. As Wheeler makes it clear: 'All sense of individuality is annihilated - the unit is lost in the mass'. (Northern Star,

No.606, June 2nd, 1849, p.3)

Unfortunately we are not given the speech as Arthur gave it, we are merely told of its eloquence, inspiration and potency and the remarkable effect it has in both silencing and inspiring the audience. Wheeler presumably did not include the speech because no speech as written could really live up to the symbolic demands of this particular speech at this moment in the development and emergence of a working-class hero, individual and yet part of the mass, both extraordinary and ordinary. Arthur has 'gone public' in a manner that is irrevocable. He now possesses a platform, both literally and figuratively, for the perpetual achievement of his own involved self, a self, but a self that cannot be completed, as the socialist self must remain incomplete until socialism itself is achieved.

As a result of his outspoken behaviour at the Convention, Arthur is pursued by the police and is ultimately forced into exile. He takes a ship to the United States to avoid arrest and avoid punitive transportation. He had viewed the Birmingham Bull Ring riots of 1839 with misgivings. Wheeler has him dedicated to the point of fighting for any measure that might produce political emancipation for the masses of England but makes him see that mere sectional rioting in a spontaneous and thoughtless manner would do nothing to advance the movement.

Arthur's reaching a point of new personal and political maturation results in a public notoriety further resulting in his forced escape. There follows in the novel what has been criticised as a largely unnecessary and unsuccessful

episode: his romance with Julia, his one-time friend Walter's married sister. Martha Vicinus gives the affair scant attention, reducing it to a single paragraph of critical comment dismissive of its 'panting scenes', a gesture toward his reader's 'vicarious sexual satisfaction'.²⁴ She is clearly correct in suggesting that 'their love comes straight from the popular novels of the day' (ibid.) and that Wheeler, largely ignorant of the lives of the aristocracy, was at his weakest when attempting to describe them. The deception apparently practiced by Walter truly is unbelievable, and Julia is little more, regarding character, than the perfect-woman-as-victim common in melodramatic fiction. However, a closer look at this section of the novel also presents us with some of the strengths of Wheeler's writing.

Arthur, the working-class young man does give a member of the aristocracy a lesson in political relations, and despite the wholly inadequate reproduction of Julia as a character and the subsequent woodenness of their relationship, this is nonetheless a very real attempt to equalise the imbalance in social classes that within a more realistic context could never take place.

Julia also functions as something of a sounding board, giving Arthur the opportunity to expound his politics - she argues for a moral aristocracy and for a sympathetic middle class, only to be argued away. The resulting assertion of working-class independence, while long-winded, is a clear step toward ideological formulation. Having so analysed the role, past and present, of the two politically powerful classes, the result is clear for the politics of the

²⁴ Martha Vicinus, 'H, Gustav Klaus (ed.) The Socialist Novel in Britain, p.20

future as Arthur asserts that 'redemption for the working classes must spring from themselves alone, long experience has shown in every instance the credulity of depending upon others' (Northern Star, No. 610, June 30th, 1849, p.3) Wheeler is raising here the possibility of a new intellectual self-confidence on behalf of the working class, through the developed faculty of rational and informed analysis. It is also notable that Wheeler is beginning to introduce metaphors from working-class experience to describe social relationships and personal circumstances. Arthur speaks of the working class and middle class as opposite poles of a battery, and Wheeler describes Julia's future as a 'mingled yarn' that is 'nearly spun' (Northern Star, No. 619, Sept 1st, 1849, p.3).

Arthur's relationship with Julia plays with alternative possibilities and takes advantage of the attractions of romance and melodrama, only to find those avenues ultimately without direction or destination. The aristocracy as represented by Julia and her husband Sir Jasper, and the corrupted middle classes as represented by Walter North, are no longer viable as routes toward full democracy. For Wheeler, only a literate, intelligent, and active working class can be their own saviour. The introduction of metaphors of 'use value' emphasises this shift; a greater confidence in the power and security, economically and culturally, of the working class will be the method of achieving self-recognition and ultimately political power. The working-class subject is becoming a more viable index to and judge of social and political relationships.

At the close of the first section of the book we have been presented with a time of misfortune and hardship that have seen the development of a working class subject, a new kind of subjectivity both in historical relationships and for literature. Wheeler prides himself on the accuracy of his portraits:

We have not plunged into the world of romance for our characters; they are the ideal representatives of known realities - through them we have embodied truths of humanity which ever lie fruitful in the human breast, needing only the action of circumstances to start them into operation. The Chartist world is blessed with many an Arthur Morton. (Northern Star, No. 617, Aug 18th 1849, p.3)

It is with the death of Julia that this self can move into clearer and deeper social and political waters. Julia's function had been to shed light upon Arthur. Wheeler does not possess at this stage a full grasp of what this new subject might be, nor does he concurrently possess the literary skill to reproduce it. His central character is a composite of dimensions pieced together as a mosaic rather than fully interpenetrating proportions of a whole configuration. The working-class subject is still problematic and the replacement of middle-class stereotypes only in its early stages. Wheeler does know, however, which structures must be dismantled and has a good idea of what, in general terms at least, must be put in their place.

Arthur's return from the United States to Liverpool, introduced in chapter

XXV, brings with it a detailed description and analysis of the state of Chartism at the time, 1842, and Arthur disappears from the novel for two full chapters. These chapters, barely fiction at all, have a fictional and ideological framing that gears them to a particular form of persuasiveness. The facts are relevant and important here because they can be seen to affect directly the construction of a representative subjectivity. That Wheeler has consistent difficulty integrating sections of his novel reflects the problematic effort, but the attempt at integrating does reveal the effort to reconcile both class-based ideologically partial realities and the individual experience of them and to recognise this openly and consciously. This failure at integration is countered by Arthur's subsequent marriage to Mary Graham.

The marriage functions as an emotional and social index within a society of which it is not representative and within which it is not represented. This family does not embody the social structure, as does the middle-class family; it stands at the mercy of such a society, an indicator of its class-based partiality. Mary Graham is here quite powerfully indicative of a changing response to the status and behaviour of the working class. Mary, while suffering the privations common to the poor, living beneath the determinisms of an alien society, nevertheless possesses the sense of self, of self-respect, not to succumb to such pressures, but to exert her own pressure back, and to resist those subordinating strictures and structures. She possesses a strong mind and becomes involved in serious political discussion revealing a capacity for reasoning and argument with which 'few men could compare.' (Northern Star, No. 625, Oct. 13th 1849, p.3). The economic and therefore political underpinnings of the relationship between Arthur and Mary are made plain.

We have seen how Arthur's fortunes have fluctuated with his employment prospects and his political activity, and how the economic circumstances of Mary's family have limited her possibilities. Arthur can only propose marriage on the basis of having been 'in constant work for four months'. (Northern Star, No. 626, Oct.20th 1849, p.3).

Their marriage, however, does begin happily, if too daintily to be entirely convincing. They possess numerous books and they also study 'works of a more scholastic character'. (ibid.) Mary sings for Arthur's entertainment, and delight, in the evenings and attends as gladly, and as successfully, to the management of the household as he does to his daily job. Arcadian though this image may be it does represent a significant assertion on the part of Wheeler that there is another side of working-class life waiting to be portrayed. Wheeler is not Gothicising working people, rendering them barbarous or grotesque, nor does he domesticate poverty, making it seem tolerable. It is in just such conscious avoidance of stereotype that the authenticity of his radicalism resides.

However all is not to remain well. The business of Arthur's 'master' fails and Arthur is thrown out of work. He cannot find work during a time of high unemployment and the well-being of himself and his family, both physically and mentally, is threatened. Arthur and his family are forced to move repeatedly, each time to a poorer and more miserable and unhealthy place; the children become sick and the medical care is expensive; they all begin to feel the pangs of real hunger. Mary becomes so weak that she cannot leave her bed, and their oldest son succumbs to the ravages of penury and dies. Yet Wheeler

is not following a completely determinist line on this issue. These circumstances *are* avoidable. In condemning the society that allows such injustices, he also confronts the role of the victim. Averring that the instances of death by hunger are more frequent than usually supposed or officially admitted, he continues: 'Shame to the country that allows it, - shame to the men who permit themselves to fall its victims. (Northern Star, No. 627, Oct. 27th 1849, p.3)

Here Wheeler valorises the alternative, and combative, subjectivity of the working-class poor who do not accept the subordinate condition given to them, who do not accept a fixed definition of class identity and class relation but are prepared to place confidence in their own sense of self and class identity and fight for those rights

guaranteed by English law, but despoiled of its beneficial tendencies by the irresponsible decision of an arbitrary power, new to the annals of British jurisprudence. (Northern Star, No.627, Oct. 27th, 1849, p.3)

As did Ernest Jones, Wheeler is arguing for a restoration of rights under the Common Law, rights observably denied to individuals but now denied to an identifiable class. He goes on to be something of an apologist for active, even violent, behaviour as the only way in which the legitimised institution of society will ever be made to take notice of alternative demands.

Mary again succumbs to illness on being unable to give their son anything but a pauper burial and Arthur is driven almost to insanity, saved only by the needs

of his sick wife. So driven, he attacks a wealthy man who is discussing business with a prostitute and steals money from him. Arthur feels in one sense morally guilty in that he has answered 'criminality' with criminality, but he neither regrets the theft nor fears the consequences. He knows both that he has done the only thing possible to save himself and his family, and feels that he has sinned against society. Arthur's sense of self is in real confusion. Possessing a powerful sense of the self as involved in and with duties and responsibilities to the social whole, Arthur does not have the hermetically sealed sense of individual self that might allow him to steal with impunity. At the same time as he feels his act to be criminal he is desperately angry at the 'crime' society has perpetuated upon himself and his family. This situation is not merely one of degradation through poverty; we are being asked to consider the mental and political implication of such a situation: the self non-existent without social forms for its articulation, subordinated and ostracised by the very society it needs, arguing and articulating political failings in its apparently isolated actions. Such actions, claims Wheeler are

analogous to the blotches thrown outward by the human frame in the efforts to restore the body to a state of health and vigour. This doctrine. . . does not advocate the cause of crime, it merely points out the source from whence it flows; it recognises the man even in the criminal, and points the finger of hope to the future. (Northern Star, No 629, Nov. 10th 1849, p.3)

Morality thus becomes definable as a material quantity rather than a transcendent quality. The morality of an action is determined by its social and political bases, themselves definable as the quality of life produced by the

patterns of social behaviour practiced by its significant groupings, here social and economic classes, as reflecting upon the 'health' of society as a whole. It cannot be socially healthy, socially constructive or successful to have so large a part of its contingent suffering so greatly. In the light of such a reconciliation between humanism and radical action Wheeler, basing his argument upon both traditional rights and the contemporary political action of the Chartist movement, can guide the closing chapters of his novel towards a final repudiation of the apparent conventions of early Victorian bourgeois society, and do so with some contempt:

Boasting of the lights of revelation and philosophy, proclaiming himself an emanation from the Deity, he spreads around himself chaos and confusion. With bitter malignity he seems to delight in heaping evils on his own head and on those of his brethren; the fair world around him he curses with his passions, until he makes it one scene of desolation. He dwells in an atmosphere of corruption, and calls it a metropolis of civilization. . . . He invents laws innumerable, and by his devices renders it impossible for them to be obeyed, in order that he may have the malicious satisfaction of punishing those that break them. He places power in the hands of those whose interest he makes to abuse it. He invents a religion, which professing peace and goodwill, spreads warfare and animosity wherever it penetrates. He delights in war and massacre, and worships it under the guise of patriotism and glory. He denies instruction, yet punishes ignorance. He brutalises his fellows, and then scoffs at their want of refinement. In a word, he makes man a monster, and then shrinks in terror from his own handiwork. (Northern Star, No. 630, Nov. 17th 1849, p.3)

Wheeler is placing the working-class political movement into a wider context

of political and social activity, not to reduce it but to assert its long-term power, its political and moral rectitude, and to confirm ground gained, despite the failure of the Charter. He views the end of the Chartist meeting and the withdrawal in the face of armed troops, as a triumph of determination and organisation, uttering truth in the face of falsehood, and expands the parameter of reference to cover the political movements for radical change in France and Italy seeing in those movements, though they also failed, the honesty of a clear battle with lines drawn. In addition, Arthur is now employed to travel the country to report on the condition of Chartism throughout the land. His first discovery is the extent to which the political influence of wealth has changed life outside of the great metropolis and destroyed even the 'happy retreats' of the countryside:

. . . he could not but observe with regret that the slime of the serpent had penetrated even to those abodes of bliss; society had become so thoroughly vitiated by the long dominant power of wealth, that it was impossible even there to contend successfully against it, unless favoured with more capital than fell to the share of most of the inhabitants of these fairy abodes; and the majority of the occupants had been so trained in the vicious customs of looking to a capitalist for their Sunday's meal, that it needed both mental and physical energy to withstand the evils they had to encounter. (Northern Star, No. 635, Dec. 22nd 1849, p.3)

The pastoral alternative is not open to him; the life of simplicity amid nature and removed from politics is a myth. The workers in the countryside face unremitting toil for little money just as do the workers in urban areas. Intellectually as well as physically, there is no neutral place to be, there are no anodynes. For Wheeler, it is the function and the duty of fiction to render

impossible the fiction that denies the truth of economic class relations, with all their cultural baggage, as the very basis of all meaningful social relations. Though the Chartist movement itself may have failed, the relationships that needed and produced the movement have come into conscious being and practice, and will not go away.

Yet Wheeler also sees that within those relationships so clearly realised, real social change could take place; that the working people could bring about a real alteration in political relations if 'their first difficulty' were overcome, namely a restoration of 'the eye, the intellect, the unbroken spirit, that alone is wanting in the labourer'. (Northern Star, No.635, Dec. 22nd, 1849, p.3) Wheeler is not naive and can see the power of the enemy ranked against working people in arms, wealth and experience, but he pins faith in the fate and the awareness of such hegemonic relations producing both the desire and the work for change. Citing the abortive French revolution he stresses:

but may the slaughter and banishment of her glorious sons ultimately eventuate in achieving a world-wide freedom; then will their misery not have been endured in vain, for the fire of their persecution will have become their beacon light to show the shoals and band on which they have foundered, and guide us in triumph to the rocks of liberty, equality and fraternity. Heaven speed the day. (Northern Star, No. 635, Dec.22nd, 1849, p.3)

This is clearly what Wheeler sees as the legacy, for England, of the Chartist movement. Arthur is sent into exile finally, thus sharing the reprisals taken against the Chartist leaders by the Whig government and becoming a martyr

more than a criminal and understood as such, 'not by the Chartist body alone, but by the public generally'. (Northern Star, No. 636, Dec. 29th 1849, p.3)

Arthur Morton is exiled to the Continent for his Chartist involvement, but this does not represent the kind of exile found in Dickens or in Mrs. Gaskell. No solution to the class antagonisms is found by transference to another part of the world. Rather, Arthur's exile is a symbolic maintenance of the principles of the radical Chartist, a waiting in the wings for another opportunity:

he yet resides awaiting the hour when the glorious red banner, the emblem of unity and freedom, shall proudly float on the highest pinnacle of St. Stephens; then will his woes, and the woes of his compatriots be recompensed; the shadow will then fall from his visage, and the sunlight beam on his countenance. (Northern Star, No. 635, Dec. 22nd 1849, p.3)

Once again, the promise of revolutionary change, change that failed for the present, is invoked through Arthur's name. He comes to be symbolic of the efforts of the people in France, Italy and Hungary, of hope for radical change elsewhere. Clearly, this could be seen as little more than a gathering of fragments after a failure. Yet Wheeler's claim is much bolder. To him, the whole Chartist movement, and the radical democracy it fought for, had achieved an intellectual success; a watershed of consciousness had been reached; a level of awareness attained about the realities in England, so that nothing short of dishonesty could fail to acknowledge such relations as the basis of all relationships, social, political, personal, and that they are all inseparably and causally linked. Wheeler had introduced into literature a conscious and politically active working-class 'subject'; a different intellectual

practice has been begun. A dimension of English culture has been produced that is capable of radically redefining the political traditions of English society and with the self-confidence to do so.

Though, as we have repeatedly seen, much of Wheeler's novel is limited by the literary conventions of the day, it has either used or overridden those forms and it has done so by introducing a new working-class character into English fiction, neither grotesque nor debased, neither comic nor gratuitously violent. Arthur Morton represents not what the novel tradition should necessarily be about, but where it might think *from*.

The last novel I will look at in this section on Chartist literature is the Ernest Jones unfinished novel, De Brassier: A Democratic Romance, published in Notes to the People between 1850 and 1852. The date is significant as the publication of the novel began when Chartism was already a spent force in terms of its immediate goals. Like Wheeler in Sunshine and Shadow, Jones incorporates both the Chartist movement (though not by name) and its 'failure' into the body of his novel. However, whereas Wheeler fought to chart and to valorise all that had been gained by the movement, Jones' novel seems born out of political despair in its emphasis upon failure. He is too harsh in his description of working-class/Chartist motives and actions and too generous in his granting of power to the ruling authorities to allow any opposing political action to make practical sense. The novel does, however, introduce the issue of determinism: the power of given authority structures in any society to subordinate identifiable groups and, more seriously, to seduce them into internalising their own subordination so as to render it natural.

While other works discussed above have included this issue, Jones presents it with provocative vividness, almost as the real central character of the novel, and thus reveals it as such a distinct and important issue for socialist literature at a crucial moment in its history, that his novel deserves attention as a late Chartist work. While I have disagreed above with some of Martha Vicinus's conclusions regarding the rigidity or otherwise of literary form and its consequences, it is difficult to disagree with her critical conclusions regarding the more general characteristics of this novel. I will therefore rely upon her judgements in order to dispense with the less useful parts of the novel and clear a path for the issue of determinism.

The purpose of the novel, she argues, was to investigate the reasons as to why efforts at achieving democracy have so often failed, and that Jones intended his work to be a warning to readers not to allow a repetition of these mistakes which allowed social evils to continue unchecked. In order to do so, though, he gave all possible strength to the oppressive government and none at all to the would-be democrats. With the astute machinations of the rich and powerful, De Brassier himself manipulates the democratic movements for his own financial ends, finally escaping into parliament where, at the point at which the novel breaks off, he begins mismanaging government funds. The novel contains a variety of sub-plots in order to contain within its scope the issues of oppressive treatment of tenants and farm workers and attacks on the banking and factory interests. Jones wanted, she continues, to encourage a more thoughtful analysis of society in the minds of working people so that they might adopt a more thoroughly considered political position. However, the virtual omnipotence of the ruling classes renders oppositional political action

neither feasible nor sensible.²⁵

The ruling class possesses the political power and the mental power. Theirs is the dominant subjectivity; the novel is not just about a political defeat by a stronger opponent, but a defeat effectively self-created by an unorganised and ineffective, unthinking and so reactionary, working class. Jones, at this point, has lost faith in the working people of England and sees them only as a mob. This produces a sense of fixed class relations and renders any inter-class dynamic impossible. His conclusion seems to be that power is so entrenched that no effective opposition is available or possible.

The first two chapters of the novel are given in their entirety to the misfortunes of Charles Dalton and his family, seen against the spectacle of a Royal procession. Dalton, who had been a factory overseer at one time, has declined into severe poverty, leaving him no choice but to beg on the street. When he is arrested and charged with vagrancy, no one offers aid, and the police will not even listen to his appeals for the well-being of his wife and child, now completely abandoned and starving. Jones makes us see that the procession is the celebration of an institution too far removed from daily life to notice the poverty and starvation of one such as Dalton; it is also a ritual that would not be possible without a crowd of common people lining the streets to celebrate it, or policemen, drawn largely from the ranks of the working class, to protect it. This opening melodrama is an important scene setter; it describes the wholly understandable reasons for working-class anger yet places the institution that is ultimately to blame at so great a distance

²⁵ Martha Vicinus, 'Chartist fiction and the development of a class-based literature', The Socialist Novel in Britain, pp. 17-18

that no confrontation is possible.

When Dalton comes to trial, an entirely corrupted legal system sentences him to seven years' transportation. The corruption seems endless: court officers and justices simply further their own careers or favour those in a powerful position; justice is an irrelevance. The jury system is also criticised. Supposedly selected for intelligence and impartiality we find that

jurymen are almost invariably selected for their stupidity or their prejudice . . . the Bench and Bar played on that miserable twelve-stringed instrument, and drew forth what response they liked. (Notes, vol.1, No. V, p.83)

The police force is also corrupt, inefficient and even in league with the criminal fraternity:

The old mossy-headed thieves . . . and their catchers among the police, are sworn brothers and allies. The former get up cases, and both share the booty. (Notes, vol. 2, No. XXIV, p.486)

These institutions are presented as multi-layered relationships or sets of relationships wholly contrived to perpetuate their own power and in so doing to evade the very purpose for which it was created. De Brassier himself is introduced as a man of totally criminal mind. His intention is to promote a popular insurrection, exploit for his own gain the expected fall in share prices which would result by buying shares when their price is artificially low, then bring the insurrection to an end, appearing to be the saviour of property and law and order, and selling the shares once their price has risen again.

Having laid this plan, De Brassier then proceeds to carry it out with little or no opposition. At the political Convention that is his target, he completely controls the crowds despite the attendance of many delegates and even causes delegates themselves to fear and distrust one another with crude devices such as the accusation that spies are in the meeting and that his life is threatened by would-be assassins. He is able to carry out this plan almost entirely because the common people are represented by Jones as an inert mass, easily swayed by the most superficial rhetoric, readily controlled by government contrivance and lacking in any real sense of their own agency in their own lives. Jones is manipulating the plot and condemning the people whatever they do. If they remain passive they are accepting their situation, which should be intolerable; if they become violent they are ignorant; they should be enlightened, but when they are they become inaudible. Their only real power lies in collectivity and yet in numbers they become merely a multitude, an unidentifiable mass. It is impossible not to see Jones's presentation as prompted by disappointment and bitterness at the failure of Chartism. It is not an exaggeration to see this writing as a bitter satire on contemporary politics, with dystopian results; if working people are really this mindless, do they deserve to play any role in government, let alone to be the government?

De Brassier in a 'good coat' can always draw obedience where he might not have in a 'fustian jacket' (Notes, vol. 1, p.52) This quality of servility is here presented as innate, not learned behaviour, a sad reflection of Jones' new-found contempt. De Brassier can demand popular obedience even after he has been discredited and does so simply by showing up and speaking rhetorically. At the moment when De Brassier is using them, physically, to ward off

bankruptcy bailiffs, they are shouting his name in praise like 'living artillery' (Notes, vol. 1, p.73).

When Dorville's factory is attacked the crowd fails to take control because they become dominated by their worst elements: 'fierce, low-browed, half drunken masses began to fill the house. Some other spirit besides democracy pervaded *them*'. (Notes, Vol. 2, p.162) Those in positions of real power are not seriously troubled. Before the attack on his factory Dorville has taken out extra insurance in anticipation of just such an event, and the forces of law and order are always more than prepared for the possibility of violent demonstration. Even the leisure activities of the poor are entirely within the compass of the rich. At a rural sports day the village people are objects of charity and are insulted by the practice of what Jones sees as a self-debasing ritual. The 'disgusting exhibitions' are 'gone through with a regular zest'. (Notes, vol.2, p.162) It is degrading that they love it. The contempt for them on the part of the high-born is naturally

mingled with satisfaction - satisfaction that such an utter want of dignity pervaded the mind of the working man. "We shall rule them long" (sic) - was the thought lurking at the bottom. (Notes, vol.2, p.162)

His description of working-class neighbourhoods is equally depressing and foreshadows the worst of naturalism. On passing through a working-class suburb of a factory town he observes:

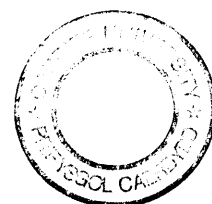
look not for romantic sorrows. The dull, heavy, stupid degradation;--the smothered, sour grief--the sensation of uneasiness and pain, so constant that it seems a necessary

condition of existence to the sufferer, so natural, that he ceases to grumble at it,--the deep eternal apathy, the moral lethargy, the living death,--these are the characteristics of the inhabitants of the humiliating suburb. (Notes, vol. 2, p.242)

Throughout the novel, Jones does something very similar to what he condemns De Brassier for doing: dividing the working class and its representatives against themselves. It is never clear, for example, exactly why Edward, the mechanic and Charles Dalton are such widely divergent types. It is of course true that Edward does not suffer to the degree that Dalton does and that Dalton is unable to enjoy the unbroken employment that has been Edward's fortune. Yet when Edward is arraigned (toward the end of what we have of the novel, as it remained unfinished) he does not behave with the violence of Dalton, and it is difficult to imagine Charles Dalton ever being capable of the restraint, the intelligence and the reasoned assertion of Edward. For Jones it seems that the real difference is between those who are capable of some nobility of behaviour and those who are merely slaves of their own desires. In other words, his ultimate recourse for the basic definition of human subjectivity is to transcendent origins for value rather than causally linked historical relationships.

It falls to Charles Dalton, with whose misfortunes the novel opens, and who remains the most potent example of the wronged member of the working classes, to instigate what oppositional response Jones will allow. At his trial he is allowed a lengthy and eloquent speech in his own defence which concludes:

I met the man I had enriched by twenty years of toil--there he sits. . . among my judges--he spurned me--the trodden worm will turn--I struck--you have my history! And now,



judge! I demand back of society that which I rendered it. This day our places alter. I am not accused, but accuser--give me my health--my strength--my life--give me back my buried dead ones--I am closing my account with this world--you mighty murderers of mankind, pay back to the working man the debt you owe! (Notes, vol.1, p.102)

This is a dramatic speech and a moving one, given intellectual strength by the word 'demand', the pride in the voice and the assertion of a challenge to accepted institutions by reversing the role of accuser and accused. All of this is based, in addition, soundly upon historical and economic relationships. However, once Dalton has been denied any claim to redress and has been sentenced to severe punishment, his behaviour becomes increasingly erratic and the legitimacy that might be accorded his anger is lost amongst the ravings of a man possessed, no longer a rational being. Edward remains the visionary who, remaining unconvinced by De Brassier's rhetoric stands up and opposes him. His speech, also, is articulate and sensible, aimed at De Brassier's supporters:

You run after rank and title, while you affect to despise it, and one word from a condescending noble can efface the plans matured in misery and tested by experience. (Notes, vol.2, p.53)

A debate, a real confrontation might have provoked an interesting sequence of argument in the novel. However, as Jones has arranged matters De Brassier is not even forced to reply. Edward's voice is drowned by a screaming mob. The demagogue merely gazes 'with ineffable scorn', waves his hand and the young mechanic is 'torn off the platform and maltreated by the crowd'. (Notes, vol.2, p.53) The victory is too easy. Jones wants to acknowledge the presence of

radical intelligence but also feels forced to separate it from the context of its potential power. Having so organised this failure, Jones concludes the chapter somewhat disingenuously:

It is a lamentable thing that the popular element should be so easily impressible by show and clamour. (Notes, vol.2, p.53)

There is a very real condescension in this sentence. 'Popular element' is used as a fixed category rather than an outcrop of distinct causes and there is implied a distinct distance between 'us' the reader, and 'them' the popular element. This tone is furthered by the emphasising 'so' in the middle of the sentence and even the use of 'lamentable'. It suggests that Jones is beginning to write for another kind of readership, a suspicion later borne out by his domestic novel Woman's Wrongs, 1852.

On the second occasion that Edward and De Brassier confront each other, the outcome is much the same, though this time more is said. Edward condemns De Brassier's plan for a strike on the grounds that the rich have accumulated capital to rely upon and could hold out while the working people, without wages, would starve. He argues instead for the creation of cooperatives to avoid having to work for a master at all. This plan, albeit rather naive, is enough to set the mob at his throat and he barely escapes with his life, indeed, he only does so because the crowd is so rapt with the person of De Brassier that they cannot spare Edward even enough attention to kill him.

Here Edward effectively separates himself and his principles from the mass of the working class and from the corrupt aristocrat, De Brassier, and seems

to be pursuing a line supportive of the alienated bourgeois individual rather than a true representative consciousness of a politically radical working class. In fact the question obviously arises as to whether Jones believes, by the close of this novel, that any such thing still exists.

At the close of chapter five, a passage does occur which might help us take Jones out of the quagmire of inescapable determinism. The passage occurs after a lengthy scene of drunken activity in a pub, where working men have met to discuss politics, but the meeting has deteriorated into name-calling and fighting. The rich look on amused. But Jones passes intelligent commentary:

Yet, sneer at it as they may, the rough germs of truth were there: they rise out of chaos, the clear conviction mounts out of the chaotic mist of error. Thoughts struggle upward with difficulty. Creation is a time of ferment--passions, vices, follies, all combine and heave--but the purifying leaven clears the dross off more and more, the movement sobers as it gathers real strength . . . the grand truth soars and spreads and seizes the masses--it calms them--it lifts them to the pure heavens of intelligence--through scenes like these recorded, as the gold through fire, democracy must pass--but it bears no stain upon its mighty wings--as the brilliant flower shoots up from the brown soil, so freedom and enlightenment rise clear of the vices that surround their first hours.

Such is the rough alembic that refines the ore of nations. (Notes, vol.2, p.73)

Here Jones is aware that even at working-class politics' lowest ebb there is something important happening, something has come into being that will continue to develop. That, facing the death of Chartism, he does not know

what it will become or how it might develop, is clear as this passage collapses into vague humanist terminology ('freedom', 'enlightenment', the 'grand truth') abstract similes of dubious relevance ('as gold through fire') or that show recourse to simplistic natural images ("as the brilliant flower shoots up from the brown soil") and the clearly passive role in this given to the working class themselves ('the grand truth...seizes on the masses - it calms them - it lifts them...'). Here, looking beyond, or trying to, both the limits of his time and the parameters of this novel, Jones is attempting to understand not just the determining forces that crush the poor, the working class, but also the determining forces that brought them into being, and gave them a role in society, albeit in 'their first hours' a subordinate one. He is unable in this novel to chart the determination of the working class to achieve political liberation and political power for themselves, but given the historical moment of composition that is not surprising. What is shown here is that if he could not see its direction or its success, Jones was capable of understanding the possibility of more than one form of determinism.

Section Three

Between Chartism and Naturalism

This section of my study covers the historical period from the 'end' of Chartism in the 1850s to the rise of ideological socialism within working-class politics at the end of the 1880s, while the literature I will be analysing covers the period 1870 to 1888. It is a period characterised by a continuum of developing political awareness, connecting the revolutionary impact of Chartist political activism, in decline after the 1840s, with the rise of conscious socialism and organised trade union struggles which developed after the depression of the 1870s. It is also a period marked by an unprecedented expansion of capital growth and the apparently permanent establishment of the bourgeois state.

It is the contention of this chapter that the period in question saw less a defeat for radical politics than an analysis of its changing and developing political subjectivity: a trenchant reappraisal of the conditions of its own possibility expressed in literary form embodying its discovery of new voices with which to represent its developing identity and the ideological settings within which it was emerging. Such voices were to articulate a complex interrelation between radical politics as determined by economic and social factors (the political nature of desired redress of grievances) and the literary forms representative of such a developing politics. Such a set of relationships would be played out across a broad front of institutionalised ideological forms common to literature, including marriage and the family, property relations, democracy, poverty, education and the Church as well as more direct political

confrontations.

As has been noted (see above, p. 24), the radical movement of this period did not attract the labouring poor to its cause. The notion of individual rather than collective rights remained paramount and radical organisers feared that the potentially revolutionary and violent power of labour would alienate the propertied whose help they sought to gain the desired political reforms. Possessing no theory of labour, they failed to grasp that labour's industrial strength might be a powerful weapon for political change and did not advocate industrial disorder by strike action, or violent riot, both of which might have been more effective in furthering their cause.

However, the work accomplished by political radicalism between 1770 and 1815 served to establish within English political life a continuing demand for a government which effectively represented a widening constituency of its people. It also helped to resolve an issue long argued within responses to Chartism: whether the labouring poor who became so central to the Chartist movement possessed a political programme or were only acting out 'hunger politics' and reacting to the appalling living conditions created by the excesses of the Industrial Revolution.¹

It is the contention of this chapter that the *combination* of an established political programme with urgent economic necessity constituted not only a particular moment in history, but a particular moment in the coming into being of a political subjectivity unique in English political history. A newly formed

¹ H.T.Dickinson, British Radicalism & the French Revolution (London:Blackwell 1985), Ch 1

industrial working class began to recognise itself and to articulate that recognition. The revolutionary potential of this was deeply felt within the current power structures despite the fact that the Chartist movement was not a consciously revolutionary movement, but a parliamentary one. The Chartist movement did, though, come to an end and key perceptions of its end will inform my continuing argument.

Gareth Stedman Jones in his essay 'The Language of Chartism'² stresses the political nature of Chartism, rejecting the often-asserted judgement that it was a social phenomenon rather than a political programme³. Without its political programme, he argues, Chartism contains a central incoherence: a structural divide between its cause (poverty) and its assumed method (the fight for universal suffrage). If Chartism were a social phenomenon only, why did it take the specific form that it did rather than applying more immediate pressure for relief from the state?⁴ The form it did take, the fight for the vote, was a clear indication that the movement's leaders had combined a deliberate political programme with substantive economic mandates to form a mass politics. Bronterre O'Brien sums it up neatly:

'Knaves will tell you that it is because you have no property that you are unrepresented. I tell you on the contrary, it is because you are unrepresented that you have no property...your poverty is the result not the cause of your being unrepresented.'⁵

² Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The Language of Chartism' in James Epstein, and Dorothy Thompson, (eds.) The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830-1860 (London: Macmillan, 1982)

³ *ibid.* p.4

⁴ *ibid.* p.8

⁵ Cited in A. Plummer, Bronterre, A Political Biography (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971), pp.177-178; quoted in Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The Language of Chartism' in Epstein and Thompson, p.17

Here Chartism connects with its radical and petitioning tradition while embracing a wider audience of participants; the 'you' in O'Brien's statement is clearly multiple.

As Stedman Jones emphasises, the specific political form of the Charter articulates a political role that could provide a 'vocabulary of grievance to a succession of political and social groups'⁶ and all functioning within radicalism and its long tradition, not between it and something else. Edward Thompson has described the developing working-class consciousness as

a consciousness of the identity of interests between working men of the most diverse occupations and levels of attainment, which was embodied in many institutional forms...there was a consciousness of the identity of the interests of the working class, or 'productive classes' as against those of other classes; and within this there was maturing the claim for an alternative system.⁷

Stedman Jones builds upon such a definition to understand the specific form of the Charter as functioning not only to raise awareness of substantiable facts, nor only as the accumulated experience of a particular form of class relations, but as

constructed and inscribed within a complex rhetoric of metaphorical association, causal inference and imaginative construction.⁸

⁶ Gareth Stedman Jones, 'The Language of Chartism', in Epstein and Thompson, p.12

⁷ E.P.Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Ch. 16

⁸ Stedman Jones, 'The Language of Chartism', in Epstein and Thompson, p.12

Such political assertion represents class relations as a complex system of political rhetorics, based upon political relations, not only economic relations, and clarifies our awareness of class relations at the time:

In radical ideology the dividing line between classes was not that between employer and employed but that between the represented and the unrepresented. Thus hostility to the middle classes was not ascribed to their role in production, but to their participation in a corrupt and unrepresentative political system...Once therefore the conviction of the totally evil character of the political system itself began to fade and distress became less pervasive there was no independent rationale within radical ideology for antagonism towards the middle classes as such.⁹

As Stedman Jones argues here, the end of Chartism came when the possibility of genuine change within the system came to be understood as realistic and achievable. Inter-class hostilities therefore took on relative rather than absolute positions within a political programme, not only relations of production in a classic Marxist sense. The playing out of such relativities would be complex.

Dorothy Thompson also sees the end of Chartism in political terms and also argues for a complex end to the Chartist period. As Stedman Jones rejects the notion that Chartism's strongest character was its sociological function, Dorothy Thompson similarly rejects the argument that Chartism was based in

⁹ *ibid.* p.15

hunger politics, leading to self-help measures which created splits within working-class realities. She also rejects the idea that the Chartist period represented a conflict between a consciously hegemonic middle class and the traditional culture of the working class, and that the end of this conflict was signalled by the end of Chartism and by the incorporation of the articulate members of the working class into the traditions and values of the middle class. While accepting that the third quarter of the Nineteenth Century was one of greater stability, she argues that it was not so as a result of simple class collaboration:

Indeed it would be strange if the long history of conflict within industry were to have ended suddenly with a brief spell of prosperity.¹⁰

She goes on to cite the bitter industrial conflicts of the 1850s and to agree with Eric Hobsbawm that the prosperity of that period was neither of the depth nor extent that many have claimed. Chartism, she argues, was always a whole philosophy in believing that political and economic change could only come and be effective, together. What happened during the third quarter of the century was the effective separation of political solutions from economic and industrial ones. The Chartists had insisted that no gains could be made without universal suffrage, but the Chartist Land Plan, increasing consumer co-operatives, friendly societies and nationally organised trade unions seemed to

¹⁰ Dorothy Thompson, The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution (London: Pantheon, 1984), p. 330

suggest differently.

Chartists argued that the repeal of the Corn Laws would make little difference without the taking of political power; they were proved wrong. Industry picked up as a result; the Ten Hours Act had been passed by a Whig administration, greater regularity of employment produced self-help organisations from trade unions and co-operative societies to friendly societies and the revival of prosperity had led to a softening of the operation of the New Poor Law and the transference of the supervision of poor relief to direct government control in 1847. This, she argues was probably the fundamental break with political solutions. ¹¹

However, while acknowledging that working people had arrived at a non-political ideology, their incorporation, albeit piecemeal, into the electoral system, changed the rules of an expanding game. She concludes:

By dropping, or rather by ceasing to believe in the efficacy of political change as the lever of social change and the establisher of social justice, the working people lost the unity of the Chartist period, the strong sense of interrelatedness of the demands of all sections of the propertyless and unrepresented. They accepted a re-definition of the nature of power and politics, accepting the division between 'political' and 'industrial' activity which Chartism had never recognised. Within this new division

¹¹ *ibid.* p.334

they made certain advances in the 'industrial' sector which ensured some share for the workers in the great industrial expansion of Victorian Britain.¹²

In these ways, the reasons for the end of Chartism are to be sought in the field of ideas as well as in the field of direct economic experience. Like Gareth Stedman Jones, Dorothy Thompson sees that class relations articulated something more flexible than a production-based class antagonism. The relations were political, based upon programmatic differences, not only on arguments for relief from economic suffering. The working classes, like the middle classes, resented the power of patronage and control over areas of social life as wielded by landowners and their ecclesiastical allies.¹³ Both resented attempts to control opinion, whether by restrictions on speech and publication or by clerical control of education. This was not class co-operation, she asserts, but both classes reaching similar conclusions from their own perspectives, for their own interests. Such a complex interplay of relations (antagonism, an adjacent accommodation, mutual hostility and interpenetration, overlap and confrontation) combined to create a world of ideas and of the articulation of those ideas, responses and power plays, which included the world of literature.

Chartists Ernest Jones in Woman's Wrongs, a novel published in 1852, and Thomas Cooper in Captain Cobler, 1850 (an historical novel set in the reign of

¹² *ibid.* p.337

¹³ *ibid.* p.332

Henry VIII), Triumph of Perseverance and Enterprise, 1854, and Letters of Young Working Men, 1850, both began to reveal in their writing the awareness of and the desire for a middle-class readership. While it is tempting to regret the compromises of such writing (perhaps most particularly the loss of political fervour so noticeable in the earlier Chartist period) such texts do stand as indices to the very real historical and ideological pressure applied to the repressed and marginal elements of a society dominated by a bourgeoisie in its pomp.

Eric Hobsbawm in The Age of Capital details the sheer magnitude of the expansion of capital's reach and power during this period.¹⁴ Cotton exports, for example, had grown by 1,100 million yards between 1820 and 1850. Between 1850 and 1860 alone they grew by 1,300 million yards. The number of employed cotton operatives had increased by 100,000 between 1819 and 1846 but the rate doubled in the 1850s. Such developments were to be found throughout Europe. Huge profits stimulated employment and even the sharp rise in cereal prices between 1853 and 1855 no longer precipitated hunger riots. The political consequences of this boom were that, in the wake of 1848, it gave governments breathing space and wrecked the hopes of the revolutionaries.¹⁵

However, as Hobsbawm also asserted:

¹⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Capital (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1975; London: Abacus, 1983), Ch.2 'The Great Boom'

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.45

The bourgeois triumph was brief and impermanent. At the very moment when it seemed complete, it proved to be not monolithic but full of fissures. In the early 1870s economic expansion and liberalism seemed irresistible. By the end of the decade they were so no longer.¹⁶

An almost unprecedented depression of global proportion occurred in 1873 causing severe downturns in trade and industry and bringing an end to an era of buoyant confidence in the social progress to be made from the benefits of capitalism and its attendant philosophy, liberalism. The institutions remained, but the ideological fabric was ruptured. Hobsbawm marks the extent of the 'Age of Capital' at twenty-seven years; but for the long-term interests of a radical political consciousness, they had not been entirely wasted years.

Political activity produced after 1850 was dominated by trade union activity, and the years between 1867 and 1875 particularly were years of decisive legislative advance for the industrial working class. Wherever trade unionism became a consistent practice, collective bargaining became the dominant means of regulating industrial relations, deciding policies and settling disputes. Although this was restricted to a local level throughout this period, its overall success gave the unions a strong market position, aiding their efforts to overcome obstructive tensions between themselves and the government, and legitimise their practical existence. The extension of the franchise to include the urban male working class had a profound influence upon this development

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.17

and allowed the working-class vote to affect the outcome of the 1874 election, rejecting the Liberal party and electing the Tories who had seemed to be more immediately sympathetic to working-class needs.

By the early 1870s unemployment had fallen to below 2% and union membership had doubled. When the depression hit, the unions were badly affected, with many smaller organisations disappearing, but the effect was not as serious as had been the 1842 slump. Unions had become better organised and were less vulnerable to trade cycle depressions. Most importantly, perhaps, this continuing union influence changed the expectations of the working class with regard to national politics, a factor accelerated by the 1874 election. In particular, the increasing power of the unions and their growth as a vanguard in radical working-class politics were noticeable throughout this period. The extreme and obvious danger of coal-mining and the significance of coal power both for industry and, perhaps more importantly, the mercantile and military navies, led the government to be willing to involve itself in the coal industry to regulate working conditions. In addition, the growth of mining communities led to a concentration of largely homogeneous, working-class votes in what became coalfield constituencies. The importance of such communities was further increased by the extension of the franchise in 1884, to include the rural working classes.

Olive Anderson speaks of a new class consciousness developing with the rapid pace of economic change and argues that this contributed significantly to a

political precariousness developing throughout the 1850s.¹⁷ Appleman *et al* have argued that the 'recovery' of 1859 did not reach some sectors of employment,¹⁸ and Geoffrey Best has stressed that the economic benefits of the mid-century boom did not reach the poor, leaving, as late as the 1890s, 30% still in 'painful poverty'¹⁹. The London Trades Council was formed in 1860 creating an important platform for Marx's first International. John Foster shows how even the apparent incorporation of members of the working class into commercial management changed management practices, which in turn changed the nature of the workplace and thus the nature of the workforce and its self identity. Thus new social formations were developed which rendered current social formation unstable, and vulnerable to economic and social pressures, allowing new forms of class consciousness to develop, with new forms for their articulation, aesthetically and otherwise.²⁰

S.S. Maccoby throughout his seminal work on English radicalism argues that effective radicalism did not die with the elimination of Chartism, but developed different goals with different methods; all combining, however, to render itself dangerous to the new commercially dominated state, by representing new forms of historical relations, which possessed new and developing ways of explaining their condition, thus questioning the boundaries of the dominant ideology of the time²¹.

¹⁷ Olive Anderson, *A Liberal State at War* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p.99

¹⁸ Philip Appelman, William A. Madden, and Michael Wolff, *1859: Entering an Age of Crisis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 132

¹⁹ Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1971), p.124

²⁰ John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1974), p.250

²¹ S. Maccoby, *English Radicalism* 2vols: 1832-1852 & 1853-1886 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935 &

The consequences of these developing relations for *literary* form are revealed in complex strategies of legitimation and opposition, representing class-based perspectives. A young Thomas Hardy's attempt to begin a novelist's career illustrates the point well. In 1869 he submitted for publication what would have been his first novel The Poor Man and the Lady. Rejected by Macmillan, it was read by George Meredith for Chapman & Hall. Meredith advised Hardy not to nail his colours so strongly to the mast in a first book, if he wished to do anything practical at literature; for if he printed so profound a thing he would be attacked on all sides by the conventional reviewers, and his future injured.

The novel had a subtitle: 'A Story with no plot; Containing some original verses' and Hardy describes the novel as 'a sweeping satire of the squirearchy and nobility, London society, the vulgarity of the middle class, modern Christianity, church restoration and political and domestic morals in general'²² and as 'socialistic not to say revolutionary'²³. The failure to publish led to the submission of Desperate Remedies, in his own estimation a melodramatic novel quite below the level of The Poor Man and the Lady...(and) the unfortunate consequence of Meredith's advice to 'write a story with a plot'.²⁴

It is clear that The Poor Man and the Lady (the manuscript sadly lost) is an attempt to interrogate major social institutions of his day and to introduce literary innovations in order to do so effectively, the two issues of content and representation not being mutually exclusive. Hardy accounts for its rejection by

1938)

²² Thomas Hardy, Life and Times of Thomas Hardy, pp.62-3

²³ *ibid.* p.63

²⁴ *ibid.* p.66

citing too many scenes as too soon for their date. It may have been the first, but it was not to be the last time Hardy faced critical hostility, and while he later took many complex strategies in the attempt to avoid such condemnation, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that some at least of his contemporary acceptance lay in the fact that he could always be looked down upon by the Establishment as a provincial novelist. He himself remarks that all of his extensive knowledge of London constituted

an experience quite ignored by the reviewers of his later books who, if he only touched London in his pages, promptly reminded him not to write of a place he was unacquainted with, but to get back to his sheepfolds²⁵.

Attempting to critique contemporary society through literature could be a battle ground.

Mike Sanders in his essay 'Accidents of Production'²⁶ cites an example from Harriet Martineau's story 'The Hill and the Valley' to give textual evidence for such ideological assertions:

It soon after happened, most unfortunately, that a boy who had in charge the management of some part of the new machinery, was careless, and put himself in the way of receiving a blow on the

²⁵ *ibid.* p.64

²⁶ Mike Sanders, 'Accidents of Production' in H. Gustav Klaus & Stephen Knight (eds.), British Industrial Fictions (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000)

head, which killed him on the spot.²⁷

Sanders refers, quite correctly, to the 'tortured syntax' of this piece, and uses this observation to emphasise the term 'accident' and the ways in which the language functions to remove the 'accident' from its causal history and therefore from nameable culpability. Such epistemological manipulation, he argues, allows the bourgeoisie to admit to the harmful consequences of industrialisation without conceding its own political responsibility for the circumstances which make such accidents inevitable. They are admitted as caused events, but are distanced as undesired events, rendering history a simple matter of arbitrary choices without causal outcomes. Thus, the very people who claim the greatest credit for making the world simultaneously reject responsibility for the world of their making. The decoupling of the economic from the social, which Sanders emphasises here, mirrors the familiar separation of the aesthetic from the political stressed by such analysts as Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton.²⁸

Ivanka Kovačević in her 1973 anthology of Nineteenth Century fiction responding to industrialisation²⁹ also uses the work of Harriet Martineau (together with representative work of Charles Dickens) to highlight the transgressive nature of art and its capacity to evade the apparent intentions of its authors. Dickens, she argues, put great stress upon an emotional and intuitive sense of truth, while his fiction (here exemplified by Hard Times) in

²⁷ Mike Sanders in British Industrial Fictions, p.24

²⁸ e.g. Terry Eagleton's Criticism & Ideology (London: Verso, 1976) and Frederic Jameson's Marxism and Form, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), The Prison House of Language (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) and The Political Unconscious (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981)

fact betrays a very conscious and planned intellectual control of his ideological meanings and stresses. Martineau, she continues, despite a declared support for free market economics and utilitarianism can nevertheless in A Manchester Strike betray a very real respect for striking workers and a clear, if indirect, appeal for state intervention to ensure a redistribution of wealth.

This uncertainty, this tension between text and apparent authorial intention, highlights a growing and serious uncertainty amongst fiction writers, a developing lack of confidence in the fact and value inherent in society around them. The crisis really develops out of the novel's determination to tell the truth about the world around it, and its relatively formal set of literary conventions which impose a need for system, order, wholeness, closure and authorial control, themselves defined by ideological pressures of a wider political/social kind, and the difficulty of finding such wholeness in an increasingly divided real society of which they were supposed to be the best and most truthful recorders.

For established and distinguished novelists, fêted and rewarded by the very society they were working to scrutinise and interrogate, it is easy to see how powerful stresses could develop between the form and content of their work. It is not an uncommon response to Dickens (see Kovačević, above) to see him as a radical writer emotionally, but rather more conservative when it came to contemplating the actual dismantling of the society to which he so often objected so passionately. His later novels reveal a novelist reluctantly discovering that the need for structural conservatism, and its aesthetic

²⁹ Ivanka Kovačević, Fact Into Fiction (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2000)

ideological voice, literary realism, were pulling in opposite directions: the more objectionable the structures and functions of society became and the more absurd they seemed, the less 'realistic' literary writing had to become to cope with it and the less 'realistic' conventional 'realism' could be described as being.

Dickens' major symbols, the fog and the Courts in Bleak House, the Circumlocution Office in Little Dorrit, educational establishments throughout his work, all represent realities which are common enough, but none of them do the job for which they seemed to have been designed. They all affect everybody alike, but nobody benefits (except perhaps the lawyers). They are there, and in one sense are very real indeed, but they convey no value and will not bear interrogation or analysis. They seem to go on going on, with mere people helpless to control them, direct them or end them. The very structures which are supposed to hold society together and give it a totalising identity are the very ones which prevent such wholeness from becoming established.

Caught between a Liberalism he could not realistically produce and a radicalism he could not achieve, Dickens' later work veers towards a tragedy not ideologically permissible to mainstream and popular Victorian novelists. This inevitably has its aesthetic effects: his last completed novel, Our Mutual Friend, has as its dominant institutional symbol the removal of human waste, (euphemistically referred to as 'dust') while a third of that novel turns out to have been a lie. Charles Boffin, the apparent sole inheritor of a 'dust heap' (the real inheritor is in fact alive) appears to have his whole, and personable, character perverted by the inheritance, only for his good nature to return (indeed for the apparent loss of it to have been a ruse) with the discovery of

the long-lost inheritor. The conversion after so long an 'alternative' development seems too contrived an optimistic ending to conceal Dickens's real fears and the closure it aids seems more a tradition than a fictional truth. Dickens's representation of the human psyche turns toward the tormented Bradley Headstone, and, in the final, though uncompleted, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, John Jasper, to represent the effective, and murderous, separation of the human mind from its social setting: novels often mentioned in the same breath as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Dracula. What we might still want to call literary realism is developing characteristics not to be found in Trollope.

George Eliot, a more consciously intellectual liberal than Dickens, constructs in her most magisterial work, Middlemarch, a totalising whole, which consists largely of the failure of her characters to achieve that for themselves. Casaubon cannot find the key synthesising all philosophical thought; Dorothea cannot find the way to connect a single overarching morality with commonplace daily life; Bulstrode cannot make his banking ventures ubiquitously powerful; Lydgate, mired in local politics and an unwise marriage, fails to be the herald of a new medical dawn; Ladislaw, the most writerly of them all, fails to achieve the aesthetic unity of human society so dear to him.

Eliot places most of her fiction either before the Industrial Revolution or within a rural setting at a safe distance from its effects. Her one attempt to look openly at industrial unrest, Felix Holt, the Radical, takes as its eponymous hero a man so unradical, so conservative as to embarrass Edmund Burke.

In chapter 39 of Middlemarch, Mr Brooke, renowned as a neglectful landlord,

comes face to face with one of his tenants. The scene is set for a direct confrontation between capital and labour. Tenant farmer Dagley's son has been caught by Brooke having killed a leveret. It is Brooke's intention to prove his generosity by telling Dagley that he will simply lock the boy in a barn for an hour or two to frighten him and then let him home confident in the expectation that Dagley himself will complete the punishment. 'No, I woon't...' is Dagley's reply.³⁰

What follows is a clear confrontation between Brooke's attempted attitudinal Liberalism, attempting an overall 'moralising' view of the matter and ignoring the structured relationship between capital and labour which underpins, indeed defines, their relationship, and Dagley's insistence upon reminding him of that very relationship. For Brooke, as for Eliot, the confrontation has been chosen, but cannot be resolved without his acknowledging the unacceptable negligence of his tenants as the basis for his own wealth and comfort, and without Eliot realising that she might have to write a very different kind of book: one which recognised the failure of Liberalism to join everything into a seamless whole.

Brooke's response, beating a hasty retreat saying, 'Another day, another day',³¹ is also Eliot's. She compromises the legitimacy of Dagley's arguments by making him drunk and thus echoing the common Victorian notion that drunkenness causes poverty and not the other way around. She separates Mrs Dagley from her husband's position by making her more ashamed of his drunkenness than supportive of his politics, separating the ideologies of the feminine and the economic. To do Eliot more justice than she does Dagley, she does give him the

³⁰ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Blackwood's Magazine, 1871-2), (London: Zodiac Press, 1961)

³¹ *Middlemarch*, p.381

dominant speech in the scene in which he looks forward to expected future political reform, or 'Rinform' as she has him say it, when the likes of Brooke will be swept away; but this is where it ends.

Brooke escapes, astonished, but none the wiser, still thinking that tenants should be pleased 'at the landlord's taking everything into his own hands'.³² The scene and the chapter end with an abstracting paragraph from the author attempting the large dispassionate position we have become accustomed to, but not managing it convincingly.

She tries to argue that 'nothing was easier in those times for an hereditary farmer to be ignorant...' when it is not Dagley's ignorance but his justifiable anger that has been demonstrated (justifiable, as prior to this scene we have been presented with a number of perspectives within the narrative critical of Brooke's practices as a landlord). She then makes rather desperate reference to London dinner parties, the Bible (Isaiah, specifically) and Apollo in what can only be seen as an attempt to diminish Dagley to the only thing he knows 'the slovenly habits of farming'³³ when he has clearly demonstrated that this is not true. He may not be an educated man, but he has shown that he is no fool, which is more than can be said for Brooke. The desperation of these claims Eliot herself acknowledges with the clear note of tragedy with which she closes the scene: 'Freeman's End (the name of Dagley's house) - so called apparently by way of sarcasm, to imply that a man was free to quit it if he chose, but that there

³² Middlemarch, p.382

³³ *ibid.*

was no earthly 'beyond' open to him'.³⁴

The very name of the house articulates the quandary she is in: Dagley is trapped; his situation is the end of his 'freedom', a freedom, which as a committed Liberal Eliot would endorse, but which could not be achieved by Liberalism, only by the Dagley's of this world changing their economic and social conditions themselves: a structural political and social change of a kind and extent that her Liberalism fears and opposes.

So powerful is George Eliot's prose that she can create the effect of the dispassionate Liberal overview as a productive 'single' analysis of a whole society even when that society is failing. Her largeness of view insists that we refrain from entirely condemning a Bulstrode or Casaubon, a Rosamund Vincy or Mr Brooke; but a Liberalism which allows validity to all perspectives is effective as long, and only as long, as they can be convincingly described within a truly shared world of structure, fact and value, which is large enough and strong enough to withstand conflict. But when the conflicts represent different ideological perspectives upon the very structure and purpose of society at all, this synthesis becomes impossible to sustain convincingly. The acknowledgement of this failure hardly constitutes a rousing endorsement for late Victorian society. The world is not living up to the demands of its writers and, while they don't like it, as products of that same world, they are forced to reveal its effects in their work, whether deliberately or not.

³⁴ *ibid.*

This critical perspective also allows us to interrogate the ideological depth of these and other works within specific literary conventions reflecting wider ideological constraints, but as *aesthetic* production, as *literature*. What we must focus upon in our study here, therefore, is the shifting subjectivity of texts, articulated out of crucial moments of an historical period in which structures of ideological possibility and utterance were *themselves* changing and developing.

The continuing presence of the aristocracy together with increasing bourgeois power might have seemed complete in their dominance during this period, but such power never sat comfortably, was never able to rest; it always felt threatened by working-class strategies of resistance to control, and independent assertions of the working class's own definition of self and society, politics and economics. It is central to this study to locate, identify and clarify the strategies in fictional texts of the period, strategies which reveal the power and authority of oppositions and assertions: textual, intellectual, ideological, political.

It is not the intention of this study to continue in the vein of ironic readings of middle-class texts as others have done, valuable as those studies remain, nor to look for texts which articulate a revolutionary expectation. Rather, the emphasis of this chapter will be to analyse texts which struggle for the ground of the political subjectivity of the historical period, texts which in Lukács' words³⁵ articulate the dialectical interaction between an historically emergent

³⁵ Georg Lukács, *A Defence of History & Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2000)

class and its dawning self-consciousness and the objective political and social realities within which it emerges, to which it responds and with which it fights:

Put as a general philosophical statement This interaction is meant to indicate that the subjective mirroring of the objective process is an actual, operative moment of the process itself, and not only something imagined. Such subjective mirroring does not only form an unavoidable link between any two objective moments, a link that might be, however, disregarded in an "objective" consideration of things, since it is not important for "objective" analysis. It also shows that people actually - and not only in their imaginations make their own history.³⁶

For Lukács, it is uniquely, the proletariat for whom this perception is valid; the emergence of the proletariat constitutes a unique moment in political history - theirs is the dominant subjectivity. The proletariat, he argues, must reject the a-historical bourgeois modes of thought and value determination, liberating itself from that way of seeing. It must discover in reality, the concrete role inherited by the proletariat as the subjective factor in history, and it must be clear about the function that its (and only its) class consciousness possess in the historical process.³⁷

In looking at this especial period we must also reorganise the validity of Lukacs'

³⁶ Lukács, p.52

³⁷ Lukács, p.53

definition of the 'moment'.

What is a moment? A situation whose duration may be longer or shorter, but which is distinguished from the process that leads up to it in that it forces together the essential tendencies of that process, and demands that a decision be taken over the future direction of the process. That is to say the tendencies reach a sort of zenith, and depending on how the situation concerned is handled, the process takes on a different direction after the moment.³⁸

In pursuing his rejection of an ahistorical subjectivity, Lukács follows Marx in understanding subjectivity in a collective and historical sense:

It is not a question what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment, regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will be historically compelled to do.³⁹

However, if people do make their own history, we cannot accept the blind determinism which this seems to suggest. Things do not happen of their own accord by blind historic compulsion, but by people within history acting it and

³⁸ Lukács, p.55

³⁹ Marx and Engels, Collected Writings, English Language Edition, vol. 4, p.37 quoted in Lukács, p.66

determining it. Similarly, the question of what the proletariat is, is hardly a simple question with a simple answer.

Rather, it is this very question which lies at the heart of our enquiry. A politicised working class was certainly a reality, but its nature and identity, what it was, what it thought it was, how it was, how it thought it was, how it articulated itself, how it was observed, characterised and understood by others, are all deeply relevant factors. As Terry Eagleton has commented:

If the romantic conforms the world to his desire, and the realist conforms his mind to the world, the revolutionary is called on to do both at once.⁴⁰

In his essay 'Capitalism and Form',⁴¹ Eagleton continues such a theme regarding 'artistic' representation. Radical art, he argues, properly written, does not allow time to render the unacceptable acceptable. Capitalism works to make such a distortion possible by rendering the past devoid of authority. As such, as a social 'system,' it is disruptive and transgressive, creating perpetual tumult. This has important implications for the role and identity of rebellion against it.

In practice, capitalism deconstructs the distinction between order and subversion, which it attempts to maintain in theory, and opens the possibility of revolution in the name of order and a quiet life as well as an exciting one: 'It must combat the fearful hubris of capitalism along with its chafing

⁴⁰ Terry Eagleton, 'Kettles boil, classes struggle' in London Review of Books, vol25, No 4 February 2003, p.17

constraints'.⁴² The bourgeois order then presents as stable what is in fact founded in radically unstable principles.

The capitalist enterprise is thus at odds with the notion of middle-class stolidity which it espouses, especially in its literature, and this conflict constructs an impossible position for the bourgeois novel: timeless bourgeois values at odds with provisional forms of life as bred by the marketplace. Eagleton continues to assert that the middle classes transfer their transgressive qualities onto others, claiming 'virtue' to be theirs, usually rendering it extremely dull in the process. However, art, he goes on, is itself too transgressive to be so controlled and thus 'splits' begin to appear in the writing, and, as we have seen, the writing begins to work as an index to bourgeois society's inability to be homogenous or even stable, but it does so despite trying to do exactly the opposite.

In contrast, radical literature focuses deliberately and consciously upon these fissures. Its function is to reveal the unstable dynamic of capitalism and so emphasise that the idea of stasis is wholly nostalgic. Its political purpose is to propose an alternative dynamic through socialism: a dynamism which could represent a sealing of the fissures. Its literary method is to explore forms which will represent these problems, thus exposing and articulating the fully engaged and dialectical relationship between art and politics, and from a radical perspective.

⁴¹ Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism & Form' New Left Review No. 14, March/April 2002, pp.119-31

⁴² *ibid.* p.123

This section of the study argues that important texts of this 'middle' period make just this argument, not by remaining in the revolutionary mode of the Chartists, nor able to draw on substantially organised labour to propound their arguments, but by looking for the core subjectivity of their own revolutionary potential to show how an historical and revolutionary subject can be brought into place and function. The radicalism of this writing lies not in its overt politics and calls for action, but in its depiction of its own subjective moment, its political subjective revolutionary consciousness and in the manner in which such a consciousness articulates the unstable but vital relationship between the literary form and political ideology of their time.

The texts concentrated upon will be The Bane of a Life, 1870, and Grainger's Thorn, 1872, by Thomas Wright, The True History of Joshua Davidson, 1872, by Eliza Lynn Linton, Saul of Mitre Court, 1879, by John W. Overton, and A More Excellent Way, 1888, by Constance Howell. I have argued above that the period in question for this section constitutes a particular historical and political 'moment' and that this moment also represents a crisis in historicity for the realist novel. It is my contention that these texts represent and constitute a political affirmation or repudiation of the world around them by their capacity to stimulate complex socio-political assessments, rather than by traditional evaluation of the 'quality' of their composition, and that they represent a dissident intrusion into the tradition of the realist novel, interrogating its assumptions of the politically innocent transparency of language and using the alterity of their aesthetic structures to propose an alternative politics

questioning the function of government and the purpose of the state.⁴³

The historical crisis for the novel brings into the foreground the method by which representative values, which constitute the 'subjectivity' of the novel, might be constructed aesthetically and the political identity and consequences of this. The structure of each of these novels is constantly brought to the attention of the reader, disconcerting normative assumptions of form and content, maximising the potential exposure of and to different values and raising the question of what, precisely, a novel is, anyway. Within this context, the declamatory nature, the didactic qualities, the logical inconsistencies, the tensions between literary form and declared ideological intent within these narratives constitute a palpable desire to refute and avoid (and at a textual level) the pitfalls of the bourgeois genre.

They constitute a destabilising of the notion of the fictional text; a removal of the possibilities of depth, of cathartic drama, of satisfying closure. In so doing, these texts reveal the sources - historical, political, social, aesthetic - of their possibility, and their composition in a manner rendering them opaque and confrontational. Gone is the 'transparency' of normative realist writing and the verisimilitude of its endeavours to disguise its constructed form.

To so question the fabric of conventions for articulating reality is an effect both enlightening and unsettling. The shock of such an effect - the realisation of a new historical situation and emerging forms for its representation which it

⁴³ Thomas Docherty 'The Ethics of Alterity: Postmodern Character' in Alterities: Criticism, History, Representation (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1996) reprinted in Niall Lucy, ed. Postmodern Literary

sets in process - is one that forces history itself to become a character in the search for what it really is. The notion of history and how it is represented can be seen as problematical and the assumption of an 'objective' easily available history far less secure. Aesthetically, as Terry Eagleton has suggested,⁴⁴ this represents a shift from the realism of the object to one of the subject, from an uncomplicated depiction of the way things are to a complex phenomenological awareness of the relationship between what we experience and how we represent that in convention-bound forms. An additional irony to be discovered in these texts is that while writing that is apparently 'transparent' tends to obscure these difficult relationships, writing characterised by opacity or obscurity is often so by dint of its efforts to clarify such relationships.

A unified subjectivity, as assumed or claimed within the bourgeois novel, dependent for its construction and existence upon a certain kind of society, becomes menaced, rendered problematic or fragmented by other social arrangements. Temporal unification, the identity of the subjectivity, becomes a function of the language used to represent it, to the level of the very sentences used. Writing thus becomes a form of self-identification in a world within which it can assume nothing and within which style is pretence. Its job is to establish a position that is always changing, to create spatial possibilities for its own enunciation and practice which did not exist as 'givens'.

The texts within the sequence constitute a search for a centred subject in a world of literary form within which such a unified subject was splitting. The

Theory: An Anthology (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000)

⁴⁴ Terry Eagleton, 'Lend Me a Fiver', *London Review of Books*, vol.27, No.12, June 2005, pp.23-4

texts within the sequence focus upon individual characters, but as nodal points within interconnecting patterns and lines of force. The narrative of the self and the narrative of the texts' aesthetic possibilities and demands articulate crucial issues of both subjection and emancipation - social, political and aesthetic. The boundary between art and politics is compromised and the texts move away from any naïve representation of an imagined future to a depiction of the difficulties that radical change faces. Aesthetically, such writing must draw upon some consistencies, or communication would be radically disabled, but it must also reveal and articulate those realities as radically contingent, never changeless as the Liberal tradition attempted.

These novels can be seen to be emerging from reliance upon past forms - a reliance which characterised the literature of the Chartist period. Such an emergence is itself complex, both acknowledging a more confident historical identity and realising in both senses of the term the more complex problematics created by such a confidence. The close connection between bourgeois society and one of its strongest and most characteristic voices, the novel, is rendered much less secure by such questioning. An aesthetic form, functioning as a unifying agent in a society's subjectivity, becomes threatened by the proposition of real alternatives: its naturalness is erased and its values clarified as ideological construct rather than archaeological occurrence. The identity of the subjectivity becomes a function of the language used to represent it, and analysis of such a subjectivity can take us to the very structure of its sentences, not merely to its larger-scale gestures.

With the act of writing a process of self-identification, a pursuit of

establishable positions in a radically unstable world, these texts embody the search for textual/political subjectivity by undertaking strategies to confront and destabilise the realist tradition and to do so by putting the subjectivity of the novel's conditions of possibility at the centre of the concern. These novels contain strategies for avoiding the pitfalls of bourgeois fiction, and work hard to do so to see what would happen when they did. They also suffer from inconsistencies and shortcomings - not unusual in the experimental in any aesthetic form - which further highlight the problematics of their project. It must also be acknowledged that novels such as these do not always positively, consciously, support a radical political agenda in the most obvious sense of that term, but even in this instance do represent the problematics of representing such a thing in fiction. Bane of a Life, for example, announces itself as a novel of and from the working classes but noticeably shies from realities which might prove uncomfortable for a middle-class readership.

Such a project did not mean writing novels about novels, nor writing novels about novels being written. Rather it implied the necessity to interrogate contemporary social and political issues using different aesthetic methods to different aesthetic ends. It is not accidental that these novels were written at a time when the assumption of a mid-century bourgeois triumph was beginning to unravel and the realist novel was finding it difficult to maintain its myth of objectivity.

This sequence of novels focuses upon the very fissures that conventional realism works so hard to obliterate, disguise, deny. In so doing, they represent a conscious sense of their own fragmentation from the 'whole', their otherness

from an established normative method, with political and social, moral and aesthetic pressures mandating it. Putting political acerbity at the centre of their project allows form to break up, and to make it break up, in order to allow the consciousness of the consequence of the politics to be structurally effective and determining, not just attitudinally acknowledged.

Each of the novels in the sequence focuses squarely upon the characteristics of a class-based society for its founding material. Each proposes a central representative character standing where classes divide, together with the institutional representation of that division: poverty and inequality, the Church, spiritual and social morality, marriage, industrial relations, government, and social norms and practices. Each also represents the effort to close, or to resist the closure, of that division. An emphasis upon politics is more overt in some than in others, but is a weighted presence in them all. They all function to question the purpose and outcome, structure and function, fact and value of the society out of which they emerged and to which they critically respond. Bane of a Life concentrates upon accounting for a working-class world with its own norms and pressures, but rejects any kind of overt inter-class relations. The 'overt' here is important as the book is a powerful depiction of class relations in denial. Grainger's Thorn focuses upon a rampant individualism with contextual social and industrial relations. The History of Joshua Davidson and Saul of Mitre Court both pursue a consciously moral, even spiritual, trajectory to hold society's own claimed views and values to interrogation and exposure, while A More Excellent Way, the last written of the five chronologically, investigates the costs to people's personal lives of the genuine attempt to change society structurally when an alternative seems more attractive and is certainly an

easier option. Such initial orientation does not, of course, limit each text to just that issue or to a similar singularity of method. Indeed, it is exactly their iconoclastic variability that is least representative of genre and most suggestive of change in process.

Part Two: Five Political Novels

Bane of a Life

Thomas Wright, 1870⁴⁵

Bane of a Life was produced, at the author's admission, at the request of unknown parties for a novel about working-class life. In the Preface, Wright cites the response to an earlier work 'Some habits and customs of the Working Classes' as the stimulus which prompted correspondents to say 'give us a novel of working-class life' (Bane, vol.1, p.viii). He argues that in contemplating the fulfilment of their request, he consciously rejected the route of the sensational novel felt to be in vogue at that time, but hesitated over what the novel should be. Eventually, correspondents went further in requesting a domestic focus for the story and this seems to have spurred him into completion of the project. He declares Bane of a Life a 'novel of purpose' (Bane, vol.1, p.xi), insists that it is 'more than merely founded on facts' (Bane, vol.1, p.xii) and then describes the choice of setting and focus, not in

large manufacturing centres, but - with a view to having the local colour in keeping with the quiet character of the plot - in one of the smaller county towns; but the people introduced are so far typical that they are such as to be found alike in large and small towns. (Bane, vol.1, p.xii)

This declaration suggests a rejection of social and economic determinism, that working-class people are 'typical' wherever they are, but it also deliberately rejects the placing of the novel in a location where there would

⁴⁵ Thomas Wright, Bane of a Life, 3 vols (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1870)

be much greater pressure to focus upon the overt politics of working-class life. Wright's choice does seem to indicate the possibility, in his mind, of separating people from events, that the domestic can be separated from the political, which suggests an intentional emasculation of the novel's potential and appropriate politics at the outset. If Wright conducts such a form of shaping and editing in order to present a faithful domestic rendering, this raises the question of how faithful it can be if it avoids the political underpinnings and ramifications of the economic and social conditions of working-class life, and how the novel will cope with the structural contradictions of asserting working-class realities whilst simultaneously restraining them.

The novel is set in the fictional Stonebury, a working town somewhere in the Midlands. The novel's business is to look at the lives of the ordinary working inhabitants of the town, focusing centrally upon the fortunes of the Mason family: Joe, the father, an engine driver, his wife, son Harry and daughter Fanny. The novel begins with a three-chapter Prologue, introducing themes and characters to create the setting. In Chapter 1 Joe connects capitalism with crime by questioning the business practices of the railway company for which he works. He argues for a revaluation of 'legitimate' business:

'They call it jobbery, though why they can't call it plain robbery I can't tell. There's only the difference of a letter between 'em on paper, and none at all in reality, without it is that the jobbery sort of robbery is more sneaking, and does more harm, and is more deserving of being transported for than straightfor'ard pocket picking or

housebreaking'. (Bane, vol.1, p.4-5).

The prologue also reveals his current job as indicative of historical shifts in labour patterns. Joe Mason had been an agricultural worker until the building of the railway. A job with the railway, initially as a cokeman, had brought more money and improved working conditions:

From the coke stage he had got to the steam shed, from there to the footplate as fireman, and now...he had been made a driver, a driver with a commencing pay of six shillings, and the certainty of a progressive and comparatively rapid rise to seven-and-sixpence a day...as from this position he looked back on the time when he was a farm labourer working for fifteen or sixteen hours a day for ten shillings a week, he should, with a feeling of gratitude, consider himself a highly successful man. (Bane, vol.1, p.13)

The social, industrial and political advantages of working class self-education are clearly advocated. Harry, the son of the family:

belonged to that rising school of artisans which has taken advantage of the abundant means of self-education within its reach. He was for his age a fair English scholar, and pretty extensively read in standard literature. Being endowed with a good memory and great fluency of speech, and oratorically inclined, he had studied with considerable success to acquire a bright and

forcible diction. He was already a person of mark at the Stonebury Debating Union, and was much petted by its leading members...In the works, where he had of late taken to speak at any meetings held among the men, he was looked upon as quite a prodigy, and as it was known that he intended to join the union of his trade as soon as he was eligible for admission to the society, the unionists even now spoke of him as one certain to become prominent as a trade union leader. (Bane, vol.1, p.16)

Chapter 2 of the prologue introduces an industrial accident in which Joe Mason is killed. This event robs the novel of the character who has appeared likely to be the central character and the Masons of their sole breadwinner, the foundation of their hopes for a prosperous future. In Chapter 3 the death is discussed in economic terms, referencing Hood's 'Song of the Shirt', so emphasising the industrial nature of the accident, and the economic consequences of too much grief:

A little weeping would ease my heart,
But in their briny bed
My tears must stop, for every drop
Hinders needle and thread.

and the general principle embodied in the lines is generally applicable to the poor. To them grief is literally a luxury, for an indulgence in it would hinder work, and it must therefore be battled down. (Bane, vol.1 p.26)

The unusual device of the three-chapter Prologue serves, then, to present a potentially very promising structure for the remainder of the novel, connecting individual and family emotional life with 'national' economic, social and political realities via work, industrial accident/bereavement, education and potential union activity. In this way, the traditional structure of the family - often represented as a conservative influence, resistant to progressive change - becomes the potential motor for such change and in so doing effectively models the emerging working class as experiencing life as simultaneously personal, economic and political, stressing the complex interplay of these factors. Moreover, centring its action upon the Mason family, with a widowed mother, son and daughter, together with trusted friends, the novels present us with an expanded family structure that exemplifies a political human structure simultaneously. The novel, from this beginning, possesses a framework with the potential to develop in several directions at once in order to articulate a many-fronted battle. Indeed by the end of the Prologue (and a year after Joe's death) Fanny, the daughter, has set up a successful dress-making business and Harry is about to complete his apprenticeship to enter gainful employment, and the fortunes of the family are being rebuilt. However, Wright cannot allow such promise to go unchecked.

There is a very clear inference, from Joe's previous criticism of the company's practices, and the assertion that 'someone had blundered' (Bane, vol.1, p.23) in allowing two trains to occupy the same line at the same time,

that the issue of the industrial accident, together perhaps with Harry's developing union ambitions, might form a significant theme within the novel. This does not happen and it is to the detriment of the novel's potential political complexity. By the end of the Prologue a year has passed since the death and it is barely referred to again. This in turn makes the rounding-off of the death with a short quotation from Hood an inadequate authorial response to an event which is as devastating domestically as it is economically. Indeed, it is a moment in a working family's life when these two terms cannot be meaningfully separated, and Wright's insistence upon separating them can be seen as an emphatic authorial decision to avoid the political consequences of an event he has chosen to introduce. Additionally, the Masons' rebuilding of their life is also thwarted when Wright closes the Epilogue with this view of the family:

over which once more hovered destruction, not this time in so sharp and terrible a shape as that in which at one blow it shattered those they built on the bright summer morning of twelve months ago, but in the, presently, less startling, though in its ultimate consequences, perhaps, more disastrous form, of a pretty girl and a self-willed love. (Bane, vol.1, p.40)

Twice, then, in the space of a prologue (forty printed pages) the working-class family central to this drama has been shown to be successful both as a family and as an economic unit and then had the development of that success - greater economic and social power - denied them by contrived plot devices. The death of Joe, after a year, has had no consequences and the 'destruction'

of the family (for it is to be destroyed) will be caused by 'self-willed love' not by the economic, social and political realities that we have been shown to have actually caused all the misery. The potential for working people to determine consciously a successful economic and social world is stressed in several ways only to be denied. This contradiction runs throughout the novel, creating tension within the narrative and producing 'resistances,' areas of suppressed energy, which are articulate in their depiction of a form of aesthetic production under indirect, but powerfully effective, political pressure.

With Chapter 1 of the novel proper the narrative focus is immediately tightened to look at son Harry and his unfortunate choice of woman, the untrustworthy and overtly sexual Kate Fairfield, who embodies the 'bane' of Harry's life, giving the novel its title. She is a spendthrift and encourages Harry's tendency towards upward mobility on insubstantial foundations - the outcome is shame, ruin and death. The fortunes of the rest of the family centre upon Fanny and her mother's sacrifice to support Harry, their great hope, who subsequently betrays their confidence with his errancy, and Fanny's moral correctness and her own uneven, but ultimately successful, love-life.

Throughout its length, with one brief exception (of which more later), the tight focus is maintained. The writing keeps immediate events so close to the reader's eye that they prevent a more expansive view from adequately contextualising the depicted realities. Immediate personal and local reality is foregrounded so as to leave no room for wider implications, and the melodramatic emotional story is given all of the available room. Such a strategy produces a flattened event-driven narrative, which denies Wright's

writing any room to move, to become expansive, allusive or metaphorical. It denies his text the possibility of developing any depth or astringency of analysis regarding the issues raised in the Prologue. The characters are denied any effective interiority; while we are constantly told what they are thinking, this is not presented dramatically and so takes on the character of a tightly arranged two-dimensional tableau which denies the story the political connectedness it urgently needs and the political clarity it deserves. There is no inter-class communication and no conflict; no experience from beyond Stonebury intrudes to loosen the tightly limited reality.

The constant suppression of the drama that the narrative introduces is effected by the intrusive authorial presence throughout the novel. The novel itself is dedicated to 'MY FELLOW MEMBERS/ OF THE / COSY CLUB' which suggests some of the condescension to come. We have seen how the Prologue introduces, limits and ultimately undercuts the dramatic possibilities of the novel at its outset. This repressive control is maintained throughout. The tone of the narrator's presence is belittling to the characters he is taking so much time to introduce and is affected in a manner clearly ill-suited to the notion of the drama. Early in chapter one of the novel proper, he remarks:

and leaving the Masons to their aerial castle-building, I will proceed to give a somewhat more detailed description of the family than can be gathered from the foregoing dialogue (Bane, vol.1, p.8)

Such a comment restricts the Masons to a narrowed reality, tamed, limited

and emasculated of all potential threat. It asks the reader to collude in the judgement that theirs is a reduced sphere, which can be readily encompassed intellectually and, by extension, politically. There follows a thirteen-page introduction/description of the Mason family all in the third person and maintaining the same tone. There is no discernable irony in this narrative voice, either here or elsewhere in the novel.

If readers will be kind enough to remember that it has been chiefly upon festival occasions that the course of our story has hitherto led them into the Mason household, it will be an advantage to all parties concerned - to themselves, the writer, and the "characters represented". (Bane, vol.1, p.203).

With such a tone, the narrative voice maintains an absolute control over the fact and value of this representative working class family, and prevents political potentialities from developing, despite having introduced them. Causal connections are reduced to simple linear, plot-development links, which deny the proposed pattern of relationships the complexity their establishment cries out for.

The author's deliberate unmetaphorical style and the intense concentration upon the narrow immediate present, without causal context, create an absence of depth perspective and add to the claustrophobic atmosphere of the novel. By his own admission, Wright's narrative exists to assert the working class as a justified subject for literature, but his simultaneous resistance to the narrative's political and social possibilities denies them this

emergence. A voice is both offered and withheld: the limits of possibility presented by the narrative reflect and articulate the limits of its maker's desire. While keen to write a novel of working-class life, Wright seems also keen to censor out those realities which might be in any way threatening or problematic. Textual strategies, whether conscious or not, combine to overwhelm the potentially powerful and dynamic narrative with a straitjacket of ideological conformity.

This trope, which maintains an almost myopic focus upon immediate events with little or nothing connecting them with the causal past or caused future, also possesses a 'spatial' dimension. With the exception of the closing scenes of the novel (introduced sixty pages before the end of a novel over eight hundred pages in length) Stonebury remains the entire universe of the novel's concern. Nothing outside of it is mentioned in anything but the vaguest terms. The two characters who leave Stonebury (and return within the narrative's time frame) disappear from the novel completely, only to reappear with unexplained differences in their character or fortunes according to the need of the narrative. Charley, Fanny's initial sweetheart, leaves Stonebury to better himself and abandons her in the process, only to reappear at the novel's close having been very successful financially and able to reignite their love and save her from the disastrous fate that otherwise seemed likely. What happened to him in the meantime, how he achieved his success, has no reality for the novel, only the resulting fact of it as convenient for the novel's closure.

One of the effects of this lack of reference to the world beyond Stonebury is

to prevent inter-class relationships from developing. Any relationships beyond those within a singular ideological 'world' are denied despite the novel claiming verisimilitude as a novel of one class of people by definition sharing the world with people of other classes. Wright cannot acknowledge the presence of an alternative, a confronting, ideological sphere within this novel, despite the implicit awareness of its powerful presence.

Such a constructed limitation not only nullifies the potential politics of the novel, but renders the characters devoid of a critical perspective upon their situation - of any comparison with others - or the language with which to articulate it and live it out. Without such established relationships and the language used to describe them, come to terms with them, change them, the novel cannot help but leave a void and a strangely obvious one - a vacuum sealed too tightly not to be noticed against the oxygen of information and other possibilities. Such a stifling atmosphere lends to the novel an extreme parochialism and to its characters a profound ignorance of wider social/political matters, their role in them and their standing with regard to them. Such a declared stasis lacks credibility given the national scale of political work undertaken by the working class before, during and after Chartism.

The potentially political character of Harry is a case in point. As we have seen, the Prologue of the novel asserts the likelihood of Harry's becoming a prominent trade unionist. This issue is repeated, but each time the potential political force of the possibility is compromised and then defeated:

Sometimes when he was more than ordinarily successful at the Debating Society, or something occurred in the workshop to make his superior intelligence apparent, he would indulge in daydreams of a time when he might be a great leader of his class - a people's tribune, in a position to speak so as 'the applause of listening senates to command'. Often in his mind's eye, had he seen himself riding the whirlwind and directing the storm when excited working-men had 'assembled in their thousands' for trade or political purposes, and from such dreamings he had derived a spirit-stirring sense of joy. But such pictures as these paled into nothingness before the heavenly vision in which Queen Kate figured, superseding the applause of senates and the devotion of a people. (Vol.1, p. 207)

While we may question the youthful excitability of the political fantasy, we have no reason to see it as false. However, no reason is presented within the narrative as to why such a pronounced, and publicly approbated, ambition becomes, literally, nothing in the face of his sexual attraction to one young woman. The real issue is that we are given no effective causal context within which either of these responses can be developed dramatically. Again, the politics of the matter are too threatening for the novel to entertain. While we are told of Harry's promise and clear standing among his workmates and colleagues (his eloquence in their behalf in arguing against capital in the interests of labour) we are given no evidence for this. We hear none of his speeches to his fellow union members with their content and purpose, and no examples of his effective leadership, which would surely reflect a fuller

maturity of mind than he is otherwise allowed. We gain no estimate of his highly-respected standing with his colleagues and of his future promise. To do any of the above would make the novel a confrontational and political one, which the author cannot allow. The union apparently has a numerous and committed membership, but we are not told why it is so unified or what its political and economic platforms amount to. No explanation is offered as to why, when the union is so united, no demands are made to management, no negotiations take place, no confrontations occur. Indeed no management seems to exist as far as the narrative of this novel is concerned.

It is true that the novel is announced as a domestic novel, but the author has made the economic bases of this domesticity very clear indeed. These bases he now tacitly denies and thus does not give what he claims to be offering. The novel is in this sense an unconscious admission that the domestic lives of the working classes cannot be effectively depicted without integrating and cross-examining their political nature. The attempt to erase this politics results in an emasculated text: the novel strains to tell us what it simultaneously refuses to give us. Harry's determination to achieve

a leadership which should place him before the public as a spokesman and representative of labour in its disputes with capital, and probably raise him to the position of a working man's MP, when that much talked of but still to be accomplished extension of the franchise should take place. (Bane, vol.1, p.216)

cannot convey the weight it should carry because it is represented without

supporting detail. Finally we receive the result of this absence of effective politics in Harry's betrayal of the very idea of political representation:

(Harry) had told her (Kate) that he meant to be something more distinguished and profitable than a common working-man...He had no hope, he admitted, of becoming a millionaire...and the bent of his genius...was to become one of those kind of men of whom she might have read in newspapers...whose names were a recognised power...At the same time he had told her, as he had told himself, that while he purposed making his class serve his interests, he was really desirous of serving theirs. (Bane, vol.1, p.240-1)

This revelation, coming late in the novel, that all of his political work and real promise was little more than an act of egotism is given no meaningful dramatic preparation within the text. It is true that we have seen his selfishness and self-indulgence in other ways, but there has been no suggestion of duplicity in this regard. Is it his passion for Kate which makes him betray his colleagues or is it his capacity to betray his colleagues which allows him to be attracted to a woman like Kate Fairfield? It is an interesting question, but it is rendered unanswerable by the absence of detailed dramatic material, this absence in turn caused by Wright's refusal to politicise the novel fully.

No investigation into realistic alternatives (a strong and positive combination of marriage and politics, or the making of a marriage that would not obstruct his politics) is even entertained. When ideological politics does enter the novel in the character of Joe Parkinson, an avowed socialist, he is immediately

patronised by the narrator: 'Joe's part in the story will be a very small one' (Bane, vol.2, p.250). Such an introduction quickly makes it clear that he will be allowed to have no determining influence within the novel. He is described as:

a good, steady workman, naturally shrewd, but what he would himself have called a very poor "scollard". (Bane, vol.2, p.251)

and his republicanism is scorned and belittled:

He honestly believed the aristocracy to be the "bloated, brutal, bloodsucking" body that his newspaper represented them to be, and was honestly impressed with the belief that under Republican Government such things as ministerial jobbing or electoral corruption were unknown. (Bane, Vol.2, p.251)

His frugality and care with money are condemned as hypocritical in a republican, feathering his own nest while he waits for the

realisation of those grand abstract measures...the possibility of equality and...the independence of the working classes. (Bane, vol.2, p.251-2)

So the advocacy of working-class aspirations is neatly divided between Harry, who has turned out to be a selfish manipulator, and Joe Parkinson, a slow-minded, limited man, stuck within fixed and unrealistic opinions. The committed, intelligent and politically effective working-class representative is

signal by its absence. The text suggests in this way that working people are really not up to the demands of politics, being either not sufficiently intelligent, or too clever by half in their own selfishness. Again, the politics which is seen as structurally inevitable in these people's lives is also made impossible to achieve. Yet there is one development in this regard which bears some attention: the development of the Stonebury co-op.

At the meeting called to decide upon the opening of the co-op, Joe speaks in favour, and his speech does not reveal a slow-witted man caught in unrealistic fantasy:

If we start this store - as I expect we will - we shall deal direct with one of the big central working-men's co-operative firms who actually manufacture or import some of the classes of goods, and in all other cases deal direct with the producers, or as close up to them as ever large purchases, ready-money, and plenty of it can bring them. By having a store of our own we get the best articles, and fair weight, and at the end of each half-year we divide among ourselves the profits that would have gone to the middle men; and if that isn't the sort of thing for us to support, I should just like to know what is? (Bane, vol.2, pp. 259-60)

He wins the day, the co-op opens and it is immediately successful. There is opposition initially from tradesmen and the local press, but the store flourishes. The manager is good, the dividend system and low prices ensure a loyal and sizeable custom and the establishment goes from strength to

strength:

Their (half-yearly) balance sheets were published, and once more the society became the talk of the town...and there came such a rush of new members that in less than a month the share capital was trebled. (Bane, vol.2, p.266)

Yet this organisation's success is only used within the novel as a vehicle for Harry's later betrayal. Its value as an achievement in itself is passed over when in fact it stands metaphorically as a powerful representative of self-generated working-class social and economic achievement, indicating the strong possibility of political advancement. Even enemies are won over by its straightforward success.

The co-op is political and it is successful; Wright both asserts its independent success and denies that success a meaningful value. He holds the possibilities that this development represents strongly, but at arm's length, making clear that it exists and is acknowledged, but not allowing it effective presence within the narrow textual world he has created. As a practical operation, such a shop is exactly the kind of location where different kinds of people meet, communicate, confront, agree, argue and so on. It could have been an important locus of activity within which working-class people prove their worth in communication with, but independent of, others, representing the possibilities of a practical socialism as social unifying and economically successful. Instead, it is given a very low profile within the novel, always secondary to the emotional lives of the characters, whose emotions are incorrigibly non-political.

The co-op comes from nowhere and leads to nothing, like Joe Parkinson himself; the danger of weighty political antecedents and fear of real political achievement seem too much for Wright to accept. The shop is forced into a kind of limbo, symptomatic of Wright's desire to insert working-class realities into history and keep them out of it at the same time. For a middle-class readership, this is accommodation in capitals: the working class exists, but stays within its own sphere, entirely consumed by its own internal concerns. Their problems are attitudinal, not structural, cultural not economic and you can observe their activities without worrying that your lifestyle might be threatened. For a working-class readership, it insists upon a political quietism that it simultaneously pretends to refute.

When, towards its close, the novel does venture beyond Stonebury, we are again faced with the trope of a form of reality strongly asserted only to be withdrawn. Harry, having stolen money from the co-op and been discovered, leaves Stonebury in disgrace, accompanied by his ever-faithful sister Fanny. They go to London and to the poorer districts of the East End: Poplar, Limehouse, the Isle of Dogs. Here the narrative style changes quite dramatically. The social and economic setting of people's lives there is pervasive and determining. A contrast is made between 'two short years before' (Bane, vol.3, p.220) and 'the now of our story' (ibid.) to compare the comparative prosperity of the past 'plenty of work and good wages' (ibid. p.221) with 'now miserably starving' (ibid.). The reason for this sharp decline is apparent:

It was no longer a centre of industry, giving employment to tens

of thousands. Its shipping yards were silent, its workmen were "the unemployed" (sic), and hunger and misery reigned in its homes. In thousands of desolated households all were starving. Women were clad in unwomanly rags, scarcely sufficient for the maintenance of decency; while children were from want of clothing kept huddled together by day as well as by night, in whatever had been left for the family bed. The men of course, shared in the starvation and misery...Their mere physical sufferings were as naught compared with the mental agony arising from the torturing sense of their impotence to relieve the misery of their wives and children. It was this feeling and the daily sight of the sufferings of the helpless creatures dependent upon them, more than the pangs of cold and hunger, that made formerly cheerful, contented workmen look the gaunt, haggard, fierce-eyed, and altogether rather fearsome-looking beings they appeared as they sat gloomily brooding in their own disfurnished houses, wandered hopelessly about seeking for the employment that was not to be found, or hung in groups about street corners, or around the portals of relieving offices, or other centres of charity. Though indirect, these unemployed workmen were probably the worst of all the sufferers by the Limited Liability mania. The district had been used as a base of operation for the outlet of the popular craze. Neck-or-nothing company promoters so inflated and disorganised its trade, got it so effectually into their hands and so inextricably woven with the Joint-Stock bubble, that when that bubble burst it (the Thames

shipbuilding) collapsed with it. (Bane, vol.3, pp. 222-3)

The style and method here are those of literary naturalism. Descriptions of abject physical surroundings and circumstances of personal suffering are so determining as to provide for no remedy. Severe economic conditions produce a debased human nature approaching the animal and the violent. The causes for this extreme suffering are clearly identified as the excesses of an uncontrolled capitalism in search of quick profits without long-term planning or social responsibility. It is a method associated most strongly with the work of Emile Zola in France, and, in England, with that of Arthur Morrison. Its power here lies in Wright's sudden shift in narrative style and content making *political* connections that he was unwilling to make before. The economic realities of working-class life, their extreme sensitivity to market fluctuations, the suffering caused and the indifference of those responsible, are made central to the narrative at a structural level; the nature of the text itself is produced by them. Descriptive lists appear in the effort to replace normative fictional tropes with the unadorned rawness of the experience; personal emotional experience of the kind which has filled the novel so far disappears in the face of extreme economic need and penetrative uncertainty; the need for survival dominates every concern and romantic vicissitudes no longer have a function:

Harry had entirely lost the jaunty elasticity of movement that had once characterised him, and was beginning to be round shouldered. His cheeks and eyes were deeply sunken, and he was pale with that mealy, sickly paleness with which the debility arising from an inefficiency of food, as well as that caused by

severe fever, overspreads the face. And while he was emaciated physically, his countenance wore a fixed expression of fuming, fretful discontent.

Fanny too had greatly altered for the worse. Her once plump figure had fallen away until her formerly well fitting garments hung loosely upon it. Her face had thinned till the dimples that had given rise to her pet name among Bentley's young ladies, were almost obliterated, the long hours she worked had made her eyes look weak, watery, and inflamed, and there was a weary, careworn look upon her face, pitiful to see in one who in her littleness, prettiness, and trustfulness, seemed so much more fitted to be some brave man's darling than to be fighting so hard a battle of life as she was called upon to do. (Bane, vol.3, p.226)

Harry acknowledges the potential tragedy of their situation:

we haven't come to the workhouse or the stoneyard yet; but we may do any day. Unless, indeed, we preferred going to the river - as I think I should. (Bane, vol.3, p. 228)

When Fanny tries to brighten his spirits, he replies 'Hope's not a very fattening thing...' (Bane, vol.3, p.228) and at this point there is the very real possibility that the novel may indeed end tragically. There is no work available for either of them and, with no apparent relief from this situation, the characteristic naturalistic alternatives of crime, prostitution and death do

loom. If it were only Harry's life at stake, this could well be the case, but Fanny has been the central representative of selfless, and apolitical, personal morality throughout the novel. It would be unthinkable for this to happen to her or Wright would have had to have written a very different novel from the beginning. Such a moral tragedy, with all its attendant social, economic and political implications could not dominate the closure of a novel of such limited ambitions. It is therefore, at this point that Fanny's former sweetheart, Charley, suddenly reappears as

a young man, good-looking, and "strappingly" built, and was evidently not one of the unemployed, as, in addition to looking in robust health, he was well, warmly, and fashionably dressed. (Bane, vol.3, p.230)

Charley has become wealthy and successful since leaving Stonebury and has come thousands of miles to reclaim Fanny's love, which he does successfully, and quickly. The narrative immediately abandons its political naturalism. The language of personal love takes over again from the language of survival. Harry and Kate are reconciled on her deathbed before Harry also dies; theirs is the tragedy, but it is a downfall limited to foolish personal self-regard rather than having broader implications. The *deus ex machina* of Charley's reappearance dominates the close of the novel and the narrative deteriorates into romantic fiction:

As through her tears she (Fanny) looked up and met Charley's proud, loving look, she knew that her love had found its haven -

that for her in the future there was love and rest and happiness - happiness beyond the feverish happiness of passion; happiness that would last; happiness that is reached through the storm and trial and make it doubly dear; the precious jewel that adversity does conceal when it is bravely borne and its lessons rightly read.

(Bane, vol.3, p.275)

The politics of the 'naturalism' section have given way completely. The social and economic realities of working-class life, that have just been demonstrated with real severity, are here reduced to the abstract term 'adversity' as something effectively without cause and which can be overcome when we learn its moral lessons. The absurd fortuitousness of Charley's arrival as a wealthy former lover is erased by the emotional, sentimental and moral tones of the novel's close. The Epilogue itself ends with the maudlin comment upon Harry and Kate:

However, they are in their quiet graves now, and those who cared for them can only hope that

After life's fitful fever

They sleep well. (Bane, vol.3, p. 28)

The interest and value of Bane of a Life lie in its being a novel constantly at war with itself. The narrative cannot carry through to their logical conclusions issues which it presents as important, because their political nature makes them discomfoting reading. Wright structures the book very

carefully with a Prologue and an Epilogue and by dividing it into 'volumes' and 'books', but this cannot disguise the very disturbed nature of the text. The radically uncertain condition of working people's lives in a world dominated by a capitalism powerful as a productive method, but radically unstable as a social structure, permeates the novel from cover to cover, and yet that fact is not permitted its consequential effects. It is strongly implied throughout that working people possess the capacity to run their own lives economically and socially with real success, but strict limits are applied to their practically attempting to do so. Their failure to break out from tight social, economic and ideological boundaries is a self-fulfilling prophecy whose 'management' by Wright cannot be hidden. This manipulation remains a very evident structural component of the novel's politics. The novel itself represents a kind of textual neurosis: a knot in written form made inevitable by the conscious effort to present class-based social and economic realities while refusing the depiction of political inter-relation or conflict.

Grainger's Thorn

Thomas Wright, 1872⁴⁶

In Grainger's Thorn, written by the same author two years later in 1872, a related but crucially different set of contradictions emerges, this time from the conscious attempt to introduce conflict as central to its narrative. Grainger's Thorn, also set in the fictional region of Stonebury, Stoneyshire, connects people of differing classes, social mores, aspirations and abilities. It does so through the creation of an intricate web of interconnected relationships with the eponymous Grainger at its centre. The fact and value of his function there, however, are not simple. Grainger is an aggressive capitalist who manipulates and attempts to control all movements, motives and outcomes. He represents capitalism attempting to reach every depth and extent of human emotional, social and industrial life. The power of the novel lies in the contrast between on the one hand Grainger's accumulation of raw power and his drastic misuse of it as a result of his individualist rejection of social integration and responsibility, and on the other the emotionally, politically, socially and culturally integrative consciousness and practices of the workmen and women of Stonebury, especially through their strike action. Aesthetically, its power lies in its insistence that the *political* causes of given social structures and relations must be made evident, even at the cost of losing fictional polish.

The intricacy of that web necessitates a brief plot summary and cast of characters. At the novel's opening we are introduced to the Vernon family,

⁴⁶ Thomas Wright, Grainger's Thorn, 3 vols, (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872)

described as 'ranking solicitors', but a family in decline as a result of unwise, and, it turns out, fraudulent investments. Vernon, the father of the family, is more a victim of this activity than a conscious perpetrator, but he accepts responsibility for the disgrace his crash brings and commits suicide, thus leaving the family, and most especially the marriageable daughter, Blanche, vulnerable to the advances of a wealthy man. The son of the family, Sidney, while having architectural pretensions, possesses little energy or ambition. Sidney's friend, Lionel Harding, a young man of good social standing and real ambition, falls in love with Blanche and she reciprocates, but he is too impoverished to offer her the secure future a woman of her standing must be given. He cannot propose to her without means.

Grainger enters the novel at this point, an aggressive, but genuinely self-made man who has fought his way up from collier to magnate. His financial success has been achieved both nationally and internationally. He made £3,000 from the California Gold Rush and used the money to buy coal pits in Stoneyshire which he developed into extended workings, including ironstone pits, forges, furnaces and engineering works. He subsequently exploited inside information concerning the outbreak of the Crimean War to manipulate smaller colliery proprietors into guaranteeing him falsely low prices. The fortune he made from this he put into the expanding railway system and eventually became the railway 'king' of Stoneyshire. His enemies retain the judgement that his practices are 'more sharp than honourable' (Grainger, vol.1, p.69). They also distrust one Stephen Barber employed by Grainger as his private secretary, reckoned to have been 'a pettifogging lawyer' (Grainger, vol.1, p.69) before his employment with his 'kindred spirit' (Grainger, vol.1, p.69), who is given the power to substitute for

Grainger in his absence and to whom Grainger trusts his secrets. Richard Wilkinson is employed by Grainger as a clerk; his sister Florence is beloved of Sidney Vernon and is taken later in the novel by Grainger as his mistress. Richard Wilkinson's love interest is Polly, a maid in the Vernon household, and therefore party to domestic goings-on there.

Jim Harrison, union leader and ex-workmate of Grainger in their younger, wild days, represents the social and political conscience of the novel. He is Grainger's parallel and opposite throughout: similar to Grainger in strength, determination and potential for violence, Jim differs in showing full emotional commitment to his wife, to his neighbours and to his work colleagues, becoming a Union branch secretary and managing the successful industrial strike against Grainger. Jim had occasion to thrash Grainger at an earlier point in their lives, an action for which he has not been forgiven. He becomes a significant power in the novel, and becomes Grainger's nemesis. The Church is represented by the Reverend Albert Grahame, a friend of Stephen Barber, who proves a liberal honest broker to all concerned.

The essence of the plot itself is that Grainger decides that he must have Blanche Vernon for his wife. Blanche wants Lionel, but Lionel is in no position to marry. The declining Vernon thinks Blanche should marry Grainger both to salvage the family's fortunes, and out of the very real fear that if Grainger does not get his way he will destroy them absolutely. In his general intransigence and dislike of Harrison, Grainger rejects his workmen's reasonable demands for improved working conditions, so both fomenting a strike and evicting workers from their rented homes. One of those set for eviction is

Harrison himself, whose wife is very ill. Grainger will not negotiate and, though the eviction is avoided, Jim's wife dies from the stress. Jim vows Grainger's death. Grainger pays Florence Wilkinson, his mistress, and an ex-postmaster and forger Reeves, to forge or intercept letters between Harding and Blanche in the attempt to break their relationship and further his own designs. Florence, realising that Grainger will never marry her as long as Blanche might be available, vows to tell Blanche the entire truth, and informs Grainger of her intention. In a moment of spontaneous violence, Grainger throws her into the river, where she drowns. Unknown to Grainger, this event has been witnessed by none other than Jim Harrison who was not, however, in a position to intervene. Grainger, meanwhile, allows suspicion of the murder to fall upon Sidney Vernon, pressing him to disappear, an action which has the dual effect of covering his own guilt and of allowing him to claim to be Sidney's protector.

Blanche agrees to marry Grainger, believing him to be helping Sidney, and having heard nothing from Harding for a considerable period of time before receiving reports of his death at sea in a ship of his own design. Meanwhile, Harrison, undertaking some quite remarkable investigative work in his aim to avenge his wife's death and bring about Grainger's demise, has uncovered the entire story, with evidence, including Grainger's interception of mail and his murder of Florence. He also discovers that Harding has survived the sinking, but has kept away from Blanche, believing that his efforts to contact her have been rejected, little knowing that this has been entirely the work of Grainger and his accomplices. Harrison brings Lionel Harding back to Blanche by telling him everything. Harding unwisely tells Barber, who warns Grainger. Harrison gets wind of this and chases Grainger as he attempts to escape abroad by train;

there is a fight and both men fall from the train and die under its wheels.

After the simultaneous deaths of Harrison and Grainger, in the final few pages of the novel, Wright attempts closure in normative realist mode by tying the plot's loose ends into an imagined and consequent future. Grainger's overwhelming personal 'will' to have what he wants and not be thwarted is determined as the 'thorn' in his character and the source of his destruction. Barber speaks for Grainger after his death, further emphasising the individualist nature of his defects:

He spoke of the inordinate self-will that had been such a thorn in the flesh to him, that had warped his mind, and entered his soul and cankered it... (Grainger, vol.3, p.278)

But when Grainger's will is discovered leaving money to Grahame (£10,000), Barber (£20,000) and the remainder to Blanche Vernon, Grainger's inheritance takes on a much broader social and political significance. Each of the main characters inherits some of Grainger's money, or benefits directly from its inheritance. None of them refuses it, despite its corrupted origins and its murderous consequences. Indeed, this blighted inheritance is the only possibility each of them has of living the life they demand for their station.

Blanche, we are told, 'had scruples about taking it; but ultimately she reconciled herself to doing so...' (Grainger, vol.3, p.280). Blanche and Lionel now have the money they need to be able to marry, and for Lionel to set up his own business. They have acted as something of a moral fulcrum throughout the novel, Blanche

resisting Grainger's pressurising overtures for her love of Lionel, who himself represents reliability, consistency, unselfish love and steadfastness, despite his absence from the action for long periods. Only with Grainger's money, however, is their imagined future life together possible. Using the money to pay off Vernon's debts goes a long way, we are told, to reinstating the respectability and genteel status of the Vernon family. This in turn gives Blanche the leisured lifestyle she seems unable to live without; she is capable, we remember, even of accepting Grainger into her bed if that is the cost of gracious living. The nature of Lionel's future business is left unidentified, and little is made of his abilities as designer or engineer, except for the unfortunate fact that the one ship for whose design and fabrication he was entirely responsible sank, giving rise to the rumour of his own death (he was in fact the only survivor).

Dick Wilkinson and Polly can also marry because Lionel employs Dick, thus also making him 'a steadier and better man' (Grainger, vol.3, p.280). We are told that 'the same could be said of Sidney Vernon' (Grainger, vol.3, p.280) without further elucidation, though implying strongly that Sidney's future was also sponsored by Lionel. Barber, now a rich man, wants to set up a home and an establishment:

Casting his eyes about for a wife to preside over and adorn it, they fell upon Mrs Vernon...As the lady was nothing loathe to have a good establishment to preside over once more, and as Barber was a well-favoured, well educated, gentlemanly fellow, she received his advances graciously. (Grainger, vol.3, pp.280-1)

The lack of preparation for this arrangement makes its arbitrary suddenness within the novel seem a gratuitous attempt to restore 'normative' property relations and class relationships, however implausible the means. The novel's closing comments, that everyone

...came to speak forgivingly of Grainger, and to make generous allowance for the failing that had proved such a thorn in his life.

(Grainger, vol.3, p.281)

are equally unconvincing when Grainger had gratuitously set about ruining every aspect of their lives, and serve only to emphasise the rather desperate attempt on Wright's part to reinstate a view of society as a coherent 'whole' as a valedictory, when the body of the novel has argued very powerfully that such a perspective is no longer possible.

The novel has presented us with conflict, conflict between irreconcilable ideologies articulated through specific forms of life. This failed attempt at closure articulates a moment of incongruity, a moment when the writing resists its own asserted rationality and cannot sustain the order it is designed to signify. Wright exhibits this characteristic in Bane of a Life, but Grainger's Thorn is a novel of broader and deeper scope and its characters are representative of more complex economic and political realities. This textual 'resistance' to closure is the direct result of the deep fissures in society's historical relationships that the novel perceives as determining forces and dramatises vividly. We are shown the divisive and destructive effects of capital

accumulation upon social and personal relationships, human character and behaviour, and its role in creating social and economic institutions which replicate such divisions and their attendant conflicts.

Ultimately, the actual structure of the novel insists, it is only the economic power, the concerted intelligence and focused work, and the co-operative culture, of organised labour that can do effective battle with the fractured consciousness of capitalism. This central argument is most fully represented by the developing relationship between Grainger and Harrison.

As we have seen, Grainger is introduced to the novel as a wealthy and powerful man who has made his fortune by aggressive exploitation of an expanding capitalism. His connection with Harrison dates from their both having been colliers together. Harrison himself is introduced in a conversation between Barber and Grahame. Grainger has taken control of the Hopewell forges from an enlightened previous owner and Grahame describes the new regulations introduced by Grainger as 'undoubtedly hard' (Grainger, vol.1, p.228) arguing that '...the men at the Hopewell forges are very much inclined to kick against the Grainger administration.' (Grainger, vol.1, p.227) When Barber indicates Grainger's intransigence in such matters and describes the workmen as 'a rough lot' (Grainger, vol.1, p.229), Grahame replies:

They are strong Unionists, and one of their number is one of the great guns among the trade-union leaders of the country, and if they do strike it will be under his guidance, and with the sanction and support not only of their own union, but of other unions

likewise. It would be a thoroughly organised affair. (Grainger, vol.1, p.229)

He warns that Grainger will not have it all his own way. Barber argues that Grainger ought to be wise enough to make concessions as risking a big strike would be

likely to attract the notice of the papers, and bring "our own correspondents" (sic) onto the ground: there are points in Grainger's system that if adversely "ventilated" by the press, would tell against him, not only in the one affair, but all over the business. (Grainger, vol.1, p.230)

Organised labour, particularly when organised by Jim Harrison, stands as a significant threat to Grainger's 'system'. At this point Jim Harrison is introduced more personally and his emblematic nickname 'Burn-my-heart-out' explained. Jim, we are told by Grahame, was at one time

a decided desperado, a drinking, swearing, scamping, fighting fellow, who seldom worked at his trade, but made a living partly as a professional pugilist, partly as a poacher. (Grainger, vol.1, pp.231-2)

His nickname originates from a small sum of money given to him by the prison chaplain (on leaving prison after a poaching offence), stressing that he should not spend it on tobacco as it burns your heart out. Jim went straight to the

nearest public house and asked for it by that name - it stuck as a nickname. More importantly for the novel, the nickname betokens something resembling an absolute commitment, an utter determination, a refusal to be beaten when right. But despite his propensity for violence, Jim, we are told by Grahame, and unlike Grainger, is a fair fighter

'always ready to take the part of the weak. In his ring-fights he was noted for a chivalrous manner, for never availing himself of petty technical advantages...and when from winning a fight he was in funds, he shared them generously with any...who were in distress'. (Grainger, vol.1, p.233)

Moreover, Jim is a courageous colleague who risked, and nearly lost, his life saving from a collapsing shaft a Methodist miner who had spoken out against him. This action, which left him more seriously injured than the man he saved, was also the beginning of his reformation. Falling in love with the young woman who nursed him, she promised to marry him on condition he gave up his wild ways. Grahame continues:

'And he more than kept his pledge: love had transformed him. He turned out a specially sober, industrious, and earnest man, and it was at that time he first began to take the interest in politics and trade affairs which has led to his becoming a power among the Union men.' (Grainger, vol.1, p.236)

It is not difficult to see in Jim a symbolic representative of the history of

working-class activity, from an untutored physicality to conscious and effective organisation. He also represents a very real morality, contrasted with the affected genteel variety we see elsewhere in the novel. Harrison's 'thrashing' of Grainger came as a result of Grainger insulting a woman and unfairly using a knuckleduster on Jim when confronted. Barber makes it clear that this memory would be very much alive to Grainger and that it boded ill for any negotiated resolution between him and the Union.

With the strike looming, we are shown the difference between the scarcely rational response from Grainger and the calm, organised and reluctant preparation of the workmen. Deeply unpopular with the workmen of Stonebury, Grainger is generally referred to by them as 'an embodiment of the worst forms of 'the tyranny of capital'. (Grainger, vol.2, p.34) Through the use of spies and any underhand means at his disposal, Grainger had always beaten them and the use of such terms as 'spies in the camp', 'enemy', 'coup', and 'conqueror' (Grainger, vol.2, pp.34-5) stresses his understanding of industrial relations as warfare. After each victory

...he had imposed some new law upon the defeated workmen that weighed more heavily upon them than those they had struck against...they...regarded his presence among them as something pestilential. (Grainger, vol2, pp.35-6)

For his part, Grainger shows no concern for this absence of effective communication between himself and his workforce:

He was perfectly aware of the estimation in which he was held, and upon the whole was rather gratified by it than otherwise. (Grainger, vol.2, p.36)

Nor is his tone in any way tempered by discussion with those he is prepared to communicate with. In discussion with Barber and Grahame who are trying to avoid the threatened strike, Grainger refers to the workmen's preparation as a 'Counsel of war...' (Grainger, vol.2, p.65) and speaks 'sneeringly' (Grainger, vol.2, p.66) of them and with 'a lowering brow.' (Grainger, vol.2, p.66) When Grahame argues that the men sincerely want a reasonable, peaceful settlement through negotiation, Grainger replies

'...but I have no such idea (of compromise), and...have specially and deliberately made up my mind against it, so that discussion would be mere waste of time'. (Grainger, vol.2, p.67).

When reminded by Grahame that a strike would bring real hardship to women and children and there would be no harm and perhaps much good in considering the men's proposals, the narrative continues

Mr Grainger had listened with evident impatience, and to Barber...it was also evident that it was only by placing a strong curb on his temper that he restrained himself from some violent outburst. As it was, he made no attempt to disguise a scoffing tone... (Grainger, vol.2, p.69).

He maintains the same 'scoffing, sneering tone' (Grainger, vol.2, p.72) and concludes menacingly

'The men at the other shops have had a taste or two of what I am in these sort of things, and if the Hopewell gang try on any of their agitator tricks with me they'll get such a taste as will sicken them'. (Grainger, vol.2, p.72).

Barber also refers to Grainger's secrecy and underhandedness and to a 'strong card' Grainger believes himself to have which will ensure victory for him;

'I suppose it is something the strength of which lies more or less in its being secret and sudden, and he always acts upon the safe principle that a secret is never known to two. Whatever it is, he is very confident about it, and you may depend upon it that he will play it with as much startling effect as he can possibly manage'. (Grainger, vol.2, p.73)

This radical isolation that Grainger's form of individualism represents is in sharp contrast to the concerted action of the workmen, and to their social and emotional awareness. The men at the Hopewell Forges had benefited from and extended the goodwill of the previous owner who had

paid the best wages and piece-work rates in the district; he had built streets of superior cottages for his workmen; had established a reading-room and library for their use, together

with a system of evening classes for those who were desirous of advancing their general or acquiring technical education; and day schools for their children. Each year he had paid for a day's excursion for them and their families to any spot which the majority had chosen; and he had always given them substantial encouragement and support in such 'movements' among themselves as the formation of a preliminary savings' bank, and of sick and clothing clubs, and workshop bands. (Grainger, vol.2, pp.37-8)

As a result of this expansion of their lives, the Hopewell men had become 'socially...superior' (Grainger, vol. 2, p.38):

better educated, more intelligent, more energetic, independent, and self-reliant than most of those around them...They had a discussion society, in which politics...were the chief topics of debate; and many of the members of the society showed a knowledge of the subjects discussed, and a readiness and clearness in setting forth their views upon them, that some Members of Parliament might have envied. (Grainger, vol.2, pp.38-9)

Union formation had also progressed, with the Hopewell branch sponsoring significant and empowering changes in the Union Constitution. Hopewell had also provided a general secretary for the union, and Hopewell delegates 'had invariably distinguished themselves'. (Grainger, vol.2, p.40) Well organised, they

would 'move as one man' (Grainger, vol.2, p.40) in the event of a strike or similar action, and through wide influence 'were certain of powerful support - of the pecuniary assistance and moral influence of their own trade at large, and of other trades, too.' (Grainger, vol.2, p.40) They were best placed to fight such as Grainger and prepared for the battle:

They at once proceeded to take timely counsel together as to how they should meet the attack which they knew would speedily be made upon them. (Grainger, vol.2, p.41)

As soon as the expected happens, and Grainger's plans to cut wages, and piece-work prices, while increasing the nominal working week by three hours (all to be enforced by agreement, the failure to sign which would constitute resignation) are made public, Harrison, the branch secretary, holds a meeting to agree a report, and we become aware of his organising skills and administrative capability. He also engages convincingly in economic debate with Grahame over the advantages and weaknesses of supply-and-demand economic policy. But, always realistic, he asserts the union's desire to avoid industrial action 'if possible' (Grainger, vol.2, p.56): 'No, honour bright, sir, we don't want to strike if we can avoid it'. (Grainger, vol.2, p.57)

In honouring this intent, the union agree to compromise:

We'll agree to the additional three hours a week, to half of the proposed reduction in the day wages, and to piece-work being done away with altogether...he musn't discharge any Union man

just because he *is* a Union man, and...he musn't try either directly or indirectly to force the truck system upon us. (Grainger, vol.2, p.58)

Jim stresses that the Union members are confident of beating Grainger, despite his refusal to negotiate:

I do believe we are in a position to force him to terms. However hot we may feel against him, we've laid plans coolly, and haven't forgotten to take his strength into account. (Grainger, vol.2, p.59)

He shows Grahame letters,

from every branch of our Union throughout the kingdom sanctioning our strike, and promising to support us, and to keep men in their districts from coming here (Grainger, vol.2, pp.61/62)

from the Unions of other trades, approving of our intentions, and promising us help (Grainger, vol.2, p.62)

from the French, and Belgian and other foreign branches of The Workman's International Association, promising to use their influence to prevent men from being brought from those parts. (Grainger, vol.2, p.62)

Harrison also has a breakdown of Grainger's system together with its real effects upon 'the working classes' (Grainger, vol.2, p.62) with the intention of sending it to 'all the leading newspapers' (Grainger, vol.2, p.62) and circulated wherever he is likely to try to recruit workers to defeat the Union. In addition, the Union has arranged either to draw out men from his other works, or allow them to stay at work and help the strike financially according to need.

While they have benefited from an enlightened employer, their very real advances, which have been political, social and economic, have been their own achievements in terms of fulfilling opportunity and of managing and sustaining their community. It also includes protecting and defending those achievements. The men know that their actions will affect their wives and children immediately - their lives know of no economic cushion - and Wright makes a point of emphasising their domestic husbandry, their careful establishment of a community and a neighbourhood, within their economically limited circumstances:

Each house had a neatly railed-in flower-plot, and by judicious annual expenditure of paint upon railings, doors, and window-frames, a general brightness and freshness of outward appearance was maintained. They were really model cottages, and had tenants worthy of them - tenants who vied with each other in keeping their flower-plots trim and the interior of their houses bright, cleanly, and nicely and comfortably furnished. (Grainger, vol.2, pp.75-6)

In addition, once Grainger has determined to evict them from these homes, they turn their communal sensibility and experience into planned and concerted action to offset the worst of his efforts. They reach agreement to use the

local drill-shed and armoury...as an eating and meeting place in the daytime, and dormitories by night for as many men as it could be made to accommodate...while...the schools...to be converted into a dwelling-place for women and children. This, they said, would, with the assistance they expected to get from other workmen, enable them to house themselves and their families, while the landlord of their club-house...had volunteered to lend them planking enough to erect sufficient shedding to warehouse their furniture in his yard.

(Grainger, vol.2, pp.107-8)

'The Ladies', the former owners of the cottages, agree to allow working women and their children to live with them in their family mansion (Grainger, vol.2, p.108), it being too large to be fully occupied by two unmarried women. (Grainger, vol.2, p.108) The other workmen are also true to their word, offering to share their homes with the evicted workers. News of these preparations makes Grainger 'almost beside himself with sullen rage' (Grainger, vol.2, p.109).

Thus Wright studiously avoids a simplistic view of the strike, emphasising the social nature of the strikers' deserving of and achieving wide popular support for their action and practical help for their needs. He also presents, and at some length, a scene surrounding the first open-air lodge meeting after the

strike has been called. He does so to strengthen the cultural aspect of the strike activity, to present evidence of working people's capacity to construct a sustainable economic and cultural life of their own. In addition, it is one that enjoys enormous variety and energy and is very effectively symbolised by their clothing. For work on the banks of the Ironstone pits, the women wear

...men's coats, and their feet and legs are protected by heavy high-ankled boots, and stout leather leggings; and from their limbs being thus encased, and their having to walk about on the rough loose banks, they acquire a masculine stride... In their working clothes they look strange figures; but many people would be inclined to regard them as still more remarkable figures when 'cleaned up'...fearfully and wonderfully dressed...their chignons are in most cases considerably larger than their by no means small heads...and are palpably not made of hair, but of dyed wool, oakum, and other materials of a like kind...And then the colours of their costumes!...They are stalwart women...broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and stout-limbed... (Grainger, vol.2, pp.81-2)

The men are also variously dressed:

...some in old loose-fitting 'house' coats, slippers...old soft felt or cloth caps...Others...in clean working dress; but the majority are 'cleaned up' in their 'second best' clothes, the prevailing characteristic of which is a sporting cut. The garments of some of the young men...are of loud check patterns, while others...wear

plain dark tweed. But all with the trowsers tight-fitting, and the 'cut-away' coats, much be-pocketed, be-flapped, and be-braided...-mosaic breast-pins and alberts run very large, and are of 'loud' patterns. ...With the older men velveteen coats and yellowish woollen cord trowsers are the general wear, and they do not 'sport' jewelry; but many, both of them and of the young men, have gaudy shawl-patterned 'mufflers,' tied loosely about their throats over their neck-ties and collars. (Grainger, vol.2, pp.83-4).

The stress upon clothing is not incidental; it constitutes an awareness of such choices and tendencies as representative of a complex social organisation. Clothing is understood here to emphasise that the working people of Stonebury, and of the Hopewell forges in particular, do not constitute a singular unvariegated mass, but a complex pattern of needs, responses, desires and choices, however pressured by economic need and the control of others. They have made, and sustain, a working-class culture of their own filled with fashions and customs, behaviour that indicates peer pressure and the resistance to peer pressure, including genuine and false notions of what is 'the thing' to be seen wearing (Grainger, vol.2, p.82).

Such a form of life contains both resistances to other norms and the aping of them, and through such responses, to a style of their own, an assurance of their own. Wright also allows for the frequency of disability among the men - results of industrial accidents - but describes the workers generally as of healthy, muscular development, with expressions that mix the 'somewhat heavy' with an

unmistakeable indication of 'a more than average degree of intelligence'. It is also clear from Wright's treatment that the women are as politically informed as the men. The women are not drawn to the meeting out of 'mere female curiosity' (Grainger, vol.2, p.79).

It is easy to see that they understand the matter in hand, and they are discussing it with even greater vehemence than the men. (Grainger, vol.2, p.70)

Harrison, speaking at the meeting, speaks both to, and from *among*, such a complex community. He compares Grainger's 'system' with feudalism, 'he has reduced their position to pretty near that of serfs' (Grainger, vol.2, p.91) and stresses the extent to which the working men and women in this district had become 'prosperous and contented' (Grainger, vol.2, p.89). These assertions further isolate Grainger's response to the workmen and to the strike. Grainger's retrogressive methods, Harrison continues, have the power to reduce them to being among 'the poorest and most degraded in England'. (Grainger, vol.2, p.89) Thus Grainger's assertion of a particular kind of radical individualism is understood to be socially, economically and politically regressive, with economic success at a national level depending upon a positive professional relationship between the owners of industry and workers in industry, and that such a relationship *is* possible. Grainger, representing an unbridled capitalism, far from being an accelerator of constructive social change as a dynamic entrepreneur, is in fact a serious brake upon it.

The instability of Grainger's representative consciousness is brought to the

fore when he and Harrison clash in a combination of the personal and the political. Grainger's trump card for defeating the strike is that he has bought the leases to the workers' cottages and fully intends to evict them if they go ahead with the strike. Harrison is one of those tenants. Harrison's wife has just given birth; the baby dies and she is very ill and unlikely to survive the trauma of eviction. Harrison approaches Grainger to request that he, or at least his wife, be allowed to stay in their house until she is fit to leave it. He even agrees to sign the infamous agreement if Grainger will allow this. Grainger responds with 'a savage sneer' (Grainger, vol.2, p.118) and Barber interprets his behaviour as indicating that he was

Trying to work himself into a sullen rage, under cover of which harshness might be made to appear the result of passion rather than of deliberate intention (Grainger, vol.2, p.119)

Grainger is thus clearly aware of his attitude as one calculated to appear spontaneous. He is not therefore dominated solely by a compulsive will to power in a 'raw' state. He is also evasive, undermining and calculating. Grainger's political significance here lies in his deliberate effort at subterfuge: attempting to appear direct and open (however uncompromising) while in fact protecting a manipulative and disguised identity. Representative of accumulating capital at its most stark, he also embodies its radically unstable psychology. Harrison argues, quite correctly, that a compassionate decision here would make no difference one way or the other to the outcome of the strike, but makes the mistake of referring to the beating he once gave Grainger, arguing that no ill-will should be borne for a slight so long ago. Grainger's controlled and vengeful

response is to order the bailiffs in to Harrison's house first, and then orders Harrison out of the office. Harrison, goaded beyond endurance, knocks Grainger down.

This is one of many climaxes as the novel moves towards its close, but it is an important one. It is the first act of violence committed by one of the workmen and it has a long and convincing crescendo including industrial and political relations, economic conflict, and cultural and personal life. The blow is clearly intended as just. The development of Harrison's character so far, has asserted the rejection of violence in favour of a reasoned and negotiated life, domestically and industrially. This moment constitutes an admission of the possibility of violence that is just, when it becomes an extreme necessity. This violence is not that endemic to a class unable to control a 'natural' tendency to an animal nature. It is wrought by the cruel and unnecessary manipulation of an unbridled capitalism completely absorbed with its own short-term interests.

The strike is supported by a cross-section of the entire community: the ex-owners of the forges, the ex-owners of the cottages, the local parson, local businessmen. Even Barber refuses to condemn it, despite owing his living to Grainger. Wright's point is that successful 'cultures' depend upon self-help, and upon co-operation between economic groups and across class divides. It is a position which develops from an open acknowledgement of conflict, not a denial of it.

While Harrison, who refuses to avoid the consequences of this action, is only bound over to keep the peace for striking Grainger, his wife dies, and all of his

'reformed' characteristics are seriously challenged as he becomes the vengeful nemesis of Grainger and the moral and investigative consciousness of the novel. However, it is central to the novel's themes that his effective work in exposing Grainger is undertaken through concerted investigative work, not through simple violent revenge, which is what he initially vows. He discovers Grainger's machinations to prevent the union of Lionel and Blanche, including using Florence Wilkinson and Reeves the forger and ex-postmaster, to forge and intercept mail between them. More importantly, he witnesses Grainger's murder of Florence when she threatens to expose him to Blanche. Barber, having been informed by Grahame of this evidence, warns Grainger who attempts to escape abroad by train. He is caught, as he is boarding the train, by Harrison; they fight and fall from the train dying under its wheels 'the one still tightly clutching the other.' (Grainger, vol.3, p.277)

In one sense this ending does produce a kind of closure. We know all of Grainger's machinations and he has been punished for them; the workmen win their strike, so justice has been done industrially; Harrison, for whom life had become all but unbearable on the death of his wife and who had become, for plot purposes, irrelevant after his investigations have exposed the truth, dies attempting to apprehend the perpetrator, fulfilling his moral promise to do so. However, as we have seen, the fuller closure of the novel turns its back on its own discoveries to restore social and property relations to their previous standing, attempting to grant simple continuity to a society already identified as one so politically unjust and so socially unstable that it cannot continue without serious structural change. Thus the combined death of Harrison and Grainger represents the failure to resolve aesthetically what so far has been

presented as a political argument.

In so far as this death individualises the relationship between the two men, it constitutes an attempt to remove the political significance of that relationship so clearly demonstrated throughout the novel. The two men effectively cancel each other out; indicating that the individual consciousness once removed from its social determinants has little determining value. Grainger's 'thorn' in the title of the book is his individual willpower which we might see as a psychotic need for power and control brought about by the fragility of his own consciousness, while Jim's fury becomes only a personal desire for revenge over his wife's needless death. However, throughout its length, the novel has clearly argued for the effective self as a representative entity, as one that cannot be individuated. Therefore an assertion of absolute individualism as implied in the identities of Grainger and Harrison constitutes an assertion of something which cannot exist, i.e. on its own it cannot really be a self at all. Simultaneously, the socially constructed and representative self cannot be an hermetically sealed entity outside of social relations. As a consequence, any attempt at closure on the basis of individual character failings represents a position that the novel has already rendered meaningless. The joint death therefore constitutes a reversion to a moralised ending: Grainger receives exactly what he deserves - a just retribution - while Harrison must sacrifice his own life for taking that of another. Such an ending attempts a very Victorian closure and remains unconvincing given the power of its earlier politics.

As a politically symbolic death, it signifies the impossibility of political resolution, and leaves the novel with a residual model of a paternalist society,

when this notion too has been demonstrated as redundant. Such a model is based upon the ownership of money and plant by a landed and leisured class, connected with an entrepreneurial tendency and claiming moral as well as economic ascendancy. However, this paternalist model is exactly what has been demolished by the novel through Vernon's initial failures, and the unpicking of Grainger's motivations and determinations and the extremity of what he was capable of in pursuit of their achievement. His is a paternalist model par excellence, failing to be socially productive because notions of integrity or morality or genteel behaviour could not obstruct his will to power, once it came within grasp. The individual personal consciousness is understood, through Grainger, to be too fragile a foundation upon which to base a successful society, to create a strong social fabric. Such a society, the novel has argued, is dependent upon structures of cooperation, negotiation and interchange. In turn, the entire social network is also exposed as extremely vulnerable to abuse by too powerful a consciousness that understands itself as functioning outside of such relations. While Grainger can be seen to represent the attitudinal outcrop of the structured lives the other wealthy people lead, but without the cover of their gentility, the novel leaves uninvestigated the issue of how such a destructively powerful consciousness can arise without society's sanction in the first place. The social, economic and political structures of society produce such as Grainger, only for the Graingers of the world to make that social life unliveable by being murderously destructive of its more enlightened ends.

An institutional society, the novel is telling us, which produces deep social, economic and political conflict as a systemic inevitability of its own function and which in turn 'produces' human social consciousness, cannot but produce a

fractured social consciousness: one at war with the world around it and thus with itself. Such an isolated consciousness cannot contribute to the production of an effective social cohesion in its turn, and will ultimately contribute only to its own destruction. The only solution offered by Wright is an attempted return to a former state, which is no solution at all. The social and political consequences of the successful strike remain unsignposted; the elevation of Barber and Harding to social, industrial and therefore political power is similarly left unidentified. Such developing relationships are the direct inheritance of the novel's political arguments and it is the weaker for leaving their development uncertain.

Most important of all, such an attempt at closure pointedly ignores and thus denies the very real advances in social and industrial power achieved by the workmen and women of Stonebury through their successful strategic and concerted actions, and which the novel spends so much of its time describing, articulating and promoting. The reader is left wondering whether Harrison's very effectivity is not another reason for his death at the novel's close.

Everything Harrison does is presented by the narrative as essentially praiseworthy. Where it is not, the weight of stress upon him is made sufficiently plain to allow for a very powerful understanding of his actions as wrought by pressure, not committed from choice or as inevitable in a working-class man. Even his personal love for his wife is established as an index to his social and political self and not a separate entity, and as forming the central vein of value for his social and political actions, counterbalancing his failings. It is clear that as a union leader he has real ability. His successful strategy for

the strike (he establishes a 'negotiating' position, copes with the possibility of eviction for himself and his members, establishes widespread support for the imminent strike, and all very effectively) suggests a man of real worth and value. Similarly, displaced as he has been by events and Grainger's machinations, he becomes the determining consciousness of the novel, using all available means to produce a just end for all, and doing that very effectively, also.

At his death, Harrison is removed as an agent of moral justice; of greater importance is that his political significance and agency, profoundly influential during his lifetime, are also gone, arresting the political potential of the novel and facilitating the unsatisfactory closure with which it ends. Had Harrison been allowed to survive, there would be no reason for him not to return to the area, to resume work and industrial and political effectiveness. But this in turn would surely lead to inevitable industrial conflict with the situation we are asked to accept as the balanced and defining closure of the novel. The ending we are given directly counters the radical historicising that has characterised the main body of the novel and returns it to a neutral void of 'natural' property relations it has already proved to be anything but natural. It is a closure that is determined by its own impossibility and thus undermined by it. Harrison's powerful ingenuity is the only convincing means we are shown by which a new social world might be made. The intelligent working classes possess a power that can change society by means of altering actual determining structures: economic and political ones. But having realised this form, Wright still cannot allow this development to create the world of the imagined future; he cannot let go of the values and structures that his fiction has just demolished.

Such an ending imparts a dominating tone of despair to the text, a despair resultant of the novel's leaving a society incapable of functioning effectively with the relationships it has *and* without them - there seems no alternative of new or renewed ones. Where the possibility of new relationships does seem to exist, there is only a vacuum. Grainger's Thorn fails to reconcile such contradicting values; but as those values are contradictions within historical society, and as a novel is an aesthetic 'working' of historical concerns, it is the novel's great success that it reveals these failings so powerfully.

Harrison dies because Grainger does, and that is the only way to secure the 'balance' the novel tries to conclude with. In Grainger and Harrison we have more than a resemblance to Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: the split between the socially constructive consciousness and the socially destructive consciousness, with the inability to discern effective causal origins for either. It is not accidental that they die wrapped around each other. When social relations produce social consciousness, and when these relations, as in this novel, promote, even mandate, fracture and real social damage, then the consciousness produced cannot but be a fractured one. Such a consciousness cannot then produce seamless social relations in turn. The proffered solution is a return to an imagined past of old money and paternalism; but the novel has already demonstrated that this relationship has been transformed into one of new money, corruptly accumulated, and merely masquerading as old money. Wright reveals impossibilities, only to return to them as his only refuge, but the strength of this powerful novel is precisely its placing of these issues into evident, and terminal, contradiction.

The True History of Joshua Davidson⁴⁷ Eliza Lynn Linton,
1872

Saul of Mitre Court⁴⁸ John W Overton, private publication,
1879

While these two novels were published seven years apart, in 1872 and 1879 respectively, they have sufficient in common for them to be considered together. Both novels eschew an orthodox mode of representation in order to combine social and political critique with an awareness of their identity as literary projects. They invite simultaneous radical investigation of the society around them and of the ways that society is represented in literary form, by questioning assumed norms for both. As aesthetic forms, they show a constant awareness of the conditions of their own possibility as novels. In so doing, they raise awareness of the relationship between literary form and ideology, questioning normative assumptions of the aesthetic representation of social reality and preventing their aesthetic function from lapsing into a too-readily consumed commodity. Their radicalism lies less in any overt politics, than in the depiction of their potential subjective revolutionary consciousness.

These two novels constitute a search for a centred subject in a world of literary form within which that possibility was failing. They inherit the problems Grainger's Thorn brought to the surface but failed to resolve. Their effort is to construct a different kind of subjectivity, a politicised consciousness that

⁴⁷ Eliza Lynn Linton, The True History of Joshua Davidson (London: Strahan Co., 1872)

⁴⁸ John W. Overton, Saul of Mitre Court, Being Extracts from the Papers of Mr. Gadshill (London: privately published, 1879)

recognises the complex realities of its social relationships, but remains critically analytical and not fully embedded. The subjectivity of the two eponymous protagonists, functioning to organise and unify value, becomes a conscious construct in attempts to describe a position that is always changing, to create a spatial and temporal possibility for the enunciation of fact and value which does not exist as a given. These two texts constitute a search for a centred subject in a world of political, moral and literary form within which such a thing was splitting. The development and representative significance of the two men is sufficiently similar for them to be analysed here in parallel. Their literary treatment and presentation, however, contain interesting variations.

While religion is central to both texts, it functions as a subversive and iconoclastic intervention, proposing a notion of the absolute with which to contrast the shifting character, the constructed and corrupted identities of social norms and their establishing and securing forms of articulation, otherwise assumed as unchanging and effectively unopposable. No spiritual solutions are offered; the determining effects or actions are all practical, social and political ones. Replacing established forms with exploratory forms is an act which functions at the locations where the fissures within traditional formations of social literature are revealing themselves. The moral argument is the leverage which stresses the point that *such* a morality (supported in theory by state structures, political rhetoric, dominant aesthetic forms and normative values) would, if ever properly put into practice, become a radical politics, a threatening presence to the state. Such a moral politics represents a position, a strategy of sorts, that cannot accept the norms of an inequitable society (cannot make the unacceptable acceptable) and that insists that action must be taken to redress

those wrongs. The 'unchanging' humanist morality really functions in both novels as an indicator pointing to the injustices and inequities otherwise accepted as inevitable and continuous. Direct action can articulate necessary social and political change when established state morality and politics refuses to recognise the job in hand at any level.

The asserted representative subjectivity in these novels, Joshua and Saul respectively, is given little or no interior life, its value is fully integrated into action. In each case their combined purpose and value is reported to the reader by an attendant figure, whose perceptions possess a distinct perspective. Both novels constitute biographies of a kind in that the ostensible purpose of each is to tell the story of one particular man (from birth to death in one case, from birth to old age in the other) to include the effect his times had upon him and that he had upon them and the people he came to know and to influence. However, the narrative strategy in the two novels transforms this conventional notion into something altogether more challenging.

The two novels share the device of adopting a documentary stance at their outset. In Joshua, the narrator, a man who remains unnamed, argues, in the opening words of the Preface, that he is producing a 'record'. (Joshua, p.vii) of events 'as I know it' (Joshua, p.vii) as a 'duty I owe' (Joshua, p.vii) in order to contradict the 'so many false reports' (Joshua, p.vii) that have 'got about' (Joshua, p.vii) regarding the 'life and opinions of JOSHUA DAVIDSON, the Cornish carpenter'. (Joshua, p.vii) He further argues that being neither 'a gentleman nor a scholar...I have not pretended to any graces of style' (Joshua, p.vii) and that he has made no attempt to make this record an amusing story.

The record will be, he goes on, more one of 'what Joshua said and thought than of what happened to him through others; that is, there is next to no dramatic interest in it' (Joshua, p.vii). He concludes that he need not give his name 'as those who know Joshua will know who I am well enough' (Joshua, p.vii) and emphasises that 'if I have said anything wrong they can come forward and challenge me' (Joshua, p.vii) and leaves the book written 'for truth's sake and for love's' (Joshua, p.vii) as 'my dear friend's memory' (Joshua, p.vii).

Such a preface is important in what is, after all, a novel and not a record of actual events. It is both a disclaimer and an assertion; that while it might lack the 'produced' qualities the reader might want or expect, it does convey that most important of all qualities, truth. At the same time, the text becomes a version among versions aimed at denying the falsity of the others, and it is written by someone whose view is partial in both senses of the term. The disclaimer also denies the qualities that might be recognised as 'novelistic': no style, no amusement, no dramatic character development, no identified author.

The full title of Saul of Mitre Court contains the sub-title 'BEING EXTRACTS FROM THE PAPERS/ OF/ MR GADSHILL/ EDITED AND ARRANGED/ BY/ JOHN W. OVERTON (Saul, title page). The same page also contains a quotation from Alton Locke indicating the author's belief that ideas must be given 'the sign o' universal comprehension' (Saul, title page) or no workman will believe in them. This was an issue of some importance to Overton, as he has published this book privately and dedicated it to 'MR CHARLES ROGERS/ PRESIDENT OF THE LONDON SOCIETY OF COPPERSMITHS/ BY HIS BROTHER CRAFTSMAN IN UNION/ THE AUTHOR'.

The writer of the biography (the narrator of the novel) thus faces the uphill task of writing a complex 'life' of a learned man. Expert in theology and philosophy as well as an engineer, Saul, by the novel's close, has become a fully-qualified physician and the acknowledged leader of a community. This life needs to be written in such a way as to do justice to the formation of that complex mind and to do so in a manner understandable to a member of the operative classes.

The 'editorial' disclaimer in this novel takes up the first chapter. The narrator, again unnamed, possibly to emphasise the documentary style of the introduction, claims a similar duality of reluctance and inability on the one hand, and active assertion on the other. He speaks of the 'pile of manuscript from which it has been my fate to draw the materials of this book' (Saul, p.1) and also stresses that 'It will be seen from the following extracts from letters that I had afterwards asked to be released from the task of editing these autobiographical sketches on the grounds of my want of artistic ability and literary skill'. (Saul, p.2) In a letter he 'receives' from 'Mr Gladshill', it is indeed written,

...you write complaining of your want of mere literary skill. I regret that I cannot help you...The knowledge of the trade I followed for so many years never seemed to me to pass from my hand to my head, but always from my head to my hand...I regard your practical acquaintance with the mode of life of a large section of the operative classes as your best qualification for the

task. (Saul, p. 4)

This sense of his own unfitness for the task of completing Saul's (Mr Gadshill's) biography is repeated throughout the book, which serves to remind the reader of the problematic task and of the lack of certainty in the narrative voice. At the same time, he asserts that the book would never have been written but for his 'presumptuous persuasion' (Saul, p.1) and knowledgeably makes a clear differentiation between the writing methods of Carlyle and Sterne to elucidate his own abilities. While Saul gives literary skill the epithet 'mere' and stresses that drawing from practical accuracy is most important, the narrator seems more aware that you don't avoid the complexities of representation in narrative form quite so easily.

Neither narrator is able to record their respective stories with unmediated confidence. Their efforts at biography are either versions of someone else's story, are written in response to someone else's story, or cobbled together out of what fragments were available as well as the writer could manage, given his limited skills and perspective. The central subjectivity of each novel (the characters Joshua and Saul) is thus very deliberately *produced* rather than unproblematically *presented*. What we are being given is a self-conscious narrative with a political purpose, not unproblematical verisimilitude. Each of the novels are refusing to recount a slice of anybody's life, simply perceived and written down. The central character is more than a real person being himself; he is a fictional construct representing many. He is a multiple voice in one body, a political representative, a 'position', that analyses and acts, responds and constructs in constant dialectic with an ongoing reality: the owl of Minerva

flying in daylight. While Joshua's and Saul's achievement of selfhood and its subsequent development is the central issue at stake, the problem of how such a process might be constructed and represented in narrative form comes only just behind. In both novels the initial strategy is to take a normative biographical method and account for the growth of the child's mind and its development into a mature adult self. The methods chosen raise as many questions as they provide answers, and work to provoke the reader into asking the same questions and to prevent the reader from simple reception of an easily-read story

Joshua is a representative figure from the outset. Reference is made to the possibility of a family connection with King Arthur, and though some scepticism is included ('for naturally down about Tintagel everything has to do with King Arthur - even the choughs', Joshua, p.2) we are told that Joshua represents some kind of 'hereditary transmission' (Joshua, p.2) that is in the blood and that might lead to 'a revival of national glories...under new aspects but from the ancient sources' (Joshua, p.2). His parents are Quakers, though 'not of a strict kind' (Joshua p.2) which seems to give him a thoughtful and dissident aspect from the first. We are told that he had a habit of

...asking why, and out of reasoning principle, from quite a little lad; which displeased people; so that he did not get all the credit from the schoolmaster and the clergyman to which his diligence and good conduct entitled him. They thought him troublesome, and some said he was self-conceited; which he never was; but the more he was in earnest the more he

offended them. (Joshua, pp. 3-4)

Joshua's parents are barely mentioned beyond this and then only to indicate his developing beyond their compass. His struggle with the institutions of the Church and Education are similarly alienating:

he became more and more thoughtful, and more and more under the influence of a higher principle than lads of his age are usually troubled with. And though always tender to his parents and respectful to the schoolmaster and minister, and the likes of that, yet he was less guided by what might be called expediency in his conduct, and more than ever a stickler for the uncompromising truth. (Joshua, p.13)

The defining moment in this development is his confrontation with the vicar over the relationship between the Church and the Christianity it professes to represent and practise. Using what we can see as an innocent version of the Socratic Method, he asks questions and highlights the discrepancies in the answers. He confirms with the vicar that the way of Christ is the right way, and that the acts of the apostles, and subsequent disciples were also the right way. Gaining agreement, he then asks, 'If we are Christians, why don't we live as Christians?' (Joshua, p.6) He goes on to contrast the opulent life of the clergy with the plight of the poor and quotes the verse, 'Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?' (Joshua, p.7) He goes on to explain his dilemma, that normative institutionalised society claims to be Christian and to

represent Christ's teaching, but then doesn't do it and apparently doesn't notice that it doesn't do it, but carries on claiming that it does, anyway. He compares this situation with the two sons in the parable, the first who says he will do his Lord's will, but doesn't and the second who says he won't, but does. The vicar immediately sees himself likened to the first son and becomes furious. He reverts to hierarchical social norms insisting that Joshua defer to those in authority over him and to those who are his social superiors. This only increases Joshua's consternation, and sets up a lifelong enmity between them.

Christianity remains central to Joshua's thinking as a vehicle for the investigation of assumptions in order to elucidate the relationship between what might be seen to be true and what is represented as truth institutionally. When his parents warn him against 'over boldness' (Joshua, p. 14) in his aim to imitate Christ, he simply answers, 'Then, if imitation is over bold, His life was a delusion, and he is not our example at all...' (Joshua, p.14). He gathers together a group of friends in order to promulgate a proper Christian life, but outside of the established Church. 'He seemed to have felt all that we felt, and to have thought all our thoughts. Young as he was, he was our leader even then'. (Joshua, p.16) Described as 'sober, industrious, chaste', (Joshua, p.17) these lads were nonetheless treated as the enemy by local clergy because they were not churchgoers, the observance of the ritual recognised and privileged over the conscience in the action.

To follow Christ's acted life was the sum of their aim and in doing so to spread that influence. Joshua, importantly, does this 'not necessarily...repeating set forms, but in the whole attitude of his mind' (Joshua, p.20). He takes to

extremes the conviction that faith alone can do anything, when he attempts to move a stone by prayer alone, by inciting a viper to bite him and eating poisoned berries, all as tests of the power of faith. The stone does not move; he becomes very ill from the bite and the berries, but he discovers a relationship between faith and the laws of nature. The difference between divine revelation and natural processes is for him a short-lived but very real crisis. He concludes that if the laws of nature cannot be changed, then it is possible that the Word of Christ is parable and not literal truth:

Can it be, he then said solemnly, that much of that Word is parable? That Christ was truly as he says of Himself, the corner stone, but not the whole building? - and that we have to carry on the work in His spirit, but in our own way, and not merely to try and repeat His acts? (Joshua, p.28)

The narrator makes clear the difficulty for them when absolute faith seems no longer possible:

was not our theory of absolute infallibility at an end? But if absolute infallibility was at an end, was not that making Christ a mere temporary teacher, local and for the day - not universal and for all time; and God a bit by bit worker? And if so, and even Gospel revelation is not final, where then exists the absolute necessity of acceptance? Yet, if we came to this conclusion - sorrowfullest of all! - we must relinquish all anchorage everywhere, and do our best to piece together a theory of life

for ourselves, glad if any of the broken fragments of faith might still serve us. (Joshua, p. 30)

The narrator goes on to say that during this period 'Joshua's mind was like an unpowered vessel', that he was beset with doubts, and but for the character of Christ, 'everything had failed him'. (Joshua, pp.72-73) Neither the social institutions of value nor their own concepts of absolute truth had been of sufficient strength to support the group and the concept of the *whole* life has deserted them. But then a second, and determining, confrontation with Mr Grand, the vicar, provides the crucial epiphany. The narrator sets the scene with details of Mr Grand's character and opinions:

He had no love for the poor, and no pity: he always called them "the common people," and spoke of them disdainfully, as if they were different creatures from gentry. I question if he allowed us the same kind of souls; and I do know that he denied equality of condition after death, and quoted the text of "many mansions" in proof of his theory of exclusion. (Joshua, p.35)

Mr Grand confronts Joshua over his non-attendance at Church and becomes both condescending and insulting. Joshua responds with the accusation that the majority of the clergy ignore the plight of the poor in all except words:

in giving two full services on Sundays, and reading the marriage-service and the burial service and the like...you discharge your conscience of all other obligations towards them, and think you

have done enough. You never seem to remember that when Christ preached the Gospel to the poor it was to make them equal with the rich. Why, sir, the poor of our day are the lepers of Christ's; and who among you, Christian priests, consorts with them? (Joshua, p.39)

The argument becomes increasingly bitter until Mr Grand accuses Joshua of 'Going in for socialism' (Joshua, p. 41) and losing the power to argue altogether, threatens him with a whip across his shoulders. Joshua responds in a manner which surprises both the narrator and Mr Grand, he erupts with an anger 'so violent' and so sudden' (Joshua, p.42) and completely unlike the placid self that he had been known to exhibit since his childhood:

'God shall smite thee, thou whited wall!...Is this your boasted leadership of souls? - this your learned solving of difficulties?...feed my lambs - with what? with stones for bread - with insult for sincerity - with the gentleman's disdain for the poor thought of the artisan - with class insolence for spiritual difficulties! Of a surety, Christ has to come again to repeat the work which you priests and churches have destroyed and made of no effect, and to strip you of your ill-used power. You are a gentleman, sir, and I am only a poor carpenter's son; but I stand against you now - man against man - soul against soul - and I spurn you with a deeper and more solemn scorn than you have spurned me!' (Joshua, pp. 42-43)

The immediate effect of this encounter is to cause Joshua to have 'a kind of vision or waking dream' (Joshua, p.46) peopled with symbolic figures in which the Church and Society sat enthroned, both 'stern, forbidding and oppressive' (Joshua, p.47) fêted by wealthy figures surrounding them, called Believing Christians and Respectable members of Society, who are graciously received for their subservience. Ecclesiastical Society is represented as promoting God as a devil and showing real pleasure when they instil fear by this device. Those believers are then bound with 'chains and swathing bands' (Joshua, p.47) until they are scarcely able to move or breathe. Far from rebelling against this treatment, however they make the bands and links even tighter. Meanwhile, at the feet of the two rulers lay three figures 'cruelly bound and tortured' (Joshua, p. 49), these are named Truth (holding Science in her arms), Freedom and Humanity. Part of the torture constitutes the, not entirely successful, attempt at gagging them. The partial failure is enough for their words to sound 'loud and clear as the sound of a silver trumpet' (Joshua, p.50) which encourages some of those bound to break their bonds. Around these three figures are gathered small groups of people, with different constituents. Around Truth and Science were gathered men of 'authority, of large brains, temperate nature, of clear and candid thought'. (Joshua, p.51) The figure of Freedom is a 'huge giant, this son of the old gods, whose might no one had been able to calculate should he once arise in his strength' (Joshua, p. 53) He frightens everyone, except 'his own few lovers, chiefly of the poorest class' (Joshua, p. 53) who gather around him, slowly and painstakingly working for his deliverance

...every now and then getting one link loosened here and another there, knowing that in time he would with their help shake

himself free of all his chains, and stand up before the world, the great-hearted leader, the glad possession of every man and woman that breathes. (Joshua, p. 53)

The third figure is the most oppressed of all, 'a lovely form, vilely clad in disfiguring garments, and bespattered with dirt that had been flung at it by the high priest and Society in concert'. (Joshua, p.54) This figure is surrounded by the 'most miserable sinner that crawled - the thief, the murderer, the harlot'. (Joshua, p.54) In that face, condemning no-one, but refusing obedience to the high priest and the king Joshua recognised, 'the soiled and vilified face of Humanity - the face of Christ' (Joshua, p.54). At this moment another figure suddenly appears side by side with all of the oppressors

A man coarsely clad in rude garments, a man of unconventional manners, but of a noble aspect, whose face was the face of an enthusiast who believed in himself, and in whose self-reliance were his sole credentials. (Joshua, p.55)

His companions are drawn from the same elements as those who supported the figure of Humanity: all the 'sinless Cains of history' (Joshua, p.55), those who have worked for the public good and been vilified for it. He points at the high priest and speaks to Joshua, rejecting society's institutional dishonesty and asserting

'Here am I, Jesus of Nazarene, the son of Joseph and Mary, as I lived on earth; poor, unlearned, a plebeian and a socialist, at war

with the gentlemen and ladies of my society, the enemy of forms, of creeds, of the priestly class of respectabilities; and there you see my modern travesty...the world wants the thing not the label'.

(Joshua, p.57)

At this point the vision fades away, but the crucial change has been made. Joshua's mature self has come into being: a radical, action-based self, alienated from institutional society, most especially the Church, but with a pro-active and socialist agenda to be with and work with the common people, the sinless Cains, to achieve social equality in the spirit of the man Jesus. Such a conception of radical selfhood clearly has implications for its literary representation. With literature, the dichotomy between the thing and the label becomes harder to discern. As fiction, fiction is both thing and label: there is no 'real' Joshua Davidson outside of the novel. However, the presence of this duality gives fiction a transgressive power and dynamic which it can use to break with normative expectations and forms in order to remind and re-remind the reader of its radical agenda, not its entertainment value.

Joshua's determining announcement to his friends and followers can be seen as the theme for the novel itself. He asserts that Jesus was a man of his time who did not question social or political conditions, but concentrated upon the deserts of individuals:

'He did his best to remedy that injustice, so far as there might be solace in thought, by proclaiming the spiritual equality of all men, and the greater value of worth than status; but he left the

social question where he found it - paying tribute even to Caesar without reluctance - His mind not being ripe to accept the idea of a radical revolution, and His hands not strong enough to accomplish it, if even He had imagined it. But neither He nor his disciples imagined more than the communism of their own sect; they did not touch the throne of Caesar, or the power of the hereditary irresponsible Lord. Their communism never aimed at the equalisation of classes throughout all society...The modern Christ would be a politician. His aim would be to raise the whole platform of society, he would not try to make the poor contented with a lot in which they cannot be much better than savages or brutes. He would work at the destruction of caste, which is the vice at the root of all our creeds and institutions. He would not content himself with denouncing sin as merely spiritual evil; he would go into its economic causes, and destroy the flower by cutting at the roots - poverty and ignorance...it is the confession that society is elastic, and that no social arrangements are final...it is the doctrine of evolution, of growth; and just as Christ was the starting-point of a new era of theological thought, so is the present the starting-point of a new era of social fact...I have come out into the upper air of action; into the understanding that Christianity is not a creed as dogmatised by Churches, but an organisation having politics for its means and the equalization of classes as its end. It is Communism...the doctrine I have chosen...is Christian Communism'. (Joshua, pp. 80-4)

Joshua has rejected the emblems of representation in favour of a concept of the real, the social fact; but that 'real', far from being a fixed *a priori* reality in constant reference, is an elastic concept always in development, always unfinished, always in the making. Similarly, the novel itself embraces this perspective and becomes itself elastic in form to include reportage, biography, theological discussion and experiment, personal drama, allegorical vision, a sociological 'essay' on prostitution, an account of the Paris Commune - a series of ideas as events, a continuum of values for experiment and discussion with scant concern for traditional novelistic values, the presentation of social norms to be dismantled with a glimpse of what the world might look like if those whom Joshua represents were to be successful.

The development of the key representative subjectivity in Saul of Mitre Court, the character of Saul himself, carries a comparable political and social weight to Joshua, while being given a different literary presentation. In Saul, the events are discovered after the fact by the narrator who discovers a small alternative community when he stumbles upon a cricket match during a country walk. Enjoying their hospitality, he meets Saul as an aging man, the spiritual leader of the community. It is through speaking with him that he comes to take on the role of biographer. The biographical narrative of Saul's early life begins no sooner than the eighth chapter, after a lengthy account of the community, to which we will return. While Joshua was described as a beautiful child, even androgynous, Saul is notable for his ugliness, with a contrasting 'pretty little boy' (Saul, p.44) for a brother. This ugliness causes him to be neglected and he remarks that had he not been he might have avoided becoming 'a man of cares and solitude' and that 'a new and better turn might have been given to my life'

(Saul, pp. 44-45). Again, in contrast to Joshua's confidence in his own powers and ideas, Saul flees from the rejection he feels so bitterly by crying himself to sleep 'in some dark corner of the old house'. (Saul, p.44) His family lives in poverty:

You might search the planet over and fail to find the four square miles which contained as much squalor, sickness, misery, and intensified wretchedness, as the four acres bisected by Mitre Lane...So filthy were the moral exhalations of the court, that my mother dared not open the windows to admit the air on the hottest summer nights...I saw and heard much I did not understand...but such influences smear the soul and prepare it for ignition. (Saul, p. 47)

At a very early age Saul develops an inquisitive mind, eager for learning, though not of following worn paths, and at school he becomes, in his own words:

at once a great dunce and a great reader. I daresay I culled more thoughts from books in a week than my companions did in a year, but any or all of them could beat me in matters of fact. I cared little for the latitude and longitude of Behring's Straits, but I was familiar with every hair in Robinson Crusoe's dog, every feather of his parrot. (Saul, p.55)

Failed by his school, which he describes as 'a very lazy one' (Saul, p.55), it is his reading and his roving imagination that forms his early mind and allows for his

later eclecticism:

I was called 'Our Storry'. Scholars will find little trouble in tracing this abbreviation of 'Historicus' through 'Storicus' downwards. I think I must have established my reputation as a reader who related what he read with marvellous additions, at a very early stage of my scholastic career...never was artist less disturbed by considerations of local colouring, or dramatist by the unities than I. (Saul, p.56)

The love of his mother, which he constantly refers to as 'sweet', is his only emotional refuge, while his stern and unimaginative chapel-going father has a violent temper which he takes out on the mother. In one crucially painful incident the father, who has made some progress to 'the second rung of the English social ladder,' (Saul, p. 74) turns his face from his family out of shame for his wife whose family were of lower social standing than his. He describes his mother's dread of his father's violent anger at her having, as he saw it, disgraced him. At one point, Saul is imprisoned in an upstairs room for having fought another boy, albeit on a matter of principle, and uses the time to ruminate as best he can at that age upon the natural and moral worlds and feels constantly the fear of the great eye of God.

Alienated from his father, he is thus also alienated from his father's chapel attendance and institutional religion. His father takes him to the chapel for what he imagines will be an important introduction to the institutionalised religious life. Saul's response is one of disappointment; the experience simply

does not live up to his imaginative conception of what it might be, that it does not live up to fictional standards. In a rare humorous moment, Saul notices that the chapel is situated

midway in a street at one end of which was a public-house called 'The Wizard's Cave,' and at the other end a police station, typifying possibly the position of supernatural religion in England, halfway between a belief in luck and a belief in law' (Saul, p.95)

He attributes the strangeness of this position as a result of the 1832 Reform Act, which 'increased the political power of Dissenters, enfranchising the smaller shopkeepers and manufacturers to whose ranks they belonged' (Saul, p.96). This perception is made in retrospect by the older Saul who has put these perceptions into his papers, from where the narrator uses them. There follows a lengthy disquisition on the organised dissenting church and the world around it. As a rapidly expanding commercial world made these increasingly wealthy, so the simplicity of their spirituality became lost, leading to a tendency 'to substitute Parliamentary action for prayer, and subscriptions to distant missions for simplicity of life'. In a lengthy passage, which seems to rehearse the views of Overton mediated through the position of an older Saul looking backwards and 'discovered' by the narrator in his papers, the position of organised religion in an age of material prosperity and scientific discovery is asserted. It takes the form of an ironic sermon in being less a debate than a form of declamation. A lengthy quotation is necessary to give a real feeling for the tone of the writing and the way in which the syntax itself contributes to the invective:

It would be unwise to look for the spiritual fruits of adversity in times of prolonged material prosperity; and madness to expect self-denial in men who make the best of this world by standing between the man who makes the shovel and the man who uses it, or between the man who makes the cloth and the man who wears it. The ministry, drawn from the sons of the middle men, must necessarily be of mediocrity; the doctrine they teach must be of the shop. Sermons are fitted to the teachings of the minor press, the press, in sporting phrase, making the running, while afraid to leave the pulpit quite out of sight. To hymn the praises of rum and gunpowder, grey shirtings and opium under the name of commerce, to corpulent and opulent gin spinners, cotton spinners, pawnbrokers and retired publicans who have taken to the suburban villa state of retirement, as to a purgatory from which they may pass to paradise, is not an unpleasant occupation. A pretty sketch, say of Nazareth, got up from the most recent volume of Eastern travel; for exordium some points made on the Do this and thou shalt have that, saith the Lord, morality; the close intimacy and direct proportion between money and morals strongly suggested, for heads of division; and the application of the inevitable to the congregation gracefully waived by a touching reference to Calvary, and a transference of the whole *dramatis personae* to another state in the conclusion - a state in which the gout of villa life, which is the punishment of the bibulous here, is made to work out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of

glory to the sufferer hereafter - is the sermon, not of a Howe or a Bunyan, but of the average Dissenting, thought-to-be-qualified minister of today. (Saul, pp. 96-97)

And it goes on, to encompass, and condemn, careerism, social ambition, and cultural imperialism. The increasing lengths of the sentences, the multiplicity of subordinate clauses, the scornful tone, the wonderful use of 'gout' as a metaphor, all combine to build a fury of language, an impassioned rejection of the hypocritical relationship between a formed religion and the values it claims, and the values it really lives by. While Joshua identified social inequity and social injustice as the fault line running through established religion, so Saul identifies the lack of critical space between commerce and institutional life as giving the lie to its claims to moral leadership; different route, same destination.

Back to Saul's childhood, he attends the chapel with fear and trembling and witnesses the complete lack of spirituality that would be meat and drink to his later analysis. To further confirm his distance from organised religion, the chapel service is immediately followed by the strongest avowal yet of his father's shame at his wife's inability to rise in the world with him, and her depression at this and the exhaustion of too many confinements and infant deaths. The father's anger meets with opposition from Saul who is knocked unconscious by his father. The shock of all this, Saul testifies, 'had been almost fatal to my mother. *Fear kills.*' (Saul, p.102, italics in original). Indeed, his mother does die very shortly after this and Saul, in his bereavement, contemplates the meaning of transcendent reality, wondering whether his

mother had a soul and if so, where it might be. He longs for miracles when all he gets is doctors and undertakers. He comes to the conclusion that she continues to exist immanently, 'in the heaven which you will make around you, wherever you go, if you grow into a true man, and preserve her moral likeness.' (Saul, p.108)

Entering adolescence, Saul embarks upon factory work, but it does not resolve the problem of his social isolation or the growth of his reading and imagination. He visits the theatre and does all that he can to promote the growth of his mind and of his moral sensibility. The work is very hard, but that only makes him more inclined to try to define it within its causal contexts, and all the more susceptible to its pressures. He asserts that the factory was a hell:

'I know of no trade in which the work is or was so laborious...it was often my fate to stand as one of a gang of six or seven full-grown men, who beat with heavy hammers a metal utensil it was their purpose to harden. The work was simply killing, and in the case of shipping orders had often to be done against time. It was often carried on far into the night: often through the day, the night, and the next day. In those days no benevolent factory acts cared for the youthful workers in non-textile trades, or fixed the sanitary conditions under which they should labour. In those days the smoke from the huge forges seldom cleared the factory, and the fumes of chemicals used as fluxes joined those of volatilising metals in giving the place the atmosphere of hell...It will easily be imagined that the morals of the men who attempted to counteract the exhaustion of severe physical exertion and

unhealthy atmospheric conditions in this way were of the lowest...You see the workshop was a hell'. (Saul, pp. 117-18)

Within the midst of this, Saul hears that the father of a woman he loves has invented a machine that his older brother is misusing to forge bank notes. He agrees to dismantle the machine in the dead of night in order to save her reputation and her father's. He seems to suffer such feelings of guilt that some sort of breakdown seems to occur:

'I seemed, indeed, to be carrying on two processes of thought - to be slowly mastering in the darkness of the part of the room the most distant from the window, the intricacies of an instrument which must be destroyed, and without noise, while the window itself seemed a stage on which the strangest phantasmagoria were enacted by my confused memory. I noticed, too, that if my work went well the windows seemed filled with the pleasanter characters culled from my earlier literary researches; while, on the contrary, if my work went ill all that was wicked and diabolical seemed to take the stage, filling it with the mimic horrors of a theatrical "Walpurgis Night".' (Saul, p.152)

He then suffers a kind of vision of human development similar to the one Joshua experienced, except that here it is much more evolutionary and based in natural forms rather than the allegorical scene imagined by Joshua. The vision has three distinct stages. In the first, Saul is a naked human animal with wolves as companions; the accidental discovery that the human animal could throw a stone

and kill with it begins their superiority and the wolves' subjection. In the second section, fire is discovered, as is the means of controlling it; such means bring power to the man who discovered this means and he becomes their counsellor and first priest. As a result of the discovery of fire, as ages go by in this section, the beginnings of industry and organised society emerge. The third section, significantly advanced in time, now sees towns and villages built and is taken up with a decision to build 'a great national monument which should give expression to the belief in the existence and goodness of the many gods they worshipped' (Saul, p.155) and the discussion, of which Saul is a part, as to what it should look like. Finally, a decision is reached that it should be the figure of a woman with a male child in her arms. It was found 'that the best builders were old men, poor women and young children, those who were yet innocent, or who had been made patiently holy by suffering'. (Saul, p.156) As a result the building of the monument took many centuries.

As Saul continues to recover, he is housed in a room filled with books, a room owned by a day labourer who says somewhat cryptically:

'I cannot tell you much about myself today, although I could tell you much that would show how I consider it an honour to know and serve you.' (Saul, p.156)

We are not immediately enlightened by the meaning of all of this and Saul remains in the room, a virtual prisoner, to protect him from the police. Saul's only concern is that his actions in dismantling the machine have protected Mr Graham and his daughter Helen. He is quietly moved to the Manor House, Mr

Graham's house, in the village of Thorncum, for his further safety. During this continued recovery and protection, the young Saul (as remembered by the older Saul) goes through a change of heart regarding the function of the growing trade union movement. The young Saul at first 'hated the trade unionism of that day with all my heart'. (Saul, p.158) He sees its guild heritage as exclusive, likely to keep prices high and therefore punitive to the poor. He sees this stage of its development as existing 'for little else than the limitation of numbers in a given trade.' (Saul, p.160) He then argues that 'to speak of the trade unionism of today as though it were the unionism of thirty years ago, would be to malign it' (Saul, p.159) and praises the development of an 'each for all and all for each' (Saul, p.160) culture within unionism in which the richer trades help the poorer ones. It is a form of unionism that combines a moral, even spiritual, dimension, but that also shares Marx's vision of a shared future in which the dialectical oppositions collapse into a socialistic future:

The engineer helps the farm labourer, and the voice of the sempstress is heard in the Trades Union Congress. In these ways the glorious brotherhood of labour will be consolidated, and unionism be moralised. The day is coming when a man's needs as a moral being, and not his deserts as a more or less mechanical contributor to the general wealth, shall be the standard of his remuneration. In that day unionism begotten in selfishness and ignorance shall have attained sanctification and die, special interests being merged in the higher general good. (Saul, p. 160)

The 'Luddite' opposition to the installation of machinery in the workshop where

Saul works, is opposed as short-sighted, by one of his fellow workers, Mr Benedict:

'They should favour the introduction of machinery, it removes the more brutifying mechanical kinds of labour - but the unions should strive to get some moral claim upon it, as compensation for the temporary displacement and consequent misery it causes. It should at least be taxed with the support of the elder workmen, just as the workman is rated to the parish.

Shall I live to see this subject discussed at a Trade Union Congress?' (Saul, p. 162)

This latter response represents a developing sympathy for the organised labour movement by the younger Saul, in contrast to his earlier antipathy. What transpires is a desire for a world that combines the every day practical with an ideal state, and again we can see in Saul's developing mind the combination of an *a priori* spiritual ideal to which all human kind should aspire, and the practical political work necessary to approach this. Also again, we can see here both an approximation of the Marxist notion of the end of history, and the desire to retreat from history into a peaceful place outside of its too complex demands:

'What is felt is the growing need for a poor world which shall neither be rude nor genteel in its belongings. A world exquisitely clean, simple, and picturesque...That the citizens of such a world are forthcoming I believe. Our shoddy and our Brummagem are but skin deep; we shall lose them, but we have not lost them.'

(Saul, p.164)

Aggressive changes made to the workshop system during Saul's sick absence begin to advance the radicalising of the workmen, bringing Saul with them. A retired police officer takes the place of the friendly janitor, a mechanically operated iron-studded door takes the place of a simple hatch for entry to the workshop and a steam whistle now signals the time to start work. Each workman now has a numbered metal ticket and is known by that more than by his name. All activities are now regulated by a 'business-faced clock'. (Saul, p.170) High-priced piece rates are introduced in order to appeal to the greed of the workers and set them against each other in competition. When the price is reduced, the culture of competition remains. This development influences Saul in his attitude toward his fellow workmen

'The habitual drunkard workman, always wretchedly poor, is the most effective instrument in the hands of the blood-money-man; he is mostly very nervous, fearful of losing his work, and will work as no human being should work if only frowned upon...I held then as I hold now, that his social condition was only degraded by his moral state. I am happy to find that there is a growing conviction among the best minds in the cultured classes that there is nothing in labour as labour that is degrading, and I am as certain to-day as at any time in my life that in those cases in which the social subjection of the labourer is in any degree unjust, the injustice is of a kind which the personal character of the labourer or the majority of his mates in his calling justifies.'

(Saul, pp. 171-2)

This emphasis upon morality and character remains a strong influence upon Saul. He admits that a religious feeling has deepened within him and that there was a 'deep need' in the human soul for 'a faith of some kind'. (Saul, p.172) It is at this moment that he meets Clough Berne, the union leader. Reports reaching Saul about Berne:

declared him an Atheist who swore by Diderot and the Encyclopedia; a Socialist who worshipped Owen; a Republican, not unwilling to give trade unionism a baptism of blood, charges made with the usual consistency. (Saul, p. 173)

but when he meets him, the impression is very different

it was with something like awe that I saw a man who stood a head taller than his rude fellows making long strides towards me. The man's open face, clear blue eyes, and light flaxen hair seemed to explain away any evil intention that might be implied by his bare brawny arms, broad exposed chest, and rapid purposeful gait. (Saul, p. 173)

The hinted sexuality aside, this is in fact the meeting with the representative of labour that Saul has been imagining and hoping for: the intelligent, composed, well-read and politically pro-active worker that Saul has seen as the only hope for the working classes to emerge from their moral and economic torpor.

Indeed, Saul seems to undergo something of a supernatural experience on seeing him:

With a rapidity of thought which my meditative habits may have given me I seemed to frame the sentence he would utter when he placed his hands upon my shoulders. I expected him to say, 'Art thou he who should come, or look we for another?' but that clear ringing voice of his which makes it seem sinful to imitate its dialect only said, 'Saul Gadshill, you must join the union'. (Saul, p. 173)

There follows a brief interchange which reads very much like an inverted catechism, a brief question-and-answer session in which Saul presents his arguments for not joining the union: that workmen are encouraged to be profligate, that the formation of an aristocracy of labour is counterproductive to the real interests of working people and, most importantly, his conviction that economic determinism is a mistake in principle, 'I do not believe that the institution shapes the man so much as the man shapes the institution'. (Saul, p. 174) He goes on to argue, again in quasi-Marxist mode, that the battle between a residual feudalism and an emergent industrialism will be won by the latter and that the question remains as to the role of unionism in this process. He rejects the notion that unionism as an institution can 'contain sufficient force to save the workman from the coming helotry'. (Saul, p. 175) Again, he refuses to join the union.

Berne answers this refusal with a surprising condescension, and then his life

story:

'My poor lad, you have been ill, be seated...I began in hard case enough, a Northumbrian miner's son, with the miner's life before me. By what efforts I crossed the gulf which divides the highly from the lowly skilled workman, I need not say. It is a jump by which a man mostly doubles his income, and thus doubles his power for good or evil. Fortunately, in my case, that which to men in our position might prove a source of increased immorality, was steadied and weighted down by good solid reading. Reading did not daze me as it seems to have dazed our friend Saul here, but it made me discontented. Discontented - not so much with my own lot, for it was much brighter than my father's had been at my age, but discontented on account of the thousands who, like my father, toiled and moiled in darkness and danger, not that the poor might have comforts merely, but that the rich might have luxuries'. (Saul, pp. 175-6)

He then adopts an organic metaphor to describe class relations:

'I saw, too, that if the miner might be compared to the root, the agricultural labourer to the stalk, the artisan to the leaves, the professional classes and all those above them were the flower of the social system which now obtains. In a word, that we were all parts of the same social plant, so to speak, and interdependent'. (Saul, p. 176)

He claims for such an idea the status of natural law, and asserts that his appeals to the ideas of the French Revolution, the Church of England and men of science had all failed to give him the method he was looking for to fulfil the demands of this natural law, especially at such a time of social crisis

'Was there ever a time when a direct special personification of eternal principles was so much wanted as in this our day of an increasingly complex social life? All the social problems of the past, all the prophets of the past, dwindle into nothingness and nobodies in the presence of our accumulated social difficulties, and in front of our conception of the Coming Man who shall make our paths straight...where then is the man, or the boy with the makings of a man, who, setting to his seal...shall teach men that labour in obedience to natural law is social salvation?...I call upon you, Saul Gadshell, in the name of every starving gutter child, in the name of every fallen woman, in the names of all who suffer, to forsake your imaginary gods, and lead the people. I admit that Unionism has faults, is inadequate, but if we brigade the artisans, the labourers will follow the example, and better it. A mighty church would be formed, through whose orders you could send the saving truths of social regeneration'. (Saul, pp.176-178)

At this point Saul stands, bows his head and grasps Clough Berne's hand accepting the responsibility, followed by 'a shout of joy' from their fellow workers. The crucial development in both novels, then, is the achievement of

selfhood not as inner personal fulfilment or as a 'mature' adjustment to the condition of the world, but as a *political consciousness*, the human condition as political condition, a notion of being that will determine the conditions of personal and social life and constantly realise and renew itself through direct action. The two men share a perspective that is a combination of practical radical politics and a clear moral sanction based within Christianity. They differ in that while Joshua insists that the political work begun by Jesus is radically unfinished, its purpose and identity undetermined, to be extended, built upon, developed by contemporary efforts with new meanings as society itself develops and changes, Saul insists that that necessary political work constitutes the effort to fulfil an established principle, a given human perfectibility. They both recognise the self as incomplete and as such are hardly characters at all in traditional novelistic manner and method. This selfhood does not constitute the plenitude of homogeneous selfhood characteristic of normative bourgeois fiction whose type of realism allows that readerly slippage into the illusion that we might meet an Esther Summerson or a Louis Trevelyan on the street and possibly recognise them if we did. We can harbour no such illusion in these novels. The characterisation of Joshua and Saul represents a development away from such individual 'roundness' into a heterogeneous notion of self.

Joshua and Saul represent collections of responses, postulates of value, a moving locus of significance. Their 'meaning' lies in the very diffusion of self into social value and inseparable from it, resisting boundary or limiting definition, or any setting that might evoke fixity. The structure and constant re-structuring of the self is shown in 'in pieces', the scaffolding is still up, the foundations are still evident; they lay no claim to that bourgeois sense of self

that can, with its plenitude of consciousness, create the world as a viable whole entity or make it into one. This political consciousness is as fragmented as the world's political relationships are fragmented, as full of real friction, as full of confrontation. If the society cannot be whole, then neither can the self - it can only constantly work towards it through direct action. These two novels incorporate indirect narration, flatness and a tableau-like montage to resist the plumpness of emotional inwardness. It is the creation of 'fully-rounded' characters which allows bourgeois fiction to leave the world much as it found it, except that individuals may have experienced an epiphany of their own. As we have seen the bourgeois novel begins to reveal these matters when these homogenising efforts become increasingly desperate and begin to lose their credibility⁴⁹. These novels are composed and the difficulties of selfhood constructed at precisely this point of difficulty. The subjectivity of Joshua and Saul cannot contain wholeness because that is unachievable; it is certainly unachievable in a world radically disabled from constructing it. What we must make do with, the texts argue, is attempts at subjectivity - the acts involved in the attempt to put it together with the construction process openly in evidence. As Thomas Docherty argues in relation to the fiction of John Barth, we are given less a statement of character than a series of 'fleeting instantiations of subjectivity',⁵⁰ a series of appearances which do not cover for a deeper reality because they are the reality and their action is the value: action as the fullest realisation of thought.

⁴⁹ See Section Three, Introduction, pp.107-115

⁵⁰ Thomas Docherty, 'The Ethics of Alterity: Postmodern Character', Niall Lucy, (ed.) Postmodern Literary Theory: An Anthology , p.144

The notion of self introduced here, then, is one that does not belong to the individual but to the social body. It is a self that is made up of elements of social reality without pretence to completeness or dispassionate objectivity. The fact and value of this selfhood have a distinct purpose and function. It is a selfhood designed to represent both politics and spiritual morality, and therefore to discriminate between the social values it does represent and those it doesn't. It is the strangest of all creatures, a self-aware non-self. The point of this is to refuse the idea of a separation between self and world, with the individual self as whole and entire, regardless of the world around it. The concept of self as contingent with the world insists that the self, integral and dispositioned, is transgressive of normative value structures and, while always about to become a whole self, cannot be so until and unless the world is made whole also; their development is co-terminate. The self is therefore deferred pending its social and political fulfilment. This stands as a rejection of the liberal notion that the self can obtain plenitude alone; both Lynn Linton and Overton insist that the self cannot be whole until the world is.

Such a structural insistence strives to affect the reader by preventing the reception of an expected homogeneity of character and totalising narrative. This strategy aims to deny the reader the option of being able to rely upon a straightforward narrative structure in order to easily assimilate ready-formed and readily consumed 'truths'. Rather, the reader is asked to differentiate between what might be a given norm and what might be true or good, no matter how abnormal it might seem. The effort is also to weld moral good with political good. The reader is asked to put these ideas together in the act of reading in order to make full sense of what is happening. In this way, the structural

political thrust of the text is integrated with the act of reading in order that full sense can be made of what is happening. The structure of the texts and the act of reading become complicit with the strategy and purpose of the novel, at the structural level of taking it in at all. The novels ask the reader to begin to think differently by making moral and political connections that institutionalised and traditional liberal forms of thought work to keep separate. The reader becomes dissident in the act of reading, an act which introduces the ethics/politics of alterity in aesthetic mode; then through alterity, or otherness, the radical figure achieves effectivity, identity and function at precisely those points where legitimate society is failing most obviously. In this position, although threatened by current forces and normative values, the radical self is enabled to step from passive alterity into active alterative mode. The self takes on a transgressive trajectory, reflecting divisions and failings, disguised and open hypocrisies, cruelties and manipulations, impossible to contain within legitimising structures. There must be a self, but it must be one that is not at home in the world, a kind of positive negation, whose purpose is to represent its own impossibility as a *normative* social construct, in order to transform mere 'otherness' into a political strength.

Neither Joshua nor Saul develops in the normal sense of maturation. Indeed, they both seem remarkably mature at a very early age, able to make reasoned arguments and absorb complex information almost from infancy. We are not presented with the linear development of 'whole' selves, but a change from self to self as the trajectory requires, in order to increase the fact and value of the engagements that take place and which fulfil the necessary and dutiful actions, rather than to fill out their characterisation. They never become 'well-rounded'

or 'vividly realised' or 'fully depicted' characters as many characters in fiction. There is a perpetual effort by both characters to 'escape the constraints of self-presence' ⁵¹ always likely to seem and to be other than what is expected. Neither character possesses effective interiority because their being functions entirely in the meaning of action, eschewing the notion of a 'deeper', introspective self expressing itself to a separate, given, 'outer' world within which it has emerged and lives. Rather, this notion stresses the impossibility for the self to be whole, when the world is fragmenting. It is a refusal to accept a differentiation between self and world. The 'two' are inextricably linked in a continuous dialectical relationship. The self is produced within the world, but not wholly determined by it; critical distance is possible. Neither does the self create the world, but it does and can shape and direct human relationships within it. With such a method, both novels constitute reconciliations between the ethical and the political. Thus Saul and Joshua represent trajectories of subjectivity always in discovery rather than the occupation of a 'volume' of subjectivity, placed and secure; their 'individuality' is prevented from deciding ethically without considering and analysing politically: the political is the necessary and unalterable context of private action.

At the point of achieving political self-awareness, then, both Joshua and Saul adopt a notion of self that rejects any duality between self and world. The layers of narration with which their actions and apparent thoughts and motivations are reported further denies the two men an inner mental life to which we can have unquestioning access; we know of them only what we are told

⁵¹Thomas Docherty, in Niall Lucy, (ed.), Postmodern Literary Theory: An Anthology, p.142

by others, in Joshua's case a close acolyte who admits his subservience, 'He, the leader, I, the led' (Joshua, p.33), and in Saul's case what the older Saul apparently wrote down to be later edited by a stranger who thought himself unfitted to do a proper job. The stated and achieved selfhood is the result of the relinquishing of a 'whole' personality (an inner life with real presence for itself) for an active one. The self and what it is engaged in are one and the same: the self according to these two novels is a political concept and practice, and opposed to the deceitful nature of the political and social society around them, where the discrepancy between claim and practice is palpable.

In realist fiction there is also a normative tendency for the reader to be given or allowed full epistemological control over the fiction: the reader gets to share what the omnipotent author knows. Joshua and Saul are constructed as a resistance to this tendency by denying the reader the reassurance of a fully totalised self for the central characters. The totality of a supposedly enlightened truth or real presence of character is denied by the reconstructed and framed narrative form. Through this, often mannered, style of construction, the reader becomes involved in putting the characters together rather than merely receiving them, and becomes an active participant in the enterprise. Both novels, structurally and thematically, appeal to the reader to respond to the texts' demands beyond normative expectations; the novels actively prevent the reader from sitting comfortably within the simulated 'world' of the novel. The textual characters Joshua and Saul embody and promote this unsettling of expectations and responses, the developing state and condition of their subjectivity mandating similar responses from the reader. Joshua is described as 'an unpiloted vessel' (Joshua, p.72) and argues that if

Jesus were alive 'today', he would be a political analyst. Saul argues that originality or wholeness of self is an 'insane root', and the text is replete with juxtapositions and contradictions (of which more later), which belie any attempted confidence of perception. The politics of the texts expands to include the reader in their dissident strategy of subjecting social and political relationships to aesthetic, political and ethical interrogation. These two novels, then, do not attempt to present alternative values using traditional and normative fictional structures and methods. They are producing structures which work to take the reader through a systematically different kind of reading experience, unframeable by normative expectations.

The novels share a declamatory character and their political and moral didacticism flattens their narratives into a montage of demonstrative scenes. Emotional depth is avoided and an intellectual response appealed to. The argument for a radical, analytical re-appraisal of social fact and value contributes to the destabilising of the text itself. Any expected homogeneity of textual 'wholeness' is rejected in favour of a very heterodox narrative form whose texture becomes emblematic of the author's iconoclasm and search for value. It corresponds to Pierre Macherey's notion of the caesura

The structure of the work, which makes it available to knowledge, is this internal displacement, this caesura, by which it corresponds to a reality that is also incomplete.⁵²

It is this lack of 'reflection', which allows the surface of the text to be such a

revealing site for the interrogation of writing's political function. In its search for 'the real thing and not the label' (Joshua, p.57), Joshua takes the reader, subsequent to Joshua's coming to political consciousness, through a sequence of themed scenes and relationships which attempt little in the way of dramatic verisimilitude but whose real purpose is to influence intellectually, to expect the reader to be so influenced and to apprehend the ideas involved rather than to respond emotionally. Such a purpose fits into the novel's strategy of prioritising political analysis over social acceptance. Such lack of drama is reinforced by a 'summing-up' from the narrator that this constitutes, 'an abandonment of the dead mystical for the living real'. (Joshua, p.86)

The sequence of scenes which will culminate in involvement in the Paris Commune and a violent death on his return to England begins with Joshua's detailed commitment to the poor within his own reach. He begins a night school whose curriculum includes the rudiments of science, personal hygiene, health matters and cooking (with some morality thrown in) and he makes this available to all, including drunkards, prostitutes and gutter children. The determination is to ensure 'no preaching at them for their sins; no expression of spiritual or moral superiority' (Joshua, p.88) but to increase their sense of 'natural self-respect and the glorious sense of inclusion and brotherhood' (Joshua, p.88). The enforced poverty is described with biting economy:

Children swarmed like rabbits in every house, and died like sheep with the rot... "The bronchitis" (sic) it was called that sent so many of them to the hospital and the graveyard, but the real word was

⁵² Pierre Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 79

poverty: poverty in everything... (Joshua, pp.89-90)

A Member of Parliament is introduced in order to air Malthusian notions that the poor are too many and profligate with what they have. He argues that having fewer children and emigrating are the best solutions to the improvement of their lot. Joshua reminds him of the inherent injustice in expecting the poor to be frugal with very little when that expectation is not levied on the rich who have so much. The response is to accuse Joshua of wanting to 'destroy the existing order of society' (Joshua, p.92) an accusation to which Joshua gladly accedes, 'root and branch, if need be!' (Joshua, p.92), condemning contemporary society as uncivilised. Political science, he continues, is a theoretical construct dependent for its existence and function upon the very social conditions it pretends to analyse. When the MP contradicts him again, Joshua replies with the statement which is also a question 'Then Christianity is wrong' (Joshua, p.94). This silences the MP; legitimate society grounds its moral right to govern on the basis of an established Church professing Christianity; if that government is not exercising its Christian duty the hypocrisy of its own claims for itself becomes clear. Important for the narrative as a whole, this conversation allows for the reality of political confrontation. The MP's final riposte to Joshua's challenge is 'prove it'. (Joshua, p.94) Joshua responds

'He advocates our making ourselves so slender that we can slip through our bands and fetters, while I hold that we should make ourselves strong enough to force those who hold the fastenings to loosen them'. (Joshua, p.96)

Such conclusions clearly allow for the possibility of violent action, and help Joshua toward realising the need for class-based action. In order to develop this conclusion from something more akin to experience than theory, two representative characters are introduced to the narrative: Mary Prinsep, a prostitute, and Joe Traill, a repeat offender who steals to feed his alcoholism. They are demonstrative of personal subjectivity produced by social circumstances, but not wholly controlled by those circumstances. The subsequent struggles of Mary and Joe serve to show just how difficult it is to escape from economic and social pressures. The novel's real radicalism lies here in showing just how difficult substantive social change can be for those at its sharpest edges.

Significant in the introduction of Mary is the clear emphasis upon the unsentimental economic reality of her position. We are told quite baldly, 'There was no romantic history attached to her. She was no "soiled dove" whose feathers had once been white and shining'. (Joshua, p.100) What follows is really an essay on prostitution stressing such manipulation of women as a moral disgrace and an economic injustice, and yet one upheld by legitimate society - the moral and the political are joined. Abandoned as a youngster, she was introduced to the practice of paid sex by 'a fine Christian gentleman living out at Bayswater in the very odour of class respectability' (Joshua, p.101). The narrative gives to prostitutes in general a clear consciousness of their social position

they look on themselves, like all the poor, as martyrs to society.

They think that, as men and things are, they must be; that they

make the virtuous wife, the chaste maiden, possible. In their blind way they are vaguely conscious that the root of this fine flower of western civilisation, the rich monogamous Christian home, is planted in the filth of prostitution, and that to them is owing the "self-restraint", so much admired in gentlemen who do not marry until they can afford to have a family, and so often offered as an example to us working men who love honestly one of our own sort, and do not as a rule go among these girls. And the more thoughtful of them, conscious of their economic uses, resent the opprobrium dealt out to them, and pity themselves angrily as victims rather than criminals, the scapegoats not the polluters of society. (Joshua, pp.103-4)

Moreover, this awareness allows them to understand themselves as professionals and as their profession as 'a legitimate trade, as lawful as a publican's'. (Joshua, p.106) In this sense Mary is presented as an example as much as a 'character' in her own right. Indeed, she is described by the narrator as 'only a text and an occasion, like others' (Joshua, p.109). This is a clear downplaying of her individuality and an emphasis upon her typicality; it is the politics of her position that is uppermost and the fictional tone of the book is temporarily suspended for the brief essay to be inserted. Throughout her part of the narrative, Mary struggles to fit back into legitimate society. With Joshua's help she attempts to get work, but on one occasion the man of the respectable house in which she anticipates work as a housemaid is one she has 'known' already and this proves impossible, in another the wife simply cannot stand to have her present in the household for fear of her own social

reputation. Mary's reintegration into society is perpetually deferred and never resolved, causing her great distress. Eventually, she dies having accompanied Joshua and the narrator to the Commune in Paris, caught up in the ensuing bloodbath following the Commune's destruction.

Joe Traill, an unrepentant convict, is also brought into Joshua's compass because 'his need is his claim'. (Joshua, p.125) As with Mary Prinsep, the social causality of Joe's condition is given more emphasis than his 'individual' character:

a gutter child, in whose very blood ran the hereditary taint; a thief, the son of thieves, the grandson of thieves; a thing of mud from head to heel, inside and out; dirty, dissipated, shiftless, and with no more moral principle in him than he had of education. He was one of those who stink in the nostrils of cleanly, civilised society, and who are its shame and secret sore. And cleanly, civilised society, not being able to make a good job of him as he stood, thrust him out of its sight, and tried to forget him behind the prison grating. (Joshua, pp.111-13)

Association with Joe leads Joshua and the narrator to be sacked from their jobs at the carpentry workshop. As the narrator wryly remarks, 'they do not understand practical Christianity in Scotland-yard'. (Joshua, p.114) Joshua's willingness to cleave to such as Mary and Joe, despite the consequent social ostracism, unemployment and problems with the law bring him greater commitment from those around him.

Another intellectual mode is introduced into the narrative, that of a philanthropist offering to help the respectable poor. Mr C (he is never named) has heard of Joshua's work and they meet with the intention of using his means to add to Joshua's efforts and, in particular, to help Joe get work. The limit of Mr C's intentions is quickly met, when he refuses to offer actual help arguing that external assistance functions only 'to encourage pauperism and to offer a premium for vice'. (Joshua, p.122)

He even accepts that the poor might be left to starve if they cannot shift for themselves. He refuses to offer Joe a position and leaves. The refusal of these two 'gentlemen' to seriously consider the reintegration of the poor into legitimate society, even through their work, makes Joshua feel 'as a stranger and an alien' (Joshua, p.142) in his own land and galvanises him into a class-based politics. A brief flirtation with an apparently concerned aristocratic couple which comes to nothing only confirms this perception.

He realises that his efforts are too limited and too insignificant. Mary and Joe become the opportunity for the realisation that the assertion of a class-based politics is really the only response with sufficient volume to be successful, so great is the fight. Joshua becomes convinced that radical reform will only be made possible through the development of working-class unionism. Joe dies without obtaining work or having been reformed and Mary constantly despairs at ever properly escaping her past, emphasising the profound social and economic weight against which they had to push and the size of the task. This conclusion signals the real end of Joshua's practical hopes of a *peaceable*

development of English interclass relations. It is more an elegy for his hopes than a confident view of the future.

Looking for organisation as the necessary framework for such achievement, Joshua joins the International Working Men's Association as one of its first members:

If labour is to make its own terms with capital, it must be by the coercive strength of the labourer. To wait for the free gift of the capitalist, through his recognition of human duties, as some among the Comtists urge, would be to wait for the millennium. (Joshua, p.146)

Yet still his aim is to avoid unnecessary violence; to promote class advancement, but not to bring about avoidable destruction with a pointless and bloody war. Yet he recognises that the relationship between the merchant class in its violent emancipation from feudalism was much the same relationship as that currently being 'fought' between that merchant class and the newly forming working class. He can also see that:

Below that paragraph where the artisan, the *prolétaire*, is to be found, society has as yet drawn a line not to be overpassed. (Joshua, p. 147)

He is sent as a delegate to working towns to drum up support for the cause by

promoting Christian communism. He enters the fray with unshakeable fortitude, but more to insist that it be done than from hope of success. Indeed, on more than one occasion, we are told, he was 'severely handled... left for dead twice in rough monarchical towns'. (Joshua, p.227)

It is through working with the International that Joshua makes his connection with French radical republicanism. While the organisation splits into factions, Joshua does not lose his radicalism and eventually joins the Commune in Paris. The change in his thinking is completed by the Paris Commune, about which Joshua's group joins in complete agreement:

The Commune, successful in Paris, meant the emancipation of the working classes here, and later on the peaceable establishment of the Republic; which we all believe *has to come*, whether peaceably or not. (Joshua, p. 230)

The scene shifts quickly to Paris. Here, the attempt at a real revolution is coming to a crisis in its development - that of armed conflict on a grand scale. It also constitutes the entry of a real historical event into the novel, and sees a revival of political hope for the radical cause.

Joshua throws himself into the revolutionary ferment 'with never a thought of self'. (Joshua, p. 245) Through his fervour, hard work and courage, Joshua becomes prominent within the Commune. But Paris, we are told by the narrator, was also

mad with despair, with famine, with shame, disease, excitement...

No-one looked sane. (Joshua, p. 235)

Divisions within the Commune ranks produce real conflict between hope and fear, high endeavour and real despair. In the midst of this the city was overmatched by opposing forces and the Commune was doomed. The only question remained as to how it would die. Some, like Joshua's hero, Delescluze, resolved to die and not to survive the end of the revolutionary effort. Others resolved to kill as many of the enemy as they could before the end, including hostages. Joshua opposes this on the grounds that cold-blooded killing will not produce the kind of society all of the Communards claimed to want. His argument is unheeded. A bloodbath ensues and the commune is defeated in an orgy of violent retribution. Joshua returns to England.

His experience has completely confirmed his political actions in his own mind and he begins to give public lectures on the cause of working-class emancipation, more out of conviction than hope. The defeat of the Commune is the first of the novel's three endings. He discovers that his having supported the Commune is an added burden to his political work and he is angered and dismayed at the amount of opposition to working-class emancipation he continues to encounter.

What turns out to be his final speech is interrupted by Mr Grand (the same, from Joshua's childhood) who delivers a speech filled with all of the qualities the novel has opposed tooth and nail: class differentiation, thoughtless patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, religiosity, using the poor to control the poor, the rendering of poverty as natural. In doing so, he incites a riot, with

Joshua as its focus. Joshua is killed in the violence. At his demise, the narrator shouts out 'that man was killed by the Christian Party of Order' (Joshua, p. 275). This is the second ending. The third and final ending concludes the narrator's coda, in which he appeals for the abandonment of established Christianity, which he condemns as a craze which in reality influences nothing. The final passage contrasts ossified Christian dogma with the life of the realised Christ through Christian communism. To add to the indeterminate closure, the novel ends with a question mark, leaving it in a sense unfinished, despite all the endings.

What the novel does most powerfully is to establish the difference between what the established, institutionalised world claims to represent and what it delivers, particularly when, through the established church, it claims to represent the very *opposite* of what it delivers. The Church becomes the central culprit in the novel's desire to exploit the redundancy of forms, which function as reactionary social effects, preventative of social change. The two clashes between Joshua and Mr Grand occur at the novel's beginning and at its close. The first, as we have seen, effectively determines Joshua's opposition to established church values which allow for differentials in social status and wealth to be consistent with Christianity. Joshua strongly opposed this argument from the beginning, using Christian teaching as his guide.

Throughout the novel, the centrality of religion as a moral indicator has guided Joshua but as a consistent oppositional force; he judges himself by his standard of opposition to its complacency, which has allowed the very social and political inequities he opposes to come into being and be constantly reconfirmed. The

repetition of Mr Grand's appearance also serves to highlight just how far Joshua has come spiritually and politically throughout the time scale of the novel, while the Church has hardened into violent reaction, if it has moved at all. Established Christianity has effectively created Joshua's alterity as a direct result of its moral hypocrisy, adherence to political inequity and refusal to adjust to social change, let alone sponsor it. Grand's return is catastrophic; the final murder of Joshua, as the result of a riot deliberately provoked by Grand, gives the ultimate lie to the Church's claim to represent a spiritually sanctioned reality, highlighting the extreme measures such ossifying structures will resort to when their social power, a power wrought by man, not given by God, is threatened by social change.

Joshua himself is forced into the position of trying to rewrite society as it should be according to its own proclaimed values. Joshua Davidson argues for the substitution of 'real' reality for emblems and representations of it, the social fact for moral theory; the inclusion of the historically real Paris Commune is testament to this. However, as a novel is nothing but representation, the first of these has to be acknowledged as impossible - the Commune included here is a version of events, with fictional embellishments, not the real Commune itself. However, the desire does lead the novel to reject what novelistic conventions it can, and, by producing narrative methods from a dissident perspective, to work to deflect assumptions and to alert the reader to new and challenging possibilities of social fact and value. The redundancy of assumed forms, most prominently represented by the established church and its voice, Mr Grand, is identified and their power resisted, and the novel becomes very aware of its own political and fictional nature.

While the main purport of Joshua Davidson is to put material reality at the centre of its argument and to make spirituality its servant (Christianity only carries meaning when the social fact is fully involved in becoming the achieved necessity of social justice for all), the aim of Saul of Mitre Court is to find a path back from material reality to an abstract and overarching *a priori* spiritual reality. This intellectual reversal, for which Overton calls upon the assistance of Comte, has significant effects upon the novel, which seems to lack the positivist certainty it claims as its guide. Two key splits appear within the narrative: that between the working poor and their intellectual and social deserts, and that between the younger Saul and the older retrospective Saul. Both devices can be seen as strategies of authorial control over forces that he had freed but whose consequences he feared: industrial and potentially violent conflict. These splits, while producing a politically disappointing closure for the novel, nonetheless exemplify what Macherey has described as writing's 'hidden eloquence', the manner in which the distance might be measured between possible variations in meaning and contrasts between conscious and unconscious intention.⁵³

Saul's efforts to reconcile the worlds of secular labour and esoteric knowledge become an attempt to render into a moral 'whole', forces and relationships we have already been persuaded are heading in a very different direction and beyond any such reconciliation. Unable to pursue the argument of social justice, Overton, groping with a world that has become more complicated than one view

⁵³ Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production, p.78

can handle, and unable to pursue the argument of social justice to its logical limits, descends into a relativism he cannot control. In this he opts for the Comtean oxymoron of the secular priesthood, representing 'a higher morality' (Saul, p.29) that only an intellectual elite can understand and that everyone else should obey. The working class becomes split between the struggle for economic and social justice and that 'high principle' which must generate and identify their efforts. The origin of fact and value must be ineffable rather than based in the material conditions of people's lives. The novel continues to insist that lowly lives are not beyond the reach of such values, but this construction only serves to confirm that these crucial principles are not embedded within them; working people may remain the object of the exercise, but they can never become its subjectivity. The views of the working people who populate the model village of Thorncum at the novel's beginning and close remain unknown; they remain unconsulted and totally controlled within its absolute hierarchy. Thorncum remains separate from the world, wholly insular and lacking the acknowledgement of social change, something even Comte allowed for. Such a move represents the righteously angry and potentially confrontational working poor separated from their own battle. It is quite apt therefore that the estate upon which Thorncum is built and developed is granted to them by a substantial bequest at exactly the moment when a decisive confrontational strike has been called, and is thus evaded.

The second device for evading the political consequences his own writing has heralded is the late splitting of Saul into two active characters: the younger more intense Saul and the older, retrospective Saul, speaking after the

consolidation of the community of Thorncum. This constitutes an important turning point in the novel. The conflict and potential violence are a logical outcome of the political relationships presented by the narrative so far. Unlike Lynn Linton, Overton does not want to face the issue of real political conflict. The textual device he introduces to accomplish this is the framing voice of the elder Saul, whose latter-day wisdom patronises the younger enthusiasm, allowing its anger to be muted and to be transformed into the already-accomplished end of the older Saul's perspective. It is this process which characterises the remaining chapters of the novel. The older Saul insists that denying the physical world is a better guide to morality than material social values:

By raising the faculties of memory and hope above present sensation in the estimation of mankind, and by insisting on their greater importance, Saul was not only able to place before his followers in all generations a purely subjective life, but to teach them to prefer abstract pleasures to those which come to them from the action of matter external to the matter of which their own bodies were composed for the time being. (Saul, pp.189-90)

While such an abstract state is a 'humanising influence' to the older Saul, the memory of the younger cannot quite be kept down:

My congregation was drawn from the very dregs of the poor. Its members did not even know, had not even heard the names of the good things on which these wretched sentimentalists

subsisted. (Saul, p.193)

But the older Saul uses this claimed representative ignorance to assert that it is indeed the abstract qualities of understanding that will provide synthesis, not political and economic anger which will fight the injustice:

It was the bitterness of the poor man's heart which led him to qualify it with the revengeful words "Blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the earth" - of course to the exclusion of the rich. Perhaps in no passage do the mixed teachings of the socialist and mystic meet in a more puzzling manner for the poor man's preacher than in this, "it is easier for a Camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God". Why shut the rich man out? (Saul, pp. 194-5)

Moreover, he goes on to argue that what the younger Saul failed to see was that working people's capacity to experience the world at all was radically limited, that they failed to achieve a quality he calls 'soul'. Speaking as if to them, he says

Your souls do not contain a single thought or impression which has not reached them through your senses. If I read to you of paradise from which a happy pair were expelled, how would you know what I meant if you had not tramped the country roads of England in search of work? It is because you have seen fields and orchards that you understand paradise. (Saul, p.197)

It is apposite to remember at this point that Saul of Mitre Court is dedicated to the President of the London Society of Coppersmiths by 'his brother craftsman in Union'. It is unlikely that either the recipient or the author would wish to be recognised as part of a proletariat unable to consider anything meaningful beyond immediate sensory experience as defined by this egotistical and patronising judgement. It is, moreover, a judgement which fails to define its terms, and stands alone on nothing more than its own assertion. He goes on to make his final point. Paradise is explained by Nature, therefore Heaven must be explained by Art. Unfortunately, 'Art and her interpreter, Labour' (Saul, p.197, author's capitals) have become corrupted into refinement and avarice respectively:

Avarice and refinement soon led the priests of Jehovah captive in their train, so that there was none to protect and teach Labour till science came. Science slays the priests at the altar - the priests who had wedded Avarice to Refinement. Yes, our hands, in the attempt to make the world the luxurious abode of the few, have called forth Science, who will soon make it the happy home of all. (Saul, p.198)

The science called forth here is not, of course, the world of Darwin, Huxley or Edison; it is the world of Comte. Had Overton undertaken to consider the former, his novel might have been a more conscious early example of a modernist text, with its juxtapositions of perspective, flattened narrative, eclecticism of reference, and assertion that rational scientific enquiry and

achievement would improve the world for all. As it stands, Overton seems so determined to refuse the working people on whose behalf he appears to be writing this book any meaningful role in their own emancipation, that such possibilities are lost. The book takes on such characteristics in an unconscious manner seemingly independent of the author's awareness, which arguably fails to lessen the effect. His Comtean science, then, is a radically dehistoricised one, founded in myth and safely free from serious analysis. What it does achieve, however, is to produce a text whose broken texture contains much of its effectiveness.

The formal framing of the novel within Comtean values works to present a certainty of perception, which can describe society with a distinct holistic clarity. However, Overton is very aware of fundamental changes taking place in society, indeed Comtean philosophy was aimed at resolving those very problems rather than denying their existence. Refusing the option of placing his novel safely in the past, Overton, believing Comte to have the solution to all of society's problems, does not hesitate to mention them all. In consequence, the novel is replete with references to such as transcendentalism, Christianity (and other religions in comparison), several philosophies, history, evolution, politics, social science, the role of science in society, the role of industry in society, the nature and effects of a class-based society, trade unionism, the importance of Art, social reform and revolution, and social and personal morality in practice. No single novel could hope to cope adequately with even a small selection of such issues and methods and retain either an appropriate depth of analysis or anything like a novelistic structure. The attempt at intellectual depth therefore retreats into a portentousness of elevated abstraction based in authoritative

prescription:

In order to obtain unity in the soul there must be harmony between the concrete reason by which we perceive material objects, and the abstract reason by which we remember and connect events. We must always subordinate subjective constructions to objective materials.

(Saul, p.27)

The 'savage man' (Saul, p.27) is contrasted with the 'civilised man' (Saul, p.27) with no serious definition of terms and there is an inevitable lapse into contradiction when civilisation and material reality are opposed to each other. Such failures leave Overton's attempt at theoretical unification at the mercy of opportunist eclecticism in which he constantly attempts to take everything into account all the time - an effort doomed to failure. The writing seems either to jump or to meander from one concern to another, reaching no satisfactory conclusions. There is a constant transference of responsibility for social fact and value between ahistorical, supernatural origins for 'Morality', 'the genius of the western world', or 'the eternal fetishism of our nature' (Saul, p.27) and man as the maker of his own reality, which is embodied in the political working-class radicalism of Clough Berne and underpins so much of the novel's argument. The result for the novel is an unresolved relativism of values represented by the repeated bold assertion of numerous positions all of which turn out to be tentative and sometimes lead all the way to nonsense:

If a poor coal-heaver had a throat like a giraffe, and a palate in

proportion, it is likely he would derive greater pleasure from drinking half a pint of beer than the rich man could from drinking the same quantity of wine. (Saul, p.194)

The boldness of the assertions and the lack of firm foundation for them create tension and uncertainty throughout the body of the text. We are constantly presented with desire, but fulfilment is withheld. We are told that there is wholeness, but we cannot see it. The pieces we are given do not fit together, and their failure to do so conveys a socially tragic message in contrast to the intended optimistic closing. The long scene describing Saul's dismantling of the illegal press used to forge bank notes and his secreting it, piece by piece, from its housing and disposing of them until nothing is left is hauntingly paralleled with what appears to be his simultaneous mental breakdown. With the press as a symbol of the relation between capitalism and crime and the breakdown as the personal cost of radical action, this scene could have been the powerful centre of a very 'modern' novel. But in the welter of references and activities it gets lost and is seen as no more than unrequited love going to extremes. There is so much to cram in, there isn't room to give time for any one idea to develop to an aesthetically satisfying conclusion. Throughout the novel, causal connections are advertised, but not made. The tension between the intense and unsuccessful personal relationships, the radical incompleteness of the social relationships and the claim that Comte solves all, only serves to magnify the sense of fragmentation. At the novel's close, Thorncum resembles more an asylum than a social and political solution.

The Oxford English Dictionary charts the first recorded use of the term breakdown for personal health to be 1858. While no etymology of such terms is

possible within the scope of this thesis, the suggestion here of a mental psychopathology can be seen as part of a developing world of psychological experience, which would later be made famous by the work of Sigmund Freud.

Ann C Colley's Tennyson and Madness, (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1983) is an interesting study combining a psychoanalytical and a gender-based study of Tennyson poetry through questioning his mental stability. The Problem of Mental Deficiency (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) by Matthew Thompson, is a useful study of official attitudes to mental ill-health during the latter part of the nineteenth century, while Jane Wood's Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction (Oxford University Press USA, 2001) offers an integrated study of medicine and literature. Christina Britzolakis, in her article 'Pathologies of the Imperial Metropolis: Impressionism as Traumatic Afterimage in Conrad and Ford' (Journal of Modern Literature - Volume 29, No. 1, Fall 2005, pp. 1-20) offers a politicized analysis of the notion of shock, and of neurological discourse as an essential ingredient in the genealogy of the modern. These terms appropriately contextualized, serve as key responses to the far-reaching reorganization of human experience brought about by changes in transport, energy, urban planning, communication and media, the economy of mass production, and the mass slaughter of modern mechanized warfare. She argues that the history of shock as a discursive formation of modernity, culminating in Freud's analysis in 1920 of the mechanisms of traumatic neurosis, can be intertwined with notions of modernization itself as pathogenic.

In her study 'A Quiet Revolution in Brighton: Dr Helen Boyle's Pioneering Approach to Mental Health Care, 1899-1939' (Journal of the Social History of Medicine, vol.14, No.3, 2001, p. 439) Louise Westwood traces the innovative

work of Dr Boyle in inclusive treatment of those whose nervous disorders were commonly referred to as insanity, keeping those so diagnosed within the community, not estranged from it. She created a unique in-patient facility in Brighton, challenged the lunacy laws and set out to establish a holistic system of care for recoverable conditions outside the asylum system.

Those who have always held the reins of power continue to do so, only now by the privilege of a spiritual enlightenment based upon nothing except their own assertion of it. They have gained a greater insight into other people's needs than those people themselves could possibly manage because they are defined as inherently incapable. The structure of social, political and economic relations is left almost exactly as it was found, but for a thin 'spiritual' gloss, which is based upon self-referential assumptions. If you assume that working people have no ability to change the world for themselves then you are likely to come up with a plan in which someone else will have to do it. The problem is that such an assumption is simply not acceptable, given the widespread evidence of working-class self-help measures of many kinds, not only existing, but *flourishing* throughout the second half of the Nineteenth Century. What makes this worse is that it is impossible to believe that Overton himself remained unaware of such valuable and decisive developments.

Each of the two novels then presents us with a version of impossibility. While The True History of Joshua Davidson confronts the issue of inevitable class conflict head-on, its conclusion is that such a conflict will be lost and the enemies of revolutionary change will triumph practically, even though they may be unable to win any moral arguments. It closes with the possible opening to a

new future when the battle will be fought again and perhaps won. The last mark on the last page is a question mark. Saul of Mitre Court, not daring to broach the conflict it sees only too well as inevitable, ultimately takes the road of retreat into an ossified notion of a moral society of aristocracy and landless 'peasantry' enjoying a spiritual harmony, hidden away where a rare passing idler can barely stumble across it. Not the mainstream, then. Authorial consciousness aside, though, the text of Saul is a powerful one. The broken texture of the writing is a remarkable example of a book honestly suffering the historical and aesthetic concerns of profound social and cultural change. It is a novel desperate to bolster up a failing Victorian rationalism and struggling to maintain a viable aesthetic representational form. In that 'unconscious' sense, it is a remarkably honest and provocative work.

A More Excellent Way ⁵⁴

Constance Howell, London 1888.

The last work in the sequence, A More Excellent Way, by Constance Howell, is able to encounter the problems of a radically changing society with a deceptive calmness. Written in the wake of the long economic depression of the 1870s, this novel is able to adopt a calmer, clearer ideological awareness, and an analytical political consciousness secure in its own identity. It is thus able to eschew many of the stresses and literary agonies experienced by earlier novels in the sequence and become a novel of exposure, penetrating appearances to bring political analysis to causal underlying realities, both public and private. Its main effort is to lay bare the conditions of possibility that give rise to the society around it, with explanations added to its descriptions. Such a method clearly has implications for the production of the novel as literary output. In addition, being a self-consciously socialist novel, it also adopts the task of attempting to suggest resolution to issues it realises and confronts.

The content of the novel concerns the growth to socialism of a middle-class young man, brought up within a conservative setting, encouraged by free thought and fed upon rational enquiry. The novel is unevenly divided into two 'books', the first much shorter than the second. The first is titled 'Preparatory' and carries great significance for the development of the novel as a whole. It opens on a fault line: that of a failed marriage. The nature of this failure serves as an important indicator of emotional and political differences to come. In a manner similar to the narrative forms of Grainger's Thorn, Joshua Davidson and Saul of

⁵⁴ Constance Howell, A More Excellent Way, 2 vols (London: Swann Sonnenschein, Lowrey & Co., 1888)

Mitre Court, structural problems, both emotional and intellectual, are foregrounded in A More Excellent Way (AMEW), allowing political and ideological concerns and differences to be developed. Maintained throughout the novel as a whole, such a strategy has the impact of forbidding the text an easy commodity status. Set against a society whose claim to moral superiority has become redundant, the novel provides explanations for everything it sees, refusing to accept any aspect of human life at face value. Laying bare the political and economic realities as 'hidden' power structures whose efforts truly characterise daily social routines, fashions, conflicts and other 'normalities,' Howell confronts the notion of what society amounts to and of what a novel really is. While she is constructing a novel, it is a novel whose 'fiction' is constantly held up for measure against the real political and economic relationships that it might otherwise misrepresent. This 'Preparatory' chapter introduces the reader to just such an inverted analysis of fact and value.

Agatha and Adrian Hathaway are a young English couple in business in the colonies. Frustrated by her uneventful lifestyle, Agatha reads widely in order to understand her husband's avowed atheism and come to terms with it, feeling that it will bring them closer. To this point she has been a traditional churchgoer. Her studies lead her to reject Christianity intellectually, as her husband had done previously; he states openly:

I do not believe in any religion; my intellect forbids me to do so.

(AMEW, Book 1, p.14)

She moves toward a spiritually sceptical freethought, fully expecting that this

confluence of intellectual conviction will overcome her husband's apparent indifference to her as a person, over and above appreciating her function as a successful wife and mother. Informing him of this development with real eagerness, she is stunned by his anger at her revelation. Far from accepting her as his companion in conviction, he condemns her proffered atheism as socially dangerous. He argues that the pretence of belief in the Christianity of the established Church is crucially necessary for the maintenance of social order as it sets a good example to women, children and the poorer classes:

'If I were in England, I should think it my duty to go to church - occasionally - just for the sake of example...To women - and children - and to the poorer classes'. (AMEW, Book 1, p.15)

While claiming that it is not necessary for a man to attend church himself, he argues that it is a wife's duty to attend in order to represent traditional values on behalf of her husband and of normative society at large:

'It is to women that all civilised nations look for the maintenance of religious bonds. It is they who throng the churches, and they keep society together by setting this example'. (AMEW, Book 1, p.16)

He further insists to her 'you can hold what opinions you like, but you cannot act on them' (AMEW, Book 1, p.36). Thus, it is the woman's role to work to maintain the social order (which denies them full membership and which they may know to be based upon falsehood), while men benefit both from the mendacity and from

not having to perform the false act themselves. Agatha is repelled by this hypocrisy, while Adrian sees it as no more than pragmatism, arguing that

'This is, at bottom, not a theological but a social matter. The lower classes must be kept in their place, and religion is an excellent means of keeping them there.' (AMEW, Book 1, p.17)

Agatha cannot but continue to question why error should be considered good enough for women, the poor and children, especially when it is put into the guise of moral guidance. She also refuses to accept that the poor should be refused knowledge:

She had never been brought into contact with the lower orders of society, and had never thought about them. It struck her however, at this moment, that as they had but a small share of the good things of life, it was hard on them to withhold from them one other good thing - knowledge. Nay, it was harder to make their poverty a reason for this privation. (AMEW, Book 1, p.16)

She further argues that it was surely only the police and army who keep the people in order. Adrian answers:

The clergy are their valuable auxiliaries...And every Government knows that. Church and State go together...Philosophers regard all religions as equally false, the

people regard them as equally true, and magistrates regard them as equally useful. (AMEW, Book 1, p.18)

In this way, the practice of controlling society by and for the wealthy and powerful is now openly stated. The differences between the wealthy and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, are no longer obscured by a credible attempt at morality as in Eliot or Dickens. The claim that social circumstances are naturally occurring and cannot be helped and can be improved slowly is now undermined. Agatha's conclusion is that it is better to destroy property than to pretend. Adrian's riposte is that such thinking is naïve, implying that the hypocrisy is a necessary social silence which never has to be acknowledged or confronted because it is effectively never seen or heard. However, as the reader is invited to realise, such conscious hypocrisy clearly creates a world convenient to its own needs, and then pretends to be free from it in order to disguise that role. That disguise must obtrude as soon as its function has been acknowledged, and it is one of the major purposes of this novel to make just such hypocrisies obtrude as much as possible. Such a realisation is a decisive one for Agatha and, once she has made it, she 'cannot go back to the state of mind from which she had emerged' (AMEW, Book 1, p.44). Her freethought makes her increasingly isolated socially. This and her distress at her son Otho's forced Christian education make her ill; she leaves for England, taking Otho with her. Adrian's last words to her are 'give up freethought' (AMEW, Book 1, p.47). This scene closes Book One, Preliminary.

In contradiction to the traditional novelistic method of *building* a structure, Book One is really a *disassembling*. The narrative focuses its attention

precisely at those points where social and political relationships are failing the most powerfully. The emotional failure of the marriage is understood as a political failure, the result of serious moral, political and social differences. Book One teases out the strands of ideological apparatus which underpin marriage as a social and political arrangement and which in turn function to bind together other institutional structures, the 'whole' representing the maintenance of established society. It clarifies important ideological ground, deliberately bringing to the surface for conscious analysis those founding political arguments previous novels have both attempted and resisted. It is the determination of the novel in full to acknowledge this crucial ground gained and to use it to unpick traditional patterns in order to reconfigure them. This constant undermining of social assumptions produces a powerfully iconoclastic work, but one that attempts to see a way beyond immediate social and political breakdown to a form of constructive renewal.

As a result of the political ground gained, realism is no longer under the same stress as in previous texts. Rather, the novel uses a deceptively simple realist method in order to undermine that method's ideological foundations and to destabilise normative middle- and upper-middle class values. Drawing-room conversations become political discussions in a matter of seconds; violent political protest is objected to insofar as it threatens, but no-one condemns it as unjust, immoral or unlikely; the introduction of John Walsh, gas fitter and socialist activist, shows us a calm, articulate and determined man whose only avowed aim is to prevent society from coming to more harm than it has already, and for whom violent conflict is an unfortunate but necessary outcome to which working people have been forced, not a deliberate choice or

irrational desire. Normative novelistic priorities are inverted when social relationships are demonstrated as subordinate to, indeed resultant from, political relationships, and become peripheral to the central political and ideological concerns of the novel.

Bourgeois society, Book One insists, far from representing naturally occurring moral values and managing them for society's good, in fact imposes its own arbitrary values simply to establish and maintain its own social and economic ascendancy. This effort incorporates government, economic institutions, the class system, the Church and the family in order to sustain economic inequity and its concomitant social injustice. The structures essential to a dominant social and economic élite defend wealth, position and power; the truth, long resisted and fought over, is now out. The moral fabric of such a society is threadbare. This is most glaringly apparent to the very people whose interests it serves, who attempt no pretence, and admit openly that they advocate the maintenance of the status quo and claim moral faith in it publicly (largely through supporting the established church), purely from economic and political self-interest, not from social or moral conviction. The novel thus has no conceptual battle to fight, and it is free to present 'established' realities as residual and fading, both morally and intellectually, from their former position as central to maintaining the effective life of society. That faith or invisible pretence gone, more urgent social needs have room to emerge and to dominate; as a result, notions of what is central and what peripheral to society's needs are also inverted, in a politically productive way.

Book Two makes up the remainder of the novel, but is itself 'divided' into two

parts: the first comprising the relationship between Agatha and her son Otho, now grown to legal independence; the second, Otho's political and personal progress after Agatha's death. Book Two begins fifteen years after Agatha and Otho left for England. We discover that the date of their leaving was 1865 and so the present of the novel is 1880. A brief résumé is included to inform us of Agatha's intellectual journey after her rejection of Christianity, to Theism and agnosticism before reaching atheism. Her mother dies, leaving her financially independent and thus able to 'carry out her own views, have her own way' (AMEW, Book 2, pp.56-7). On Otho's birthday her main announcement to him is that she is now an atheist (AMEW, Book 2, p.58). She explains her creed to him (AMEW, Book 2, p.59), joins the National Freethought Society (AMEW, Book 2, p.60), an inter-class society, and begins to distribute leaflets (AMEW, Book 2, pp.60-61) as well as contributing financially to the general and benevolent funds of the Society. She gives to Otho three books on freethought, which she wrote while still abroad, and which explain all the bases of her political convictions. (AMEW, Book 2, pp.60-61) These she has written for him (AMEW, Book 2, p.62) and offers to him for him to read, but to make up his own mind over. She accepts that there is very real pressure to conform to society's norms but can do no more than offer her best conscience to her only son. In her politics and the honest expounding of those convictions, especially her passing them on to Otho, Agatha finds her true personal identity and fullest expression. It is said of Agatha at this point that 'she was her very self' (AMEW, Book 2, p.65). Otho duly reads the books and is convinced by the atheism they contain; thus begins his journey into radicalism.

Otho receives from his father's brother, Dr Fulbert Hathaway, the same

hypocrisy as uttered by his father. He begins to look at passers-by closely, wondering whether each of those he sees is equally 'consciously deceiving' (AMEW, Book 2, p.75). He argues publicly in favour of Irish Home Rule; those who hear him 'hated him with a perfect hatred' for it, (AMEW, Book 2, p.81) wishing the nationalists hanged. He begins to consider the notion of free speech in England something of a sham.

Agatha contracts tuberculosis and she and Otho decamp to Madeira where they come across the ex-patriate English at their worst. Despite these people's claims to cultural superiority, their objections to atheistic views and to the suggestion that English troops should leave Irish territory are brutally made, leaving Agatha with the conclusion 'It seems to me...that gentle-people are very violent' (AMEW, Book 2, p.83). Undeterred, Agatha continues to support the Freethought movement financially and with practical guidance. She and Otho are now working together on what have become joint political and social commitments. When the movement's newspaper, The Atheist, is prosecuted for blasphemy, they jointly co-ordinate fund raising for the defence. Given the established Church's role in prosecuting The Atheist, Otho wonders whether the Christian mind is capable of giving up the falsities it is filled with. Agatha replies:

'...to investigate is hazardous. You must remember, a clergyman is least of all persons a free agent in the matter of religion. And for my part, I can imagine no position more distressing than that of the man who feels that he is spending his life in teaching falsehoods to the people, and yet dare not change, because his

bread depends upon it'. (AMEW, Book 2, p. 93)

This passage confirms one of the major themes of the novel, namely the investigation of social norms to elucidate the truth and speak it regardless of consequences and pressure to the contrary. It also emphasises the rejection of political neutrality. The Church is embedded within social and economic pressures it cannot break. Otho replies, 'It strikes me...that nobody is free' (AMEW, Book 2, p.93), acknowledging that the mind always functions within a form of life, a pattern of social and political relationships that cannot be evaded. This realisation is followed by Agatha's death, which throws Otho into another life. Shortly before her death, Agatha urges Otho to continue their work and become better than she was. She counters his doubts and asserts the importance of the job they have taken on

'New ideas will arise, and you must take them up and carry them forward. It is only in this way that the world can be saved.'
(AMEW, Book 2, p. 107)

Otho returns Agatha's body to England, where she is buried in unconsecrated ground. Otho's uncle, his father's brother, Dr Fulbert Hathaway, who attends the ceremony remarks

'It was what I call a sensible ceremony, and I should like to be buried that way myself. There would be some satisfaction in coming out in one's true colours when sincerity could no longer spoil my practice.'
(AMEW, Book 2, p. 108)

He goes on to say that his wife would never allow such a thing. When Otho remarks on her piety, Fulbert dismisses the idea out of hand, asserting that she is entirely concerned with decorum as judged by members of her own class, concluding that he will therefore 'have to die as I have lived' (AMEW, Book 2, p.109) and then leaves Otho with 'God bless you. And don't tell on me'. (AMEW, Book2, p.109) Otho is reminded that this is the second time he has had that said to him by an atheist. His father had said it to him while they were still living in India, in order to counter Agatha's scepticism and make Christianity normal to the boy, even though he, Adrian, possessed no such belief. The hypocrisy, together with the memory, upsets Otho and he feels that Fulbert is belittled by it. The betrayal of conscience serves to emphasise further the extent to which assumptions of fact and value are being inverted. The older man seems much younger than the nephew ('don't tell on me') and the respected doctor accepting quite openly that his obedience to form is a sham and his wife's brittle reliance upon decorum empty, heightens the moral authority of Otho the social 'naysayer'. In some disgust, he leaves for Europe.

While Otho is contemptuous of such hypocrisy and fully inherits his mother's freethinking atheistic liberalism, he is at this point some distance from practical commitment to radical causes. While abroad he becomes independently wealthy as a result of the death of a relative and seems in no hurry to return to England or to devote himself to the freethought cause:

He did not take the same eager interest in its workings as Mrs

Hathaway had done; and besides, there was no persecution going on, and consequently no great demand for enthusiasm...
(AMEW, Book 2, p.111)

However, it is not marriage or a career which occupies his thoughts, but politics. He contemplates, for example, the politics of the United States:

Almost all the Radical programme was possessed by America in practice - they had no royal family, no House of Lords, no Established Church; they had manhood suffrage and other advantages for which the English were still striving; but yet he was told that poverty was rife, and he could see by the papers that riots were not infrequent. The American working-citizen was politically free, but socially helpless. Hathaway was a Radical still, but he was not sure that Radicalism would do everything. (AMEW, Book 2, pp.111-112)

Three important events help Otho's mind to a sharper, more analytical focus. When he does arrive back in England from Antwerp, he is repelled by the scene at the docks in London

It was so grimy, so debasing in its ugliness; and as he watched lines of men carrying heavy loads on their shoulders between the ships and the shore, and marked their general appearance, a feeling came over him that things in this world were all wrong, and that it was hopeless to try to set them right.

(AMEW, Book 2, p.112)

His contemplation is interrupted by a fellow passenger who fulminates against those very working men, furious at men who, as far as he is concerned, make fifteen shillings a day and squander it all on drink and gambling because they are incapable of thrift. Money would be wasted on them, he concludes, because they do not know how to make proper use of it. On taking a cab, Otho looks at the men and women around him:

They were totally different from himself; ill-shaped, ill-featured, every variation of ill-favour was there; they were ugly and mean-looking, and anxious, and out of temper; and he noticed not only their forms and faces, but their clothes. They gave him no civil words, they seemed angry that his cab blocked the way, and as if they thought he had no business there. (AMEW, Book 2, p.113)

The first of these two instances gives us a not untypical positivist view of the working poor from those echeloned above them: a response habitually resisting and denying the power of social determination by insisting that conditions are brought about by people as individual agents. In such a view, lack of thrift is the cause of poverty, just as drunkenness is the cause of poverty; almost any causality will do as long as it is not admitted that poverty itself might be the cause of anything. In the second instance we are given a piece of naturalism, a description of people so totally dominated by their conditions of life as to be completely unable to do anything about them

except go on suffering them or, potentially, turn to violence. Otho's reflection on these experiences reflects the novel's theme that there is a way of superseding these alternatives with political analysis:

Fifteen shillings a day...And they gamble and drink and the money is gone. A man ought to take it home to his wife; why, he might get quite well off at that rate. But what kind of a home has he to take it to? I have seen nothing that looks like a decent home, and a man must live near to his work. Take it home to a cellar or a garret? To a tipsy wife and quarrelling children? Is it any wonder he stays outside such a place? And how can he squander it on refined pleasures when only coarse ones are within his reach? But he ought not to squander it at all; see what comforts a man can buy with 15s a day. Ah! But it is not 15s a day; it is only 15s in a day - a great difference that. (AMEW, Book 2, p.114)

On the face of it, such an analysis takes the 'drama' out of the matter, but the strength of this development is not that it substitutes documentary for drama, but that it simply makes clear what the bases for drama really are and opens the way for a more complex fiction, one that takes political and economic realities formally into account as part of its drama, indeed productive of it in complex ways. It is not difficult to look at Otho's rumination above and see the multiple directions such fiction might take in modern form: proletarian fiction, feminist fiction, psychological fiction, political fiction. Otho's response can be this suggestive because it is both an

endeavouring to get as close as possible to the experience of the people he is contemplating and to the structured economic relationships that underwrite their lives. His thoughts now compromise the earlier perception that such people were 'totally different from himself', (Book 2, p.113) and adopts the understanding that such differences are not absolute but circumstantial. There is a causal context producing these outcomes and fiction fully produced must accept that as part of its construct.

On alighting from his cab, Otho enters the Langham hotel to meet a friend Basil Champneys. No sooner have they settled to talk when

A distant noise came rapidly nearer, and resolved itself into a tramping of feet, above which shouts and loud words were heard. It was a singular sound - that of a vast crowd of displaced human beings, a sinister sound that threatened something worse. (AMEW, Book 2, pp.114-115)

It is a public demonstration by unemployed men. Basil, when questioned by Otho as to its character, replies 'it is those wretches' (AMEW, Book 2, p.115) clearly indicating a familiarity with them and their demonstrations. The narrative presentation of the march is carefully handled:

Looking down into the street they saw a mass of men, that filled it completely, overflowing the road and pavements. These men were of the lower classes, both respectable and the reverse; many of them in extreme poverty; they came on

shouting angrily, but they kept a forward march and did not seem disposed to violence. Still there was great disorder. The artisans among them might have been manageable by their leaders, but the throng was of a mixed description, and largely influenced in its behaviour by the thieves and roughs who had joined it for the sake of excitement. Otho had often heard of the 'the masses', he saw them now, and the sight was a shock to him. Gaunt, unkempt, dirty, in want and hunger, their faces darkened by despair or lighted up by desperation, the men tramped past; and the gently-born, gently-nurtured gentlemen looked down upon them, while a horrified pity took possession of him. (AMEW, Book 2, p.115)

The crowd is not simply homogeneous, but varied in character, reflecting the multi-faceted character of working-class life, and our reading of Otho's previous analysis now mandates the application of similar understanding to the men's circumstances. The 'shouting angrily' is balanced by the 'forward march' which gives both purpose and order to the anger. 'Did not seem disposed to anger' returns us to Otho's view of them, with the narration interposing more 'facts' before Otho's full response closes the passage. The images of the faces 'darkened' or 'lighted up' evoke a symbolic, painterly quality to the image, while 'tramped past' stresses the capacity for long and painful endurance tested to the limit.

The vividness of this description brings the demonstrators into the centre of our perception and renders 'gently-born and gently-nurtured' into terms

which diminish those so described. Having been drawn into these angry men's lives in this way, the mocking response of the wealthy to the demonstration of need is doubly shocking. They are described as 'shaking with laughter' and 'jeering aloud'. (AMEW, Book 2, p.116) The extremity of this response serves to highlight the absence of any considered opposition to the marchers. Not one of them suggests that the demonstration is illegal or likely to represent a threat to a legitimate morally sanctioned social order as represented by themselves. The cruelty of their taunting represents, rather, evidence of moral abdication; culminating in an effective, if symbolic, act of war when they throw crusts down upon the starving men. This elicits a violent response, which, as we have been assured, was not in the men's minds otherwise. The actions of the rich contain no inherent value and serve only to make a statement of power. This is

A meeting of the haves and the have-nots; they were evil passions on both sides, but one side had an excuse, the other none. Not content with being better-off, they must needs make merry, because the others were badly-off. (AMEW, Book 2, p.116)

Refusing to retreat when a stone breaks their window, Otho notices among the crowd:

A few men with red rosettes on, exerting themselves desperately to quell the riot; they were few, but they were of varied social status, seeming as if they represented all classes

except the highest. He noticed their splendid exertions and the great influence they had. (AMEW, Book 2, p.117)

These men are indeed the socialists Otho suspects they might be, and are clearly representing a stabilising cross-class force as a potential resolution of violent conflict. Socialism thus represents less a revolutionary overturning of society than an antidote to the violent radicalism of capitalism, which produces such conflict. Basil continues to abuse the men as 'brutes' while Otho replies, 'It is my own class who are the brutes.' (AMEW, Book 2, p. 118)

Basil Champneys is also introduced as a means of constructing a sub-plot within the novel, which provides the other half of a political and social dichotomy central to Otho's life. Basil's sister Agnes is eager to marry. She has been 'out' in society for several years without being able to achieve a husband. Her current chosen man is a baronet, Sir Paul Bythesea, who seems undecided, and half inclined to transfer his attentions to her younger sister, Evangeline. Otho had shown admiration for Evangeline before his departure for Madeira and now possesses ample income for marriage. If, therefore, he and Evangeline could be encouraged, it would leave open the course Agnes and her mother most wish for. Their attitude toward Evangeline is made quite plain:

They felt kindly to her, but they considered that in these days of competition in marriage as in everything else, they were bound to think of themselves first. (AMEW, Book 2, p.118)

In this way a Victorian marriage sub-plot is introduced very succinctly. The sympathetic portrayals of Agatha and Otho, the introduction of the brutal Basil, the manipulateness revealed in these last remarks and the delay in the introduction of the marriage plot until long after the novel's ideological soundings have been taken, all serve to frame powerfully this sub-plot and relegate it to a clearly subordinate status. The reader is reminded of how important the Romance had been for radical literature earlier in the century; the 'distance' between that past need and contemporary literary/political possibilities becomes a palpable measure of progress made in socialist and radical politics over that period. The idea of society marriage is also parodied (Sir Paul Bythesea) and undermined ('competition in marriage as in everything else') as yet another outcrop of a society that has failed morally. The marriage factor also introduces the decisive dichotomy in Otho's life. The path he might have taken automatically has been exposed as an arbitrary and contrived construct, fabricated for the purpose of its own self-repetition. It no longer functions as a paradigm for positive social values or valuable and worthy social structures. Fashionable life is revealed as a commodity market like any other. Such an acknowledgement allows the novel to become structurally iconoclastic very quietly. The centre of the novel's attention is its political issues and the Victorian marriage is peripheral. Part of the work Otho sets himself is to attempt reconciliation between polite society and the values it has purported to uphold. Its failure to do so hands moral and political guardianship to others, here to the Socialists who garner the entire moral crop. In this novel, polite society has become entirely alienated from any

values it might once have laid claim to; it simply clings to power and its disguises have been seen through.

Otho, continuing to analyse the significance of the events he has just witnessed within hours of landing back in England, begins to realise the perceptual mistake he has made. At first perplexed that he should be hated by someone to whom he has done no wrong, he begins to be aware that conscious intention has very little to do with it and that situation is all powerful:

Though he had not taken anything from them, did not the very fact of his enjoying so much constitute an offence against them? Must it not inevitably arouse envy, anger, dislike?
(AMEW, Book 2, p.121)

Otho begins to experience the feeling of alienation from his own class which will continue throughout the remainder of the novel. He keeps apart from the others in the hotel, avoiding chatter and reading newspapers avidly to discover the causal details behind the events he had witnessed. What he reads is details of an economic depression: many thousands out of work, causing severe distress amongst the labouring classes who were left without adequate relief or prospect of improved circumstances, with private charitable gifts totally inadequate and a Government unwilling to do anything to alleviate the situation. The scene he had witnessed had been the aftermath of a meeting in Trafalgar Square, convened by the National Socialist Federation. The speeches of the leaders had been published and on

reading them Otho considers their violent language justified, like their bitterness at the apathy of the wealthy to their plight. While those of his class and education are full of abuse, we are not presented with any kind of rational opposition to the demonstration; as we have seen the opposition is based upon the need to suppress others as your own moral case has failed, or simple fear. Otho

began to warm to the Socialists. They were accused of trying to upset the foundation of society; but was a society that had for its under-structure want, unhappiness, ignorance, filth and crime, very much worth preserving? (AMEW, Book 2, p.122)

The Socialists do not only blame the evils above upon the 'well-to-do' (AMEW, Book 2, p.122), they announce the possibility of an alternative. It is this step in perception which influences Otho the most deeply. The world has moved away from the spiritualised notions of the poor always enduring but always there; now structural change was a real possibility. Otho appreciates the enormous nature and significance of this shift and sees it as the core of the Socialists' persistence. The novel can now state the existence of a publicly active socialist movement. Denials, resistances, narrative contradictions are no longer powerful influences. Humanist terminology is placed within a clearly established ideological context. Otho's mother's words, which come to him now regarding the 'improvement and perfection of Humanity', (AMEW, Book 2, p.122) now have a political structure through which to pursue their purpose. Agatha and Otho are shown to be of transgressive mind; they possess the ability to understand the power of

determinisms and of the positivist perspective and yet to overreach them and look beyond them into political analysis. It is Howell's narrative method to avoid the same pitfalls and articulate the same strengths, accounting for the social and economic determination of human behaviour without denying psychological complexity to human motivation.

Nowhere is this shift more evident than in the social scenes involving the proposed marriage between Otho and Evangeline and the necessity for the Champneys to accept Otho into their home for their purposes. The attempt at maintaining a polite social gloss to hide the manipulation crumbles at the first touch and every conversation becomes an admission of the ideological underpinnings separating those present that they are working so hard to hide. Otho meets Evangeline's family and the attempted social manipulation begins, but its hidden reality is made clear

Miss Champneys was beginning to show signs of wear, for the life of a lady of fashion is exhausting, more especially if to late hours and constant gadding about there is added a fear of failure and ridicule. (AMEW, Book 2, p.125)

It becomes obvious to the Champneys that Otho is indeed attracted to Evangeline and their plans are likely to succeed. However, their assumptions of straightforward social triumph are rudely punctured when Agnes introduces the issue of the unemployed. Clearly expecting a consensus of opinion, she is surprised when Otho expresses sympathy for the demonstrators, but horrified when he announces that he is making

contributions to the National Socialist Federation. As liberals, the Champneys respond by arguing that the Mansion House Charitable fund is entirely sufficient help to the poor and is exemplary of the 'true Christian spirit' (AMEW, Book 2, p.127). Otho argues a forceful rejection of the patronage of the rich, praising the self-help mechanisms of the poor as vanguarded by the Socialists. Agnes responds with immediate anger at the Socialists, hoping that they would be hanged:

Her words brought back to Otho's mind the sentiments expressed by the Conservatives in Funchal with regard to the hanging of the Nationalists. He did not find that Liberals were any less bloodthirsty. (AMEW, Book 2, p.128)

The meeting between Otho and his prospective future family has become a political argument immediately. He continues to assert that he sees no wickedness in taking the part either of the poor or of the Socialists:

'The Socialists have not invented this awful poverty; it is a fact, and they have called attention to it. If their methods are violent, it is because gentle methods fail.' (AMEW, Book 2, p.129)

Ho goes on to stress that charities respond to situations such as these out of fear alone - an assertion that is not contradicted. The claim is then made that the well-to-do cannot be expected to do more than this. Otho responds with specifics:

'Short of actual Socialism, the Federation puts forward several moderate proposals, and the Eight Hour Labour Day is one of them. A national demand for that measure, Government would not dare to refuse; they would press it on and vast numbers of the unemployed would be brought into employment at once.' (AMEW, Book 2, pp.129-30)

The argument resolves nothing and is closed on this occasion by a photograph of Evangeline being put into Otho's hand to take his mind off the subject. This symbolic interjection strengthens the dichotomy between his expected life of marriage and career, and his life of political conviction.

Otho hears that several members of the Socialist movement have been arrested; he contributes to their defence fund, but is bitterly disappointed that Government fails to respond, that not one of twelve labour members of the House of Commons even mentions the issue and that no measure was put upon the order book for parliamentary time. Those arrested are acquitted and, the narration tells us, 'the people calmed down, and everything went on as before' (AMEW, Book 2, p.133). Except that, in a manner similar to other novels in this sequence, this is a crucial epiphany for the protagonist of the novel:

But with Otho Hathaway, nothing could be again as it had been. The condition of the masses was no longer an abstract subject to him; they had come to his very door, as it were, and after

that they were constantly present with him. His political faiths were breaking up, and he could not rest until he had a new faith. (AMEW, Book 2, p.133)

Continued study convinces Otho that the path of Socialism is the one approach to practical politics which can override and potentially combine all other sectional approaches whether liberal or radical, suffragist or republican. At the same time, he retains faith that he can convince Evangeline of the urgency of this matter, convert her to socialism and thus give their marriage a social and political dimension which will abandon the empty notions of social form or socially irresponsible private happiness and sanction it with a renewed public significance. However, the narrative voice lays open to the reader aspects of Evangeline's character that it refuses to Otho

She was a gentle girl, prone to lean on those around her, not apt to strike out any original path for herself, not easily persuaded to walk in such a one; but at present her road lay plain before her and she strolled down it happily. He was a man of her own class, he was recommended to her by her friends; what more could an unmarried woman of twenty-two want? She loved him dearly. (AMEW, Book 2, p.135)

She leans towards Otho's position taking an interest in his political researching without fully understanding its implications for them both. Otho interprets this response in a more positive light than he should; it is plain to

the reader that the marriage cannot happen. It is the attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. This use of dramatic irony works very successfully in order to maintain a very real tension throughout the novel. It is a tension which serves to give a marked emphasis to the real difficulties Otho faces when taking such a political line and taking it to its full conclusion. He is putting at risk and potentially relinquishing a life of ease and comfort, marriage and family - no small option to abandon. It is through this quiet, but determined and honourable, thoroughness that Otho's life takes on the character of the heroic.

Chapter Seven of Book Two presents the reader with the most openly didactic episode of the novel. It includes a list of authors Otho consults in his research into Socialism and serves as instruction to the reader offering both a bibliography of Socialist writers and a synopsis of their views. He encounters the self-humiliation of realising how much his own financial situation fits into the exploitative relations between classes he reads about. While he might be a friend to the poor attitudinally, he is their enemy structurally. Resolving to alter this relation in the long term, he realises that he has 'found at last a cause that satisfied him' (AMEW, Book 2, p.140). We are then presented with a list of organisations that he might possibly join in order to further his commitment. They include the Fabian Society which is rejected as 'socialism of the armchair' (AMEW, Book 2, p.141) and the Christian Socialists who seem in no hurry to bring about meaningful change at all. Of the remaining two, a socialist league and the socialist Federation, Otho chooses the latter because it is the poorest and the most in need of help. His membership card, heavily influenced by the French

Revolution, is the symbol of his new political life that he hopes will persuade Evangeline to join him in making the new future.

The scene of Otho's proposal is a strange one, augmented as it is by the family parrot, King Pippin. When Otho pauses in the emotion of the moment, the parrot takes over:

Kiss me, he muttered, in an undertone, as Otho paused.

Evangeline - , said the lover again.

Kiss me, cried the parrot loudly. Come along! Kiss! Kiss!

A happy light of love and fun sprang into Otho's eyes; he put his arms round her and raised her from her chair. And King Pippin was obeyed; they kissed, and kissed, and kissed. (AMEW, Book 2, p.145)

The effect of this scene is to gloss over the issue of their marriage and the centrality of Otho's politics, and to delay the inevitable collision between the two. Its tone is comic, but out of tune with the tone of the novel as a whole, and, placed immediately after the account of his political study, only adds to the sense of the trivialising of what should be an important moment. Throughout the novel, Howell juxtaposes scenes of political argument with scenes of clichéd domesticity in order to contrast the rigorous nature of the one with the lifelessness of the other. It also serves to highlight the spontaneity that ought to be in the marriage proposal, but isn't at any depth. We know that Otho, as an atheist, cannot regard marriage as a spiritual relationship and we also know that for Evangeline, marriage is the social form

that is expected of her. As a result, the impending union is flawed every bit as much as his mother's marriage had been. The institution of marriage, far from being a solution to personal and social problems, is now an index to them and can resolve nothing; the presence of the parrot only serves to indicate just how far apart the intended couple really are. The scene concludes

'And so you are not afraid to be a Socialist's wife?' said Otho, when they were both calmer.

'Not a bit. I will try to think as you do. I suppose it will be my duty,' she added, with a charming pout and a side-glance at him.

(AMEW, Book 2, p.145)

The truth of this coyness on Evangeline's part is given to the reader when Otho has left the room and Agnes and her mother have come to her with congratulations. When they argue that they hoped her future husband would not get mixed up with too much 'riff-raff' (AMEW, Book 2, p.146) Evangeline replies, 'He is not my husband yet' (AMEW, Book 2, p.146). The explanation is provided shortly after:

What she meant was, that Otho and she would be so absorbed, each in each, after marriage, that he would have no inclination to run after strange theories; she could not imagine him leaving her side to attend stuffy meetings, in hot halls, crowded by 'the great unwashed'. So she took his present vagaries placidly, and was willing to listen, and to try to respond. (AMEW, Book 2, pp. 146-47)

The dichotomy between conventional love and politicised thought could not be clearer than in this attempted courtship. Evangeline and Otho are in effect living in different worlds. This is further emphasised by the 'contradictory feeling' (AMEW, Book 2, p.147) Otho experiences during the early days of the impending marriage between his love and his principles which 'took him into such different spheres of thought' (AMEW, Book 2, p.147):

He was proud as a successful lover ought to be, he was joyful, exulting in his life and prospects; and yet there was a bitter in the sweetness, because he thought of others as well as himself. He did not need to seek out poverty - he could not go out of doors without encountering it; it was around him everywhere. And the more because he was so happy, did he notice keenly the unhappiness of those whom he was wronging. None of his friends or acquaintances could have understood the sort of shame with which this irreproachably-dressed gentleman walked along the street, lowered in his own esteem because he was living on money he had not earned. The principle he had just adopted permeated every daily detail and put a new complexion upon everything; and the excellence of his belongings, which had hitherto been a satisfaction to his self-respect, was now a source of reproach to him. (AMEW, Book 2, pp. 147-48)

At this juncture the narrative is really wearing its heart upon its sleeve. The disjointed values are causal not resultant; ideological values are not merely attitudinal they are structural and for Otho they are changing society and its practices and 'permeating every daily detail'. These new ideas cannot be compartmentalised and safely controlled by traditional forms; everything becomes different. To grasp this is to enter a difficult world of social isolation; as Agatha put it, 'to investigate is hazardous' (AMEW, Book 2, p.93). The Victorian novel is being unbound. As discussed in the Introduction to this Section, above, the Victorian novel with its Liberal philosophical underpinnings had worked to disguise fundamental ideological and political conflict with the myth of dispassionate 'wholeness'. As we have seen, that position was so powerful an influence that the literature of radical authors was wrought into the most peculiar shapes by the attempt to escape its illusion, while simultaneously belonging to it all the time. A More Excellent Way is a novel written after such illusions no longer held the same power. The increased power of organised labour, fought for in the wake of the depression of the 1870s, and the increasing awareness that the two leading political parties, Tory and Liberal, were seriously reluctant to introduce legislation to create a more equitable society resulted in the realistic assessment of politics as a power battle between opposed groups, separated and connected by deep ideological differences wanting very different things from society, indeed a very different society. A More Excellent Way nails its ideological colours to the mast, making no attempt at a Liberal 'objectivity' of perspective. The Liberal optimism of bourgeois economic growth of the third quarter of the century is no more. The myth of a 'whole' Liberal society has gone. As a result, the capacity for literature to maintain Liberalism as a

meaningful metaphor has also gone. As Nietzsche put it:

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms - in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.⁵⁵

The illusion of the transparency of writing, apolitical and non-ideological, has been erased, its metaphorical value worn away. As ideological strategies replaced Liberalism in practical politics, so the self-consciousness of writing - modernism - begins to replace Victorian realism as a dominant mode for literature. A More Excellent Way is a novel written after the optimism of economic growth and an improving society has been punctured and social relationships have had their metaphorical value worn away, leaving them bare power strategies.

The implications for literature are further exposed when Otho opposes the overt Christianity within a book given to a young child, Dorothy, who is staying with the Champneys. Again, what begins as a pleasant, harmless

⁵⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lie', in Walter Kaufman, (ed.) The Portable Nietzsche, (London: Penguin, 1976), pp.46-7

drawing-room scene almost immediately becomes a political discussion. Otho adopts a material theory toward the Established Church:

'Some young men enter the Church because a good living awaits them, and some are entering because the examinations are easier to pass than other professions...Once in the Church, he must keep on saying what he is paid to say. And his arguments are the less satisfactory to a doubter because he is recommending his own wares'. (AMEW, Book 2, pp.152-3)

He goes on to argue that once socialism is achieved the notion of God will no more be taught to children than that there are fairies. Attempting to ameliorate the situation, and because Otho is 'always on the side of the poor' (AMEW, Book 2, p.154), Evangeline offers a section in the book on omnibus drivers and conductors and the very long hours they work, Otho replies that he objects as much to that part of the book as the rest of it because 'the teaching is thoroughly wrong' (AMEW, Book 2, p.154):

'My objection to this article on the omnibus employees is, that it only describes and does not explain. It treats of poverty as a thing that always must be. It throws over it the protection of the Almighty decree, and so it seeks to paralyse every effort to uproot it. This is not the sort of literature that makes the reformer and the revolutionist...I object that tales of poverty should be used to raise a pleasing glow of pity in the breasts of the rich. They make a luxury for themselves out of it; they are

content that the poor should remain poor, in order that they may have the pleasure of pitying them. Such sympathy is a sham sympathy'. (AMEW, Book 2, pp.154-5)

When Evangeline interrupts with the claim that charitable sympathy is genuine, Otho responds:

'Charity is a hateful thing. It is necessary under the present order of society, I grant you; but it is a hateful necessity. It demoralises both the giver and the receiver. The poor man, who is the injured, feels grateful; and the rich man, who is the injurer, feels generous; thus the thought of both is confused, and they are led astray'. (AMEW, Book 2, p.155)

Agnes continues the conversation by asking Otho what kind of article he would have written on the omnibus employees. Otho replies:

'An explanatory one...I would have shown that the reason why these men are overworked and underpaid is, that shareholders want high dividends; that their condition is not divinely ordered, but is due to human selfishness; that the present state of things is wicked, and that it is curable'. (AMEW, Book 2, p.156)

While the 'article' is not fiction, the point is made and the description Otho gives could readily be applied to this novel. The point made most tellingly

here is that socially responsible writing should reveal to the best of its ability the conditions of possibility of its subject matter, the causes of its particular being. Without this, writing always runs the risk of having nothing more than a fetishistic function, as Otho's analysis makes abundantly clear. The article described is pretending to expose something while actually covering it or disguising it, functioning as an ellipsis, a talisman to ward off the evil eye of political reality. In addition, responsible writing should clarify origins and causes, pass judgements and assert the pro-active possibilities of human agency in public life, rejecting passivity or subservience and insisting upon the possibility of life being changed for the better as a result. Responsible writing combines the affective experience of life with the structured social determinisms which provide its characteristics. The presence of this piece of literary criticism within the novel is a didactic but effective means of stressing the need to puncture the magical qualities of writing, those means by which it takes on an air of authority, regardless of merit, because it is writing. The authority of writing, we are reminded here, is questionable and its purpose must always be looked to and judged on the basis of analysis; the analysis is not merely aesthetic, but also social and political and assumptions of hierarchical value, wherever they arise, are always to be thoroughly questioned.

This form of questioning is extended when Otho introduces John Walsh, a gas fitter and socialist activist, to his uncle and aunt. It is left to Dr Hathaway's wife to uphold class-based reaction, remarking to Otho

'You forget yourself very strangely, I must say. To think that

I should have lived to be introduced to a gas-fitter!' (AMEW, Book 2, p.163)

She then invites her husband to leave with her, but he refuses to do so, much to her consternation. He had read John Walsh's name in the paper in connection with arguments for free meetings and free speech and

He was not sorry to find himself in the same room as the owner of it. He stood back, observing everything. He saw a twinkle of amusement in the man's eyes, a black frown from the lady's brow, and the most innocent composure in the bearing of their host. (AMEW, Book 2, p.163)

Only Mrs Hathaway's rejection of the meeting is treated as a cliché, 'she swept haughtily to the front door' (AMEW, Book 2, p.164), echoing again the notion of the woman as performer and representative of conservative values. It is important symbolically that Walsh and Hathaway both find it difficult to speak to one another without Otho's presence. When the three speak, Walsh reveals himself to be intelligent and informed and, just as importantly for the fictional depiction of the working class, articulate, self-possessed and self-respecting; he fulfils none of the clichés of the working classes in fiction: none of the drunkenness or violence or down-trodden rage of the naturalists, and none of the patronising or sentimental treatment of the 'realist' school. Walsh is even shown to be amused by Mrs Hathaway's behaviour, such is his composure. Despite living in a world that ostensibly represents her interests, it is she who is shown to be discomforted and

outside of the social 'whole', albeit at her own decision, while Walsh goes on to play the dominant role in the ensuing discussion between the three men. He represents working people increasingly coming to terms with the world in their efforts to change it. 'Demos is waking up' (AMEW, Book 2, p.165) is Dr Hathaway's conclusion. He does fear that Demos might be 'waking up to a vengeance' (AMEW, Book 2, p.166), but Otho replies in a manner which alters the identity of radicalism:

'I hold that collective socialism is the next development in the evolution of society; necessarily so because of what has gone before. It may be resisted, but it cannot be prevented. And if the propertied classes would only help, the new social birth might be accomplished peacefully. If you were to attend the democratic meeting, you would find that Demos is not revengeful; his thirst is for his rights; his desire is to take from his oppressors the power of doing harm. The democracy have cruel wrongs to avenge yet their cry is not for the shedding of blood, but for equity.' (AMEW, Book 2, p.166)

The aim of socialism, stated clearly here, is not to take revenge, not a lust for violence for its own sake, but the much saner and much calmer desire to stop the damage society suffers as a result of inequity and injustice. It is the results of industrial capitalism that are shown to be drastic and extreme; socialism's job is to rein it back.

After this meeting, Otho's life begins to change decisively as he takes on the

role of public speaker for the Federation. His first speech is presented in a mixture of reported and direct speech which has the effect of stressing the immediacy and importance of what he has to say, but reducing the drama of the moment. It also allows for editing, again to highlight the key moments. Crucial to Otho's thesis is the extent to which the institutions of established society are out of the reach of the poor because access to them is dependent upon the possession of money. 'Only in proportion as a man is independent economically can he be free to live his own life' (Book 2, p.181), he argues, stressing economic determinism. He also stresses that only through a co-operative culture, with redistribution of wealth, can something like a healthy society be likely. Importantly, this speech is not a resounding climax, a dramatic moment of sacrifice. It is a moderately successful speech, delivered well and cogently argued, but it does not have decisive impact. The meeting breaks up with a deliberate anti-climax:

The collection had amounted to eighteen shillings and a few odd pence; those who could give easily would not do so, and the money was mostly in coppers. (AMEW, Book 2, p.186)

The anti-climax is placed carefully to represent practical politics of this kind as difficult work; to emphasise just how much work has to be done to encourage people to think even in terms contrary to the weight of the present, the culture of the normal. There are no barricades. Otho continues to make speeches, and continues to try to convince Evangeline to support his work as his wife, but cannot convince her. Dr Hathaway makes the point starkly to Otho that the reader has been aware of for some time:

'You will have to give up trying to make socialism and society run in double harness. Choose one or the other. Things cannot go on like this; it is an impossible position'. (AMEW, Book 2, p.203)

He remains bitterly disappointed at his inability to convert Evangeline who, when asked by Dorothy whether she is a Socialist replies 'I have always been a Conservative' (Book 2, p.204) Otho puts to her what is his final plea by explaining as bluntly as he can the reality of the political life he has chosen. If she wants to be his wife, she will be choosing

'...the better but the harder part. Our friends - say rather, our acquaintance - will fall away from us; and we must be content without them.' Evangeline looked dismayed. (AMEW, Book 2, p.205)

Otho refuses to accompany the family to Scotland for a holiday because he has work to do in Kent, speaking to hop-pickers. Thus he and Evangeline part company, albeit temporarily, for the first time since Otho's return from Europe. Otho is now alone for the first time since that day, but whereas his initial journey was a search for new groundings, this journey to Kent is based upon the achievement of a clear political consciousness. His new journey is also a kind of political odyssey living amongst people from outside of the social circle that has been the domestic norm for him to date. His journey is not easy, but nor is it hopeless:

The 'hoppers' were helpless in a matter which concerned themselves, for they were too poor to resist and combine. Hathaway and his associates found them a very mixed company; some were densely ignorant and stupid, while some had heard about socialism in London, and had glimmerings of what it meant. All received their visitors well, and accepted the literature distributed by them. (AMEW, Book 2, p.213)

The landlady at his lodgings, Mrs Fleming, is introduced as a type of woman

whom a capitalistic system produces, and who (as Otho used comfortingly to assure himself) would certainly become extinct under a better system. (AMEW, Book 2, p.214)

Her struggle for life has 'hardened and narrowed and spoiled her' (AMEW, Book2, p. 214) and all her efforts put into the desperate hope that her children would not sink below their current level of life. The distress and work caused by this worry has caused her to be rampantly angry with those around her with whom she might have felt comradeship, so much so that she 'hated and despised everybody poorer than herself'. (AMEW, Book 2, p.214)

Knowing what it was to compete, she never pitied those who were competing under even greater difficulties... No words were contemptuous enough to express her scorn of the struggling women by whom she was surrounded, and who were just a trifle

beneath herself in the social scale. (AMEW, Book 2, pp.214-5)

In this presentation, we are given the kind of detail Otho has required in socially responsible writing earlier. The distortions and internalised distress of the human personality under capitalism are clearly there, but with the political explanation for this also included. Importantly, this detail does not have the effect of limiting the woman's possibilities, but precisely of expanding their scope and significance and lending them a greater complexity, given the elements of the pressures and distortions, and an enhanced, representative, status. The text itself is now able to avoid the unconscious stresses we have seen in earlier novels in the sequence, as discussed above, because such stresses can be openly identified. Such stress is now passed to characters such as Mrs Fleming who are now placed where the tectonic plates of economic survival and social status cause the most friction.

A similar example is presented when Otho walks into a private park near to his lodgings. It is a park which is open to the public but equipped with a special constable empowered to keep out unwanted intruders. It is the constable's custom to allow any 'well dressed person' (AMEW, Book 2, p.218) to enter. This in practice means that he keeps out members of his own class. He approaches Otho to ask if it is he who has been leaving socialist pamphlets on the benches. On hearing this suspicion confirmed, he warns Otho to cease this practice or the park will be closed to him. He speaks civilly but he intends a confrontation. Otho analyses the situation:

He knew he was being respected because he wore good clothes, and despised because he was spreading socialism. And if the worker had been wise, those feelings would have been exactly reversed. (AMEW, Book 2, p.218)

Refusing to take the pamphlets back and offering them to the constable and his friends, Otho gives him a different kind of confrontation:

'You respect me because I injure you... and you despise me because I try to benefit you. Is that sensible on your part?'
(AMEW, Book 2, p.218)

The constable argues that he has a good living and has no cause to complain and is grateful for the charity of the rich at time of any family ill-health. When Otho reminds him that there are many who do have cause to complain and that even he has appeared on the town common to listen to socialist speeches, the man replies:

'I've only stopped a few minutes out of curiosity, Sir, ... and it might be as much as my place is worth if it got known'. (AMEW, Book 2, p.219)

Otho continues:

'But if you cannot go where you like in your leisure, and listen to whom you choose, you are little better than a slave. Is it

possible you do not feel this'? (AMEW, Book 2, p.219)

The conversation continues for a few minutes and ends when Otho asks:

'But I want you to ask yourself one question: since these precautions are necessary, are you a free man?' (AMEW, Book 2, p.219)

The constable only smiles, touches his cap, and walks away without answer, but again Otho continues to analyse:

The other tenants of the park were provided for to their lives' end, but the man who made himself useful by keeping it in order had only a moderate pay as long as he was able to exert himself, and no provision was made for his old age. There was nothing for his sons and daughters but to take their chance in life, and the chances were small. Hathaway had reminded him of this, and he had not seemed to care: he was used to such a condition of things, that he thought it must be right... the enemy of the unemployed workman who is in employment: and the workmen out of employ is again the enemy of the employed, for by the possibility of replacing him he keeps down the employed man's wages. The disinherited classes are not fraternal; they are fratricidal. And the selfish contentment of some is the ruin of the rest. (AMEW, Book 2, p.221)

Again, we have the impulse to explain the economic and political causes lying behind apparently straightforward behaviour. As with Mrs Fleming the causes contain complexity and contradiction, stress and unconscious resistance, and they are political ones; the causes of these social fracturings are laid bare, without human complexity being subjected to reduction, sentiment or simplification.

At this stage of events Agnes Champneys has become engaged to Sir Paul Bythesea and the importance of Evangeline marrying Otho is seriously diminished. While Otho is still received by the Champneys, the hostility is now overt. What might have been a forum for discussion and adjustment has become open conflict. Judith taunts Otho's political explanations of socialism:

'I hear that the federation is going to make a worse agitation than ever this about the unemployed this Winter; Do you intend to do your little best to stir up the scum to the surface?' (AMEW, Book 2, p.228).

Otho does not take the bait, but shocks them anew with his resolute defence of nihilists arrested for attempting to kill the Tsar of Russia. It provokes an argument between those more conservative of view like Judith Hathaway and those she dubs liberal, embodied in Agnes Champney, who is blamed by Judith for encouraging the poor with education when they should simply be kept down. Otho argues that such measures would only lead to violent revolution. Otho effectively closes the verbal conflict with:

'Their place is in the palaces - not in the slums... their place is among all the beautiful things that they have made! They will rise and take their place, and you and all useless persons who oppose them will be swept out of the way in the on-rush'.
(AMEW, Book 2, p.232)

There follows a sequence of now separate discussions: between Judith and her mother, Mrs Champney and Agnes, and between Otho and Evangeline. It is now impossible for the separated 'camps' to share space for discussion. Otho again tries to reassure Evangeline regarding what he sees as a huge and imminent social change toward something like justice, but 'The community was nothing to her' (AMEW, Book 2, p.236) and she is unable to learn the 'duty of discontent' (AMEW, Book 2, p.239) that Otho has achieved. The others, one way or another, are all hidebound by their circumstances, caught within ideological vacuums that ultimately cannot bear to become cognisant of their condition. The beginnings of a psychology of politics are certainly observable here and a newer development in fiction is joined.

Otho determines that he will give most of his money to the cause and propose to Evangeline on the strength of this political commitment and sacrifice. Her response, 'I cannot do it, I cannot' (AMEW, Book 2, p.266) is no more than the reader has been expecting for a considerable period. Otho leaves London, alone, to become an itinerant socialist speaker. His final leave-taking makes it clear how difficult the wrench is, and how tempting a life he is abandoning. A card made for him by Evangeline and bearing a quotation

from Bakhunin ('Michael Bakounine'), the three books his mother had given him and the picture painted of her, are his only possessions as he takes his leave. He accounts for his actions to Doctor Hathaway as 'the barest justice, the merest honesty'. (AMEW, Book 2, p.270)

The closing pages of the novel contain first a montage sequence, containing developments in socialism throughout the country and then Otho's being turned away from Mrs Fleming's house in Heathborough. Her friends had persuaded her that his presence would be detrimental to her interests, but Otho takes the rejection with such composure that she regrets her decision. While little is made of Mrs Fleming's character, she is interesting. Part put-upon and part consciously determined, her regret leaves an interesting tension. Does she only regret rejecting him because of the money, or does she begin to see something valuable in his certainty and composure? Agatha was described as being 'her very self' (AMEW, Book 2, p.65) when imparting her cherished values. The same can be said of Otho at the novel's close. Having separated forever from Evangeline and her family, he embarks upon the (implied) lonely career of itinerant socialist activist. He accepts that the differences between himself and those born into working-class lives are great enough to have to be accepted and he keeps enough of his private income to maintain his standing as a gentleman, aiming his efforts at convincing members of his own class to embrace socialism. Eschewing the performative norms of his own class, while being unable to embrace another, does suggest real isolation, but the elation felt in the honesty of his position is palpable. So, while the ending is optimistic, it is not foolishly so. Each of these devices serves to suggest a positive future, despite Otho's leaving

alone. The closing words of the novel belong to Otho, not as a crescendo, or as a final act, but as the acceptance of continuing work.

'It is not praise and thanks we socialists must look for... but rather misapprehension and blame. If I were giving the workers my life in another way, if I were fighting by their side, shedding my blood, under the red flag, that would be a glorious death to die! And yet this must be better, because it is more useful. The time has not come yet to give my life for the people. I will give my life to the people.' (AMEW, Book 2, p.278)

A More Excellent Way becomes an intellectual novel by ensuring that ideas dominate relationships, indeed that they provide the conditions of possibility *for* relationships. This novel represents the abandonment of the fantasy that the personal and the social can be meaningfully separated from the political and the economic. What is revealed is the clear understanding that there is no 'neutral' place for the novel to function or for human characters to act; there is nowhere that is not political in the fullest sense of that word. Society thus becomes not merely the setting of the action, but the question for the action, and the notions of social and private self are radically conflated.

Political action becomes the more rational action; the real problem lies in trying to avoid it. The strains in this novel are felt not by the politically active, but by those who refuse to engage with political understanding. It is

the strain of a residual consciousness resisting its own demise. A More Excellent Way is a novel of radical self-awareness as social awareness, advocating socialism as the best cure for social division, and expressing it with a clear ideological understanding. This also has a profound effect upon the clarity of the language used. While earlier radical novels, as discussed above, presented similar issues very powerfully, they had to strain to lever into position powerfully dominant institutions of fact and value in order to subject them to critical scrutiny. A More Excellent Way is able to reject their intense rhetorical style and produce ideological interrogation with greater conceptual clarity, producing a calmer and more incisive prose. An important battle has been won here. The socialist novel is no longer struggling for its own voice; it is arguing its own case.

The central critical interest in any appraisal of this novel is its very modern method; it seems to stand less at the end of a Victorian tradition than at the beginning of a new era of novel writing, one that rejects the 'compendium' model of the great Victorian novel and takes a more pointed, less encompassing, more symbolic and succinct, but no less ambitious critical perspective on the world. It is a model which accepts that the world can no longer be held 'whole' within one book or one world view; it has become too complicated a place for that. It is a method which also recognises that a stronger case may be argued by taking a sharper focus within a more pointed field of vision, and carefully selecting material in order to make what you have included accurately represent what you have left out. The results may be less monumental, but they are much more effective.

Section Four

The Novels of Margaret Harkness

Part One: Introduction

After 1848, the failure of Chartism to bring about radical social change saw a decline in the mass political movement of the working class in England. This lasted until the effects of the depression of the 1870s began to be felt. Efforts to organise tended to be localised and concerned themselves more closely with specific work issues than with construction or maintaining a national political platform.

As we have seen in Section Two above, the absence of a political movement caused writers real problems in their attempted formulation of totalising concepts for the understanding of social and political relationships. The dawning, if resisted, awareness that society resembled not an organic and achievable whole, but a self-reproducing mechanism of antagonistic classes led radical thinkers and writers to work toward a collective self-identity not mortgaged to middle-class philanthropy'.¹ Section Two has discussed the strains and pressures articulated by texts produced by radical writers, during this period as testimony to the real historical and ideological pressures applied to the repressed and marginal elements of a society dominated by a bourgeoisie in its pomp. However, as Eric Hobsbawm has asserted:

The bourgeois triumph was brief and impermanent. At the very moment when it seemed complete, it proved to be not

¹ John Rignall, 'Between Chartism and the 1880s: J.W. Overton and E. Lynn Linton', H. Gustav Klaus, (ed.)

monolithic but full of fissures. In the early 1870s economic expansion and liberalism seemed irresistible. By the end of the decade they were so no longer.²

An almost unprecedented depression, of global proportions, occurred in 1873 causing severe downturns in trade and industry and bringing an end to an era of buoyant confidence in the social progress to be made from the benefits of capitalism and its attendant philosophy, Liberalism. The institutions remained, but the ideological fabric was ruptured. Eric Hobsbawm marks the extent of the *Age of Capital* at twenty-seven years; but for the long-term interests of a radical political consciousness they had clearly not been wasted years. The extreme and obvious danger of coal-mining and the significance of coal power both for industry and for the commercial and military navies, led the government to involve itself in the coal industry to regulate working conditions. In addition, the growth of mining communities led to a concentration of largely homogeneous, working class votes in what became coalfield constituencies. The importance of such communities was further increased by the extension of the franchise in 1884, to include the rural working classes.

As a result, most unions clung to their local sectional advantages, particularly when put on the defensive by the depression of the 1870s. Such protective measures usually took the form of maintaining skill standards for union entry,

The Socialist Novel in Britain, p.31

² Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Capital, (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1975), p.xxi

a consciousness of job-status and pay differentials, and the assertion of demarcation rules. Such practices had the effect of making socialist alternatives more popular for the unskilled and those unrepresented by union organisation. The expanding influence of socialism, becoming pronounced by the middle of the 1880s, encouraged the idea of a crucial role for the working class in producing social change, spoke of direct government intervention in securing rights and privileges for working people and of the formation of an independent labour party. The emergence of Keir Hardie as the socialist leader of the Ayrshire miners with his outspoken attack upon liberal economics added theory and publicity to the socialist cause.³

This historical period, like any other, possesses its cultural and literary ideological forms of articulation. Raymond Williams identifies a point of crisis in the emerging consciousness of society itself as the creator of values; that what could previously be understood as moral failings were now to be located as faults in institutional and cultural practices, not as matters of individual behaviour, but as social questions.⁴ Terry Eagleton has characterised this period as articulating a collision between 'individualist' and 'corporate' ideologies⁵ though he would surely agree with Williams's analysis that this cultural crisis produced:

...a break in texture where consciousness itself was determined; an assault, or so it seemed, not only on the form of the novel but on an idea, the idea, of literature

³ E.H. Hunt, *British Labour History 1815-1914* (London, Humanities Press, 1981), pp.194-97 and p.259

⁴ Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, pp. 15 and 121

itself.⁶

The failure of the totalising vision of the realist tradition to contain within its singular view the tensions and 'collisions' of an ideologically divided society, together with the advancing of determinist ideologies (evolution, Marxism) saw the emergence and development of a different emphasis in literary articulation, one that we have come to know as Naturalism. It is with the growth in influence of naturalistic techniques and the development of a socialist ideology during the 1880s in England that we can trace a renewal, an inheritance, of the fervour of the Chartist writers.

While no detailed study of naturalism in literature can be undertaken here, the significance of Margaret Harkness's work must be seen within the conscious influence of this movement and consequently some remarks regarding literary problematics thrown up by the movement will serve both to contextualise her literary oeuvre and clarify some of the problematics of her own literature that make it important and potent.

Haskell Block⁷ has suggested that one of the significances of naturalism was its project as a reaction against the limitations of middle-class realism, responding against the idea of totality into areas of experience and techniques of representation not 'containable' within that tradition. Frederic Jameson⁸ has also noted the tendency for naturalist writers to replace older 'totalising'

⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London, Verso, 1978), p. 112

⁶ Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, p. 126

⁷ Haskell Block, *The Naturalist Triptych* (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 10-11

⁸ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, (Ithaca: Cornell, Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 190

literary structures with narrative frameworks that assert a specific historical placement and class or ideological identification. Jameson's exemplary author in this respect is Zola, the 'founder' of naturalist method and the most influential of naturalist writers. The case of Zola must be briefly assessed in order to clarify a critical analysis of naturalism as an ideological method.

Before Zola the idea of naturalism was used to indicate 'only materialist, secular, or scientific attitudes toward human experience'.⁹ Zola adopted this for the literary world of both subject matter and production by insisting that 'the intellectual world is subject to laws in the same way as the material world'.¹⁰ However, Zola tended to understand such laws in a rather uneven fashion. He applied the heaviest of determinisms to those who were to be the subject matter of naturalist fiction describing them as 'human beasts...dragged along each act of their life by the fatalities of their flesh'.¹¹ The novelist is to be akin to a scientist involved in experimentation or as 'the analytical work which surgeons perform upon cadavers'.¹² However, such a profound, indeed all-embracing, conception of determinism is not applied by Zola to the writer/observer to whom he grants a form of objectivity not possessed by others. This aesthetic freedom of perspective remains a privilege, and allows recourse to forms of consciousness - imagination, 'genius' - that are, again, unavailable to others and for reasons which remain unaccounted for.

⁹ Haskell Block, pp. 10-11

¹⁰ *ibid.* pp. 10-11

¹¹ *ibid.* pp. 10-11

¹² *ibid.* pp. 5-7

Zola is therefore simultaneously rejecting the novel of the imagination, replacing it with a literature of observation and experimentation, and assuming a species of imagination for the writers of such a literature that is fully within a Romantic tradition. This confusion has had important consequences for our understanding of naturalism as a literary 'method'. It tended toward the production of a literature produced by intellectuals themselves remarkably free from the ravages of determinism, but about those who suffered most from the most painfully obvious forms of determinism: the poor and the brutalised, those most clearly chained to their circumstances. These people are then frequently represented as so much the victims of their circumstances that all effective agency in their own lives to improve their conditions, to assert alternative ideological values, to change society, is removed from them. The ubiquity of disaster in naturalistic novels is a powerful indication of such a tendency,¹³ as is the frequency of the extraordinary (albeit disguised in common garb), and violent drama and the incorporation of colossal symbolic configurations. Such devices also assert the existence and effectivity of elemental forces, a biological or 'natural' determinism rendering class differences of behaviour natural in origin. Such tendencies tended to take on a voyeuristic character, using sordid subject matter and brutal events as exemplifying the poor or working class and assuming a middle class readership.

While it is true that areas of social experience previously ignored by the Nineteenth-Century realist novel were now being 'investigated', the method largely ignored the active subjectivity of those who were its subject matter.

¹³ Haskell Block, p.13

Zola appeared to be aiming at a dialectical view of the relationship between art and 'reality', form and content, documentation and imagination but lacked the clear ideological groundwork that would have historicised the subjectivity of his novels. As a result, his novels remain confused and he ultimately asserts the intellectual possibility of an autonomous fictive 'world'.

That some dependence upon the literal and the actual is indispensable if the novel is to be effective in its verisimilitude to the social life it depicts is largely unquestioned by the naturalist fraternity, nor has been since. However, the status of the imaginative consciousness, both social and literary, remained a real problem. As we have seen much of the naturalist project would seem to suggest that the imaginative self is in fact free from the determining influences that other people suffer from. The determining consciousness of literature remains itself undetermined - hence the swerving between the 'objectivities of the scientific method and the boundless opportunities of the Romantic concept of self'¹⁴. The scales are not calibrated; the writing consciousness itself remains unhistoricised.

As we have seen, Terry Eagleton viewed this contradiction not simply as a relationship between individual and society but as a clash of ideologies - corporate and individualist. Indeed, the forms of determinism were beginning to be understood by some to include the working writer every bit as much as the subjects for the fiction, most particularly given the new demands and difficulties of the literary market. As Rachel Bowlby has pointed out, the artist, in an age of relative truths and without absolutes, in a world of

developing sociology, a society fragmented economically and intellectually, becoming more susceptible to social theory, a world of developing consumer culture he or she could no longer believe in, was caught between a dying and redundant Romanticism and the corruption of a profit-oriented and determining market. Industrialisation was not only producing economic victims and ideological confrontations it was also reproducing new conditions for the writers themselves, new and determining conditions for the production of literature.¹⁵ It is here that we can see the clearly political dimension of literature emphasised by the influence of Marx and Darwin in demanding a move away from simplistic ideas of representation and idealism towards a more radical historicising of literature in both subject matter and form.

As George Gissing made painfully clear in New Grub Street the writer, no longer the Romantic artist in touch with 'higher' values, was rather, like everyone else, thoroughly immersed in the business of producing commodities, themselves fitted to the 'desire' of the market. Under these circumstances the writer could not be neutral, could lay no claim to 'objectivity' as a producer, regardless of his/her intellectual intention. Two possibilities were available for the committed intellectual. Jameson claims for Gissing that he produced texts that represent 'a precondition for desiring' rather than a commodity desire. They are texts which remain 'unfinished' in a traditional aesthetic sense; their characters remain unfulfilled, never reaching the position of actually desiring and accomplishing. Thus Gissing produces a literature that undermines the commodified system of success and failure by

¹⁴ Haskell Block, p.14

¹⁵ Rachel Bowlby, Just Looking (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 15

'narrative strategy': 'a refusal of commodity desire itself, the negation of a negation'.¹⁶ The other possibility was to adopt a clearer position as a writer in society, and not merely concern yourself with questions regarding your position as a writer on society. In other words achieve an awareness of your ideological placement and project and turn that into a decisive intervention.

Following such a project, the novel moves away from the concept of organic form in literature. Rather it represents a particular form of ideological organisation produced by but not identical with concrete and specific historical situations. The significance of all literature can be seen to be its contribution to the processes of signification and the critic's function is to view it as ideological organisation. The naturalist novel is not separate from other literature in this regard, but does represent a vivid example of a literature produced within a matrix of enormous social and ideological alteration.

Margaret Harkness's work represents and articulates a significant shift in the 'subjectivity' of literature; a subjectivity achieved by combining dialectically the ideological project of the writing, in its subject matter and the construction of a new representative human subject, in the novel's form. Her 'textual real', in Eagleton's words, articulates that historical matrix as the product of signifying practices whose source and referent is history itself¹⁷ both as personal experience and as representative social action. Her work represents a rare attempt to be consciously ideological without recourse to

¹⁶Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p.205

¹⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, pp.74-5

the idealism of the realist tradition, the transcendent values of the Romantic imagination, the organic concept of literary evolution, the sterile assumptions of social elitism, the 'naturalists'' predisposition towards squalor and its voyeuristic qualities, or the fixtures of an a priori ideological system.

John Goode has suggested that it is the very 'inorganicism' of Gissing's work that emphasises its ideological position as questioning the ideological function of literature itself and as refusing to support the system of capitalist production.¹⁸ Its lack of traditional form was its ideological textual real. However, Gissing's lack of conscious ideological identification with the poor and the working class make his novels examples, albeit of a unique kind, of a despairing bourgeois consciousness, a disillusionment that Lukacs directly identified as a central facet of naturalism.¹⁹ Harkness, conscious of the ideological function and position of literature, took sides. Determined that writing itself should not represent hegemonic realities in its form, she nonetheless worked toward form. Her incoherences are less the result of the disintegration of a dying consciousness than the difficulties inherent in articulating a particular kind of 'new' social subjectivity. If the Chartist novelists were primarily concerned with the identity and construction of an emergent socialist/working class subjectivity at its very inception, Harkness's writing projects the articulation of the working-class subject within a different historical setting; one in which greater structured social recognition had been granted to it, but within which it risked institutional annihilation.

¹⁸ John Goode, *Gissing: Ideology and Fiction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), p.38

¹⁹ Bowlby, p. 13

While *Gissing's* pessimism abandons individual character and asserts the power of situation,²⁰ Harkness combines the two into an indissoluble amalgam: a complex subjectivity. While *Gissing* negated political dynamism for the poor and working class as a result of his abandonment of their active subjectivity, Harkness's approach allows for the articulation of the development of socialist thinking after the 1880s. While *Gissing* remains caught between the monoliths of social determinism and Romantic individualism, Harkness reveals the human subjectivity as a dialectical process of becoming, not a given state of being, and a process integrally linked with the contextual society and history of class relations, not merely dominated by them. She is writing directly against the idea of the disengaged writer. Her writing promotes itself within the context of its historical situation, acknowledging ideological and economic determinism, but asserting ideological determination.

The connections between Harkness's work, that of the Chartists, and that of radical novelists in between, are therefore clear: the continuation of the effort to grant and articulate the status of the subject to those not hitherto granted that status and denied it at a political level. While the Chartists were concerned with the construction of the working class/socialist subject as initial possibility, and those of the '70s and '80s articulated problems in the creation and function of such a subject, Margaret Harkness is now concerned with it as a given human and political reality, but as a subjectivity caught within patterns of hegemony and resistance that both encourage and prohibit it at a political level. She outlines the necessary conditions of existence for

²⁰ John Goode, *Gissing: Ideology and Fiction*, pp. 34-5

the human self as both need and desire and details those mediating factors within society preventing their fulfilment and the assertion of such a self to be present at its own making. She is concerned with such characters as Otho's landlady in A More Excellent Way, above, rather than the 'Othos' themselves. It is this assertion that makes her novels socialist; she is disrupting ruling-class structures and expectations and asserting the right to an ideologically grounded self determination for working-class people.

My treatment of Margaret Harkness in this thesis has been conducted with a particular theoretical project in mind. This should not be read as evading the growing recognition of Margaret as a major novelist. Many writers have contributed to the re-establishment of our understanding of the depth and extent of political literature on the left during this period. Lynne Hapgood's article 'The Novel and Political Agency: Socialism and the Work of Margaret Harkness, Constance Howell and Clementina Black', in the biannual journal Literature and History, (Manchester University Press, third series, December 1996, pp.52-67) places Harkness's work within the context of literary work by other women socialists of this period. She also contributes a chapter, 'Is This Friendship?' to a book of essays edited by John Stokes: Eleanor Marx 1855-1898: Life, Work and Contacts (Leicester: Ashgate, 2000, pp.129-144) to further establish the network of political workers and writers active during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. June Hannam and Karen Hunt's study Socialist Women, Britain 1880s to 1920s (London: Routledge, 2002) gives an important feminised analysis of such networks refocusing the debate by theorising the female biography, analysing the construction of the 'woman question' and investigating the relationship between socialist feminism,

capitalist society and the suffrage. By reasserting women's individual and political lives, they reject the marginality of turn of the century women novelists, and work to restore their reputations not only as writers, but as activist political women and to elevate the significance of their networks of female contemporaries. They argue that such women populate the formative years of the British socialist movement and the history of political organizations such as the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). They suggest that the nature and function of these bodies will be mapped differently if seen through the eyes of socialist women.

In 'Neither Pairs nor Odd: Female Community in Late Nineteenth-Century London', Signs, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Summer, 1990), pp. 733-754, Deborah Epstein Nord emphasizes the role played by women in radical and feminist politics and in artistic endeavours, while her Walking the Victorian Streets: Woman, Representation, and the City (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) includes Margaret Harkness in her analysis of women's fight against the power of the male 'gaze', especially that of a new phenomenon, the 'lone man'. She describes the figure of a middle-class male 'rambler', using the city streets and his male urban power, hiding behind anonymity, ephemerality and estrangement to exploit the images of city life within a newly developing commodity culture in which women, particularly 'fallen' women, prostitutes, lesbians and the seduced, were commodities for consumption in this essentially predatory activity. Nord argues that this figure became a paradigm for male dominated city living and became widely used within fictional narrative. Ann Heilmann in 'The New Woman in the New Millenium: Recent Trends in Criticism of New

Woman Fiction', *Literature Compass* 3 (1), 32-42, 2006, (article published online 21 Dec, 2005, affiliations, the University of Hull) understands the work of such as Harkness as part of the New Woman movement during the fin-de-siècle and early years of the twentieth century, particularly international and ethnically diverse aspects, and the impact of work upon a new feminine aesthetic developing since 2000. She argues that women writers of the time not only drew upon traditional, male-dominated tropes and paradigms for narrative fiction, but mimicked them in order to interrogate their assumptions and feminize them in new ways²¹.

During the thirty-four year writing period here under study Margaret Harkness changed her mind many times about many things. Such a factor has important consequences for an attempted analysis of her work. It makes a canonical approach inevitable as an attempt to chart alterations in textual strategy and political concern, but also difficult in that she sometimes seems to be going backwards, or abandoning an idea as ineffective only to pick it up again with renewed vigour. The concerns of Harkness's work not only question the identity of the social human subject, but articulate an enquiry into the subjectivity of the fiction itself.

Illegitimacy and infanticide arise more than once in Harkness's work and she

²¹ Dina M Copelman in *London's Women Teachers: Gender, Class and Feminism, 1870-1930*, (London: Routledge, 1996) and Susan M Pennybacker in *A Vision for London, 1889-1914: Labour, Everyday Life and the LCC Experiment*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), examine the wider field of women's work during the period identifying a wide and varied community of women including teachers, clerks, artists, scientists and writers who together populated the world of what became known as the New Woman. James D. Young, 'Militancy, English Socialism and the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, (Vol. 20, No. 2, Working-Class and Left Wing politics (Apr.1985), pp.283-303), connects the work of Robert Tressell with other radical fiction written 'contemporarily', including Harkness.

was far from alone in recognizing their significance as indices to real concerns over selfhood and identity, both potential and thwarted. Wordsworth raised such issues in 'The Thorn', as did Charlotte Bronte in Villette, George Eliot in Adam Bede, Thomas Hardy in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and Grant Allen in The Woman Who Did. While there is not room within this thesis to investigate the origins of these themes it is important to note their salience within the Victorian novel as a genre.

Both sides of this subject are discussed by Ann Higginbotham in an influential essay 'Sin of the Age: Infanticide and illegitimacy in Victorian London', reprinted in Kristine Garrigan (ed.) Victorian Scandal (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1992). Emma Liggins in her article, 'With a Dead Child in her Lap: Bad Mothers and Infant Mortality in George Egerton's Discords', Literature and History, vol. 9, issue 2, Autumn 2000, pp. 17-36, uses a discussion of George Moore's Esther Waters (1894) and George Egerton's short story collection Discords (1894) to discuss such issues within the contextual debate about bad motherhood which played a significant part of fin-de-siècle culture. She emphasizes fears regarding rising mortality rates and changes in women's assumed social role as perceived through women's involvement in baby farming, infanticide, abortion and illegitimacy, arguing that economic reasons for restricting motherhood were often obscured by a moralistic condemnation of 'bad' mothers. Representations of middle-class women increasingly showed them rejecting motherhood when they had better economic alternatives, while those of working-class women showed them as increasingly unable to support their families. The powerful connection between motherhood and class is emphasized (as it is by Harkness here) to

reveal the ambiguous role motherhood played in the real lives of women.

The history of illegitimacy during the nineteenth century has been charted and queried by Gail Reekie in Measuring Immorality: Social Enquiry and the Problem of Illegitimacy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). She connects issues of class and race in a discussion of the authenticity of measuring forms of illegitimacy, including lone motherhood, citing the increasing prevalence of statistical measurement which was subsequently given a moral weight it perhaps could not bear. She also acknowledges the apparent rise in working-class illegitimacy and the ensuing bourgeois fears of the 'moral decay' it would bring to society at large. She emphasizes the increasing trend toward reliance upon medical rather than economic discourses for the comprehending of such realities with its emphasis upon pathology rather than economics and politics. Ginger Frost in 'The Black Lamb of the Black Sheep: Illegitimacy in the English Working Class 1850-1939', Journal of Social History, vol.37, issue 2, pp. 293-322, 2003 cites the particularly harsh English bastardy laws (which condemned an illegitimate child to eternal parentlessness) as the main cause of the serious social stigma of bastardy, which even a subsequent marriage could not change. She also charges such laws with using the children to punish the parents in a manner hardly in accordance with the proclaimed morality of their function.

Andrew Mangham's article 'Murdered at the Breast: Maternal Violence and the Self-Made Man in Popular Victorian Culture', (Critical Survey, vol. 16, 2004, pp.20-34), gives a very valuable insight into contemporary social attitudes towards child murder, particularly by mothers. He uses such sources

as the *British Medical Journal* and *The Lancet* to chart official attitudes to this act maintaining a campaign against what they were calling 'the holocausts in infanticide'. Child murder was reported to be rife, as in 1865 when *The Lancet* claimed that the streets were literally strewn with the bodies of murdered infants. Infanticide was understood to be an essentially unmotherly act that went forcibly against women's natural inclinations, and the apparent proliferation of child murder was an indication of how the nation itself was disordered and unhealthy. The perceived prevalence of infanticide was understood as a slur upon the civilizing influence of British culture. In addition, he argues, the mid-nineteenth century was not unfamiliar with the apparently paradoxical notion of child murder as an extreme example of parental duty. In the period's journalism, he continues, the Victorians found themselves overwhelmed by written accounts of women killing their babies out of economic necessity. For many mothers, it seemed, murdering their children to save them from the hardships of slum living was an extreme act of nurture in itself. In this way his work allows for the connection of the psychosomatic and the economic, making for a complex analysis of texts which articulate the points of connection between private experience and public significance political textual analysis.

That child murder was a relatively common phenomenon within English society throughout the nineteenth century is supported by Josephine McDonagh in *Child Murder and British Culture, 1720-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) in which she indicates that the prime causes lay within social and economic inequity. For the basis of her work she uses test cases from sources which articulate child murder as a powerful literary and cultural

phenomenon. She begins with Swift's 'A Modest Proposal' and includes texts such as Wordsworth's Romantic child-killer Martha Ray in 'The Thorn', asserting his tone of tragic sympathy as heralding later debates on the issue. McDonagh observes how such acts of desperation were melodramatically represented by Chartist sympathisers of the 1830s and 40s, as political acts of sacrifice, and reveals how the image of the impoverished mother, murdering her baby because she was unable to afford its maintenance, became a poignant and heart-rending signifier of slum misery and social oppression for poor-law commentators. For this purpose, she uses Meg Veck in Dickens's 'The Chimes' and points to Malthus as the motivating origin of 'scientific' assertions of the need for birth control measures, highlighting the political nature of such attitudes. She produces a vivid relationship between the novel and its historical context, stressing its power as a locus of associations, ideas and social formations from a variety of historical and political contexts. . She asserts that child murder is a dynamic within George Eliot's Adam Bede, which denies the novel its attempted liberal-humanist agenda, and interprets the children's deaths in Hardy's Jude the Obscure as an ultimate moment in child murder, suggestive of an ultimate despair. McDonagh's effort is to stress Eliot's attempt within this novel to construct a complex but unified narrative of the English past, but concludes that the novel transgresses such constraints and disrupts Eliot's intentions, by including remnants of histories that go beyond the limits of the form of representation designed for them.

Miriam Jones in her essay 'The Usual Sad Catastrophe: From Street to Parlour in *Adam Bede*', Victorian Literature and Culture, 2004, argues that while Eliot's use of Hetty Sorrel appears at first to be an asserted culmination of the Romantic wanderer figure popular in Romantic texts and so frequent in

popular fiction, she is in fact used by Eliot to disguise a beleaguered conservatism and a nostalgic nationalism, revealing anxiety about the transgressive and troubling sexuality of the working classes, only adding to their generally worrying existence. Jones does however give Eliot the benefit of not sentimentalizing Hetty. Judith Knelman's article 'Women Murderers in Victorian Britain', in History Today, Vol. 48, August 1998, stresses the way that, in Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891), Thomas Hardy insisted that readers understand Tess to be a woman trapped within an unforgiving society and a loveless relationship, despite being a 'fallen' woman and a murderess. His depiction of Tess's hanging is an angry condemnation of society's intolerance and callousness. Knelman typifies the nineteenth-century murderess as a young girl who had killed her newborn, illegitimate baby, and argues that as the century progressed, it tended to be treated increasingly leniently by the criminal justice system. Like Hardy, George Eliot in her first full-length novel, reconstructed a murder case to show what pressures might drive a woman to kill: in Adam Bede (1859) we meet Hetty Sorrel long before her seduction and subsequent pregnancy, and we see how impossible it would be for her to maintain a child.

Laura Berry in The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999) takes the issue wider in focusing upon victimized childhood and the ways in which children playing important roles in novels represent particular social dilemmas, especially in the early Victorian period. She cites for this purpose Frankenstein (1818), Oliver Twist (1837-38), Dombey and Son (1847-48), Wuthering Heights (1847), The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848), and Adam Bede (1859). She examines these canonical

texts alongside extraliterary documents such as James Kay's writings on the New Poor Law of 1834, William Acton and C. H. F. Routh's exchanges on wet-nursing in the 1850s, the 1839 Custody of Infants Act, and discussions of infanticide at mid-century.

Judith Knelman adds to such study by also examining this issue as treated by nineteenth-century novelists who were not social reformers and so exploited its commercial potential rather than sympathised with its victims: the 'Newgate' novelists of the 1830s, including Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and 'penny dreadfuls' which often took themes from the *Newgate Calendar*. She also stresses the importance of the 'sensation novels' of the 1860s, arguing that Dickens and Wilkie Collins, amongst others, used their characteristics of mistaken identity, murder and mystery, ominous settings, peculiar plot details and characters from recent actual murders to give female deviancy an aura of glamour that it had not previously been given. She claims that the Victorians, reined in by an exacting and repressive social code, were fascinated by the shocking and the outrageous. The implication of her work is to suggest the possibility of a more flexible approach to the 'positioning' of such novels as those of Margaret Harkness: that they do not simply fit within a realist tradition or 'received' canon, but stand within the purview of many possible critical perspectives: politicised melodrama, deliberate manipulation of stereotypes, the manipulation of naturalistic tropes for a much more controlled artistry, gendered perspectives, a modernistic undermining of

realist assumptions, all of which serve to question the power of established literary genres²².

Any critical study of Margaret Harkness's oeuvre must divide her novels into two groups for both thematic and sequential reasons. Publishing all of her novels under the pseudonym 'John Law', she began with a flurry of four novels in four years: A City Girl (1887), Out of Work (1888), Captain Lobe (1889), and A Manchester Shirtmaker (1890). In these four novels are to be found the major elements of her fiction: the individual as focus of political relationships at once defined, yet crippled, by economic and institutional forms of determinism; a putative, though uncertain, feminism; and the possibility of resistance to oppression, attempts to achieve a fulfilled selfhood, and of the possibility of non-determining social and political institutions, themselves the product of ideological human agency. These themes do not run a clear course of sequential development but rather remain in a flux of re-thinking and re-evaluation, of permanent revision.

Such a refusal to 'conclude' is also embodied in her last two novels George

²² Other writers who have investigated these issues include, Catherine R Hancock, 'It was Bone of her Bone, and Flesh of her Flesh, and she had Killed it: Three Versions of Destructive Maternity in Victorian Fiction' in Literature Interpretation Theory, vol. 15, No. 3, July/September 2004, pp. 299-320; Christine L. Kreuger, 'The Crime in Mind: Criminal Responsibility and the Victorian Novel' (review) Victorian Studies - Volume 47, Number 1, Autumn 2004, pp. 98-100; Maunder, Andrew (2005), 'Mapping the Victorian Sensation Novel: Some Recent and Future Trends', Literature Compass 2 (1), 2005 vol.6, No. 140, pp.1-33, published online 21 Dec 2005; Sally Ledger, 'Wisps of violence: Producing Public and Private Politics in the Turn-of-the-Century British Novel', Women's History Review, Volume 4, Number 4 / December 1995, pp.555 - 566; A.C. Gatrell, The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Mary Hartman, Victorian Murderesses: A True History of Thirteen Respectable French and English Women Accused of Unspeakable Crimes (New York: Schocken Books, 1977); Virginia Morris, Double Jeopardy: Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1990); Victor E. Neuberg, Popular Literature: A History and Guide (London: Penguin, 1977); Leslie Shepherd, The History of Street Literature (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973); Lucia Zedner, Women, Crime, and Custody in Victorian England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

Eastmont, Wanderer (1905), and A Curate's Promise (1921). They reveal a revision in the subjectivity of her fiction and articulate a clear shift in perspective from her earlier novels. Such an expanded spectrum of significance for working class/socialist literature has important consequences for that literature in the 'new' century, as we shall see.

Margaret Harkness's first novel, A City Girl,²³ is a schematic patterning of relations between individual and corporate ideologies focusing upon the fortunes of a young working-class woman, Nelly Ambrose. The plot is simplicity itself. Nelly, who works in a sweat shop to support her indolent and violent mother and brother, seeks escape from her desperate situation in an affair with a married middle-class man, Grant. She becomes pregnant. The church will not help, she cannot appeal to the man and her erstwhile fiancé George, offended, abandons her. The child dies in infancy after she has been aided in her hours of labour by the Salvation Army in the character of Captain Lobe. Her fiancé re-accepts her and they plan to marry after moving to a new location in the country. The apparent simplicity of the story is, however, deceptive.

Throughout the extension of plot and character, Nelly remains a focus of resistance to forms of ideological and institutional determinism that surround

²³ John Law, A City Girl (London: Vizetelly, 1887)

her. She is twice subordinated, by her class identity and her gender, and with no identity outside of these constructs. It is just her class and gender, in alien surroundings, that produce her consciousness and her attempts to convert her identity to her own purposes.

The novel articulates relations of subjection and attempts at resistance to it. Harkness makes no attempt to produce a plenitude of character for Nelly, replete with complex inner life, instead she maps out the possibilities for the articulation of the working-class woman in an ideologically partial and hegemonic society, emphasising the relationships as ideological without clearly identifying or asserting a distinct ideological position herself. If Harkness draws to some degree upon Romance and melodrama she does so to highlight their limitations and is overtly critical of such forms in at least one important set piece in the novel. She uses naturalism not as voyeuristic indulgence or exploitation, but in a low-key manner to emphasise the workaday and ordinary life lived by Nelly: she is not an extraordinary character, nor has an extraordinary life. Nelly's relationship with Grant serves as the key to her relationship with the world of institutions in which she lives. Nelly's first response upon meeting Grant is that 'He's a gentleman.' (*A City Girl*, p.36) Moreover, Harkness's narration emphasises that she says this 'slowly'. Her interest in him lies in their class difference. He stands out for her as so different from George, a subservient working-class Tory.

For Nelly, Grant represents an ideal, a fantasy figure, emphasising the enormous difference in their respective social positions. Grant also responds to the myth of class, except that he is in the stronger economic and social

position, hence his willingness to take advantage of Nelly as soon as the opportunity arises. The truth is less bright; Grant is profoundly unoriginal:

He developed the jargon other people talked in his own phraseology, and thought it original. He had a knack of transposing other people's ideas, not only in politics, but in everything else he talked and wrote about. (A City Girl, p.52)

This dilettante character makes him cling to formal social institutions and their established status and identity, regardless of their content, as a necessary support to an otherwise uncertain sense of self. For Grant, a relationship with a girl of Nelly's class performs the role of maintaining and reaffirming the strength of his current class position; for Nelly, it represents an attempt to break with the severe limitations of her class position and gain reception from one of another class

Nelly heard the men and women fighting and swearing, the children crying, the boys shouting...and her thoughts flew away from the noisy buildings to a pair of blue eyes that had looked sympathetically into her face that evening, and a voice that was like music when compared with Whitechapel voices. She wondered where Mr. Grant was, and what he was doing. (A City Girl, p.56)

That both Nelly and Grant are playing a role of a kind, representing a pattern of repeated and repeatable class-based behaviours, is emphasised by the

complementing action of a play they see together, a highly wrought melodrama of little consequence.

Although Nelly has been conditioned and surrounded by specific kinds of institutional practice from the novel's opening - Charlotte's buildings (the sweat-shop where she works), her class position, her familial relationships, her Roman Catholic religion - the significance of these relationships does not come to the fore until she becomes pregnant by Grant and abandoned by him. Until that point her fantasy relationship has represented a way out of her difficult life. It is the stuff of the worst romantic fiction and constitutes an attempt to imagine life outside of history. It is the pregnancy that firmly returns her to reality and to the institutions surrounding her demonstrative of the society that constitutes her real parameters of possibility.

She attempts to gain guidance from the Church and is met with Father O'Hara, a priest dedicated to upholding its unyielding authority. She immediately finds what he represents unapproachable. Her isolation begins. She quarrels with her mother and brother, who have only used her; she is repeatedly unable to take the sacrament, though reveals no lack of personal faith in kissing her crucifix. She can play no part in the Christmas festivities of the Charlotte's buildings' tenants, becoming isolated from her immediate community. She takes a train to West Kensington to where Grant lives, but on arriving confronts not the man, but the institution of his life. Significantly, outside of the house and looking through the window Nelly sees Grant with his two children; his wife then enters with a third child, a baby, and Nelly becomes mournfully fascinated by Grant's dandling the baby on his knee. Her

comment, which she repeats, is 'He never looked at me like that'. (A City Girl, p.98)

Her deep feeling of estrangement is threefold: economic (as a hint, Harkness has her lose her purse), social in the status-conscious arrangement of London's boroughs and suburbs, and sexual with the ignominy of being pregnant and unmarried. With all three, it becomes political. The wider impact of Nelly's pregnancy begins to become more obvious, as she loses her job. The combination has inevitable consequences.

she felt as though she were being thrust down, down into a pit, the bottom of which she could never reach, into which she must sink, alone, helpless. (A City Girl, p.106)

Unable to find alternative work she becomes desperate and again attempts an appeal to her church. Again, she feels unable and returns home only to be savagely beaten by her brother while 'her mother drank' (A City Girl, p.110). Every major relationship in her life has betrayed her the moment she needed confirmation and affirmation from them. The institutions of legitimised society stand condemned: employment, living accommodations, family, sexual/emotional relations. She runs distraught to a derelict site and collapses upon a heap of stones and bricks until found by George the caretaker.

To this point, Harkness has followed a path of contemporary naturalism, focusing upon the lower classes of society and emphasising through the depiction of daily details of routine necessity the various factors determining

the possibilities of social and economic existence. George's finding Nelly and, in their desperation, taking her to the Salvation Army introduces the Army as one of Harkness's characteristic motifs, one that runs throughout her work. Indeed, the Salvation Army captain, Lobe, introduced here, has his 'own' novel later in the sequence. The significance and potency of the Army varies throughout the novels, but is introduced in A City Girl in its most important function, that of the anti-institutional institution, offering support to engage with the subject's capacity to fight back and to be represented in doing so.

The relations between individual and 'corporate' or capitalistic ideologies are considered by Harkness to be almost totally destructive of the individual, especially as a woman. Such a route could lead to the acceptance of a completely dominating and effectively unopposable determinism, economic and social. But it is clearly Harkness's desire not simply to accept such a situation but to investigate the possibilities of an assertive determination of self; to map out the social construction of personality but also to locate those moments of breakdown, pressure and resistance against destruction that the self may undergo in experiencing the political and economic world of its own history. Thus the self becomes definable as the location, in history, of these patterns of pressure and resistance. Harkness is aiming her initial literary project at the political crux of obedience and contrary assertion.

Clearly, and significantly, Nelly is unable to act 'alone' to change her predicament. It has also been strongly emphasised that the world in which she lives is made up of capitalist institutions with very real influence and power. It is therefore effectively impossible for Harkness to insert here some

ahistorical and substantial causeless factor as the index to social redemption. There exists no good aristocrat to save her, as Disraeli might have imagined, or good bourgeois, as Charles Dickens relied upon. Market-oriented institutions and lone individuals seem to Harkness destructive of human society and impossible to imagine, respectively. Her project is to devise and assert a 'third term' into this binary opposition, to envision an institutional structure that rejects market capitalism and functions at the level of social need, a representative of the socialism she espouses. Such an institution would be comprised of its members who make it, belong to it and to its work. For this purpose, Harkness chose the Salvation Army.

Her choice has both social and literary significance. The Salvation Army, along perhaps with the Rowntree charities, was, at the time of Harkness's writing, the only social institution making any real attempt to investigate the causes and facts regarding social poverty and attempting to do something about it. This factor could hardly have been lost on Margaret Harkness. It also gave her a very real, an historically verifiable, organisation that would 'solve' a literary dilemma. It allowed her to present the possibility (and occasionally the impossibility) of a society that eschews competition and the profit motive, that has real organisation, clear historical causality and which could be seen to be at work. From the point of view of the novel writer this gave her the freedom to avoid ahistorical values and characters able to function independently of their historical setting. It allowed her to reject utopianism on the one hand with its usual lack of specificity, and to avoid having to assert a rigid theoretical or vaguely semi-mystical ideology as a substitute for the failing history around her. The historically actual and the 'textually real' could

complement each other. Lest the complementarity be taken too literally it should be noted that Margaret Harkness was not a Salvationist as such. Rather, she used the idea of the Army, and some of its structure and functions, to render practical illustration to her literary/political motives.

In A City Girl it is the Army that provides the context and stimulus for Nelly to claw her way back into life. Nelly has the possibility of reasserting her own identity in an alien world. We are also provided with a glimpse of what a truly responsible society might be like. The Army, here, represents the assertion of a culture in opposition to an automatised culture. Lobe, as the central representative, in this novel of the Salvation Army presents a telling combination of the committed, the obedient and free-spirited. His posture is not that of a mere functionary or authoritarian figure. His tendency to sit on a table and swing his legs, his general inability to keep still, is emphasised several times as an indicator of his eccentricity and individuality. Yet this verve is contrasted, or perhaps combined, with his wearing a uniform and a military-looking one at that. He even possesses smartness suggestive of discipline, order, and intelligence. Similarly, he looks a mere youth, but his eyes possess the 'sympathies' that come with age. His voice is emphatically the voice of a mature man, knowledgeable in the affairs of the world. He may be a man in the Army, but he is not an Army man. When asked why he joined, he replies

'I joined it because I found less hypocrisy in it than in other religions, and I shall leave it directly I find anything better.'

(A City Girl, p.174)

Harkness portrays the Salvation Army as an institution that takes responsibility for those it helps and not just in a formal way. For Nelly, her reception by the Army is as a haven, enjoying there 'a sense of peace and comfort which she had not experienced for nearly a twelvemonth'. (A City Girl, p.115) As a result of the care she is given, she is able to give birth safely and gain enough confidence to begin to assert some of her own desires and conditions. She will not divulge the name of the baby's father. This is less a protection of Grant than an assertion that the baby is hers. When asked whose baby it is, she replies simply 'mine'. (A City Girl, p.146) Nelly also refuses absolutely to return to live with her mother and brother, a situation she had seemed incapable of leaving before. Her statement to Tom, her brother, that, 'I'll never come back to the Buildings' (A City Girl, p.146) suggests far more than a simple denial. It clearly bears the weight of a decision of great moment to her. She will not, and cannot, return to that former self, a self beaten both physically and metaphorically, a self now able to reproduce itself in an important and multiple sense. She is able to produce something new from herself and her social relationships. She is even able to accept a dimension of responsibility for the pregnancy:

As to Mr. Grant she scarcely gave him a thought, he seemed so far off. 'Besides', said Nelly, 'it wasn't all his fault.' (A City Girl, p.162)

It was not rape. And at this point Nelly is no longer the sadly mistreated waif. Her sense of self has developed beyond those confines toward a level of self-

recognition, as an effective agent in her own life. She has found work via the efforts of Captain Lobe and is now able 'rather proudly' (A City Girl, p.149) to support both the baby and herself; she has become independent. Harkness seems clearly to be legitimising the right of a woman to bear her own child and care for it; that the 'fallen' woman does not have to die and, moreover, that the very definition 'fallen' is meaningless. At the same time whether because the author was herself rather afraid of such ideas and their potential or because she did not want to present an arcadian ending of any kind, Harkness, at this stage of the 'plot' places a clear arrest upon the expansion of Nelly's possibilities: her baby falls ill. This eventuality places her again within the grip of hostile institutions.

She is given no choice but to leave the baby at the hospital, whose staff shows more concern for a visiting dignitary than with Nelly's baby. Her fortunes at the hands of the hospital staff go from bad to worse. Her guilt at what seems to her an act of abandonment is to repeat her feeling that women who have not had babies should not be able to look after them, that 'it's cruel and wicked'. (A City Girl, p.165) On leaving the hospital, she becomes stranded on a triangle of grass surrounded by water. This isolation is, of course, not accidental. The misfortunes of her baby have brought her again beneath the powerful influences of forces she is unable to overcome. The morning comes and she does leave the island, but only to find her baby dead at the hospital.

It was important to glimpse what Nelly might be under different social circumstances; it was also crucial for Margaret Harkness to show the ways in which human, class-based potential is stunted and deformed by the refusal of

an inequitable society to countenance the legitimacy of its aspirations. Grant reappears in time to see the dead baby and be chastened by a talk with Lobe about his responsibilities. He gives money both to the Salvation Army and to Nelly and walks home 'thinking'. (A City Girl, p.183) Yet he does not reappear as the penitent sinner about to take up the cross and the hymn book. His sensibilities have not been materially altered and his sorrow is shown as superficial. Similarly, lest the presence of Lobe be taken as a fixture in society, ever willing to be of service in putting right other's mistakes, we find at the novel's close that he is leaving Whitechapel. The only realisation of beneficent permanence in the novel is leaving, he knows not where, and this has profound effects upon the tone of the novel's close, preventing it from providing reassurance or completion. Finally, and most centrally, the novel ends with the proposed marriage of George and Nelly.

However, this is not the ending of romance with the unlucky woman saved and elevated by the right man to prove that love conquers all. George, it is clear, only finds Nelly acceptable because the baby, another man's baby, is safely dead. Nelly, in accepting him, is doing little more than making virtue out of grim necessity. Their closing statements, and the statements that close the novel, prevent any kind of comforting resolution. Nelly's acceptance is to say: 'I was only thinking how nice it would have been to have baby down in the country'. (A City Girl, p.190) George's angry, but fatalistic response to Nelly's unromantic assessment is to shake his head and mutter between his teeth, 'I wish I'd never left the service'. (A City Girl, p.190)

None of the major issues in the novel has been resolved. George's intention at

the end is to secure a better position for himself and he needs a wife to get the job. He is therefore prepared to 'let bygones be bygones'. Nelly simply says 'I'm not worth it', (A City Girl, p.189) which seems more articulate in its absence of love than its assertion of fact. Nelly has been allowed to live but she remains as caught within patterns of social power and expectation at the end as at the beginning. The novel concludes with her facing a kind of social ostracism (the move to the country is not accidental), marriage, servitude and gratitude. Her capacity to reproduce herself into something more independently constructive has failed. By extension, the working-class characters in the novel are given no choice but to maintain their subservient status. We have, however, been given a mapping of the condition, mental and physical, emotional and economic, of that subservience as well as a glimpse of alternative possibilities. Given these combined characteristics as constituent elements of the self, the representative subject is declared to be a material entity, neither anterior to, nor removed from the world of its emergence and perception. At the same time, while becoming aware of its own existence and position within patterns of historical practice, here a class-determined capitalistic society, it is yet unable to conceive of itself as a viable agent for its own further development. The textual subjectivity of the novel is able to posit certain strategies and potentialities but remains here unable to pursue them further. The socialist subjectivity remains alive, but unable to break the stranglehold of institutional power dedicated against it.

Nelly ends up serving a colony of artists, suggestive of an expanding of future horizons. Her resistance has been significant but it remains undeveloped and unable to become assertion, assertion that is of supra-personal value. It is

exactly here that a shift takes place, and a significant one, between Harkness's first and second novels.

Out of Work²⁴ reveals society as a clear pattern of contending and antagonistic elements in strained and violent relation. The novel, through the person of Jos, a representative of the unemployed poor, explores whether these elements can effect any real communication with each other in any attempt to resolve the conflict. The novel articulates the impossibility of real dialogue; it is the assertion of a negation. Such an assertion declares both the power and the impotence of the aesthetic 'realm' in human affairs. When it succeeds most fully as art, it invokes and emphasises qualities that are lacking in life, yet reminds us of its absolute grounding within that historical life. On both these levels, then, the novel presents us with a series of attempted correspondences between antagonistic groups in an hierarchical society, and to emphasise the weaknesses of legitimate institutions when faced with established, if ostracised, opposition. The novel grounds its narrative within the subjectivity of an economically marginalised and socially ostracised character, and articulates a series of decisive interventions into bourgeois norms by representatives of the poor and the working class. It is these innovations that make the novel a socialist novel.

The central character, Jos, is not introduced until the third chapter of the novel, but the first two chapters are so constructed in subject and content as to prepare for his presence. The novel opens with the procession of the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria - a real historical event contemporary with

the composition of the novel. The narrative, however, focuses squarely upon the event as experienced in and by Whitechapel. Seventeen hours earlier, we are told, the Queen had been 'enthusiastically welcomed' (Out of Work, p.1) by crowds in the West End, by 'brewers' wives', 'medical students' and 'doctors' daughters' (Out of Work, pp.1-2) all representative of the middle classes. In addition, the press is eagerly involved in maintaining the illusion of national unity: 'preparing for the illustrated weekly papers pictures of Whitechapel as it may possibly appear in the Millennium'. (Out of Work, p.2)

We are then invited to acknowledge the 'hisses' from the slums, the 'sullen, ugly look' of the crowd 'which may a year or so from hence prove dangerous'. (Out of Work, p.2) The 'ladies', the '*blasé* frequenters of Hyde Park and the Clubs' (Out of Work, p.2) could continue to ignore the 'ragged men, hungry women and little dirty children' because the mediating function of the press would represent them as 'unselfish' in supplying a spectacle for the 'under-paid men and over-worked women.' (Out of Work, p.3) From state we move to church and a complacent middle-class Methodist chapel whose members enjoy a 'state of grace', knowing that '...whatever may happen to the unsaved, their own souls are safe'. (Out of Work, p.5)

However, into this self-satisfied group walks 'a man in tattered clothes and battered-in hat'. He represents a drastic, and potentially dangerous, contrast to the rest of the congregation:

He passed the steward, who looked suspiciously at him, as

²⁴John Law, Out of Work (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1888)

though his pocket might contain gunpowder and his hat hold dynamite. As he walked into the chapel, men stared at him and women drew away their dresses. (Out of Work, p.6)

Most importantly, the man speaks, and when he does so it is to introduce the introductory intervention, heralded by the subdued hisses of the crowd earlier, of a subjectivity alternative to the institutionalised norms we have been introduced to so far. The minister's sermon is interrupted:

Our Queen rules over a kingdom upon which the sun never sets, she is Empress of India, Protectress of Burmah, Benefactress of Egypt, and Royal Mother of the Colonies. All these things have been given us because we are a God-fearing nation. The smile of God is upon us, because Sunday by Sunday our thanksgivings and praises ascend to Him as incense. So he vouchsafes us his blessing. He fills us with corn and wine. He---

'Sir,' asked a voice, 'ave you ever been 'ungry?' (Out of Work, p.13)

The minister, Mr. Meek, is unable to provide an adequate answer and the man persists with his question. He is quietly slipped a penny as persuasion to leave but we are told that 'the panegyric of the godly nation fell flat after the ragged man had departed'. (Out of Work, p.14) The scene reveals the instability of such structures when confronted with the asserted subjectivity of an alternative economic and social group. The man is not given an individual name even when he reappears later in the novel. He remains as the emergent

articulation of an established but ostracised group; the working class as scapegoats to an unstable economy. The first two set-pieces of the novel have contrasted the pomp of state with the anger it arouses in those it disadvantages, and the hypocrisy of the church in the face of a voiced appeal to its real responsibilities.

In the third chapter we are taken to a more personal level still in this articulation of class relations. We are introduced to a character, Polly Elwin, who will remain the representative of religious and moral hypocrisy. The household is a conventional one of middle-class pretension. Mrs. Elwin, Polly's mother, is able to gracefully 'take the air' (Out of Work, p.19) after religious service because she enjoyed the luxury of keeping a servant. However, the servant, Mary Anne, is not what we might expect:

While the pretty Methodist smoothed the soft fair hair on her forehead, Mary Anne threw herself upon the bed, and rocked her body backwards and forwards without speaking.

'What's the matter?' inquired Polly.

'I'm sick hon't', said the little maidservant.

'Sick of what?'

'Sick of bein' myself. It's Mary Hanne here and Mary Hanne there; it's nothing but Mary Hanne heverywhere. I wish I was hanybody helse'. (Out of Work, p. 24)

Mary Anne's position is not left as personal pique:

She did nearly all the housework - no light task, as Mrs. Elwin took in lodgers - and she had at least ten rooms to do and fifteen people to attend to. Mrs. Elwin super-intended; Polly did needlework. So Mary Anne was everybody's servant. She scrubbed and cooked, she swept and dusted, she made beds and carried up water, she sometimes gave the rooms what she called 'a turn-hout'. (Out of Work, p.26)

In addition to being far from a silent one Mary Anne's position, though she is largely unable to alter it, is not that simply of unrelieved oppression and hardship. It is not that her position is materially alleviated, but that she is depicted as possessing a real subjectivity beyond the confines of her economic and occupational circumstances. She is thus enabled to respond critically against the circumstances of her life and assert herself, and all that she represents, as a viable alternative:

Half an hour before she went to bed she dressed herself and washed her face; the rest of the day she wore rags, and had her hair in curl papers. Her supreme delight was to uncurl her hair just before bedtime, wash her hands and face, put on a clean apron, and sit down for what she called 'half an hour's quiet'. (Out of Work, p.26)

While it is true that Harkness also presents her as virtually addicted to 'novelettes' with their clichéd and ossified romantic stories of aristocratic wrongdoings, this moment does present the reality, however incapable of

realisation, of the underprivileged, here the servant class, possessing a potent subjectivity of its own. This emphasis is made even clearer by Harkness's narration itself taking on the structured speech of its protagonist:

She had a brother somewhere in some workhouse, and a mother who ten years ago had gone on tramp and never come back again. Mrs. Elwin had taken her from an aunt, and kept her because she worked like a galley-slave, and was strong as a horse. Her short stout figure seemed made to carry buckets, and her round red face showed that people can live on bread and scrape, with scarcely a glimpse of daylight.

(Out of Work, p.27)

The use of 'some' in the first sentence, the deliberate omission of 'as' before 'strong' in the second and the use without quotation marks of phrases such as 'gone on tramp' and 'bread and scrape' suggest that the narrative voice is incorporating and absorbing as fully communicative patterns of speech more customarily marginalised, de-centred from the conventions of the bourgeois novel. Gissing, Kipling, and Maugham, all noted for their forays into local dialect, tend to do so without alternative ideological intent, to present local colour to a clearly middle class audience. Harkness is here attempting, and successfully, to bring the political consciousness of her writing not merely into the subject matter of her work, but into the structure of its textual subjectivity. Mary Anne can speak and does not lose her job because of her work and her economic value. This is a clear demonstration of the potential shifting of power relations.

The introductory chapters of the novel, then, have articulated a series of connected 'shifts' in representative social and literary subjectivity. The 'official' version of the Golden Jubilee is broken by the voices of the disaffected, the spiritualising of inequity and property is countered by the spoken challenge of the dispossessed, the norms of domestic subjection questioned by the potent subjectivity of a customarily silenced sub-group; the objective style of realist narration has been de-centred by the blending of variable speech patterns within the narrative structure of the novel and without voyeurism, framing, preamble or apology. These textual shifts have prepared us for the major issue of the novel: the presentation of a representative subjectivity that would be both adequate to articulate the deleterious effects of late nineteenth century English society, and sufficient to serve as a connecting index to variations of rebellious and potentially revolutionary responses to the social and political structure. In this broad sense, Jos's individual impotence as an effective force in the novel becomes the necessity for the potency of its alternative possibilities.

After the first two chapters of the novel, the introduction of Jos seems less alien than it might otherwise have been, his experience more closely understood. Important ideological barriers have been removed. Significantly, Jos's entry is not as violently dramatic as those of earlier dissident voices. He is shown in close relation with Polly, the middle-class Methodist, and the description of him is intimate while conscious of his class identity:

As he took off his hat, and wiped his forehead with a red

cotton pocket handkerchief, one noticed that his brown hair stood up-right, short and sharp, on his head. It showed no parting. Men of his class often dispense with partings; they wear their hair on end, cropped close to the skin. One does not see this sort of hair-dressing in the fashionable parts of London, but it is not unbecoming; so no doubt some day one of the gentlemen at aesthetic Toynbee Hall, or ascetic Oxford House, will adopt it, and set the fashion in the West End. (Out of Work, p.39)

This is both a personal description and a class-identified relationship. We are told that he looked as many of his class looked 'until one has time to recognise their individuality' (Out of Work, p.39) and that his eyes 'deep-set, grey' are thoughtful and contain much: 'the intelligent observer would have cogitated over those eyes of his'. (Out of Work, p.39) We are also made aware 'there was nothing remarkable about this young man's appearance' (Out Of Work, p.39) and that:

The flesh of his face was falling away; and by so doing was leaving the skin loose, ready to expand again, when a supply of food allowed it to be expanded. His face showed the first signs of starvation -- signs easily interpreted by one who has studied the painful science of keeping alive on next to nothing, but never understood by those who receive their daily bread without effort or consideration. (Out of Work, p.40)

The narrative thus draws us close to the man and then lengthens its focus to encapsulate a society of class relations then, in turn, to draw close again to the man and so on. In doing so it invites a humanistic response and makes us aware of the consequences of not developing that response into a mature form of social responsibility. Jos is not merely the passive and unreflecting victim or product of determining forces, he is a man living them and clearly aware of it. Thus Jos is simultaneously an 'individual' and a focus of material, historical forces; his particular experience of those forces is, precisely, his 'individuality'. This assertion is further emphasised by the first words of conversation that pass between Jos and Polly on meeting. Polly asks

'Jos, have you got any work yet?'

'No', answered Jos. (Out of Work, p.41)

The simple, but crucial, fact of his unemployment is the singular threat to, and ultimate destroyer of, their relationship. Polly's middle-class expectations of well-being, prosperity, property, and respectability, are too profoundly determining a dimension of her character to allow her the strength to support Jos who is unable, though not unwilling, to join her in prosperity. Ultimately, Polly marries the class leader William Ford who, significantly, works at the Royal Mint and who she finds repulsive physically. Jos, economically and socially outcast, and emotionally abandoned, unable to find an orientation of his own in the society around him, experiences a long, slow decline ending in his death.

Jos's decline, however, is not without its real significance as his experience as an outcast allows us to gain access to various potential alternative voices, voices from outside of the mainstream of political life and literary custom. In a sense, Jos's 'self' is disseminated among other subjectivities and cannot be evaluated without them.

Harkness's text allows us to gain access to other subjectivities than those conventionally legitimised by a conservative capitalist society. Though these voices may be distorted, wrenched out of shape, almost always powerless, they remain morally and politically viable, ideologically potent. Nor are the poor here merely an undifferentiated mass to be feared, despised, pitied or patronised. Such an opening of possibilities by Harkness denies such stereotypical responses and allows for the varying, various, and variable subjectivities of those we nominate as 'working class' to emerge with salient respect. As a consequence, when we are presented with a not unconventional scene at Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park we are unable to listen to the orators as cranks or extremists. In narrative and political terms the groundwork has been laid for us to listen to them again with different attention, especially as Jos, the centre of the unfolding narrative subjectivity, is no casual observer but a man of the same social placement as the speakers, in very real need, potentially at least, of their ideas and support. Typically, Polly tries to lure Jos away 'their talk's downright wicked', (Out of Work, p.47) but Jos refuses to be diverted, 'Well, I rather like to hear them talk' (Out Of Work, p.47) and this leads him to visit one of the speakers, a revolutionary socialist who had been haranguing the crowd to achieve the violent overthrow of government. At home, however, he seems a different man. Holding his child:

His face was no longer grim and scornful. Its features had softened, every muscle had relaxed, and his thin lips were parted by a smile of tenderness. (Out of Work, p.57)

He has amassed, and read, a sizeable collection of literary and political works, leaflets, old newspapers, etc. but the accumulative effect is of confusion and litter, not one of achievement and progression; and this for a very particular reason:

He was one of the many people crushed out by our competitive system. He might have been a statesman or a judge if he had been born in more favourable circumstances. (Out of Work, p.59)

Moreover, his intellectual self is beginning to ossify and his ideas are becoming cruder and more inflexible. Having no stimulus except disappointment his speeches could only be bitter, and bitterness persuades few followers. It is notable that Harkness makes no claim for absolute ideological motives. While it is theorised, the man's opposition to the current status quo is also soundly rooted in its treatment of him and those like him, not only in an abstract theoretical position. It is the hypocrisy of a society that claims to valorise individualism while arranging itself as class-based and punitively hierarchical in its economic distributions that so angers him, and so weakens him.

Here, we are presented with a model in which neither an absolute individual subjectivity, nor a total societally determinate subjectivity is recognised. Rather, the labourer is an index to a society in conflict with itself: demanding a labour force, rendering it impotent when economically not needed, and punishing it for being unnecessary in order to maintain an hierarchical social order based upon economic differentiation. Clearly, though, with the insistent inclusion of the labourer's book collection and his inability to keep mentally vibrant amidst such isolation are emphases upon the mental and cultural effect that such political and economic power can wield.

Margaret Harkness's fiction becomes significant here in that she clearly and deliberately makes her writing a form of aesthetic mediation. Her work eschews a dispassionate, value-neutral aesthetics as a capitulation to the politics of the status quo and insists that her work be thus given an ideological reading and critical response. Margaret Harkness gives a distinct validity to forms of subjectivity hitherto silenced, debased or patronised. In so doing, she makes her fiction less a singular ideological assertion, more a complex location for 'inter-subjective' interplay; that subjectivity being the product of those relations. As a result, the mediating qualities of her literature are not to be discovered by ironic readings or internal textual stresses. For Harkness, dramatic literature stands as an ideologically aware articulation of material relations. It is neither a substitute for them, nor an answer to the problems they experience; but as a committed articulation it becomes a part of those relations and does not stand aside in an aesthetic realm abstracted from them.

This is a significant shift for socialist literature and the novel in that the understanding of the political self has been taken through a new 'turn' in sophistication and substance and this issue of effective representation understood on a new level of complexity. Margaret Harkness in Out of Work has successfully dismantled the edifice of the normative middle-class novel and asserted variegated, though ideologically cohesive, responses as improved and improving social and political alternatives. As a result, her novel needs no speeches. If the work is successfully socialist in construction and project, such a speech is unnecessary and can therefore be seen as redundant. Rooted in observable material class relations it cannot help but articulate them. When Jos and the dock labourer attend a political rally, it is not the ideological climax to the main speech that attracts most attention, nor is it (the same thing, in effect) that part of the speech that is the most socialist. The most telling moment comes when the speaker acknowledges the existence of experiences so common and so in common as to need little re-emphasis; that there is, in effect no difference in intellect, experience, power between the speaker and those spoken to: 'I need draw no picture of these things. You not only see them, but feel them'. (Out of Work, p.65) This approach allows her to concentrate upon the material relations that cause conscious ideological positions to come into being as subsequent causal material relations in their own right.

She accomplishes this most effectively by making no distinction between the physical experience of hardship and the mental structure of suffering. The dock labourer's mind, his most potent weapon, has been seriously weakened, its power undermined, by his economic and thus physical condition. Similarly,

an elderly woman that Jos encounters whose husband is forced to contemplate the workhouse clings, in her desperation, to the idea of a respectable burial for which they have been paying for many years despite economic hardship. The irony of established social institutions for Harkness, as in many ways for Dickens, is that while geared toward the maintenance of political power, they serve largely to provoke dissent and rebellion. While drinking in a bar, Jos is joined by a newcomer, also unemployed. This man has hoped that as a result of lengthy military service and in possession of a testimonial, a 'character', from the colonel of his regiment, he will find employment readily. Jos puts him wise:

'Oh, then you'll never get on. The men here won't put up with characters. They're always shy of a man what's recommended, and show him nothing'.

'Why's that?'

'They're jealous. The labour-master puts men what's recommended into the best places, so the others make it difficult for 'em to get on; they show 'em nothing'. (Out of Work, pp.156-7)

The man's response is striking and absolute. He effectively destroys everything upon which he has based his past life:

'I've served my Queen and my country for fifteen years', he said, 'and this is what I've come to. I've had bullets whizzing round my head, I've had fevers, I've nearly died of thirst in Egypt, and now I can't get a job anywhere, not even as a dock

labourer. Here goes my character'.

He took the colonel's letter out of his pocket, tore it into bits, put it in his mouth, chewed it, spat it on the ground, and stamped on it. (Out of Work, p.157)

When Jos himself is forced to enter the workhouse, he sees written on the wall the last statement of the ex-soldier: 'I've served my Queen and my country for fifteen years, and this is what I've come to'. (Out of Work, p.182)
Jos finds occasional casual work at the docks, but the warehouses only serve to remind him of the gross inequities of the society that possesses and uses them:

Everything that people could want to eat, everything that people could care to drink, stood in those warehouses. And among all this wealth worked the hungriest set of men in England, while sleek merchants, who came to make bargains, were furnished with refreshments. It seemed to him a horrible injustice that men should see all these things, and move them about, while suffering from empty stomachs.
(Out of Work, p.168)

When work becomes slack he joins the ranks of the homeless in Trafalgar Square. It is immediately the natural world, the 'far off' stars, that seem pitiless, but it is amongst the very real symbols of current society that the real blame is laid:

Then he laughed; a bitter laugh that echoed round Nelson's monument, and died away among the pillars of the National Gallery. The noise attracted a policeman who came up, and said a few warning words about vagrants. (Out of Work, p.171)

The disturbances in Trafalgar Square between early 1886 and November 1887 had enormous significance for class relations in England, and affected more than Margaret Harkness. Significant for nearly two years, these problems began on February 8th 1886 when a section of the Fair Trade League who had called a meeting in the Square was led away into the West End by the Social Democratic Federation, where £50,000 worth of damage was caused. In the summer of 1887 a growing number of homeless, unemployed vagrants began to camp out in the Square. East and West London began to divide along class lines as the West began to fear that the 'respectable poor' having faced a lengthy period of unemployment, might throw in their lot with the casual poor, large and uncontrollable in number, a combination which seemed to threaten revolution. The climate of fear thus caused led the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Charles Warren to veto a socialist meeting called by the Federation of Radical Clubs to be held in the Square on 13th November 1887. The police violently prevented the meeting from arriving at its destination.

While Harkness makes good use of the disturbances in Trafalgar Square in this novel, she is not alone in responding to it as a powerful indicator of fundamental social upheaval. Robert Haggard in his article 'Jack the Ripper as the Threat of Outcast London', Essays in History, vol.35, pp.2-15, University

of Virginia, 1993, introduces the influence of these events upon both real events and their perceived meaning. Henry James in The Princess Casamassima (1886), George Gissing in The Nether World (1889) and George Bernard Shaw in Major Barbara (1905) also make use of it for their political fiction and drama. Thomas Hardy in his unpublished first novel The Poor Man and the Lady has his protagonist Will Strong speak in Trafalgar Square. Gale W. Sherman in The Pessimism of Thomas Hardy: A Social Study (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, March 1976) argues for a political reading of Hardy, as affected by such social and political events. Christine De Vine in 'Revolution and Democracy in the London Times and The Princess Casamassima', The Henry James Review, vol. 23, No. 1, Winter 2002, pp. 53-71, and in her later Class in Turn-of-the-Century of Gissing, James, Hardy and Wells (Leicester: Ashgate, 2005) argues for the serious political threat this event posed within the British establishment and the fear that it represented a very real connection with international terrorism. She also makes a strong case for a political reading of these novelists.

Perhaps the most telling condemnation of legitimised society comes with the final rift between Jos and Polly. It represents a fundamental separation of class interest that cannot be breached. It also suggests, from within the poverty and political impotence that we have seen throughout the novel, a resurgence of the mental agency of the oppressed in response to their situation: Jos condemns Polly, and with the clear support of the thrust of the novel's narrative. Incapable of understanding or involving herself in, Jos's economic hardship, Polly abandons him for the respectable Methodist group

leader:

I'm not going to marry you, Joseph Cone; I'm going to marry a godly young man with a settled income. (Out of Work, p.221)

It is at this point that his attempts to maintain the relationship finally break and he calls her 'hypocrite!' (Out of Work, p.221) The term reverberates through her mind as it has taken from her the sense of morality she needed to legitimise her life and prevent her from seeing the economic and social underpinnings that supported it:

...instead of leaving her on a pedestal of righteousness, Jos had rudely kicked the stool of self-respect from beneath her feet. (Out of Work, pp.221-2)

Having attempted to maintain and assert the myths of her own life, Polly has been rudely reminded by Jos of her selfish realities. Her real desires are financial security and social respectability and the spiritual and moral elements of her religion are revealed as little more than a disguise. Jos, the country man coming to London looking for work is able to see through the vacuity at its centre. It is this growth in knowledge that makes it possible for the alternative interventions into legitimised society to maintain their force of appeal and persuasiveness despite their practical political weakness.

Harkness in Out of Work uses a theme of persistent relevance within English culture, but greatly enhanced by the increasingly dominant rise of urban living throughout the nineteenth century as a result of the Industrial Revolution: namely the drawing of a moral, not just a geographical, difference between the country and the city. While it would be impossible to do more than refer to this issue within this thesis, a few words are apposite here.

While quests for 'Old England' may have a long ancestry, Martin J. Wiener in his seminal study English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) argues that the myth of a rural England as relevant for a modern England really began with work of Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, Charles Dickens and John Stuart Mill, all of them reacting against the developing commercial-industrial society that had arisen in their lifetime. Wiener charts the development of their ideas throughout the century and argues that the myth of an England essentially rural and essentially unchanging appealed across political divides, acknowledging William Morris as perhaps the most outspoken inheritor of this perspective, both in his early romanticism and his later socialism. Wiener stresses that Morris was both a revolutionary Marxist advocating a radically new society, and a nostalgic romantic seeking to revive the traditional rural English way of life. He notes significant tensions throughout the work of Thomas Hardy, arguing that much of Hardy's popularity lay in his being understood as a country novelist, much to Hardy's chagrin, while also acknowledging that Hardy did revise his novels to make Wessex both more prominent, and more findable. He offers Hardy's novels as an index to the complex problematic posed by the changing relationship between traditional

ways of life and modernizing change and accepts that Hardy was himself deeply ambivalent about them.

The result was a divided bourgeois consciousness: both responsible for the industrial revolution and deeply uncomfortable with its consequences. This led both political leaders and industrialists to advocate an entrepreneurial attitude while actually abandoning it for the more acceptable role of gentleman as soon as the opportunity arose. Wiener concludes that this produced a social elite at war with itself. Much later, Daniel Bell in The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (New York, Basic Books, 1996) was to repeat this conclusion.

It is to her great credit as a novelist that Margaret Harkness in Out of Work denies this rural myth its normative potency. Throughout the novel the countryside is presented as a potent index to key events, but its meaning is usually ambiguous. Jos comes from the country to London to seek work. While he is presented as an intelligent and attractive man, his appearance labels him as a countryman as his clothes are rustic 'so one could easily see'. (Out of Work, p.38). He seems immediately out of place in the fashionable metropolis. Polly Elwin, Jos's betrothed for much of the novel, has shepherds and shepherdesses and country scenes as art works on her mantelpiece, which denote her sentimental acceptance of the rural myth, but with scant knowledge of rural realities: 'on the mantelpiece, were china ornaments, representing shepherds and shepherdesses, a little Samuel saying his prayers, and a little girl reading the Bible' (Out of Work, p.69). Polly has also made country scenes, with birds made from worsted, beads and silk. One contains a small cottage with a young couple kissing in front of it. This emotional

superficiality will later underpin her betrayal of Jos.

Jos recognizes himself as 'nothing but a village artist' (Out of Work, p.84), in his woodworking skills, recognizing that this will limit his ability to find craftwork in London where more sophisticated output will be expected and natural images begin to take on an ominous power. When Polly ventures on a walk with William Ford the Christian class-leader and the man for whom she will betray Jos, the sun sets with disinterest as it would upon 'the just and the unjust' (Out of Work, p.97). After Polly has fantasized about marrying him and not Jos, the sun 'sank down behind the wooded hills, not a ray of purple was left on the horizon. A dull grey covered the sky'. (Out of Work, p.98)

Jos does try to hold onto the idea of the country as a source of value and possibility, imagining Polly as 'a picture that resembled his mother, that was in some vague way connected with things down in the country' (Out of Work, p.106) and being easily reminded of the country as a place of peace and beauty 'the sky was blue, the flowers and grass made him think of the country' (Out of Work, p.117), and 'he liked to see the sun rising, it reminded him of things down in his native village' (Out of Work, p.167).

But we are told in no uncertain terms that the rural economy is just as vulnerable to vicious economic cycles as the urban. There is no work in the country; his return is cut off: 'somehow or other things had not gone well there lately. Labourers were out of work, farms were vacant, the shop was shut up, only one carpenter was wanted. Men had said that the land did not pay, and delegates had come preaching strange doctrines. Certainly work was slack in the village; that was why Jos had been forced to take his mother's savings out of the bank, and come to this great city' (Out of Work, p.119) A

labourer of Jos's acquaintance offers a description of life as an itinerant worker in the countryside, 'you sleep in a ditch...you get a job if you can; if not, you snare a rabbit or steal a chicken. Children run away if they see you coming...Often you're had up afore a magistrate...' (Out of Work, p.134). After this, the natural world begins to take on a mocking character as stars reflected in the water around Nelson's column 'danced up and down in mocking fashion, as though the universe had nothing to do with the earth, but to laugh at its littleness. He looked at them. They were far off, and pitiless'. (Out of Work, p.171)

When Polly expresses her wish that Jos would 'go back to the country' (Out of Work, p.151), she does so as an act of rejection which contains no positive connotations. Meanwhile, she and her mother visit the Royal Mint in which money is exposed as the central fetish of a commercial culture (Out of Work, p.140-43). Jos befriends a young woman who is known as 'the squirrel', an ironic reversal of a natural creature as her scavenging for survival makes her little more than an animal amongst humans, despite her courage and loyalty. Jos's decision to 'go back home again' (Out of Work, p.238) is made without hope as the narrative voice completes the thought that he would go back to his native place because he felt so ill. 'Maybe', he said to himself, 'I'm dying'. (Out of Work, p.239) The narrative voice makes it absolutely plain that returning to the country is without hope and that the rural myth has also become a compulsion without value, another fetish: 'To-morrow,' he said to himself, 'I'll sell my watch, and go back home again.' Human nature *must* have a fetish. His walk home to Windsor reminds us that the novel began with the Queen's Jubilee, and that there is no escape from dominant economic and

social power structures. Jos dies from starvation on his mother's grave. For Harkness, this is a bitterly ironic homecoming; it offers no peaceful retreat, no respite; for her, the modern world of ideological conflict, commercialism and commodification has erased the myth of unchanging ahistorical values often assumed to be inherent in the English countryside²⁵.

The climax of the novel's action, the meeting and near-riot in Trafalgar Square, begins with a decided and repeated condemnation, not only of the institutional structures of current society, but of the ways in which that society insists it be viewed. The speaker repeats the phrase 'none of your rubbish' (Out of Work, p.192) over and over again as an ultimate condemnation

²⁵ The potent myth of ruralism has been revisited many times. Jeremy Burchardt's Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change Since 1800 (London: I B Tauris, 2002) charts familiar territory, but from the perspective of an historian and sociologist, while Paul Carter's 'Enclosure, Waged Labour, and the Formation of Class Consciousness: Rural Middlesex c.1700-1835' in Labour History Review vol.66, pp.269-93 argues a non-literary rural and economic case for the development of class consciousness. Christine Hallas's Rural Responses to Industrialization: the North Yorkshire Pennines, 1790-1914 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang publishing, 1999) provides a detailed look at one upland area to discern how it responded to the problem of industrialization and urbanization and how it survived in increasingly industrial country. Elisabeth Helsing's Rural Scenes and National Representation: Britain 1815-1850 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) reviews the changing landscape from the perspective of a literary expert and an art historian. Joan Thirsk, in The English Rural Landscape (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) provides an authoritative account of changes over a long period, while Donald Ulin's 'Seeing the Country, Imagining a Nation: Tourism and Ideology in William Howitt's *Rural Life of England*,' Victorians Institute Journal, vol.30, 2002, gives a modern perspective upon the political significance of the changing countryside. Nicola Verdon, in Rural Women Workers in Nineteenth Century England: Gender, Work and Wages (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002) supplies a gendered political account of what it was like to be a working woman in the countryside, showing a keen eye for regional variations. T.O.M Williamson in The Transformation of Rural England: Farming and the Landscape From 1700-1870 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002) provides an unusual perspective upon the agricultural revolution, arguing that there was not one such revolution, but several. He argues that large landowners played a much smaller role than had often been thought and that the efforts of large capitalist farmers had little improving effect upon arable farming. The greatest, and revolutionary, changes took place not on the large estates but were in fact the work of tenant farmers.

of the ways in which his class has been condemned and misrepresented:

'Now the papers say no respectable men have been at these 'ere demonstrations, nothing but roughs and idle chaps that wouldn't work if they got the chance...' 'Look 'ere,' he continued, bringing forward a workman's basket, and producing a hammer, 'is this a legitimate workman's tool or isn't it?' (Out of Work, p.192)

As the riot fails an authorial assertion suggests:

Success is never absurd. Failure is ridiculous. This thing is certain -- if more people had followed the example of those men and women, if it had really been a Bloody Sunday, that labour programme which is loomin' in the distance would now be before Parliament; Lord Salisbury and his party would ere this have vanished into nothingness. (Out of Work, p.201)

Violence is thus the only means to full ideologically determined change, but the voices interceding into the status quo are pleading for a position of effectiveness in society rather than for the absolute overturning of it. The despair that leads to revolutionary possibilities is the hopelessness at the lack of change in an ossifying system. It is Harkness's despair that serves to make her a socialist, without being able to imagine political success. The issue raised here is not that of the potential existence of a particular economic class as it

was for Chartist literature; rather it is the assertion of a determining role in society for a clearly established but crudely ostracised and mis-represented class belonging to that society. Moreover, those in power possess power by the crudest means, thus rendering the very structure of an apparently powerful society pitifully weak morally and ideologically.

While Jos's own subjectivity ends in failure and death, his 'dissolving' self serves as an index to other affiliated voices. The intervention of those voices prevents the uninterrupted narrative of power, possessed by a singular hegemonic group. We are shown the inside of a doss-house, the processing of inmates in a workhouse, the practice of police arraignment and a prison cell. We are shown them from the perspective of those at the receiving end, demanding recognition from the reader and thus insisting upon political redress as the only solution. In doing so, Harkness reveals a simple, if desperate, legitimacy for the subjectivity of the oppressed and asserts their potential power for the improvement of society if liberated from the brutal containments of a punitive economic manipulation. She does not resort to moral invective or ideological rhetoric; based upon the realities of lived experience within politicised historical relationships, her novel exudes socialist intent in its structure, theme and treatment.

Margaret Harkness's next novel, Captain Lobe,²⁶ marks a decisive shift in her intellectual development. Out of Work is notable for its clear assertion that improved conditions for working people can only be obtained by political action. Moreover, the novel insists that these political necessities are *national* in

character, an assertion most clearly articulated by the putative riot in Trafalgar Square amidst the emblems of an imperial nation.²⁷ At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the fact that Harkness's political vision in Out of Work nowhere allows for the likelihood of successful political action on the part of any radical movement. The destructive forces of an inegalitarian capitalist society are so great as to be effectively impregnable. The novel thus leaves us with a pattern of contending ideologies with no expectation of resolution and leaving radical possibilities with little more than an asserted recognition of their own existence, without the power to produce real change just as consciousness of its need has reached a peak.

The role that socialism might play in the developing trade union movement also remained unclear. The unions, fraught with contests of strength between 'old' and 'new' unionism experienced uneven membership between 1888 and 1895²⁸ and, as Eric Hobsbawm has indicated, unionist industrial policy until 1910 remained 'cautious, limited, conservative, and sectional'.²⁹ Margaret Harkness's political understanding indicates a clear awareness that the left and socialist movements had a central role to play in current political issues of national significance, but seemed less sure of a synthesising perspective that might render them more politically effective.³⁰ Out of Work suggests a multiplicity of voices that cohere into a single voice, but only in political

²⁶ John Law, Captain Lobe (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889) reprinted by Wm. Reeves, London, 1891

²⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, Workers: Worlds of Labour (London: Pantheon, 1984), p.182, has claimed such an 'elevation' to be one of the major achievements of radical politics between the Chartist period and the late 1880s

²⁸ E.H Hunt, British Labour History 1815-1914, p.295

²⁹ Quoted in Hunt, p.308

³⁰ See also Kenneth O. Morgan Kier Hardie, Radical and Socialist (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1975) for an extended discussion of this issue

failure; the very nature of the circumstances which produce those voices also renders them impotent. Thus, while being a politically powerful novel, its political thrust also serves to condemn its form.

Margaret Harkness responded to this problem by shifting the subjectivity of her next novel away from a naturalist 'copying' of a distinct experiential situation (poverty, unemployment, cultural deprivation) towards the possibilities of a political/ideological position based upon theory. In this way the desire for political and social change need be neither crudely determined nor a voice from 'nowhere'. As John Goode puts it, in Captain Lobe Harkness renders the Salvation Army into 'a mode of insight, which has to be theorised'.

³¹ This is not, I would suggest, to reject determinism as an effective force, but to suggest an intellectual continuity that would allow for political agency when immediate physical and economic conditions seemed to render such action impossible for those most crushingly oppressed. The multiple voices in this novel represent attempts at a synthesis of political desire into a joint ideological position within the socialist rubric, even to crossing traditional class boundaries. In Captain Lobe the central characters are involved in looking to find socialism as an intellectual as well as a social possibility, usually against the resistance of the poor themselves.

This novel thus stands as a signal move away from class-bound politics and suggests the possibility of socialism without class in its apparent search for a form of transitive political consciousness, operating at the level of political desire, irreducible to an hermetically sealed subjectivity, able to look beyond

its own immediate experience, acknowledge wider frames of reference and not succumb to the cruder forms of determinism. Such a transitive consciousness offers a synthesis of fragmented political and personal projects by emphasising the significance of an intellectual political consciousness not representative of a disinterested position.

Such an intellectual shift away from absolute determinism had effects upon the form and structure of Harkness's novel. Attempting to dramatise such a shift towards a theorising of political values, whilst maintaining an essentially naturalistic framework, produces an often disappointing text. Margaret Harkness is often unable to marry the necessary abstractions with a sense of lived experience. She is, in fact, caught here between the naturalistic novel and a new form, the more formal modernist, even symbolic, novel that she was unable to bring properly to light. John Goode has shown an awareness of this growing artificiality by highlighting one of the major weaknesses of the novel: that its events are often reduced to 'a series of tableaux, brilliant, and angry but static and without much development'.³² Such contained sequences, he argues, limit the political dynamism of the novel. This is true on one level as the poor here are shown to be an unregenerate lumpen proletariat and only one working class character is allowed her own voice. Such criticism, however, does not fully acknowledge the shift in location of the novel's subjectivity and therefore its intellectual significance as socialist literature; a significance not rooted in the answers it provides, but in the problematic it articulates.

³¹ John Goode, 'Margaret Harkness and the Socialist Novel' in The Socialist Novel in Britain, p.63

³² *ibid.* p.63

In Captain Lobe (1889), as in A City Girl (1887), the Salvation Army serves as a model for an alternative social structure and purpose. However, whereas in A City Girl the Army's identity was established and Lobe was consulted over Fanny's distress in his own 'territory', in Captain Lobe the Salvation Army is presented as much less substantial. Army members are seen struggling against resentment, even violence, to assert and maintain outposts among the poor, and their effect is minimal. Moreover, the spirituality of the Salvation Army members, its rigid fundamentalism, becomes a problem. In an early chapter two female Army slum workers encounter a man who, reminiscent of the church scene in Out of Work, charges them with his hunger as more significant than their theology. The Salvationists respond:

You must give up your sins; then God will send you food.

The man persists, claiming that no loving God would starve his people for sinning:

He would give him food first, and speak about his sin afterwards...Let him send me work...then I'll believe in Him.

The Salvationist insists upon her theological point whereupon she is dismissed by the man:

Then, my lass, you can carry your preaching somewhere else. Don't come here to talk of salvation to a man like me.

I'm hungry. (Captain Lobe, p.50)

This scene highlights the contradictory function of the Salvation Army. Harkness's use of the Salvation Army is an interesting one. She does not seem interested in its spirituality (which, in this novel, is more a hindrance than a

help) and yet only the spirituality prevents them from being socialists in all but stated programme. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Harkness is advocating socialism *and* resisting it and thus throws into relief one of the major intellectual questions in the novel. Throughout the scene one of the 'lassies' is described as having eyes that 'seemed fixed on something in the distance' (Captain Lobe, p.50) and it is this state of absolute conviction, of spiritual subjectivity that precludes any meaningful dialogue with the man. The materialist argument he advances cannot be genuinely engaged and yet the man himself is radically unable to produce his own solution to his plight. Forms of determinism still hold sway here and prevent meaningful understanding that could lead to a dynamic of social practice. It is just such pressures that must be resisted both practically and intellectually if such a social stasis is to be overridden.

Captain Lobe himself, at the hub of the novel, embodies this focus of pressures and resistances more fully than any other character:

he felt every word that he said, and the sympathy which he showed to his fellow men was a fire fed by self-sacrifice. He was no milk-and-water religionist...He did not preach about Hell and then go home to enjoy a good meal. [He] recognised the fact the man's soul has an intimate relationship with a man's stomach. He hated sin in the abstract; but he loved sinners and most of all he loved his Whitechapel people. Even the loafers were clear to him. And the roughs were good lads, he said, lacking opportunities. (Captain Lobe, p.11)

Here Lobe acknowledges both the power of socially determining factors and the necessity of personal responsibility ('sin'). He is not a man to favour institutions per se and possesses 'no great affection' for the Salvation Army itself, accepting with some reluctance that

he did not know any other organisation that worked so hard or fought so manfully against the world of the flesh and the devil. (Captain Lobe, p.226)

At the same time, he is unable to revert to a more individualist consciousness:

More than once he had felt inclined to hand in his resignation, and work singlehanded in Whitechapel But who was he? What could he do by himself? (ibid..)

He is thus caught in an important crux of the novel's narrative thrust, between inflexible institutional assertion and individual impotence. Moreover, he possesses no intellectual capacity for the full theorising of his own position. Rather, he thanks God for the absence of intellect and relies upon his emotions and intuitions which are inadequate for the pressures he faces, resulting in a mental breakdown. Indeed, we are told forcefully that the Salvationists

think the intellect a little thing that requires wheedling. Consequently, few educated men and women join their ranks,

and they cannot point to one scholar in their camp of any importance. (Captain Lobe, p.34)

This lack of desire on the part of the Army for an adequate theory of its own function radically disables it. It acknowledges a material and social base for the social problems it apprehends, it can only respond to them with an inarticulate theology:

To get saved is a phrase that forever haunts the lips of Salvationist. How this process takes place they cannot tell us. (Captain Lobe, p.34)

In its attempt to apprehend the faults of a destructive materialism its critical metalanguage can only offer a rejection of materialism per se for an inexplicable transcendent consciousness. The attempt by the Army, through Lobe, to synthesise the elements of the problematic posed by the failure of material determinism to transcend itself has succeeded in exposing that problematic, but not in solving it intellectually.

Lobe also comes into contact with involved parties with whom he has no personal connection or distinct professional association as members of the Salvation Army. It is in such cases that the possibility of a more distinct theoretical analysis might be possible. An East End doctor provides an objective account of the destructive aspects of a wretched environment upon those unable to change it, and quotes from Frederick Engels to support his case. When asked by Lobe as to a possible solution he refers him to the level

of national politics:

'If I were a younger man I would give up medicine and go into politics. I would teach the people to use their votes, to send their own men into Parliament; and I would agitate myself in St. Stephens for measures that would make the proletariat master of the situation. In fact I would be a constitutional socialist, using all lawful means to improve the condition of the working man'. (Captain Lobe, p.86)

While this 'intention' does not become a dynamic element in the novel, it is a significant statement of radical politics as the only meaningful solution to society's failings and it comes from a man himself not a member of the proletariat he would empower. It is also notable that Margaret Harkness gives Lobe no rejoinder to this plea for a new politics.

He does however enter into discussion with a 'lady' who remains nameless and enters the novel only twice to offer a criticism of Lobe's religiosity and a documentary statement of the current state of British politics. A declared socialist and a member of the upper classes, she offers an admonishment to Lobe over his uncritical literal acceptance of the biblical sentence 'Ye have the poor always with you'. She asserts that poverty is not a 'divine fiat' (Captain Lobe, p.66) but the result of specific historical conditions that can be overcome through active political agency on the part of those desirous of producing such change. The crucial difference in perception that she offers Lobe is that she is agnostic:

'The difference lies in the fact that you believe in immortality and I do not. That is why I say that social conditions must, and shall be altered, in order that all may have, during their short span of life, a chance of happiness. You can afford to see human beings suffering here because you think that they will be happy hereafter.' (Captain Lobe, p.69)

Material circumstances must have a full material response: politics, and national politics of a radical kind. She condemns contemporary socialist parties for their falling into rivalry:

'They cannot work together. They split up into small parties, and spend their time in quarrelling'. (Captain Lobe, p.153)

However she acknowledges the socialist position as based upon economic theory as the correct one:

'...it is au fond an economic question. Socialists think this, and they say, "We intend to do away with all this degradation and misery"'. (Captain Lobe, p.157)

She also asserts that all interested parties, including the church, are going to have to educate themselves in economic theory if they are to be able to play a role in the social and political changes that she foresees as both necessary

and inevitable:

'But socialism is in the air, it is touching everyone and tingeing everything...Socialism is growing every day, both the sentiment and the economic theory...at present its most hopeful sign is an embryonic labour-party. This party is spreading all over the United Kingdom. It is a new Chartist movement, with twice as many points as were contained in the Old Charter.' (Captain Lobe, p.158)

Nowhere in the novel are these possibilities discussed in any greater detail and the 'lady's' presence, brief as it is, remains too disembodied from the lives of those who populate this novel to make a decisive change in the narrative. It does clearly suggest, however, that an ideological and practically political agency is possible and it will serve and be served by all those who adhere to its ideology. The foundation of such a politics is clearly laid in class-based experience, but the political desire for such change is not class-bound.

While Lobe remains the centre of the novel's plot-line, the real energy of the later chapters rests with Jane Hardy, the only working-class character in the novel to be given an effective voice. Her energies and capacities are framed by a narrative irony placing her desires within a frustrating framework of limitation both in mind and in action:

She would attend women's rights meetings if she knew where they take place, and agitate for the enfranchisement

of their sex if she knew how to agitate. Her ideas about socialism are vague, for she has no time to study, and little time to think...she sees the words, but they elude her grasp.
(Captain Lobe, p.16)

However, Jane does have real significance for the intellectual and political concerns at the novel's core. Experienced in the world of factory work, Jane is a frank materialist with a capacity for conceptualization, political self-recognition and the adoption of an ideological stance:

...we're all equals. That's my doctrine, though I do stay on here grinding work out of poor girls for the capitalist. I've a mother to keep, so I have to put my principles in my pocket. But I believe in combination, fighting the upper classes and justice. (Captain Lobe, p.105)

Moreover, she possesses no fixed assumption of class identity and is ready to accept help wherever it comes from. Indeed implicit in this statement is the assumption that such aid does, and should, come from quarters other than only the working class as such. She attends socialist meetings and takes Lobe's fiancée Ruth to them to try to educate her and explains such terms as Ruth finds confusing, for example 'environment'. Jane also provides a counter-response to the religiosity of the Salvationists. When a local clergyman is reprimanded by them for presenting entertainments for the poor instead of spending his energies on more spiritual nourishment, Jane replies:

'But Mr. Barnett is one of the best men living...He's brought happiness into the lives of people like me--people that have no chance of seeing the world and of knowing what is going on in it. He's started lectures and classes, and all sorts of things to improve the minds of the working classes.' (Captain Lobe, p.141)

Jane represents the only real possibility here for the working classes to help themselves by becoming intellectually conscious of their own circumstances and using that capacity to change social and ultimately political, conditions. Sadly, she remains trapped by the necessity to work and, one cannot help suspecting, by Harkness's inability to grasp all of her possibilities:

Her whole soul was athirst, poor thing, for knowledge. In her was a bitter rebellion against the present state of society; for that state forced her to work so hard all day that her brain ached when she tried to read in the evening (Captain Lobe, p.168)

She is also rendered incapable of full social action by experiencing an emotional dichotomy between her political commitment and her personal life

...'Force', 'survival of the fittest', 'surplus value', all the names that puzzled her so much, that stood for things she could not grasp, she would have bartered at that minute for half an ounce of love, for a few grains of affection. (Captain

Lobe, p.169)

Such deliberate limitations lead Jane to become a caricature of herself by the novel's close. However, her hard-won efforts and values do carry effective weight. Pressured on all sides, she does not give way. Of the working class, Jane is not contained mentally by the determining forces that have created the brute lumpen proletariat that populates most of the novel. She represents an intellectual position in emergent state, awaiting a real opportunity if not adequately placed to create one. The novel remains remarkable, and important, for Harkness understanding that, in political/fictional narrative a multiplicity of subjectivities, ideologically connected could function as the best locus of socio/political realities and change, even though she was unable to fully develop them.

After the asserted apprehending of socialist problematics in her first three novels, Margaret Harkness's fourth work, A Manchester Shirtmaker,³³ must be considered a major disappointment. The plot delineates the misfortunes of a young widow, Mary, the shirtmaker of the title. Of unknown parentage, found in a church and brought up in a workhouse, Mary knows nothing but misery until her marriage to a young artisan, Jack Dillon. Her happiness is short-lived however as, with Mary heavily pregnant, Jack suffers a mortal injury at work. Alone, with a child to support and rejected as low-born by Jack's family, Mary is forced into sweated labour. She is cheated out of her only money, her rent money, by a sweater and is ultimately forced to pawn her

³³ John Law, A Manchester Shirtmaker: A Realistic Story of Today (London: Author's Co-op Publishing Co., 1890)

only means of making a living, her sewing machine, in order to feed her child. As this money runs out she attempts to buy a Dove's powder, containing opium in order to give some rest and sleep to her child. Unable to obtain it without prescription she steals it. She prepares what she believes is a safe dose for the baby and, as she gives it, herself faints from hunger. On awakening she finds the baby dead - the dose had been too great. With the heaviest of ironies a five-pound note arrives from Jack's family but all Mary wishes to do with the money is to buy a headstone for her husband's grave and a coffin for her baby. She begins to deteriorate mentally and carries the coffin to the cemetery in the hope of burying it with her husband. Apprehended, and without a death certificate, an autopsy reveals the baby to have been poisoned and Mary is tried for her life. She escapes hanging but is incarcerated in a mental institution where, at the novel's close, she strangles herself with the white silk handkerchief of a visiting millionaire philanthropist.

The events of the novel succeed one another in a slow crescendo of horror and accumulate as a perversely nihilistic fantasy with strong elements of melodrama and an unremitting assertion of destructive institutional determinism. From birth to death Mary is at the mercy of cruel and relentless institutions: the church, the workhouse, the sweatshop and labour market, her husband's dangerous employment, the courts of law, the mental asylum, even the need for official death certificate and medical prescription. There exists no escape from such forces and her constant belief in her own right to happiness - 'she had always said to herself, that happiness was coming' (A Manchester Shirtmaker, p.25) - is bitterly futile.

Jack's family, only marginally 'above' her in social station, reject her as beneath their notice. Others of her own class are too politically ignorant and economically competitive to enjoy any fellow-feeling or understand any shared political reality and, when Mary goes to trial, they take bets as to the likelihood of her being sentenced to death. Those outside of her class represent their respective institutions and can offer nothing. Even the Salvation Army is thoroughly rejected, condemned for its insensitive subjectivity akin, here, to madness. Indeed, the Army's representative in this novel is known as the 'Mad Lamplighter':

He was singing lustily, for he belonged to the Salvation Army, and thought that his mission was to 'save' people by shouting, 'O, I'm so 'appy, Allelujah!' in the streets, as he went on his rounds. He brought his ugly face close to her [Mary], and she shrank from him, for he had the senseless grin of an idiot, and thick, heavy lips that showed his teeth as he shouted, 'O, I'm so 'appy, Allelujah!' (A Manchester Shirtmaker, p.65)

The novel's subjectivity remains almost entirely with the 'internal' emotional reality of Mary herself, but as only the product and the victim of her social surroundings, possessing no observable active agency to assert against that world in either a personal or political manner. Harkness does develop a more consciously symbolic narrative; Mary compares lamps in the street with 'the eyes of a man suffering from jaundice', (A Manchester Shirtmaker, p.1) and her life is entirely defined by its symbols: an advertisement for hands at a

local factory, her sewing machine, her husband's grave and headstone, her baby's coffin, the silk scarf of the millionaire. Entropy remains so dominant that as either a feminist or socialist narrative it does comparatively little but reassert destructive determinisms already handled more fully elsewhere.

At the close of the novel, the narrative briefly emerges from Mary's emotional suffering to present a millionaire, his daughter and two young doctors visiting the asylum in which Mary is housed. The rich young woman provides an immediate contrast to Mary's life; it is at her behest that her father gives Mary the handkerchief. On the millionaire's departure from the ward the two doctors remain to discuss their future careers. One asserts that he is going to marry the millionaire's daughter because he wants to set up a lucrative practice in London's West End and therefore needs a rich wife. The other declares his intention of taking an East End practice to work among the poor, asserting that he is a socialist: 'What else can I be, while I live amongst so much physical pain that might be remedied?' (A Manchester Shirtmaker, p.165)

He is no conventional socialist, however, denying atheism and asserting his belief in a new scientific discovery that will destroy our individualistic social system by replacing it with 'an evolving spirit, using the universe as its garment just as our souls use our bodies'. (A Manchester Shirtmaker, p. 165) Such an eventuality would release us from the power of the ego and force us to realise that human happiness can only be attained through forgetfulness of self and all men will become brothers. The origin of these ideas remains unstated - it may be a reference to Comte - but the conversation is rudely interrupted by

the news that Mary has strangled herself while they were talking. The first doctor's riposte 'Dreams...idle dreams...you know there is a blank wall in front of us. Why then attempt to paint pictures upon it?' (A Manchester Shirtmaker, p.167) seems emblematic of the novel's general mood of despair. After this novel Margaret Harkness was to publish nothing new³⁴ for fifteen years.

Nihilism is one term used to characterize developments in culture, science and philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century, which began to question the absolutes that had seemed to underpin Victorian society. A liberal-conservative morality was fighting a new commodity culture; figures such as Ernst Mach were questioning Newtonian absolutes in physics, and the growing popularity of Nietzsche's philosophy questioned the very bases of liberal democracy. In addition, the developing working classes were seen by some to represent a degenerate tendency within British society. All of the above lent weight to notions of apocalypse and entropy.

In 'The Prospects of Political Science', The Journal of Politics, (Vol. 17, No. 2, May, 1955, pp. 265-274), Thomas I. Cook argues that the confidence of the Victorian and Edwardian periods was in considerable dispute during this period. Poets and commentators, he argues, questioned the very bases of mercantile and materialist optimism. Darwinism could not buttress earlier concepts of the dignity of man and radically altered our shared self-image, while economic prosperity was seriously questioned by the depression of the 1870s. He cites a

³⁴ Except for the republication of Captain Lobe as In Darkest London by Reeves as vol. 8 in the Bellamy Library, 1891

variety of sources to insist that the stability of the western notion of life had come very much into question by some serious commentators, and that the discovery of the irrational as a motivator created a deep uncertainty regarding the rational bases for a western democratic culture. Also interesting in this context are Mark Bevir's article 'The Long Nineteenth Century in Intellectual History', in The Journal of Victorian Culture, vol.6, 2001, pp.313-335, and Oscar Wilde's essay 'The Decay of Lying: An Observation' (1889).

Christopher Lindner in Fictions of Commodity Culture, (Leicester: Ashgate, 2003) draws on recent critical and cultural theory to examine the ways in which commodity culture has been represented in a number of texts, beginning with nineteenth-century fiction. He draws connections between such texts and 'postmodern' cultural characteristics in order to highlight the dramatic changes the late nineteenth-century world was experiencing. He argues that these selected Victorian authors were beginning to conceive of social exchange in terms of economic and therefore political and ideological exchange rather than as relations within moral absolutes. Christopher Herbert, Victorian Relativity: Radical Thought and Scientific Discovery (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), undertakes a cultural history of relativity theory prior to Albert Einstein. Herbert's history emphasizes the role of British scientists and intellectuals in marking a new resurgence of relativistic modes of thought³⁵.

³⁵ In a Radical History Review interview (Radical History Review, Issue 85, Winter 2003, pp. 227-237) Mike Davis discusses an intended project, a history of revolutionary terrorism. He argues that 1878 was the beginning of a 'classical' age of terrorism, introducing a half-century during which the bourgeois imagination was haunted by the spectre of the bomb-throwing nihilist or anarchist, and argues that that

The determining subjectivity of Harkness's 1905 novel George Eastmont: Wanderer³⁶ is no longer centred among the poor and/or working class. The eponymous hero of this piece is an aristocrat manqué who wishes to dedicate his life to 'the people'. The novel is really three short novels in one, each focusing upon one significant relationship or event in George Eastmont's life as he discovers himself personally and politically.

In the first, he eschews his aristocratic background and career as a soldier and marries a working-class woman in order to be at one with the common people. He also writes for a socialist paper and becomes involved in radical politics. Such is his ability and determination that he becomes a leader of the radical movement, inciting and heading a major political demonstration in Hyde Park. The would-be rioters, however, turn placid when the army is called out. The demonstration is a failure and he is jailed. His marriage is a disaster as he cannot accustom himself to the vulgar habits and lack of intelligence shown by his wife. In her misery she turns to drugs for compensation, eventually dying of an overdose while Eastmont is in prison. The result of these experiences is enough to prove to him that his attempt to be of the working classes was a mistake, but that he can still be *for* them.

fear has cast a long shadow.

³⁶ John Law, George Eastmont, Wanderer (London: Burns and Oates, 1905)

In the novel's second section Eastmont becomes involved in the great Dock Strike of 1889 (a documentary element of an otherwise fictional novel) sponsored and fostered by the union leader Dick Charleston. The two men become political allies, but 'fictional' rivals for the dominant emphasis of the narrative. Eastmont allows himself to become a leading figure in the strike while remaining aware of its likely failure. He sees the two sides in the dispute, the dockers' demanding 'a tanner an hour' in pay and the employers' refusal 'on principle', as a kind of game. The success of the strike in real question, Charleston determines to call the gas stokers out on strike to support the dockers. The potential hardship of such an eventuality is too much for Eastmont and he calls in Cardinal Loraine (a thin disguise for the real Cardinal Manning) a family friend, to mediate and end the strike. Charleston claims a victory; Eastmont claims that the working-class is unable to achieve its political aims without external intervention. He rejects unionism and socialism to spend the next year of his life studying the 'land question' and Henry George's single tax idea.

Section three finds him in Australia, where he becomes involved with an Australian labour party. At a general election, his party gains sufficient seats to hold a balance of power between Conservatives and Liberals. They agree to side with the Liberal government on the promise that their land tax/land distribution policy will be adopted. It is not, they are cheated, and Eastmont is once more 'betrayed' by organised politics. At this point he learns of his grandfather's death and his own subsequent inheritance of large estate and abundant cash. The estate is in Ireland, no less. He leaves for Ireland to create an 'ideal' community on his own estate at the novel's close.

Throughout the novel Margaret Harkness is both focusing upon socialist issues and preventing them from developing. Radical politics remains at the centre of its narrative throughout, while Harkness restricts the potential of her thinking through a 'framing' of significant characters and relationships: the Cardinal and Eastmont's grandfather, and their metalanguage of spirituality and paternalism; Eastmont's choosing a working-class wife who is then denied intelligence or political acumen; the imposition of a theatrical motif for Eastmont's perception of his own activity. During the Hyde Park riot he says 'were the people only playing at a riot?' (George Eastmont, Wanderer, p.73) and in the police cells afterwards feels that:

the policemen seemed to be part of a performance, and he followed a warder to the cells, feeling that the curtain was being drawn up for the third act. (George Eastmont, Wanderer, p.75)

Harkness's desire to pursue an investigation of possibilities for the political consciousness that escapes the worst ravages of determinism, has here led her to present one that virtually escapes history, and condemns those that do not. When asked, 'What about the Socialist ideal?' Eastmont merely replies: 'The strongest man is he who stands alone'. (George Eastmont, Wanderer, p.167) The possibility of radical or socialist politics is denied at this point; the mass seems helpless without a leader, but their only apparent leader cares nothing for that public interest.

The level of Eastmont's political retreat is nicely modelled by a short passage at the end of the novel:

He would keep his property in his own hands, but let his tenants choose from amongst themselves a Committee of Advice, and he would consult with this Committee on all subjects. He would introduce a People's Bank, from which all could borrow in bad times and illness. A few pounds would often keep a man above the line of poverty. (George Eastmont, Wanderer, p.239)

All property relations, even that of land, would stay as they always had, tenant power would be extremely limited and exist at the permission of the landlord who, while taking advice would clearly remain the centre of all decision making. Even the bank would only allow tenants to remain above the poverty line providing they take out loans. No rights to self-empowerment here.

Why read the novel at all? Because there is one relationship that does not fit this pattern and which presents us, almost, with a very different novel. While Harkness's rejection of trade unionism is decisive, its major protagonist, 'Dick Charleston, the Socialist' (George Eastmont, Wanderer, p.17) remains a more powerful figure than her attempted repudiation allows. It is Charleston who educates Eastmont politically and who shrewdly sees in him the kind of man, despite his origins, or because of them, who could play a significant role in stimulating mass political movement. He is a man who understands his politics not as an egoistic expression of his own power, but as the very stuff of his

life:

'Oh, I've been through it all before...It's only what one has to expect, if one goes into this sort of business. I shall find work again in a few weeks, for I'm worth my hire. I'll borrow a pound and pay it back. My wife's bothering about the rent; we've never owed a penny since we married, though many a day we've gone hungry. It's hard on the missus, isn't it? I don't mind six months in jail myself, it will be a rest and the wife can go home for a bit'. (George Eastmont, Wanderer, p.59)

This is a brief but convincing glimpse of the efforts and strains of a political life; also of the essential good humour on the part of husband *and* wife with which such a life can be lived. It throws Eastmont into perspective and makes his 'my work is my religion' (George Eastmont, Wanderer, p.150) sound callow and self-serving. It is Charleston who is able to gather more votes than expected in a parliamentary election and who stimulates the dock strike into effectiveness, raising money for the strike fund, food tickets for strikers, and making eloquent speeches to maintain the morale of the strikers and their supporters. Despite the narrative's attempts to undercut his significance - 'Charleston spoke for the Dockers, advised by Eastmont', 'Charleston...did not realise the Dock Directors' powers of endurance; but Eastmont measured the enemy's strength', (George Eastmont, Wanderer, pp.132-4) it is clearly Charleston who represents the strike's political project and desire. While his appeal for 'old' trades union support meets at best a mixed response, his

appeal to the gas-stokers is successful and potentially crucial to the success of the strike. Further, Charleston asserts his intent, after the success of the strike, to join the old and new unions together and produce a national movement: 'The workers must have their own representatives in Parliament' (George Eastmont, Wanderer, p.164), and he is paid a salary by the unions for organising unskilled workers into trade unions.

The text, therefore, brings to a kind of fulfilment what it is also trying to prevent. Prevent being the operative word, not deny. The powerful working-class political reality is now a reality and a new world is being made out of it. The scope of the novel in its entirety reflects this by broadening the compass of its politics, whilst attempting and failing to limit that potential by viewing all possibilities only through the lens of Eastmont's biases. In the first section of the novel, while the central issues are personal and local, the documentary element of the dock strike elevates them to a level of national significance. In section three the political concerns are of an international significance, the stuff of the making and breaking of governments. Meanwhile, Eastmont's own political decisions lead to a withdrawal into paternalism. The recognition of this shift in the received relevance of socialist ideas, their emergence from localities of poverty and of purely domestic account into the warp and weft of national politics was to substantiate the ideological and aesthetic problematic of twentieth century socialist fiction.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century is remarkable for its sense of impending and massive social and cultural change; a sense that has been recorded so often to have passed into general awareness as the *fin-de-siècle*

period. This period saw a process of radical change with fundamental questions posed regarding gender roles, sexual and marital relations, class relations via political and economic changes, fears about economic performance in the light of foreign competition, the role of empire, the viability of assumed moral patterns and anxiety regarding the very future of liberal society. Many issues collide and interact during this period.

Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken's Cultural Politics at the Fin De Siècle, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) offers a variety of essays from many contributors offering a depth and breadth of analysis. In this volume, Terry Eagleton identifies the fin-de-siècle as the age of the subjective and the extravagant, of inwardness and individual deviancy which burst stereotypes of language and convention. This collection also contains references to all of the major figures who populate the period from Freud, Marx and Darwin, to Wilde, Le Fanu and Stoker, and Morris, Morrison and Booth. Also discussed are the contemporary changes in ideology, imperialism and social identity. With co-editor Roger Luckhurst, Ledger has also contributed The Fin De Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History (OUP, N.Y. 2000) which collects key texts from the period.

Amanda Anderson and Joseph Valente, as editors of Disciplinarity at the Fin De Siècle, (Princeton UP, 2002) bring together a collection of essays analysing academic disciplines during this period, to discover that assumptions of clear differentiation were a myth and that all disciplines involved serious compromise, despite claims to certainty. Nicholas Daly in Modernism, Romance, and the Fin De Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-

1914, (Cambridge University Press, New York. 1999) explores the 'romance revival' of late Victorian and Edwardian years, arguing that the tropes of that fiction - vampires, mummies, etc. - constituted a species of popular modernism rather than a reversion to the gothic. As such they represent a complex locus of social and political change at a time when Britain was trying to accommodate such difficult issues as 'new imperialism', the growing professionalism of the workplace, and the expansion of consumerist culture. He concludes that such a concept of modernism can be useful in compromising any assumed distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture.

Deborah Mutch in her article 'The Merrie England Triptych: Robert Blatchford, Edward Fay and the Didactic Use of Clarion Fiction' (Victorian Periodicals Review, vol. 38, No.1, Spring 2005, pp. 83-103) continues a similar theme by examining the proliferation of popular radical newspapers at this period. She argues that the development of what has become known as 'New Journalism' - largely an issue-based investigative journalism which made no pretence to disinterested objectivity - gave greater scope for public political arguments and that the subsequent 'exposures' contributed to the changing cultural scene which characterized the fin-de-siècle period. Most particularly, she stresses that by using such methods, newspapers published by the new, though often short-lived, British socialist groups of the fin-de-siècle became a powerful and popular propaganda tool for disseminating socialist ideas and influencing social change. Many socialist periodicals of the era recognised the popularity of the New Journalism with working-class readers and engaged its methods for political purposes. Henry Hyde Champion, she explains, ran an investigative series through the Labour Elector between 1888 and 1889 against poor working conditions and long hours at the Brunner Mond chemical

works in Cheshire, with activist Tom Mann posing as an employee in order to gain information. Keir Hardie's Labour Leader ran a series called 'White Slaves' in 1899 in order to expose bad working conditions suffered by Post Office workers, and government and shop workers. Robert Blatchford's Clarion supported campaigns to protect the health and safety of female match and pottery workers. But, she argues, Blatchford's most influential piece of propagandist journalism was Merrie England, an explanation of socialism written in plain English, described as '[h]orse-sense in tinker's English'.

Nina Auerbach in her article 'The Rise of the Fallen Woman' (Nineteenth-Century Fiction, vol. 35, No. 1, June 1980), pp. 29-52, traces from earlier in the century the enormous interest in the idea of the woman who has fallen from 'respectability' either sexually or by eschewing other societal norms, equating the response in contemporary terms with both revulsion and sympathy. This fascination, she argues, contributed significantly both to ideas of the degeneration of English culture and to a renewed perspective upon the role of women in society. Later, this article was incorporated into a full-length study Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1982), in which she discusses the various monstrous forms that women were rendered into by the male imagination; crippling social restrictions wishing physical weakness upon women being articulations of attempts to exorcise women's mysterious strength. Auerbach's references to prostitution within this study were followed by Amanda Anderson, Painted Faces, Tainted Lives, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), and Judith Walkowitz City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London (Chicago, Illinois, University of Chicago Press, 1992) which provide very valuable studies of

Victorian prostitution. Linda Dowling, in her article 'The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890's' in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, (vol. 33, No. 4 March 1979, pp. 434-453) extends this argument to reveal the added attention to women's psychology being given by novelists, journalists, critics and the general reading public toward the close of the century. Her Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin De Siècle, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986) presents a full-length study of these issues as they appear within the literature of the fin-de-siècle.

In 'The Fiction of Class at the Fin De Siècle: Walter Besant and George Gissing', Gissing Journal, vol. 38, Issue 2, pp.21-29, Christine De Vine connects fin-de-siècle issues with class politics and their representation in literature. David Sweetman in Explosive Acts: Toulouse- Lautrec, Oscar Wilde, Art and Anarchy of Fin De Siècle (Simon & Schuster, N.Y. 1999) collects the somewhat dissolute lives of many artists of the period to give an anarchic picture of the era. Founding work on The Yellow Book publications has been conducted by Lasner M Samuels, Margaret D. Stetz and Karl Beckson, especially in Beckson, Karl and Mark Samuels Lasner (eds.) 'The Yellow Book and Beyond: Selected Letters of Henry Holland to John Lane' (English Literature in Translation 1880-1920, vol.42, 1999, pp. 401-32) focusing upon ways in which stylistic changes throughout those publications represented a serious and continuous questioning of traditional values such as marriage and religion. Building upon this foundation, Winnie Chan in her essay 'Morbidly, Masculinity and the Misadventures of the New Woman in Yellow Book's Short Stories' (Nineteenth Century Feminisms, vol. 4, 2001, pp. 35-46) assesses such representations as both granting publicity to the 'new woman' and simultaneously punishing her

with an unpleasant fate.

Another sixteen years was to pass before the publication of Harkness's final novel A Curate's Promise³⁷ In most respects a conservative novel and not in itself worthy of inclusion within a canon of socialist literature, it does, in context of Harkness's oeuvre, indicate a connection with both a residual nineteenth century radical literature and an emergent twentieth century writing. It is the novel of a young man, Benjamin Digby, of wealthy, landed family and the events of the novel take place during a three week period September 14-October 5, 1917, three years into World War I. Against his inclination, Benjamin has made a promise to his mother on her death-bed that he will become a Church of England clergyman. Unable to fight in the war because of his profession, though desirous of so doing, he feels morally and practically caught between his landowning elder brother, Lionel, influential in the higher echelons of the Army and the war office in Whitehall, and his brilliant, eccentric cousin, Cyril, who has become a conscientious objector. Benjamin's crisis of conscience is solved when he experiences the work of the Salvation Army at first hand during an air raid. Ultimately, abandoning both the institutional and financial authority of his brother and the almost beatific spirituality of his cousin, he decides to break his promise to his mother, join the Salvation Army and run a men's lodging house for the homeless and unemployed.

While the Salvation Army is deployed here as a potential synthesis of possibilities unavailable either to wealth per se or the established Church, it is

³⁷ John Law, A Curate's Promise, A Story of Three Weeks (September 14-October 15, 1917) (London:

not here the radical institution it once was in Harkness's fiction. The historical effect of the Salvation Army's work, together with such innovations as 'education, the County Councils, Trades Unions', (A Curate's Promise, p.16) have created a different, and better, world. The rejection both of a static naturalism earlier in her career, and the refusal or inability to grasp the new 'material' questions of a more sophisticatedly institutionalised capitalism led Harkness to veer toward a self-conscious spiritualising of such issues and the production of 'respectable' (A Curate's Promise, p.80) citizens now appears as the Army's major purpose; its index to urgent political questions no longer operative. There does exist, however, a subtext within this novel that suggests, perhaps against the author's wishes, that the spiritualised ad hoc paternalism being consciously asserted may not be adequate to face the potential enormity of the social and political problems ahead. In a letter from France, Lionel the elder brother states that 'There never was a war like this war, for everyone, and everything, seems to go into it'. (A Curate's Promise, p.3) It is also clear that the mass of the men caught up in the war are being radicalised by it. Benjamin:

...had too many relations in the Army to be ignorant of what was really going on in France, or to believe the camouflage of the newspapers...these men had not the enthusiasm, the lofty purpose of the volunteers...in 1914. These men were trying to make the best of a bad job, for they had been conscripted, and if they did not go over the top, their officers would shoot them; in fact, hundreds of such men

had been shot. (A Curate's Promise, p.35)

Benjamin comes to recognise that such a betrayal will lead to significant social problems for the post-war world:

Do you ever think what will happen to the Tommies after the war is over? Do you know the sort of homes they must come back to -- I don't mean in the villages but in the cities? It's all very well for the officers to call the men "splendid"...but the men can't be splendid unless they have proper homes and work under proper conditions. (A Curate's Promise, p.152)

Some form of socialistic programme is the logic of such an understanding and expectation. Indeed, Lionel asks Benjamin if he has become a socialist. His counter-assertion of Salvation Army fundamentalism is a profoundly inadequate response to such new and potentially catastrophic developments. There is real recognition in this novel of an old world disappearing, even to bombing raids, deadly shrapnel and the destruction of familiar landmarks. There is also clear indication of a new world emerging with aeroplanes, motor omnibuses and the cinema. How to live amongst all these new developments is more than Harkness can desire or articulate. Instead she asserts in the face of it a species of subjectively self-contained and spiritualised heroism, leaving fundamentally intact the very social and property relations that had produced the problems in the first place. Her naturalism had failed to fully produce a dynamic socialistic consciousness. Her later 'supernaturalism' relinquished the very material relations it intended to resolve. It was for twentieth-century-

socialist literature to articulate the new institutionalised relations and to achieve an awareness of a renewed, self-confident and self-consciously ideological, agency.

Conclusion

It has been the central argument of this thesis that there is literary continuity between the literature of Chartism and the political naturalism of the last years of the Nineteenth Century, that this continuity is both literary and political, and that key radical texts published after 1870 provide that

continuity. It is also the conclusion of this thesis that the works studied here constitute an insertion, a dissident intrusion, into a dominant culture, at an historical period when the bourgeois realist novel began to show the strains of attempting to represent both timeless 'human' values *and* provisional forms of life functioning within an increasingly powerful and disruptive marketplace of economic and social values; that these works constitute the development of aesthetic forms representing a countervailing radical aesthetic, which might practically reconcile forthright political consciousness with incontrovertible social realities.

Section One of the thesis has described the character and function of the forms of literary criticism to be adopted in order to realise the full aesthetic and political potential of radical and socialist literary texts.

Section Two of the thesis has argued that Chartist literature possesses more than a sociological interest and has very real value *as literature* in articulating a radical political consciousness at a particular time of its development: engaging with the effects of the Industrial Revolution, fighting for radical political change and parliamentary representation for a newly emerging social and political class, trying to find ways of using fiction to articulate this new self-awareness and in doing so struggling with inherited fictional forms largely alien to its political project. The thesis has also argued here that Chartist literature made very real progress in challenging conventional available forms for fiction, thus breaking ground in ways that could be taken further by later writers.

Section Three of the thesis, comprising its main body, has argued that the period between Chartism and political naturalism constitutes a much more fertile area for study than has often been assumed; that radical novels were written at this period which are fully deserving of extended study, being important indicators of the changing relationship between literary realism as the normative representative within literature of a dominant capitalist ideology, and of oppositional radical and socialist ideologies in development. It has also argued that these issues have important implications for literary form.

Section Four of the thesis has comprised an analysis of the fiction of Margaret Harkness, as exemplary both of the ideological link with radical fiction of earlier years and the new development of English political naturalism based upon Marxism.

The sequence of literary works discussed within this thesis exposed capitalist liberalism as in a state of crisis, unable to fulfil the essentials of its own declared intentions of social improvement and strongly resistant to forces of fundamental economic change. Eric Hobsbawm describes the end of the Nineteenth Century as

years when the stable and flexible mechanism of British political adjustment ceased to function, and when the naked bones of power emerged from the accumulations of tissue

which normally concealed them.³⁸

Many reasons have been put forward to explain why established power was able to maintain its position throughout this crisis. JFC Harrison has cited ordinary people's inexperience in dealing with the structures of political authority,³⁹ while Henry Pelling has noted the varying and often conflicting motives within the working-class movement as to how best to effect change.⁴⁰ Kenneth O. Morgan has accounted in detail for the difficulty in achieving unified political agreement across the radical spectrum.⁴¹ He charts Keir Hardie's great efforts and real failure (before 1895) to achieve either fusion or federation between socialist factions: the pragmatic radical-socialism of the Independent Labour Party, the Marxism of the Social Democratic Federation, the localised communism of the Anarchists, and the trade unions. Success of a kind came only with the formation in 1900 of the parliamentary-based Labour Party (with its compromised dedication to evolutionary social change) as a collective response to the disastrous defeats of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers' strike in 1897, of the Penrhyn quarry strikers in the same year, and the failed six-month stoppage in the South Wales coalfield begun in the spring of 1898. He is also eloquent here upon the constant need to placate Liberal voters and elements of the Liberal Party despite an ideological antipathy to its congruence with commercial capitalism.

Eric Hobsbawm has argued that the substantially improved political

³⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (London: Penguin, 1969), p.193

³⁹ JFC Harrison, *The Common People* (London: Fontana, 1984), pp. 333-4

⁴⁰ Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, 4th ed., (London: Penguin, 1987), p.98

⁴¹ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1975), ch.

involvement of the urban working classes allowed by the expansion of the franchise in 1884 increased their potential leverage over the Liberal Party which had always courted proletarian support, and thus encouraged them to remain within the scope of the established political party system.⁴² He also argues that the likelihood of radical change was reduced by the relative stability and conspicuous strength of the class system, with its enormous discrepancies in wealth, which encouraged a developing middle class to fulfil its aspirations within capitalism.⁴³

Artist and socialist William Morris continued to argue for full socialism and against reformism. Of the former he wrote 'to the socialist the aim is not the improvement of condition but the change in position of the working classes'.⁴⁴ Of the reformist road he wrote, 'I think it will be taken, I fear not wholly unsuccessfully'⁴⁵. Socialism did not come to government and, as a consequence, literature was condemned to live within an increasingly desperate liberalism.

Literary responses to this situation gave rise to the term Modernism, a convenient label for a complex reality, often seen as a split within the arts between revolution and reaction. That most studies of Modernism are founded upon such writers such as T.S.Eliot, D.H.Lawrence, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, Wyndham Lewis and W.B.Yeats grants the reactionary side both greater attention and unbalanced valorisation.

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⁴² Industry and Empire, p.165

⁴³ Industry and Empire, p.167-8

⁴⁴ William Morris, Justice May Day Special 1895, quoted in E.P.Thompson William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary, (London, Merlin Press, 1977), p.623

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.623

It is, however, the thrust of this thesis that this should not be so; that a developmental change, both political and aesthetic, had taken place which introduced radical and socialist thought into daily political life and that a very real continuity of such thought and practice had become established. It could be argued that the reaction of others was brought about by the very potency of socialist and radically democratic voices. John Carey⁴⁶ has argued that the intellectual élite came to think of itself as a new aristocracy and flirted dangerously with extreme anti-humanist policies like eugenics, so great was their hatred of the increasingly influential and increasingly educated working classes.

Radical and socialist writers certainly continued to assert their politics more widely. H.G.Wells became a profound influence upon Twentieth Century socialist and labour politics and his 1909 novel Tono Bungay remains a masterly critique of a society dominated by market forces. Writers such as Robert Tressell, Fredric Manning, and Ivor Gurney early in the new century, Henry Green, Patrick Hamilton, David Garnett and Sylvia Townsend Warner in the 1920s and Harold Heslop, James Hanley, Walter Brierley, Lewis Jones, Jack Jones, Storm Jameson, Winifred Holtby in the 1930s all continued to extend and fulfil a radical and socialist tradition, and incorporate new political and social experience into their ambit: World War, Revolution in Russia and the creation of the first workers' state, feminism, the influence of Freud, the General Strike, another crisis within capitalism in 1929, and so on. For such writers, the politics of writing was not an élite practice. For them, the

aesthetic articulation of the social self and of shared political realities remained rooted within the experience of the ordinary working people of the country.

As John Lucas indicates, paying attention to such a tradition, which came into being at great cost and has remained in constant need of restatement, means concentrating attention upon 'writers who have for the most part been written out of the record'.⁴⁷ It is the contention of this thesis that those writers whose work has filled it played a significant role in establishing a radical and socialist tradition within literature, particularly the novel, within Britain. It is the hope of its author that the thesis itself has added something to the constant rediscovery of that tradition and to the process of writing them back into the record.

⁴⁶ John Carey, The Intellectuals and the Masses, (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 71-90 and 118-134

⁴⁷ John Lucas, The Radical Twenties: Writing, Politics and Culture (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), p.4

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